

The Fog of Waugh: The Evacuation from Sphakia, Crete, May 1941

War is the realm of uncertainty; three quarters of the factors on which action is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty.

von Clausewitz, *On War* (unfinished on his death in 1831)

...the battle of Crete was, and I fear will remain, one of the most baffling and controversial of the late war.

D M Davin, *Crete* (1953), Preface, p vii

On this subject, one hesitates to unsheathe one's sword - much less to wield it - against so redoubtable opponent as Professor Donat Gallagher, whose authority on the evacuation from Crete in May 1941 has been established on a reading of what appears to be every relevant source, and whose judgements appear on first reading to be not merely well-founded but balanced. One is equally reluctant to get between Gallagher and Antony Beevor, whose book *Crete: The Battle and the Resistance* is one of the standard works, but to aspects of which Gallagher takes much exception. Nonetheless, casting caution aside, I argue below that in his attempts to extract or impose order on accounts of the evacuation from Sphakia in May 1941, Gallagher goes too far: the relevant events and the records of them do not permit a wholly coherent explanation, as they differ from each other and some contradict others. In some respects, I suggest that both Gallagher and Beevor are in error. While not covering the entire period, the fog of war extended to von Clausewitz's three quarters, and it was succeeded by a cloud of unknowing. Only an agnostic position is possible for some of the events described.

The crux of the disagreement between Beevor and Gallagher is that on Beevor's account, the commander of Layforce, Colonel Bob Laycock, was guilty of 'arrogantly disregarding orders' in leaving Crete; but Gallagher claims that 'every accusation Beevor levels at Laycock is incorrect, as is each of the purported facts he adduces to support the charges.'

Gallagher's thrusts, and so far as I am aware Beevor's only parry, are as follows:

Gallagher, Donat (2000) Sir Robert Laycock, Antony Beevor and the evacuation of Crete from Sphakia. *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 78 (313). pp. 38-55. (hereafter Laycock and Beevor)

Beevor, Antony (2000) Note: Colonel Laycock in the Evacuation of Crete from Sphakia, *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, 78 (315) pp 226-227 (hereafter Beevor's Note); 'It is now nearly nine years', Beevor recorded at 226, 'since Donat Gallagher told me of his great interest in Evelyn Waugh's experiences in Crete...I offered to send him copies of the Laycock documents I had collected...Little did I know what an obsessive quest this would unleash'.

Gallagher, Donat (2008) Misfire! Reassessing the Legacy of General Robert Laycock, *Royal United Services Institute Journal*, 153, 2008, 1, 80-89 (hereafter Misfire!)

Gallagher, Donat (2011) Guy Crouchback's Disillusion: Crete, Beevor, and the Soviet alliance in *Sword of Honour*. In: Gallagher, Donat, Slater, Ann Pasternak, and Wilson, John Howard, (eds.) *A Handful of Mischief: new essays on Evelyn Waugh*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. Co-

published with Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Plymouth, UK, pp. 172-219, with 203 footnotes (hereafter *Mischief*)

Gallagher, Donat (2014) The plain facts about Crete. *Evelyn Waugh Studies*, 45 (1). pp. 17-25. available online at <http://leicester.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/pi6445coll12/id/1938/rec/25> (hereafter Plain Facts)

What follows assumes some familiarity with these sources, as it would be tiresome to repeat them. Unfortunately only one of the five is available online, and copies of the 2011 volume are sadly rare - even in London, where this was written.

The title of this piece is chosen deliberately. Most of the British forces on Crete were there by accident, in the sense that they had landed there on the retreat from Greece and expected to be shipped on to Cairo, as many of their fellow-evacuees from Greece had been. When the decision was taken to defend Crete, they found themselves again on the front line, some in complete formations, but others in only parts of what had been larger formations, while still others, including civilians, were part of no formations at all. The retreat itself, over mountains, was particularly arduous. In these circumstances, expecting good record-keeping is idle, as is agreement among the survivors as to the particulars of what happened. The role of Evelyn Waugh in adding to the confusion is dealt with below.

As a precautionary note, most accounts of the evacuation by historians writing long after the event contain errors. Trying to navigate our way through the fog, we glimpse a ray of light and seek to illuminate what happened by its glow. Others see different rays which they argue cast a different light. Gallagher points out a number of errors in accounts by others. This paper identifies errors made by him, and there are further examples in Appendix III. No doubt others writing after this paper is published will identify errors made by me.

As only the evacuation from Sphakia is dealt with here, it is unnecessary to discuss the events which occurred on Crete days or weeks beforehand, except where they are relevant to the evacuation.

It is thus relevant to note that the fog had already descended when Laycock and the bulk of Layforce arrived in Suda Bay on the evening of 26 May. On Davin's account (*Crete*, 365-6*, hereafter Davin), General Freyberg, the commander of the British troops on the island,

met them and explained that it was no longer possible to hold the island and that they were to help cover the withdrawal to Sfakia. As the main body of forward troops was still in contact with the enemy, they would not take up their rearguard task until the following day, 27 May.

Stewart (*Struggle*, 409) has Freyberg telling Laycock this personally. Beevor (*Crete* p 197) has Freyberg on the quay at Suda Bay 'not to meet Layforce, although he spoke to one of their officers...' Messenger et al (*The Middle East Commandos*, 81) support this version, naming the officer as Company Commander Bill Burton, who 'bumped into Freyberg in person on the quayside. Burton was told that the battle was already lost and that Freyberg considered Layforce's mission to be pointless'. In his War Diary, Waugh does not mention Freyberg on the quay, but instead has Laycock being met 'by L.Os from "A" Bn [of Layforce] and CREFORCE with verbal instructions for occupation of defensive positions East of SUDA'. He made a similar record in his *Diaries* (499, hereafter Memorandum). Laycock himself recorded that 'When we got ashore there was no one to meet us.' (DEFE2/699)

*full references are given in the bibliography

As with so many other records concerning Crete, and especially the evacuation, it is fruitless to try and decide which account is the most likely. How is one to decide?

Finally by way of introduction it is necessary to describe the embarkation point, Sphakia, and Cunningham did it thus in his Despatch:

19, Sphakia is a small fishing village with one shingle beach, of which a stretch less than a cable [one-tenth of a mile] in extent could be used for embarking in boats. The road over the mountains from Suda to Sphakia finished up with a series of acute hairpin bends and came to an abrupt termination at the top of a 500 foot high escarpment. From this point a precipitous goat track led down to the village... Touch between the beach area and the top of the escarpment had to be maintained on foot as there was no signal communication. The climb required at least two hours to complete.

Waugh's Role

A good deal of the fog was generated by Waugh himself. While he may have been among the finest English prose writers of the twentieth century, as a recorder of events on Crete, as a reporter, he was quite inadequate. The novelist overwhelmed the soldier. His mistakes are such as to cast doubt on the accuracy of any statement he made which cannot be independently verified. The Layforce War Diary, which he kept, should be more accurately called the Waugh Diary, as it does not resemble in form or content a properly kept war diary, good examples of which are the diaries of the Australian units which were on Crete at that time (e.g. the 2/7 Infantry Battalion, the War Diary of which is available online at <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1367332>). It will hereafter be referred to as the Waugh/War Diary; to describe it as a war diary would invest it with an authority it does not possess. Thus he fails to record important events, such as the 'late order' said to have been received by Laycock to leave on 31 May, an omission which Gallagher seeks to justify as being 'to some extent explained by Waugh's idiosyncratic economy'. (Laycock and Beevor 46) There is not even any consistency between the Waugh/War Diary and the relevant parts of Waugh's Memorandum on LAYFORCE.

Despite being in general Waugh's doughty defender, Gallagher blows hot and cold on the Diary and the Memorandum. As well as 'idiosyncratic economy', he refers to the Memorandum as containing 'egregious blunders about names and times, and idiosyncratic doubts about the meaning of Creforce orders', but these faults notwithstanding 'the Memorandum remains a source of information on a par with other eyewitness accounts of the Crete campaign' (Laycock and Beevor 39). Gallagher claims further that the Memorandum 'corroborates' Major Graham's statement that Weston ordered Laycock to take himself and as many of his men off on the night of 31 May (Laycock and Beevor 44); but again he does not - cannot - point to a relevant passage. On Waugh's accounts in both the Diary and the Memorandum, the decision for Laycock and his men to leave that night was made on Laycock's own authority. 'Like much of the Memorandum', Gallagher concludes at Plain Facts 23, 'this sentence [the embarkation of Brigade HQ] is deeply confused about times (and much else)'.

Despite these considerable reservations, Gallagher clings to the belief that his own efforts with regard to the Waugh/War Diary, at least, 'vindicate its honesty and basic accuracy' (Mischief 173).

Part of the problem in deciphering the Waugh/War Diary lies in the cryptic record on 25 May at 2300 hours - '(N.B. All signals and written orders were subsequently destroyed to prevent

them falling into enemy hands).’ The Australian and New Zealand keepers of their diaries felt no such restriction, and it is impossible to see any basis for it. Destroy codes, yes, but how would signals and written orders sent during the course of a battle aid the enemy after the event? Laycock evidently felt no such restriction, at least so far as the order of 28 May from Freyberg was concerned, which he preserved. Nor did Lt-Col Graham and Lt-Col Young, both of Layforce, who kept copies of the capitulation order given to Graham by Weston. Perhaps this was a restriction Waugh foolishly imposed upon himself?

The Memorandum is equally unreliable, but more revealing of both Waugh and Laycock, as discussed below. It emphasises Waugh’s limitations as a reliable source (‘I think that was the plan but I have no copy of the orders and, anyway, it did not work out that way the next day’ (502) ‘A plan was decided on which I cannot now remember and, anyway, was never put into effect’ (504)) Two of Waugh’s more absurd statements in the Memorandum at 509 are that

At about 10 o’clock that evening [31 May] there was no sign of the enemy and the approaches to the beaches were thronged with non-fighting troops.

and later the same day, once Laycock, Waugh and Graham (with some ‘servants’, as Waugh called them, but not Waugh’s servant Tanner, whom they thought they had left behind) were on board the *Kimberley*

There were no ‘fighting troops’ among the officers in her and few among the men.

Waugh was fortunate that he did not express his opinions to the fighting troops around him in both situations, since among those on the approaches to the beaches were a contingent of Royal Marines and the Australian 2/7 Battalion; while on board the *Kimberley* were, among others, elements of the New Zealand 23rd Battalion, as its historian recorded (<http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WH2-23Ba-c5.html#name-207147-mention> page 93)

One could go on and on like this, but the reader will get the general idea.

Laycock’s Orders

As the orders given to Laycock concerning the evacuation are the subject of so much controversy, and so far as Beevor and Gallagher are concerned, the central issue, it is important to record what was said - or is recorded as having been said - on this subject. Some versions suggest that on 27 May Laycock went to see Weston and then Freyberg. Waugh recorded (Waugh/War Diary) that Weston ‘confirmed that battle of CRETE was already lost, that CREFORCE was evacuating the island and that LAYFORCE had been given rear guard role’. There is then the enigmatic entry: ‘Col LAYCOCK then visited Gen FREYBERG and received further orders for action’. The Memorandum (500) was more forthcoming regarding Freyberg:

Bob asked if it was a defence to be held to the last man and the last round.
‘No, a rearguard. Withdraw when you are hard pressed.’

Beevor (*Crete* 200) has Laycock and Waugh visiting the generals ‘in search of instructions’ with no indication of what were given, if any. Stewart does not mention any such encounter; nor does Davin. The fog at work, or further evidence of Waugh’s unreliability.

Whatever may or may not have happened on 27 May, the situation on 28 May became clearer. On that day, Davin recorded (414) 'General Freyberg's staff on Creforce issued the formal evacuation order, addressed to General Weston with copies to the other parties affected.' It is reproduced here in full (National Library of NZ; Crete - B.G.S. file)

OPERATIONAL DIRECTIVE

To: Maj-General Weston

1. ORGANISATION and COMMAND

All troops formerly in the SUDA BAY and MALEME sections are placed under your comd for operational purposes. Force HQ will make all arrangements for the actual embarkation of tps.

