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THE NAVY AND ITS OFFICER CORP IN THE DECADE OF THE THIRTIES AND UP TO THE EVE OF THE GRECO-ITALIAN WAR.

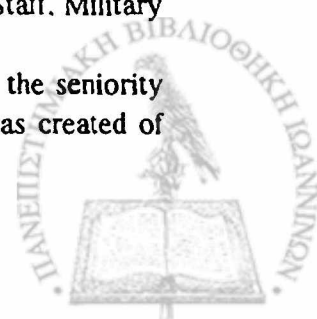
The debacle in Asia Minor had not only shaken the foundations of the fragile bourgeoisie state which had emerged after 1909, but its convulsions were to transform, radically indeed, with the institutionalization of the regime of wholesale purges in the officer corp, the outlook of the Greek Navy materially and professionally for years to come. The Navy, its officer corp assuming a leading role in the revolution of 1922, became the catalyst of things to come in the body politic of the country. The American military attache in Athens reporting to Washington on the part played by the Navy referred to a rather unusual number of officers of various ranks, who in one capacity or another had participated actively. And anxious to prevent any eyebrows rising by the certainly flabbergasted bureaucrats at the War Department in Washington prophetically concluded:

It may appear to the reader of this report that there is a good deal of unnecessary detail, such as the inclusion and repetition of the names of every officer who took part in the various enterprises. These...names were left in on purpose by me *because these officers are now from time to time appearing before the public eye and also for the reason that it is not at all unlikely that a revolution may break out at any time and the same officers may reappear in a prominent capacity*¹.

Beginning with the creation of an artificially inflated and monstrous in proportions naval officer corp with 15 admirals on active duty², in 1920, the

1. *National Archives of the United States*, War Department, Office of Chief of Staff, Military Intelligence, Report 615 of December 30, 1922.

2. "With the return of the 52 anti-Venizelists and the orderly arrangement of the seniority list in somehow ordinary level of August 16th, 1916, a disproportionate Navy was created of



day after the old Venizelist parties had wrestled power from the Liberals, and the retirement of an almost equal number of officer corp cadets, the Navy was to witness a series of professional setbacks and transformations, which were to mark its nature and constitution into the war years of the nineteen forties. And it should be kept in mind, of course, that this upheaval was materialized when the work of the British Naval Mission had not as yet succeeded in inducing them with the professional values necessary to immune them from the traditional political imbroglios:

The officers are not as good as the men. They have the requisite intelligence but are naturally too lazy to properly learn their business and attend to it. Their chief interest centers in having a good looking uniform and in strolling along the boulevards and sitting in cafes¹.

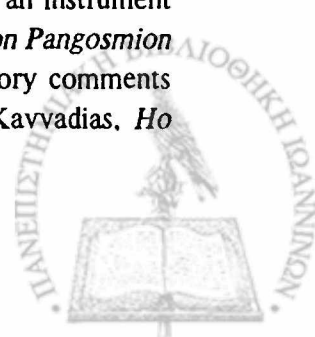
The professional naval officer by the 1900's was exclusively a graduate of the state Naval Academy with uniform traditions and an adequate spirit of adherence to duty. The great split between the crown and Venizelos in the end of the decade of 1910's provided the impetus and the rationalization for the "politicization" of that branch of service. Identification with one of the feuding camps, well after the demise of its founders becomes a *sine qua non*² for its cadres if they wanted to be promoted and attain leadership positions. Taken to its logical conclusions the naval officer corp as its counterparts in the other services, becomes the prime element of political instability assuming a primary role in the evolution and determination, as it has been indicated elsewhere, of the political social and economic outlook of the state.

However, this process which becomes endemic and is to last well within the first decades of the post war period, splits and demoralizes, to an unprece-

15 Rear Admirals, 32 Captains, 56 Commanders, 33 Lieutenant Commanders, 48 Lieutenants, 57 Lieutenants j.c., 13 Ensigns..." Styl. Charatses, *1023 Axiomatikoi kai 22 Kinimata*. Athens, 1985, 2 vols., vol. 1, pp. 80-81. Nik. Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis enos Palaiou Nautikou*, Athens, 1970-1974, 4 vols., vol.1, p. 34.

1. *National Archives of the United States*, Records of the War Department, Discipline in the Navy. Monograph reports, February 11, 1921.

