

**GOD IS  
OUR SAVIOUR**

**Europe**

**Year 8**

**Term 2**

## Thinking Skills

Year 8 Saviour

### Europe 1

Draw 3 different symbols to represent each of the following countries:

- The Netherlands
- Italy
- France

### Europe 2

List all the capital cities you can think of in Europe, and write next to each, the country.

### Europe 3

List 3 types of stone buildings or structures you would find in Europe.

### Europe 4

Make an improvement to a Norwegian dog sled.



### Europe 5

Imagine that the Roman colosseum could be reconstructed. Compare its PAST uses with what it could be used for in the PRESENT.



### Europe 6

If the Eiffel Tower (Paris) was open for sporting activities, what could be offered?



# Sefanaia Sukanaivalu

## Biography

The Second World War was a defining moment in the history of the Pacific Islands. It exposed Islanders to the global theatre of war and brought home to them the many disparate worlds of Westerners. Over 11,000 men passed through the Fiji military forces, which peaked in size in August 1943 at 8,513 men. Of these, 6,371 were Fijians, 1,878 were Europeans and 264 were Indians: In this bloody episode of human conflict, unprecedented in the Pacific Islands, Corporal Sefanaia Sukanaivalu demonstrated one of the finest qualities of the human spirit by making- the ultimate sacrifice in Bougainville, Solomon Islands. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest medal in the British military. His citation eloquently describes what happened on that fateful afternoon in the middle of 1944:

“On 23 June 1944, at Mawaraka, Bougainville, in the Solomon Islands, Corporal Sefanaia Sukanaivalu crawled forward to rescue men who had been wounded when their platoon was ambushed and -some leading elements had become casualties. After two wounded men had been successfully recovered, this N CO, who was in command of the rear section, volunteered to go on further along and try to rescue another man in spite of the mortar and machine gun fire, but on the way back he himself was seriously wounded in the groin and thigh and he fell to the ground unable to move.

Several attempts were made to rescue Corporal Sefania but without success owing to heavy firing encountered on each occasion and further casualties were caused. This gallant NCO then called .to his men not to try to get him as he was in a very exposed position, but they replied they would never leave him alive into the hands of the enemy. Realizing his men would not leave him as long as they could see he was alive, and knowing that they were all in danger of being killed or captured as long as they remained where they were, Corporal Sefania, well aware of the consequences, raised himself up in front of the Japanese machine guns and was riddled with bullets.

This brave Fiji soldier, after rescuing two wounded men and being gravely wounded himself, deliberately sacrificed his life because he knew it was the only way in which the remainder of his platoon could be induced to retire from a situation in which, had they remained, they must have been annihilated.

Corporal Sefanaia Sukanaivalu, VC, was 26 years of age when he gave his life to save his fellow soldiers.

### Questions:

1. Which races from Fiji fought in World War 2?
2. In which country was Corporal Sukanaivalu killed? Answer: Bougainville which is part of Papua New Guinea)
3. What medal was awarded to Corporal Sefanaia Sukanaivalu?
4. What does ‘posthumously’ mean?
5. Read John 15:13, and how Corporal Sukanaivalu was an example of what Jesus taught in this verse.

# Reona Peterson

## Biography

Reona Peterson and her friend Evey had a dangerous mission to accomplish. God had called them to take His message of love into the country of Albania. In 1973, when this story took place, the Albanian government had a strong hatred for Christians. People were forbidden by law to believe in the God of the Bible. People were expected to honour and obey the government above everything else.

Reona had been a teacher from New Zealand, and Evey, a nurse from England. The only way they could get into Albania was with a tour group. Tour groups were seldom allowed into Albania, but the two ladies finally found a French group leaving for Albania that summer.