2. The operations henceforth must be based on the evacuation programme which is:

Night 28/29 May - 1000
Night 29/30 May - 6000
Night 30/31 May - 5000
Night 31 May/1 June - 3000

3. So far as can be foreseen 5 NZ and 19 Aus Inf Bdes and LAYFORCE will withdraw through the line of the pass immediately north of the "Saucer" which is to be occupied this evening by 4 NZ Inf Bde. The 5 NZ and 19 Aus Inf Bdes will almost certainly be very tired and should therefore, subject to the tactical situation be withdrawn south of the "Saucer" into assembly areas.

4. The C-in-C directs that you should put RM Bn into a defensive position immediately south of the saucer forthwith.

5. FUTURE OPERATIONS

It is anticipated that the enemy will make contact with 4 NZ Inf Bde in the afternoon 29 May. In order to keep the enemy at a distance from the beaches (see para 2) it would appear that the 4 NZ Inf Bde will have to hold its position until dark night 29/30 May when it is hoped to withdraw it direct to the beaches for embarkation, LAYFORCE reverting to your command. This forecast may have to be reviewed tomorrow when the actual facts are known.

6. It is anticipated that the enemy will follow up the withdrawal of the 4 NZ Inf Bde and make contact with RM Bn on morning 30 May. This position must be held until dark night 31 May. It is intended to embark 5 NZ Inf Bde and 19 Aust Bde on this night. therefore the only troops available to hold an intermediate position will be the RM Bn and LAYFORCE. This they MUST do during 31 May and at nightfall they will disengage and embark night 31 May/1 June.

7. POLICY OF EMBARKATION

Only after fighting troops have embarked will non-combatants be provided.

8. POSSIBLE CHANGES

It is possible that the embarkation programme (see para 2) may be expedited in which case the necessity for occupying an intermediate position between the "Saucer" and the sea may not arise.

(sgnd) R C Querie Major
For Brigadier
General Staff

(Distribution list)
HQ British Tps in Crete
28 May 41

The Australian war historian, Gavin Long, also recorded this order (Greece, etc p 295). Laycock received a copy and preserved it (Gallagher, Plain Facts, 19). When he wrote Laycock and Beevor, Gallagher was not aware of it: he recorded at 40 that 'No written orders relating to Layforce's evacuation are extant...'

A further instruction on embarkation arrangements was issued that day to Weston by Creforce. The full instruction is reproduced in Appendix II entitled 'A Note on the Organisation of the Embarkation from Sphakia'. (Davin, *ibid*) summarised it thus:

By this General Weston was made responsible for the flow of troops to the beach and for the establishment of a suitable assembly area. It laid down that only organised parties travelling from the assembly area by a specified route were to be embarked and that parties given particular tasks on any one night should have priority of embarkation the following night.

Waugh does not seem to have been aware of either of these orders (although there is what might be a relevant reference at 500 in the Memorandum: 'Bob produced some written orders for a timed rearguard action lasting two days'); nor does Beevor. How far Weston circulated the second order is a nice question.

On 29 May however Weston held a conference at which decisions concerning variations to the Creforce order were issued. So far as Layforce was concerned, it was ordered to 'move back to the beaches and occupy a position at KOMITADES 2523 covering the exits of the IMVROTIKO ravine' (Weston's Report para 34). It moved there that night according to the War Diaries of the two Layforce Battalions. There is a useful map at Davin 428.

It was now clear that the original plan set out in Freyberg's order of 28 May had been substantially revised. Instead of the Royal Marines and Layforce providing the last of the main rearguard, this role was given to 2/7 Australian Battalion and the Royal Marines. (See also Thompson *The Royal Marines* 258-260). Weston was clearly concerned about the possibility of the enemy conducting flanking movements east and west of the main retreat route. Layforce was moved to the east and the New Zealand 20th Battalion to the west. (Davin at 429 has the Layforce move being ordered by Brigadier Vasey of the 19th Australian Infantry Brigade). This concern turned out to have been well-founded as on 30 May a party of Germans came down the Sfakiano Ravine to the west and were dealt with by the New Zealanders (Davin 430-1). While another detachment of Germans was advancing to the northeast of Layforce, it did not get near enough to cause problems. There is another useful map showing these dispositions at Davin 442.

Save for ordering Colvin of Layforce to effect the surrender of Crete (see below), Layforce is not thereafter mentioned in Weston's Report.

It is clear from Weston's Report that he saw the Australians and the Marines as forming the rearguard. In para 34 he referred to the Australians (the Marines were to come under their command) as being ordered 'to recce a rearguard position...'; in para 35 he referred to 'Brigadier Vasey with 2/7 Aus Bn and R M Bn in rearguard position...'; and in para 36 he referred to Brig Vasey as 'the rearguard commander'. No other unit or commander is so referred to. As against

this (see below), the War Diary of D Battalion Layforce had it at 'the final rearguard' position when it moved to Sphakia.

For what it is worth, the Waugh/War Diary recorded on 28 May at 9 p m
...in view of losses sustained and the exhaustion of remaining troops, Major Gen
WESTON relieved Bde of its rearguard role and ordered it to proceed to assembly area
south of IMVROS...

It may or may not be relevant to the question of why Layforce was moved that a signal from Creforce to Middle East sent on 30 May, but beginning 'Situation Report 0900 hours May 29th', (WO201/2661, page 64) contained the following:

4th NZ Brigade holding covering position 17 repeat 17 miles from Sphakia. 19th Australian Brigade - 5th NZ Brigade less 23rd Battalion resting behind covering position. Layforce very dispersed and nothing definite. Marine Battalion occupying another position 5 (5) miles in rear during the day.

This may have been an implied criticism of Layforce.

No further developments as to the evacuation seem to have occurred until 30 May, when a number of conflicting accounts began to emerge. Thus Waugh (Diary, 30 May)

p.m. Col LAYCOCK visited CREFORCE...General Freyberg defined order of priority of evacuation as fighting troops before stragglers. LAYFORCE to leave last of fighting troops.

The Memorandum records at 507 that Laycock and Waugh went to see Freyberg on 30 May:

Bob asked him about order of embarkation and he said, 'You were the last to come so you will be the last to go.'

The relevant part of the next entry (Diary 31 May 1400 hours) reads:

Final orders from CREFORCE for evacuation (a) LAYFORCE positions not to be held to last man and last round but only as long as was necessary to cover withdrawal of other fighting forces (b) No withdrawal before order from H.Q. (c) LAYFORCE to embark after other fighting forces but before stragglers.

Waugh records (Memorandum 508) that 'in the afternoon, the 31st of May, Bob and I went to get further orders...' and that

Before leaving, Freyberg dictated an order of priority for disembarkation which said Layforce was to be last, but all fighting troops had precedence over others. We interpreted this to mean troops who had retained their arms and organization, but I believe he may have meant soldiers as opposed to civilian refugees. Anyway no attempt was made to enforce the priority.

This may have been a reference to the Creforce order of 28 May, reproduced above, where the distinction between fighting troops and non-combatants was quite clear.

In the evening, they saw Weston again who 'said that we were to cover the withdrawal and that a message would be sent to us by the embarkation officer of Sphakia beach when we could retire.' (Memorandum 509) Note that the Diary entry has this happening during the afternoon at 1400 hours: '...(b) No withdrawal before order from H.Q..'

On Waugh's account, Laycock and Waugh showed remarkable determination to get orders from senior officers, perhaps in the hope that they would vary from the ones already received. It is not clear how much or how little time they spent with Layforce - see below.

On 31 May Layforce was moved again. It was, as Waugh accurately recorded in the Diary (for once), 'relieved in flank by MAORIS and ordered to take up new positions covering town and beach of SPHAKION at mouth of SPHAKION RAVINE'. A written order partly to this effect survives in the War Diary of 5 NZ Brigade (in NZ Archives), to which unit it was copied:

To Layforce reptd 5 IB
From GOC Refugees in Crete [?]

The 28 Bn (Maori) will act as flank guard on the gorge now watched by Layforce.
The Maoris will also act as a guard on the Antonio Gorge 2 and 1/2 miles further east.
When relieved Layforce will march to Sphakia village receive a meal fill up with ammunition and water and return to vicinity of GHQ for orders.

According to the war diary of A Battalion Layforce, it moved to 'a perimeter position covering the beach at Sphakia' at 1600 hours on 31 May, there forming - according to the war diary of D Battalion Layforce - 'the final rear guard position to cover the the withdrawal and embarking of troops from the beach'. Who issued the order for Layforce to cover the beach at Sphakia remains a mystery. As noted above, Weston did not mention any such order, and in fact recorded on Saturday 31st May 'No material changes were made to dispositions this day'. (para 36 of his report) As noted below, the unreliable Waugh recorded in the Memorandum at 508 that Freddy Graham was sent off to see Weston on 30 May and got orders 'that the next day we were to leave the gorge and cover the Sphakia gorge'.

Before considering other events which occurred on 31 May and were relevant to the question of whether Laycock carried out his orders, it is instructive to look at what happened to the units which replaced Layforce at the Imvrotikho Ravine and which Layforce replaced behind Sphakia. The detachment of Maoris (who thought they had been left behind, most of 28 Bn having sailed the previous day) which replaced Layforce on 31 May were late that afternoon instructed to report to Sphakia to cover the embarkation to take place that night. There they formed an inner cordon around the beach and later that night they were taken off. (Maori Bn 132) The same applied to the other New Zealanders whom Layforce replaced at Sphakia on 31 May: they too were taken off that night. It is thus plausible that in ordering these moves - which took place before he received the news that 31 May was to be the last night of embarkation - Weston, assuming it was he, had it in mind that Layforce too would in its turn ('after other fighting forces') be taken off. This is consistent with D Battalion's war diary as noted recording that it had arrived at the final rearguard position.

Further evidence in support of this argument is provided in Weston's Report. Having listed the units of the 4000 fighting troops left on the island early on 31 May, including of course Layforce, Weston recorded at para 42 that 'first priorities in the form of signed chits issued to officers i/c parties were issued to the extent of 2,000. Second priorities being issued to a further 2,000.' Clearly he envisaged at that point that all 4000 would be taken off.

As against this, at least some men in Layforce thought that they would not be taken off on the last night. A letter to Laycock from the Captain of G Troop, A Battalion, dated 24 June 1941, said that 'In Crete on the last night of the evacuation we were ordered to hold a position covering the beach and were told that our chances of being taken off were almost nil.' (WO 201/717) Clearly the author was among those taken off.

Not all of Layforce was in the hills behind Sphakia. Christie Lawrence, a subaltern in Layforce, recorded in *Irregular Adventure* waking on 1 June 'in my cave near Force H.Q' looking forward 'almost eagerly' towards the day's action, only to be told by a party of New Zealanders outside that 'your Commandos' had been withdrawn about 10 p.m. the previous night. 'But it makes no difference, you've all missed the boat'. Lawrence 'collected the half-dozen signallers who had been with me in the cave, and we all walked slowly back to the beach'.

Gallagher and Beevor both proceed on the basis that Freyberg's orders regarding Layforce continued to apply notwithstanding the changes made by Weston. It is hard to swallow that this could have been the case. As the Operational Directive quoted above shows, Weston had been given command of the troops and there were contingencies built into the Directive ('As far as can be foreseen..', 'subject to the tactical situation..' and so on) so there can be no question that Weston was authorised to make changes. Why Gallagher and Beevor ignore them is part of the fog.

The Night of 31 May-1 June

Further orders and counter-orders were issued or allegedly issued to Laycock on this night.

'At 1830 hours [on 31 May] I was handed a signal' Weston recorded in his Report, paras 44 and 45, 'stating that 3,600 would be lifted that Saturday night and that no further evacuations could be made'. He then went 'up the hill' as he put it to see Vasey of the 2/7 Australian Battalion whom he met at 8 p.m. 'and it was arranged that the rearguard would march out at dusk'. On his return at 9.30 p m he 'sent for the senior officer available Lt Col Colvin of "LAYFORCE" and gave him the following order...', which was the order to capitulate. Worth recording is that Colvin is mentioned twice more by Weston. At the end of para 45 appears 'A sum of about £1,000 in Greek currency was turned over by me to Lt. Col. Colvin that evening.'; while para 46 reads in part 'An extemporised Code was issued and left with Lt.Col. Colvin ...' So it is clear that Weston had in his mind left Colvin in charge.