2. "And while in every well governed state the officer never becomes the arbiter of the political life of the country, but always executes the orders of the state in ours it has become customary every officer who wants to advance must be politicized and also to be an instrument of a given political party". Alex. Sakellariou, *He Thesis tes Hellados eis ton Deuteron Pangosmion Polemon*, second edition. Athens, 1945 p. 143. See also similar, if more derogatory comments by admiral Kavvadias, himself a prototype of a "politicized" officer. Epamin. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton Ezesa*. Athens, 1950, p. 27.



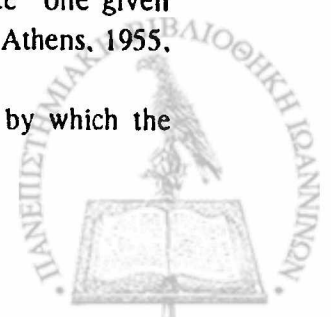
dented degree, the officer corp and jeopardizes the very existence of the fighting apparatus of the Navy, the Fleet. The vicious antagonisms in the two camps, concervative and quasi-liberal, of the emerging bourgeoisie, brought about the proverbial clash of King Constantine and Prime minister Venizelos, thrived on the close alliances and the active partisanship of the officer corp. To the later the consequences were dire indeed. In 1917, immediately, after the Venizelist *coup d' etat*, a byproduct of allied intrigues and open revolt by Venizelist officers, 82 naval officers, that is 46.5 of the total number of the active members of the corp, were dismissed under various pretexes¹ as unreliable due to their "concervative" leanings. A number of others were reduced in rank, an unprecedented occurrence, in such a massive scale, 42 officers and 54 recently promoted, in the annals of any Navy, thus ushering the period of what was to be known in the Navy as the Great Split"².

The return to power of the royalists could not but bring new convulsions to the already demoralized Navy. As it has been indicated at the beginning of this chapter, a hydrocephalous naval officer corps was brought into being with the restitution of the previously removed from service. The higher ranks were now well in excess of the capabilities, needs, of the Greek Navy. But the one item that stands out, and in fact was to color the future course and evolution of the said corp, was the shaping of a rather extraneous nature mentality based solely on the intricate art of survival. In the naval officer corp after the midnineteen there were to observed three distinct ideological tendencies a byproduct of these developments. The epigones of the tradition of 1909, the "makers" or the "underminers" of any administration which did not adhere to their demands³ gradually, identify their professional and personal interests with the party, Liberal, which they had been instrumental for the later's coming to power in 1909. Through party apparatus sought personal promotions and the spoils of office, not unlike any other pressure group, and at the same time, as it was to be expected, effectivelly removing from the active list of the naval

1. It is not accidental that a tradition was being established then according to which is considered imperative to attribute a certain unpleasant attributes to the officers dismissed. At this early stage usually have to do with their professional abilities or personal traits, *not of political orientations*. Charatses. *1023 Axiomatikoi kai 22 Kinemata*, p.71, Italics mine.

2. Among other works see the comments of vice-admiral Konstas in his work on the Greek Navy during the Second World War, which all things considered, is a "moderate" one given the period it was written. Pana. E. Konstas, *He Hellas tes Dekatias 1940-1950*, Athens, 1955, p.14.

3. A popular expression coined at the time, illustrative of the repugnance by which the Greek public opinion held the officer corp.



officer corp, those officers who either because of their ideological proclivities or personal animosities, could be considered as belonging to the *ancient regime*. As such their presence in the naval officer corp was interpreted as a threat to the *status quo*, and a constant source of intrigues and counter plots.

A rather substantial number of naval officers, indeed a considerable percentage of the naval officer corp, reflecting the traditions, political, of the land, and the mentality of their social surroundings, readily adopted to the new realities. Eager to maintain their posts, and to continue their careers uninterrupted, not only willingly compromised their political beliefs and professional integrity, but not surprisigly, hailed every new *coup d'etat* or putschist takeover and wholeheartily identified with it. That trend, became such a familiar practice and an almost revered tradition on its own right, that it did immensely contributed to the existence and perpetuation of a state of constant turbulence in the Navy.

