

(d) I emphasised that I must know not later than Wednesday, 23rd April if withdrawal was to commence on 28th April or not, due to the fact that four days' notice was required before the necessary shipping could be made available in Greek waters.

(e) The A.O.C. drew attention to the precarious state to which his fighter strength was being reduced.

(f) It was decided that no preliminary evacuation should take place, both from the point of view of secrecy and because it was undesirable to discourage the Greeks at this time.

*Sunday, 20th April.*

11. Most of the beach reconnaissance parties returned during the course of the day. As soon as their reports had been considered, an outline plan was drawn up in collaboration with the Army and R.A.F. authorities. The plan was of necessity only a rough approximation, as it was impossible at this time to arrive at reliable figures, or predict the sequence of events in what would obviously be an extremely difficult military operation.

*Monday, 21st April.*

12. News was received that the Adolf Hitler Division had reached Yannina the previous evening, and that the Greek Army in the Epirus had capitulated without informing the Greek Government and without reference to General Papagos, and consequently without warning to the British in Athens. As the left of the Anzac Corps was now under the German threat from the direction of Messolonghion and had insufficient troops to meet it, and as, moreover, there appeared to be a possibility that the Italians and Germans might try a landing at or near Patras which would threaten the whole left rear, General Wilson decided that evacuation must begin at the earliest possible moment. I accordingly requested, as a preliminary step, certain shipping to be held in readiness in Suda Bay in case of emergency.

13. Brigadier Hewer flew to Cairo where a meeting was held at G.H.Q., M.E., to decide ways and means of putting the military and naval outline plans into effect.

14. In the evening I was called to General Wilson's house for a conference, and after dark General Wilson, Brigadier Galloway and I motored to the vicinity of Thebes, and had a conference with General Sir Thomas Blamey. Details of the retirement were decided upon and it was agreed that the evacuation should be commenced at the earliest possible date, which was likely to be the night of 24th/25th April.

15. Today a Naval Signal Office was established at Combined H.Q. with direct telephone lines to Botannikos W/T station and to a stand-by W/T station on the roof of a house about a quarter mile away from G.H.Q. Owing to language difficulties it was necessary to send a P.O. Telegraphist and a Signalman to man the telephone line in Botannikos W/T station. The Signalman had a lamp in case the telephone should be put out of action. The W/T station on the roof maintained communication on 465 kc/s with Suda Bay.

*Tuesday, 22nd April.*

16. At this time it was thought that the Glen ships, in view of C-in-C., Mediterranean's signal timed 1023/19, might already be at

Suda Bay, so that a preliminary evacuation might be possible if required on the night of 23rd/24th April. It was learnt later, however, that the Glen ships were not due to arrive at Suda until 2300 on 23rd April, and so would not be available until 24th/25th.

17. A fresh outline programme was then made out and signalled in my 1429/22. This programme was subsequently altered owing to the fact that the G.O.C. decided it was impracticable, due to the unexpectedly rapid advance of the German forces, to embark the rearguard, who were likely to be in contact with the enemy, from the Megara area, and that it would be necessary to withdraw these troops across the Corinth Canal and embark them from positions in the Morea. As will be seen later, this plan had again to be altered owing to the attack on the Corinth Canal by German parachute troops at daylight on Saturday, 26th April.

18. On 21st and 22nd April there were heavy massed air attacks on shipping and 23 vessels including two hospital ships and the Greek destroyer HYDRA were reported sunk in local waters on these two days. This did not promise well for the evacuation. After consultation with Air Vice Marshal d'Albiac, and considering both the naval and air aspects, I decided that the best time for transports to arrive at the beaches was one hour after dark, and to leave at 0300. This would prevent enemy reconnaissance aircraft from spotting the exact beaches being used, and so bombing them by the light of flares, while the transports should still be able to find the beaches. The early return from the beaches would give some chance of the ships clearing the coast without being spotted, and would give them more time to reach the area within support of the fighters from Crete by daylight or as soon as possible afterwards. There would be no such support from Greece whatsoever from 24th April onwards. I decided to accept the disadvantage of reducing the time the ships were at the beaches in order to give this possible extra security, and as events turned out it appears this was justified. The only transport to leave really late, the SLAMAT, was bombed and sunk and was the only ship to become a total loss after loading. Moreover, no beaches were bombed during embarkation.

*Wednesday, 23rd April.*

19. L.C.T. arrived at their beaches as follows:—

L.C.T.1 and 19 at Megara,

L.C.T.6 at Nauplion,

L.C.T.5 at Lavrion.

All except L.C.T.6 were lost in this operation.

The fact that they had no W/T was a great handicap at this time, as well as decreasing their chances of survival on the Greek coast.

20. Evacuation of the British colony, and certain numbers of troops, was proceeding irregularly in Greek steamers, sailing after dark, mostly for Crete. It was usually with the utmost difficulty that these ships could be found, fuelled and watered so that they could proceed. The majority of them were very slow, and nearly all unescorted.