Chapter V - SUNDAY 2nd JUNE

Outline

Due East – back to Dunkirk!  Mid-Channel  about 2.00 a.m.
It's One of Ours!  Approaching Dover  about 6.00 a.m.
Big Wings  England – France  from 7.30 a.m.
No Entry!  Dover Harbour  about 7.30 a.m.
The Dynamic Centre  Beneath Dover Castle  -
Better Late Than…  Hartley Wintney  from about 9.00 a.m.
The Final Straight  Deal, East Kent Coast  about 9.15 a.m.
Summoned and Sent  War Office, London  mid-morning
Blighty – and Souvenirs  Ramsgate Harbour  from 10.25 a.m.
Sunday Lunch  Chequers, Bucks.  from noon
A Generals Tour  Lille to Cambrai  until 2.50 p.m.
Morning News  U.S.A.  from noon, B.S.T.
12/7 for Guns  Woolwich Arsenal  afternoon
Gen. von Rundstedt's H.Q.  Charleville, France  from 4.00 p.m.
Ed Murrow's Reportings  R.A.F. Hawkinge, Dover  afternoon
Too Slow! They Said  Off Thanet  afternoon
'If He Wants Nothing Else…'  Blairon House, Charleville  from 4.00 p.m.
Chiefs & the Cabinet  Admiralty, London.  5.15 p.m.
'My Dear Fighter Boys'  H.Q., R.A.F. Fighter Command  -
Invasion Imminent  Paris  from 6.00 p.m.
First Rate Performance  B.B.C., London  8.50 p.m.
We Shall Never Surrender  The Admiralty  midnight
We Are Coming Back  Dunkirk  -

'Now We Remember…'
'Due East, back to Dunkirk!'

Mid-Channel – about 2 a.m.

Sunday: a week had passed since the National Day of Prayer. It says much about the times, and about Dunkirk, that it had then taken centre stage in the nation's life.

Every church and synagogue had been packed. Petticoat Lane's market closed for the only time in its history so that traders could attend church. On the forecourt of Southampton's Guildhall, an overflow of 2,000 had assembled to hear relayed the united service within. The B.B.C. had broadcast a special service from Westminster Abbey, which the King had attended. During it, prayers had been offered for 'our soldiers in dire peril in France.'

For any of the troops who heard it in France, the unfamiliar and massive invoking of divine aid tended not to encourage them, but to underline the enormity of their peril. (Perhaps in later years, if they discussed the 'Miracle of Dunkirk', the significance of Dynamo's first Sunday would become clearer when seen in the light of the deliverances achieved before its second.)

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The new week began, of course, at midnight, but as daylight rescue became less possible, and the night lifting more intense, the significance of midnight at Dunkirk dwindled. It passed unnoticed, except by the few whose task it was to write their ship's log, or to produce the daily totals of ships lost, aircraft destroyed and troops evacuated.

Saturday was the peak of the embarkations from the harbour, with just over 47,000 embarking. Only 7,000 were rescued from the beaches (a third of Friday's lifting), due to the German advance from the east. Over half of those rescued on Saturday were French – well over double Friday's numbers.

The first week of Operation Dynamo ended with a grand total of 260,000 evacuated.

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Among the earliest references to the new day was the departure from the East Mole of H.M.S. Icarus at '00.01'. She had moored alongside the Maid of Orleans at the East Mole, with the destroyers Windsor and Vanquisher moored outside her. She left with 677 troops.

In the light of Palmer's decision to avoid the dark dangers of Route X, it is worth noting that Icarus – 'collided with a small trawler in the Dunkirk Road. Damage to trawler not known.' The victim of darkness was probably the Belgian trawler Sunny-Isle, as she is known to have been rammed and sunk. (Icarus returned to Dover, but was too damaged to make another trip.)

The hours either side of midnight became the busiest, as large troop ships endeavoured to collect their massive loads and get well away from Dunkirk under cover of darkness. Longer darkness was needed for such acts of mercy, but as May became June each coming of dusk was a little delayed, and each dawn arrived a little too early.

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To avoid being run down in the darkness on the busy, but unlit, Route X, Palmer headed west.

I felt confident that I would reach Dover, for I knew the geography of the coast – so I asked a soldier to take the wheel while I looked out into the night to give my eyes a rest.

Palmer's eyes needed a rest, because it was too dark to see where he was going, and the only way to navigate was to steer by compass. As ships could show no lights, Palmer could only read the compass in the reflected glow of its little inbuilt oil lamp.

Palmer left the central wheelhouse, and went up and out through its hatch to the foredeck ahead of it. It was probably the only space available.

I had been looking round for about five minutes when something seemed to me that we were not going in the right direction, so I immediately goes down [from the foredeck] and has a look at the compass to find that we were steaming due East, back to Dunkirk again!

* 54.3 % (35,013 of 64,497).
How dark it must have been in the early hours of Sunday morning! The fires of Dunkirk seem not to have provided any visual reference point. John Masefield, in his history of the Evacuation, noted that there was a 'good deal of haze' – and that may have been a factor.

Why was Palmer's boat steaming back East and not going west?

As has been mentioned, Naiad Errant was only going on her right-hand ('starboard') engine. Its constant thrust to turn her left seems, eventually, to have overcome the helmsman's efforts to keep her straight! Palmer understood that in complete darkness and on a calm sea, and with no visual point of reference, a gentle turn can go unnoticed.

Well, I couldn't blame the soldier, he was half asleep anyway, and seamanship was not his job after all, so I took over the wheel.

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Dunkirk was not the first time that British troops had had to be evacuated – although it was the greatest evacuation.

In the Great War, British troops had been evacuated at Gallipoli. At one point, 90,000 were rescued without loss of life.

John Masefield was a very experienced seaman, and had financed, formed, led and sailed his own mobile hospital flotilla from Britain some 3,500 miles to the Dardanelles. Following a lecture tour in the States when he had been under great pressure to explain the controversial evacuation, he had written his highly acclaimed account: Gallipoli. After the Great War, in 1930, he had become Poet Laureate, a post which he held until his death in 1967.

Masefield was, therefore, the obvious candidate to record the fortunes, misfortunes and evacuation of the B.E.F. in 1940.

Masefield did so, and entitled it The Twenty-Five Days because it covered the period from the German attack on the Low Countries (10 May) to the end of Operation Dynamo (4 June).

Masefield was no politician, so he told it as it was. The Ministry of Defence realised that it would upset the French, so they forbade its publication for over thirty years!

The M.O.D. however did allow the final section on Operation Dynamo to be printed, so a slim volume appeared in March 1941, renamed The Nine Days Wonder.

It was so popular that a second print run was underway within a couple of weeks. Then some very powerful individual, or body, stopped the print run. Such intervention over a straightforward history is unheard of in publishing circles.

What was the fuss about?

The changes made make it quite clear, and are particularly relevant to this narrative.

Of the 160 paragraphs only one was changed, and that was Masefield's 130-word account of Samuel Palmer and the Naiad Errant!

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Masefield had originally written that after Naiad Errant had put into the beach in the surf – she was rushed and swamped by French soldiers.

Masefield then changed this to – unfortunately swamped and washed ashore.

Clearly it was Masefield's negative reference to the French that had caused the stopping of the print run, and the demand to rewrite the paragraph.

Why did the French kick up so much fuss? To whom did they complain? Who had the authority to intervene on their behalf?

Swamping boats – by all nationalities – was such a usual and frequent event at Dunkirk that no one closely familiar with the Evacuation

* First published 1972, by Heinemann.
would even have noticed it. It was a common and trivial event that involved, in this instance, only a very few, yet it seemed to have become almost an international incident!

It might partly be explained by the fact that Masefield had, by 1940, been Poet Laureate to no less than three monarchs. Foreigners, who are unfamiliar with quaint British appointments, might assume that the Poet Laureateship automatically expressed the official view of the British Crown!

The protest must have been made by the French and to an extremely influential source. Churchill springs most readily to mind.

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As Masefield knew that the paragraph's type had to be reset, he took the opportunity to make one correction and one addition.

_Naiad Errant_ – a pun on 'Knight Errant' (because a 'naiad' is a water nymph) – was a name that always caused difficulty. It had been spelt _Knight, Naaid, and Niada_, but the most common misspelling was –

_Maid Errant_.

This (possibly immoral?) lass dominated the Navy's earliest records. Palmer and she were linked not only in the London Gazette's official listing of his award, but _Maid Errant_ was, later, even engraved around the rim of Palmer's Distinguished Service Medal!

Not surprisingly, Masefield had originally also used the Navy's _Maid Errant_. When Palmer received a copy of The Nine Days Wonder, he wrote to Masefield asking him to forward his request for a photo of _Naiad Errant_ to her owner – which he did. Having had her name straight from the horse's mouth, Masefield took the opportunity to correct it.

He did not stop there.

Having obediently omitted the negative reference to the French, Masefield – the most polite of men – neatly replaced another sentence by stressing how indebted the French were to the British!

This boat helped to save the crew of the French destroyer Sirocco when sinking off the port.

Touché!

(It has already been explained why the Navy's failure to change _Naiad_'s record when she was delayed a day, led them, and others, to think that Palmer rescued sailors on Friday, not Saturday, and thus from the _Sirocco_ and not from the _Foudroyant_.)

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Sunday 2 June was Masefield's sixty-third birthday. Two incidents of German ruthlessness that day clearly distressed him. He wrote:

'This day, being Sunday, a Chaplain held Holy Communion on the beach and dunes. His congregation was scattered five times by low-diving bombers, but reassembled each time until the service ended.'

The Anglican Prayer designated for the day included the singularly apt petition –

_Keep us, we beseech thee, under the protection of thy good providence..._ *

The second incident involved the injured.

'It was felt that possibly some of the grievously hurt men might be permitted to leave without molestation. The Geneva Convention, which provides safe passage for hospital ships carrying none but wounded soldiers, had been accepted by Germany. An appeal [deliberately not sent in code] was therefore radioed at 10.30 this morning.

_Wounded situation acute and hospital ships to enter during day. Geneva Convention will be honourably observed and it is felt that the enemy will refrain from attacking._

Hospital ships were all over white, with a red band along their sides with large Red Crosses on it. At night, they deliberately blazed with lights. Masefield's account continues:

'After the wireless message had been issued, two hospital ships, the _Paris_ and the _Worthing_, sailed to bring off the wounded. The _Worthing_ was attacked by twelve bombers and forced to return... the _Paris_ reported that she was [also] bombed, badly hit and in danger. The bombing that wrecked her took place in full daylight... Men in a ship just astern of her at the time "saw the German aeroplanes machine-gunning the boats which contained nurses and medical personnel."'
The two boats on Saturday had, between them, taken 530 wounded back to England. On Sunday they saved none.

'As these last atrocities made it impossible for us to take certain of the more grievously wounded men, it was decided that chaplains, doctors and orderlies should draw lots, as on past occasions, for the honour of staying to look after them.'

It's One of Ours!

Approaching Dover – about 6.00 a.m.

Sergeant Norman Palmer, the Guardsman aboard the Naiad Errant on her way to Dover, later wrote:

'...a Spitfire spotted us, circled us, waggled his wings and flew off to Dunkirk.'

Cyril Chell, also on board, shared memories that dovetail with this. Notes taken of his reminiscences read:

Sailed back to Ramsgate – planes came low – but they were British – only rifles.

Palmer himself made no mention of the Spitfire and stated simply –

Just after dawn I struck Dover dead centre...

The mist cleared, and it became warm and cloudless.

Palmer's reference to just after dawn indicates that the Spitfire was on a dawn patrol. On this Sunday, that would mean between about 4.20 and 6.30 a.m.

Guardsman Palmer interpreted the Spitfire flying off in a different direction as going to Dunkirk. This should not be interpreted to mean that the Spitfire broke formation on route to Dunkirk, which it would never have done. To fly off and investigate a small lone vessel, could only have been done on a return flight.

The dawn patrols found no hostile planes this Sunday, which fits neatly with the pilot having enough fuel to make such a detour, and to try to be helpful.

We have no other description of the Spitfire overflying Palmer's small boat on Sunday morning, but the earlier action of Flight Lieutenant Frankie Howell, in a Spitfire of 609 Squadron, does much to explain it.

‘Dover, Ramsgate and Folkestone and all piers around Kent were crowded to overflowing, disembarking the troops and setting off again on the suicide journey. Naturally there were some pretty terrible sights as well, ships on their sides burning furiously, ships sinking and beached, and I even saw a salvo of bombs land smack in the middle of one large boat – it burst into flames, slowly turned over and sank in about 2 minutes.'

'Having lost everyone else and being all on my own...I whistled around at 0 feet for a bit about 15 miles from Dunkirk. I thought I saw a boat, just a speck on the water, so I went to have a look. There were 8 or 10 Tommies and sailors rowing for dear life in a ship's lifeboat for England about 70 miles away!

'The way they were rowing they would miss England altogether, so I flew three times in the direction. They all stood up and waved and cheered poor devils. I only hope they were picked up alright, as I reported their position as soon as I landed…'

Early on Sunday morning, Palmer's little white motorboat, with no other vessel within a radius of about eight miles, must have looked particularly lonely and probably in need. The pilot would have seen that all vessels were heading north-west towards Ramsgate, even if the larger ones then turned south, and went inshore of the Goodwin Sands down to Dover. There was nothing going directly, almost due west, from Dunkirk to Dover.

Palmer was not on any of the three established Routes, although he had had to cross Route X (somewhere near where Westerly blew up).

In about mid-Channel, Palmer's route will have taken him over – or dangerously near – part of the massive British minefield. As the hull of his boat was wooden not metal, it may have saved him.

\[a \text{ actually 280° (W by N).}\]
Anyone aboard *Naiad Errant* who had been awake enough to notice, would have been worried by any fast-approaching fighter silhouetted against the early morning sky.

Guardsman Palmer remembers the Spitfire circling and waggling his wings.

**Why circle?**

The pilot circled in order to see. A Spitfire pilot's vision is restricted by a massive engine in front and broad wings either side. The best way to see anything below, is to dip a wing and fly a low circle around it.

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Why did he waggle his wings?

The pilot had no wireless communication with Palmer's boat, and without it he was extremely limited. Wing-waggling was one of his few options. What did it signal?

The next thing the pilot did, suggests an answer: he flew off in a different direction.\(^a\)

Nowadays, circling, wing-waggling and flying off in a different direction are the standard procedure of Search and Rescue aircraft to get a vessel to change course. Given the very limited options, it is most likely that the pilot did it by instinct. (Certainly, he will not have been trained to redirect small boats!)

Unfortunately, wing-waggling is ambiguous. Was it a greeting? a warning? an encouragement? an order? or even all four?

*Hello! Watch out! I'll get help! Follow me!*

As the pilot seems conspicuously to have gone off in another direction, it probably was an attempt to get Palmer to change course – *Follow me!*

Able Seaman Palmer would, like anyone else, have assumed that Dover was his destination. He had been on the go for thirty hours. Because of his excellent navigation, Dover lay ahead and he would *hit it dead centre*\(^1\) He had eight exhausted troops aboard, including one shell-shocked nineteen-year-old.\(^2\) All will have had little or no food for days. Palmer was coaxing his boat along on just one engine, and his fuel was limited. Blighty was dead ahead! He must have felt sure that Dover would welcome and feed his weary troops.

The Spitfire pilot will have seen things very differently. Dover was only dealing with the biggest ships, mostly destroyers. Little Ships were going to and from Ramsgate. As Palmer was heading for Dover, Ramsgate was way off to his right. It is likely that the pilot was trying to encourage the skipper of *Naiad Errant* to do a ninety-degree right turn.

Standing at the wheel inside the small covered wheelhouse, Able Seaman Palmer would probably not have heard the Spitfire coming up behind him over the noise of his hard-working engine. He would have had little chance to watch the fighter, or any motive to interpret it. Dover lay dead ahead, and, like an oasis, seemed to promise rest, relief and refreshment.

* As the daylight brightened, the famous White Cliffs would have appeared to rise over the horizon. Dover, Britain's nearest town to the continent, had always been the natural 'Gateway to England'. It would never have occurred to Palmer that for him, and those who had fought for England,\(^b\) so famous a ‘Gate’ might be shut against them.

Dover had been in the first line of defence against invaders since the Bronze Age. Julius Caesar with 10,000 storm-troopers arrived offshore half a century before Christ was born. The Romans had built two lighthouses to help seamen find the sheltered waters below its cliffs. Of these, one *pharos* survives – the

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\(^a\) Which the Guardsman mistakenly thought was towards Dunkirk.

\(^1\) They were, of course, fighting for *Britain*, but in 1940 the focus was so much on the English coast of Kent that friend and foe alike, from J.B.Priestly to Hitler, invariably used the term 'England'.
tallest of the Roman remains in Britain.

Palmer needed no lighthouses. Dover Castle rose 450 feet (137m) above the sea, and would have been clearly visible. It had been garrisoned continually for the last 800 years, but, as Palmer approached, he could not have known that there was a hive of activity in the cliffs below it.

In the nineteenth century, when France was the national threat, not Germany, the British made French Prisoners of War carve out from the chalk a catacomb of vaults, later regarded as bombproof. Central to them was a room that once housed the electricity back-up equipment – the Dynamo Room. On Sunday sixteen naval staff were at work in the complex. Rosemary Keyes, a cypher staff officer, described the place as:

'…a rabbit warren of dark, dreary, damp and airless passages and rooms. We worked all day in electric light, and the only time we saw daylight was when we went to the 'heads'. This was a small room with a noisome 'thunder-box' but a beautiful view of Dover harbour, seen through a window cut out of the cliff face. It was a wonderful place for watching the air raids.'14

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During this weekend, a little way along the coast from Dover, Private Spike Milligan was keeping a detailed diary of events, which he would later write up.

'Things were indeed very grave. For days previously we could hear the distant sound of explosions and heavy gunfire from across the channel. Sitting in a crude wood O.P. [Observation Post] heaped with earth at two

Big Wings

England – France – from 7.30 a.m.

After their uneventful dawn patrol over Dunkirk, the R.A.F. pilots had breakfast and many were in the air again as Palmer was approaching Dover. This time the Spitfires of 66, 92, 266 and 611 Squadrons flew en masse to Dunkirk. It was one of the earliest 'Big Wings' ever assembled. The leader of the forty or fifty fighters was the dashing twenty-three year old Flight Lieutenant Bob Stanford Tuck.