And a lesser part, the revanchists, the hard core of those purged, abandoned only temporarily the ranks becoming part of the opposition political party machinery and sought avenge and restitution at the top leadership commands when the fortunes of their political patrons brought them back into power¹.

Of course, as it might be expected, the professional competency, the morale and efficiency of the Fleet, its state of war preparedness, was in the lowest possible state, far below the proverbial level of the Balkan military establishments. The British naval missions both the one which withdrew in 1923 and had been in the country since 1911, and the one which succeeded it in 1925, were unanimous in their basic conclusions that the officer corp molded by them just could not develop the necessary professionalism needed to overcome its natural "political" proclivities:

The Naval Service, concluded the British Naval Mission which left in 1923, is the most popular in Greece and British influence has been responsible for creating the *esprit de corps*, as well as for the creation of a high standard among the officer personnel. The British officers have, however, often remarked that they had not been able to inculcate in the Greek officer to any great extent, the British ideas of thoroughness regarding duties and responsibilities. They have not been able to overcome the Boulevard and Cafe proclivities which are natural to the race².

1. Kavvadias. *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton Ezesa*. p. 27.

2. *National Archives of the United States*, War Department, Office of the Naval Intelligence G-2. Report May 1, 1923.



The annual naval exercises, a more or less customary annual ritual, were undertaken not as means to maintain a state of professional preparedness but as means to remove the Fleet from the vicinity of Athens, where the main naval arsenal, so as to minimize the potential threat of having the Fleet taken over by a prospective putschists. And this was reinforced by the common belief shared among military attaches in Athens at the time, on the express policy of the Greek administrations to minimize the capabilities of the Navy. It is therefore not surprising to see comments underlying the established dogma of the governments in Athens: "It appears the (that) none of the recent governments have trusted the Navy and have not wished to see it well organized under a strong leadership"¹. Indeed, throughout the year, with the brief period of the naval exercises mentioned, the Fleet was virtually mothballed with only a skeleton crew aboard. As the American military attache was to observe in 1933, there was also lacking a Fleet organization "but only three independent Flotilla commands..."².

There is, however, no Fleet organization at present, but only three independent Flotilla commands. Reason: The Admiral of the Fleet is now in jail having picked the wrong side in the last revolution. In the meantime the present Government has deemed safer to keep the Navy in three separate commands so as to prevent unified action³.

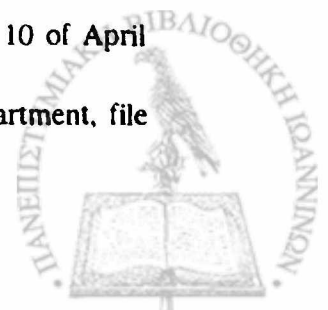
The political convulsions rocking the Navy, had not only reduced professional competency of its cadres but the Naval corp was saddled with too many officers in the top ranks both incompetent and potentially dangerous as rabble rousers. During the rather brief period of Pangalos' dictatorship in 1925, a complete change, according to the American military attache took place. And he added: "The Navy has been handicapped by the political sympathies of its officers. They have taken an active part in politics and after each of the revolutions during the last eight years there has been a complete change of the officer personnel in the higher ranks"⁴.

1. *Ibid.* Navy Department, Office of Naval Intelligence. Report No. 902-100 by the Military Attache Greece of February 3, 1927.

2. *Ibid.* Despach by the American military attache in Belgrade (Athens), No. 7110 of April 10, 1933.

3. *Ibid.* Despach by the American military attache in Belgrade (Athens) No.7110 of April 10, 1927.

4. *Ibid.* Report by the American military attache in Greece to the Navy Department, file no. 902-100 of February 3, 1927.



By 1930, a turning point in the political history of Greece, the end of a decade of military *coups d' etat* and military dictatorships, the Greek Navy was composed of 741 officers and 5.500 petty officers and ratings. Those 741 officers were classified as follows¹:

Grades	Line Officers	Engineers Medical Supply, etc	Officers higher than Petty Officers	TOTALS
Admirals	9			9
Captains	27	15		42
Commanders Lt	40	43		83
Commanders	47	57		104
Lieutenants	58	100	4	162
Lieutenants J.G.	72	83	42	197
Ensings	47	57	40	144
Totals	300	355	86	74