This seems plain enough, but the fog which subsequently descended, including a fresh cloud as recently as 2016, is impenetrable; and it is regarding this period of time - from 9.30 p m until early the following morning - that the alternative scenarios have been developed, the accusations made and the deep division between Beevor and Gallagher emerged. What follows attempts to clarify some aspects but the central events are beyond clarification.

To take events in chronological order, what happened with Weston and who was present? Weston's version is as shown (and may be called Version 1), and is repeated in the Inter-Services Committee Report; but two others present have differing versions. Laycock's Brigade Major, Graham, left an account (Version 2) which said that soon after dusk he reported to Weston on Laycock's instructions. Colvin was present. Weston dictated to Graham the capitulation of Crete, 'in the form of a short operational instruction addressed to [Colvin]'. Weston handed a copy to Colvin and kept another, and then left. (Beevor 219-20) Subsequently Laycock came 'panting up the hill' and told Graham that 'he got counter-orders this evening...we are to be evacuated tonight taking as many of our troops with us as we can...General Weston said "my staff will see to it" '. Graham added in 1976 that 'General Weston later in the day...changed his mind and ordered Laycock to take his Brigade HQ and as many of his force...as he could get out that night'. (Laycock and Beevor 44)

Laycock himself left two accounts. In an undated but probably 1942 report entitled Operation Crete (DEF2/699) he said without any detail that 'General Weston told us to get to Sphakia and get off'. Further, 'My orders were to go with the men, but I am not sure that in cases like that the Commanding Officer should behave in the same way as the Captain of a ship and be the last to leave'.

The second fuller account (Version 3) has only recently come to light. It is from his Memoirs and is quoted by Richard Mead in his 2016 biography of Laycock (88-9). The salient points are:

- Laycock was present with Graham when Weston dictated the surrender order; Colvin was not present;
- the order was apparently addressed to Laycock;
- Laycock 'asked Weston whether he would consider it very insubordinate if I flatly refused to obey it';
- 'Weston's reply was not, as might so easily have been the case, that it was not for me to reason why', but that after his own departure as well as the departures of Vasey and Hargest, who were 'about to embark', Laycock would be the senior officer left on the island and he needed 'to explain the situation formally to the enemy';
- Laycock pointed out that either he could stay and organise guerrilla warfare in the hills or 'I could evacuate as many of my own men, including my Brigade Staff, as could get down to the beach in time';
- after some thought, Weston agreed to the second alternative, taking into account 'that as the Germans were making no attempt to give us the coup de gras (sic), the responsibility of Layforce to provide a rearguard to a force which was due to surrender in a few hours had lapsed';
- Colvin (although not named) evidently having been agreed upon as the senior officer to surrender to the Germans 'I now had his permission to delegate my responsibility and that I was at liberty to evacuate my Brigade Headquarters and as many of my men as possible';
- Laycock 'left Weston to go out to his seaplane' and then went and found Colvin and gave him the surrender order.

As to Laycock raising the possibility of flatly refusing to obey the order, in a letter to Davin on September 17 1951, Laycock said that Weston had ordered Colvin to surrender 'after I had frankly refused to do so!' (Mischief, 216, fn 154). It might be worth noting here that in the Preface to *Crete* ix Davin listed among those who lent 'willing aid'

Major-General 'Bob' Laycock who dispensed information and hospitality with equal liberality; ... Lieutenant-Colonel G. A. D. Young, DSO, RE, Mr. Evelyn Waugh and Mr. Anthony Cheetham, all of whom provided information without which it would have been almost impossible to do justice to the role of the Commandos in the concluding stages of the battle

In the text at 446 Davin recorded (Version 4) that after Weston had heard late on 31 May that there were to be no further ships after that night:

Weston had still one unenviable task. Layforce had been the last troops to arrive. There would be no room for all who had fought. Some would have to stay. The only criterion was the crude one of seniority in the battle. Weston therefore sent for Colonel Laycock. The latter was to nominate an officer to handle the capitulation. He decided it would be Lieutenant-Colonel Colvin, the commander of A Battalion.

These accounts are different in so many ways that it is impossible to try to reconcile them, or to give preference to one account over another. A quite impenetrable patch of fog has now descended and it is difficult to see it ever lifting.

Laycock also asked himself in his memoirs (Mead 93-94)

Was I right in using arguments which influenced Weston to countermand his original orders, should I, personally, have embarked that night knowing that nearly three-quarters of my command was still ashore? Probably not....Once the order to surrender was given I maintained that every able-bodied man who succeeded in getting back to Egypt had done the right thing...

Most men on the island did not know until the next day that the order to surrender had been given, by which time the orthodox means of getting back to Egypt had ceased to operate. Further, Laycock seems to have made no effort on the night of 31 May, until very late in the piece, to tell his troops via Tanner that they should leave. In fact, the only such message recorded in the diaries of the Layforce battalions is shown as having come from the Brigade Major. Had Laycock got a message to them earlier, more might have been evacuated.

So did Laycock carry out his orders? The prior question is: what were those orders? And the answer is that we do not know, as it is lost in the fog. It is clear that Freyberg's orders had been modified by Weston, although 'last to arrive so last to go' is a recurring theme - until the last day when the fog descends. Gallagher argues in Laycock and Beevor that Laycock got 'counter-orders' in the evening of 31 May, but is forced to rely on 'indirect evidence' (45); he also deals ineffectively with Waugh's damaging admission in the Waugh/War Diary that 'Col LAYCOCK on his own authority issued orders...' Beevor's response centred on the question of the 'supposed fresh order to LAYFORCE, allowing it to abandon its defensive perimeter and embark' and issued a challenge:

If Gallagher or anyone else manages to produce a specific counter-order allowing LAYFORCE to abandon its defensive positions to leave in front of other fighting forces, then I will be the first to eat humble-pie, but he has not, and until he does, my charge of high-handedness, *never* of cowardice, against Laycock stands.

Further,

However much Gallagher twists and turns with the evidence, he cannot deny that the key phrase is 'Colonel Laycock on own authority'. This surely demonstrates straight from the horse's mouth that Laycock had *not* received permission to embark his men before 'other fighting forces'. If LAYFORCE had received the counter-order that Gallagher imagines, then Waugh and Laycock would have ensured that it was mentioned in the war diary for the very obvious reason that it would have cleared them of any suspicion.

This is a very powerful argument and one that Gallagher is unable to rebut in any of his succeeding three essays on the subject.

On Weston's own account, on the last night he urged the Australians and the Royal Marines to go to Sphakia (i.e. to go to the beach to embark) 'with all speed' but he did not record that he so urged Layforce. One might infer that he expected Layforce to continue to provide the rearguard and then to surrender the following morning with its senior officer to whom he had issued the surrender order; but we'll never know. At 446 Davin has Weston at this point allotting 500 extra places to Vasey and 300 to the Royal Marines; again, there is no mention of Layforce.

There is another element here, which neither Beevor nor Gallagher really addresses. At about 9.30 on the evening of 31 May, and unbeknown to most of his forces, Weston as British Commander decided to surrender, although the surrender would not take place until the following morning. What effect did that have on orders already issued? Were all bets off? It's essentially a military question which military men should answer. Judging by some of the reactions at Sphakia on 1 June, when news of the surrender spread, it was up to the men themselves to make their own decisions - whether to surrender, take to the hills or make their own arrangements to escape. Most surrendered while the other options attracted some; but the important points surely are that there was no question of 'orders' at that stage, and no blame attached to any troops no matter which option they chose.

Thanks to a red herring thrown into the discussion by Waugh, both Beevor and Gallagher get distracted from the main narrative concerning the last night. At pages 50-51 of Laycock and Beevor, Gallagher discusses what he calls the 'Key Issue': did Layforce withdraw before other fighting forces were in a position for embarkation? He begins with the entry from the Waugh/War Diary made at 1400 hours on 31 May, thus:

Final orders from CREFORCE for evacuation (a) LAYFORCE positions not to be held to last man and last round but only as long as was necessary to cover withdrawal of other fighting forces (b) No withdrawal before order from H Q (c) LAYFORCE to embark after other fighting forces but before stragglers.

This seems plain enough and is consistent with what Freyberg told Laycock the previous day, again as recorded in the Diary: 'LAYFORCE to leave last of fighting troops.' Gallagher argues however that

A great deal hangs on the meaning of 'as long as was necessary'. The natural effect of the words is to suggest that Layforce was required to stay in place until the enemy presented no danger to other fighting forces.

He then goes on to complain that Beevor stretches the words 'cover the withdrawal of other fighting forces' to mean that Layforce 'should have held its positions until after other fighting forces had embarked'.

Some would say that Beevor clearly has the better of this exchange about the natural effect of the words. But both had become embroiled in a quite separate issue. As part of the justification for Laycock's decision later that evening - shown as being at 2200 - Waugh recorded in the Diary that 'all fighting forces were now in position for embarkation'. Both Beevor (Crete 220) and in particular Gallagher in Laycock and Beevor argue the toss as to whether the remaining fighting forces were in such a position. The question is irrelevant because that is not what the orders said: leaving last of fighting troops, and to embark after other fighting forces, admit of no ambiguity. Assuming, as both Beevor and Gallagher do, that Freyberg's orders still applied, it was thus incumbent on Laycock that evening to cause inquiries to be made as to whether all other fighting troops had embarked; and on finding out that more were to embark, it was his duty to cover their withdrawal.

Laycock's Leadership

An examination of Laycock's whereabouts and activities during the final days of the battle raises questions about his leadership.

Waugh's Memorandum reveals the way in which Laycock commanded Layforce. A good deal of time was ostensibly spent on finding and then establishing suitable quarters for 'Brigade HQ', mostly away from the rest of Layforce. Sometimes the facade crumbles: 'We ...established brigade HQ here. That at least would be the military expression, but in fact we simply rested' (507) At Babali Hani (erroneously described as Babali Inn) 'brigade HQ withdrew a mile or so to a place of great beauty' where Waugh and Laycock kept a bottle of wine cool in a spring and 'Bob had a box of cigars and a book a crossword puzzles' (505). In marked contrast, when later in the afternoon Laycock and Waugh went to visit George Young and A Battalion, they found them being shot at from three sides by sub-machine gunners and also being fired upon by a four-inch mortar which was 'accurate and damaging'.

What one finds missing in the war diaries of A and D Battalions of Layforce, and in the Waugh/War Diary and Memorandum, is the lack of contact between Laycock and his troops, when compared to the Australian and New Zealand units, and the general lack of detail about orders. The war diaries of the both the 22nd and 28th NZ Battalions record a conference concerning embarkation arrangements on 30 May at 5 Brigade Headquarters (available on-line at <http://www.22battalion.org.nz/war-diary/1941-may.htm>, and <http://www.28maoribattalion.org.nz/node/6953>). The war diary of the 19th Australian Infantry Brigade recorded that on 29 May Weston 'arrived at a conference of Brigade Command and gave details of the embarkation'. (see <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/RCDIG1019963/>)

By contrast, the Crete War Diary of A Battalion Layforce (WO 218/168), which occupies barely more than a page, does not mention Laycock at all, nor any other officer apart from Colvin meeting no 2 Company when it disembarked on 27 May. With some exceptions, how and from whom orders were received remains a mystery. The War Diary of D Battalion (WO 218/172) is much the same, except that as discussed elsewhere it records that on 31 May 'Late in the evening the Brigade Major sent a runner to the Commanding Officer ordering the withdrawal of the battalion for embarkation'. At some times the Battalion (or at least the keeper of the diary) seemed to have little idea where it was. Thus on 29 May 'At nightfall the battalion took up positions flanking a ravine' while on 30 May 'The battalion remained in the ravine leading to the beach, in the same position which had been taken up last night'. There is no indication or explanation of exactly where it was or what it was doing there.

The Waugh/War Diary alternates between what Layforce was doing (not always accurately, as noted) and what Laycock was doing; the two seem to overlap infrequently, and it rarely seems to be the case that Laycock received orders and passed them on to his two battalions. Perhaps the comment of Laycock's Brigade Major, Freddie Graham, describing the events of the evening of 31 May, says it all: '...Brigadier [sic -Laycock], whom I had not seen all day came panting up the hill' (Messenger 92).