By 8.00 a.m. they were over Dunkirk patrolling in tiers for protection. Tuck led an attack against three German bombers, and damaged a Heinkel 111. In spite of the British squadrons above, his section was 'jumped' by Me.109 fighters. One damaged the tail of Tuck's fighter, but Tuck later shot it and it exploded. After that, he saw a Heinkel below him and sent that crashing down also – while its crew parachuted to safety. Finally, he out-fought another attack by German fighters and damaged two of them. He was back at R.A.F. Martlesham by 9.00 this Sunday morning. It was an outstanding achievement.

The Big Wing's victories came, however, at a price.

Five British pilots were killed on this Sunday morning patrol. Such casualties will not have surprised Tuck. His own position as Commanding Officer (C.O.) of 92 Squadron was due to the death of his own C.O. nine days earlier when, in just one day, almost half of the squadron had been lost.

Two of the pilots killed this Sunday morning were from 266 'Rhodesia' Squadron, based at Wittering. One, aged twenty-six, was later buried in Dunkirk.

611 'West Lancashire' Squadron, at Digby, also lost two pilots, aged twenty-four and

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14 From the 1960's to 80's they were adapted for use as a Regional Seat of Government in the event of a nuclear attack.

15 Nautical term for the toilet.

16 Near Ipswich.
twenty-three. Their two nineteen-year-old brides were at a champagne breakfast that the Squadron Commander had arranged for the recently widowed. Therefore, it was amidst the bereavement of others that Mrs. Crompton and Mrs. Little learned that both Ken and Donald were now dead. ‘Without a tear or a word, they quietly slipped out…’

Bravery takes many forms.

During that same patrol, five other pilots were shot down, but survived. One landed behind enemy lines and so became a Prisoner of War. Another took a bullet in his leg before an anti-aircraft shell destroyed all his flight controls. He baled out, landed on the beach east of Dunkirk, and sailed home.

The ‘Big Wing’ had met sixty German planes – bombers, dive-bombers and fighters. In a desperate engagement – during which the ‘evacuation ships escaped all damage’ – the British pilots of that morning patrol claimed fourteen enemy aircraft destroyed and twenty-one damaged. The whole engagement lasted no more than forty minutes – barely enough time for Palmer's boat to have chugged a further four miles nearer to Dover!

The R.A.F.’s Fighter Command made the most obvious contribution to the Evacuation, but its Coastal Command made thirty reconnaissance flights a day. In daylight its Blenheims, Hudsons, Skuas and Rocs were usually without fighter escort, so they were particularly vulnerable to the Luftwaffe.

Adolf Galland had shot down two Blenheims in six minutes! It was so simple that he felt somewhat bad about it. He said, ‘Quite easy. No escort and the bomber not armoured.’

Pilot Officer D. H. Clarke remembers Coastal Command's second patrol this Sunday. Thirty-seven aircraft, Skuas and Rocs, were ‘a splendid sight as they took off in mass formation.’ He waited to see them return. Only nine of the thirty-seven returned for Sunday lunch. Twenty-eight pilots were killed. One plane reached the aerodrome, but crash-landed: its pilot dead. Clarke saw him and was ‘nearly sick with the horror of it’.

Of the nine planes that returned, only four were now serviceable. After lunch, therefore, four brave pilots – who that Sunday morning had lost twenty-eight of their colleagues – took off once again to protect the evacuating Army at Dunkirk.

R.A.F. Bomber Command also supported the Evacuation. They made over 650 individual flights ['sorties'] during Operation Dynamo. At night their heavy bombers pounded the approaches to Dunkirk and the German communications further inland.

No Entry!

Dover Harbour – about 7.30 a.m.

The port of Dover was crowded and busy. Its Admiralty Pier had eight berths that were suitable for massive disembarkations and the harbour contained no fewer than fifty mooring buoys. The two massive tugs, Lady Duncanon and Lady Brassey, worked full time pushing, pulling or nudging large ships from their disembarkation points to be repaired, rearmed or refuelled. Against the eastern arm was moored the 10,000 ton depot ship Sandhurst. She was a mobile fleet workshop whose skilled engineers worked long hours patching up and making damaged vessels seaworthy.

Between the two arms of Dover harbour lay a concrete breakwater four-fifths of a mile long. On it were observation towers, searchlights, one twin six-pounder and two six-inch guns. It was manned by various Army units, who lived in and on the breakwater that was only twenty-five feet wide.

This concrete barrier was unofficially dubbed H.M.S. Breakwater.

Three times daily a boat went out to the breakwater with rations, medical supplies, fuel for the generator, and post, and returned with anyone who was ill or due for leave. Those who lived in its claustrophobic honeycomb of tunnels and rooms washed in seawater. In very bad weather, personnel could be marooned for days. Indeed, one sentry was fatally washed overboard. Its inmates later learned to supplement their rations by lowering a bucket into the water every time a bomb exploded nearby. Its retrieval yielded a haul of stunned fish!

In peacetime, access to the harbour was through the small gaps of less than 200 yards at either end of the breakwater. The western entrance had since been blocked, and the harbour's eastern entrance governed by an
anti-mine boom.

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In 1940 the nation's entertainment centred on the wireless. The Germans naturally exploited this, and regularly used William Joyce to broadcast in English. The British dubbed him 'Lord Haw Haw' because of his accent, and his catch-phrase 'Jar-mini caulling!' On the previous Tuesday German radio had, for the first time, adopted the British nickname in the hope of undermining British contempt for him. Interestingly, the British – who were convinced that the Germans had no sense of humour – were a bit miffed at the enemy adopting their term of ridicule!

About one-in-five, for one reason or another, listened to Lord Haw Haw at this period.

It became a national pastime to spot Lord Haw Haw's gaffes. His most famous was his interpretation of 'bombs being dropped at random'. He boasted that the town of Random had suffered a German attack! Folk at Dover particularly enjoyed Lord Haw Haw's report that among the gallant victories of Göring's magnificent Luftwaffe was the sinking at Dover of H.M.S. Breakwater!

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Guardsman Palmer, aboard the Naiad Errant, recalled many years later:

'On reaching Dover an Officer on the pier told us the boom was down and the port closed.'  

The 'boom', sometimes termed a 'mine gate', was a barrier against submarines, mines and torpedoes.

Ferry using the 'mine gate' entrance of 1940. H.M.S. Breakwater on right.

Dover's War Diary later disclosed what the Officer withheld: 'the eastern entrance to the harbour was closed on account of mines'. It was not reopened until 3.50 Sunday afternoon.

The schuit Hilda had arrived at 10.00 on Saturday evening, but had been forbidden entry. She had originally moored half a mile off H.M.S. Breakwater, but just after midnight the Luftwaffe had dropped a magnetic mine very near her, so she moved closer inshore.

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One sailor on the way to Folkestone remembers being told to keep his lifejacket on when they passed Dover because 'magnetic mines had been sown during the night. By the time the mine gate was open, three mines had been detonated – two of them near H.M.S. Breakwater; and one by Folkestone pier. Regardless of mines, although the harbour was a relatively safe haven for large vessels, it was not a suitable refuge for small wooden craft. An eight-ton wooden boat among the 3,000 tonners was like a small child in a crowd – in danger of not being seen and of being crushed. Palmer had eight aboard; the ships in harbour arrived – on average – with 500.

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The harbour was full and very busy when Palmer reached Dover. Since midnight, a dozen large ships had arrived, including the destroyers Codrington, Sabre, Icarus, Windsor, Venomous and Shikari. They had, between them, landed 7,000 men.

Since Codrington's round trip on Saturday morning, when she had returned Montgomery, she had been to Dunkirk again, rescued 878, and disembarked them before Sunday sunrise.

Dover harbour was not only accommodating destroyers. The Isle of Man ferry Mona's Isle had returned with 1,210 – and with no casualties. It was a relief. (Earlier she had made the first round-trip of the Evacuation, had been straffed by a German plane, and had returned with twenty dead and sixty injured.)

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A naval officer on Dover's East Pier told Palmer that he would have to go on to Ramsgate. Provided he had enough fuel, it was less boring than the orders given the Dutch schuit Hilda. As mentioned above, she had arrived at 10.00 on Saturday evening with 500 troops aboard. It was not until late Sunday afternoon – after a twenty-hour wait – that her troops were able to disembark.
The Dynamic Centre
Beneath Dover Castle

At Dover, Palmer was at his furthest point from Dunkirk, but nearest to the heart of Operation Dynamo. Visible beyond the guns and barbed wire of H.M.S. Breakwater were the castle and the cliffs. Set in the cliff-face, the equivalent of thirteen storeys up, were a series of bricked arched windows and a narrow balcony – the fresh-air end of a network of tunnels. Within them was the Dynamo Room (already mentioned) which gave its name to the Operation. Also there, was the human 'dynamo' behind it – Vice-Admiral Bertram Ramsay.

With the outbreak of War, Britain's Expeditionary Force, with all its personnel, motor transport, ammunition, and the meat and stores necessary to sustain it, had had to be transported to France by sea. Ramsay had been the Naval Officer responsible for dispatching the B.E.F. to France in 1939.

Ramsay was exactly the right man in the right place. He was quiet and unemotional, but he had an incisive brain and did not 'suffer fools gladly'. While Churchill believed in centralised leadership, Ramsay believed in the then-modern concept of the Staff system, that is to say, top control of essentials only with details decentralised. (In current jargon, it is 'Mission Command'.)

Ramsay was not, therefore, interested in having anyone on his team who, in his words, lacked a 'self-starter'!

In the Great War Ramsay had command of the famous Dover Patrol, and responsibility for the 4,000 square miles of sea between the Kent coast and the continent from Holland to Le Havre. After the Great War Ramsay had tried to work for a Commander-in-Chief of the old school – a workaholic who was unable to delegate. The dynamic Ramsay had been left with too little to do. He had therefore resigned his plum job, and forfeited certain promotion, to enable his Chief to have someone more suited to his ways.

The Navy's response to Ramsay's resignation had been to halve his pay and offer him command of a gunboat – in China! Ramsay had refused it (ostensibly on domestic grounds). The real reason, however, was that he thought that when war broke out he would be of more use to his country if he remained, than if he languished on a muddy river in the Far East. His decision to stay had the finest consequences for Britain and the War.

The Navy had then relegated Ramsay to its 'Retired List', so he had spent his time on the Scottish border, hunting, shooting and fishing.

In 1938 the Munich crisis had alerted the Navy to the importance of Dover's defences, so they had then asked Ramsay to report on them. He had produced a 'devastating analysis of neglect'. The harbour was silted up, the defences were deplorable, and the facilities were inadequate. The Command, for instance, had neither a telephone nor a typewriter!

His report on Dover had two good results. Over three million pounds were promptly spent on Dover's defences, and Ramsay was given a 'dormant command'. That meant that if war broke out Ramsay would be given a post. The Navy – probably as a punishment more than a prize – gave him Dover.

In the event of war, Ramsay's four main tasks would be clear:
- to deny the use of the Dover Straits to enemy forces – particularly submarines,
- to protect Allied cross-channel shipping,
- to defend against destroyer raids,
- to deal with magnetic mines.

It was hardly a job for the semi-retired!

In the spring of 1940, Ramsay had become known as 'Vice-Admiral Dover'. By that time aerial bombardment was a real threat, so

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* Hitler also believed in it, but did not always abide by it. It is the official doctrine of NATO.

b Officially 'Flag Officer Commanding Dover'.

John Richards, 2008
Ramsay had sited his Headquarters in the tunnels of Dover Cliffs (already mentioned). He had fourteen loyal and hard-working staff, seven telephones, and a view over Dover harbour to the Channel and the coast of France.

He had had only one week to prepare for Operation Dynamo, but, as he said later, there would have been no benefit in having had longer since "nobody could have foreseen the size of the problem." One of his biographers says:

'It was not simply a question of providing an astronomical number of craft. Crews, different types of fuel, stores, ammunition and charts had to be accessible, and arrangements had to be made for the assembly, maintenance and operational control of this heterogeneous collection of shipping; a colossal task with ramifications affecting railways and supplies throughout the country.'

Four years after Dunkirk, Ramsay would be the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief for the D-Day landings. While the Dunkirk Evacuation was a masterpiece of improvisation and flexibility, the D-Day landings in Normandy were the result of immense planning and organisation. In 1940, Ramsay evacuated a third-of-a-million in nine days, and in 1944, he landed a million-strong army in four weeks. *Full Circle* is the aptly named title chosen by one of his biographers. It was a remarkable double achievement. When the D-Day newsreels were shown in Dover, the audience stood and cheered with such enthusiasm for their local hero that the film had to be run three times!

Ramsay was among the greatest leaders of the 1939-45 War. Sadly in 1945, when he was flying to see Montgomery, his plane crashed, so the general public has had, until recently, little chance to know much about him.

Fortunately the town of Dover has since done him proud, and the chalk tunnels – now called 'Hellfire Corner' – can be visited, so that later generations may easily learn about Ramsay, the Dunkirk Evacuation, and much else. Members of the public may stand on the balcony from which, in A. D. Divine’s words, Ramsay ‘…commanded one of the greatest campaigns [i.e. Operation Dynamo] in the sea story of Britain.’

How could anyone aboard the Evacuation ships have guessed what was going on in the chalk tunnels three-quarters of the way up the famous White Cliffs of Dover?

One of Ramsay’s staff there was Second Officer Daphne Lumsden. On Saturday morning she had decoded the signal: HMS Keith bombed. No news of survivors. She could hardly manage to keep working for worry, because her husband was the Keith’s Navigation Officer. On Saturday morning, Lieutenant Lumsden had found himself swimming in oil. He had survived not only the sinking of the H.M.S. Keith, but also the sinking of the St. Abbs tug that had rescued him! He had had to swim for his life.

Dunkirk Revisited, Chapter V, Sunday 2nd June

© John Richards, 2008
On Sunday morning he arrived in Dover.

He had no uniform. He went to Ramsay's Headquarters in the cliffs, and into the Cypher Room where his wife, Daphne, worked. She looked up, but did not recognise her husband standing there – his face black with oil, and wearing a French sailor's jersey and pom-pom hat!  

Husband and wife may have had to step over bodies to embrace each other. Rosemary Keynes who worked there remembers how difficult it was to hand out copies of ciphers to everyone since –

‘All the staff worked around the clock, and when they couldn't keep awake any longer they just lay down on the floor and slept.’  

In due course, Daphne Lumsden will have learned how when the Keith was evacuating troops from Boulogne, ten days earlier, her husband's link with the spirit of Nelson came a little too close to history for comfort. Graham Lumsden was descending from the bridge with the Keith's Captain just behind him. A bullet fired by a German sniper killed the Captain outright. Lumsden was saved, perhaps, by his lowlier rank.

Better Late Than…

Hartley Wintney – from about 9.00 a.m.

It was on this Sunday morning that Lieutenant General Alan Brooke woke up. In such remarkable times, the event merits mention.

On Thursday at Dunkirk, after handing over his Second Army Corps to Montgomery, Brooke had been rowed out to H.M.S. Worcester where he had collapsed, exhausted. He had crossed the Channel overnight, and had then been driven from Dover to London on Friday morning. He later wrote:

‘That drive has always remained deeply engraved on my memory…It was the most lovely English spring morning, with all the countryside looking as it can only look in spring. Everywhere around us were those spring sights and smells of nature awaking from her winter slumbers. The contrast of this lovely sunlit country and its perfect peacefulness when compared to those Belgian roads crammed with distressed and demoralised humanity, horizons shrouded in smoke-clouds from burning villages, continuous rumbling of guns, bombs and aircraft, smashed houses, dead cattle, broken trees and all those war scars that distort the face of nature. To have moved straight from that inferno into such a paradise within the spell of a few anguished hours made the contrast all the more wonderful.’

Brooke recorded in his diary that he then went to see his Chief, Sir John Dill. He had apparently managed to snatch a brief time with Ramsay and with Dill, before the latter left to accompany Churchill to Paris (See Ennote 40). Brooke had then caught a train from Waterloo, but he had continually to pace up-and-down for the forty-mile journey to keep himself awake, and not miss Winchfield (his stop for Hartley Wintney).

His family met him. His two young children will have thought that their Daddy looked like two different pictures stuck together! Brooke's top half looked like an immaculate general – complete with scarlet and gold insignia – while his legs appeared to belong to someone else! Instead of his usual breeches and highly-polished Norwegian leather boots he was wearing an old pair of trousers and plimsolls! Brooke had opted for lighter trousers and footwear in case he had had to swim for it. He had given his breeches and boots to his batman. His batman had arrived back independently, and had created some adverse comments for wearing the General's immaculate boots and discarded breeches. It was irregular but not, perhaps, improper, since British Army breeches (unlike German) had no stripes indicating rank.)

It had been Friday teatime when Brooke had gone to bed. He then slept through all of Saturday, until woken on Sunday morning by a phone call from Sir John Dill.

The Chief of Imperial General Staff wanted him at the War Office as soon as possible.

It was there, on this lovely Sunday morning, that Brooke suffered a moment that he would later describe as one of the 'blackest of the war'. He arrived with a light heart, and asked what it was Dill wanted him to do. His reply was devastating:

\footnote{The Close he lived in is now named Alanbrooke – the name that he later adopted for his Viscountcy.}
'Return to France to form a new B.E.F.'

Brooke recognised that while such a move might have some political value in giving moral support to the French, recent weeks had taught him that it stood no chance whatsoever of having any military value. It would only waste lives. He told Dill so. He was then summoned by the Secretary of State for War, Anthony Eden. He asked Brooke if he was 'satisfied' with all that had been done. His answer, in short, was 'No!'

Brooke made very clear to Eden that we had just escaped a major disaster at Dunkirk and were now risking a second. There was no chance now of any military success in France, and every probability of disaster.

The Final Strait

East Kent Coast, Deal – about 9.15 a.m.

While Brooke was waking up, Palmer was probably trying to avoid nodding off! Palmer left Dover for Ramsgate, and his route was a simple one. For the remaining seventeen miles, he would hug the coast and stay to the landward side of the Goodwin Sands. The route would pass through the 'Downs', a slightly sheltered area that could accommodate a hundred moored vessels.

As Dover was the closest British town to the continent, it was of great military importance. Once H.M.S. Breakwater was a mile behind him, Palmer would have found himself abeam the work underway on the cliff top above, establishing two huge cross-channel guns. When Churchill had learned that the Germans were constructing emplacements for guns to strike Dover, he had 'seethed with the urge to [enable us to] strike back'. The Navy therefore had supplied two massive fourteen-inch-bore guns. Churchill named them Winnie and Pooh. They could fire two-and-a-half thousand pound shells over sixty miles. Within three months, the first of 2,000 German shells reached Britain. It took over a minute to arrive, but as it missed the town centre, few were killed. Winnie was ready to respond ten days later.