Those navy personnel was to man an assortment of vessels, essentially destroyers and a new class of submarines, the latest aquisition of the Greek Navy, all dating back to the Balkan wars or added during that general period of time. The classification of the Greek war vessels up to 1930 were as follows²:

Battleships	0
Cruisers	2
Destroyers or Torpedo Boats	20
Submarines	6 ³

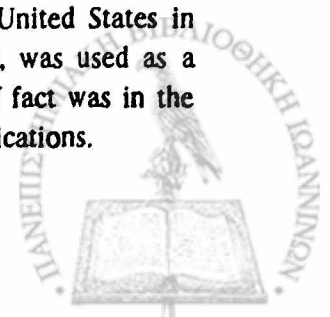
Specifications

Cruisers 2

1. *Ibid*, Report by Lt. col. Edward Davis, American military attache, Athens, to the War Department of May 16, 1928.

2. *National Archives of the United States*, Office of Naval Intelligence, War Department, Despach by the American military attache in Athens of May 11, 1932, no.1927.

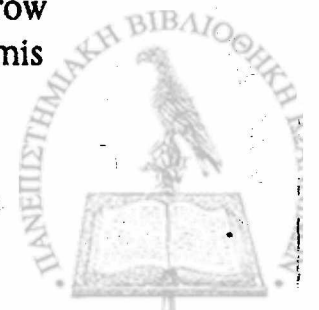
3. The *Kilkis*, and *Lemnos*, the two predreadnoughts acquired from the United States in 1914, by the end of the 1920's had been retired from the active list. *Kilkis*, was used as a gunnery ship. *Lemnos*, was laid up and was not in service, and as a matter of fact was in the process of being scrapped, her armaments used to fill the needs of land fortifications.



<u>Name</u>	<u>Tonnage</u>	<u>Armaments</u>	<u>Speed</u>	<u>Date of Commission</u>	<u>Builders</u>
Averoff	10.000	4-9.2" 8-7.5" 12-3 A.A.	22.8	1910 and recommissioned	(1910) Orlando. (1926)Forges and Chantiers de la Mediteranee
Helle	2.600	3-6" 2-3"	21	1912 and recommissioned in 1926	(1912) N.Y. Shipbuilding Co. (1926) Forges and Chantiers de la Meditteranee.

Destroyers and Torpedo Boats: 20

4 Hydra class	2.050	4-4.7" 3-40 mm. A.A. 8	39.5 Knots	1931	Odero, Italy
4 Aetos class	2.050	-21"T.T. 4-4" 6-21"T.T. 1-3" A.A.	32 Knots	1912 and recommissioned in 1924	Cammell-Laird (1924)J.C. White and Company
	400			1907 and	Yarrow Salamis



Note: A.A. Antiaircraft

T.T. Torpedo Tubes

P.P. A.A. An automatic antiaircraft gun of 41 mm cal.

Submarines: 6

<u>Name</u>	<u>Tonnage</u>	<u>Armament</u>	<u>Speed</u>	<u>Date of Commis- sion</u>	<u>Where Build</u>
2 Katsonis class	1- 605	1-4"	14 Knots	1927	Chantiers de la Gironde
4 Proteus class	1- 775	6- 21" T.T.	10 Knots	1929	Chantiers de la Loire
	2- 730	1-4"	14 Knots		Chantiers de la Loire
	2- 930	8- 21" T.T.	10 Knots		Chantiers Navals Francais

These vessels for tactical purposes were organized into three independent flotillas, for reasons outlined in the preceding pages, creating among other things, a multiplicity of ineffectual commands, and at the same time providing "employment" for the swollen upper ranks:

a. The Cruiser Flotilla, consisting of:

The armored cruiser *Averoff*

The mine laying light cruiser *Helle*

b. The Destroyer Flotilla, consisting of:

2 Destroyers of the Hydra class

2 Destroyers of the Aetos class

2 Destroyers of the Thyella class

2 Destroyers of the Niki class



c. The Submarine Flotilla, consisting of:

- 2 Submarines of the Katsonis class
- 4 Submarines of the Proteus class

The destroyers omitted were laid up with small care-take detachments on board under the command of the less desired, politically, officers, who did belong to the parties or officers groups opposing the administration, and who despite that were not deemed aggressive enough to challenge the *status quo*.

