

CRETE

L.I. - Sunoco. Thursday, May 22, 1941.

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Prime Minister Churchill today reported to the House of Commons on the Battle of Crete. ~~One thing he said reveals the situation in terms most vivid and striking.~~ "It's a most strange and grim battle that is being fought," said Winston Churchill. "Our side has no air support, and the other side has little or no artillery or tanks. Neither side," he added, "has any means of retreat." ~~That statement can be taken as chapter and verse - the way a preacher recites a Biblical text and develops his sermon from it.~~

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The British side indeed, has no air support - as Churchill said. Tonight the London Air Ministry reports that all R.A.F. fighter squadrons are being withdrawn from Crete. The combat planes, which might fight the Nazi air fleet, are leaving. The London Air Ministry gives the reason in these two words, "pronounced disadvantage." ~~The Royal Air Force has been operating at too great disadvantage.~~ The reason ~~for that~~ is largely - airports. The rugged and mountainous island is poorly supplied with flying fields. The two principal airports are at Canea and Candia. So let's see what has been happening at those places. ~~Winston~~

Churchill told the House of Commons that the troops of the Nazi air invasion have captured the City of Candia, the largest town in Crete. It would appear that the Nazi troops got into the place - seizing streets and buildings. But, declared Churchill, they have not taken the Candia airport. We might easily surmise, however, that, with the Germans holding the city, the airport ~~might be~~^{is} a perilous base of operations for squadrons of British fighter planes.

The capital of Crete is Canea. There the troops that came from the sky have not ~~been~~ captured the city, but they have seized the flying field - the Malémi airdrome, about ten miles away.

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Such is the flying field situation and, moreover, British headquarters at Cairo point out that the Island of Crete is so close to Axis-controlled areas, that the German air force can bring an overwhleming power of planes to bear. The British flying bases in Egypt, on the other hand, are so far away, ~~that~~^{the} the speedy short range fighter planes can't make the flight to Crete - they can't bring up fighter reenforcements. In consequence - we

are told that the R.A.F. on the island has been battling against odds of upward of twenty to one. All of which makes it an impossible state of affairs for the British air force, and so the fighter squadrons have been ordered out of Crete.

The R.A.F. is ^{still} taking part in the battle ^{but} with bombers only - long range ships that can fly from the Egyptian bases. These have been conducting a violent counter-attack -- against the Nazi flying fields in Greece - from which the air fleets of the invasion are launched. Cairo describes the R.A.F. bomber counter-offensive against the Nazi points of departure as - a minor blitzkrieg. ^R The net result of it all is that over Crete the Germans are in complete and undisputed control of the sky - no fighter planes to meet them in the air. Save for anti-aircraft batteries on the ground " they encounter no opposition as they dive-bomb the British and Greek defenders incessantly, and as they continually send new forces by the sky route. More thousands of parachute soldiers and troops that arrive by transport plane and glider.

The obvious and perhaps decisive feature is, that the German command can continue to pour troops into Crete through the air, constantly reenforcing the attack, ~~against the defenders.~~ They've been coming in at night. But now we hear that some air-borne units have been landed in the full light of morning and afternoon. The latest report is that they've already sent across a complete division of aerial troops - about eight thousand, and are beginning to transport units of a second division.

The Nazi command is said to have forty thousand soldiers of the sky massed for ^{this overhead} ~~the sky~~ invasion of Crete.

Soldiers with light equipment. They can't carry ~~air~~ by air anything ponderous like tanks or heavy artillery. The Nazis in Crete are conducting their ground attack with small automatic weapons - hand grenades, machine guns, and the ^{lighter} ~~smaller~~ types of automatic armament. Such is the background for the Churchill statement that while the defenders are without air support, the attackers have little or no artillery or tanks.

The British Prime Minister used another terse phrase

in describing another aspect of the battle. "The enemy air force is attacking our ships, and we are attacking their convoys."