They boarded the bus in Paris, travelled through France, then Italy and Yugoslavia. As they crossed the border between Yugoslavia and Albania, they sensed the danger that lay ahead. Through the bus window they could see a cluster of white concrete buildings and a large red and black flag fluttering from a flag pole. Without warning, the bus stopped. Within seconds they were surrounded by soldiers with guns at their sides. All those on board were asked to get off. Clothing was checked carefully. Anyone with bright, conspicuous clothing had to change immediately. Luggage was searched, then visas checked.

Finally they were on the bus again, heading for their hotel. On arrival, they were assigned three to a room. Reona and Evey were joined by a British woman named Mary.

"This is my second trip to Albania," said Mary. "On my last trip, six years ago, two members of the group were interrogated for carrying Christian books and leaflets. That's the thing they're after."

Reona and Evey froze as they thought of the small New Testaments and Christian leaflets, they were carrying in their shoulder bags. The bags had concealed compartments where the Bibles and leaflets could be hidden quite well.

After a few days the tour party visited the city of Tirana. The guide surprised everyone with the news that they had two hours walk in the city. The tourists were allowed to go off on their own instead of being supervised as usual. There were several parks in the city. Reona and Evey made their way to these, leaving Christian leaflets on benches, on tops of hedges, or on walls of fountains. While walking in the city they met a man who spoke French. This was unusual, as most people here spoke only Albanian. Both Reona and Evey knew some French so they were able to tell him about Jesus.

"I know it and believe it," said the man in French. He was a secret believer. How glad he was to meet some other Christians.

One night, towards the end of the tour, Reona and Evey were returning to their hotel, when Reona felt ill. She had a terrible night with severe stomach pains. By morning, she knew that she could not join the party for the two day excursion which had been planned. Evey would have to go alone.

At lunch time, a woman came into the room with a food tray. Reona knew what she must say try to tell the woman about Jesus.

Tears came to the woman's eyes.

"Me Christian too," she said in broken English.

Reona gave her a New Testament.

About four O'clock there was another knock at the door. Reona was expecting the waitress again, but instead it was a stern-faced man who demanded that Reona come down stairs for interrogation. Grabbing her dressing gown she followed the man downstairs to a small room where a special chair awaited her. A copy of a New Testament was placed on the table in front of her.

"Have you seen this before?" asked the chief interrogator.

Reona said that she had.

"The one who received this from you has betrayed you," said the interrogator.

Reona did not believe this. The truth was, that the Christian waitress had left it lying about somewhere.

"Why did you come to Albania?" continued the interrogator. "Don't you know that no one in Albania believes in God? You will never see your family again. You are a traitor to our government, and traitors are shot. We will come for you at nine O'clock tomorrow morning."

Photographs were taken, and Reona was led back to her room. Reona lay on her bed and prayed, "Lord Jesus," she said, "It will be a privilege to lay down my life for you."

When the next day arrived, Reona was interrogated once more. Then the tour party returned and Evey was interrogated as well. During Evey's eight hours of interrogation she tried to take every opportunity to talk about God.

"Don't mention God again!" roared the interrogator angrily.

The French tour guide knew the situation the women were in and tried to be helpful. He assured them that he would do everything he could to try to get them released.

The next morning, Reona and Evey were told that they would be released.

"We will drive them to the border and leave them there. Never again will they be allowed to enter Albania," was the announcement to the group. However, after the group departed, the women were interrogated again.

"So you thought you were free! There are still more questions for you to answer," said the chief.

Had the announcement of their release just been to fool the group into thinking they were free? Did the authorities have other plans for them? Finally they were given some forms to sign concerning the crimes they had committed, then they were ushered into a car. The car drove for about half an hour and then stopped. The ladies did not know where they were being taken. The

two interrogators got out and the car continued. Could this be the road leading to the border, or was it leading to a prison?

Finally they passed through a town that they recognised. They knew they were only half an hour from the border. On arriving at the border their passports were stamped, 'PERSONAE NON GRATA', (a person forbidden to enter the country again).

"You may go," said a voice.

The two women walked through the gates into 'no-man's land'. This was an area of swampy country between Albania and Yugoslavia, a zone belonging to neither country. The Yugoslavian border was still about ten kilometres away. How could they ever find their way?