The closer they got to Sphakia the less Laycock seemed to see of his troops. He and Waugh roamed around on their own. On the evening of 29 May 'Bob and I went to look for a naval embarkation officer'. They didn't find him but learned of Freyberg's presence nearby and went to see him instead (507), not returning to their HQ until the next day. There doesn't seem to have been any direct contact with the troops in these last two days. Freddy Graham was sent off to see Weston and got orders 'that the next day we were to leave the gorge and cover the Sphakia gorge'. Thereafter it was 'Bob, Freddy and I' up to the embarkation, the details of which Waugh got quite wrong, as Gallagher shows. (Plain Facts, 22-3)

When Waugh's batman Tanner was sent to the battalion late at night on 31 May, on Beevor's account (221) 'Nobody could tell him where George Young's headquarters were' so that he had to wander around in the dark calling out. Clearly, nobody from 'brigade HQ' had bothered to

visit the battalion there after it had been posted. When Tanner got back to the beach, there was (of course) 'no sign of Laycock' (Beavor 221)

In *The Middle East Commandos*, which Young co-authored, he recorded the message from Graham but did not mention Tanner or Laycock's message; but he may have been confused after so many years, as the clear implication is that, having allegedly received the surrender order indirectly from Laycock at 0300 hours on 1 June, he negotiated the surrender.

Getting to the Beach

Lack of contact between Laycock and Layforce was also evident when Laycock went to the beach on the last night. It might first be noted that having found no Creforce staff on the night of 31 May:

Gathering a few nearby colleagues (some who were asleep complained later about not being wakened), Laycock "set off hotfoot for Sphakia" [as Graham put it], to find "the embarkation officer on [the] beach" (Waugh Diaries 509) Mischief! 185

This is another example of Laycock putting himself before his troops. How much time would it have taken for Laycock to wake one of the sleeping men and get him to wake the others?

Where 'Brigade HQ' was at this point is anybody's guess, the Waugh Memorandum having ceased to record its whereabouts; but it was presumably near Weston's Headquarters, and presumably again Waugh and Graham were fortunate enough to be awake, as on Waugh's account in the Waugh/War Diary, the three of them ('with servants', the Memorandum notes at 509) set off at about 10 o'clock for the beach. 'We pushed our way through the crowds', the Memorandum records, 'who were too spiritless even to resist what they took to be an unauthorised intrusion and arrived on the beach...

This event needs to be put together with another recorded by Major Madoc who was in charge of the 100 Marines queuing up to get to the beach. He wrote:

Then a party started pushing past us, shouting make 'Make way for Layforce'. This was a Commando. They said that they had orders to form a beach defensive line. This was sheer nonsense...they were trying to crash the beach. I am glad to say they were too late. (Misfire 81)

Who else could this have been but Laycock's party? Thompson suggests at 261 that '... it is probable that the Army commandos who pushed past Madoc were Laycock's party.' His two battalions were some distance away in the hills behind Sphakia, not on the route to the beach being followed by the Marines (and the Australians). (See also Misfire 82.) Presumably the Layforce troops Madoc saw on the beach (he also was too late) were from the battalions.

Gallagher does not confront this question but introduces a number of red herrings, thus:

Finally - a speculative query - is Madoc's scepticism about the Commandos who 'pushed past' justified; or could it be that these Commandos had been ordered to the beach for sound operational reasons; and that, if they had formed a 'beach defensive line', the later part of the evacuation might have been salvaged?

Speculative, indeed. He does not identify 'these Commandos' and can produce no evidence of any such orders.

Another eye-witness, Miles Hildyard, an officer in the Sherwood Rangers and who knew Laycock, confirmed that Layforce had just pushed through, but also has the time of 'about 11 p.m.', thus (89):

We formed up about 11 p.m., and with some difficulty and jostling, get into our position. But unfortunately about then the rearguard begins to arrive and pass through us. (Lay force - Bob just cut in).

Hildyard too was left behind.

There is more fog here. At Misfire! 86, Gallagher quotes Major Garrett, Madoc's commanding officer, as meeting the commandos before they reached Madoc, thus:

'A' Battalion of 'Layforce' appeared and said they had priority as they had to take up a position covering the beach. I queried this statement and was told by their Company Commander that this was Colonel Young's order [Young, who commanded both battalions of Layforce, was on the beach] and so allowed them to pass.

This makes no sense (and it was not worth the effort to check it by going to Portsmouth, where Garrett's report reposes). It is not clear what time it was, where Garrett was and what authority he had at that point. As noted, 'A' Battalion of Layforce moved on 31 May to take up a position covering the beach, that is, in the hills behind Sphakia; and their only other recorded movement on 31 May/1 June was from those hills down to the beach in an attempt to board the ships (some were successful); so Garrett must have encountered that part of 'A' Battalion which did make it to the beach and were taken off. As for Gallagher's interpolation, there is no record of Young being on the beach until the ships were sailing or had sailed early in the morning of 1 June.

On the Beach

Waugh claimed that on the last night 'Bob and I and Freddy, with servants...arrived on the beach to find that there was no one in charge, Colonel Healy [Hely] having left earlier by aeroplane' (Memorandum, 509). But clearly someone was in charge; otherwise the Laycock party would not have been able to board a ship. Lt Col Windham, Royal Signals, provided the answer in his complaint of 10 June 1941 to the Inter-Services Committee (WO201/2663, Minute 6), thus:

On the final night it appears that General WESTON and staff evacuated without giving any orders to close down the W/T and ciphers, and without in fact stating that it was the final night. Lt GRANT [one of Windham's officers who was in charge of the Signals party at Sphakia] appears to have been left with Capt McLEAN to run the whole evacuation that night, from the beach...When the last boat was leaving the shore, a naval officer ordered Lt GRANT aboard, and he complied as there was nothing further he could do.

The only conclusion one can draw from all this is that the fog is the winner.

Denis Lenihan
London 2017

APPENDIX I: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. ARCHIVAL SOURCES

(a) (i) United Kingdom National Archives

ADM202/442 Suda Area, Crete: despatch by Major General E D Weston

CAB44/121 Committee of Imperial Defence, Historical Branch and Cabinet Office, Historical Section: Draft Chapters and Narratives, Military. WAR OF 1939-1945. Mediterranean and Middle East...Section V, Chapter R:1940 Nov-1941 June, the campaign in Crete, by Lt Col E E Rich (1946)

DEFE2/699 Early History of Combined Operations - notes, memoranda and interviews by senior officers (1942); undated report by Laycock; *the relevant part is entitled Operation "Crete"*

DEFE2/1066 Laycock biography and other papers; *this resembles a PR exercise, and was presumably the material prepared by Combined Operations HQ when Laycock was promoted to Chief of Combined Operations, succeeding Mountbatten, in 1943 (Mead 162)*

PREM 3/109 Prime Minister's Office: Operational Correspondence and Papers Crete November 1940- September 1942. Memorandum from Prime Minister to General Wavell warning of a possible airborne attack on Crete; *the file contains just this memorandum, which has been digitised; as Beevor quotes this file a number of times as holding various documents (see pages 357, 361 and 362), either he gives the wrong number or the contents of the file have changed; paradoxically, Beevor gives as his source for the only document on the file Churchill's The Grand Alliance (see page 84 and the relevant note on page 357)*

WO106/3126 Inter-Services Committee Report

WO201/2652 Inter Services Commission Report on Crete; *repeatedly mis-numbered by Gallagher in Laycock and Beevor as WO202/2652*

WO232/12 Extracts from a report by an Inter-Services Committee on operations in Crete

These three files are a muddle. What appears to be a copy of the original report (printed and not typed) is on /3126, together with what appears to be the original of Wavell's comments thereon. /12 is a copy of the bowdlerised version, as is /2652 (i.e most of Summary of Lessons excluded), which includes a suggestion that the original report was suppressed and that a second ISC was established under Brigadier Erskine (no trace found in Archives)

WO169/1492 Medium Regiment War Diary; *while it confirms that the Regiment 'picketed approach to beach and gradually withdrew' it gives no timings and no detail as to which unit it replaced or which unit replaced it*

WO 169/1334A British Troops Crete (Creforce Crete Area) HQ; *this is the Creforce HQ War Diary for May 1941; it ceases about 18 May, while a separate folder containing movement control orders fades away about 13 May; the name Creforce was in use at least from Nov 1940*

WO201/717 Laycock Commander Personal Papers; *contains comments by OC G Troop A Bn Layforce on behaviour of troop on last night in Crete;*

WO201/2654: Administrative aspects of the campaigns (Greece and Crete) by Brigadier G S Brunskill [1891-1982]; *mainly about rations and supplies; in Waugh's Memorandum 507-8, he records meeting a Deputy Assistant Quarter-Master General, 'a one-eyed booby' - 'I think this ass was called Brunskill'*. <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/rd/185d664a-59e9-468d-a57c-c2a1c13d5261> records that Brunskill lost an eye in France in 1914.

WO201/2661 Evacuation of forces from Crete; *many signals to and from Creforce/Weston to C in C Med/Wavell re last few days; many signals re Retimo*

WO201/2662 Report by officers on their return from Crete; *relevant parts of War Diary NZ 5 Inf Brigade (no appendices); comments by Andrew on first day of invasion; file name is a misnomer*

WO201/2663 Lessons from Operations in Crete; *contains some working papers for ISC Report (Laycock was summoned to appear on 13 June), and comments on Weston's report including by Freyberg; also minute by Lt Col Windham, Royal Signals re last night; there is a long report by an apparently anonymous author who had been POW (?) including a suggestion that German soldiers had been on drugs; this turns out not to have been the far-fetched suggestion it might have appeared in the 1940s - see Norman Ohler: Blitzed: Drugs in Nazi Germany, Penguin, 2017, a work which impressed Beevor (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2017/03/09/blitzed-very-drugged-nazis/>)*

WO218/166 HQ 'Z' Force (later Layforce); *contains the Waugh/War Diary*

WO218/168 A Battalion Layforce War Diary January-May 1941

WO218/172 D Battalion Layforce War Diary January-May 1941

(a) (ii) Imperial War Museum

In *The Royal Marines*, Thompson quotes Major R W Madoc of the MNBDO, who at some unrecorded date contributed to the Imperial War Museum's oral history project (<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80013115>) which is unfortunately not available on-line. Thompson quotes Madoc as saying 'The MNBDO was to remain until everyone had gone.' (Marines, 260) On the very next page, however, Thompson has Freyburg (sic - misspelt throughout) telling Laycock 'You were the last to come so you will be the last to go.' and 'This was confirmed by Weston, who ordered him to remain until the MNDBO rearguard and 2/7th Australian Battalion got away.'

Speaking of 31 May, Madoc said 'Suddenly, at 2030 we were told to withdraw immediately'. Weston told Madoc that only 100 of the MNDBO force would be evacuated that night. It may be that Weston did not want to be seen as giving preference to his fellow-Marines.

As noted in the main piece, Madoc also complained (260) that on the narrow track leading to the beach 'a number of Army commandos pushed through and jumped the queue shouting 'make way for Layforce'.

What is available on-line is a similar recording made in 1983 for the Imperial War Museum by George Alan Dawson Young (<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/search?query=young%02C+george+alan+dawson>), in which he talks of forming 50 Commando in the Middle East, which was eventually amalgamated with 52 Commando and became D Battalion of Layforce, of which Young was the commander. Sadly, the talk ends early in 1941, before he went to Crete.