He told how the Nazis have been trying to support the air invasion by troop movement across the sea - ^{attempting} ~~trying~~ to land on the coast of Crete. Churchill said that the first attempt was beaten off, and that two transports and a number of smaller Greek boats were sunk - also an Axis destroyer. Meaning - the British fleet is in action. For, while the Germans control the sky, the British control the sea.

Churchill told of a second attempt to cross the water - an Axis convoy making for Crete. It was spotted by British warships, and on this the issue is still in doubt.
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~~"The convoy," related Winston Churchill, "turned away, while being attacked by our light forces. I have not received any further information as to what happened," he added.~~

It's a battle of sky and sea, such as has become familiar in this war. The Germans make large claims. Berlin says absolutely nothing about the air invasion of Crete, but tells of bombing

attacks on British naval units in adjacent waters. After large claims of bombing British warships yesterday an official bulletin issued by the German High Command now declares that four British cruisers were sunk today -- and several destroyers, heavily damaged - in today's fighting. An enormous victory in a two day battle -- not confirmed in London.

The general fact is this, and it's a fact of world importance. - that the Battle of Crete is now turning into a full-dress conflict of German air power and British sea power. It's a major test, which will decide whether air control can prevail over sea control -- in the conquest of an island, conquest across some seventy miles of water.

Unique in military history!

NEUTRALITY

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Today brought some new possible indications about the policy of the United States toward the war. One was a declaration by Secretary of War Stimson ^{today} ~~He~~ echoed and supported what Secretary of the Navy Knox had to say yesterday - that the United States Neutrality Law should be repealed, so that American merchant ships can carry aid to Britain. Today Secretary Stimson told a press conference that he never has approved of the Neutrality Law and doesn't now. He spoke of it in these words:- "a violation of our most sacred and important tradition of foreign policy - the freedom of the seas."

The reaction in Congress was immediate - pro and con. Congressman Hamilton Fish denounced the two Secretaries in these words:- "Secretaries Stimson and Knox are two of the greatest arch interventionists in the United States." Typical ~~of~~ the opposite point of view was Republican Senator Austin of Vermont, who spoke as follows:- "I agree with the Secretaries," said he, "our effort to make sacrifices in the interests of peace has been a failure."

Washington is wondering whether the statements made

by the Secretaries of Navy and War mean that there's an administration plan to have Congress abrogate the Neutrality Act, - which keeps American merchant vessels out of war zones.

Surmises were heightened by a declaration made by the President. He spoke of the American merchant marine playing its part in the defense of democracies. The President wrote his statement in connection with the observance of National Maritime Day. Here are significant words that he used, a prediction concerning the merchant marine:- "It will," said the President - "carry through the open waters of the seven seas implements that will help to destroy the menace of free peoples everywhere."

To all of this, add a move made by the Navy Department - a request for congressional legislation. The Navy asked Congress to authorize the creation of a number of additional vice-admirals. The purpose of these ~~new vice-admirals~~ would be to command what the Navy calls "task forces." ~~That's a~~ term meaning units assigned to carry out special duties, missions on the sea. The Navy did not specify just what duties might be assigned to the new vice-admirals in command of task forces, but Washington promptly started guessing

that this might have something to do with the freedom of the seas,
getting aid across to Britain or protecting American shipping in
the Red Sea -- war supplies to the British at Suez.

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Just off the wire :- the C.I.O. has won out in the
election at the Ford plant. An overwhelming victory.

A weather-beaten Polar explorer is sitting beside me tonight, a young Norwegian American just back from the Antarctic continent. He has, I believe, travelled more in the vicinity of the South Pole than any explorer living or dead. No wonder he is an explorer, when you consider his background! His father, Martin Ronne, was with Amundsen at the South Pole on that expedition back in Nineteen Ten to Nineteen Twelve. Later, his father was with Amundsen in the Arctic, on the "MAUD" when they discovered the Northeast Passage. Also with Ellsworth and Amundsen, in Spitzberg, when they made their two Polar flights, one by plane and the other in the dirigible Norge. It was there that his father met Admiral Byrd. And later his father was with Byrd in the Antarctic on that first expedition in Nineteen Twenty-Eight -- Thirty.