It was not long before a car pulled up.

"Taxi?" said a young man.

"No dinar," said Reona, meaning 'no money'.

The car drove back in the direction that it had come. Soon the car returned. The young man got out, took their suitcases and motioned to the women to get in. This time they did not argue. The taxi drove them to the Yugoslavian border for no cost. "Why would a taxi driver do this?" they wondered. "Was he an angel in disguise?"

From here, another driver offered them a ride to Italy. They did not know the driver, but at the end of the journey he pushed into their hands a large number of silver coins. They had exactly enough money for the bus and train fare back to Switzerland, where Christian friends had been praying earnestly for the safety and protection of the two women.

Reference: *Tomorrow You Die* by Reona Peterson, 1996

## Activities

1. Find the country of Albania on a map. Albania is in which continent?
2. Name some countries that border it.
3. What did the government think about people who believed in God?
4. How did the two ladies get into Albania?
5. What did Mary tell the two ladies about carrying Christian books and leaflets?
6. How did Reona and Evey hide their Bibles and leaflets?
7. What did they intend to do with these?
8. How were they caught?
9. What is an interrogation?
10. What happened just after they thought they were free?
11. What miracles happened to get them to Switzerland?

God has a whole army of angels fighting for us. We don't know who the taxi driver was in this story. The Bible tells us that we should take care in entertaining strangers, because these strangers just might be angels. Angels don't have to have a white gown and wings. They could look like ordinary people. The taxi driver may have been an angel. He had certainly been sent by God to help Reona and Evey. God wants us to pray for protection, not just for ourselves, but for others too. Reona and Evey had friends who were praying for them.

# Some European countries: Facts and figures

Reference: [www.operationworld.org](http://www.operationworld.org)

## Albania

### Geography

**Area:** 28,748 sq km

A mountainous Balkan state on the Adriatic Sea, just west of Greece.

**Population:** 3,169,087

**Capital:** Tirana

**People living in cities:** 48%

**Official language:** Albanian

### Religion:

Muslim 62%

Christians 30%

Albania was a Communist country from 1941 until 1991. Christianity was banned during the Communist era. Albania now has a democratic government.

### Challenge for Prayer

Christian help ministries:

- a) Scripture translation. The New Testament was recently retranslated into modern Albanian in a collaborative project of Orthodox, Catholics and Protestants; a new Old Testament translation is underway.
- b) Religious literature from many faiths flooded the country upon the fall of Communism. Christian books are published in the Albanian language but there are very few Christian bookstores. Pray for translation of useful Christian books and literature and for their impact.
- c) Christian radio is an area of great growth.

## Denmark

One of four Scandinavian countries, (along with Norway, Sweden and Finland)

### Geography

**Area:** 43,092 sq km

The most southerly of the Scandinavian countries.

**Population:** 5,481,283

**Capital:** Copenhagen

**People living in cities:** 87.2%

**Official language:** Danish

**Largest Religion:** Christian (Catholic or Lutheran) 70%

**Challenges for Prayer:** Denmark is becoming secular, with many people being non-believers. Many church goers are nominal.

## France

**Capital:** Paris

**Population:** 65,630,692

**People living in cities:** 77.8%

**Official language:** French

**Religion:**

Christian (Catholic) 60%

Christian (Protestant) 1%

Muslim: 8%

Non-religious over 30%

**Challenges for Prayer**

regular attendance in any church is below 8%

Protestants of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were willing to die for their faith, but over the years there has been a rapid decline in Christianity and a rise in atheism. Pray for restoration to the faith and commitment shown by their martyr forebears.

## Germany

**Geography**

**Area:** 357,042 sq km

Strategically placed in the centre of Europe and the European Union.

**Population:** 82,056,775    Annual Growth: -0.09%

**Capital:** Berlin

**People living in cities:** 73.8%

**Official language:** German. Religion

**Religion:** (Catholic and Lutheran) 65%

**Challenges for Prayer:** Low church attendance. Many old churches are empty and crumbling. Many of the Lutheran clergy do not even believe in life after death. Pray for return to genuine faith in the Bible.