The decade of 1920-1930, notwithstanding the tumultuous upheavals plaguing the military establishment of the land, nevertheless, as the preceding statistics ably demonstrated, some significant ground work was performed in the Navy admitted by both foe and friend alike. Six new submarines were exclusively build for the Greek Navy at French naval yards, while the rest of the Fleet received extensive refitting and repairing at ship building factories in France and in England². Beginning the 1930's four new destroyers of Italian making were added, the only modern units to be employed by the Greek Navy after the Balkan wars. And with two more build at the end of the decade at British shipyards, fitted with German armament, comprised the Greek Fleet that would see Greece into the conflict with Italy and as a matter of fact would be the backbone of the Greek naval might up to the 1943's.

This emphasis on light surface units was not only imposed by the perennial shortage of the budget allocated to the Navy, but it was a byproduct of a deliberate policy pursued by the British Naval Mission in the country. Indeed, the last, under admiral Webb which had been in Greece since 1925, advocated a Fleet comprised of light draft ships, such as torpedo boat destroyers, torpedo boats and submarine and under the extraordinary powers enjoyed by the British under the various post Venizelist administrations the Greek Fleet was molded to the broader requirements of the British Admiralty in Eastern Mediterranean. So much so that in both the naval and political establishment in Greece and in Greece's archrival at the time Rome, the Greek Navy was considered but an appendage to the British Mediterranean Fleet².

1. It is the general consensus of all associated with the Navy at the time, that indeed without the extensive refitting that the Greek Fleet received at the period of 1920's, the Greek Navy would have been left without any sea working units in the late thirties. Something which would have resembled the affairs of the Ottoman Navy at the beginning of the century as was very aptly described by Marder: "The Turkish Fleet was assessed by the D.N.I. (Otley) in November 1905 as being in a deplorable condition and quite useless for the fighting purposes". Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, vol.1, pp.301-302.

2. *National Archives of the United States*, War Department. Report by the American Attache in Rome of December 7, 1925. Report no. 3800.

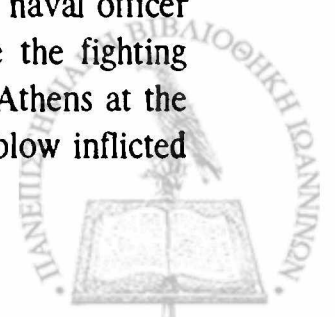


But if the years immediately preceding the war period of the 1940's witnessed this rather sustained effort to upgrade and modernize the Fleet, even within the context of the imperial interests of Great Britain, that very period was to constitute one of the most trying and humiliating, if not degrading intervals in the entire annals of the Greek naval establishment. The gradual process of disintegration was inaugurated with the abortive *coup d'etat* of Plasteras in 1933 which marks the advent of mass exodus of Venizelist officers holding staff positions and the braintanks of the transformation of the Greek Navy in the framework of the British imperial interests in Mediterranean.

In the spring of 1935, the naval officer corp, composed in its entirety of Venizelist allegiance cadres, in conspiracy with the political leadership of the Liberal party, not only participated in the general uprising by that party but was the main thrust to overthrow the Populist administration. Ostensibly, to safeguard the republican institutions under the sweeping onslaught of the old monarchist order, the republican military establishment of the country through the time honored method of the military *coup d'etat*, were by the use of raw military power to stem off the orderly succession to power of the conservatives. Conscious of course, in the best traditions of the recent Greek history, that the rise to power in Athens of the Populist party would have signaled the advent of systematic dismissals and retirements, the loss at best of prestigious commands and the most onerous, political oblivion.

It was then this caste interest, self-interest, and factional *esprit de corps*, which motivated the greatest military *coup d'etat*, in the annals of this *coups d'etat* infested land. This in turn along with the most thorough purge of the naval officer corp that was ever undertaken since its inception, provoked a second, exclusively this time military intervention by the ones who decapitated the previous naval leadership sealing the careers of the less fortunate liquidated in the spring of 1935 from the naval officers corp.