* Palmer's Little Ship was alone on its way north to Ramsgate. All the boat traffic was going in the opposite direction: a ship of that night's evacuation going south to Dover passed Palmer on average about every ten minutes.

Nor were there any fast ships from Dover overtaking him, because they would stay in harbour until the evening, and try to do as much as possible of their round trip to Dunkirk under cover of darkness.

The first to pass Palmer as he left Dover were, probably, the last two of the night's destroyers, Winchelsea and Whitshed.

H.M.S. Winchelsea was on the fifth of her six trips. She would bring – in total – over 4,000 troops to safety.

The Captain of the H.M.S. Whitshed, before he had set out, had had all her mess tables and everything possible from below decks removed, to gain space for the troops. But he had found that when Whitshed reached the East Mole at Dunkirk, around first light on Sunday morning, that there was no one around! This may have been because Wake-Walker had thought that the weather was exceptionally clear, and had therefore stopped embarkations a half an hour earlier – at 3.00 a.m. instead of 3.30.

Whitshed's Captain disembarked and began walking the three-quarters of a mile along the East Mole, but an abandoned bike enabled him to cycle first to the naval bastion at its base and then into town. He unearthed British, French and Belgian groups for rescue. To carry as many troops as possible he took the unprecedented step of opening the watertight doors while still in the ‘battle zone’. This enabled him to cram aboard over 500.

It had been only three weeks earlier, on 11 May, that the Whitshed had brought to Dover the first casualties of the German Blitzkrieg of the West, that had started the previous day. Germany, having already occupied Norway, Poland and Denmark, had, since then, taken the Low Countries and driven the B.E.F. back to Britain. Aggressors always have the advantage, and the Germans had taken it with ruthlessness and speed.

After these elderly destroyers passed Palmer, they were followed by a minesweeper and two

*b There are reliable references to it being misty as well. Probably both are true of slightly different times and places.
Drifters—a each was carrying over 100 troops. Two French vessels, a torpedo boat and another drifter, then went by, bringing 200 more to safety.

* When Palmer's boat rounded the South Foreland, she approached St. Margaret's Bay. Behind it is a short break in the White Cliffs and a road zigzags down to the shore. It was an obvious landing point for any small invading force, so the military had sited guns there. A few weeks after Palmer had passed, Churchill was there. General Hollis who was with him recalled,

‘...the officer in charge of the anti-invasion defences explained rather apologetically that he had only three anti-aircraft guns in the whole brigade, which covered five miles of this coast nearest France, with [only] six rounds for each gun. He wondered whether he was justified in firing one of these six to show the men how the gun worked. Winston replied that the fire should be held for the last moment at the closest range.’

Such would be the weaknesses of Britain's defences were the Germans to invade.

* Next to pass Palmer and his motor boat was the St. Helier—a Channel Island ferry belonging to the Great Western Railway. She had overtaken Palmer on Route X on Saturday morning, and they had both left Dunkirk late on Saturday evening. She was coming to Dover along Route X. The day before, at Dunkirk, Captain Pitman had refused to leave the wounded behind as instructed, and had spent a harrowing seven hours moored at the East Mole to take them aboard. He acted in spite of the new ruling—and ignored it on Sunday as well!

* Deal pier would have been just ahead of Palmer, and he probably thought that invasion was immanent when he saw that its central portion appeared to have been already blown up. In fact, a few months before, a German mine had damaged a 350-ton Dutch coaster, the Nora. Her crew had been injured, and she had been badly holed. Tugs had managed to beach her just fifty yards south of Deal pier where she sank completely. A later storm, though, coupled with a rising tide, had refloated her, and repeatedly hurled her against the pier. Nora won! After energetically demolishing a section of the pier, she had then passed through the gap and rested high-and-dry on the beach beyond. When Palmer passed, she lay there on her side, where she defied all later attempts to refloat her.

* At the end of the account of Saturday morning, the saga of getting troops off the massive Prague has been told, and the desperate hope of her Captain to reach shallow waters before she sank. He had headed her due east, but, similarly to Palmer, had had constantly to steer to counteract the loss of one of her engines.

At midday on Saturday, Dover's massive Rescue Tug, the Lady Brassey, had steamed to Prague's rescue. At 1.30 p.m. she began to tow her to the nearest sandy shallows. The few remaining troops, of her 3,000, were put

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a Drifters were so named because they fished by allowing their nets to drift with the tide. Unlike ‘trawlers’, they did not drag—or ‘trawl’—their nets through the water.
aboard two trawlers. As the water poured into Prague's stern, her bows lifted and she adopted the pose of a speedboat – but speedy she certainly was not!

Her Master temporarily beached her on the 'Sandwich Flats'. This ever-widening stretch of sand begins by the Royal St. George Golf Links, and then runs northward past the Prince's Golf Links, after which it merges into the River Stour's massive delta called Pegwell Bay. These 'Sandwich Flats' are exposed at Low Water, which enables the underside of any beached boat on them to be examined or worked on for a few hours twice a day.

The Prague stayed on the Sandwich Flats for four hours – most likely to let as much water as possible drain from her, and also to be pumped away. At High Water, Lady Brassey then towed Prague three miles south. She passed the above-mentioned golf courses and then the Royal Cinque Ports' links.

A mile north of Deal pier lie the ruins of one of a chain of Henry VIII's artillery fortifications designed against invasion four centuries earlier: Sandown Castle. Here the beach was narrow but clear of a series of groins further along (designed to retain Deal's sandy beach).

It was opposite Sandown Castle that Prague was towed inshore and, where the pebbles gave way to more forgiving sand, was 'gently beached'.

The seemingly unending line of ships will probably have been no great surprise to Palmer. But to see one of the two biggest ferry steamers in the world beached on the shore just ahead of him, beyond Deal's broken pier, must have been a shock.

What a pity that Palmer was unaware of the great nautical saga that had preceded her arrival. He could not, of course, enjoy her story's happy ending. The efforts of the Prague's crew and Lady Brassey paid off. In due course, she was patched up sufficiently to reach London for full repairs. In 1944, as a hospital ship, she was available to make no less than fifty cross-Channel trips in support of the Americans in Normandy.

Prague's Master and Chief Engineer were each given Distinguished Service awards for their bravery and initiative.

Looking inland, beyond the Prague, Palmer will have been able to see the white smoke of trains crossing the marshes on their way down to Dover. Not all carried troops. On Sunday morning, Palmer may well have seen trains for the evacuation of children, in addition to the Dynamo Specials.

At about 9.00 a.m., one train will have passed to depart Dover Station at 9.20 a.m. It collected 687 children and 59 helpers and teachers from Dover Boys' and Girls’ County Schools, to take them all to Monmouth, Wales. This Sunday the Mayor and the Town Councillors of Dover gathered at the Station to see off children from eighteen local schools. A later newspaper report showed the young pupils of the Duke of York's school by their bus at Dover Station, with their few belongings in paper carrier bags, and their names written on large labels tied to their coat buttonholes. The first children's Special had departed Dover earlier, at 7.45 a.m. The third would leave mid-morning – at about the time that Palmer reached Ramsgate. On this Sunday eight trains – each of twelve coaches – took Thanet children off to Wales.

The Dynamo Specials, which had steamed 'around the clock' for a week, stopped at teatime on Sunday and did not start again until next day. With the end of major shipping in daylight, there were no troops.

The ticket collector at Dover neatly summed up the uniqueness of the days: '300,000 passengers, and not one asked me where their train was going!'*

Palmer, motoring on just one engine, will have been grateful for the tidal stream that was helping him along. The rescue vessels passing him on their way to Dover were all sailing against it.49

Four fishing boats were probably the next to

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* The Distinguished Service award is divided into two. The Cross (D.S.C.) is given to those of Officer Status and the Medal (D.S.M.) to non-officers. (A similar system applies to the Military and to the Distinguished Flying awards.) The cross/medal distinction reflects only the recipient's rank, there is no difference in the honour or its merit.
pass. After these drifters, Palmer would have seen two paddle steamers, one from Harwich, and the Emperor of India from Bournemouth. The latter was returning from her third and last trip carrying 213 troops. Up to twenty-seven paddleboats took part in Operation Dynamo: six never returned. Five of them were bombed (Brighton Queen, Crested Eagle, Devonia, Gracie Fields and the Waverley), while the Brighton Belle hit a submerged wreck near the North Goodwins.

* 

H.M.S. Locust then passed Palmer. She was a ‘Chinese Gun Boat’. Her odd description derived from her class originally being built for river use in the Far East – although they were later used much more widely. They had been cleverly designed for use in shallow waters. Instead of having their propellers outside and below the hull, they were protected and positioned within the hull. They were sited within tunnels through which they propelled the water. Such gunboats had remarkably shallow draughts for their size. While Palmer’s Naiad Errant had a draft of three foot (0.9m) and could not easily carry more than nine, a Chinese Gun Boat had less than twice that draft but could carry 630! 50

The shallow draught of the Chinese Gun Boats, together with their speed and manoeuvrability, made them ideal for Dynamo, so the Navy provided Locust and Mosquito. As recounted above, on Saturday afternoon, Mosquito had raced to the aid of the Scotia only to be dive-bombed, sunk, and have her crew lost.

Locust’s first return had been ‘among the epics of Dunkirk’. 51 The Navy had one single-masted large sailing ship in use during Operation Dynamo, the H.M.S. Bideford, already mentioned. Forty feet had been blasted off her stern.

Locust, only half her size and already carrying her own load of 620 French troops, had taken Bideford in tow. Because of the Bideford’s damage and lack of rudder, she was hardly controllable, and had ‘yawed wildly from side-to-side’! Three times in the first three miles the tow had parted, but the problem had been mastered. (As if that were not enough, Bideford had on board a suicidal French soldier who, with his full equipment, had jumped overboard. Locust stopped for half an hour in calm waters, but he was never found.)

Locust had then towed Bideford all the way from Dunkirk at walking pace and had not reached Dover until a day-and-a-half later. 52

On this Sunday morning, Locust was returning from her third trip and carrying only ninety-three troops – a fraction of her previous load. Perhaps, as the skipper of H.M.S. Whitshed had discovered, there had been no troops on the East Mole. It was, after all, very exposed and under constant shelling.

On Monday Locust would return to Dunkirk carrying the demolition team who would, sadly, then blow up the burnt-out and stranded hull of her sister-ship, Mosquito. 53

* 

The French Railway’s ferry Côte d’Argent also passed Palmer. She was manned by the French but officially under the orders of the Royal Navy. When she had left Dover on Saturday evening, the Capitaine had promptly stopped and anchored outside the harbour so that he and his officers could sit down to a five-course dinner followed by coffee and liqueurs. Draining his last cup of coffee the Capitaine had leapt to his feet crying ’Aux armes!’ 54 and had then raced the Côte d’Argent at her full 20 knots a to Dunkirk on the third of her five trips. At the East Mole the conditions of wind and tide had made it extremely tricky for him. He nevertheless embarked 1,250 French troops just after midnight, so bringing her total to over 5,000 rescued. (Two months later Côte d’Argent fell into enemy hands and was converted to a minelayer.)

Next to pass Palmer on the last leg of his journey was the Young Mun, a flare-burning drifter of the Dover Patrol. Her gunner had succeeded in shooting down a German plane. Such results were often claimed, but rarely verified. He was later awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. The Young Mun had 120 aboard, and since being in mid-Channel she had had in tow the little thirty-foot motorboat the Quisisana – carrying her own considerable load of eighteen. 55 These were mainly Coldstream Guards. Did Sgt. Norman Palmer (of the Second Battalion) aboard Naiad Errant notice her? Did he ever realise that probably the only other small wooden ship

a 24 mph.
south of Ramsgate was filled with men from his own regiment? Quisisana, unlike Naiad Errant, would be accepted at Dover, because she was powerless to go elsewhere. (Happily, the paths of Naiad Errant and Quisisana would cross again sixty years later.)

*

Palmer's destination, Ramsgate, was on the Isle of Thanet. Historically it was an island, because of a considerable channel between it and the mainland. For centuries, the channel was called the Wantsum because of its tendency to be in want of some water, i.e. to silt up. The Wantsum is now only a few yards across, although in the fourteenth century Edward III had been able to anchor 1,600 ships in it. To guard its two entrances the Romans had built forts at its northern and southern ends: Reculver and Richborough respectively.

Richborough had been the site of a secret terminal in the Great War for the movement of troops and ammunition to France (a role it would repeat during the D-Day landings).

When Palmer passed, it had become a transit and training camp for 3,500 refugees who had fled from Nazi regimes in various countries. Many belonged to a unit that gloried in the name: The King's Own Loyal Enemy Aliens (later the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps). By an application of ruthless logic, as Alex Howard recalls, they were:

'...given rifles without ammunition because although we were friendly aliens – we were aliens!'

As Palmer approached the Isle of Thanet, he passed the place where the Prague had, initially, been beached, before he crossed Pegwell Bay.

At low tide, the bay becomes an area of mud the size of Ramsgate itself. It is famous as the landing place of the Saxons, and St. Augustine. Eric Martin was an apprentice electrician working on boats in Ramsgate Harbour during Operation Dynamo. He recalls:

'I have never seen so many small ships together and the whole harbour was full and Pegwell Bay was crowded with larger vessels. They were all types and it seemed that everything that could float was there. I even remember seeing the Massey Shaw which was a well-known fire fighting boat from London…'

'…the sea was as calm as a mill pond, and so calm that even rowing boats could be towed across but I remember that for days a great pall of smoke drifted along the horizon. It was Dunkirk burning.'

**Summoned and Sent**

War Office, London – mid-morning

The Chief of Imperial General Staff had not only Alan Brooke for an interview on Sunday morning, but also Montgomery. The latter had returned to Whitehall on Sunday morning feeling 'very full of beans', and 'demanded a private interview' with his chief.

CIGS looked despondent. 'Do you realize that for the first time for a thousand years this country is now in danger of invasion?'

Montgomery recalls,

'I laughed. This made Dill very angry, and he asked what was there to laugh about. I said that the people of England would never believe we were in danger of being invaded when they saw useless generals in charge of some of the Home Commands…'

On first reading, it seems impressive enough. But half a moment's examination reveals that – even if Monty's assessment of the generals was correct – it was on three counts an illogical and childish remark.

1. How many of the 'people of England' would even know who the generals were, let alone 'see' them.
2. If they did see them, how many would be in a position accurately to assess them?
3. Of those who accurately assessed them, would it lead them to assume we would not be invaded?

No wonder Dill was furious at such inappropriate drivel!

Montgomery said that certain officers should be retired. Gort, he felt, had never 'commanded' the B.E.F. and should be replaced! In his Memoirs, Montgomery recorded that Dill –

'…ticked me off for speaking in such a way at such a time in our misfortunes, and that remarks of that kind could only cause a loss of confidence.'

\* When they would both be restored and be near-neighbours on the Middle Thames.
Dill followed it up with a letter in the same vein. Montgomery, characteristically, took credit for the alleged results. He claimed 'the useless generals disappeared', but gave no names.

Blighty – and Souvenirs

Ramsgate Harbour – from 10.25 a.m.

The boats that had returned to Ramsgate from Dunkirk had not entered the Harbour in the dark, but had waited for first light.

Ramsgate Harbour had been very busy before Palmer arrived. Twenty-four vessels had entered with 4,356 troops all told (see Endnote 60).

The first vessel to be allowed in bore the most prestigious name in the Navy. She was one of the motor boats off the battleship H.M.S. Nelson. Her three engines failed to live up to the high naval traditions evoked by her name.

* 

The battleship H.M.S. Nelson was, by chance, in this Sunday's papers. They reported the claim of a 'military spokesman in Berlin' that the Germans had recently sunk H.M.S. Nelson, with a loss of 700 of her crew. (In fact, she served until 1948.)

The Admiralty, sadly, misapplied its rule of making no comment concerning any individual British ship, so did nothing whatever to allay the fears of those related to Nelson's 1,360-strong crew. The Admiralty missed the essential difference between military fact – for which the rule was designed – and military fiction, for which it was not. Such a blind and wrong application of policy served only German interests, and caused the British undue suffering. (An unofficial leak – implying that someone at the Admiralty thought it 'complete bunkum' – would have put much right, and stolen the German's advantage. A little truth from the Admiralty could have killed the great German lie.)

* 

On Wednesday the starboard engine of Nelson's motor boat had packed up after leaving Portsmouth, and had never worked again. She had called in at Newhaven for repairs to her central engine on Thursday, but it had caught fire! She had then struggled into Ramsgate on her one remaining engine, while Friday was spent trying to repair the central engine. Her skipper, Sub-Lieutenant Lucey R.N. (whose opinion, perhaps mercifully, has not been recorded), transferred himself to a more reliable civilian vessel – the London fire-float Massey Shaw. Nelson's luck did not change. On Saturday, under new command, she had left Ramsgate at lunchtime in company with Fervent, but had had to turn back because of air locks in both of her two 'good' engines!

Three hours later, Nelson had again left Ramsgate. Near the North Goodwin Light Ship she spent an hour transferring French troops from a trawler that had hit a submerged wreck. On reaching Dunkirk, she had immediately to return and not engage in 'beach work' because by then she was running short of petrol. Early on Sunday morning she had arrived back with twenty-two British soldiers. Her difficulties seem to have been due more to the phenomenon known as 'that's life!', than to the warlike expertise of Hitler's hoards.

* 

Boats of similar size and speed tend to travel together! The next to arrive in Ramsgate Harbour early that Sunday morning had been the Dutch schuits Hondsrug and Lena – both under British command. The Hondsrug's schedule was typical. In the previous twenty-four hours she had embarked troops at Dunkirk under heavy fire (while machine-gunning German planes), and had delivered over 200 troops to Ramsgate. Next, she had collected a further shipload of 400 from Dunkirk, and had returned yet again to Ramsgate. She made four Dunkirk trips in all, and brought back over 1,400 men. Lena's record was almost as impressive.

* 

Eight fishing boats had also arrived before Palmer: three British, three French and two Belgian. Two of the British had arrived just after 6.00 a.m. with seventy troops each. The other vessels arrived some three hours later. The numbers landed indicate that the boats varied greatly in size. The smallest of the Belgian trawlers had arrived with just twenty-nine, while the French trawler Cap d'Antifer had disembarked no less than 291 troops. Another fishing boat, Lord Barham, had gone
to deliver food and fresh water, and had returned to Ramsgate with nearly 200 French troops aboard – double her legal limit!