## Italy

**Geography**

**Area:** 301,000 sq km

A long, mountainous peninsula that dominates the central Mediterranean Sea.

**Population:** 60,097,564    Annual Growth: 0.49%

**Capital:** Rome

**People living in cities:** 68.4%

**Official language:** Italian, but also use of nine regional languages akin to Italian

**Largest Religion:** Christian (Catholic) 82%

**Challenges for Prayer:** Occultism is widespread. There are more occult magicians than Catholic priests. Literature and Bible distribution have not had a wide impact due to Italians' reluctance to read. There are only about 15 Evangelical Christian bookshops, plus the Bible Society which is Italy's largest Bible and literature centre. Pray for strong Christian leaders to



be raised up. Pray for a hunger for God's Word, for a desire for wholesome Christian literature and that quality material that leads people to Christ would be found in the more than 1,000 Catholic bookshops. The Gideons are active throughout Italy in distributing Scripture.

## Russia

### Geography

**Area:** 17,075,400 sq km

The world's largest country, extending across nine time-zones between the Baltic and the Pacific. **Population:** 140,366,561

**Capital:** Moscow

**People living in cities:** 73%

**Official language:** Russian

### Religion:

Christian (Russian Orthodox) 66%

Evangelical Christian 1%

Judaism 1%

Islam 5%

### Challenges for Prayer

Christian leaders, who are few in number, must rise to many great challenges. In the past there has been lack of training. Many pastors and educators have emigrated. This has contributed to a lack of leaders. Pray for these needs:

- a) Biblical leadership and discipleship
- b) Many churches across all evangelical groups are filled with younger folk, But most of these come from non-Christian backgrounds and need training in Biblical Christian world view
- c) Bible education and training of pastors

## United Kingdom

(England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland)

### Geography

**Area:** 244,110 sq km

Two main islands: Britain and the northeast of Ireland. A union of four countries: England 103,400 sq km, Scotland 78,800 sq km, Wales 20,800 sq km, Northern Ireland 14,100 sq km

**Capital:** London

**People living in cities:** 90.1%

**Official language:** English; in Wales both English and Welsh.

### Religion:

Christian 40%

No religion: 50%

Islam: 5%

Hindu: 1.5%

### **Challenges for Prayer**

Students in higher education are exposed to great pressures. A largely godless, materialistic younger generation is being formed by the secular system. Less than 2% of students are actively involved in church. Pray especially for a life of consistent and loving witness by Christian students; they are the ones best equipped to reach their own peers.

**Pray for:** The Christian Union groups among students, especially the more than two million in colleges and universities. Pray international students. There are about 400,000 international students in the UK – 80,000 from China alone – plus many thousands in English-language schools. Outreach to them is varied but too limited, and many return home without hearing the gospel.

## **The history of Communism in Europe**

Communism is a type of government and philosophy. Its goal is to form a society where everything is shared equally. All people are treated equally and there is little private ownership. In a communist government, the government owns and controls most everything including property, means of production, education, transportation, and agriculture.

Karl Marx is considered the Father of Communism. Marx was a German philosopher and economist who wrote about his ideas in a book called the Communist Manifesto in 1848. His communist theories have also become known as Marxism. Marx described ten important aspects of a communist government:

1. No private property
2. A single central bank High income tax that would rise significantly as you made more
3. All property rights would be confiscated
4. No inheritance rights
5. The government would own and control all communication and transportation
6. The government would own and control all education
7. The government would own and control factories and agriculture
8. Farming and regional planning would be run by the government
9. The government would tightly control labor

### **Communism in Russia**

Communism began in Russia with the rise of the Bolshevik Party led by Vladimir Lenin. They led the 1917 October Revolution that overthrew the current government and took power. Lenin was a follower of Marxist philosophies. His views on government became known as Marxism-Leninism. Russia became known as the Soviet Union. In World War II Russia sided with the Allied Powers in order to help defeat Germany and Adolf Hitler. However, after the war the Soviet Union took control of several countries in Eastern Europe. They became known as the Eastern Bloc.

