

General Staff, accompanied by my Chief of the General Staff, proceeded to Turkey for discussions with the Turkish Government and General Staff. Though the Turks showed themselves still cordial to the alliance and approved our action in supporting Greece, they professed themselves unable, owing to lack of modern equipment, to take any action should the Germans enter Bulgaria, or to give assistance to the Greeks should the Germans attack them. While these conversations were still in progress the Germans, on 1st March, entered Bulgaria.

13. From Turkey the party proceeded direct on a further visit to Athens. On arrival there they found to their dismay that General Papagos had changed his attitude. He had not, apparently for political reasons, ordered the withdrawal of the troops in Macedonia to the Aliakhmon Line and he now declared this to be impossible in view of the German entry into Bulgaria, since the troops might be attacked while in process of withdrawal. He also stated that any withdrawal of reserves from Albania was impossible. He now proposed that the British contingent should land at Salonika and be sent forward to hold the advanced line in Macedonia which he had agreed at the previous conference was strategically unsound.

The British representatives were therefore faced with the situation that, instead of a strong and effective Greek force to hold the Aliakhmon Line, there would only be one weak division, and that there was every prospect of the Greek forces being defeated in detail. In these circumstances I was summoned to Athens and a series of long conferences took place between 2nd and 5th March, as a result of which it was decided that the Greek army should leave three divisions in Macedonia to defend the prepared positions on the frontier, but would concentrate on the Aliakhmon Line three divisions and seven independent battalions, to hold the line and prepare it for defence until the arrival of the British contingent, which would be disembarked mainly at the Piraeus, except for certain units and stores which would be landed at Volos. This was a very unsatisfactory arrangement in comparison with the original proposal but it was found impossible to persuade the Greeks to move back the troops in Macedonia, and the alternative of refusing to send aid to the Greeks altogether seemed politically impossible.

14. The despatch of the British force to Greece began on 5th March. The formations were to proceed in the following order:—

- 1st Armoured Brigade.
- New Zealand Division.
- 6th Australian Division.
- Polish Independent Brigade Group.
- 7th Australian Division.

It was estimated that the programme would be completed by 11th May.

Concentration of British Forces in Greece

15. General Sir H. M. Wilson had been selected for command of the British forces in Greece, his place in Cyrenaica being taken by Lieut.-General P. Neame from Palestine. General Wilson arrived in Athens on 4th March, but owing to the insistence of the Greek Government on the avoidance of anything that might be held to provoke the Germans he was compelled for a month to remain incognito under

the pseudonym of Mr. Watt. This restriction hampered him in supervising the occupation of the Aliakhmon position and in reconnoitring the ground over which operations might take place. Several representations to the Greek Government, however, were met with a request that his incognito should be preserved, although it was quite obvious that the Germans were well informed both of his presence and of the landing of British troops. It was agreed with the Greek Government that General Wilson, when the time came, should be in command of all the troops, British and Greek, in the Aliakhmon position. This force was subsequently entitled "W" Force. The Greek portion of it was known as the Central Macedonian Army. Its original composition was the 12th Division from Macedonia (six battalions, one field battery, one or two mountain batteries and a group of seven 150 mm. guns); the 20th Division from Florina (six battalions, one or two field batteries and one or two mountain batteries); and the 19th Mechanized Division from Larissa, which had only recently been formed, had little training and was of slight value. The 19th Division was removed to another front on the arrival of the New Zealand Division. There were also seven battalions to be withdrawn from Western Thrace. This Greek force consisted of second line troops of doubtful fighting value, and was a very poor substitute for the original force of five good divisions promised by General Papagos.

16. The general situation in Greece at this time was that practically the whole of the Greek army was involved in Albania, where some 300,000 troops had been concentrated. The aim of the Greek army in Albania had been, ever since their successful counter-attack at the end of 1940, to reach the line Berat-Valona. Not only would this line enable them considerably to shorten their front, but it was estimated that if the port of Valona passed out of Italian hands, the Italians would be quite unable to support the large force they had assembled in northern Albania. The Greeks had made frequent representations to the British Government that British naval and air forces should combine to prevent the transport of reinforcements from Italy across the Adriatic to Albania. In the narrow waters of the Adriatic it was impossible to maintain a sufficient naval force, and our air resources were never sufficient to keep up a heavy scale of attack on the ports in Italy or Albania. Consequently the Italians were able to keep up a continual flow of reinforcements into Albania and to prevent the Greeks from attaining their main objective of Valona. As a result of the appalling conditions of their long winter campaign the Greek army had begun to deteriorate in morale and fighting value.

When the German menace developed it would obviously have been sound strategy for the Greeks to withdraw from Albania to a shorter front, so as to make available reserves for north-eastern Greece to meet the German attack. General Papagos, however, while recognising the theoretical soundness of this move, felt that a withdrawal would have a disastrous effect on the morale of the Greek army after its series of successes over the Italians. Further, the lack of mechanical transport and shortage even of pack animals, together with the very poor communications