Then the year 1935, exemplifies best and offers the most vivid and persuasive illustration of the factionalism and the institutionalization of the purging in the ranks of the officer corp. In the Navy, the elimination of the political stalwarts of the Liberal party and of those not openly associated, the rather professionally minded officers, with the assortment of non-Liberal, party groups, reached epidemic proportions. Forced retirements of officers who were considered not simply "political" opponents but unreliable as political faithful, jailings and exiles, in the word of both the protagonists of this dismemberment of the naval officer corp, admirals Kavvadias and Sakellariou put seriously at stake the fighting capabilities of the Greek Fleet. The American military attache in Athens at the period Lt. colonel Whitley rather underestimated the devastating blow inflicted



on the Navy as a whole by the purges when he reported:

As reported, the revolt dealt the Navy a severe blow. Many of its best officers were involved in the revolt and the sentences and discharge of personnel involved have for the time crippled the Navy as a combatant force. It is estimated that at least 2 years will be required to rehabilitate the Navy and place it on a footing approaching a fighting force¹.

The following table of effectiveness drawn immediately after the two *coup d' etat* provide the debt of the havoc inflicted upon the naval officer corp:

	1935-36		1934-35		1933-34	
	Active	Reserve	Active	Reserve	Active	Reserve
Officers(1)	549	1.130	660	1.020	757	960
Petty Officers	1.007	3.000	3.116	1.500	1.802	1.450
Seamen(2)	2.909	11.400	6.250	9.900	6.859	9.300
Total	4.535	15.530	10.026	12.420	9.418	11.710

1. *Ibid.* Despach by the American military attache in Athens to the War Department of May 21, 1935,p.2.



	1932-33	1931-32	1930-31
	Active Reserve	Active Reserve	Active Reserve
Officers(1)	841	694	743
	883	841	837
Petty Officers	1.536	1.736	1.632
	1.150	750	430
Seamen(2)			
Total	3.000	4.800	5.055
	7.500	7.500	16.000
	5.737	7.230	7.430
	9.533	9.091	17.267

(1) Includes 367 officers of auxiliary service.

(2) Men of the naval reserves who had served for five years there in were transferred to the general army reserves. This caused a reduction in the number of reservists from 16.000.

Land staffs and services had to be reduced to the minimum possible or temporarily discontinued. But to no avail. The Fleet, the active list of the ships that constituted the Greek Navy, was dramatically dwindled. The ones in operation were functioning with a market absence of qualified and trained personnel upper ranks and non-commissioned officers:

It was natural that such a sudden thin out to shake from the foundation the Navy... In the submarines, of which I became the commander, the most Venizelist of the services, had been wasted several years training. From a total of 7 reservist commanders, the four had been withdrawn, as well as 7 from the 9 then serving commanders and 2 from the 5 under training. Also the 2/3 of petty officers and able seamen, the best engineers and electricians!

The liberal counterpart of admiral Kavvadias, captain Petropoulos, chief of staff of the C.-in-C. of the Greek Navy the revanchist admiral Sakellariou, was not exaggerating the effects of the *coup d' etat* when he was writing:

1. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton Ezesa*, p.50.



One of the greatest evils of the 1935 *coup d'etat*, was also the fact that deprived the Navy from a great number of the officer of the line. In 204 from lieutenant J.G. onward 63 were dismissed. In the ranks of lieutenant commander and commander who can be said are the backbone of the corps the bleeding was felt more. In 40 lieutenant commanders 13 were cashiered (33%). And in 31 commanders the 14 (45%)¹.

A total of 249 officers of all grades had gone through naval court-martial of which 158 were sentenced, 36 acquitted and 55 were to be sentenced, court-martialed, at a later day².

Immediately, after the suppression of the naval uprising the royalist vice-admiral Dousmanis replaced admiral Chatzikyriakos, a conservative, who had actively assisted in putting down the uprising. It was a clear signal that only the full-fledged cronies of the Populist party would be now in charge of the Navy, a Navy which in its officer corp would reflect the Populist's party domination and the corresponding ostracism of all non loyalists. And indeed a new Navy it was to be. Admiral Dousmanis was set to reorganize at once the remnants of the former Navy purging out not only the culprits but staffing it with proven adherents of the monarchy and arch enemies of the Venizelist ideology. "He expects to reorganize the officer personnel, weeding out all members active in opposition politics or engaged in the revolt"³.

