

available, made it almost impossible to transfer any considerable portion of the Greek army from the Albanian front elsewhere without very long delays. A further consideration that influenced General Papagos in delaying any transfer of troops till too late was the hope that the Yugoslavs might yet join the Allies, and by attacking the Italian forces in the rear compel the evacuation or surrender of the Italian army in Albania. This would have enabled a large proportion of the Greek army to be transferred to meet the Germans without loss of morale.

17. The undeveloped state of communications in Greece and the poor equipment of the Greek army must be borne in mind throughout in considering the operations in Greece. Greece is for the most part a country of high and difficult mountains with poor communications, where pack transport or ox wagons are the normal means of communication. There are few good roads and these are usually narrow where they pass through the mountains, making the use of mechanical transport extremely difficult. The Greek army was almost entirely unprovided with mechanical transport, except such as we had supplied, while our own troops on a mechanized basis and without pack transport often found extreme difficulty in working mechanical transport on the difficult, hilly roads or in the conditions of deep mud in the plains. The climate during March and April is severe in the hilly country, where snow falls were frequent, and there was much rain in the plains, rendering the poor roads even more difficult.

So far as was possible, the Greek troops with their pack transport held the hilly country, while the British forces were employed to cover the main roads by which alone their mechanical transport could operate.

18. The first flight of the British force disembarked at the Piraeus on 7th March, nearly a week after the Germans had entered Bulgaria. The first fighting troops to arrive were the 1st Armoured Brigade Group, under Brigadier H. V. S. Charrington. It consisted of:—

- 4th Hussars (Light Tanks).
- 3rd R.T.R. (Cruiser Tanks).
- 2 R.H.A. (25-pounders).
- Northumberland Hussars (Anti-tank).
- 3rd Cheshire Field Squadron, R.E.
- Rangers (Motor Battalion).

It completed its concentration in the forward area about 21st March, and was given the task of operating east of the defensive position in order to cover the occupation of the position and the preparation of demolitions by the Royal Engineers.

The next to arrive was the New Zealand Division, under Major-General Freyberg, which was concentrated on the right of the position, in the Katerini area, by 2nd April. The 6th Australian Division, under Major-General Sir Ivan Mackay, was still in process of arrival when the Germans invaded Greece.

19. The attitude of the Yugoslav Government had, as already indicated, been most uncertain. Finally, towards the end of March, they signed an agreement with the Germans. This caused deep resentment to the greater part of the Yugoslav nation and led to a *coup d'état* on the 27th March in which the existing Government was overthrown and a new one formed, pledged to defend Yugoslavia against any German attack. The reaction of the

Germans was practically immediate, and on 6th April German forces invaded both Greece and Yugoslavia.

Although repeated efforts had been made to get into touch with the Yugoslav authorities and to concert some plan of action in the event of Yugoslavia defending herself against a German attack, it had proved impossible to get the Yugoslavs to agree to any plan of combined action or even to a meeting. On 9th March the Yugoslav General Staff had sent an officer in mufti, under the name of Mr. Hope, to Athens for discussion, but he had had no power to commit the Yugoslav General Staff to any plans and did not even seem to be aware if any plan existed. Eventually, after the *coup d'état*, the C.I.G.S., Sir John Dill, flew to Belgrade on 1st April, but was unable to obtain agreement to a combined plan of action. Two days later a meeting was arranged with considerable difficulty at Florina, at which General Papagos and General Wilson met General Jankovitch, the newly appointed Yugoslav Director of Military Operations and Intelligence. The discussions revealed that the Yugoslavs were completely unready, had no practical plan of action, had an entirely exaggerated idea of the strength of the British forces in Greece and had made no preparations to meet a German attack. The German attack took place two days later and no further touch was obtained with the Yugoslav army.

German Counter Attack in Cyrenaica.

20. Before describing the campaign in Greece it will be convenient to turn to events in Cyrenaica. During March, while the concentration in Greece was proceeding, the situation in Cyrenaica gave me increasing cause for anxiety. Evidence accumulated of the presence of German armoured troops in Libya; but, as already explained, our intelligence reports from Italy and Libya were so scanty and so few aircraft were available for long-range reconnaissance that we remained very much in the dark as to the enemy's real strength or intentions. I still considered, from the evidence available, that an enemy attack was unlikely before the middle of April at the earliest, and I hoped that it might not take place before May, by which time I hoped to be able to strengthen considerably the force in Cyrenaica.

21. The position in Cyrenaica was rendered more difficult by the German air attacks on Benghazi. These began soon after our occupation and in the absence of any effective defence, since practically all available fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft guns were required for Greece, made it hazardous to bring shipping into Benghazi. By the third week in February, the air attacks had become so heavy that it was agreed that the Navy should not risk any more shipping into Benghazi until an effective air defence could be provided. This meant that all supplies had to be brought from Tobruk, increasing the line of communications to the forward troops by more than 200 miles. This was most serious, since it meant that practically all the transport available had to be used in transporting supplies and the mobility of the forward troops was greatly affected. In particular, the 2nd Armoured Division had to be supplied from dumps, instead of having its own transport. This fact later had a very serious effect on operations.