Then when the Veteran Arctic traveler, Martin Ronne, died, his son Finn took over his work, and now has been with Byrd on two expeditions to the Antarctic, carrying on where his father left off.

Finn Ronne came in to see me tonight to present me with a square chunk of rock from the foundation of his base camp at Palmer Peninsula on the South Polar Continent, about a thousand miles south of Cape Horn, *with the Byrd Expedition*. It's a stone for a fireplace we have on Quaker Hill, which is to tell the History of Man, in stone.

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Finn Ronne, what ~~what~~ was accomplished on this latest Byrd expedition, ~~the~~ one from which you have just returned?

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RONNE: But first, Lowell, about that stone. I had a still ~~larg~~ larger stone for your "History of Civilization" fireplace. I had it all crated, and with your name printed on it. But we had to make an ~~emergency~~ emergency getaway, and I was unable to bring that larger chunk. However, I have left a letter, with the stone, in case another expedition finds it some day, explaining that they are to bring it back from the South Polar regions -- at your expense.

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L.T.: Oh ho! And if they fly it all the way back in a special plane I'll have to pay for that, will I?
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RONNE: In the region where I was, we found that Alexandra-land is an island. I was the leader of the southern party on that portion of the expedition. So we solved one of the mysteries of the Antarctic. Also, southeast of Charcot Island, we discovered an open sea similar to the Ross Sea. And then we charted and explored large sections of the South Polar continent.

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L.T. How many were there of you, and how long were you gone?

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RONNE: About two years. And there were fifty-nine of us on the ice.

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L.T. What about that huge snow cruiser, the one that Dr. Poulter invented and which had so much publicity before the expedition sailed?

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RONNE: Oh, it's down there on the ice. It never got anywhere. It turned out that the cruiser had the wrong gear-reduction unit.

But, if someone will take down the right unit the snow cruiser will work okay, and be able to travel over many parts of the Antarctic continent.

GHOST SHIP

Today a ghost ship was explained. A spooky spectre of the sea turns into something simple and comprehensible.

At New York today, a Portuguese liner, upon putting into harbor, reported a strange discovery made in mid-Atlantic. The Portuguese vessel was sailing along when it sighted a singular craft something like a huge barge. No sign of life aboard, just drifting along;— sixteen hundred miles from the coast of America.

The Portuguese captain investigated, sent a party aboard the mystery ship. They found that all was lifeless and deserted. There was a cabin with a table and chairs, and an icebox. In the icebox was a container of drinking water, but nothing else. The spooky craft was equipped with a powerful metal crane, which showed signs of never

having been used. ~~(The condition of the hull was such that the~~

~~Portuguese figured the mystery ship had been at sea for two months.~~

~~There was only one clue to explain what had happened—a broken~~

~~tow line.~~

The story flashed on the press wire, and drew a quick response from ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ The Maritime Company of New York.

"That mystery ship belongs to us," declared a Company official.

He said he had immediately recognized the craft from the

Portuguese description - and told the following:

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The ghost of the sea is a twenty thousand dollar floating crane which vanished two months ago. It was on its way from Jacksonville, Florida, to the new United States Defense Base at Bermuda, to be used for dredging operations. The crane was being towed by a sea-going tug. The ocean was rough and stormy, and the tow line broke. The giant crane went drifting before the wind. The weather was so bad the tug couldn't follow it. The ponderous crane vanished and had been missing - until today.

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"It's fantastic," said the Company official, "to think the monster is still afloat. But afloat it is, in mid-Atlantic - after having drifted sixteen hundred miles!

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And where do we drift from here, Hugh?