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MEMORIES OF A BRITISH OFFICER SERVING  
IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS EXECUTIVE IN GREECE, 1941

The «Ochi» (No!) of Metaxas to Mussolini's ultimatum and the Greek counter - offensive in the harsh winter of 1940-1941 won world - wide admiration. The offensive was largely an unaided effort. In view of his wide commitments Wavell was able at first to send only a Military Mission and a few squadrons of fighter - aircraft, and later, after the victory in the Western Desert in January 1941, large quantities of captured Italian transport and supplies. The Greeks excelled in mountain warfare; men, women and mules moved their artillery high up above the snow - line, and the Evzones, the Greek Highlanders, charged down with the battlecry of «Aera», and drove off the Italians with the bayonet and the hand - grenade. As we found later, they suffered more casualties from frostbite (*kryopagemata*) than from enemy action. The spirit of the people in Athens was tremendous. Unified behind Metaxas and confident in their achievements, they sang ballads ridiculing the «macaroni - eaters» and their bull - frog of a leader in truly Aristophanic manner, and they showed a sense of purpose and discipline which appeared also in the soldiers and sailors who seemed to be constantly on the march through the streets of Athens. All entertainments were off, except for a night - club or two for foreigners, where British and Germans sat at adjoining tables. For Greece was still at peace with Germany.

S.O.E. in Athens was attached to the Embassy and had offices near it in Merlin St. It was run by two young business men, P. and P., one of whom had had much local experience, and the staff was assisted by girl secretaries, store - keepers and so on — a set - up more akin to peacetime and not what I had been accustomed to in Palestine. At first my task was to deal with the arrival of stores at the Peiraeus and their delivery to Merlin St., and to negotiate at the «Poudrerie», or arms factory on the outskirts of Athens, where we were buying up large quantities of small arms and ammunition. Later I was put on to the training of Greek agents in the use of explosives, which involved driving to remote parts of the coast, blowing up hunks of scrap - iron, and getting away before the police arrived. These activities brought me into touch with some of the leaders of a clandestine organisation in Athens, which had been equipped with wireless

transmitters of the type made by us in Palestine. It was clear to me that a few of these agents and leaders were Venizelist and that the bulk of them were Communists. This was the legacy of a decision which had been taken many months earlier.

The background to that decision had been something like this. It was thought that Metaxas and his fellow - Generals, such as Papagos, having been trained as young officers in Germany, were likely not to resist Germany, with which of course their régime had something in common. As S.O.E. was concerned not with initial resistance to the Axis but with sabotage and resistance after occupation by the enemy, the decision had been taken to train only anti - Metaxas elements. These were of two kinds. The first consisted of senior Army officers and politicians of the Venizelist group, whom Metaxas had ousted at the time of his coup d'état and had not seen fit to employ in senior positions; in general these were elderly men, as the younger Venizelists had joined up to fight against Italy. The others were Communists who had been outlawed by Metaxas and were generally still in hiding. They were highly trained in underground methods, as they had been operating in this way for some years, and they were far more determined characters than the average Venizelist; but their loyalties were to Russia, and at this stage in the war Russia was at peace with Germany.

It seemed to me absurd to train the anti - Metaxas personnel only. The heroes of the war were fighting under the Metaxas Government against the Italians in Albania, and the best of these would fight on in the hills or provide information from the cities, if Greece was occupied. I argued that the basis on which the earlier decision had been taken was no longer valid, and that Greece would resist Germany also, if Germany intervened. I won the argument, and a change of policy was approved; but it came too late. The political scene was changing rapidly. Germany was already in possession of Bulgaria, and the Yugoslav regime was pro - German. On March 27th a revolution brought Yugoslavia over to our side. It was a great opportunity for S.O.E. in Athens. We sent supplies of arms and explosives as fast as we could by rail, so that a Yugoslav resistance movement could be equipped. This was the beginning in fact of the Chetnik movement, soon to be led by Mihailovits. At the last moment our Cairo H.Q. woke up to the possibility of organising a resistance movement in Greece, and a mission headed by Peter Fleming, the Tibetan explorer, arrived only a few days before the German invasion began. Fleming's task

was to select bases for guerrilla warfare and to organise supplies and personnel. He invited me to join his mission, but in my opinion he had come too late in the day. I refused his invitation and advised him to work through official Greek channels and select his bases first in Northern Pindus and in Chalcidice. Needless to say, the plans were still-born and nothing came of the mission.

On Sunday April 6th Belgrade was savagely bombed by the Luftwaffe. On the same day Metaxas said «No» to an ultimatum from Germany. Crowds collected at the British Embassy, singing «God save the King» and «Tipperary»; there were bands and demonstrations in the streets, and flags were flown everywhere. That night the Germans made an air-raid on the Peiraeus. A ship loaded with explosives was hit, and there was a tremendous explosion, which fetched down a bit of the ceiling in my room five miles away. At dawn the next day I drove a lorry down to the Peiraeus and collected S.O.E. stores, which were to be sent off to Yugoslavia.

On April 7th I was sent north with a medium-sized lorry and a small Greek driver. My orders were to meet a party of British and other diplomats who were in flight from Belgrade, and hoped to reach Florina before the German advance from Yugoslavia caught up with them. The one and only main road to the north, via Thebes and Larissa, was devoid of tarmac and heavily pot-holed. On the way I picked up two Greek privates who had been injured through frost-bite, and were now returning from sick-leave. Their one aim was to get back to the fighting line. They were as confident as ever of a quick victory. Their mood was reflected in every village on the journey north until I reached Florina. There it was reported that the Germans were already in occupation of Salonica, having smashed their way through South Serbia and North Macedonia. As the British line lay south of Salonica, the Germans were not yet in contact with our main forces. Another detachment of Germans was expected to enter Florina from the north in a matter of hours. The Greek H.Q. at Florina was in turmoil. The Greek Colonel in command told me he was moving his unit south to Amyntaion behind our front line, but in fact, as I learnt later, he himself with his staff set off for Koritsa in Albania, leaving his troops to fall back to Amyntaion in confusion.

There were already at Florina a number of Serbian refugees, mostly women and children, who had been stopped by the Greeks and refused admission towards the south. I interviewed them and advised them to work their way back into Yugoslavia during the confusion

of the German advance. Most of the women were hysterical and in deadly fear of German planes machine - gunning them from the air. I gave them some food and money, but I doubt if they had the courage to move. Among them were two young officers of the Yugoslav Air Force. Before the change in Government which had brought Yugoslavia into the war, they had taken to the hills and crossed in snow over the Greek frontier, in order to join the Allies. The Greeks had no use for them, but after examining their papers, I said I would take them back to Athens. No one had heard of my party of British and other diplomats, and it was clear that they could not now arrive ahead of the Germans.

When I left Florina, all Greek troops and many civilians had gone, the latter removing their valuables to the hills. The town was very quiet as we set off with our two Yugoslavs and some lightly wounded Greek soldiers. The Serbian refugees watched us go in silence. My driver, a little Greek private, drove at full speed and in great fear to the cross - roads where the Florina road joins the main road from Yugoslavia, down which the advancing Germans might be expected.