The Soviet Union became one of the world's two superpowers along with the United States. For many years they fought the west in what is today called the Cold War. Communist China is another major country to be ruled by a communist government

## **Actual Results**

The actual results of communist governments have been nothing like the theories of Marxism. The low-class people that were supposed to be helped by Marxism, were treated horribly by the leaders of the government. For example, it is estimated that Soviet Union leader Joseph Stalin had over 40 million people murdered for the "good of the state". Stalin created labor camps for anyone who disagreed with the government. He even created famines in order to break the will of the people and gain total control. Communist states generally have much less freedom. They prevent the practice of religion, order certain people to work certain jobs, and prevent people from moving around or moving to other countries. People lose all rights to ownership and government officials become incredibly powerful.

**Current Communist Countries:** China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam.

## **Former European Communist countries (by current name):**

**Formerly part of the Soviet Union:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

**Soviet-controlled Eastern bloc countries:** Bulgaria, Czech Republic, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia.

**The Balkans:** Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Rep. of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia.

## **The Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall**

The Berlin Wall was built by the communist government of East Berlin in 1961. The wall separated East Berlin (the Communist part of Germany) and West Berlin (the free part of Germany). It was built in order to prevent people from fleeing from East Berlin to the west. In many ways it was the perfect symbol of the "Iron Curtain" that separated the democratic (free) western countries and the communist countries of Eastern Europe throughout the Cold War.

## **How it all started**

After World War II the country of Germany ended up dividing into two separate countries. East Germany became a communist country under the control of the Soviet Union. At the same time West Germany was a democratic country and allied with Britain, France, and the

United States. The initial plan was that the country would eventually be reunited, but this didn't happen for a long time.

### **The city of Berlin**

Berlin was the capital of Germany. Even though it was located in the eastern half of the country, the city was controlled by all four major powers; the Soviet Union, the United States, Britain, and France. As people in East Germany began to realize that they did not want to live under the rule of the Soviet Union and communism, they started to leave the eastern part of the country and move to the west. These people were called defectors. If caught they would be shot. Over time more and more people left. The Soviet and East German leaders began to worry that they were losing too many people.

Over the course of the years 1949 to 1959, over 2 million people left the country. In 1960 alone, around 230,000 people defected. Although the East Germans tried to keep people from leaving, it was fairly easy for people to leave the city of Berlin because the inside of the city was controlled by all four major powers.

### **Building the wall**

Finally, the Soviets and the East German leaders had had enough. On August 12th and 13th of 1961 they built a wall around Berlin to prevent people from leaving. At first the wall was just a barbed wire fence. Later it was rebuilt with concrete blocks 12 feet high and four feet wide. There were many guard towers along the wall. Guards were ordered to shoot anyone attempting to escape. It is estimated that around 5000 people escaped over or through the wall during the 28 years it stood. Around 200 were killed trying to escape.

### **The Wall torn down in 1987**

President Ronald Reagan gave a speech in Berlin where he asked the leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, to "Tear down this Wall!" Around that time the Soviet Union was beginning to collapse. They were losing their hold on East Germany. A few years later on November 9, 1989 the announcement was made. The borders were open and people could freely move between Eastern and Western Germany. Much of the wall was torn down by people chipping away as they celebrated the end to a divided Germany. On October 3, 1990 Germany was officially reunified into a single country.

### **The collapse of Communism in Europe**

The collapse of the Soviet Union started in the late 1980s and was complete when the country broke up into 15 independent states on December 25, 1991. This signaled the end of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States.

Mikhail Gorbachev was elected General Secretary of the Soviet Union in 1985. When he took over the Soviet Union economy was in bad shape and his idea was to reform the economy and modernize the political situation in the country.