(a) (iii) Other

Beavor refers several times to 'the archive of the Middle East Commando Historical Research Group' without giving its location. Other references seemed to point to the Imperial War Museum but inquiries there drew a blank. In the preface to his book *The Middle East Commandos* (with Col George Young and Lt Col Stephen Rose), Charles Messenger said that the archive was to be presented to the National Army Museum, but inquiries there likewise drew a blank. After some difficulty I got in touch with Messenger, who said that 'It was certainly the intention of Stephen Rose, one of my co-authors, that the archive, which he held, should be passed to the NAM. He himself died some years ago and I don't know the whereabouts of his family. I have no idea what happened to the archive.' (email of 15 March 2017)

(b) Archives New Zealand/National Library of New Zealand/individual NZ websites

Crete - B.G.S. file, March -May 1941; online at http://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE21909168; *contains the Operational Directive of 28 May addressed to Weston, and Brunskill's Instruction of the same day*

22 Battalion 2NZEF War Diary; online at <http://www.22battalion.org.nz/war-diary/1941-may-hm>

Series GOC 2NZEF/17 Crete - Historical papers, Orders etc; online at <http://ndhadeliver.natlib.govt.nz/>

Archives NZ: HQ 5 Infantry Brigade 2 NZEF War Diary 1-31 May 1941, record R23517595; not online

28 (Maori) Battalion 2NZEF War Diary; online at <http://www.28maoribattalion.org.nz/node/6953>

(c) Australian War Memorial

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1367332>; *war diary of 2/7 Australian Battalion for the period covering Crete*

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/RCDIG1019963/>; RCDIG1021721, RCDIG1021722; *war diary of 19th Australian Infantry Brigade for the period covering Crete*

2. SECONDARY SOURCES

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available online at <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/6th-april-1991/25/the-first-casualty-of-waugh>

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This adds more fog to Crete. At 294 the author writes:

Some 300 survivors [of earlier actions on Crete by 1 Welch Battalion], many of them wounded, eventually reached Sphakia where the Navy was organising evacuation. But here Major Gibson, now in command, was ordered to send a composite company of 200 men to support the commando battalion holding the last rearguard position. These marched off under Major Griffiths and were not seen again. Subsequently it was learned that after holding off attacks they received orders from Force Headquarters to surrender.

Nobody else mentions their support of Layforce, and what attacks could they have held off on that last night, when most reports say there was no enemy activity?

Bright, Joan (1949): *History of the Northumberland Hussars Yeomanry 1924-1949*, Newcastle

In this volume, Joan Bright, later Joan Bright Astley, records two interesting matters at 92. (The Hussars, aka The Noodles, had been in Greece as part of an armoured brigade). One is recorded in the Appendix entitled Organisation of the Embarkation from Sphakia. The other is that on 31 May, the Hussars were told that 21 of them had been allotted places in a boat (by whom, one wonders). By 2.30 am on 1 June they 'were just about level on the last rise before reaching the beach' in the expectation that the boats were leaving at 3 am. But another string of men came in from the flank and reached what turned out to be the last boat before the Hussars, taking up the space allotted.' They may well have been from Layforce. There was some disagreement about Crete between Waugh and Mrs Astley in 1954, as discussed below under Stannard.

Buckley, Christopher (1952): *Greece and Crete, 1941* London

Cody, J.F. (1956): *28 Maori Battalion*, Wellington; available on-line at <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WH2Maor.html>; *this and the other volumes shown below on this website are part of the Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War*

Cox, Geoffrey (1987): *A Tale of Two Battles*, London; *he left with his New Zealand unit on the Australian cruiser HMAS Perth on the night of 29/30 May, and he recorded at 105 taking a muster roll of the men crowded on the decks below. Amongst them were a number from the Commando units which were supposed to be forming the rearguard; precisely which elements of Layforce these were, and how they had managed to get away, are questions which have not excited the interest of historians.*

Cunningham, Admiral Sir Andrew B (1948): The Battle of Crete, Phase IV - The Evacuation of British and Imperial Troops from the Island, Supplement to the *London Gazette*, 24 May 1948, pp 3113-9; <http://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/38296/supplement/1>

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Gallagher, Donat (2014) The Plain Facts about Crete. *Evelyn Waugh Studies*, 45 (1). pp. 17-25; <http://leicester.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p16445coll12/id/1938/rec/25>

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Long, Gavin (1953): *Australian War History - Greece, Crete and Syria*, Canberra; available on-line at <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1417307>

Mead, Richard (2016): *Commando General: The Life of Major General Sir Robert Laycock KCMG CB DSO*, Barnsley; *the foreword is by Major-General Julian Thompson (see his work listed below) who refers to Waugh thus:*

...Evelyn Waugh, whom Laycock allowed to serve in the Special Service Brigade, in the role of court jester, long after he had overstayed his welcome. Several officers who served with him have expressed the view that although personally brave, Waugh was the type of officer who should never be allowed near troops.

Messenger, Charles (with George Young and Stephen Rose) (1988): *The Middle East Commandos*, London

Murphy, W.E (1966): *2nd New Zealand Divisional Artillery*, Wellington: <http://nzetc.victoria.ac.nz/tm/scholarly/tei-WH2Arti.html>

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Simpson, Tony (1981): *Operation Mercury: The Battle for Crete 1941*, London

Simpson quotes from interviews with soldiers who were present at Sphakia on the night of 31 May. Thus Lofty Fellows:

a lot of what we'll call odds and sods wanted to join our unit and it was decided there would be parties of fifty, and they were to be identified. If you could identify yourself you could join a party of fifty under an officer and you were then given an evacuation time.

This sounds like Major Bull's parties (see Appendix II below).

Simpson then continues without quoting a source:

There were ugly scenes as word passed that this was to be the last of three nights of evacuation, and it became clear that not all the men could be taken.

He then quotes another man present, Peter Butler:

When the landing craft approached a mob came down the road towards the beach and were challenged by the Maoris. Someone said 'let's rush the boats', there was a shot, a yelp, and the mob went back the way they came.

So far as I am aware, this is the only mention of the possibility of the boats being rushed; and the fact that 31 May was the last night of evacuation was so tightly held - no one else refers to the word being passed - that even officers like Major Bull only became aware on 1 June that there would be no more boats. Brigadier Vasey recorded in the 19 Aus Inf Bde War Diary that

The fact that that night was the last night of embarkation was made known by me to only two people outside my own HQ since it was obvious that had this fact been widely known there would have been worse congestion than in fact proved to be the case.

Stannard, Martin (1992): *Evelyn Waugh: No Abiding City 1939-1966*, London

At pages 355-357, Stannard recounts how Waugh used Writers and Speakers Research 'to check historical, meteorological and medical data', the firm being run by Joan Bright [Astley] (see above) and Joan St George Saunders, the wife of the official historian of the Commandos. As noted above, it is likely that those who took up the space allotted for the Hussars were Layforce. 'She [Mrs Astley] embarrassed [Waugh] further', Standard writes, 'by emphasising the distinction between "the regular fighting men on Crete", debilitated by weeks of courageous rearguard action, and the "newcomers" who had not suffered equally....' She also suggested that Waugh's character who got an immediate passage home from Egypt after being evacuated from Crete was the beneficiary of string-pulling. 'Waugh was infuriated by her interference,' Stannard notes 'It not only retold his account but it implicated him in dishonour, recalling the uncomfortable fact that the military in Egypt had packed him off home, unwounded, at a time when every man was needed.'

Stewart, I.McD.G (1966): *The Struggle for Crete 20 May-1 June 1941*, London

Tanner, Ralph (1991) in *Touch and Go: The Battle for Crete 1941*, ed David Smurthwaite, London

Thompson, Julian (2000): *The Royal Marines: From Sea Soldiers to a Special Force*, London

APPENDIX II; A NOTE ON THE ORGANISATION OF THE EMBARKATION FROM SPHAKIA

In an attempt to make sense of the matter, this note seeks to put together a narrative of the embarkation, drawing on such information as can be located. It is almost certainly incomplete, and suggestions as to further sources will be welcomed.

The basic initial document was 'Evacuation Administrative Instruction No 1', issued on 28 May by Brigadier Brunskill 'for Major-General GOC-in-C'. It was addressed to 'Cmd Suda Sector' (Weston) and read as follows:

1. POLICY OF EMBARKATION

(a) You will be responsible for controlling the flow of embarkation up to the R.V. and the beach.

(b) You will establish an assembly area with southern boundary of the escarpment.

(c) Except for such special parties as may be nominated by GOC no personnel will embark unless they arrive in controlled parties from the assembly area to the R.V. by the route arranged with you.

(d) On principle parties detailed for labour etc will be given priority for allotment on the night following that on which they carry out the work in question.

2. ALLOTMENT FOR NIGHT 28/29 MAY

(a) The total to be embarked if shipping arrives successfully is 1000.

(b) GOC allots this as follows:

(i) walking wounded	200
(ii) seamen of sunken vessels	10
(iii) RAF	100
(iv) Cypriots	50
(v) CD [?] and AA not employed)	
in defence)
(vi) Fighting troops not)	640
employed in defence)

(c) If less shipping than that predicted materialises that this priority be observed [sic]

(d) Details of timings will be notified by signal or verbally.

3. ADMINISTRATIVE

(a) You will send back for the assistance of the rearguard all tpt which you can mobilise. When the dvrs return they will have priority of evacuation with the fighting troops.

(b) All walking wounded will in future be directed to a special collecting station established by you in assembly area.

A copy of this instruction is at Crete - B.G.S. file at the New Zealand National Library (see bibliography). No other instructions of this kind have been seen.

Weston accordingly made some arrangements on that day. Thus, at the top of the hill:

I ... obtained the services from Brigadier Puttick [NZ Division] of Colonel Strutt, C.R.A. (Commander Royal Artillery) for the organisation of the dispersal areas on the top of the hill and the passing down to the beaches of the numbers required for embarkation. A staff was improvised for him and excellent work was done in organising a most difficult situation. (Weston's report, para 38)

Strutt was in fact an Australian of the 2/3 Royal Australia Regiment who had been seconded to the New Zealand Division (Davin 196). On Davin's account at 410, this arrangement with Puttick was made on Wednesday afternoon

Weston made other arrangements (at 'Wednesday forenoon') for further down the hill:

..I found Major Burston 2/3/Aus Fd Regt and directed him to take 50 of his men to report to CREFORCE on the lower slopes as guides. This officer did most valuable work during the last days of the evacuation and showed high organising capacity. It was undoubtedly his indifference to his own safety and his devotion to duty which prevented him from being embarked on the last lift. (Weston's Report, para 38)

Long described it thus at 297:

Early on the afternoon of the 28th he went to Imvros, where Major Burston commanded a group which included the headquarters of the 2/3rd Field Regiment and other detachments. Weston arranged that Burston should organise about 60 men of the 2/3rd Field Regiment to guide units from the top of the escarpment to the beach. Burston and Captain Forbes reconnoitred the escarpment and disposed their men along a track winding across the Komitadhes ravine and through Komitadhes village, and that night these guides kept the flow of traffic moving steadily to the beach.

Davin's maps at 442 and 448 give some idea of the routes from the top of the hill to that part of the beach where the embarkation took place.

Burston and his 2-i-c, Captain Forbes, improved their traffic control organisation, as Long put it (299), on 29 May so that it resembled a sheeprace: 'once a man got into the flow of traffic he just could not (and was not allowed to) stop.'

On Long's account (297), 230 wounded and 800 British troops, including the RAF contingent, were taken off on the first night. Davin reported that (416):

There was some scrimmaging and jockeying for place by the stragglers who had managed to evade the control posts, but all the wounded except about seventy were got on board, together with 800 men from the Suda Area, including the RAF contingent.

The 10 'seamen of sunken vessels' were also taken off - on HMAS *Napier*, together with 36 officers and 260 other ranks, as well as '3 women, 1 Greek, 1 Chinaman, 2 children and a dog'. (Beevor 216, footnote). Another report, unsigned but looking likely to have been prepared by the Navy, has only 750 being taken off on this night - 'caused by the numbers of wounded among the men, which made embarkation slow'. (WO 201/2661)

Cunningham recorded in his Despatch of 14 September 1941 that as well as the *Napier*, there were three other destroyers which took troops off that night - *Nizam*, *Kelvin* and *Kandahar* - embarking 'nearly 700 troops'.

The evacuation on the second night is apparently less well documented. While about 6000 were taken off (Long 299-300), there are few details about who they were and what their experiences were on or near the beach. Some of the NZ Divisional Headquarters staff made it to the beach that night and embarked, but not all did so. Davin (423) refers to what he calls 'the marching troops of the HQ' (number not specified) not reaching the control point until a quarter to nine. 'There they found that the delay caused by the attentions of enemy aircraft

and the crowds of stragglers had cost them their passage that night'. They went off the next night (Davin 436)

As the great bulk of the New Zealand and Australian troops left on the third and fourth nights, it is safe to assume that those who left on the second night were largely British troops.