When we were on the main road, we found it was so impeded with piles of road metal that it was, in effect, a one - way road. As everyone was going south now, this may not seem to have mattered, but in fact there was general confusion. Some Greek troops had their stores and ammunition dragged by horses or oxen. Others tried to force their way past in rickety buses, converted by a daub of paint into military vehicles, or in large Italian trucks which had been captured in Libya and sent to Greece. One realised the difficulties the Greeks must have had in supplying their front in Albania, and the difficulty they would now have in keeping contact with our mechanised forces. The Greek troops were in good heart. There were no civilians refugees on the road. The only peasant to whom I spoke was hastening south to report for duty, as his age group was due for conscription. His only fear was that he might be too late for the fighting. As we passed through the British outposts at Klidhi, the road was already drilled for mining, and the guns and tanks were deployed. The men were having their tea, and were rather quiet. The weather had been as splendid as only Greek weather in the Spring can be, but at midday it had turned cold and a drizzle was falling. There was still snow on the hilltops. We entered Amyntaion just before dark. The town was full of Yugoslavs and Greeks who were jostling one another as they queued up to catch the train which ran south towards Kozani. On the edge of the town.

a Yugoslav mechanised battery was parked; its officers were resplendent in blue and gold uniforms, and walked with a swagger. They had not been in action, and contrasted strangely with the shabby Greek troops who had seen service in Albania. Greek H.Q. appeared to be in some confusion; no officer of the unit to which my wounded Greek soldiers belonged could be found, and I decided to take them on to Kozani.

When we reached Kozani, rain and sleet had set in. It was clear that many of our deployed M.T. (motor transport) and guns were in danger of being bogged down where they stood. The advanced landing-ground for aircraft at Kozani was said to be unusable. That evening I left Kozani and drove by night through Thessaly where the asphodels on the hillsides were shining like white wax in bright moonlight. We had a picnic at dawn by the roadside, and later we dropped down the twisting road to Lamia — a road which lends itself to demolition. We rested during the day, and we left at dark on the last stage of our journey via Thebes to Athens. I drove at night to keep out of the way of our main forces, which were still moving up from Athens to the forward areas during daylight.

At Athens the head of my department was as confident as ever that he would be wintering in Greece. He sent me out to hire flats for more personnel on a year's lease, the bulk of the rent being paid in advance. I visited a friend in the Intelligence Department of C.H.Q. and suggested to him that the weak point of our main line was west of Klidhi where an undefended route led to Grevena, and that it was possible for mechanised forces to proceed from Grevena via Velemishti or Milia to Kalabaka. He did not think so. Indeed he denied that such a route was practicable for mechanised transport. I consulted Professor Wace, then in the Passport Control Office, who agreed with me in thinking the route possible for mechanised forces. Our friend was unshaken in his opinion. As we heard later, this was the route by which the Germans turned our position along the lower Haliaemon River, reached Ioannina, and caused the Greek collapse. If we had blown up a bridge or two they would not have got through.

In Athens the same enthusiasm prevailed. There were processions in the streets. One of the most popular was a parade of mountain guns; they were carried by mules down Stadium Street, en route for the front in Albania. If there was an air raid at night, everyone went into the streets or on to the roof-tops and cheered when a search-light held a German plane in its beam. On one occasion we saw one shot

down in flames. Excitement ran high in the belief that the British and the Greeks would hold the Germans and the Italians. I had been only a few days in Athens, when the head of my department sent for me and explained that preliminary plans were being made for the demolition of certain targets in the event of a withdrawal. Among the targets allocated to our department was the cotton factory at Lake Copais. He explained that any demolition would have to be carried out without the knowledge of the Greek Government. He wanted me to make a reconnaissance but he considered there was no need for haste, and that I should not take up any explosive. I insisted on leaving at once with explosive, and gained my point. Another officer and I set off on April 21st in a shiny blue Ford pick - up, loaded with explosives, incendiaries and tins of petrol. When I had visited Peiraeus after the great explosion, I had seen wooden barges laden with cotton bales. The barges were burnt away to water level, but the bales were burnt only on the outside. I reckoned I should need a combination of explosives, incendiaries and petrol at Lake Copais, and I expected that we should have to act quickly when the time came.

We left shortly after dawn, and soon saw German planes flying high towards Peiraeus and Patras. It was a clear bright day. We passed many burnt - out trucks on the roadside, and there was little traffic. We watched out for German planes as far as was possible in our shiny Ford with its enclosed driver's seat. We were passing through a hollow with low hills on all sides, and there were some army trucks ahead of us, when I saw four German planes swoop over the hills on our right. I jammed on the brakes and dived for the ditch as the planes opened fire. The truck in front was hit. It blew up in a burst of flame. The planes disappeared in a matter of seconds. We drove on past the gutted truck and reached cover at Haliartus before the next planes came over low and machine - gunned the road. I learnt that an A.A. battery H.Q. was located at the hostel of the Lake Copais Company on a wooded hill - top. I went to visit the C.O., who generously agreed to house my explosives in a larder alongside his mess. As German planes were coming over low every fifteen minutes he asked me to get my conspicuous vehicle off - loaded in one of the intervals. It was off - loaded in time, but in cacking out of a difficult approach to the larder, my off rear wheel dropped into an open drain up to the axle. The car was stuck in the open, its shiny roof reflecting the rays of the sun. By collecting every man within hearing, we lifted it out bodily, and I got it under some trees just in time as the next batch of planes roared over.

The Germans were engaged mainly in bombing the cross-roads at Haliartus, which lay just below us, and they occasionally machine-gunned the village beside the road. The enclosure of the Copais Company factory lay alongside the road and not far from the crossroads. It was surrounded by a high wall. We found that the gate was locked, and the place was deserted. I walked up the hill behind the village, found a peasant, and eventually located a Greek official of the Copais Company. After some delay, he brought me the main keys. I explained that my job was to see what precautions could be taken against fire in the factory, if German bombers should hit it. He was not willing to accompany us to the factory. We reconnoitred it as far as we could. The warehouses were padlocked. We could see into them only by placing ladders against small ventilation windows which were high up in the walls. We found that they contained large stocks of cotton in bale and in slack, wheat in slack, and engine rooms. About lunchtime there was a lull in the German bombing, and we joined the A.A. mess to eat our rations. They told us of the retreat from Thessaly, and of their own need to conserve their A.A. ammunition at present. The German bombing had done almost no damage to the main road. On the other hand, we could see big fires burning in the railway yard at Levadeia to the north. Although none of us knew it, the Greek command in Albania had surrendered that very morning, and the main Greek force was out of the battle. This turned our position on the Greek mainland, for the Germans could and did press on to the Peloponnese, crossing the western part of the Gulf of Corinth. The surrender of the Greek Army was not published on our side until the 27th, by which date the evacuation had begun and the Greek Government had flown to Crete. The intensive bombing of the main road was intended to hinder our eventual retreat. German planes were coming in from the north and from the east from (the Dodecanese), meeting at Haliartus in pursuit of their objectives. We saw enough of German air power on that day to appreciate the danger.

Returning to Athens that evening, I handed in my report. Next day I was sent to Eleusis to transport a magnetic mine from there to Peiraeus in an open lorry. The Eleusis airfield, where I loaded the mine, had just been successfully raided by the Luftwaffe, and several gutted planes were still smoking on the airfield. With the mine I collected an able-bodied seaman, one Saunders, with rabbit teeth, sandy hair, and an engaging grin. He sat astride the mine as if it were a horse, and grinned as we bounced along the pot-holes with a yard or more of

the mine sticking over the tail-board. On the outskirts of Athens the air-raid sirens blew, but I drove on through Stadium Street with Greek police trying to stop me, for the rule was that all traffic should stop during an air-raid. Saunders had a good laugh when he saw them gaping at the tail of the mine after we had passed them. We reached Peiraeus with the «all clear», and I left the mine and Saunders with a young naval officer called Mike Cumberlege.