Gorbachev allowed more freedom of speech and openness in government. Government officials would be held accountable to the people for their actions. People could protest and the media could report on issues for the first time. People could express their desire for independence.

The other major reform was the restructuring of the Soviet economy to work more efficiently. He allowed some private ownership and released some of the tight control the government had on the economy. However, the people and economy of the Soviet Union were used to the government doing everything, so things got worse before they got better.

The first states to demand their freedom were the Baltic states of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia. The central government of the Soviet Union began to feel the pressure of so many states wanting independence.

In August of 1991, some hard-line communists kidnapped Gorbachev and announced to the world that he was too sick to govern. They would be taking over. When the Soviet citizens began to protest, the hardliners called in the military to shut them down. However, the soldiers refused to shoot and arrest their own people. Without the military to back them up, the takeover had failed.

The Soviet Union broke up on December 24, 1991. At the same time Mikhail Gorbachev announced his resignation. The Soviet Union divided up into 15 separate independent countries including: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

<http://www.ducksters.com/history/>

# Miraculous events from World War 1 & 2

## The Angels of Mons

During World War I, the armies of Britain, France and other allies were confronted by the armed forces of Germany, supported by its allies. On a battle front that extended across south-east Belgium and northern France, the German armies were advancing towards the west. They had broken through the allied lines and the British situation was desperate, due to the heavy casualties they had sustained and the lack of reserves.

The German breakthrough had occurred at Bethune, near Mons, in Belgium, and they concentrated their attack at the point with high explosive and machine gunfire, preparatory to a bayonet attack in mass formation.

Suddenly the enemy shell fire lifted and concentrated on a slight rise beyond the town. The ground here was absolutely bare, yet the enemy machine guns and shells raked it from end to end with a hail of lead. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the enemy's fire ceased. The dense line of German troops, which had started to move forward to victory in mass formation, suddenly halted. As the British watched, they saw that line break! The Germans threw down everything they had and fled in frantic panic.

What had caused this retreat by an army that appeared to be a step away from victory?

A senior German officer who was taken prisoner immediately after this incident gave this account to the staff captain of the 1<sup>st</sup> Corp intelligence, 1<sup>st</sup> British Army Headquarters.

The German officer stated, "The order was given to advance in mass formation and our troops were marching behind us singing their way to victory when Fritz, my lieutenant here, said, "Herr Kapitan, just look at that open ground behind Bethune. There is a brigade of cavalry coming up through the smoke drifting across it. They must be mad to advance against such a force as ours in the open. I suppose they must be the cavalry of one of their colonial forces, for, see, they are all in white uniform and they're mounted on white horses!"

"Strange," I replied, "I've never heard of the English having any white-uniformed cavalry, whether colonial or not. They have all been fighting on foot for some years, and anyway, their men all wear khaki, not white."

"Well, they're plain enough," he replied. "Look, our guns have got their range now. They'll be blown to pieces in no time."

The German officer continued his description of the event. "We saw shells bursting among the horse and their riders. Yet not one horse or rider fell. They advanced at a quiet walk-trot, in parade ground formation, each man and horse in his exact place."

"Shortly afterwards our machine guns opened heavy fire, raking the advancing cavalry with a hail of lead; but on they came, and not one single man or horse fell. Steadily they

advanced, clear in the shining sunlight, and a few paces in front of them rode their leader, fine figure of man, whose hair, like spun gold, shone in an aura around his head. By his side was a great sword, but his hands lay quietly holding the reins, as his huge white charger carried him proudly forward."

"The heavy shell fire and concentrated machine gunfire continued, but the white cavalry advanced, unyielding, untouched by the attack, like the incoming tide surging over a sandy beach. Then a great fear came upon me and I turned to flee. Yes, I, an officer of the Prussian Guard, fled, panic-stricken, and around me were hundreds of terrified men, whimpering like children, throwing away their weapons in order that their movements should not be impeded.... all running. Their one desire was to escape from that advancing white cavalry; above all, from their awe-inspiring leader whose hair shone like a golden halo."