* The paddle steamers Medway Queen and Duchess of Fife had arrived together at Ramsgate Harbour at about 6.30 a.m.\textsuperscript{\textdagger}

Before the War, the Medway Queen had been used for trips between Chatham, Southend, Clacton and North Kent. She survived no less than seven Dunkirk trips. Her Captain had an independent streak. After his first trip back to Dover he returned troops to Ramsgate instead, since he thought it less congested and a shorter journey. To save time he then 'slipped over the minefields'\textsuperscript{62} as he thought her five-and-a-half foot draught (1.7m) would allow it – a sure way to find out! Albert Powell, a lorry driver with the Royal Army Service Corps, arrived back on the Medway Queen on Sunday morning. He recalls:

'Owing to the shallow draft of the beach, the first job was getting on to a rowing boat which took us a little way out, and where we were transferred to a launch which took us to the larger vessels which were lying further off. On the way to the bigger ships…one bomb hit the water close enough to us to swamp the boat and I found myself in the water; luckily I could swim. Having divested myself of my pack, etc. I surfaced and looked around and saw there was a ship closer to me than the shore. I struck out for her. She was a converted minesweeper called the Medway Queen. I was hauled out of the water totally exhausted – and so were my mates. Before long the old paddle steamer was on her way, and we soon arrived at Ramsgate. I remember it was a fine day and very warm, and by the time we got there my clothing had practically dried on me. After a smashing welcome from the W.V.S.\textsuperscript{a} we got on a train…\textsuperscript{63}

* Later on Sunday morning, Ramsay signalled:

The final evacuation is staged for tonight, and the Nation looks to the Navy to see this through.
I want every ship to report as soon as possible whether she is fit to make the call which has been made on our courage and endurance.

The replies flooded back:
'Fit and ready.'
'Ready and anxious to carry out your orders.'
'Ship unfit, but officers and ship's company are willing to serve in any capacity.'\textsuperscript{64}

Only the Medway Queen among the larger ships was unable to sail, and this was owing to the exhaustion of her crew. She was sent to Dover for a replacement crew and went to Dunkirk twice more, bringing her total of troops rescued to over 5,000.\textsuperscript{65} She was oil-fired, so her trips were not restricted by lack of fuel as was the case with the coal-fired paddle steamers. (After the Evacuation, her exploits made her the most famous of the paddle steamers and ferries that had taken part. She is the largest vessel used in Operation Dynamo to have survived.\textsuperscript{b})

* The Clyde paddle steamer Duchess of Fife had returned from her third trip. She had initially gone to the Dunkirk beaches but, finding no remaining troops, she had gone to the East Mole. On it stood a mass of French troops, but they had refused to embark! The Captain, Lt. John Anderson, had harangued them without result. The natural language barrier was made more difficult by his strong Scottish accent. Anderson shouted for any British Officer present to come forward.

A memorable exchange took place.

British Officer: Don't be so windy, what do you want?
Captain: Damn you Sir! I am not windy or I wouldn't be here!

The officer then explained that there were no British around. His entente was less than cordiale: he succinctly expressed his firm belief in the yellow hue of the bellies of the Allies around him. He concluded by saying that as the French would not move, the Duchess should leave.\textsuperscript{66}

The Captain persisted, however, and managed to embark 404\textsuperscript{67} reluctant Frenchmen.

There are not many details of the very smallest boats used in Operation Dynamo. We are grateful to Captain Anderson for recording

\textsuperscript{a} Women's Voluntary Service, now the R(oyal)W.V.S.

\textsuperscript{b} Support her. www.medwayqueen.co.uk
that on an earlier occasion, when he had sent his sea boats off to the beach to embark troops, his junior engineer, Mr. V. N. Wood, had volunteered to take the Duchess of Fife's thirteen-foot skiff ashore. Wood, with the second Engineer and the Coxswain, made five ship-to-shore-to-ship trips, and brought off six soldiers at a time.68

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The thirty-two foot Naiad Errant was by far the smallest of the first six motor boats to enter Ramsgate on Sunday morning, and so had the least troops. Next in size was the forty-foot pinnace Marsayru, with nineteen troops aboard. She had spent the night in mid-channel moored against a buoy. Just before sunrise, a trawler had taken her line and had given her a three-and-a-half hour tow to Ramsgate Harbour.69

Marsayru's steel hull stood her in good stead later on Sunday when she was returning to Dunkirk. She was machine-gunned for half an hour by four Messerschmitts with no great damage. They gave up when three Hurricanes appeared.

* 

Other ‘small craft’ that had arrived at Ramsgate before Palmer that morning included the forty-two foot motor boat Encore, with forty-four troops aboard, and the motor-boat Providence with twenty-seven.

The seventy-two foot motor-yacht Mermaiden\(^a\) was there. She had returned from her second trip with twenty-five troops. Most of her crew were not willing to go a third time and had to be replaced. She would be towed the following day to Dunkirk by the tug Sun IV.

Small craft were often towed across the Channel, since this conserved fuel for where it was most needed. One lifeboat, for instance, was able to stay working the Dunkirk beaches for four successive days.

Such ships and crews that 'stayed over the other side', in the battle area, were much less likely to survive than those who ferried troops across the Channel. The latter could often claim impressive figures for the number of troops they had landed, but the small craft operating shore-to-ship off the Dunkirk beaches rarely kept a tally of their efforts.

The final totals show that, on average over the nine days, 11,000 a day were rescued first by a small boat and then a large one.\(^b\) (That is 500 an hour even when averaged over twenty-four hours.)

This is particularly worth noting, given the tendency by some nowadays to minimise the role of the 'Little Ships.'

When this is done, the statistic they use is the percentage of troops that the Little Ships brought back across the Channel. It is an inappropriate statistic to employ. Compared with other boats, the Little Ships brought back very few, simply because it was not their task. They were unsuited for it as they lacked both capacity and speed.

The relevant statistic regarding the Little Ships is this:

Three out of ten troops needed a small ship initially to get them on their way.

(Statistics in the footnote \(^c\) below.)

* 

The Thames steam tug Sun IV arrived in Ramsgate Harbour at 7.40 Sunday morning. The London firms of W. H. J. Alexander and William Watkins had supplied twenty-two tugs between them for use in Operation Dynamo. Alexander's tugs were all Suns, and all Watkins' tugs had names ending with '–a'.

The Port of London was left with only one tug capable of handling a large ship.

* 

The engineer of Sun IV had the unforgettable experience of hauling a B.E.F. soldier out of the water – to find out that it was his own brother!

On Sunday Sun IV had found the lost Walton-on-the-Naze lifeboat, with a rope around her propeller and her Coxswain killed by a shell.\(^70\) She towed the lifeboat back, and once the diver had freed her rope, a replacement Coxswain returned her to Dunkirk.

\(^a\) Now renamed Amazone.

\(^b\) 98,671 were rescued from the beaches in just under 9 days.

\(^c\) 338.226 were rescued, 98.671 from the beaches, i.e. 29.17%. The few occasions when larger ships, e.g. Portsdown, went aground to act as piers would not significantly alter the percentage.
Watkins’ tug *Racia* was in Harbour. On Saturday, she had towed across twelve ship's lifeboats, and overnight had brought back 250 troops.

Much of the greatest work by tugs took place in British waters, as they laboured ceaselessly in or near the British harbours enabling the large ships to dock or moor, to be repaired, to rearm or to refuel.

In addition to the crippled Walton lifeboat, the Great Yarmouth & Gorleston lifeboat *Louise Stephens* was also in Ramsgate Harbour. As well as her own troops, she had taken on board soldiers from another lifeboat, *Mary Scott*, which, as related earlier, had found herself stranded at Dunkirk on a falling tide – and at the wrong end of a lorry pier!

The falling tides at Dunkirk had also nearly trapped the London fire-float the *Massey Shaw*, but by using full power she had just managed to get clear. She had spent most of her time ferrying troops from the beaches – some 500 in all. The *Massey Shaw* was not equipped with a compass, but one had been hastily purchased when she left London. In the darkness of Saturday night, her skipper, like Palmer, had to navigate by it. He felt that it was malfunctioning, so when he saw a drifter (probably *Lord Barham*) towing two small boats, he followed her instead, and delivered twenty-eight troops to Ramsgate at 8.00 a.m.

* The boat that Palmer followed into Ramsgate Harbour was the *Portsdown*. A greater contrast to Palmer's *Naiad Errant* could hardly be imagined.

*Portsdown* was an elderly Southern Railway paddle steamer. She was 160 feet longer than Palmer’s boat and carried seventy-five times the number of troops. The *Portsdown* had been rushed into service on Saturday. As she had not been painted in wartime grey, the crew tried to camouflage her as much as possible by covering her white superstructure with brown and black canvas. They draped kapok and life-jackets around the wheelhouse as a thin protection against shell splinters. Had Palmer looked closely at the impressive gun that *Portsdown* had mounted on her foredeck, he would have seen that it was merely a Luftwaffe deterrent, hurriedly make of wood and canvas!

The paddle steamer had left Sheerness with two fifteen-foot ship's lifeboats, but had lost both of them. The first had been blown out of the water by a shell. The other had been so damaged at the end of its fourth trip to the beaches that it simply sank. Around dawn on Sunday morning (Low Water was at 3.30 a.m.) *Portsdown’s* Captain had run her bow aground to enable troops to embark now that he had no ship's lifeboats. He had then waited for two-and-a-half hours until the rising tide lifted her off.

* Commander J. C. Clouston was the Piermaster at Dunkirk, and had masterminded a way of directing both troops and ships to use the East Mole to its best advantage. With the stopping of daylight sailings, he and a dozen of his team had planned a brief return to England to report to British authorities, to have a very short rest and refreshment, and then to return again to Dunkirk mid-afternoon. They had abandoned their rather odd transport (a 'motor driven naval pontoon boat') and had hitched a lift aboard *Portsdown* instead.

(As *Portsdown* had no degaussing equipment she was unprotected, and so was not used again in Operation Dynamo.)

* It was 10.25 on Sunday morning when Palmer's troops disembarked in Ramsgate Harbour. As Palmer's watch had been ruined swimming, Palmer could only guess his time of arrival, and wrote *I arrived there at eleven*. The authorities duly recorded the arrival of *Knight* (- yes!) *Errant*, and the disembarking of her eight troops.

Palmer’s round trip had taken him since 4.00 a.m. Saturday. He had had no sleep, and was obviously tired.

* *Naiad Errant*, like so many, including the *Massey Shaw*, had lost the small dinghy (‘tender’) that she had carried. She still had the boarding ladder that must have been almost essential for rescuing the stricken French sailors from the *Foudroyant*. One of her life rings was missing. On the roof, where the dinghy had been stowed, were some of the

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*a* A survivor, now named *Tyne Star.*

*b* Named after the founder of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (1891).
now-empty petrol cans that Palmer had taken off the supply boat near the East Mole almost twelve hours earlier. Photos taken a fortnight later suggest that she had probably had some windows broken.

* 

Palmer reported, I put the soldiers ashore on the pier.

Arriving at Ramsgate must have been an experience of mixed emotions.

On the pier, at one stage, the dead were laid out with the Navy's corpses on one side, and the Army's corpses on the other.

When Corporal John Jones landed, he straightaway kissed the ground. His Sergeant's untypical reaction says a great deal, 'Give it one from me as well!' He did.

Driver Albert Matthews (see Endnote) took the chrome Ship's Bell – with Naiad Errant engraved on it – and gave it to a tea-lady on the pier. It was not an unusual emotional reaction on reaching safety. At Plymouth a high-ranking French officer was so moved by the caring welcome given him, that he cut off his medals and gave them to two canteen staff. (In 1978 the bell was returned. The tea-lady had kept it wrapped in tissue paper in her wardrobe drawer since 1940.)

Sergeant Norman 'Pedlar' Palmer, the Guardsman aboard Naiad Errant, removed her large Red Ensign and went off to be given 'beer, tea and buns which was like manna from Heaven.' It was unusual to be given beer; perhaps it was a privilege of rank. (He did not live up to his ‘pedlar’ nickname. He initially kept the flag, but, after fifty years, he returned it to Naiad Errant's owner – after seeing her picture on the cover of Christian Brann's 1989 book The Little Ships of Dunkirk.)

* 

Three of the soldiers Palmer had brought back were Army drivers: Matthews – who took the bell – Stan Cox, and Stan Cullen. They highlight the obvious fact that an army consists of both personnel and equipment. By the end of the Evacuation, the B.E.F. had left behind 38,000 vehicles in France. Even if all their 38,000 drivers had been evacuated from Dunkirk, each could not exercise his

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a Also left behind were 475 tanks and 12,000 motorcycles.
specialised role in the Army until the 38,000 vehicles had been replaced.

It takes personnel plus equipment to make an Army.

This important truth lies behind three things. First, the need of the B.E.F. to evacuate. Second, Hitler not regarding the evacuated troops as, in any real sense, an Army. Third, Britain's acute awareness of her vulnerability to German invasion.

Sunday Lunch
Chequers, Bucks. – from noon

Churchill and his wife had their Sunday lunch at Chequers.

At tea on Saturday, in their flat at the Admiralty, Mrs. Churchill had been 'full of conversation and pleasurably excited at the prospect of going to Chequers for the first time.' Chequers Court, near Wendover, Buckinghamshire, was, and is, the official country residence of the British Prime Minister. The Churchills had arrived there, with the P.M.'s bodyguard and a secretary, on Saturday evening. Churchill's schedule meant that they would have less than twenty-four hours away.

Mrs. Churchill – 'Clemmie' – had visited the redbrick Tudor house as a guest of Lloyd George* many years earlier, but this was her first visit to Chequers as the hostess. She found the house attractive but inconvenient. The bedrooms and bathrooms were adequate, but the staffing would probably be difficult. As it was a warm June weekend, her shock of learning that there was no central heating was postponed.

Inspector Walter Thompson was the bodyguard. He had also acted as Lloyd George's bodyguard during his 'housewarming' of Chequers in 1921, when the Sinn Fein was threatening to burn the place down. In June 1940 Thompson thought that the place was a terrible security risk. Bushes lined all the paths and afforded easy cover for any intruder. There were rumours of the Germans wanting to parachute assassins into the extensive grounds. He realised that the estate was only guarded by a few local policemen, merely to discourage intruders. Thompson alerted Scotland Yard to the problem and soon two hundred guards were deployed, ack-ack guns were positioned, Bren-gun carriers moved in, and work was started to build an underground shelter.77

The secretary that Churchill had with him for this weekend's visit was Mary Shearburn. Although it was a physical break, Churchill's work did not stop. He worked his usual hours, and finished dictating to Miss Shearburn long after midnight.

That was when Walter Thompson came in from patrolling the grounds and Mary offered him a cup of tea. As it was already 2.30 on Sunday morning, she told Thompson of her first interview with Churchill. He had asked her if she minded working late. She replied that she did not, having worked for a theatre manager who worked until 11.30! Churchill, she recounted, 'had smiled so wryly'.78

* On Sunday the Churchills invited two guests for lunch – Eric Seal, Churchill's Principal Private Secretary (1939-1941), and the Churchills' near neighbour at Chartwell, Sir Desmond Morton, Head of the Industrial Intelligence Centre.

During Churchill's pre-War 'Wilderness Years' Morton is thought to have been among those who had helped him gather the necessary confidential material to warn the government and the nation of German re-armament and intent.

Over lunch this Sunday, Morton had relayed to him the Foreign Office's query about the possible overseas evacuation of the Royal Family. Churchill's reply was 'minuted' by Mary Shearburn: 'I believe we shall make them rue the day they try to invade our island. No such discussion can be permitted.'

Only thirty people – headed by the King and the Prime Minister – ever received the messages from the Enigma decrypting device. Morton was possibly one of them. Less than a fortnight earlier the cryptographic centre at Bletchley had succeeded in 'cracking' the daily changing settings used by the German
Luftwaffe (but not those used by the German Army or Navy). It was what the communications had *not* revealed that was important. They had given no indication that the Dunkirk evacuation would divert Hitler from his long-term plan to take and occupy northern France and Paris. This implied that there was little danger of Britain being invaded until Hitler had conquered France. There would be a delay, therefore, of perhaps a couple of weeks.

* Everyone was worried.

Over Sunday lunchtime another of Churchill's Secretaries, John Colville, was with his aristocratic grandfather, the Marquess of Crewe. The Marchioness was 'much exercised about Fifth Columnists and the lack of deep air-raid shelters'.

'Chips' Channon, a famous diarist, an Under Secretary at the Foreign Office, and a leading personality in London society, recorded his thoughts on this day:

'I wonder as I gaze out on the grey and green Horse Guards Parade with the blue sky and the huge silver balloons like bowing elephants, the barbed-wire entanglements and soldiers about, is this really the end of England? Are we witnessing, as for so long I have feared, the decline, the decay and perhaps extinction, of this great island people?'

The upper classes were not alone in their anxiety.

A pregnant wife of a London fireman with a three year old son had been evacuated to a Surrey village. Her diary entry this Sunday ran:

'I pictured myself with my young baby in my arms and Michael beside me trying to fulfil what is asked of us in the leaflet about invasion, e.g. refusing water to the enemy, and the obvious result, and wondering how it would help my country to make my children motherless.'

* While he was at Chequers, Churchill continued to work. He dealt, for instance, with a question raised by Kenneth Clark, Director of London's National Gallery, who had asked whether the nation's art treasures should be shipped abroad, perhaps to Canada. Mary Shearburn minuted the P.M.'s response:

'No, bury them in caves and cellars. None must go. We are going to beat them.'

If the British were worried, the Germans certainly were not.

William Shirer, the famous American war correspondent who pioneered live trans-Atlantic radio broadcasts, was in Berlin. It had been nine months since Berliners had heard an air-raid warning – it had been a false alarm. He described this Sunday in Berlin.

'[It was a]…warm sunny June day, tens of thousands of people, mostly in family groups, betook themselves to the woods on the lakes on the outskirts of the city… Everyone had that lazy, idle, happy-go-lucky Sunday holiday air. One reason for this particular state of things, I suppose, is that the war has not been brought home to the people of Berlin. They read about it, or on the radio hear the pounding of the big guns. But that's all. Paris and London may feel in danger. Berlin doesn't.'

* The Churchills, Inspector Thompson and Miss Shearburn left Chequers mid-afternoon because at 5.15 Churchill had to attend the second half of the Chief of Staffs' Committee Meeting.

Churchill was not the only leader to have Sunday meetings.

A Generals Tour

Lille to Cambrai – until 2.50 p.m.

While Churchill had been enjoying Sunday lunch with his wife and two friends in the Elizabethan mansion in the Chilterns, Hitler continued his touring, and once again had a field-kitchen lunch.

Hitler had left the eighteenth century Chateau de Brigode at 8.30 a.m. this Sunday, and his motorcade had once more crossed Lille. He did not seem security conscious there. Perhaps he was relying on the local goodwill engendered by General Wäger's honourable treatment of the French twenty-four hours earlier.
He then went inland to Pont-à-Marcq and met up with the Commander of his 4 Army (von Kluge), and also saw nearby the Commander of the II Armeekorps *(Strauss).

