

launches and caiques of the Levant Schooner Flotilla manned by Royal Naval crews provided the transport.

5. In Rhodes our emissaries were unable to prevent the Italian Governor surrendering the island to the Germans after a short resistance. (There were 30,000 Italian and 7,000 German troops in the island.) The combined service mission waiting at Castelorusso and the 234 Infantry Brigade waiting to proceed to Rhodes were therefore held available to reinforce the British forces in the other islands.

6. During this phase our naval forces, consisting of six Fleet destroyers of the 8th Destroyer Flotilla, 2 Hunt class destroyers, 1st Submarine Flotilla, 6 motor launches, 4 L.C.F.* caiques and 8 R.A.F. high speed launches and pinnaces were employed on:—

(a) Building up British forces and supplies in the islands.

(b) Intercepting enemy shipping proceeding from the Piraeus to the Dodecanese.

7. By 28th September, the following had been landed:—

2,700 men, 21 guns, 7 vehicles, 450 tons of stores and ammunition.

8. Acting on air reconnaissance, on reports from agents in the Piraeus area and from Italian reporting posts and L.R.D.G.† patrols in the Cyclades, destroyers carried out sweeps in the Aegean by night, retiring to the southward or lying up in Leros during the day. On 18th September, H.M.S. FAULKNER (Captain A. K. Scott-Moncrieff, D.S.O., R.N.), H.M.S. ECLIPSE (Commander E. Mack, D.S.O., D.S.C., R.N.) and H.M.S. QUEEN OLGA (Lieutenant-Commander G. Blessas, D.S.O., R.H.N.) sank a 3,000 ton merchant vessel and a 1,200 ton merchant vessel north of Stampalia and damaged the escort vessel, which put into Stampalia and was captured by one of our patrols assisted by the Italian garrison. This convoy was carrying specialist personnel and supplies to Rhodes. On 23rd September, H.M.S. ECLIPSE sank a 2,500 ton merchant vessel off the S.W. point of Rhodes which had landed reinforcements in Rhodes and was returning to the westward. An ex-Italian torpedo-boat was driven ashore and later destroyed by the R.A.F.

9. Prior to the Italian surrender, the Germans had made preparations to take over the entire military administration of Greece as from 6th September and had disposed sufficient forces on the west coast of Greece, the Peloponnesus, Melos, Crete, Scarpanto and Rhodes, to ensure the retention of their control in these key positions. In the period immediately following the surrender, the Germans were in no position to undertake seaborne operations, owing to the lack of shipping, escort vessels and landing craft, which they had to obtain from the Italians or transfer from other areas. By the middle of September, however, they had collected enough craft to despatch raiding forces to the Cyclades to evacuate the Italian garrisons and such food

and war material as they could lay their hands on. With the exception of Syra they established observation posts only and did not garrison the islands in force.

10. Apart from Rhodes, the Italians' attitude was co-operative in the islands visited by us, though their fighting value was low. It was considered that even if Leros were reinforced by such British troops as were available and Kos airfields developed and defended adequately, we should not be in a secure position to continue operations in the Aegean until Rhodes was in our possession. Accordingly on 22nd September the Chiefs' of Staff approval was obtained to mount "Accolade" before the end of October with such forces as were available in the Middle East and could be spared from the Central Mediterranean.

PHASE II.

The Start of the German Offensive.

26th September-12th October.

11. With the arrival of large enemy air reinforcements from France and the Russian front and the proved inefficiency of the A.A. defences of Leros, as shewn by the sinking of H.M.S. INTREPID (Commander C. A. de W. Kitcat, R.N.) and H.M.S. QUEEN OLGA in Leros harbour on 26th September, operations of our surface forces in the Aegean were restricted to sweeps during the dark hours with forces who retired to the south-eastward to obtain fighter cover from Cyprus during the day. On 1st October all available Fleet destroyers were sailed to Malta as escort to H.M. Ships HOWE and KING GEORGE V, leaving us with the Hunts whose speed and endurance made it difficult for them to operate far into the Aegean and still be clear by daylight. As a result, H.M.S. ALDENHAM (Lieutenant-Commander J. I. Jones, D.S.O., D.S.C., R.N.R.), H.M.S. MIAULIS (Commander C. Nikitiades) and H.M.S. THEMISTOCLES (Lieutenant-Commander N. Sarris, R.H.N.) who were patrolling off Kaso Strait on the night of the 2nd/3rd October, were short of fuel and in no position to take action on an aircraft report of an enemy convoy sighted off Naxos and believed on all available intelligence to be bound for Rhodes. They were ordered to withdraw to Alexandria for fuel. This convoy, in fact, carried an invasion force which was landed on Kos at 0500 on October 3rd and captured the island in spite of stubborn resistance from the British battalion, who received small assistance from the Italian garrison.

12. No surface force was available to interfere with the landing, but submarines on patrol were ordered to proceed to the Kos area to attack invasion shipping, and on 4th October the 12th Cruiser Squadron, consisting of H.M. Ships AURORA, flying the broad pendant of Commodore W. E. Agnew, C.B., D.S.O., R.N., PENELOPE (Captain G. D. Belben, D.S.C., A.M., R.N.), SIRIUS (Captain P. W. B. Brooking, D.S.C., R.N.) and DIDO (Captain J. Terry, M.V.O., R.N.), with five Fleet destroyers sailed from Malta at high speed to be available for operations in the Aegean. From the night of 5th/6th onwards a force of cruisers and destroyers patrolled

Admiralty footnotes:

* L.C.F.—large landing craft converted to mount A.A. guns for air defence in combined operations.

† L.R.D.G.—Long Range Desert Group.