All the higher commands were taken over by monarchists, many of them recalled from the reserves, having been away from the service for a considerable period of time, and promoted at once, to higher ranks. Captain D. Oikonomou, promoted immediately to rear admiral was appointed C.-in-C. replacing the well known if not the most colourful of them all captain Kolialexis. Director general of the naval arsenal became a rather obscure officer, captain Pellias Ioannides, taking the post vacated by rear admiral Roussen who had been removed for complicity in the revolt. And all in the spirit of the draconian revenge of the monarchists so aptly voiced by admiral Kavvadias:

However, we the officers, had already taken our decisions which were irrepealable. It could not be allowed any longer to remain in the Navy any officer who (was) politicized or (was) a trouble maker. And the

1. Petropoulos, *Anamneseis kai Skepseis enos Palaiou Nautikou*, vol.1, p.70.

2. *National Archives of the United States*, Office of Naval Intelligence, War Department. Despatch by the American military attache in Athens of May 21, 1935, p.2.

3. *Ibid*.



Government was able to be lenient with the sentences imposed... but from the officers of the line at the time 241 were removed from the active list¹.

Admiral Kavvadias was not only statistically correct. His arrogant assertions that the government attempted to impose a more fair treatment on the summarily dismissed officers, not, of course, to reinstate them, is indicative of the ever growing influence of the revanchist officer corp. The aftermath of the crushing of the naval uprising of 1935, therefore, brought to force the unquestionable ability of this new informal "Military League", to shape from that time onward the character, composition and the ideological outlook of the Greek naval officer corp.

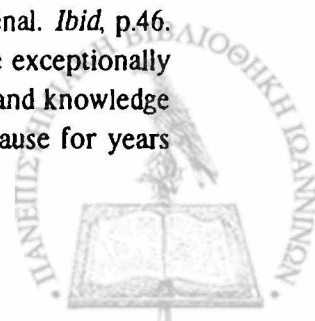
Notwithstanding, the truly Herculean efforts of admiral Dousmanis, not a mediocre officer by any measure, to reorganize what was left of the Navy, and to place the ships mishadled in the revolt back in service, many of them in great need of repairs², his task was not all successful. The "New Navy", that the admiral and his conspirators were building was seriously lacking the necessary competent naval cadres required to man the few ships recovered intact from the upheaval.

In the first naval exercises undertaken immediately following the purges, in the summer of 1935, the new leadership of the Fleet had literary to scrap all the land staffs from the available naval officers and non-commissioned officers, many of them with little or non existen sea duty, for the Fleet to sail. So much so that numerous sea accidents, collissions, inability to perform the simplest of naval exercises that characterized those post 1935 naval sea exercises that memorable summer of 1935, so as to become proverbial, continued with the same more or less tempo for two years very close to the eve of the war with Italy, in all subsequent annual training exercises of the Greek Fleet³.

1. "But it was not sufficient that we had purged the (naval) corps. We ought to detach the remaining officers from now onward from any political interests, devoting them to their task". Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton Ezesa*, p.51.

2. Not only ships had been damaged by the efforts of the counterrevolutionaries to board them but even before outbreak of the *coup d'etat*, the administration had taken measures to render the fighting capability and the very sea worthiness of the units obsolete for the very fear of a possible taking over of the Fleet by the Venizelists. For instance the armored cruiser *Averoff*, had vital parts of its engine removed and stored in well guarded places in the naval arsenal. *Ibid*, p.46.

3. "I cannot claim that the naval exercises undertook at those two years were exceptionally successfull. It was not allowed by the organization of the ships, the lack of sailors and knowledge trained officers... The firing exercises they were few and mediocre in results because for years



To ameliorate this pitiful state of affairs admiral Dousmanis in the summer of 1935 promulgated a new law according to which no naval officer, except those of the rank of captains or rear admirals, could be promoted to a superior grade, unless they had served the minimum years required in the grade that they currently were. And to make sure of their fidelity to the new order, the professional requirements notwithstanding, the officers under consideration had also to be politically reliable. The later qualification was to be guaranteed by the Naval Superior Council, a new board comprised of the new naval leadership, which had to approve all new promotions:

“The six above (the officers of the high commands mentioned in the previous page), we made the Superior Naval Council which suppressed the *coup d'etat*, did the purging of the Officer Corp from the agitators, and started the reorganization”¹.

By October 1935, whatever repairs could be made in the local shipyards having been completed, the Fleet was divided into five squadrons, comprised of one Cruiser, and twenty one Destroyers. Those units with the addition of two more destroyers added to the Fleet at the end of the decade, would be the Fleet which would be facing the combined forces of the Axis.