A couple of days later I joined him for the planting of the mine in the Corinth Canal. It was a very secret operation and had to be done without the knowledge of the Greek authorities. I was required as a Greek-speaking officer, so that we could obtain permission to pass through the Canal in our caïque. It proved less difficult than I had expected, because the news of the Greek capitulation in Albania had spread, and the Greek naval officers at the entrance to the Canal were less careful than usual. They went over the caïque, but disregarded our dinghy, which was in tow with Saunders and the mine sitting inside it, entirely covered by a large tarpaulin. As we chugged our way through the steep-sided passage of the Canal, we noted faults in the rock, and places where demolition might be possible. After passing below the road-bridge and the Greek guards high above us, Mike joined Saunders in the dinghy, activated the mine and dumped it overboard, while we were still in the deep shadow of the canal side. At the western end of the Canal we asked for some information (to account for our presence there), and then sailed back through the canal and on to the Peiraeus. It was hoped that the mine would sink the first metal-hulled ship to use the canal, almost certainly an Italian naval vessel, but Mike learnt later, that the mine failed to go off.

In Athens, I spent some of the night-hours taking special stores round to our agents in Athens, driving without lights through backstreets, and going quietly into untenanted houses like a footpad. One morning I pressed for orders to undertake the demolition at Lake Copais. The head of my department was now opposed to the demolition, perhaps because the presence of wheat in the stores could be used as a reason for not destroying the cotton. On the other hand, I knew that cotton was much needed by the Germans. In the end, I persuaded him to go with me to see General Heywood, the Commander of the Allied Mission in Greece. An elderly, tired man, he dithered and then decided against demolition. I asked permission to take the matter to the G.O.C., «Jumbo» Wilson. Heywood was displeased, but did not refuse. I caught the G.O.C. before a conference, and explained the position. He decided



immediately that the warehouses should be demolished. I collected five sappers, and set off in the evening for Copais, with another officer under me. We took two cars. We were to report by dawn on the next day but one at a small harbour near the Peiraeus for evacuation by caique. If we missed the caique, we must take our chance.

We reached Haliartus after dark, having passed many more burnt out vehicles than on the last trip. My orders were to contact the advanced H.Q., but we learnt it had already moved to the south of us. I therefore drove up to the A.A. post on the hill-top, which we found deserted, but my demolition stores were intact. We shifted the stores down to the warehouses, and forced an entry with a crowbar, which I had brought with me from Athens. The cotton was in three great warehouses, built of concrete with sliding doors and metal roofs. The bales were packed tight together in stacks from floor to roof, but there were narrow alleyways between the stacks. My plan was to cut the steel tapes of the bales facing the metal doors, and to lay small explosive and incendiary charges in the interstices between the bales; to lay heavier charges among the stacks further inside the warehouses; and to leave charges against the end walls, which would blow holes and create a through draught. We only had a small supply of petrol. This was concentrated beside the bales facing the metal doors. We finished the setting of the charges by 5 a.m. The men had worked in shifts. As one of them was ill, and the officer was no help, I sent them off in one of the cars to Athens. The rest of us lay outside the main warehouse in the sun, all with gelnite headaches and sleepy. Not long after dawn, four planes came over. They circled over the warehouses, and dropped several salvoes of bombs. I called out to the men to lie still, but one man jumped up and ran as the first lot dropped. One bomb fell some fifty yards away, and at that moment he slipped and fell in front of a steel door. The door was perforated, but he was untouched. During the bombing, I had heard several of the charges detonate in the adjoining warehouse. As it was intended to make the destruction of the cotton appear to be due either to enemy action or an accident, I had laid small charges only. So no harm was done. But we moved to the outer side of the compound for the rest of the day.

During the day, which was hot and clear, the bombing of the road was fairly continuous, but the bombs were not heavy ones. I found an R.E. officer in Haliartus who agreed to bring me some forty-four gallon drums of petrol from a dump which I had discovered nearby. He sent for me later to help nurse a Greek soldier whose leg had been

almost severed below the knee by shrapnel from a bomb. Like many others who had surrendered with the Greek forces in Epirus, he was walking home to his village and he had been resting near the road after dawn, when the bombing started. There were no medical stores or stretchers. He lay under a tree on a trestle bed in a field. When I talked Greek to him, he was partly delirious and kept repeating the question «pou eene to podhi mou?» «where is my foot»? Later, he told me he was a peasant from a village in the Peloponnese with a wife and children, but he always returned to the same question, however often I said his leg was damaged, but would probably be saved. Eventually, we got a truck and sent him down to a field dressing station. I was violently sick at one stage in the proceedings. It made one feel the pathos of war for a simple-hearted and uneducated Greek peasant whose family would be brought almost to starvation by the splinter of that bomb. He himself was so brave in his pain, and so grateful for the little one could do.

Late in the day, I inspected the damage to the factory and warehouses and chased out some looting Greeks on the pretext that I was responsible for guarding the buildings and preventing fire. By the evening we had the forty-four gallon drums of petrol in place. The retreat was now under way. A solid stream of vehicles began to pass southwards as soon as the light faded. Just before dark a fire started in an outlying warehouse, fortunately the furthest from the road, so that the stream of vehicles was not lit up. The R.E. Officer told me that he would demolish the road bridge at Haliartus at 2 a.m., by which time the last of our forces would have passed. As it would take us five or more hours to reach Athens, we should not catch our caique if we waited until then. I explained the situation to the R.E. officer, and he agreed to fire my charges at 2 a.m. He came over to see the charges and liked the job.

We stayed till 9 p.m. to guard the warehouse. The burning warehouse cast a glow over the other buildings, and we saw no Greeks inside the enclosure. As I was driving out in our small car with my four sappers, an old Greek, whom I has been pottering about during the day, passed in the glow of the fire. I had to decide whether or not to shoot him. He had seemed a bit cracked when I had spoken to him during the day, and my charges were well hidden. So we let him go. On the main road, we fell into the stream of trucks, and drove on through clouds of dust. It was a slow procession of vehicles, nose to tail with dimmed lights, and it moved at little more than walking speed.

When we stopped, we realized that on each side of the road a line of men was walking southwards. They were Greek soldiers who had laid down their arms in Albania. They never asked for a lift. We felt respect and affection for them as they wished us good luck and a happy return to Greece. As Winston Churchill wrote later, «there were no recriminations. The friendliness and aid which the Greeks had so faithfully shown to our troops endured to the end... Greek martial honour stands undimmed». Around 3 a.m. I broke out of the stream and turned off for Athens. Although dawn was near, I had to stop until my eyes were rested once the strain of driving in convoy was over. We passed through Athens, which was as quiet as the grave, and reached the little harbour in the grey light of dawn. I blew the horn and shouted, but we got no reply. I put off in a rowing boat, and found our caique near the mouth of the harbour. They were getting ready to sail in the firm belief that we had not come in time.

By mid-day we were bathing at Hydra. We sailed on down to Monemvasia in Laconia, where we were to take off General Heywood on the 28th. We anchored in a bay north of Monemvasia. Next morning I walked into Monemvasia town where I found a Greek destroyer and merchantman anchored inshore. Entering the cafe alongside, I learnt from some of the crew of the destroyer that they had been in convoy for Egypt when they had been bombed. Some of the ships had gone on, but these two had had a minor mutiny, and had put back. There was much ill-feeling between officers and men, and arguments were still going on. A roar of planes brought us outside, and we saw twelve Messerschmidts diving towards us. We dashed back into the restaurant as the bombs fell, bringing down most of the plaster. I noticed one Greek turning an olive-green to yellow colour, the colour in which fear was expressed in antiquity. As the bombing ceased, a sailor dashed in and hurled himself into a corner. He had been aboard the destroyer by himself (although she had A.A. guns), and he had swum the short distance to the rocks before the bombs came. The destroyer had been hit and was in two parts, her bows cast up into the rocks, and the merchantman was burning. The Greeks were soon going home in twos and threes with their kitbags on their shoulders, officers as well as men. The war had definitely ended for them.