Among those who went on on the third night, 29-30 May, was Geoffrey Cox, who did leave an account of his embarkation (104-5):

Then we were off, formed into columns of threes, with strict instructions to keep in formation and allow no stragglers. We passed through the cordon of guards on the edge of Sphakia, and lay in the darkness waiting for the wounded and the troops ahead of us to be embarked...At last we were off down the slope through the narrow village street, and in the small bay clear Navy voices in cultured Dartmouth accents called, 'Come on, come, get a move on. Hurry up there, hurry up.'

Cunningham recorded that 'a total of about 6,000 men had been embarked' on the night of 29-30 May in no fewer than eight vessels.

On the beach itself, after Friday 29 May, Weston recorded (Report para 39):

...an improvised staff had to be formed, as CREFORCE HQ was evacuated complete on Friday evening. Lt.Col.Hely R.A. and Captain Coutts, NZ were of the greatest value in this respect.

As discussed below, Weston instituted further control measures on Saturday 30 May.

Another control element was the units assembled by the New Zealander Major Bull. Davin describes what happened:

By the morning of 29 May the greater part of the New Zealand artillery and other components of the Composite Battalion who had managed to get across the mountains were scattered along the road from the Askifou Plain southwards. Many—indeed most—of them were organised in small groups under their officers or NCOs; but they were directionless and without orders and threatened to be a serious impediment to the movement of the larger units. To Major Bull belongs the main share of credit for ending this state of affairs. On his own initiative he soon had an organisation going by which the men were got off the roads, sorted into manageable parties, and assembled under fairly good control in the ravine by Komitadhes. There he arranged pickets and got the officers to prepare nominal rolls. Ultimately all sorts of units were represented and the numbers rose to over 3000.

Long records that this was done 'by arrangement with Burston' and 'perhaps a dozen such groups were embarked this night' [of 30-31 May] (302).

Davin recorded later at 436 that:

Major Bull's party was continually increased by other parties coming in and was organised as well as possible in the circumstances. A member of the embarkation staff had told Bull that word would be sent when parties were needed at the beach, and until then he kept the area picketed. He also organised ration parties to forage for food—though they found none. On such a mission in the village Second-Lieutenant Allison was offered embarkation by a beach officer but refused on the ground that it was his duty to return and report. 'This action had immense moral effect, since some officers and NCOs were already voicing extremely undisciplined and self centred views.' [The quotation is from a report by Major Bull]

In *Operation Mercury: The Battle for Crete, 1941* (published 1981) Tony Simpson quotes from interviews with soldiers who were present at Sphakia on the night of 31 May. Thus Lofty Fellows:

a lot of what we'll call odds and sods wanted to join our unit and it was decided there would be parties of fifty, and they were to be identified. If you could identify yourself you could join a party of fifty under an officer and you were then given an evacuation time.

In *The Northumberland Hussars* (the Hussars, aka The Noodles, had been in Greece as part of an armoured brigade), Joan Bright, later Joan Bright Astley, recorded that on the evening of May 30, Lt Barrett of the Hussars took a party of 50 Australians to Sphakia village to collect food. They heard an English voice say 'Any more British soldiers for the ships?' and 30 of the party accepted the invitation. Given the number of 50, this looks likely to have been one of Major Bull's groups.

The example of Bull's units was catching. 'And in the ravines', Stewart records (469), 'many had followed the example set by Major Bull, continuing to wait their turn with stoic discipline and restraint'. The balance of Bull's units were still in position on the night of 31 May, unaware that this was the last night. Bull was likewise not aware and had to be convinced on 1 June that the surrender order had been made. (Davin 454) Thus his units may have continued their picket duties the previous night.

On assuming responsibility for embarkations on 30 May, Weston instituted further measures. One was to get his staff to check the numbers remaining. They came up with a total of 9000, of which 4000 were fighting troops (including 500 Layforce); 'formed bodies and mixed details in Komitades and H.Q. Area' 3500; and 'scattered details in SPHARKIA area 1500'. (Weston's report para 42.) A further measure was a chit system - 'first priorities in the form of signed chits issued to officers i/c parties were issued to the extent of 2,000. Second priorities being issued to a further 2,000.' (also para 42) These chits presumably covered the 4000 fighting troops. (Although he did not mention it, Laycock must have received a chit). This system was still in operation on the last night: see Laycock and Beavor, 49, note 60, quoting Captain Morrison of NZ Engineers, who got a chit from Hargest 'just as he was stepping on to a landing craft'; Morrison's unit had initially been refused entry to the beach, presumably because he did not then have a chit; see also 48, note 57, where Colonel Hely is reported as giving a pass to Major Madoc of the Royal Marines.

Chits having been issued for only 4000 of the estimated 9000 left around Sphakia, it is a nice question whether this indicated in Weston's mind he expected the others to be left behind.

On the third night, 30 May, under instructions from Freyberg, Brigadier Inglis (4 NZ Brigade) arranged for 18 Battalion to picket the beach, to which they went at about 9 p.m. 'fixed bayonets, and formed a cordon through which only authorised units could come'. The historian of 18 Battalion wrote that 'The previous evacuations [from Greece] had run along anything but smoothly—crowds of stragglers had tried to push their way aboard, some had succeeded, and there had been ugly scenes.' (Dawson 166) As Kippenberger later recorded, 'I had to count my men through' - although he was able to get a few additional men embarked also. The original numbers to be taken off having been halved, only 764 men from 4 Brigade (including 20 and 28 (Maori) Battalions) were due to be taken off that night with the balance to be taken off the following night.

In the event only two of the original four destroyers were able to get to Sphakia but took off not only those due to go (parts of 18, 19, 20 and 28 Battalions and 4 Brigade Headquarters) but

also managed to take '400 extra men of various units' (Dawson 167) During the embarkation, an intruder was reported as being present on the beach and was 'literally' thrown off. He identified himself as 'Col...in charge of the beach and responsible for making contact with the Navy to get us taken off'. (Dawson 167) This was presumably Colonel Hely.

Cunningham recorded about 700 troops on each of the two destroyers. This accords with Rich's figure. He added that initially only 1000 were allowed on to the beach by the 18 NZ Battalion pickets, in the expectation that only that number would be loaded on to the ships; but when it turned out that 2000 could be taken 'the hillside was searched' for another 1000 but eventually only another 400 were shipped. Long at 302 has 'some 1510 troops'.

On the fourth and final night, 31 May, Long records at 305 that 'having been informed by Weston that there would be no further embarkation after the 31st Burston instructed Forbes to have his guides at the embarkation point by 9 p.m. He himself then went across country to the beach to try to preserve control there. He wrote later that:

by nightfall organisation had completely broken down at Sfakia and troops were reaching the beach by the alternative route [to the west of Komitadhes] or just across country in small batches. With the withdrawal of the guides and their organisation from Komitadhes and the track the situation became hopeless, but Captain Forbes managed to get his men to the beach about 0100 hours...as a disciplined unit. All were embarked on the last boat to leave the island'.

The alleged hopelessness of the situation clearly did not prevent Forbes and his unit from reaching the beach and being embarked. Burston 'declined to embark' while others of his regiment were still on the island, and became a prisoner.

5 NZ Brigade was to supply the beach cordon on the last night. Brigadier Hargest allotted the job to 22 Battalion and the remainder of 28 Battalion. His order to 28 Battalion read in part:

I desire to remind you that this job will be hard—you must be ruthless and determined. It will be necessary to be on the beach somewhere about 2115 hrs when you will report to Col Andrews [Andrew].

Davin recorded at 447 that:

A similar order was sent at 4.10 p.m. to 22 Battalion, together with the information that the only New Zealand units authorised to embark were HQ 5 Brigade, 21, 22, 23, 28 and 20 Battalions in that order, except for the two cordon units which would come last. All New Zealand units were to reach the barrier not later than 10 p.m.

What happened on the beach is recorded in histories or war diaries of the two New Zealand battalions concerned:

- The history of 28 (Maori) Bn at 132 has a detachment of Maoris (those who thought they had been left behind) being sent to Komitades village about two miles along the beach in support of Layforce which was holding a position there (on 31 May). Late that afternoon the detachment was instructed to report to Colonel Andrew at Sfakia to cover the embarkation to take place that night. There they formed an inner cordon around the beach and 22 Bn the outer cordon. An unsuccessful attempt was made to break the line. 'It was not a sight to remember and best forgotten. About midnight a call came for 28 Bn to go down to the beach and the Royal Marines [sic - in fact 64 Medium Rgt] took over.'

- the relevant part of the 22 Battalion War Diary (www.22battalion.org.nz/war-diary/1941-may.htm) reads as follows:

In conjunction with one coy of 28 Bn (rest having gone with 4 Bde) - the 28th holding the inner perimeter & the 22nd the outer we continued to guard the approaches to the port until 21 Bn, 23 Bn, Aussie, Marines and part of Layforce passed through us.

2330 embarkation commenced. June 1

0230 Last of 22 Bn embarked.

'Aussie' was 2/8 Bn, and 'Marines' the Landing and Maintenance troops from MNDBO. Among those taken off were Major Bliss and a party of New Zealand gunners 'who had come down on the chance that there might be places to spare'. (Davin 452). There was more to it than that: the historian of the 2nd New Zealand Divisional Artillery records that Bliss

had also heard that the evacuation authorities had misjudged the rate at which men could be embarked the previous evening [30 May] and had been 'screaming out' for another 700 men. Had any been at hand they could have gone. He therefore determined that whatever happened his men would be down on the beach and ready to embark that night. (Murphy 163)

We have some idea of what happened on the beach on the last night from Lt Col W.R.S Windham of Royal Signals, in Minute no 6 he sent to the Inter-Services Committee on 10 June 1941 (WO 201/2663). Having explained that his Lt Grant was in command of the wireless detachment working at G.H.Q.:

On the final night it appears that General WESTON and staff evacuated without giving any orders to close down the W/T and ciphers, and without in fact stating that it was the final night. Lt GRANT appears to have been left with Capt McLEAN to run the whole evacuation that night, from the beach... When the last boat was leaving the shore, a Naval Officer ordered Lt GRANT aboard, and he complied as there was nothing further he could do.

Cunningham recorded that the five vessels which sailed to Sphakia on this last night embarked 'nearly 4,000 troops'. He noted also that 'The embarkation proceeded so quickly that for a time the beach was empty of troops'.

It would appear from this summary that what happened on the last night was that when Burston's men who were responsible for traffic control down from the top of the hill left their posts so that they could themselves embark, the flow of troops was slowed down to such an extent that the Australians and the Marines only reached the beach when it was too late to embark. Even Burston's men did not get to the beach until 0100 hours and were taken off in the last boat. It also appears that Colonel Strutt (and presumably his unit) got off that night which would likewise have meant less control at the top of the hill. Access to the embarkation beach was kept under control - too successfully, as Cunningham noted.

As Windham complained to the Inter-Services Committee, Weston left without stating that the night of 31 May/1 June was the final night. Some might therefore argue that what happened on the final night which prevented fighting troops from being embarked was down to him. But it is hard to see how he could have acted otherwise. Any suggestion that reached the stragglers - or even the formed units - that this was the final night would have virtually guaranteed complete chaos and disorder.

In the circumstances - a retreating army crossing a mountain range under intermittent land and air fire, a large number of stragglers mainly from the evacuation of Greece, the shortage of food, water and land transport, the terrain, the tiny embarkation beach - it might reasonably be argued that the wonder was not that so many were left behind at Sphakia, but that so many were taken off.

APPENDIX III: GALLAGHER'S OTHER ERRORS AND OMISSIONS

The Salisbury-Jones Report

Gallagher writes in Plain Facts 22 that 'Brigadier Guy Salisbury-Jones [the Inter-Services Committee's] President, was banished to South Africa for the remainder of the war, despite pleas to the Army Council; and its report was (a) ordered revised; and (b) even as revised, suppressed.' In Mischief (footnote 168), Gallagher has the report being 'released only in 1972'.