Hitler's preoccupation with the Great War continued unabated from Saturday. His motorcade went next to visit the Canadian Memorial Park with its twin stone towers in remembrance of 66,000 fallen in battle – of whom over 11,000 had no known grave.

The French nation had given the land in gratitude for Canadian help in the Great War. The park had been opened by the Duke of Windsor, during his short reign as Edward VIII, and, therefore, King of Canada. The park contains, unchanged, some trenches and craters of the Great War.

The Canadian memorial has no theme of victory or triumph over Germany, but simply remembers the dead. Because of this emphasis, Hitler actually admired it. He later had it protected from any vandalism by ordinary German soldiers by placing special units of the Waffen [Armed] S.S. to guard it.

The memorial is marked by two 100-foot pillars. At the base of them General Hoth, of the V Armeekorps, set up maps to illustrate the German Army's crossing of the river Meuse and the tank battle near Cambrai.

General Erwin Rommel, Commander of the 7th. Panzer Division*, was present among the senior leaders. The reason for his presence was because he had deliberately sent Hitler a summary of his recent achievement:
Prisoners taken – 6,849
Light tanks destroyed – 295
Light tanks captured – 48
Heavy tanks destroyed – 18

Hitler was impressed, although the details cannot have surprised him since, on the previous Monday, he had awarded Rommel the first Knight's Cross of the French Campaign.85

Rommel wrote to his wife next day:
'The Fuhrer's visit was wonderful. He greeted me with the words: "Rommel, we were very worried about you during [those days you were on]86 the attack." His whole face was radiant and I had to accompany him afterwards. I was the only division commander who did.'87

Hitler and his party then drove on towards Bouchain to receive a report from General Heitz (of the VIII Armeekorps). On the way, Hitler stopped at the main French Cemetery of the Great War.

The site is unusual in having, in addition to a central chapel, a 170-foot (52m) lighthouse. The lantern's 3,000 candlepower light revolves twelve times a minute, and can be seen for a forty-three mile (70km) radius – as far away as Dunkirk, in fact.

At Lille, four hours earlier, Hitler had been very relaxed, but as he approached Bouchain

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* Armeekorps comprise an Armee.
* Divisions comprise an Armeekorps.
everything switched to top security. On 20 May the French 43ème Régiment d'Infanterie had blown all the bridges of the river Escaut as the Germans approached, and had held them at bay for six whole days. Perhaps it was the knowledge of this that made
Hitler suddenly so security conscious at Bouchain.

German troops, after searching every home, herded about a hundred inhabitants out of the little village to a local farm. Those who were unable to move were kept indoors, with their shutters closed and each under armed guard.

At about 1 p.m. Hitler was taken up a tower to view the area, and was, once again, shown maps. These detailed the advance of the German 8th. Infantry Division.

Once away from Bouchain, Hitler relaxed. At Cambrai – only nine miles (12km) away – he stood up in an open car to acknowledge the lines of cheering troops.

At Cambrai, Hitler had a meeting with General von Kleist (commanding his own Panzer Gruppe) to discuss the military situation, and it was here that Hitler and his entourage had a late field-kitchen lunch at about 1.45 p.m. After that, they crossed Cambrai to its local airport, and at 2.50 Hitler boarded his own plane. It was one of his splendid four-engined Focke Wulf 200 'Condor' civilian airliners.

After visiting and conferring with no less than four different Generals since breakfast – and five the day before – Hitler doubtless reclined in his special bullet-proof seat to enjoy a fifty-minute flight before his most important meeting of the day, where seven more generals awaited him.

Morning News

U.S.A. – from 12.00 p.m. B.S.T.

While Europe moved towards Sunday afternoon, in America the early morning papers were speaking of Dunkirk. The Sunday's *New York Times* carried a rhetorical piece written in a supposedly Churchillian style – but completely lacking his precision:

'So long as the English tongue survives, the word Dunkirk will be spoken with reverence. For in that harbour, in such a hell as never blazed on earth before, at the end of a lost battle, the rags and blemishes that have hidden the soul of democracy fell away… This shining thing in the souls of free men Hitler cannot command, or stain or conquer…it is the great tradition of democracy. It is the future. It is victory.'

The *Daily Mirror* famously made the same point in everyday English:

**BLOODY MARVELLOUS**

*This United Press cable appeared widely in the American Sunday papers.*

PARISS SENDS U.S. ENVOY FROM FLANDERS 'HELL'

Count René de Chambrun to tell Roosevelt of Operations.

PARIS June 2 (UP) – A survivor of the "Flanders Hell" is en route to Washington to inform President Roosevelt regarding Allied war operations. It was revealed last night.

The Count had been the liaison officer between the 1st French Army and the B.E.F. He wrote of his Dunkirk experience:

'As we left the French coast, three squadrons of Heinkels, twenty-seven in all, converged from three directions …six British fighters [of 264 Squadron] appeared in the sky at the precise moment that the Germans jettisoned their mines, they dived on them. They fought under our eyes the finest air battle I have ever seen. In a few minutes almost all the Heinkels had been hit and fell in the sea, leaving behind them long trails of smoke. Only when I reached Dover did I learn the news: the first "Bolton Defiants" with their revolving turrets had been sent that very morning over the channel by the R.A.F. This extraordinary sight, which has come to my mind often since, convinced me with absolute certainty, that any German attempt at a landing on British soil would be doomed to fail.'

What the papers did not record was what Chambrun was doing leaving Dunkirk. He had vital papers from the French First Army's General Blanchard, and he was delivering them to Blanchard's Commander-in-Chief, General Weygand, in Paris. Readers may feel that the obvious route from Dunkirk to Paris does not involve a Channel crossing! It did when at war! Because the Allies at Dunkirk were surrounded, the route to the French C-in-C in Paris had to be as follows:

- a fast boat from Dunkirk to Dover
- a *Dynamo Special* train to Victoria
- a flight from London to Paris's Le Bourget airport.90

Armed with his over-optimistic view of R.A.F. supremacy, Chambrun reported, in due course, to the American President. Roosevelt immediately gave him thirty-six hours to visit a list of twenty-three very influential Americans, who, if also convinced, would check the pessimism and isolationism that had recently swept the country. Chambrun's success was such that Roosevelt then gave him a further task, 'I am going to ask you to do a job, and that job is to convince the country.' Chambrun replied that there were 130 million Americans, and the majority believed in German victory. 'The task,' Roosevelt replied, 'is perhaps less difficult than the one you have just accomplished.' Roosevelt sent him on a speaking tour.

Chambrun's experience of the Defiants' air battle was providential but, sadly, untypical. No later experience of them could have engendered such optimism.

The Defiant was similar to a Hurricane but with a gun-turret and gunner on top. It was designed for defensive patrols, and could fight well against slow-moving bombers. When the Germans first saw them, they assumed they were single-seater Hurricanes, and so were mauled by their unexpected ability to fire to the rear – as Chambrun had witnessed.

The gun turret, with its four guns and second crew member, made the Defiants heavier, slower and less manoeuvrable than the Spitfires and Hurricanes, and they were vulnerable from below. The Luftwaffe pilots soon changed their tactics when they realised that the Defiants had no direct forward firing. A few weeks later, in the Battle of Britain, one Defiant patrol lost no less than two-thirds of its aircraft in one go. Fortunately, that happened too late to shake Chambrun's confidence! (Defiants were subsequently withdrawn and restricted to night fighting.)

12/7 for Guns
Woolwich Arsenal – 2.00 - 4.00 p.m.
On Saturday, President Roosevelt had directed his War and Navy Departments to assess what they could immediately spare for Britain, to make up for the tremendous stocks of weapons lost during the B.E.F.'s Evacuation.91

On this Sunday, probably from Chequers, Churchill wrote to Roosevelt asking for 200 aircraft at once, stressing the courage and success of our pilots 'against numerical superiority', and giving a guarantee that such aircraft would be well used. He added that, at the present rate of comparative losses, that number of planes could account for the loss of some 800 German machines.92

Within ten days, over 130 million rounds of ammunition, 100's of field guns and 1000's of rifles and machine guns were being loaded onto a dozen British freighters docked at New Jersey. It was a breath-taking transfer, for it stripped America's own military forces to the minimum level of support needed to retain their army. When the rifles arrived, they provoked not only gratitude but frustration! Since their manufacture in 1917-18, they had been packed and preserved in glutinous oil. In Cambridge, it took a fortnight for a team of 250 volunteers to get them ready for use.93

* Many of the Dunkirk troops returned with their rifles, and the Guards' Regiments were given no choice. Rifles were stacked in piles at every disembarkation point. Many of those who came back without them feared a court-martial. Certainly there were those on the smaller ships who did not have to think twice before dropping three or four rifles overboard, to make room for a soldier and perhaps to save a life.

* On this Sunday, King George visited Woolwich Arsenal, which was only nine miles from the centre of London. It employed 40,000 workers, and this Sunday was the first of a new 12-hour 7-day week that had had to be introduced to meet the needs of defence. With the King was the Minister of Supply, Herbert Morrison.

When the King arrived, the workers did not even stop for a cheer, but kept going on their vital work. The King operated some of the machines himself, and examined various items. He chatted with the workers, and paid tribute to their cheerfulness on the new twelve-hour shift. He stayed for two hours.
The Daily Sketch reported:
'The King saw veteran guns of this war. Stained with sea water, chipped and rusty, these had come from Flanders that morning.'

At least these returned to Britain. 1,000 heavy guns, 8,000 Bren guns, 90,000 rifles and 7,000 tons of ammunition had been left in France.

* Round-the-clock production was to be backed-up by impressive round-the-clock postal services. Saturday's The Times, under the heading ‘Sunday Post For Munition Works’, told its readers:
‘The Postmaster General announces that firms working throughout the weekend on munition or aircraft production can obtain letters on hand for them on Sunday mornings by calling at their local post office. Special arrangements can also be made for accepting these firms’ outward correspondence on Sunday afternoons…'

* The King was photographed at Woolwich firing a Bren gun for the first time in public. According to the papers, he scored a bull's-eye at 200 yards. This was not editorial licence: he was a good shot. Indeed, his first Royal duty at the age of twenty-one – in the middle of the Great War – had been to open the M.P.s' rifle range in Westminster. 'I shall declare the range open by firing the first shot and I will try my very best to obtain a bull's-eye,' he had said. (It was a bold promise, since the situation denied him the usual 'sighter' shot and the chance to adjust his gun-sights to his own requirements.)

King George's roles were nothing if not varied. On the first Sunday of the Evacuation, he had been at Westminster Abbey leading his nation in a Day of Prayer for the Allied cause. On the second, he was firing guns at Woolwich Arsenal.

General von Rundstedt's H.Q.
Charleville, France – from 4.00 p.m.
General von Rundstedt, like Bertram Ramsay, had been brought out of retirement. He was sixty-four. He had begun military service in the nineteenth century, at the age of sixteen. He considerably pre-dated Hitler and Nazi-ism and was an aristocrat and a non-political soldier of the 'old school'.

Four years before the Dunkirk Evacuation, he had represented the German Army at the funeral of King George's father, King George V.

Rundstedt had led his Army Group A at the outbreak of the War in the conquest of Poland (Plan White), and it was his fast mechanical armoured units ('panzers') which had broken through the Allied lines when the German War machine turned west on 10 May 1940, and started Hitler's next Operation: Plan Yellow.

Rundstedt's General Headquarters (G.H.Q.) was strategically placed at Charleville, on the mighty river Meuse. On Sunday afternoon, it was Hitler's destination as he flew in from Cambrai.

Two days after the Germans had begun their blitzkrieg of the West, the Allies, in an attempt to impede the German forces, had blown up every bridge over the Meuse except the one at Charleville.

The German breakthrough had started with the Battle of the Meuse – only three weeks earlier. They had established three bridgeheads across the Meuse and had destroyed the French 9th. Army. Then, von Rundstedt's forces had blasted a fifty-mile (80 kms) gap in the Allied Front by coming through the 'impassable' forests and hills of the Ardennes. A week later, it was von Rundstedt's Army Group A that had driven a wedge right through the Allies, thereby isolating the northern forces and cutting their supply lines. Armies need supplies (as has been repeatedly noted). The result, a mere two weeks later, was the necessity to evacuate Allied troops from Dunkirk.

* Although the Dunkirk Evacuation was the focus of attention among British leaders, it was not so for the Germans.

By this weekend, the German Front Line had overrun Belgium and Luxembourg, had passed Dunkirk and was well into France. This Front was 400 miles long, while the Dunkirk 'pocket' was by this time barely twenty.\(^b\)

\(^a\) He scored an 'inner', which is next best.

\(^b\) 600 miles long with a name that varies in different countries i.e. Maes and Maas.

\(^c\) 644 kms and 32 kms respectively.
The Front's first 300 miles ran across France from the Atlantic (the estuary of the Somme) to the south-west German border north of Strasbourg. The remaining 100 miles went down the Rhine's German border to Switzerland.

This 400-mile Front was held by three Army Groups. Army Group A was at the centre, with Group B reaching to the coast, and Group C to Switzerland.

The account of Saturday included Hitler's visit to the Commander-in-Chief of Army Group B in Brussels.

Hitler's move, this Sunday, to visit Rundstedt at the G.H.Q. of Army Group A, meant a ninety-mile move inland.

This is highly significant in understanding Hitler's surprisingly muted response to the Dunkirk Evacuation. Unlike the British, the Germans were not preoccupied with Dunkirk, and Hitler was sticking to his original plan to capture the rich industrial north of France regardless of the opportunity to destroy the unarmed personnel of Britain's escaping Army.

Belgium had unconditionally surrendered the previous Tuesday. So far in the War, Hitler's forward Headquarters had been safely in Germany, near Cologne. The unexpectedly swift advance of the German forces, however, had rendered it obsolete. Rundstedt wanted a new site for Hitler's H.Q. near him at Charleville, but in Belgium rather than France, because it was safer for Hitler to be based in a country with which he was not at war.

Contrary to the impression of Hollywood films, Hitler, according to Trevor-Roper, spent most of the War living in military headquarters, and in his special train used as a mobile H.Q.

For Hitler's next Headquarters, von Rundstedt had selected Brûly-de-Pesche. It was a small village in a forest clearing just over the Belgian border, and barely fifteen miles away.

Before Hitler arrived at Charleville, frantic preparations were underway at Brûly-de-Pesche. The inhabitants had been evacuated, new gardens were being laid out and barracks, offices and a dining room were being built by Todt. The village church had been utilised for accommodation. One of Hitler's secretaries spent her first few nights in a former pigsty.

The site would accommodate the High Command of the Armed Forces (O.K.W.) headed by Colonel General Jodl. Anti-aircraft batteries and barbed wire entanglements were being put into place.

Sunday afternoon's secret High Command meeting should have taken place at Brûly-de-Pesche, but its readiness was running forty-eight hours late. The cement of Hitler's bunker was still wet!

The generals gathered, therefore, at Rundstedt's own Headquarters, Blaïron House. This appealed to Hitler, because the Kaiser had used it in the Great War. It was not Hitler's first visit.

Ed Murrow's Reportings
R.A.F. Hawkinge, Dover – Afternoon

As well as the American Sunday newspapers reporting the Evacuation on C.B.S. News, the Americans heard the now-famous Ed Murrow on his This is London programme speaking about his previous day's visit to an R.A.F. Station.

Murrow had arrived at Hawkinge two days after Lord Trenchard's visit, and in fine flying weather. With him were five other representatives from American Broadcasting companies, so the U.S.A. probably awoke on Sunday to no less than six wireless stations telling them about the R.A.F.'s aerodrome nearest to Dover.

It was Ed Murrow who had so memorably told the Americans of the change in Britain when Chamberlain had been replaced by Churchill:

'To me it seems that this country is ten years younger than it was ten days ago.'

Murrow's report on this Sunday, 2 June, ran:

'Yesterday I spent many hours at what will be

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* 28 May.

b Architect of the autobahn system.

c O.K.W., i.e. Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, Overall Command of the Forces.

d The subject of George Clooney's 2006 film Goodnight, and Good Luck.

e 21 May.
tonight or next week Britain's first line of defence, an airfield on the south coast...I talked with pilots as they came back from Dunkirk.

'They stripped off their flight jackets, glanced at a few bullet holes in the wings or the fuselage [of their Hurricanes], and as the ground crews swarmed over the aircraft, refuelling motors and guns, we sat on the ground and talked. In the middle of the field the wreckage of a plane was being cleared up. It had crashed the night before. The pilot had been shot in the head but had managed to get back to his field...

'I can tell you what these boys told me. They were the cream of the youth of Britain. As we sat there, they were waiting to take off again. They talked of their own work; discussed the German air force with the casualness of Sunday morning halfbacks discussing yesterday's football. There were no nerves, no profanities, no heroics. There was no swagger about these boys in wrinkled and stained uniforms. The movies do that sort of thing much more dramatically than it is in real life...

'When ... [245] Squadron took off, one of them remarked quite casually that he'd be back in time for tea.

'About that time, a boy of twenty [Pilot Officer Roy Morant, part of whose story has been told above] drove up in a station wagon...He asked the squadron leader if he could have someone fly him back to his own field [Hornchurch, to Bader's 222 Squadron]. His voice was loud and flat; his uniform was torn, he had obviously been wet. He wore a pair of brown tennis shoes, three sizes too big. After he had gone I asked one of the men...what was the matter with him. 'Oh,' he replied, 'he was shot down over Dunkirk on the first patrol [of Saturday] morning ... landed in the sea, swam to the beach, was bombed for a couple of hours, came home in a paddle steamer. His voice sounds like that because he cannot hear himself. You get that way after you've been bombed for a few hours.'

Most pilots arrived by plane, of course – some of them only just! The vital work of the Ground Crews was beyond praise. One historian describes the return of pilots to Hawkinge from Dunkirk.

'Pilots flew in with petrol gauges reading empty, hydraulics shot away, ammunition expended, engines smoking, tail sections crumpled, and trailing fabric like bunting.' Some of the hasty landings would have made the hair of any instructor stand on end. Aircraft clipped the perimeter trees and hedges, ploughed through the fences, and dug deep grooves in the turf. Machines stood up on their propellers, some cartwheeled, some skidded across the field on their canopies [i.e. inverted]. Even a pirouette was not uncommon.

Too Slow ! They Said
Off Thanet – afternoon

After Able Seaman Palmer had brought Naiad Errant safely back and had disembarked his troops, he –

Straight away...took the boat to be filled up again with petrol, water and provisions and got an engineer to fix up the engines – they were covered in sand.