Further inland, I found a British officer who had come ahead to arrange for the evacuation. As I had explored part of the coast, I told him of beaches, and said I would try to bring our caiques round to help in the evacuation next evening. As I was returning to our two

caiques, I was stopped by a car carrying a naval captain and his family, survivors from a ship hit in the Peiraeus. They had got away by sea to the Peloponnese and had taken a taxi to Monemvasia, where evacuation was due the next evening. He told me that General Heywood had been evacuated by plane. On the way to our own anchorage, I stripped and swam out to four seaplanes which lay off - shore in shallow water. I wanted to see if they required demolition. I was on one when I spotted a German plane flying low in my direction. I jumped off and swam as quickly as I could to the shore. As he began machine-gunning the sea - planes, I was lying flat on the beach. It was clear that the vicinity of Monemvasia was a dangerous place for any caique to be. So when I got back to the others, I suggested that one caique should sail at once for Crete with the women and children of the Greek skipper, and with all the stores, and that the second should stay to help with the evacuation, but they decided that both should remain.

Just before dawn I heard engines, and made out small landing - craft coming in all round us. It was clear that they were coming in for the evacuation, and that they had chosen our anchorage as a hide-up. I persuaded the others that our anchorage was now unhealthy. They sailed off northwards to Yeraka, further up the coast while I got ashore and talked to the naval people. Their commander, Rear - Admiral Bailey Gromer, told me his craft were staying for that day and would move into Monemvasia at dusk. I guided one of his officers into Monemvasia to make contact with the Army and arrange a plan for evacuation. We found a Brigadier Galloway with some staff officers, and had a conference. As he was short of small craft, it was agreed that I should bring a caique round to Monemvasia that night. I then walked to Yeraka, passing two villages where bread and good wishes were pressed upon me by Greeks who knew of the Greek surrender, but not of the fate of their sons serving in Albania. On the way I heard bombing and saw planes over Bailey Gromer's force.

Just before I reached Yeraka, I saw a German plane fly low over Yeraka bay and drop its bombs. I could not see the water as a ridge of rock lay between, but I watched the timbers and the brebis flying upwards. Hurrying over the rocks, I saw several caiques sunk, and only one of our two afloat. All the caiques had been anchored in a row along one side of the narrow channel. They offered a perfect target. None of our people was about, but in response to my shouts a Greek of our party emerged from some rocks. I told him to come and help me move the surviving caique to the other side of the channel, where

she would be less exposed. I swam out to her, and after some argument he came to join me. We up - anchored and towed her in with a rowing boat. As I got ashore the Greek owner of the caique went abroad and started a fight with the Greek who had helped me, both parties drawing knives, but I got them apart.

As one of our caiques was sunk, and it proved impossible to engage another caique to help in the evacuation, we all got aboard the survivor, and sailed off after dusk. With the first light of dawn we saw cruiser and destroyers at sea, outlined against the morning sky. The Greeks cried out that they were Italian ships; then planes came over, and the ships and the planes tried at one another, until an exchange of rockets established that they were on the same side. Later, we learnt they were our ships and planes. At the time we hurried into the cover of some desert islands called the Ananas, and brought the caique to anchor in a shady place so that we should be less visible from the air. In the evening, a whaleboat came round the corner of the island. We shouted and waved, and it came towards us. It contained twenty - four survivors of the destroyer «Wryneck», which had been sunk during the evacuation. Some were wounded and all were cold and hungry after thirty - six hours in the water and in the whaleboat. It had been calm all day, but now a wind was getting up. After talking it over with the Greek caique skipper, I decided that we should tow the whaler and jettison all our cargo in order to take the men on board. We gave them food and drink, and dressed their wounds. An engineer petty - officer who was in charge of them kept going despite a stomach wound. One of the crew was a wretched Lascar, half - dead with cold and exposure.

At dusk we set off towards Crete, our hold crammed with the men, and the whaler in tow. It was difficult to keep the men in the hold until we got out to sea, where we ran into big waves. With a following wind and sea, we made good speed, and the whaler towed well with two men to steer her. I slept a bit sitting opposite a Greek sailor, with my head resting on his shoulder and his on mine, and with our legs dangling into the forecastle hatch. Next morning we were picked up by an «A» lighter, which towed us into Souda Bay at noon. We spent several hours arranging for the wounded men to go to an emergency hospital, and for our caique to be moored in a safe place. Then a lift to Canea, a meal in a Taverna and a long sleep under the trees. Next morning I woke to find men of all ranks around me, the flotsam and jetsam of the evacuation from Greece. The wine - shops were the great

attraction. Before the day was out, I was called in twice by wine-shop owners who knew I spoke Greek. On the first occasion I turned out some Aussies who were breaking the shop up, but on the second occasion I was thrown out by the Aussies.

In Canea the usual scramble was going on for the best accommodation. The advance party of my branch had staked a claim on a large house, and expected to occupy it for the winter at least. The company was made up of officers, English girl typists, Greek staff and hanger-son, including a girl from a cabaret in Athens. It was suggested that I should go on to Cairo, but I was eager to stay in Crete. I obtained permission to join Mike Cumberlege, whom I had already met in Egypt and Athens. He was in command of H.M.S. «Dolphin». She was a metal-hulled caique from Haifa. At a distance she appeared to be an innocent caique or Greek sailing-vessel, but in fact she was well armed with two Lewis guns and two Bren guns set on anti-aircraft mountings, and a two-pounder gun in her bows. In Greece she had shot down several enemy planes, and she had done good work in ferrying troops from the beaches at Nauplia and Monemvasia to the destroyers. Her crew was formed by Mike and his cousin Cle, a regular R.A. officer; an able-bodied seaman of eighteen years' service, Saunders, who had ridden on my magnetic mine through Athens; and two Palestinian Jews, Sam and Johnny. I joined her one evening, and the next morning I rowed some three miles in a small dinghy to one of the two small islands where we had a dump of explosives, at the mouth of Souda Bay. Here we had an officer in charge, and there was also a company of New Zealand A.A. machine-gunners camped on the island. After arranging for the transport of stores for the «Dolphin», I rowed back in a flat calm sea with a hot sun. When I was in the middle of the bay, several waves of dive-bombers attacked the shipping at the head of the bay and came out towards the two islands, flying as low as possible to keep underneath the anti-aircraft fire. Sitting in my dinghy, I seemed to be in the centre of the falling shrapnel. My first reaction was to lie down under the thwarts, where I listened to the bangs on the sides of the boat caused by the concussion of the bombs in the sea, and to the splashes of the falling shrapnel. Then it seemed ridiculous to lie down, so I sat up again and tried to row on in seeming indifference. Then once again I would lie down under the thwarts. In this halting manner I reached the first ship as the raid was ending. I was greeted with cheers and catcalls from its crew and gunners, who had had a good laugh at my antics.

Our first job for the Navy was to reconnoitre the beaches on the south coast of Crete for the landing of stores, since Souda was already too dangerous for general purposes. Mike also had in mind the value of such a reconnaissance for a return to Crete, if it was lost to the enemy. Our first trip was by car to Sphakia, a village famous for its brigands, which lies at the foot of a deep ravine and has the smallest of landing places. The road was of the worst. In the southern stretch, it was only partly excavated, and ended abruptly, as so many Greek roads do, a few miles from Sphakia. The Sphakia road looked most unsuitable for the carting of stores. From the road end we walked down a torrent bed within the deep ravine.

