

General Soldarelli, had been persuaded to espouse the British cause and to disarm the 1,500 Blackshirts on the island. A temporary civil government had been set up under the Metropolitan Archbishop, the local guerillas had been kept in order, and an Allied force of one infantry battalion (2nd Royal West Kents, less one company) and the Greek Sacred Squadron had been built up.

227. On Major-General Hall's appointment as G.O.C. Aegean, he made a thorough inspection of the defences of Leros and arrived at Samos on 12th November, the morning of the enemy's attack on Leros. The battle of Leros lasted five days, and from the beginning the Samos garrison was standing by to provide reinforcements should they be needed. On 12th November, Leros asked for the despatch of the Royal West Kents; preparations were put in hand to move the battalion that night, but in the absence of suitable shipping the men were returned to their battle stations. The next night, 13th-14th, a suitable vessel was found and one company was sent to Portolago, where it arrived the following night; the remainder of the battalion arrived by destroyer on the night of the 15th-16th. The Greek Sacred Squadron, too, was ordered to move and was actually embarked, but since it was reported that Leros had fallen on the afternoon of 16th November, the squadron stood down.

228. That night I instructed Major-General Hall to leave Samos and return to Cairo, leaving the conduct of operations in the hands of Brigadier Baird, the Military Governor of Samos. I also ordered that if, at a later date, the enemy were to attack Samos, and Italian resistance proved to be of no value, Brigadier Baird was to evacuate himself and his staff, leaving the Greek troops and the guerrillas to operate on the island.

229. On 17th November, the enemy switched his air offensive to Samos. At about midday Vathi and Tiganion were heavily bombed and extensive damage was caused, including the disruption of communications with Middle East.

230. Next day I ordered the withdrawal, if possible, of all British troops and the Greek Sacred Squadron, on the night of 18th-19th November. Brigadier Baird was to remain in Samos until the last possible moment for reasons of prestige, and maintenance was to continue as long as possible under arrangements to be made with the Military Attaché at Ankara. I also ordered that arrangements should be made for evacuating some Greek civilians.

231. During the evening of 19th November, a caique fleet left Turkey and the evacuation was carried out, although the rendezvous on the Turkish coast had to be changed owing to the unwillingness of the caique captains to face the Samos channel, where German "E" boats were thought to be operating. The fleet arrived at Kusadasi early on 20th November, bringing with it Brigadier Baird and his staff, Colonel Tzigantes, commander of the Greek Sacred Squadron, General Soldarelli, the Italian Commander, the Metropolitan Archbishop and all British and Greek forces, with a hundred Italian civilians. The British Attaché at Ankara gained the consent of the Turkish Government for the evacuees to pass through Turkey in the guise of civilians.

232. Since it appeared, on 20th November, that the Germans had not yet occupied the eastern end of Samos, a second fleet set out on the night of 20th-21st November, and returned next morning with all British and Greek stragglers, one thousand Greek civilians and four hundred Italian troops. Meanwhile, some two thousand Greek civilians had arrived in Turkey by their own means, and arrangements were put in hand for the evacuation by rail of all refugees and military personnel. This was accomplished by means of special refugee trains which began to leave on 23rd November.

233. During 21st November, news was received that the Germans had landed on Samos, and permission was given to the Greek Sacred Squadron to organise a final round-up of stragglers. This they did, and a further two hundred Greek civilians and two thousand eight hundred Italians were successfully evacuated.

234. The only outstanding British commitments, apart from Castelrosso, were now isolated patrols from the Long Range Desert Group (playing a new role) on the islands of Seriphos and Nikonos; these were successfully evacuated to Turkey by 29th November. Castelrosso was kept, with a small garrison, as a base for possible future operations.

235. The maintenance of the forces in the Aegean was exceedingly difficult, and, owing to the complex lines of communication, which were liable to interruption, and the dispersion of the forces, presented a problem out of all proportion to the number of troops involved, which amounted in all to the equivalent of two brigades.

236. It was intended that reserves for each garrison in the islands, plus the civilian population and such Italian troops as were not evacuated, would be established as soon as possible on the general basis of thirty days' reserve and fifteen days' working margin.

237. Maintenance was to be by sea from the Middle East bases, supplemented (primarily for the civilian population) as far as was practicable from Turkey. The main islands to be supplied were Castelrosso, Cos, Leros and Samos. The original sea movement plan was that direct shipments should be made to Castelrosso, Leros and Cos, from Middle East ports, including those in Cyprus, whilst for Samos and the other islands transshipments were to be made in caiques or L.C.Ts. from Cos and Leros or from Kusadasi in Turkey.

238. In the initial stages, until Cos fell, this plan was carried out, and small stores-ships sailed direct from Egypt and Palestine to Castelrosso, Leros and Cos; there the cargo was transhipped for distribution throughout the islands by caique and other small craft. Arrangements were also made for maintaining Cos by air, but this method was only used to meet urgent demands which could not be satisfied in time by sea. Between 14th September and 3rd October, aircraft of 216 Group, R.A.F., landed or dropped on Cos, 458,100 lbs. of freight, 714 Army and 310 Royal Air Force personnel.

239. With the fall of Cos, on 3rd October, and the consequent lack of single engined fighter cover, it became impossible to despatch stores-ships to Leros except when favourable opportunity offered. In the middle of October