

on 21st April made it necessary to advance the date, since it was now possible that a German force might reach Athens from the west before the Imperial forces could be re-embarked. It was accordingly decided to begin the embarkation on the night 24th-25th April and to endeavour to complete it in three nights. The time had afterwards to be extended.

44. The withdrawal from the Thermopylae position to the beaches was covered by a brigade group of the New Zealand Division, which inflicted severe casualties on the enemy and knocked out a considerable number of tanks on 26th April.

On 23rd April the remaining Hurricanes, about twelve in number, on which reliance had been placed to protect the convoys during the first part of their journey from Greece, were, owing to unavoidable lack of A.A. defences, all destroyed on the ground at Argos by enemy action. The embarkation programme was accordingly revised to enable a greater number of troops to be embarked in the Peloponnese whence the journey to Crete would be shorter and less exposed to air attack. Fortunately, however, the plan remained elastic, and when the Corinth Canal was cut by enemy parachutists in the early morning of 26th April, it was possible again to change the plans and to embark the 4th New Zealand Brigade from a beach east of Athens, Porto Rafti, instead of from the Peloponnese.

45. Thanks to the excellent arrangements by the Royal Navy, the air cover of some few Blenheim fighters and the good work of the Joint Planning Staff sent to Greece, the embarkations were carried out according to plan except in two places. At Nauplion on the night of 26th-27th April, some 1,700 personnel had to be left behind owing to one of the ships, which had been set on fire by enemy bombing, having blocked the channel, so that the destroyers could not get alongside the quay. Another merchant ship which conveyed troops from this place was bombed and set on fire soon after leaving Greece and two destroyers which picked up the survivors from the ship were both sunk by bombs within a few minutes of each other. Some 700 troops are believed to have lost their lives. These were practically the only casualties during the voyage from Greece.

The second failure to embark personnel was at Kalamata, in the south of the Peloponnese, on the night of 28th-29th April. The senior officer at this port had neglected to make proper arrangements for local protection or reconnaissance, and a German force entered the town and reached the quays just as embarkation was due to begin. By the efforts of a number of officers who got together small parties and organised counter attacks on their own, the enemy was driven out and 150 prisoners taken. But in the meantime the Royal Navy had been informed that the Germans were in the town and that the quays were mined, and no information appears ever to have reached them that the enemy had been driven out again. The Naval Commander, therefore, naturally decided not to risk his valuable forces by entering the harbour. The troops at Kalamata are believed to have numbered some 8,000, including 1,500 Yugoslavs. The greater part of the remainder were labour units and details, and comparatively few were fighting troops. Unfortunately,

among them were the first reinforcements of the New Zealand Division.

46. The total number of troops sent to Greece was approximately 57,660; of these close on 43,000 were safely re-embarked. All guns, transport and equipment other than personal were, however, lost. In view of the complete enemy air superiority, the re-embarkation of so many troops may be considered an extremely fine performance. It was due to the magnificent work of the Royal Navy, the good staff arrangements made by those concerned, and the discipline and endurance of the troops themselves.

Of the troops re-embarked, about 27,000 were landed in Crete and the remainder taken back to Egypt. The reason for landing so many troops in Crete was to shorten the sea journey and to make possible quicker and more frequent journeys.

Summary of Greek Operations.

47. As will be seen from the above account, the expedition to Greece was ill starred from the first. The change of plan by the Greek Commander-in-Chief after the first decision to despatch a force resulted in the position on which the Imperial forces were to concentrate being held by a very inadequate Greek force instead of the five organised divisions which General Papagos had promised. The uncertainties of the Yugoslav attitude seriously affected the plans both of ourselves and of the Greeks, while the complete collapse of their armies on the German invasion exposed the flank of what was otherwise an extremely strong position. The German attack took place while the Imperial force was still in process of concentration and before it had time to get properly settled down. That the Greek army which had fought so heroically against the Italians disintegrated so rapidly under the German attack is not surprising. They had already been strained to the uttermost and neither their organisation nor equipment were sufficiently up to date to enable them to face the German army. Finally the enemy bombing attacks on the Piraeus closed the only good port, deprived us of any chance of removing any of our heavy equipment and made the re-embarkation of the personnel of the force an extremely hazardous operation. Thus, while the whole expedition was something in the nature of a gamble, the dice were loaded against it from the first. It was not really such a forlorn hope from the military point of view as it may seem from its results.

Situation in Middle East after Greek Campaign.

48. The situation in the Middle East at the beginning of May was full of anxiety. I was threatened with having to undertake operations simultaneously in no fewer than five theatres with my resources in men and material very seriously depleted by the losses in Greece. There was an obvious possibility, which was soon confirmed, that the enemy would undertake operations against Crete; or he might reinforce his effort in the Western Desert, which though checked for the present still constituted a serious menace to Egypt; responsibility for dealing with the revolt in Iraq was handed over to Middle East from India in the first week in May; the Germans were making use of air bases in Syria which might constitute a very serious threat to the defence of the Canal and Egyptian ports as