

This state of affairs was further aggravated by the fact that during the moonlight nights ships proceeded to sea and kept under way until daylight, with the object of avoiding bombing attacks inside the harbour or being mined in. Although sound in theory owing to the factors mentioned, this resulted in ships frequently disappearing during the course of the night, and all contact with them was lost in the morning, some Captains refusing to bring their ships back for several days. As the planning and success of the evacuation in the early stages largely depended on efficient control of shipping in Greek waters and as Greek ships might be required to assist, quite apart from any shipping from Egypt, it was quite clear this state of affairs would have to be altered. As a first step a signal station was established in Phaleron Bay manned by Royal Naval ratings for reporting and keeping in touch with ships. Greek sailors supplied by Greek naval authorities, with a knowledge of English, were placed on telephone watch at the most important telephones to Piraeus and Phaleron Bay, and interpreters provided. Also an arrangement was come to whereby I gradually took over control of Greek shipping in local waters, and eventually the conduct of all local naval affairs, the Divisional Sea Transport Officer and Naval Control Service Officer moving to my office at G.H.Q. Rear Admiral Turle was left free to give his attention to his diplomatic duties, which increased daily as the situation grew more critical. The cypher staff of the Naval Attaché were later on also transferred to my office. This arrangement was a mutual one between Rear Admiral Turle and myself, and I received every possible assistance and co-operation from him.

5. I could appreciate at once that the bottle-neck of any evacuation would be the small craft required for ferrying troops to H.M. Ships and transports from the beaches. It would have been a bad risk to use what quays were left available at Piraeus, and Kalamai in the S.W. Morea was the only other port with quays. A "Caique and Local Craft Committee" was formed this day under the direction of Commander K. Michell (of the Divisional Sea Transport Officer's staff) with military and Greek representatives, its purpose being to charter and fit out as many caiques, motor boats and local craft as possible. As it turned out hundreds of soldiers owe their escape to caiques and small craft taken up in this manner.

6. The reconnaissance parties already referred to left to reconnoitre beaches and roads. That this was necessary was shown by the fact that one of the best beaches to which roads were shown on some maps and charts had, in fact, no approach roads or tracks whatever, and so was useless for the purpose of evacuation. In order to put the beach organisation on a solid footing, the C.-in-C., Mediterranean was requested to send 12 officers for beaches and services with local craft and 24 Petty Officers and Leading Seamen, 72 Seamen and 6 Signalmen for beaches. These parties were considered vital as a quick turn round of craft at beaches would be essential, and numbers requested were based on the fact that the likelihood of being able to transfer parties from one locality to another under the prevailing conditions, was remote.

7. From a conference held at Air H.Q. this day at which General Wilson, Air Vice Marshal d'Albiac and I were present, the following facts emerged:—

(a) There was a marked deterioration in the military situation and in the morale of the Greek forces, as well as a weakening of the will to resist on the part of the Greek Government. General Papagos, the Greek Commander-in-Chief, had informed General Wilson that, if it was possible, he would like the British forces to be withdrawn as soon as practicable. General Wilson had informed the Greek Commander-in-Chief that the British could hold on for another month, but General Papagos doubted if the Greeks could hold out as long as that.

(b) Two major considerations at this time pointed to an early withdrawal:—

(i) The enemy's superiority in the air.

(ii) The fact that if our forces remained in Greece we would undoubtedly be confronted, at an early date, with the problem of feeding two million people.

(c) The earliest date of D.I for Operation "Demon" was likely to be Monday, 28th April.

(d) It was possible that the Thermopylae line might not hold out as the covering troops might not get back in time to hold it. It was therefore agreed that an emergency plan of evacuation should be made forthwith, without awaiting the results of beach reconnaissances.

8. Large numbers of the British colony were evacuated this day in two ships which sailed after dark. Subsequent to their sailing, I was informed that there were still 1,500 British subjects remaining to be evacuated. Every day saw this number diminishing, as they took whatever Greek ships were available, whether escorted or not.

9. The Greek Prime Minister today committed suicide and a new Government had to be formed.

*Saturday, 19th April.*

10. A conference was held at 1800 at which General Sir Archibald Wavell was present. The following points emerged and show the situation as it was at this time:—

(a) The new Greek Government had not yet been formed, and a new Prime Minister had not yet been elected. No decision had yet been received from the Head of the Government whether they wished to hold out or withdraw.

(b) A cable was received from the British Prime Minister in which he stated that there could be no question of a withdrawal of British troops for the present unless specially requested both by the Greek King and Government. The cable pointed out that as the Greeks had asked for the assistance of British troops in Greece, these troops could not be withdrawn on the grounds that the country would be devastated if they stayed.

(c) General Wilson was of the opinion that we could hold the Thermopylae line indefinitely once our troops were in position.