This is wrong on both counts. Salisbury-Jones' entry in *Who's Who 2017* (which includes Who was Who) shows that in 1944-45 he was attached to the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), which was established in the UK and later moved to Europe. In 1945 he was invested CBE. The revised version of the report cannot have been suppressed or released only in 1972: it was quoted by Rich in 1946 (chapter 5), by Davin in 1953 (19, 459-60), and also by Long in 1953 at 316. Freyberg also had a copy for about a month, having received it on 13 August 1941 from the Chief of General Staff, General Headquarters, Middle East, and then returning it on 8 September 1941 at the request of the same source. (NZ National Library, Crete papers).

The Committee said in its report (para 73) that it was 'unfortunate that the 2nd/7th Australian Battalion did not reach the beach in time', and that 'The bulk of Layforce were also left behind through a misunderstanding.' No details were given. Apart from saying that '...the difficulties were great, and there was no means of intercommunication between the beaches and the assembly area except by runner', and making a number of self-evident recommendations (paras 57-62, one of which was 'Necessity for a strong cordon on the beach'), the Committee added little to our knowledge of the evacuation.

Gallagher seeks to make much of the Committee's report to bolster his case: 'That Weston gave Layforce an order to leave Crete on the night of May 31st is ...beyond doubt'. (Mischief 197) Quoting from para 73 of the Report (see above), Gallagher then concludes that 'This implies that Weston intended the Commandos to be sent an order to withdraw, but that the staff failed to carry it out because of the practical difficulties involved.' This is drawing a very long bow indeed, and hardly counts as 'a misunderstanding' as the Committee called it.

Plain Facts 22 repeats these 'clear implications' and also claims that 'If Laycock had acted wrongly, the Committee would have censured him'. In Laycock and Beevor 42, Gallagher goes further: 'Weston, the Narrator [Rich: The Campaign in Crete] and the Inter-Services Committee establish that the military authorities intended Layforce to get away from Crete and tacitly approved the independent actions Laycock took to that end'.

In Misfire! 84, Gallagher again attempts to put more weight on para 73 than it will easily bear. Thus:

...Weston clearly intended Layforce to leave Crete. This is evident from testimony given to the Inter-Services Committee. Creforce staff explained their failure to deliver the withdrawal order (which implies that Weston gave it to them to deliver) by citing 'no means of communication'. The implications are that it was safe for Layforce to withdraw; and that, if it had been physically possible, staff would have been sent an appropriate order.

Well, perhaps (in both cases). The difficulty in reaching such conclusions is that we do not have (yet, one says hopefully) any account of who said what to the Committee and what the Committee's reactions were. There are a few working papers at WO 201/2663 'Lessons from

Operations in Crete', which contain for example the Committee's request that Laycock appear before it on 13 June, and some comments on Weston's Report (including by Freyberg); but the absence of more complete working papers makes drawing such conclusions as Gallagher's hazardous, as well giving the appearance of seeking to use the Report as a kind of retrospective blessing.

Laycock's Subsequent Promotions and the 'Rommel Raid'

Gallagher argues that 'The view that Laycock acted properly [in Crete] is reinforced by the approval implicit in his subsequent rapid promotion to Chief of Combined Operations.' (Laycock and Beevor, 55) But except for one further commando raid, Laycock never again commanded troops in the field; under the patronage of Churchill and Mountbatten (his nickname was 'Lucky' Laycock - Mead x), he had a succession of staff appointments, which was arguably a reflection of the Army's view of him as a commander in the field, and perhaps also of his conduct on Crete. The exception, which may well have reinforced the Army's view, was the 'Rommel Raid' which took place later in 1941, and which is described by Mead (Chapter 13) as 'in almost every respect a disaster': of the 25 or so men involved, only Laycock and two others survived death or capture; of the two commandos shot, one fatally, 'it can be said with some certainty' in the case of one and 'it is likely' in the case of the other, that both were shot by other commandos; and Laycock and a sergeant spent 41 days on the run before they made contact with British troops. Perhaps most seriously for present purposes, the accounts of what happened during the action, in Mead's words, 'are seriously inconsistent'. In January 1942, Laycock dictated to Lady Ranfurly in Cairo an account of the raid. What he described as 'the object of the raid' is said by Mead to be 'at odds with the operational order and Bob's subsequent report...the rest of the story recorded by Lady Ranfurly is broadly in line with Bob's report and thus differs from what really happened, at least as far as the attack on the house was concerned'. More fog, or more imperfect recollection, or both?

The fact of the matter is...

On the publication of *Officers and Gentlemen* in 1955, Ann Fleming sent Waugh a telegram saying 'Presume Ivor Claire based Laycock dedication ironical'. He responded very strongly, and in his diary he wrote 'I replied to her that if she breathes a suspicion of this cruel fact it will be the end of our friendship'. (Beevor, Crete 222) (Gallagher, Misfire! 88 note 2)

'This cruel *fact*'? Not 'this slanderous assertion' or 'this monstrous lie' but 'this cruel *fact*'. What is one to make of this? At Mischief n 182, Gallagher writes:

Some read "cruel fact" as damning, not recognizing that *fact* can mean "alleged" or "untrue" fact. A lawyer wrote to *Private Eye* on May 30, 1997: "I did accept...30,000 pounds." The editor replied: "This fact is not correct." Older editions of *Oxford English Dictionary* give many relevant meanings of *fact*.

Really? The older editions of the OED do give many relevant meanings; some go back centuries. But what evidence is there that Waugh was using an archaic or even an elderly, as distinct from a modern, meaning? Relying on a single usage from *Private Eye* is hardly persuasive.

Waugh's 'bunk' from Crete

It is passing strange that Gallagher does not mention, anywhere, Waugh's letter to Dorothy Lygon of 27 November 1962, in which he refers to 'Laycock's and my ignominious flight' and 'my bunk from Crete'. The letter is mentioned by Patey (Life 188) and Hastings (Biography 573), to both of which Gallagher refers in the second paragraph of Laycock and Beevor, 38.

Making Something out of Very Little

At Mischief 184, Gallagher seeks to massage the confused exchanges between Weston and Laycock on 31 May into a replica of Freyberg's order of 28 May, thus:

Weston's directive as reported by Waugh and Laycock - "Weston said we were to cover the withdrawal and that a message would be sent to us by the embarkation officer on Sphakia beach when we could retire"; "take as many of [your] troops with [you] as [you] can...my staff will see to it" - contains, on inspection, all the crucial elements found in the written Creforce order of May 28th, discussed earlier, which directs Layforce on "31 May/1 June" to hold "an intermediate position" covering "5 NZ Infantry Brigade and 19 Australian Brigade" and "at nightfall...embark." On May 30th, Freyberg repeated that order to Laycock verbally: in Waugh's elliptical diary it comes out as "You were the last to come so you will be the last to go" (Waugh's *Diaries* 507).

Most of this is just wrong. The intermediate position in Freyberg's 28 May order was in the path of the enemy, not in the hills behind Sphakia. The quote 'at nightfall ...embark' is a misleading contraction of what Freyberg's order said, which was 'at nightfall they will disengage and embark night 31 May/1 June'. (The mangled quote is repeated *ad nauseam* in Plain Facts and vitiates a good deal of the discussion there.) Freyberg clearly envisaged two separate actions: disengaging at nightfall, and then at some point during the next five or so hours, embarking. Clearly, Freyberg did not *repeat* the order to Laycock: he summarised the final part of it.

Shouting for Laycock

At Mischief 184, Gallagher writes that when Weston returned to his headquarters at 9.30 p.m.:

He shouted for Laycock, who was not present, and Major Graham, who was, went in. There he found Lieutenant Colonel Colvin with Weston, and Weston dictated the surrender order to Graham, addressing it to 'the senior officer available Lt Col Colvin'.

This is part invention and part misquotation. In his report, Weston did not mention Laycock or Graham at all on his return to his headquarters. He said in para 45 that 'On my return at 2130, I sent for the senior officer available Lt Col Colvin of "LAYFORCE" and gave him the following order...' At the end of Gallagher's previous sentence is footnote 84, which reads: Weston, Despatch, para 45: "on my return at 2130, I sent for the senior officer available.' As can readily be seen, this too is a misquotation.

Laycock the athlete

'Laycock hurried long distances to his battalions with Weston's late embarkation order, then raced to Creforce to pick up his HQ, then "set off hot foot to Sphakia" in search of the Beach Officer'. Thus Gallagher at Laycock and Beevor 54. This is quite extraordinary, even given Gallagher's adulation of Laycock. Unsupported by any evidence, or indications of timing, this amounts to a claim that Laycock went from Creforce HQ to the hills behind Sphakia, back to Creforce HQ and then down to the beach. There is no evidence that Laycock went to his

battalions that night. As noted, when he sent Tanner to them from the beach, nobody knew where they were.

Buckley's book

Gallagher claims at Laycock and Beevor 48 that

Christopher Buckley's official history of Crete [he means the 1941 battle], which was rigorously scrutinized by senior participants in the campaign, gives the order of embarkation as '4th NZ Bde (about 200), 5th NZ Bde (950), 19 Australian Bde (1000-1250), Layforce (500) and Royal Marine Bn (550) in that priority.'

It isn't clear from whence Buckley derived this order of priority (no source is shown), which looks suspiciously like Weston's list at para 42 (a) of his Report, which in turn seems to be in roughly in order of numbers (5 NZ Div [sic] 1000, 4 NZ Div [sic] 200, Aust 1000 and so on, these all being 'fighting troops'). And as Gallagher notes in Laycock and Beevor 41, the list of fighting troops in Weston's Report 'could be in random order, or in priority order - there is no indication'.

As to Buckley's work (which is expressed as being 'popular military history for the general reader') having been 'rigorously scrutinized by senior participants in the campaign', the foreword records that the publishers (His Majesty's Stationery Office) and the late Christopher Buckley are 'greatly indebted to the official historians of Australia and New Zealand who devoted much time and trouble to a critical reading of the narrative and supplying additional information; and also to Lord Freyberg for his valuable notes and suggestions'. So one senior and one junior participant (Davin) scrutinized it, and apparently and curiously no English participant.

Judging by the scathing treatment that both Buckley's draft and final (1952) version received in Stewart, it is doubtful that the work received much scrutiny at all; or if it did, that many of the comments received were incorporated. Thus, as to the final version, at 87 a view expressed by Buckley 'is disproved by both *Operation Crete* [the German Einsatz Kreta report] and by Student's own comments [the German General commanding the XI Air Corps]'. At 219-220, after quoting what Buckley had to say on the matter, Stewart commented: 'Thus, eleven years after the battle, historians were still failing to distinguish between gliders and powered aircraft.' At 274, quoting from a 1951 letter from Buckley to Davin, Stewart noted Buckley's view that German parachutists were at work by the end of the first day preparing alternative landing grounds, notably one near Canea, and then dismissed it. At 308-9, again quoting Buckley's final version as to what Freyberg was thinking on the night of 21/22 May, Stewart comments 'None of this was true.' And finally and perhaps most tellingly, Stewart quotes at 370 from yet another Buckley passage on where German aircraft were landing and comments 'Inaccuracy and paradox could scarcely be more tightly packed within a single sentence'.

Confident assertions without sources

'...General Weston...gave evidence to [the Inter-Services] Committee' (Mischief 197). Did he? No source is given. He was quite shy after the evacuation and later, declining to reply to Davin's letters. The material quoting him in the Committee's Report could easily have come from his Report.

Misreading Davin

At Laycock and Beevor 182-3, Gallagher says that

...Davin, publishing in 1953, did not know the Naval Staff History published in 1960 and believed that that Navy was to uplift only 3,500 [on the last night]. Weston learned of the Navy's decision to fill "to capacity" only later in the evening, and that gave him a flexibility about numbers of which the conference and Davin were unaware.

But Davin did not need to wait until 1960 to find out about the Navy's decision to fill to capacity. He was already aware of it from Cunningham's 1948 Despatch published in the *London Gazette*, and also from his *A Sailor's Odyssey*, published in 1951, from both of which Davin quotes at Crete 449, referring specifically to the decision to fill to capacity.

Laycock's Meetings with Weston on 31 May

The War/Waugh Diary says that on 30 May p.m 'Colonel LAYCOCK visited CREFORCE... General FREYBERG defined order of priority of evacuation...' On 31 May at 1400 there were issued 'Final orders from CREFORCE for evacuation...', while at 2100 'Maj.Gen.WESTON dictated to B.M. Layforce orders for capitulation....'