From Sphakia we took a small caique to Loutro, a better landing place, but almost inaccessible by land. Several caiques lay there, close together, as they had lain at Yeraka Bay, offering a good bombing target. We heard later that all of them were sunk by bombing in the last stages of the campaign. Returning by Sphakia, we carried up a box of eggs and a crate of fish to our car, and returned to Souda where we handed in a report on Sphakia and Loutro beaches. Next day we sailed along the coast to Heraklion, where we had our engines overhauled, a job which lasted a week. During that time Cle and I crossed the island and reconnoitred the beaches at Matala, Kokkinos Pyrgos, and Ayia Galene, of which only Kokkinos Pyrgos was suitable for landing stores. On these trips we met some of Pendlebury's guerrilla chiefs, usually elderly men of peasant type, dressed in Cretan costume and carrying a variety of weapons. They were perhaps too well-known; for those I met were mostly killed by the Germans soon after the fall of Crete. At Heraklion we had some happy evenings with John Pendlebury. He was eager to find out what the enemy had in store for us. He drew up a plan for a raid on Kaso, in which John and his picked men were to take some prisoners from whom information of enemy plans might be obtained. Pendlebury wanted me to join him and stay with him should Crete fall; we left it open until our raid on Kaso was made. Meanwhile he gave me some idea of his organisation. The difficulty, as always, was to get arms and ammunition; the rifles and ammunition which had been destined for him had been diverted to Greece and had never returned, so that his force was almost weaponless.

By this time we had seen some of the forces available for the defence of Crete. In Souda, Canea and Heraklion the survivors of the Expeditionary Force which had been evacuated from the Greek main-

land were deficient in equipment; caiques were still coming in with men who did not even have rifles. Some of the Australians were without arms, and some without discipline, drinking hard and talking much of the fifth column. Crete had lost two divisions, one in Albania and one in Thrace, and there were now few Cretans of military age in the island. The people resented the loss of these two divisions and were critical of the Greek Government and Staff. The Commander of a Cretan division and some other officers escaped from Greece and landed near Canea, to be shot by their countrymen for leaving the division behind. But there was no doubt the Cretans would fight with anything we could give them. Apart from the Cretans, there were some Greek regular officers who had escaped from Greece, and a small force of Greek recruits who had been undergoing training in Crete for service in Albania. At Heraklion we had a battalion of the Black Watch and some other units which had not been in Greece, and so were fully equipped; they gave a good account of themselves later. We did not know the situation at Malemi.

At Souda the German Air Force had met with little opposition. It was the same at Heraklion. The «Dolphin» lay in the inner Venetian harbour, close to the stone quayside. We slept on deck. Each day before dawn, as we lay in the moonlight, we would hear an enemy plane come over and circle the harbour and aerodrome. When it turned out to sea as a preliminary to a run-in for bombing, we dashed on shore, the men going to the shelters and the officers to a terrace from which we watched to see if the enemy was laying mines in the harbour. We never saw the mines, but we saw plenty of bombs explode. The German planes came back sometimes at midday, and always at dusk, to blast the aerodrome and machine-gun or bomb the harbour. From the aerodrome two Gladiators went up against thirty-odd Germans; they lasted for a day or two, and then they were shot down. From our position by the quayside we machine-gunned any low-flying planes. They passed like great ducks on their evening flight. As they sped past we peppered them with all we had, while their rear-gunners replied with tracer bullets which always seemed to be coming straight for you. One plane came down in flames, but we were not sure if we could claim it.

In between raids, life was blissful at Heraklion. We bathed in the blue waters of the harbour, breakfasted on the fresh fish killed by the German bombs, and made many friends with the Cretans over a glass of wine or a dish of yiaourti. Saunders adopted me as his buddy. We



went ashore in the evenings. He was devoted to a small nephew, for whom he was always buying presents, and he had many yarns of his naval service, ending with the sinking of a destroyer off Greece, when he was one of the few to survive. The N.O.I.C. at Heraklion was the naval captain whom I had met on the road near Monemvasia. He was nick - named Snow - white. He instructed us to report on the possibility of salvaging the cargo of a sunk steamer at Hierapetra on the south coast. Before we sailed, we rid ourselves of the two Palestinians. They were replaced by Jumbo Steels, who was a Rhodesian serving in the Black Watch, and by a Dodecanesian Greek, Kyriakou Kyriakides, a sponge - diver by trade, who had served in Macedonia as a volunteer in an infantry battalion of Dodecanesians. Jumbo was a first class machine - gunner and could serve as ship's engineer. Kyriakou dived like a fish, knew the coast of Crete and Libya, and had a child - like sense of humour and devotion. He used to brink up all variety of shell fish, crabs and sea - weed from the seabottom, and insist on our eating them, and then laugh at our expressions. Delighted to be on the sea again, he used to clean our dinghy by rolling it round and round in the water, a trick none of us could learn.

On the way to Hierapetra we visited two desert islands, Dia and Elasa, on which a few wild goats were to be seen, and we chose hidden anchorages suitable for a caique. At Hierapetra the ship under the surface lay in shallow water about a mile off-shore. She had sailed from Alexandria with a cargo of A.A. guns, machine guns, mortars, rifles and ammunition, and in consequence, no doubt, of information given to the enemy she had been torpedoed out at sea. She had limbed towards Hierapetra only to be sunk by enemy bombers. If she had reached Souda, or even been beached at Hierapetra, her cargo might have saved Crete from capture. The Germans were taking no chances anyhow; for enemy planes came over Hierapetra throughout the day to watch the wreck. We sent Kyriakou down to examine her hull, but it was clear that nothing could be done to salvage the cargo without equipment from Souda. We sent on westwards and completed our reconnaissance of the coast up to Sudsuro near Matala. Here I rang up Pendlebury and arranged that we should collect his men on May 19th and make the raid on Kaso on the 20th. Near Sudsuro we visited a monastery in a narrow and remote valley where there was one monk. He was daft, and wanted to go to sea with us. It was quite a job to shake him off. Many months later, Mike was to use this valley when he returned to Crete.

From Sudsuro we returned as we had come, and we stopped in the afternoon at the desert island in the Kaso Strait. We intended to cross the channel that night and make a reconnaissance by moonlight of the stretch of the Kaso coast on which we had agreed with Pendlebury to land on the 20th. At Elasa, we held a conference and as we had been having some engine trouble, we decided not to go on to Kaso that evening. Moreover, we were already late for our rendezvous with Pendlebury. Just before dark, when we might have been well on the way to Kaso, a couple of Italian sea - planes flying low scouted the channel. They came over the island of Elasa without spotting the «Dolphin». Shortly after dark firing could be heard in the Kaso channel. It was clear that one of our convoys was fighting its way through the channel; we could see the flashes and flares, and we were glad we were not in the middle of it.

We set off later in the night, and on the morning of the 21st we called at Sitia, a beautiful bay with a calm sea. It was already very hot inshore. I landed to «phone Pendlebury, but found all communication with Heraklion was cut. No one knew why. Here at the request of a Greek officer we took on board an archaic charging engine for W.T. in the form of a bicycle with seat and pedals which worked a dynamo; it was out of order and could be repaired at Heraklion, he said. Then we coasted along the shore for Heraklion. On several occasions we were fired at, especially as we got nearer to Heraklion. We cursed the naval authorities for failing to inform the coastguards, and we praised the zeal of the Cretans at the same time. Just before we came to the port of Heraklion, we were hit by machine - gun fire at long range, and began to suspect that things were seriously wrong on shore. We therefore moored at the seaward end of the long mole which runs out from the inner harbour of Heraklion. We could hear spasmodic firing. Cle and I went ashore and walked together down the mole we were armed with a Mauser apiece. The mole had a high flanking wall on our right so that we could see only the outer harbour on our left. At the end of the mole a Venetian fortress controlled the mole itself, and also the entry into the inner harbour. As we walked towards the fortress we saw we were being covered by rifles and machine - guns from its embrasures. We walked on rather unhappily. We soon reached the outer right - hand side of the fortress where the flanking wall of the mole was broken down. Through the gap we saw the Nazi flag flying on the power - station, about half - a mile away. There was considerable firing from that quarter. As we rounded the fortress to enter

the inner harbour, we saw several British dead, Royal Engineers, lying on the inner side of the flanking wall. Was the fortress held by the German too? While Cle waited outside, I walked through a tunnel entry into the fortress, and found a Greek doctor with some wounded. He told me that the British had evacuated the town and had gone towards the aerodrome. The Germans were on the western edge of the town, and the Cretans were trying to hold them. German parachutists had dropped the day before in considerable numbers. It was now dusk and there was nothing we could do. We passed the word up to the men in the fortress that we were returning to the «Dolphin».