Then I was ready for another trip. I went ashore to report my safe arrival and was told to get into some dry clothes.

They rigged me out with civilian clothes and after a hot bath, felt brand new again...

...I did not see my original "crew" again so I don't know how they got on. No doubt they returned safe and sound as I and the Naiad Errant did – the job had been done.

The Commendation Report on Palmer recommended his immediate promotion, and recorded that on Sunday afternoon 2 June –

'Without orders, he sailed with a crew and one other Able Seaman.'

The hallmark of Operation Dynamo was improvisation, so the phrase 'without orders' was not negative, but recognised for what it was – a sign of commitment and courage. (Had they viewed it otherwise, they would not have been recommending promotion.)
On Saturday, in the space of a few hours, the Royal Navy had lost three destroyers, a Fleet minesweeper and a gunboat. Four destroyers had also been damaged. Daylight embarkation was stopped, and the Admiralty signalled:

'...there will be no ships proceeding to Dunkirk between 0700 and 1730 tomorrow Sunday.'

In his Report to the Navy, Palmer recorded what happened next. Two-and-a-half miles out of Ramsgate, halfway to the North Goodwin Light Ship, a naval officer on the motor boat *Usanco* (on her way to Dunkirk) stopped him. He turned Palmer back because – 'his craft was too slow to take part in the night evacuation ordered for that evening.'

He was not the only one to be turned back. Commander Lightoller in *Sundowner* had reached Ramsgate the previous evening. He and his crew were working to prepare *Sundowner* for an immediate return, when he too was 'ordered to remain in harbour as nothing under twenty knots [twenty-three m.p.h.] would be used in future.' Another small motor boat, *Madame Pompadour*, was also prevented from returning.

The new requirement was at least double the top speed of the average small motor boat of 1940. Probably none of the Thames motor-cruisers could have qualified. Even larger ships were curtailed. The *Jutland*, a *schuit* of 357 tons, had twice carried back over 200 troops, but Ramsgate authorities prevented any third trip on Sunday evening: speed seems to have mattered more than capacity.

Not everyone obeyed the restriction. Lieutenant-Commander Buchanan, who had been invalided out of the Navy when the War began and was not, therefore, 'under orders' in the same way as Palmer, brought his motor boat from Lowestoft to Ramsgate in response to an Admiralty request on the wireless for 'enginemen for yachts'. Due to a muddle, he was sent back – much to his fury – but was later recalled. He had arrived at Ramsgate about half an hour before Palmer on Sunday morning, and reported to the Senior Naval Officer who was not pleased to see him. The S.N.O. protested that his boat was too slow, and that his crew were civilians.

Buchanan responded as only a born leader could – by using his initiative, disobeying orders and achieving the impossible. He managed to get his civilian crew issued with rifles – an unheard-of thing, and on Sunday evening he went off aboard the thirty-four foot *Elvin*. He ignored the protests of the naval staff on the eastern Harbour wall, while other folk threw a sympathetic shower of first-aid kits down into his cockpit. He had no charts, so he simply headed for the smoke and fires of Dunkirk. He was certainly slow, and he was made even slower by an engine failure.

At Dunkirk, Buchanan was asked by a French officer how many he could carry. The answer was twenty-five, but as he could not remember *vingt-cinq* he replied 'Trente' – and an extra five were saved!

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*If He Wants Nothing Else…'*

Blairon House, Charleville – 4.00 p.m.

Many people contributed to the success of Operation Dynamo, but by far the most unexpected was Hitler himself.

On his last visit to Rundstedt's G.H.Q., nine days earlier, Hitler had authorised his famous – or infamous – 'Halt Order'. Liddell Hart described it as one of 'the great riddles of the war'. It is so important that historians are still arguing over whether to blame or thank Hitler or Rundstedt for conceiving it!

It was issued to halt the armoured units (Panzers) when they were just twelve miles from Dunkirk, and it resulted in their being pinned-down for three days – from Friday 24 May to Sunday 26 May.

Halder, the German Army Staff Chief, fumed in his diary:

'Our left wing, consisting of armour and motorised forces will thus be stopped dead in its tracks on the direct orders of the Führer. Finishing off the encircled army is to be left to the [German] Air Force!'

Andrew Roberts in *Hitler & Churchill: Secrets of Leadership* writes:

'No other decision of the Second World War caused such a storm of protest from German Generals.'

The German tank crews were astounded too – they could see the spires of Dunkirk!
One factor was that the ambitious Göring wanted his Luftwaffe to be seen as the victors at the climax of the Army's campaign, so he promised Hitler that he would rout the Allies by air. It probably suited Hitler. He tended to keep individuals and groups in tension between themselves, perhaps to avoid their ganging-up against him. Anyway, it has been said that in 'forcing the Army to share victory with the Luftwaffe...Hitler could be certain to receive the main credit for it.'

There were good reasons for stopping the tanks. They needed servicing, and their crews were tired. Tanks were vulnerable in marshlands and the areas around Dunkirk had been deliberately flooded. It was also much cheaper to rout the British by air.

Military usage decrees that an army's motorised units should not get too far ahead of its slower-moving infantry.

Perhaps, more importantly, the German tanks were a vital part of Hitler's next campaign, which would follow without a break.

One biographer of Hitler says: 'Oddly, the continuing evacuation [from Dunkirk] did not seem to perturb Hitler. It was almost as though it were no concern of his. While Brauchitsch [Commander-in-Chief of the German Army] and Halder frantically looked for ways to stop the steady flow to England, the Führer responded haltingly, almost lackadaisically. It was the commanders who waved their arms at conferences these days, not he.'

The secret High Command meeting started at 4.00 p.m., at Rundstedt's Headquarters. To save Hitler travelling further inland, Rundstedt had invited the Commander of Army Group C (Gen. Leeb), whose forces were holding the German front line inland to Switzerland. This enabled Hitler to confer with the commanders of all three of his army Groups (A, B and C) this weekend.

Rundstedt convened the Commanders (and their Staff Officers) of all the Armies within his command: Armies 2, 4, 9, 12 and 16.

* It was Hitler's first return to the G.H.Q. of Army Group A since his Halt Order. He began, therefore, as he had done at the G.H.Q. of Army Group B the day before, by explaining – or explaining away – his controversial action.

'Gentlemen, you will have wondered why I stopped the armoured divisions outside Dunkirk. The fact was I could not afford to waste military effort. I was anxious lest the enemy launch an offensive from the Somme and wipe out the Fourth Army's weak armoured force, perhaps even going so far as Dunkirk. Such a military rebuff might have had intolerable effects on foreign policy.'

When the British now envisage Dunkirk, they tend to think of the entire might of the German Forces gathered around and thrown against it. It could certainly have felt and looked like that to those involved, but the main German forces had, in fact, passed Dunkirk.

Army Group A's involvement at the Dunkirk beachhead had ended on Thursday evening, 30 May. Its units were then redeployed twenty-five miles inland of Dunkirk, east of the Oise to a line facing south on the River Aisne. This was barely fifty miles from Paris.

The Germans had completed Plan Yellow: the conquest of Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg. They had been so swift and successful that they had taken themselves by surprise. In the last twenty-two days they had:
- defeated two nations
- destroyed six armies
- taken a million prisoners.

Austria, the Sudetenland, Poland, Denmark, Norway, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg all in the bag – and France nearly so. The mood at Charleville was a happy one!

Victory was just around the corner! A week earlier, before the Dunkirk Evacuation had really got under way, General Jodl thought: 'the war is won, it just needs to be ended'. He was not alone.

At that time, Rommel expected the war to be over in a fortnight.

Hitler expected it to be over in five weeks.

On Monday, he told Admiral Canaris (Head of the German Armed Forces Intelligence) that he thought it already won, and he was so sure of

* Head of the German High Command (O.K.W.), and thus the most important military decision-maker after Hitler.
Britain making peace that he forbade Canaris to wage any chemical warfare against her.

Hitler's view of Britain was not an unreasonable or sudden response. A year previously, on 23 May 1939, he had said:

'If Holland and Belgium are successfully occupied and if France is also defeated, the fundamental conditions for a successful war against England will have been secured. England can then be blockaded from Western France at close quarters by the Luftwaffe\(^1\), while the Navy with its U-boats [submarines] can extend the range of the blockade. When this is done, England will not be able to fight on the Continent and daily attacks by the Luftwaffe and Navy will cut her life-lines. The moment England's supply routes are severed, she will be forced to capitulate.'\(^2\)

Since Hitler still believed this in June 1940, he assumed that any British troops who escaped from Dunkirk to England would, in effect, merely have escaped into captivity!

The French were not yet beaten, though they had suffered badly and had lost a third of their army.

Hitler outlined to his Generals *Plan Red*, the second half of the French campaign.

Its objectives were to break French resistance and to occupy Paris. Its method would be to attack along the rivers Somme, Seine, Aisne and Moselle. It would start in three days' time. It was not unexpected on either side of the Channel. In Britain, the *Sunday Pictorial* had a leading article with the banner headline:

**IS PARIS NEXT?**

*  

Hitler then informed his Generals that Italy would soon join them. Hitler's opinion of Mussolini was low. In the Great War, the Italians had fought against Germany. In 1939 Hitler had wanted Mussolini's aid, but now that he had achieved so much without him, he had changed his mind. Hitler knew that Mussolini was hoping simply to reap the spoils.

On Saturday, Mussolini had persuaded the King of Italy to give his formal consent to the declaration of war. The King naively explained to his family that he was expressing the will of his people. It was not so. The British Government's assessment (as Lord Dalton records) was that 'apart from Mussolini and a few Fascist extremists, the Italians had no wish to go to war.'\(^3\) Mussolini had set his mind on declaring war the following Wednesday, 5 June. He assumed that it would be profitable and short – it would be neither. (Hitler was against declarations of war, he thought that aggressors should just attack unannounced.)

The latest copy of the *Relazioni Internazionali*, quoted in Sunday's papers\(^4\), boasted that the 'hour for which Italy had waited for fifty years' had arrived and that the Italians would fight their 'French and British enemies with grim determination until victory is won.'

Also on Sunday, the United States liner *Manhattan* left Genoa with 2,000 Americans who had been advised by their Italian Consulate to leave.

Hitler had kept delaying Mussolini's involvement, since, understandably, he did not want people to get the ludicrous idea that Germany needed Italy's help to subdue the French!

*  

Hitler concluded his High Command meeting by speaking about the French, the Belgians and the British.

Anticipating France's surrender, Hitler said
that he would exact severe reparations. She must be:
'...stamped into the ground. She must pay the bill.'

He was true to his word. France was made to pay twenty million francs a day for, as Sebastian Faulks has put it, 'the privilege of being occupied.' The reason the Germans gave the French was that it was a 'contribution to her [France's] defence against Britain'! Another nail in the coffin of entente!

* 

Since the response of Belgium to Hitler had differed from France, Hitler dealt more leniently with her. When on the previous Tuesday King Leopold's military situation became hopeless, he had capitulated to the Germans (against the wishes of his government). German propaganda had used this to assert that Leopold had 'strong sympathies' for Germany. In keeping with this lie, Hitler later awarded him an allowance of 50 million francs.

* 

Hitler's stated attitude to Britain was very different. Hitler said,
'Now that Britain will presumably be willing to make peace, I will begin the final settlement of scores with the Bolsheviks [i.e. Russia].'

One General noted Hitler as saying:
'...without a navy the equal of Britain's we could not hold on to her colonies for long. Thus we can easily find a basis for peace with Britain.'

Hitler had earlier told Rundstedt that all he wanted from the British was an acknowledgement of Germany's position on the continent. But Hitler reckoned without three things: the British Prime Minister, the British anger at Germany's aggression, and the British commitment to freedom – of others, as well as herself.

When Hitler left Rundstedt's Headquarters at Charleville early on Sunday evening, he acknowledged the cheers of his troops like a victorious warlord – which, indeed, he was. He went to Odendorf airport, and was back at his German H.Q. at Münstereifel, near Bonn, by 6.30 p.m.

Everyone there was preparing to move out. Hitler had ordered that nothing be dismantled or demolished, so that it would serve as a national monument. Three days later, at Brüly-de-Pesche, Hitler officially proclaimed victory in 'the greatest battle of all time' and ordered the flying of flags for eight days and the ringing of church bells for three!

When Hitler had left Charleville, Rundstedt said with a sigh, 'Well, if he wants nothing else we shall have peace at last.' If only...

* 

The Luftwaffe was already softening-up France for Plan Red, with Operation Paula. On Saturday about 500 German aircraft had bombed Marseilles, and this Sunday they bombed Lyon and the Rhône valley, and killed nearly 100 civilians. They dropped warning leaflets on Paris to cause hysteria – and with some success.

Chiefs & the Cabinet

Admiralty, London – from 5.15 p.m.

Churchill left Chequers mid-afternoon for London, and the second half of the Chief of Staffs' meetings.

When he arrived, the Chiefs reported that the Evacuation was continuing, but only during the hours of darkness. It had been halted at 7.00 this morning, but would recommence at 9.00 this evening. It was hoped that 22,000 could be rescued overnight. The French had asked if the Evacuation could continue on Monday night as well, so that their 25,000 remaining troops could be lifted.

An appeal from Reynaud for three divisions of evacuated troops to be sent to the Somme, and for British aircraft to be based in France annoyed Churchill, who considered them 'grasping'. (Facts related below, but not known at the time, proved him right.) Churchill's personal wish was that he would like to be able to send three divisions to France 'within the next five to six weeks', and for British bombers to switch from bombing the Ruhr to those targets indicated by the French Commander-in-Chief.

All realised that it was important to sustain French morale, but how much could Britain
spare without weakening her defences?

* At 6.30 p.m. Churchill then had a meeting of the War Cabinet, and the same themes arose. Sir Alexander Cadogan, the Permanent Under Secretary, noted in his diary\(^{129}\) –

'French howling for assistance on the Somme. Perhaps we should give them a token, but it's so much down the drain. It won't do any good – It won't prevent the French from reviling us.'

Churchill said there was urgent need to examine how the type of swift German tank advance demonstrated in France might be defeated. He pointed out that if the tanks themselves could not be stopped, then their crews could be cut off from food, water and petrol.

In spite of his experience at the Paris summit meeting on Friday, he still envisaged that the French would continue to resist.

Churchill's focus was on consolidating Britain's home defences, conserving her air power and building up a new army. All present realised the importance of sustaining French morale, and that British behaviour should not be such that they could blame their collapse on it.\(^{130}\)

In relation to Italy's intention of declaring war, Hugh Dalton (Minister of Economic Warfare) quoted the *Relationi Internationali* threat, mentioned above, of the Italians to 'fight their British and French enemies with grim determination until victory is won'. He proposed that cargo ships going to Italy should be stopped and checked for war material.\(^{131}\)

Both the Air Minister and the Chief of Air Staff received letters from Churchill, written this Sunday, asking that heavy bomber squadrons should be flown at once to southern France to 'strike back at Italy' the moment she declared war.

### Invasion Imminente

Paris – from 6.00 p.m.

Saturday's *Picture Post* had profiled all of Churchill’s ministers, and stated that before the War Duff Cooper (with Churchill and Eden) had the distinction of being – in Nazi eyes – the three 'arch-warmongers' who were 'threatening the peace of Nazi Germany.'\(^{132}\)

Duff Cooper had served with the B.E.F. in the Great War, and, as already related, had been First Lord of the Admiralty after it. (Churchill had held the post in the Great War, and again in 1939.)

Although it was Chamberlain who had appointed Duff Cooper to the post, Duff had resigned over Chamberlain's policies at 'Munich' – and rightly so. Britain, France, Italy and Germany agreed between themselves – without Czech representation – that Germany could 'annex' Western Czechoslovakia. The four nations then simply gave the Czechs the unenviable choice – either to submit to German aims or to fight them alone! It was despicable politics: and like most despicable politics – advantageous to its perpetrators.

When Churchill became Prime Minister in May, he offered Duff Cooper the post of Minister of Information. It was a new Department and its objectives and methods had to be created.

Before his appointment, Duff Cooper had very successfully toured the United States to enlighten them to the danger of Hitler and to reassure them of Britain's resolve to fight. Although his writing could be scholarly, it did not lack the 'common touch'. The public knew him best for his regular column in Beaverbrook's *Evening Standard*.

Some were angered by his brilliant and trenchant statement about Italy. If Italy declared war, he wrote, the only result would be that she would extend the number of her ruins for which she was justly famous!

* After returning Churchill to Hendon on Saturday, the same *Flamingo* of 24 Squadron had flown Duff Cooper to Paris to attend a conference with the French Ministry of Information.

The *Paris Soir* declared the fate of Britain – in words that need no translation:

'BBC se prépare à faire face à une tentative d'invasion imminente'\(^{133}\)

On Sunday, the Germans struck deep into mainland France with attacks on Orleans and Tours. Their attack on the oil refineries at Marseille provoked 'violent reaction from
defending French fighters'. The French lost about six aircraft and had four damaged.\textsuperscript{134}

Duff Cooper spent Sunday evening with his counterpart in the French Ministry of Information.

'I dined at the Embassy with our Ambassador… It was a melancholy evening. In the garden was smouldering a huge fire on which our confidential archives were being burnt… Julius Cain, Head of the Bibliothèque Nationale…said that he wished it were possible to go to sleep and not to awake until the war was over.'\textsuperscript{135} a

In a broadcast to the French, Duff Cooper said: 'United we are bound to conquer, separated we might be destroyed.'\textsuperscript{136}

* 

Duff Cooper was in the right city to get a foretaste of what might be in store.

On this Sunday, Paris became officially part of the French 'War Zone'. The Police were being armed with machine guns 'against Fifth Columnists'. The public were forbidden to phone from public call offices, cafés or restaurants.\textsuperscript{137} The Luftwaffe arrived next day to soften-up Paris.

The Ministers' Information Conference was lunching at the Savoy. When, eventually, the air raid warning was given, the waiters obeyed French law and disappeared underground, leaving the delegates to fend for themselves.

The radio alerts, sent by the French communications centre from the Eiffel Tower, were cleverly jammed by German radio interference – so there was minimal warning.

The Germans then produced a 'chilling demonstration' of aerial power by sending 600 bombers, with an escort of over 450 fighters, to destroy the French Air Force. They attacked sixteen airfields around Paris, three air parks, and several aircraft factories. They also bombed railway marshalling yards, twenty-two stations, and cut several main lines. Unfortunately, five schools and a hospital were also hit. The raid injured 650 and killed 250 – mostly civilians.