"That is all I have to tell you," the German concluded. "We are beaten. The German army is broken. They may be fighting, but we have lost the war; we are beaten by the White Cavalry.... I cannot understand... I cannot understand."

A number of German prisoners were questioned in the days following and, although their accounts differed in some details, this story was substantially the same. Thus, it was that the British Expeditionary Force was given sufficient time to withdraw to safer positions and prepare the counter attack that was to finally leading to victory on November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918.

1. The following terms are all related to warfare. Find the exact meaning of each and write it: allies, reserves, bayonet attack, mass formation, cavalry, casualty, shell fire, machine gun fire and counter attack.
2. Read the story of Elisha and his servant in 2 Kings 6:8-19. In what ways is this story similar to the story of the Angels of Mons? In what ways is it different?
3. Make a sketch map of Western Europe, showing the borders of the countries mentioned in the story.

Adapted from *The Trumpet Sounds for Britain*, Vol 2, by David Gardner, Christian Foundation Publication, Great Britain

## The Evacuation of Dunkirk, 1940

In May 1940, some of the darkest days in the history of Europe were experienced, and in particular, in the history of Britain. German forces under Hitler were surging west, having overthrown Holland and Belgium and broken through the defences on the north-eastern borders of France.

The British Expeditionary Force were fighting in France, as the German forces advanced in a pincer movement, threatening to encircle the entire British force of 355,000. The decision was made to evacuate the British Expeditionary Force from France. The B.E.F. were only 8 to 12 miles (approximately 13 to 20 kilometres) from Dunkirk, but the German forces were only 10 miles (16 km) behind them. Winston Churchill later wrote in a history of the war that at best they expected to save only up to 30,000 of the total. "The whole root and core and brain of the British Army seemed about to perish on the field or be led into ignominious and starving captivity," he wrote.

But Britain had a Godly sovereign. Seeing this situation developing, His Majesty King George VI requested that Sunday May 26 should be observed as a National Day of Prayer. In a stirring broadcast, he called the people of Britain and the Commonwealth to commit their cause to God. Together with members of the cabinet, the King attended Westminster Abbey, whilst millions of his subjects in all parts of the Commonwealth flocked to the churches in prayer. Hundreds who had neglected church attendance for years were moved to join the crowds in prayer. Britain was given inspiring leadership in those days, and her people responded immediately when this kind of initiative was taken. The whole nation and Commonwealth were at prayer that Sunday. The scene outside Westminster Abbey was remarkable – photographs show long queues of people who could not even get in, the Abbey was so crowded. So much so that a daily newspaper the following morning exclaimed, "Nothing like this has ever happened before!" In its hour of deep distress, a heart-cry from both monarch and people was going up to God in prayer. And that cry did not go unanswered. For very soon at least three miracles were seen to happen.

The first was that for some reason, which has never yet been fully explained, Hitler over-ruled his generals and halted the advance of his armoured troops, at the very point when they could have proceeded to the British Army's annihilation being only 10 miles away. Later Mr. Churchill asserted in his memoirs that this was because Hitler believed that his air superiority would be sufficient to prevent a large-scale evacuation by sea. That is very significant in terms of the second miracle.

A storm of unprecedented fury broke over Flanders, a region just east of Dunkirk, on Tuesday May 28, grounding the German squadrons of planes and enabling the British army formations to move up the 8 to 12 miles to the coast on foot. The darkness of the storm and the violence of the rain, with scarcely any interruption from enemy aircraft were wonderful protection as the planes were unable to operate in such turbulent conditions. Hitler had obviously not taken the weather into his reckoning, nor the One who controls the weather.