As we sailed out, we were again popped at by a machine - gun. We put in at Dia, the desert island opposite Heraklion, and spent next day with our machine - guns placed among the rocks, guarding the «Dolphin» and having a grandstand view of Heraklion. German planes passed over us all day. At 10 a.m. or so a force of German parachutists and parachuted supplies dropped to the east of Heraklion. Later in the day we could see the flash of artillery fire between that point and our batteries inland of the aerodrome. It was a brilliant day, the rocks grilling in the heat, and we bathed between our turns at the machine - gun. The best sight of the day was in the evening when for the first time only one German plane was flying over the aerodrome. There was one flash from the ground, a flash near the tail of the plane, and down she came in flames, a direct hit with the one and only A.A. round fired that day.

Our plan was to sail after dark towards the position of a German battery near the coast which we had spotted during the day. There was a small island off - shore at that point, and we were to use it as cover for the «Dolphin», coming out to fire at the shore battery with our two - pounder gun and M.G.'s. The least we should do was frighten the Germans and cheer our own side. But the engine would not start. Eventually, after midnight, it started on one cylinder. We decided to abandon our plan, for the German planes would find us there at dawn. Instead we limped off towards Souda, where we intended to report what we had seen at Heraklion, and find out the situation at Souda. With the engine misbehaving, we could not gauge our speed, and we passed the mouth of Souda Bay without realising it. Dawn on May 23rd found us some way round the Akroterion, and we had to put back. Here too we were fired at. We saw two large collapsible rubber boats and one caique in Shore; when we went closer to have a look, we could see men taking cover and firing at us. We were pretty sure they were

Germans, but they got the benefit of the doubt. On the way back to Souda, a Heinkel came low over us and proceeded to circle us. She fired a few rounds; we did not reply. Those of us who were not on the machine - guns following her round, waved enthusiastically. This seemed to reassure the Heinkel, and after firing off a Verey light or two she pushed off to the north. It was clear that some Germans were on the Akroterion, and others were expected by the Heinkel to be on the way there in caiques. As we entered the mouth of Souda Bay, the engine failed completely. Kyriakou and I towed her in, rowing our dinghy. A stiff off - shore wind was getting up. We moored the «Dolphin» between the two islets at the mouth of the Bay and landed on one of them. A strong wind was now blowing, and quite a heavy sea cut us off from the coast. We had been lucky to get in before the engine failed.

We visited the New Zealand company on the other island. They had had no news or orders for three days, but had heard firing and seen many planes. They were armed only with machine - guns, and they had been told to hold their fire. We sat on our island all day, while Jumbo and Mike worked at the engine. There were many wrecks half afloat at the head of the Bay, and many planes circling over Canea and searching Souda Bay, but we escaped their attentions. We made a little home for ourselves inside a cave. Saunders adopted a white rabbit which someone had left behind, and fed it on slops which gave it «the trots», as he put it. Saunders was now known as the «Admiral» and I as «the drunken captain», an unjust nick - name!. Next day, May 24th, Mike, Cle and I rowed ashore and walked into Souda. We saw the Naval Officer in Charge, a Captain Morse, and gave him our reports on the south coast, the wrecked cargo vessel off Hierapetra, the position at Heraklion and on the Akroterion. The N.O.I.C. was not au fait with the situation at Heraklion, which was cut off, but he confirmed that some Germans were on the Akroterion. The main fighting was between Malemi aerodrome and Souda. We walked on to the Royal Marines' lines and arranged for the repair of our engine. They were encamped among the olive groves, and it was a hot still day with no one moving on the dusty main road from Souda to Canea. We returned to our island and got the engine ready for shipment to the Royal Marines' workshop.

Next day, the 25th, Cle and I decided to walk into Canea; we wanted to contact our own firm whose H.Q. was in Canea, and to get one or two more caiques for the removal of the store of explosives which lay in a Venetian powder vault on our small island. We became sep-

arated; I walked into Canea by myself. The town was a wreckage of shattered houses, many still burning, and occasional German planes were bombing and machine - gunning. I took refuge among other places in what was left of the 'Piccadilly', a restaurant once much frequented by the troops. The only man I saw as I went through towards the harbour was a Greek policeman still on his beat. He seemed rather dazed, standing in a street of smoking debris, but he would not leave his post. He told me that I might find people in the caves near the harbour. The first I found was a group of four English privates who had lost their unit and were sheltering until dark. The harbour was full of half - submerged caiques, sunk by machine - gun fire, and the German planes were still at it. I found two caiques afloat. One was little damaged. By going round the caves, I raked together a crew, one of them the rascal «Manoli» who had moved our caïque with me at Yeraka. I arranged that they would sail her round that night to our island in Souda Bay, while I walked back to warn Mike. In fact, she never arrived.

I found a tunnel - like taverna, where an old man was sitting over his kitchen. He too was dazed but at his post. He had lost his house and his wife in the bombing, but he gave me a meal. A few other Greeks were busy removing tinned foods from a N.A.A.F.I. store which had received a direct hit. The only troops were the four stragglers, and I revisited them before leaving. They greeted me with loaded rifles made me put up my hands and disarmed me. They said I was a German parachutist in British uniform. They were rattled, and meant business, but finally I calmed them down and persuaded them I was genuine. They refused to move until dark, so I walked out of the wreckage of Canea in the evening light and soon collected a New Zealand private, wounded in the foot, who had been hiding on the edge of the town. I helped him along to a cross - roads, where there were several wrecked German planes. The firing was now close to Canea, and the German planes were flying low over the olives like a cloud of bees. I left the New Zealander with a despatch rider who was able to take him on his pillion, and I pushed on alone for Souda. While it was still light, I was halted by a loud shout from a nearby grove, and asked to identify myself. I called back «I am an English Officer». The reply, «You're a Vawmit» meant that they were Australians. I went over and talked with them. They were leading for Souda but would not move while it was light.

It was 2 a.m. on the 26th when I got back to the mouth of the

bay opposite our island. I slept in a field till dawn when Mile and Cle came ashore. They had entered Canea, but having decided there was no caique available they had returned before dark. We went up to G.H.Q. which we found had moved back to a wooden hollow not far away. There we found the N.O.I.C. who was very glad to see us as our reports on the south coast beaches had been lost. Mike made out another report. While he was at work I came across John May, who had been one of my original companions when we left England; he was on the staff, and I sat with him while I waited. The planes were now passing low over Souda Bay and strafing the road which led towards the south coast. Some troops had already been withdrawn in that direction, and the fighting was now nearing Souda harbour. General Freyberg called for an interpreter. As no one appeared, I went up and was asked to translate a despatch. It came from the Greek G.O.C., saying that ammunition was short and his men could not last much longer. Where, he asked, were the supplies and the reinforcements promised by Churchill over the wireless? He had every confidence in us, but his position was becoming untenable. Freyberg said to another senior officer that we could not help the Greek G.O.C., and that he was still awaiting a reply from London whether or not to evacuate. After another talk with Morse, we went back to our island. On the 27th our first task was to find a ship, as the «Dolphin» was out of action, and Manoli had not arrived with the caique from Canea. As far as we could see, there was only one caique afloat in Souda Bay. She was a small red, wooden-hulled vessel, called the «Athanasios Miaoules», after a famous Admiral of the Greek War of Independence, and we boarded her soon after dawn. The mate was an old man of Sphakia, called Strati, and he wanted us to go off with the ship, as the skipper-owner, whom he evidently disliked, was ashore. However, we managed to find the skipper, «Old Johnny», and he agreed to go with us. We brought the «Athanasios Miaoules» to our mooring by the island and moved our machine-guns and cargo on to her.