In the Memorandum 508-9, Waugh says that he accompanied Laycock on the visit to Freyberg, and provides supporting detail, but he is less clear about the visit to Weston on 31 May. 'In the afternoon, the 31st of May, Bob and I went to get further orders...' but there is no mention of the 'final orders'. There is mention however of Weston being aware from the wireless that 'that night was the last night for evacuation'. Later (in a paragraph beginning 'At dusk') there is a description of Weston issuing the surrender order and then 'Weston said we were to cover the withdrawal and and that a message would be sent to us by the embarkation officer at Sphakia beach when we could retire.' There is no suggestion here or elsewhere that Waugh was present on the second occasion.

In Mischief 183, however, Gallagher has no doubt that Waugh was present at 'the meeting [which] must have taken place after 6.30 pm' and that 'Only Waugh relates firsthand - albeit elliptically - what was said at this meeting'.

All this is a huge muddle. As Gallagher notes at Mischief 182, Weston was informed by signal at 6.30 pm that 31 May was the last night for evacuation (para 44 of his report). So he could not have been aware of it in the afternoon, as Waugh records. The surrender order was issued on Gallagher's account at 9.30 pm (Mischief 184), so Waugh's sequence in the Memorandum is quite unreliable. Gallagher makes confusion worse confounded by conflating the supposed afternoon and evening meetings: he has what on Waugh's account was said in the afternoon ('the last night for evacuation', those left behind to drift eastwards) being said in the evening.

Having analysed the signals going to and from Weston on this final day, Davin concluded at 445-6 that Weston received the message about 31 May being the last night for evacuation 'some time after 4 p.m.' but 'before 6 p.m.' when he sent his reply. More fog.

In Laycock and Beevor 195, Gallagher quotes Kyriakopoulos (361-2) as giving

a dramatized, seemingly eyewitness account of a meeting during which Weston tells Laycock that he (Weston) is leaving that night and that he has been instructed to 'pass the command to the next senior officer'. Weston then '*offers* Laycock command' and 'Laycock respectfully declines the *offer*'.... Kyriakopoulos says that Weston now '*ordered*' Laycock to pick the officer to capitulate'. This part of the account is corroborated by Davin, who writes that after 6.30 p.m. Weston sent for Laycock, who 'was to nominate an officer' to capitulate. (*Italics in original*).

This is faulty on several levels. Kyriakopoulos relies on Davin in making these statements, specifically at 446-7. At 446, Davin wrote: 'Weston therefore sent for Colonel Laycock. The latter was to nominate an officer to handle the capitulation.' That is the only mention of Laycock. The rest of the Kyriakopoulos account is invented, which is nowhere more apparent than in the following sentence: 'Laycock shuffled his stance nervously, and clasped his hands behind him.' As Gallagher notes at 216 footnote 159, Kyriakopoulos also wrongly has Laycock ordering George Young to make the surrender.

At Misfire! 85, Gallagher refers to Professor Kyriakopoulos' 'second-hand account of the meeting'. Second-hand from whom?

Why Gallagher should rely on material of this standard is unclear.

The best support for this invention comes from Laycock himself, who is quoted by Gallagher at 216, footnote 154, as telling Davin that Weston had ordered Colvin to surrender 'after I had frankly refused to do so!' Why not mention that here?

Mistakes about times on the evening of 31 May

According to his Report, at 9.30 p.m. Weston saw Colvin (or perhaps Graham or Laycock or some combination of the three, depending upon whom one believes). Having dictated the surrender order, Weston left for the flying boat. By this time it was say 10 p.m. Graham 'was left staring at the miserable piece of paper' [his copy of the order] and then having roused himself gave an order to his Brigade Sergeant Major about a Motor Landing Craft, which he wanted to sail down the east coast. 'Just after he [the Brigade Sergeant Major] had gone' Laycock arrived. (Messenger 91-2). By this time it was say 10.30 p.m. - being generous.

Gallagher has three bites at the cherry in trying to get his timings right on this night. In Laycock and Beevor 45, 'Laycock came "panting up" to Creforce HQ around 10.30 p.m....they [Laycock, Graham and Waugh] reached Sphakia around 11 p.m...'

In Mischief 185-6 (the second bite) Gallagher ties himself in knots trying to reconcile the subsequent timings on that night. His main mistake is to hang his hat on Graham hearing the ships loading before Laycock arrived. Gallagher verified the time of the loading as beginning at 11.35 pm from Navy records. But Navy records (Cunningham's Despatch at para 45) also show that 'three fully loaded M.L.C.s which had been left behind from the previous evacuation, immediately went alongside the ships, thus saving a valuable 40 minutes'. Gallagher himself later refers to 'three previously loaded landing craft' immediately going out to the ships when they arrived (Misfire! 86). So the solution to the timing question is that what Graham heard was the M.L.C.s being loaded, this having taken place when or shortly after they arrived at the beach at 10.15 p.m. (NZ 5 Infantry Brigade War Diary)

Following his mistake, Gallagher has Laycock et al arriving at the beach 'close to midnight' (Mischief 191) and sending Tanner to Layforce; but as noted according to the A Battalion War Diary the order was received 'about midnight' despite Tanner stumbling around in the dark for some time because nobody knew where Layforce was. This too shows that Gallagher's timings are awry. A further complication is that the order recorded in the D Battalion War Diary (no source is mentioned in the A Battalion War Diary) is shown as coming from Graham, not Laycock. This is consistent with an account of Graham having issued such an order earlier that evening (Messenger 92).

The third bite is at Plain Facts 22, where Gallagher has Laycock issuing his order variously 'around 12.15 a m or later' and 'at 12.15 a m', and it reaching the closest part of Layforce at 'the earliest probably by 1 a.m.'

The first version looks the more probable, Graham having heard the landing craft rather than the ships loading. Allowing for 30 minutes to get to the beach, on this revised timing the Laycock party would have got there about 11 p.m. The relevant entry in the Waugh/War Diary is at 2200 hours, but as it encompassed the party going to Sphakia to obtain authority for withdrawal, Laycock issuing the order to Young and the embarkation of the Laycock party, it is difficult to pinpoint what happened when. The Memorandum (509) is more specific, thus:

At about 10 o'clock that evening there was no sign of the enemy and the approaches to the beaches were thronged with non-fighting troops. Bob and I and Freddy, with servants, therefore set off to find the beach officer, Colonel Healy, and ask authority to withdraw. We pushed our way through the crowds....

This is closer to the revised timing. Beevor (220) has it that 'Laycock did not send the message to Young until about 11 p.m.'. Tanner's own account (Touch and Go 53) has no timings, although it does show that he had become separated from Laycock's group. 'I walked towards Sfakia and got down on the beach and - somehow - there was Colonel Laycock'. Beevor at 221 has Tanner wandering about in the dark 'shouting for Layforce', delivering the message, drinking but then vomiting some sherry and then getting back to the beach just in time to get the last landing craft to a destroyer - so, say 2.30 am. Would this occupy 3 1/2 hours? Or even 2 1/2 hours on Gallagher's timing? Or does it mean that Laycock issued the order some time after he got to the beach? Beevor spoke to Tanner (361, note re page 221), and Gallagher evidently exchanged letters with him (Laycock and Beevor 213 note 105). Why neither apparently tried to clarify the timings is a contribution to the fog.

Note also however that in the Memorandum Waugh said that when he and Laycock and Graham and 'servants' arrived at the beach 'there was no one in charge, Colonel Healy having left earlier by aeroplane'. Healy took off with Weston at 2350 hours and would have left the beach before that. (The war diary of NZ 5 Infantry Brigade has Brigadier Hargest and his staff, who also left by the Sunderland flying boat that night, leaving the beach at 2315 hours). This conforms to the earlier but not the revised timings. More fog.

This revised timing has implications for Laycock's conduct on that night, as discussed in the main body of this piece.

Orders from Whom?

In Laycock and Beevor 41-44, Gallagher argues that 'the military authorities intended Layforce to leave Crete' and in doing so he relies in part on the British Narrative of the Crete campaign

by Col E E Rich. Rich stated that “Layforce” ...was ordered, late in the evening, to embark...’ and gave as his source W.D. 330/16/14 which Gallagher claims is ‘now unidentifiable’. So it is, but W.D. looks suspiciously like an abbreviation for war diary, and some war diaries listed in Rich’s bibliography have such an abbreviation. (W.D. 330/16/14 is unfortunately not listed). This and the other references to this number make it look very likely that the document being referred to is the War Diary of one of Layforce’s A and D Battalions, both of which have references to being ordered to withdraw and embark. Only the D Battalion Diary has the author of the order - the Brigade Major, Graham. As this was so to speak an internal order issued by Graham apparently on his own initiative after he became aware of the imminent surrender of the British forces in Crete, it cannot count as part of an argument about ‘the military authorities’ issuing orders.

As a further piece of fog, Messenger at 92 has this: ‘Freddie Graham sent a runner to George Young with a message telling him to withdraw his men for embarkation and D Battalion began to move down to the quay’. What of A Battalion?

Gallagher also argues as to Rich’s statement that ‘Draft Narratives were submitted to senior participants for comment. Neither Weston nor any member of his staff corrected Rich’s repeated statement that “Layforce” ... was ordered late in the evening to embark’. No authority is given for this process. In any event, if Weston and others did see the draft, they may well have been satisfied by the reference to the war diary. Had Weston himself issued such an order he might well have asked that the draft be changed to reflect this.

Gallagher at Misfire! 87 notes that the commander of D Battalion, Lt Col Young, recorded later (in 1950) that ‘Layforce took up positions covering Sphakia, which were held till the evacuation was completed’. This is clearly wrong: the evacuation never was completed.

The beach pickets on the last night

‘No history records, and only one draft Narrative (fn 117) briefly mentions (fn 118), the withdrawal of the New Zealand cordons and the handover to 64 Medium Regiment (or even the presence of the 64th at Sphakia) (fn 119)’. Thus Gallagher in Mischief, 188. Note 117 is about Narratives generally, but 118 refers us to the New Zealand historian McClymont who states that the 64th took over from the Maoris at midnight. Note 119 refers the reader to Buckley’s history, for which see above, who hints at the withdrawal of the cordons.

No history may have recorded the relevant facts but the War Diary of NZ 22 Battalion did, thus:

31 May In conjunction with one coy of 28 [Maori] Bn (rest having gone with 4 Bde) - the 28th holding the inner perimeter, & the 22nd the outer we continued to guard the approaches to the port until 21 Bn, 23 Bn, Aussie, Marines & part of Layforce passed through us.

2330 Embarkation commenced. Whalers, A.L.C & M.L.C took us to the waiting ships...

June 1 0230 Last of 22 Bn embarked. 0300 Convoy left Sphakia.

In the teeth of this evidence, Gallagher says at footnote 122 that ‘The War Diary of 22 NZ Bn does not make clear when the battalion withdrew.’ He then quotes Buckley, whose status is elevated to being ‘the most realistic historian of the evacuation’, as saying that ‘The guards at the approaches were either withdrawn too early or were overwhelmed ... and confusion

reigned', before trying to argue that 'Because 22 NZ Bn embarked, we may conclude that it was not "overwhelmed" and "must have withdrawn too early". History as she is mangled.

An even more adventurous interpretation of what happened on the morning of 1 June appears in Plain Facts. 'By midnight the New Zealanders had embarked.' On the other hand, however, '...at midnight the effective New Zealand cordons withdrew...' After the Maoris restored order, just after midnight, 'From this point, order at Sphakia broke down' so that

official entry to the embarkation beach became jammed by aggressive stragglers, preventing the rearguard units from embarking; on the other hand, non-scheduled troops flooded onto the beach from other directions.

No sources are given for these extraordinary claims.

Non-recording of orders

At Plain Facts 24, Gallagher claims that on the last night

Laycock gave Pvt Tanner a verbal order to carry to the Commanding Officer "A" and "D" Battalions. The gist of that order was: "If [they] *could* get away, they *were* to get away" (the words "A" Battalion records receiving).

No such words appear in the A Battalion War Diary, nor for that matter in the D Battalion War Diary.