And the third miracle? Despite the storm in Flanders, a great calm such as has rarely been experienced, settled over the English Channel during the days which followed and its waters became as still as a mill pond. It was this quite extraordinary calm which enabled a vast armada of little ships, big ships, war ships, privately owned motor cruisers from British rivers and estuaries. In fact, almost anything that would float, to travel back and forth between Dunkirk and the English port of Dover, in a desperate bid to rescue as many men as possible. There were so many ships involved in the evacuation that Douglas Bader, a famous Spitfire pilot, described the scene like this in his book *"Flight for The Sky"*:

"The sea from Dunkirk to Dover during these days of the evacuation looked like any coastal road in England on a bank holiday. It was solid with shipping. One felt one could walk across without getting one's feet wet, or that's what it looked like from the air. There were naval escort vessels, sailing dinghies, rowing boats, paddle steamers, indeed every floating device known in this country. They were all taking British soldiers from Dunkirk back home. You could identify Dunkirk from the Thames estuary by the huge covering of black smoke rising straight up into a windless sky from the oil tanks which were ablaze just inside the harbour."

Yet still, to a large extent, the German air squadrons were unable to intervene - certainly not in force, nor in the way Hitler had anticipated, for so many of these squadrons remained grounded. General Halder, Chief of the German General Staff, three days after the High Command, proudly boasted that the British Army was about to be annihilated. But now he was obliged to record in his diary on 30<sup>th</sup> May that "Bad weather has grounded our air squadrons, and now we must stand by and watch countless thousands of the enemy getting away to England right under our noses."

Even though some squadrons did get through, it seems that yet another miracle happened. Many of the troops on the beaches were favoured with a strange immunity. When about 400 men were being machine-gunned and bombed, systematically by about sixty enemy aircraft, one man who flung himself down with the rest reported that, after the attack was over, he was amazed to find that there was not a single casualty.

Another man, a chaplain, was likewise machine-gunned and bombed as he lay on the beach. After what seemed like an eternity, he realised he had not been hit, and rose to his feet to find that the sand where he had been lying was pitted with bullet holes, and his figure was outlined on the ground. Truly, amazing things were happening. There were signs on every hand that God had intervened and delivered officers and men from the hands of a mighty foe who, humanly speaking had them at its mercy.

After the last rescue boats left Dunkirk harbor on June 4, 1940, the Germans captured some 40,000 French troops who'd been left behind as well as at least 40,000 British soldiers in the Dunkirk vicinity. There is a story that is often overlooked, but for the next five years, until the war's end, large numbers of these POWs were mistreated and abused in violation of Geneva Convention guidelines governing the sick, wounded, prisoners of war and civilians. As described in *Dunkirk: The Men They Left Behind*, by Sean Longden, some were summarily executed. The POWs were denied food and medical treatment. The wounded were jeered at. To lower officer morale, the Nazis told British officers that they would lose their rank and be sent to the salt mines to work. They were forced to drink ditch water and eat putrid food.

As noted by Longden: “These dreadful days were never forgotten by those who endured them. They had fought the battles to ensure the successful evacuation of over 300,000 fellow soldiers. Their sacrifice had brought the salvation of the British nation.

Sunday June 9<sup>th</sup> was appointed as a Day of National Thanksgiving and once again the people of Britain and the Commonwealth joined in prayer, this time giving thanks to God who had miraculously saved over 300,000 British soldiers from the jaws of death and returned them safely home.

Psalm 124 was read in the churches where thanksgiving was made. The closing verse read, “Praised be the Lord who has not given us over for a prey unto their teeth. Our soul is escaped even as a bird out of the snare of the fowler: the snare is broken and we are delivered. Our help stands in the name of the Lord who has made heaven and earth.”

1. Use an atlas to locate Dunkirk, Dover, Flanders, the English Channel, Holland, Belgium, Germany, France.
2. What is meant by an evacuation?
3. Find words that mean: humiliating, to come between, of special importance.
4. What do you think was the ‘pincer movement’ whereby the German armies advanced?
5. What lesson can we learn from this event? a) for ourselves b) for our nation.

*Psalm 46:1- God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in the time of trouble.*

*Psalm 50:15 - Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you will honour me.*

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