Nearly 250 French fighter planes rose to defend the capital. Their pilots were commanded to attack the bombers, but as the hoards of German fighters were there to protect them, it was difficult for the French Air Force, and put them at a disadvantage.

By chance, the British Deputy Chief of Air Staff\textsuperscript{b} happened to land at Villacoublay during the raid. He saw forty French aircraft lined up to protect Paris.\textsuperscript{138} He was obviously not impressed when only four took off, because most pilots were having lunch.\textsuperscript{139} It seems, fortunately, not to have been typical.

The French lost about ten aircraft, damaged or destroyed, although the German forces claimed to have destroyed 95 French aircraft – 'an optimistic tally far in excess of reality'.

The French military had censored the newspapers, and their long blank columns had led Parisians to believe that they would never be bombed, although they knew of their capital's barrage emplacements and its fighter bases. The Parisians, therefore, were shocked when their assumptions were so rudely shattered.

The Minister of the Interior, George Mandel, could only prevent a flight of public officials from Paris by a 'threat of severe penalties'.\textsuperscript{140}

* 

In his book \textit{Blitzkrieg}, Len Deighton has a succinct and illuminating section on ‘The Missing French Aircraft’.

The French Commander-in-Chief was later to ask:

‘Why, out of two thousand modern fighters on hand at the beginning of May 1940, were fewer than 500 used on the north-east front?’\textsuperscript{141}

The answer, apparently, was because planes were moved \textit{back} into the interior, and also that deliveries of new planes were diverted to ‘safe places’. The airfield at Tours – 130 miles south-west of Paris – had 200 aircraft parked there, of which 150 were fighters. This meant that France had \textit{more} aircraft at the end of the German offensive than she had at its start!

It shows the accuracy of Churchill’s view that the French were indeed ‘grasping’, and reveals as a \textit{complete fallacy} any theory that the later Fall of France was due to Britain’s unwillingness to send further squadrons.

* 

While in Paris on Sunday evening Duff

\textsuperscript{a} Cain was right to be afraid. He later suffered terribly at German hands.

\textsuperscript{b} Air Vice Marshal W. Sholto Douglas.
Cooper and Julius Cain were sharing bad news about the War, the Commander-in-Chief of the German Army, at Münstereifel, was sharing his good news. He told Hitler that, according to German Intelligence, half his enemies' forces had been swept from the battlefield; the 136 divisions of his German Army were virtually intact, and the German forces could embark on his Plan Red with a two-to-one superiority.  

A fortnight earlier, Churchill had appointed the Labour M.P. Harold Nicholson to assist Duff Cooper at the Ministry of Information. Nicholson's diary entry for Saturday was interesting and shrewd.  

'Lord Gort says that he offered to take more French off but they were too dead beat to move and that all who could be galvanized into marching a few miles further were in fact rescued. This may be true, but the French with their tendency to attribute blame to others will be certain to say that we thought only of rescuing the B.E.F. and let them down.'

Nicholson had to spend Monday frantically producing a memo 'about invasion' for the Cabinet's Tuesday meeting, because, 'As Duff was over in Paris I had to do all this myself'. He wrote to his wife, the poet and novelist Vita Sackville-West,  

'We do not know whether to warn people [about invasion], or to wait until it becomes likely. It is 80 per cent probable that the enemy will attack France first and only go for us afterwards. Yet we must be prepared for the invasion when it comes and the public must be told what to do…'

Nicholson and his wife lived in Kent, at Sissinghurst, and Nicholson was worried that if the Germans landed at Hastings and Faversham to cut off the British forces in Kent by a pincer movement, they would be near his home. It is later in that very same letter that Nicholson famously wrote,  

'Finally there is the bare bodkin. That is a real comfort.'

His phrase, borrowed from Hamlet, referred to the suicide-pill, which he and his wife planned to obtain from their doctor, to take if captured by the invading Germans. This was something that the Ministry of Information would not be making public!

Nicholson's over-reaction does capture the degree of anxiety among intelligent British people.

A more typical British response was that of an elderly woman in Diss, Norfolk, who when scrap was being collected locally for the Ministry of Supply took aside one very jagged bit of old iron. When asked why, she said, 'So I can get at least one of them before they get me!'

'My Dear Fighter Boys'

Headquarters, R.A.F. Fighter Command

British fighter pilots who parachuted or crash-landed near Dunkirk often returned home within hours, while many that landed behind enemy lines were taken prisoner. Flying Officer B. J. Wicks' experience followed neither pattern. He was shot down before Operation Dynamo had started, but only reached Dunkirk on Sunday 2 June.

Eleven days earlier, Wicks, of 56 Squadron, had shot one plane down, and then pursued another at very low level, but had been hit by ground-fire. He had force-landed near Cambrai but, as he was covered in petrol, he had thought it unwise to set his Hurricane alight in case he exploded first! He had been helped, initially, by a French family, and then by Belgians. They had not only given him dungarees to conceal his uniform, but also a car so that he could drive north.

He had witnessed 'long columns of German troops – all heading south towards the Somme.'

This Sunday he reached Dunkirk but, as he was dressed as a Belgian peasant, it took time to convince the Army that he was an R.A.F. pilot! He was allowed, finally, to queue for a boat, and he reached Dover on Monday. He returned to Biggin Hill, only to find that his Squadron had since been 'rotated' and moved back to Digby. When he arrived, he discovered that all his belongings had been inventoried and his car sold.  

\[\text{Dowding constantly ‘rotated’ squadrons. This enabled the exhausted ones on the front line to recover and be replaced by fresher airmen.}\]
Not all R.A.F. pilots were allowed to queue. On one occasion, an officious Sergeant Major on the East Mole attempted to turn back a pilot, who was eager to get home and continue to give some protection to the evacuating troops. The Sergeant had no jurisdiction over the pilot, and he did not realise that the pilot boxed for the R.A.F. If the Sergeant Major had the time, and was conscious, the thought may have crossed his mind before he hit the water below!

*  

Air Chief Marshal Dowding, the Head of Fighter Command, had the responsibility of defending Britain. Churchill’s responsibility included giving support to the French. Churchill had been swayed to promise squadrons to the French that Britain could not afford to give them. Dowding protested. In a famous letter in which he outlined his reasons, he concluded:

‘If the Home Defence Force is drained away in desperate attempts to remedy the situation in France, defeat in France will involve the final, complete and irremediable defeat of this country.’

At a Cabinet meeting Dowding had demonstrated that he now had available only half the number of squadrons earlier deemed necessary for Britain’s defence. General Pile relates in his biography the story of how Dowding had just laid back in his chair and thrown his pencil on the table –

‘… as a sign to all and sundry that he was through and that his resignation would be with the Prime Minister as soon as the meeting was over. I think that pencil may have saved Britain, for after that not a single squadron or gun was sent out of this country.’

*  

The end of daylight evacuations changed the pattern of R.A.F. support. They concentrated on dusk and dawn, when the night-time ships were most in danger. With this short respite, Dowding paused on Sunday to send this signal to all his men –

My Dear Fighter Boys,

I don't send out many congratulatory letters and signals, but I feel that I must take this occasion when the intensive fighting in France is for the time being over, to tell you how proud I am of you and the way in which you have fought since the "Blitzkrieg" started.

I wish I could have spent my time visiting you and hearing your accounts of the fighting, but I have occupied myself in working for you in other ways.

I want you to know that my thoughts are always with you, and that it is you and your fighting spirit which will crack the morale of the German Air Force, and will preserve our Country through the trials which yet lie ahead.

Good luck to you.

H. C. T. Dowding.     Air Chief Marshal.

Next morning Dowding told the War Cabinet that if the Germans mounted an attack on Britain he 'could not guarantee air superiority for more than forty-eight hours.' Britain had only 504 serviceable aircraft.

First Rate Performance

B.B.C. London – 8.50 p.m.

Just before Sunday evening’s nine o’clock News, Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for War, broadcast to the nation an account of the battle of the ports. It was a model of truth and clarity.

'From the moment of the collapse of the Belgian Army there was only one course left to the Allied Armies – to hold a line round Dunkirk, the only port that remained, and to embark as many men as possible before the rearguards were overwhelmed. Thanks to the magnificent and untiring co-operation of the Allied Navies and Air Forces we have been able to embark and save more than four-fifths of that B.E.F. which the Germans claimed were surrounded…' The British

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\[a\] He was killed 3 months later in the Battle of Britain.

\[b\] Eden succeeded Churchill as Prime Minister in 1955.
Expeditionary Force still exists, not as a handful of fugitives, but as a body of seasoned veterans. The vital weapon of any army is its spirit. Ours has been tried and tempered in the furnace. It has not been found wanting. It is this refusal to accept defeat that is the guarantee of final victory. It would take Churchill between ten and fourteen hours to write a speech. To the non-professional that may seem a great deal, but it is not. The B.B.C. used to expect an hour-per-minute as the typical ratio between creation and public delivery. (Shorter items, like Eden's broadcast, usually take longer, since succinct writing is often longer writing that has been repeatedly condensed.)

He concluded:

'Our duty in this country is plain. We must make good our losses and we must win the war. To do that we must profit by the lessons of this battle. Brave hearts alone cannot stand up against steel. We need more planes, more tanks, more guns. The people of this country must work as never before. We must show the same qualities, the same discipline, and the same self-sacrifice at home as the British Expeditionary Force has shown in the field…'

It was, in the words of one of Churchill's Private Secretaries: 'a first rate performance'. Ed Murrow reported it to the Americans, in his next *This is London* broadcast.

### We Shall Never Surrender…

**The Admiralty, London – Midnight**

Although it was midnight, Mary Shearburn was still working at the Admiralty. Churchill was dictating, and she worked with one of Churchill's special silent Remington typewriters. Churchill had enormous energy, and his secretaries had to work a complex rota of shifts, since he often worked right into the early hours.

As a public speaker Churchill knew that if he looked at his audience to keep their attention, then it could be a problem to find his place again if faced by a solid page of print.

He therefore 'psalmed' his speeches – Churchill's term for having them written in short lines. In addition, Mrs. Shearburn triple-spaced them to give him room to make changes.

Churchill calculated the time of his speeches by their number of words, so his secretaries needed to keep a constant running tally, so as not to be caught out when he suddenly asked, 'How many?'

It was, in the words of one of Churchill's Private Secretaries: 'a first rate performance'. Ed Murrow reported it to the Americans, in his next *This is London* broadcast.

...
build, and are to build, the great British Armies in the later years of the war, seemed about to perish upon the field or to be led into an ignominious and starving captivity.'

The speech then systematically covered the German breakthrough, their 'scythe-stroke' through nearly to Dunkirk, the defence of Boulogne, the heroic stand at Calais, the surrender by the King of the Belgians, the German pressure on the Dunkirk pocket, the combined action of the Royal and Merchant Navies to bring nearly 1,000 ships to the rescue of the B.E.F., the deliberate German attacks on hospital ships, the R.A.F.'s victorious onslaught against the Luftwaffe, and the 'miracle of deliverance' of 335,000 French and British troops, being:

'carried out of the jaws of death and shame to their native land and to the tasks which lie immediately ahead.'

Churchill would then warn Parliament – 'We must be very careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of a victory. Wars are not won by evacuations.'

The R.A.F., he planned to say, had won a victory within a deliverance. With the Battle of Britain not yet underway, Churchill dictated this prophetic claim:

'May it not also be that the cause of civilization itself will be defended by the skill and devotion of a few thousand airmen.'

* Churchill's text then outlined the long series of fierce battles that the Army had undertaken, and told of 30,000 men killed, wounded or missing. He commiserated with those who were bereaved, and offered hope to those whose relatives were only 'missing'.

Thanksgiving for the deliverance, however, must not blind Parliament to the fact that – '...what has happened in Belgium and France is a colossal military disaster. The French Army has been weakened, the Belgian Army lost, a large part of those fortified lines [e.g. the Maginot Line] upon which so much faith had been reposed is gone, many valuable mining districts and factories have passed into the enemy's possession, the whole of the Channel ports are in his hands, with all the tragic consequences that follow from that, and we must expect another blow almost immediately at us or at France.'

His intended speech continued by raising the question of home defence against invasion, to be discussed further in secret session. He expressed Britain's intention to reconstitute and build up its B.E.F. once again under its 'gallant Lord Gort'.

He would mention two other issues. The first was the government's necessarily increased measures against enemy aliens, and he regretted their effect on those who were loyal to Britain. The second issue concerned Fifth Columnists. Parliament had authorised that they could be dealt with by a 'strong hand'.

As Churchill began to conclude his draft speech, he returned to the most pressing issue of all – German invasion. The call to 'defend our island home, to ride out the storms of war, and to outlive the menace of tyranny' was the resolve of government, and the will of the people.

* After midnight on Sunday, Churchill was dictating the conclusion of his speech. He will have been fully aware that a listener's 'lasting impression' of a speech usually rests on what he or she heard last! In preparing a speech, the conclusion is far too important to leave to the end! Time may run out, and its inadequate preparation may weaken the impact of the whole.

Churchill had to give a lead; he had to inspire. It was an awesome responsibility.

His son-in-law, on active service in Norway, from where he would soon be evacuated, wrote to him on Sunday and expressed the feelings of many:

'The one and only thing that makes us cheerful and confident of ultimate victory is the knowledge that you are at the wheel. However badly things may seem to be going, everyone is firmly assured that somehow you will pull us through. I know you will. Good luck to you dear Winston. You are, I feel, our one solid and visible war asset. All else may fail. But as long as you are there, somehow you will bring us through to victory.'

Mary Shearburn was not seated near Churchill because he liked to pace around. It meant that at times his voice could be, for her, barely audible – but it was counter-productive for her, or any of his other secretaries, to interrupt or to ask a question!
He dictated:

'Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous states have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail.'

Most speakers find that where pain, difficulty, or sorrow are concerned, they have sometimes to 'go-through-the-mill' emotionally themselves before they can talk about it. Churchill experienced this on Sunday night. He worked through the agonies of seeing a Britain crushed by the evil of Nazi-ism.

With his head bowed, and struggling with tears, Churchill quietly listed the British responses:

'We shall go on to the end.
We shall fight in France,
we shall fight on the seas and oceans,
we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air,
we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be,
we shall fight on the beaches,
we shall fight on the landing grounds,
we shall fight in the fields and in the streets,
we shall fight in the hills…'

At this point, 'racked by grief for his stricken land, Churchill could not go on.' Mary Shearburn remembered this well, and that it was the most difficult dictation she had ever taken. A whole minute passed while Churchill allowed his pain to drain away, and gathered his strength and resolve once more.

Then, at full strength, 'with' as Mary remembers 'all the tears gone from his voice', there came the words that would galvanise the nation:

'We shall NEVER surrender.'

Once the main message had been given – clear, clean and sharp – Churchill changed style. From a sentence of just four words, Churchill composed one of sixty-five. It allowed his oration to reach a soaring crescendo:

'And even if,

which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated or starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the new world, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and liberation of the old.'

* 

During Churchill's dictation, at 11.30 on Sunday evening, the Senior Naval Officer at Dunkirk sent the following message to Vice-Admiral Ramsay at Dover:

_B.E.F. Evacuated. Returning now._

* 

When Churchill addressed the House of Commons on Tuesday, his speech was greeted with enthusiasm; some were sufficiently moved to weep.

One Labour M.P. who in the Great War had been at Gallipoli, wrote: 'My Dear Winston, That was worth 1,000 guns and the speeches of 1,000 years.'

It will ever remain one of the greatest speeches of British history.

* 

The French reacted rather differently. Churchill's phrase that we would fight on 'if necessary alone' so alarmed the French Ambassador in London when it was reported to him that he demanded an interview with the P.M. Churchill took him fully into his confidence, and disclosed to him the startling truth: _it meant exactly what it said!_

**We Are Coming Back**

Dunkirk

Writers of fiction can end their accounts with the events of their choice: historians have no such option.
The ‘B.E.F. Evacuated’ signal was clear enough, but strictly speaking it was not the whole truth, because the Germans had not originally encircled the entire B.E.F., but had sliced through it. There were still 136,000 British troops in Western France ready to be thrown into the battle, with more coming from Norway.

Some would die fighting, and a number would have to surrender. Among the latter was the 51st Highland Division who were cut off when Rommel sliced through the French Tenth Army at bewildering speed on 8 June.

Others, however, would be evacuated. Operation Dynamo was followed by two more naval operations: ‘Cycle’ (June 11-13) and ‘Aerial’ (June 15-25).

The first involved 200 ships and evacuated from St. Valery and Le Havre over 15,000 Allied troops.

The second was the final evacuation from French ports and the Channel Islands. Including civilians, the total evacuated during Operation Aerial was over 211,000.

On Sunday night, 2 June, at Dunkirk, things began to go wrong.

A general breakdown in the French command meant that the French did not appear at the appointed time and place for their embarkation. Rear-Admiral Wake-Walker was the Senior Naval Officer responsible for all sea operations off Dunkirk. In the light of the frenetic activity of recent days, his signals to Dover sent in the early hours of Monday morning seem incredible:

Four ships now alongside east pier but no French troops.

Plenty of ships cannot get troops.

From 9.30 Sunday evening until 2.30 Monday morning, Wake-Walker had the following destroyers scheduled to arrive at half-hourly intervals: Shikari, Sabre, Venomous, Windsor, Icarus, Winchelsea, Esk, Vanquisher, Codrington, Express, Vivacious, Whitshed and Malcolm.

While Codrington rescued 878 troops on her previous trip, she returned on Monday morning with only forty-four. Similarly Whitshed’s numbers dropped from 512 to eighty-four.

Some destroyers returned empty.

The 20,000 French troops that could have been evacuated remained ashore. Previously, the French had embarked from the western side of the harbour. It was, admittedly, no easy matter to transfer from the west side to the East Mole across the ten acre complex of quays and docks.

Of those troops who did reach the point of embarkation, many lacked the British willingness to queue! While the rescue boats were lined along each side of the East Mole, the troops insisted on boarding the first in sight, thus blocking access to everything moored beyond! The difficulty was compounded by the absence of the British Piermaster. Commander Clouston and his team, as we have read, had spent a few hours in Ramsgate early Sunday afternoon with some of his team – which included French officers for liaison purposes. When they returned from Ramsgate on Sunday afternoon, in two fast R.A.F. launches, they were bombed, and Clouston and others were drowned.

Many of the French persisted in keeping everything: greatcoats, blankets, bottles of brandy, dogs, and even sacks of loot. Some wore inflated inner tubes as life-rings. There were those who refused to have their units split, so once on board, if it appeared that there was not room for all their comrades, they got off again.
Their behaviour may seem extreme, but going to Britain was, of course, a very different thing for French troops than it was for British. Leaving the German threat for the security of home, loved ones and the familiar is one thing: leaving such things to German threat is quite another. Some of the French refused to get into small boats, but this is best related to deeper feelings than the fear of the sea – to the instinct not to forsake their homeland.