We then went to see Captain Morse. The evacuation was in full swing. The Germans, we were told, were likely to be at the head of Souda Bay that evening. Cle and I offered to move some of our explosives down to the shore, so that they could be collected for demolitions on the road; to blow up the rest; and to demolish any engines on wrecked shipping in the bay. Apart from the Dolphin and the Athanasios Miaoules the only vessel afloat was an «A» lighter, cleverly moored alongside a Turkish mole. She had escaped the attentions of

the German planes. We spent most of the day with her commander, a nice chap called Walters. He agreed to collect the explosives from the island. There were also some fifty men, stragglers from various units, hiding in a ruined Turkish building where there was a spring of water near the shore. I tried to persuade them to move on to Sphakia where we knew the evacuation would be made. With a few exceptions they insisted on staying where they were in the hope that the Navy would come into Souda to take them off. They were thoroughly played out. As there were so many planes about, we decided to wait until dusk before crossing over to the island. We sat relaxed on the hillside looking out towards the sea. Just before dusk a caique under sail put out from the Akroterion side of Souda Bay, and headed out to sea. Suddenly an aeroplane swooped down and circled round it several times. We could hear machine - gun fire. The caique was left drifting sideways, its sail crumpled and no sign of life aboard. As the plane rose up, it was shot down by another plane, flying at tremendous speed. A cheer went up for the R.A.F. It was the first plane of ours we had seen for days.

At dark we put off to the island. We carted boxes of explosives down a small criff to the shore. Years before I had had a certilage operation and I ricked my knee several times on this job. Walters collected a load of explosives in his «A» lighter, and we loaded the rest in the «Athanasios Miaoules». We saw several lights on the Akroterion, and a boatload of stragglers tried to seize the «Dolphin». Jumbo persuaded them to push on to the mainland and make for Sphakia. Meanwhile I laid charges in the main dump of explosives and on the engine, the two - pounder gun, and the hull of the «Dolphin». In the small hours of the 28th, Mike said we must sail. There was no time now to go round laying charges on any wrecks. I went up alone to the main dump and broke the glass capsules of acid in the time - delay «pencils». The acid took a certain time, in this case, several hours, to eat through a wire which held back a striker, and then the striker detonated the immediately charge. Sometimes, if a pencil had leaked, an instantaneous detonation would occur when the capsule was broken. I was in a cold sweat as I broke the last capsule in the light of a small torch. Cle and I went crossed over to the «Dolphin» and set off the time - delay there. The «Athanasios Miaoules» weighed anchor and we set off from Souda Bay. Dawn on the 28th found us many miles from Dia, where we intended to hide up. The first excitement was an E-boat bearing down towards us from the north. We changed course

and ran on the same line, hoping she would think us to be a caique of the Germans, and the E - boat later veered off. Three planes passed us flying towards Crete. When they returned, one circled us, while we waved. After firing a Verey light, it left us. On this occasion too, we had changed our course so that we seemed to be sailing towards Crete. We reached Dia about 10 a.m. and Mike insisted on reconnoitering the whole of the island's coast, much to our annoyance. His argument was that one should return one day to a German occupied Crete and need some local knowledge. When we had almost finished, we heard a roar of planes and dived below, all except old Strati at the helm. Seventy - nine troop - carriers flew low overhead without firing a shot at us. The planes were unescorted. After that, even Mike agreed that we had better hide up in a crack in the cliffs. Cle and I climbed the cliff with an M.G. and set up a machine - gun, so that we could fire at any plane which might attack our caique. Later in the day we explored the island. We stayed there till dark, bathing and sleeping. At dusk we set off on the next stage, aiming for the group of islets called the Yanisades. The «Athanasios Miaoules» proved to be very slow. Her engine had only one cylinder, of which the head was badly cracked. We used to fill the crack with pieces of cotton waste every halfhour or so, and we could run the engine for no more than two hours at a time. She made some two knots and belched forth smoke and sparks from her short exhaust funnel. We had a box - compass on board, but there was no fitting or lighting device, so we steered mainly by the stars.

I was on the watch with old Johnny, the skipper, as we were passing east of Heraklion, when we felt the wash of seven or eight fast ships, which I guessed were our own going to Heraklion to evacuate the force there. A few hours before dawn on the 29th we felt their wash again, and we saw a light flashing from the neighbourhood of the Yanisades. We then made out a destroyer heading close towards us. We imagined she thought us to be a German caique. Mike signalled with a lamp, saying who we were and that signals were being shown on the Yanisades. The destroyer passed very close to us without acknowledging our signal. As dawn lightened, we could see the ships off the entry to the Kaso Strait, and then the bombers came out and the squadron disappeared with guns in action. Before the sun was bright, we reached the Yanisades and hid up in a cove. In the afternoon we walked across our island and saw an E - boat lying off the outer island with some men on shore. She had evidently signalled the approach of the squad-



ron. During that day, the 29th, a large ship crossed from Kaso to Sitia.

Mike was anxious to attack the E - boat. We had an anti - tank rifle, and three machine - guns, all without mountings. We were prepared to try an attack, but by the time we had got our engine started and were way, Mike had decided against it. During that night we lumbered slowly through the Kaso Strait. Mike and I were on watch together during the later part of the night, and discussed the chances of making Sphakia in time to help in the evacuation. We had always regarded the Kaso Strait as the most dangerous stage in the trip, but we passed through it without incident. We put in at a small cove below a white - washed monastery just before dawn on the 30th. Opposite us was a small island, Kyphonisi, which seemed a promising refuge, but Mike decided against it as too obvious a place. It suited me to stay on the main coast, as I wanted to learn what was happening in Crete.

After a bathe, I followed the others up to a monastery. There I found that the monks supposed us to be Germans or Italians; they were delighted when we convinced them that we were British. The monastery was two hours from the nearest road, and it was rumoured that a force of Germans had arrived at the road end the previous evening. Soon after dawn a German plane flew low along the coast. Our machine - guns were manned among the rocks to cover the caique if she were attacked, but the plane took no notice of us. Soon afterwards, some planes flew over Kyphonisi, and we heard their M.G.'s firing for some time. The monks said that there had been a naval post there. With old Strati, Cle and I set along the coast to learn where the Germans and Italians were. We might hear something too of Pendlebury's and his men. Cle came some of the way, and then returned to the caique. When we saw peasants or houses, Strati left his rifle with me, and he went ahead while I covered him; he was to wave me on if all was well. He was in civvy clothes, while I was in uniform. Our first encounter was with a group of peasants harvesting. He duly went forward and was soon seen having an argument and threatening them. I went on to join them, and arrived as Strati seized an old man by the throat and hurled him to the ground. I intervened to stop a free fight. It turned out that the old man had suggested that the British would have to evacuate Crete, and had, therefore, been attacked as «a traitor» by Strati. The old man pointed out that he had lost two sons in Albania, and had two more whose fate was unknown. They knew nothing of the Germans.