* The tragedy increased.

The French asked for the Evacuation to be extended a further night. Vice-Admiral Ramsay told the Admiralty that his crews were exhausted, that they had suffered beyond human endurance and would have to be replaced. (Ramsay’s vessels and crews did not start operations with ‘Dynamo’; it was one operation within a chain of others. In the six days before ‘Dynamo’, for instance, they had landed 28,000 from French ports, as well as coping with the evacuation from Norway.)

Ramsay now had only a quarter of his destroyers and a third of his personnel ships left. The Admiralty, however, under political pressure, could not give way to Ramsay’s enormous protest.

* Churchill was attached so emotionally to France that before his flight on Friday, King George had thought it necessary to remind him that he was the Prime Minister of Great Britain – not France! When Churchill heard a translation of the French account of the Evacuation, however, he flew into a rage. Most readers, once they have read it, will identify with Churchill’s reaction, since all that has been recorded here lays bare its deliberate and wicked denial of the facts. It fulfilled Cadogan’s prediction this Sunday evening that nothing the British might do would ‘prevent the French reviling us.’ Such lies are simple to produce, but well nigh impossible to eradicate.

Here is the French account:

‘A few British ships returned to Dunkirk to pick up French survivors. But unwilling to approach too near to the coast for fear of violent enemy bombardment, they stayed a good distance from the beach while our soldiers were making desperate attempts to get to them.

Tired of waiting, the ships sailed back empty. One can imagine the feeling of our soldiers at seeing the last hope of their salvation disappearing over the horizon...’

Churchill ordered General Spears to tell the French Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief that he did not intend to risk any more of His Majesty’s ships to no purpose!

Spears warned him that such a policy would be the ‘last straw’!

Churchill relented.

He concealed his feelings, and informed the French P.M. –

‘We are coming back for your men tonight. Please ensure that all facilities are used promptly.

For three hours last night many ships waited idly and at great danger.’

Never have so many words of so much anger been condensed to so few!

* Together with sixty-three French vessels, the British mustered enough to lift off the estimated 30,000 troops left ashore.

The moment the boats arrived, they were thronged with men, but these were not the gallant soldiers who had held the line and for whom the boats had come. These were a rabble that had appeared from nowhere. These men had burrowed into the sand dunes and cellars of Dunkirk. They had hidden from conflict for days on end.

The kindest interpretation is that of Richard Collier when he says that they were ‘unwilling to run the gauntlet of fire without a firm directive.’ Certainly the onslaught upon the Allies had created countless small units cut off from their officers. These men knew, however, when their last chance of escape had come – and grabbed it.

Instead, therefore, of just 30,000 fighting men being in Dunkirk, there were about 60,000 French troops.

The evacuation of the true fighting men was blocked by the rabble, who gained undeserved freedom. The gallant heroes who had held the perimeter for others to be evacuated, and who
were themselves promised escape, faced only German imprisonment.

* 

To heap tragedy upon tragedy, a large French minesweeper, the *Emile Deschamps*, with 500 French troops on board, detonated a magnetic mine as she neared Ramsgate, and sank in seconds. (The London fire-float the *Massey Shaw* was only 200 yards away and rescued forty of the badly wounded.)

This grim conclusion to the Evacuation is offset a little by the fact that following Churchill’s promise that fifty percent of those embarked should be French, the percentage on the next day shot from 22% to 54%. On this Sunday it was 61%, and would climb to reach 100% on the final day, Tuesday.

* 

The French, who had stopped the Germans fifteen miles from Paris in the Great War, this time around declared it an 'open city'. On 11 June the French Government quit the capital, and the Germans marched in, three days later, without a shot being fired.

Britain was alone.

Looking back on Operation Dynamo as a whole, Vice-Admiral Ramsay wrote to his wife:

‘The relief is stupendous. The results are beyond belief.*169

* 

*End of Sunday*

**Now We Remember…**

**AUTHOR’S NOTE.**

Below is a commemorative poem of mine written on the 50th Anniversary Return of the (Association of) Little Ships to Dunkirk. Its conclusion sums up why I have written this account.

THEN, nineteen-forty, they too left from England, using the Routes codenamed X, Y and Z; steamers, *schuifs*, lifeboats, dinghies, yachts, launches, each dodges the flotsam, the shells and the dead.

NOW, nineteen-ninety, some fifty years later scrubbed-white survivors, all neatly in lines, humbly parade with flags to remind us of when they faced death from the air or the mines.

THEN lurked the hazards, in daylight or darkness, collision of friends, or bombardment by foe; breakdown, capsizing, exploding or sinking! Getting the men off was so bloody slow!

NOW as the years pass, the Ships are not bloodstained, nor are the waters upon which they ride.

Now we remember the cost of our freedom, and thank God again for the turn of the tide.

John Richards
Tablet of Thanksgiving on the wall of the Church Notre Dame des Dunes, at Dunkirk
THANKS

Without the co-operation of three people, over nearly twenty years, this Dunkirk Revisited story could not have been told.

Raymond Baxter, O.B.E., was the Honorary Admiral of the Association of Dunkirk Little Ships. We corresponded almost weekly (until his death in 2006) about every aspect of Dunkirk Revisited as it evolved. His advice guided me, his criticisms stimulated me and his unflagging encouragement did much to keep me going.

I have been 'with book as a woman is with child' (C.S.Lewis) for nearly two decades. My special thanks to my wife Rosemary for amicably enduring so much of our successive homes being almost permanently strewn with books, papers, maps and files!

My son Paul Richards, B.Sc., M.Eng., has, over the years, been invaluable. He has submitted every development of my text to detailed and wide-ranging scrutiny, and has saved me from many errors and inconsistencies, both factual and verbal. The website is his creation not mine. He improved many of my maps and illustrations with colour and captions. Many readers will already have seen his outstanding web-site: www.niiderrant.co.uk

My Thanks to the following groups and their staff or members -


My Thanks to the following individuals –

Endnotes, Chapter V

1 Calder, The People's War, p.111.
2 Gelb, Dunkirk: The Incredible Escape, p.82.
3 Original has 'Channel', but changed to 'Road' to avoid readers' confusion.
4 See 'locus' in Orde's List (NMM), and 'Sunny Isle' in Winser, p.123.
7 Masefield, op.cit., From pp. 40-1.
8 Letter to Sandy Evans, 2/12/89.
9 Cyril Chell's recollections noted by Sandy Evans in '94.
10 Wood & Dempster, The Narrow Margin, p.101. Quoted also by Wood in The Battle of Britain, p.43. I have transposed the paragraphs into the order 3,1,2. so that his account ends with the overflying.
11 I do not know what sort of mine the British used.
12 Palmer, M.V. Naiad Errant at Dunkirk, p.9.
13 Cyril Chell op.cit..
14 Humphreys, Hellfire Corner, p.31.
15 Excerpt from Adolf Hitler: My Part in His Downfall in Games's, The Essential Spike Milligan, p.198.
16 Franks, Air Battle Dunkirk, pp140-1.
17 ibid., pp.146-7.
18 Hough & Richards, The Battle of Britain, p.94.
19 Franks, op.cit., p.183.
20 Data based on Terraine, The Right of the Line, pp.154,157, and D. Richards, RAF 1939-1945., p.133.
21 quoted McKee, Strike from the Sky, p.41.
22 ibid., p.44.
23 Details from Humphreys, Dover at War, 1939-45, p.18.
24 Glover, Invasion Scare 1940, pp.18-20.
26 Palmer, Sgt. Norman, notes of conversation with Sandy Evans refers to the 'anti-submarine barrier'.
27 Humphreys, op.cit. p.30.
28 'Dover War Diary' p.183.
29 The numbers, and timings, are taken/deduced from Capt. Walker's Recordings made day by day of vessels arriving at Dover during the evacuation from Dunkirk, IWM ref. K85/796.
30 Humphreys, The Dover Patrol, pp.8-9.
31 Chalmers, Full Circle, p.49.
32 Collier, Sands of Dunkirk, pp 229-330.
33 Chalmers, op.cit. p.69.
34 Smith, Britain's Frontline Town: Dover, p.11.
36 Collier, op.cit. p.244.
37 Humphreys, Hellfire..., p.31.
38 Hawkins, Destroyers, p.554.
39 Bryant, A. The Turn of the Tide, p.155.
40 If Brooke's diary is correct, the schedule was just about impossible. We know two times with certainty – the arrival of his destroyer at Dover at 7.20, and the departure of Churchill's plane (with Dill aboard) at 9.15 from Hendon. Into this slot Brooke washed and breakfasted, went from the harbour to the Castle to visit Ramsay, then was driven to London, and saw Dill, before Dill left for Hendon at about 8.45 a.m. for his flight at 9.15. One hesitates to cast doubt on the report of so great a man, but it is interesting that Ramsay's Dispatches make no mention of Brooke's visit to him – which he might well have done had Brooke's intervention been as decisive as Brooke himself claimed. Also, Divine thinks that Ramsay acted under no new influence from Brooke at all.
41 Fraser, Alan Brooke, pp.163-4.
42 Alanbrooke, War Diaries, p.75.
43 Blaxland, South-East Britain, p.137.
44 Smith, op.cit., p.24.
45 Harris, Dunkirk: The Storms of War, p.141.
46 Leasor, War at the Top, p.97-8.
47 Humphreys, Dover at War, p.20.
48 He describes the children's evacuation both as 'Sunday' (i.e. June 2nd) and as 'June 1st.' Either may be correct. As it was an important part of Dover's experience, I thought it better to include it on Sunday, than to omit because of its uncertain date. Its dating has no bearing on any other aspect of this account. Published in Humphreys, Ibid., p.27.
49 High Water Dover 0759 (GMT) i.e. 8.59 a.m. Summer Time.
50 Main details taken from McMurtie’s 1938 Ships of the Royal Navy, p.163. It was printed while Locast was being built, and I have assumed that Locast was not basically different although she was the next generation.
51 Divine, op.cit., p.149.
52 Gardner, Evacuation from Dunkirk, p. 46.
Endnotes, Chapter V

53 Divine, Dunkirk, p.235.
54 Collier, op.cit., p.250.
55 Winser, B.E.F. Ships, p.95.
56 Hyndman, Wartime Kent, p.23.
57 Shaw, F & J, We Remember Dunkirk, p.204.
58 Hamilton's Monty, p.294ff, for this and the following interview.
59 Montgomery, Memoirs, p.67.
60 I have not end-noted every detail. My main authors for this 'Ships in Ramsgate' section are – Brann, Little Ships of Dunkirk, Gardner, op.cit., Orde, 'Dunkirk List' (NMM), Plummer, The Ships That Saved an Army, and Winser, op.cit.
61 The records here, as elsewhere, disagree. Winser (p.93) says she arrived at 7.35. I have taken the timing from the Dunkirk List at the Greenwich Maritime Museum. There would seem to be no conclusive evidence one way or the other. Both sources have instances of error.
62 Brann, Little Ships of Dunkirk, p.94.
63 Knowles, Escape from Catastrophe, p.187.
64 All three replies from Gardner, op.cit., p.105.
65 Winser, op.cit. has 2,914, see p. 93. Her officers think the true figure closer to 7,000. See Plummer, The Ships that Saved the Army, p.96.
66 For Anderson's own account of the conversation – recorded in many Dunkirk books – see Harman, Dunkirk..., p.226.
67 The incident is taken from Plummer, The Ships that Saved an Army, p. 86, but authorities vary as to the number. Winser op.cit. has 404, Plummer and Gardner, op.cit. have 550. I have opted for Winser's number as he is the latest of the three and may have had data not available to the others in 1990 and 1947 (respectively).
68 His Majesty's Minesweepers, HMSO, [undated, c. '43.]
69 She has two entries in the NMM 'Dunkirk List' and the reports conflict.
70 Vince, Storm on the Waters, p.38.
71 These details are based on a Planet News photograph taken on Naiad Errant's return up the Thames 9 June. They are highly likely to have been true on the 2 June.
72 Certain chrome window frames had been removed.
74 There is some confusion about his name. The lady to whom he gave the bell remembered it as Walker, but Cyril Chell's memory of him will have been longer and more reliable.
75 Palmer. Sgt. N., Letter, op.cit. 2/12/89.
76 Colville, Fringes of Power, p.146.
77 Details from pp 118119 of Hickman's Churchill's Bodyguard. Hickman is writing about 'when Churchill first went there', and dates it June 1941, not 1940. I assume that was a slip. He made a number, e.g. he dates Churchill's flight to Paris of May 31st on June 3rd (p.96) and Mussolini's entry into the War a month early (p.285).
78 Hickman in Churchill's Bodyguard does not date the incident but describes it happening 'on his [Thompson's] first night patrolling Chartwell' (p.207). If true it can only be June 1-2, 1940.
79 Gilbert, Second World War, p.92.
80 James, R.(ed.) Chips: The Diaries of Sir Henry Channon, p.313.
81 Longmate, How We Lived Then, p.107.
83 Shirer, Berlin Diary, p.308.
85 Irving, The Trail of the Fox, p. 47.
86 The section within [ ] is the clearer translation given in Irving's The Trial of the Fox, p. 48.
87 Hart, Rommel Papers, p.43.
88 20,000 of 45,000.
89 Chambrun, Mission & Betrayal, pp. 147-8.
90 Collier, R. 1940, p. 79.
91 Hallion, 'The American Perspective', in Burning Blue, p.87.
92 Black. ...Roosevelt, p.544.
93 Calder, The People's War, p.125.
94 Daily Sketch, 3/6/40, p.5.
95 The Times, Saturday, 1/6/40, p.2.
96 Trevor-Roper's essay 'The Mind of Adolf Hitler' in Hitler's Table Talk p.xi.
97 Irving, Hitler's War, pp.127-8.
98 Paragraph details from Irving, Hitler's War, p.127; Pallud, Blitzkrieg in the West, p. 459; Tolland, Adolph Hitler, p. 612.
99 This is the date given by Gilbert, op. cit., p.87. but Pallud, op.cit. says 1.30 am on the 6th (see p. 459.)
100 Glover, op.cit., p.35.
101 Quoted in Gelb, Scramble, pp.30-1.
102 Humphreys, 'Hawkinge' in Ramsey (ed.) The Battle of Britain, p. 105.
Endnotes, Chapter V

104 Gardner, op.cit., p.184.
105 From 'Naiad Errant' entry in Orde's Dunkirk List.
107 Rather than lengthen the anecdote I did not record that he then added 'a friend' of one of the 30, so he actually returned with 31. See Brann, op.cit., p.207.
108 Phrase of Liddell Hart, The Other Side of the Hill, p.188.
109 Toland, Adolf Hitler, pp.609-10.
110 p.90.
112 Toland, op.cit., pp.610-11.
113 In an absence of the actual text of Sunday's explanation of the Halt Order I have repeated Saturday's. There is no indication that it was substantially different.
114 Irving, Hitler's War, p.125.
116 Gilbert, Second World War, p.73.
117 On 24 May Hitler thought it would be over in 6 weeks. Toyland, Adolf Hitler, p.609.
118 Rather than lengthen the anecdote I did not record that he then added 'a friend' of one of the 30, so he actually returned with 31. See Brann, op.cit., p.207.
119 Phrase of Liddell Hart, The Other Side of the Hill, p.188.
120 Wilmot, Struggle for Europe, p.21. The following sentence is based on Wilmot. The transcript of Hitler's speech, Wilmot notes, was used at the Nuremburg Trial.
121 Dalton, The Fateful Years, p.331.
122 e.g. Sunday Pictorial, 2/1/40.
123 Faulks, Charlotte Gray, p.144.
124 Deighton, Blitzkreig, p.361.
125 Reuth, Goebbels, p.271.
126 Quoted both in Irving, op.cit., p.125 and in Gilbert, Second World War, p.83.
127 Atkin, Pillar of Fire, p.12.
128 Mercer, Chronicle of the Second World War, p.96.
129 Dilks, Diaries of... Cadogan, p.293.
132 Picture Post, 1/6/40, p.16.
133 From issue 1/6/40, describing 31st May.
134 Details from Cornwall's Battle of France, p.413.
135 Cooper, Duff, Old Men Forget, '54, p.281.
136 Quoted in The War Illustrated, 14/6/40. Exact date of broadcast not specified.
138 Flint, Dowding & Headquarters Fighter Command, p.84.
139 Dilks, Cadogan Diaries. Entry for June 4. p.294
140 Gilbert, Second World War, p.85.
141 Deighton, op.cit., pp.354-5
142 Irving, op.cit., p.124.
144 Nicholson, Vita and Harold, pp. 322-3.
145 Dalton, op.cit., p.337.
146 Franks, op.cit., pp.61, 161.
147 Lord, The Miracle of Dunkirk, p. 337.
148 Deighton & Hastings, Battle of Britain, p.67.
149 Pile, Ack Ack, pp.119-20. Pile was not present, but the story was told him by ‘one of Dowding’s greatest friends’. Pile himself kept in very close touch with Dowding.
150 Original has 'Headquarters' but changed to H.Q. because of the narrow column format.
151 On p. 85 of his Second World War, Martin Gilbert has Dowding report on Sunday, but his more detailed volume on Churchill, Vol VI, p 256ff. and Cadogan's diary has it on Monday (See Dilks, op.cit., p. 294.)
152 Gilbert, Second World War, p.85.
154 Eden, Memoirs, p.113.
155 Colville, op.cit., p.146.
156 Lord, The Miracle of Dunkirk, p. 337.
157 Deighton & Hastings, Battle of Britain, p.67.
158 Pile, Ack Ack, pp.119-20. Pile was not present, but the story was told him by ‘one of Dowding’s greatest friends’. Pile himself kept in very close touch with Dowding.
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161 Gilbert, Second World War, p.85.
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165 Lord, The Miracle of Dunkirk, p. 337.
166 Deighton & Hastings, Battle of Britain, p.67.
167 Pile, Ack Ack, pp.119-20. Pile was not present, but the story was told him by ‘one of Dowding’s greatest friends’. Pile himself kept in very close touch with Dowding.
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170 Gilbert, Second World War, p.85.
that Churchill prepared it over about four days and worked on it in all these places.

162 The account of Churchill is taken from p. 248-9 of Collier, *Sands of...*. He lists Miss. Shearburn as one of his informants. He also affirms that 'there are no imaginary conversations' in his book.
165 All the signals of the Operation are published in Gardner, *op.cit.* pp. 162-94.
166 Several are not even mentioned in the Dover list of embarkation numbers.