Strati had dysentery, but he kept going well. We fed at a peasant's hut, and then reached the village of Makri Yialo. The villagers were sullen and suspicious. It was clearly a «bad village», as the Greeks say. They would tell me nothing, and declared that the war was no business of theirs. So I found a telephone and rang up the largest village inland, opening in Greek with the words «Where are the enemy?» to which came the immediate reply «Which enemy?» I then burst into a tirade, saying I was a British officer with a couple of battalions under my command, and the Greeks had only one enemy, the Germans - and - Italians. This seemed to convince the fellow at the other end. He told me that a large force of Italians was at Sitia, and that troops were being sent to Hierapetra; some Germans and Italians in lorries had toured most of the villages, including his own village, but had not occupied them. I told him to keep his spirits up and rang off. We got back in the evening to find that there had been something of a quarrel. Mike had made up his mind to sail on to Sphakia, although it was now the evening of the 30th., and the evacuation was due to finish on the 30th or the 31st. It would take us at least three days to reach Sphakia, and probably four, and in any case, our caique was already full enough and quite unreliable with its cracked cylinder-head. Mike held that it was our duty to go on in case we could help, and he thought the evacuation might be protracted beyond the 31st. Cle had disagreed with Mike, who, being hot - tempered, had said things which he later regretted. Cle, who was a quiet, reserved man, had refused to be drawn into a quarrel. I first learned of this from Saunders; and Jumbo who were manning separate machine - gun posts, when I returned. Saunders was depressed about the whole business, and, most unusually for him, he was pessimistic about our chances either way. Jumbo, who also had a hot temper at times, was annoyed with the «skipper», having himself had a bit of a quarrel with Mike over the same time. When I found Mike, he told me of the choice and asked me to decide. I voted for Egypt, with the condition that, if we got through, we should try to return with a better vessel to Crete. Mike was disappointed' I think, but showed no resentment. We said goodbye to the monks, and put off at dusk. Mike had talked of sailing for Cyprus, but he decided finally to head due south for Libya, aiming at the Bay of Sollum. As in all matters of the sea, we had the greatest faith in his judgement.

Dawn on the 31th of May found us well out to sea. It was calm and hot with a clear sky, and we were all rather tired and sleepy

after a series of night - watches. At 9. o'clock or so, when the heat was oppressive, I noticed a plane very high above us, and gave the alarm (we had no look - out on duty). Cle and Jumbo, our best machine - gunners, took a Bren each in the bows, and Mike took the till-er and a Lewis machine - gun. The four Greeks got into the engine cabin, and Saunders, Kyriakou and I got into the hold, from which we could see a patch of sky through the hatch. Forward of the hold there was a smaller hold full of explosives and detonaters. We heard the plane coming in low and received the full force of her guns. Saunders was hit by two bullets which entered the back of his shoulders. He lost consciousness, but was evidently in pain. I tried to make him comfortable and put blankets on him, while the plane came round again and gave us another series of bursts, to which Cle and Jumbo replied from the bows. After that attack, Mike came to the hatch to say that Cle had been killed outright. He asked me to stay with Saunders, who was twisting and turning in pain. Mike rested his Lewis on the winch by the main hatch. Then the third attack began. When it was over, I came on deck to find Mike wounded in the elbow by an incendiary bullet, but Jumbo was O.K. The plane was flying away towards Crete, low down and with smoke pouring from one engine. Jumbo had had a narrow escape both times. When Cle was killed, Jumbo had seen the plane jerk as it pulled out of a dive to come head - on towards the caique. That jerk had put the hail of machine - gun bullets on one side of the bows, and Jumbo had been grazed on the head by a bullet. In the last attack, Jumbo had hit the plane as it pulled out of its dive. Of the Gt Greeks, one boy had been grazed by a bullet on the side of his head, and was deaf in one ear. Mike had a bullet through his elbow-joint which was very painful later. Saunders was still twisting and tossing, and I gave him some morphia. He died soon afterwards. Mike was sobbing, and we were all near to tears. We wrapped Cle and Saunders in a Union Jack which we had brought over from the «Dolphin», and I read an impromptu service in English and Greek before we slid them into the sea. The phrases of the 102nd Psalm went straight to our hearts. When we started up the engine to resume our journey, it went full - speed in neutral, shaking the boat. I saw the Lewis machine-gun slipping from the winch, and jumping to catch it I fell through the hatch as I stepped on a loose plank, and hit my ribs a nasty crack on a iron bolt. This provided some light if painful relief. We found afterwards that several bullets had passed through the explosives in the bows. As the plane had been firing explosive, incendiary, and ar-

mour - piercing bullets, it was astonishing that our explosives had not been detonated.

By the evening of the next day, June 1st, we thought we saw low-lying land at dusk. Mike had become delirious at times with his wound. I had done most of the steering by day, and all of it by night, as the Greeks could not keep a course. I decided to sail east that night. At dawn on June 2nd we found ourselves off a low coast which we reckoned was the Bay of Sollum, if we had steered correctly. Kyriakou said he recognised the coast from his sponge - fishing expeditions, but he did not know any names which appeared on our chart. In a few hours we put up a reef off shore which I identified from the chart as one in the eastern end of the Bay of Sollum. We also saw bursts of smoke which came from artillery or demolitions inland. We did not know where the Germans were in Libya, as our last news of a week or so ago was that they had retaken Benghazi. Although I wanted to get Mike ashore, I decided to sail on during the night, aiming for Mersa Matruh. Just before dawn on the 3rd two Italian bombers flew over us. Another plane came low over us soon after dawn it proved to be an R.A.F. one, we waved happily. By midday we saw the hill by Mersa Matruh, and later they began to signal to us. I got Mike on deck, and he said they were asking the name of our ship. We felt like replying «The Queen Elisabeth», but we contented ourselves with saying «British», and sailed on to the harbour. As we came in, two naval officers were on the pier; after a look at us, they turned and walked away. Mike and I caught them up. We both knew one of them, a man called Nicholls, who was the Naval Officer in Charge there. He did not recognise us at first; for on seeing us come in he had dismissed us as Greek fishermen, with our growth of beard and our dirty clothes. We handed over the cargo of the «Athanasios Miaoules», and left «Old Johnny» in charge of her. Mike's elbow and my rib were bandaged at a field hospital. Jumbo and I bathed that evening. There were many other men bathing, and it seemed strange to be no longer just our own little company. We rested next day and then we sailed from Mersa Matruh to Alexandria in a three-masted brig which was returning from a supply - run to Tobruk. With a strong off - shore wind and full sail up she made nine to ten knots on the trip. It was a wonderful journey. At Alexandria we were fêted by the Navy as the latest arrivals from Crete, Admiral Sommerville had us to lunch, sat me beside himself and argued that the «Odyssey» had been written by a woman. He was less intransigent on the subject than the Colonel of the 1st

Battalion of the Welch Regiment had been on the Battle of El Aboukir. Mike's arm was going to mend, but it would take time. He and I discussed with the Naval Intelligence Officer at Alexandria ways and means of returning to Crete. In view of our experience, Mike planned to cross to and fro by fast motor - boat, and to use the small islands and the secluded coves of the south coast as hide - ups and bases. The immediate aim was to make contact with the numerous groups of British troops who were said to be still in the mountains, and to collect them for evacuation by submarine. We hoped also to find Pendlebury and his men and arrange for the delivery of supplies. Thus the first plans for a return to Crete were made. But Mike's arm had to mend first. This might be a matter of some weeks, and Crete was of less immediate concern than the situation in Libya and the campaign in Syria. I went up to Cairo to report. There I met up with my bosses at Athens, who were now esconced in the Cairo Office. They arranged for me to meet representatives of the Lake Copais Company, who were anxious to obtain compensation for their cotton stocks at Haliartus from the British Government. The destruction of the cotton had been confirmed. Many months later I found out that the dump of explosives etc. on the island in Souda Bay had also blown up.