At the eve of the war the Fleet was, with some minor adjustments, in matters of personnel, divided as follows:

Flagship of Command: Cruiser *Helle*

Commander and Chief of Staff of the Fleet Captain Kontoyiannis.

1st Destroyer Squadron

Commander: Captain 2nd Cl. Anghelis.

Destroyers: *Hydra, Spetsai, Koundouriotis, Psara.*

2nd Destroyer Squadron

Commander: Captain 1st Cl. Vandoros.

Destroyers: *Leon, Hierax, Aetos, Panther.*

3rd Destroyers Squadron

Commander: Captain 2nd Cl. Hatzopoulos.

no one had taken an interest in them or had study their results and the mishaps were many”.
Kavvadias. *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton Ezesa*, p.52.

1. *Ibid.* p.48.



Destroyers: *Thyella, Aspis, Niki, Sfendoni.*

4rth Destroyer Squadron

Commander: Captain 3rd Cl. Lappas.

Destroyers: *Prousa, Kios, Kyzikos, Kydoniai.*

5th Destroyer Squadron

Commander: Captain 4rd Cl. Philippou.

Destroyers: *Alkyon, Doris, Aigli, Arethousa.*

The subsequent events in Greece in the fall of 1935, culminating with the establishment of the Metaxas dictatorship in 1936, affirmed the new naval leadership's hold of the Navy. For almost a decade, up to 1943, the Greek Navy would be molded by the "directorate" of "the Two", admirals Sakellariou and Kavvadias, who along with the other two admirals Oikonomou and Delagramatikas comprised the Superior Council of the Navy. For the gradual and sporadic recalling to the ranks of a limited number of purged officers at the eve of war could not fill the gap created in both the leadership and the professional management of the Greek Fleet, and certainly did not alter the rigid regime maintained by the two admirals:

The wounds that the Navy had received...especially after the *coup d'etat* of 1935 had not been healed when the war broke out. Responsible, among others, was the firm policy which was adhered to since 1936, and which instead of attempting to assist as far as possible the Navy from the bleeding that it had suffered because of the cashiering of one third of its cadres, in the face of the dangers of an imminent war, recalling at least the lower ranks to fill the gap, on the contrary sought to retain, at a great sacrifice, the one sided, (politically), composition¹.

A protracted period of stability was then enforced in the "New Greek Navy", maintained by the constant vigilance and the zealous devotion of the new devotees of the regime. So vigorously was that policy pursued that when in 1936, with the return to Greece of the great body of naval officers who had sought refuge in Italy after the abortive *coup d'etat*, some of the less doctrinaire remaining career officers attempted to socialize with their former

1. K. Alexandris, *To Nautiko mas kata ten Polemiken Periodo 1941-45*, Athens, 1952, p.64.



colleagues, were warned by no less an authority than the Supreme Naval Council, in no uncertain terms, that should they continue, they themselves would be removed from the ranks. The naval officer corp had, as a matter of state policy, to ostracise then their former comrades in arms.

It was then to be expected as admiral Alexandris did not fail to observe¹, that the new regime did aim at creating a homogeneous officer corp both politically and in a new *esprit de corp*. Identified as it was with the Metaxas regime, the new regime was determined to uphold its monopoly and exclusive power of the senior service of the Greek and armed forces. Within the context of this philosophy therefore, in the last *coup d'etat* prior to the establishment of the Metaxas dictatorship, that of October 1935, the remaining few non-partisan officers like commander Petropoulos, lieutenant-commander Benas and lieutenant Ioannis Melissenos, who were to distinguish themselves at the forthcoming war, were forced to resign from the active list, the naval officer corp assuming a rather exclusive character as a monarchist preserve².

The years between 1935 and the actual outbreak of the Greco-Italian war in October of 1940, witnessed an augmentation in the Greek Fleet with the addition of two new destroyers ordered from the British naval yards of Yarrow. Those two boats supplied with German armament³, became the more efficient and up to standard of modern warfare units of the Greek Navy. The commissioning of *Vasileus Georgios* and *Vasilissa Sophia*, among other things necessitated a new reorganization of the Fleet's commands:

Flagship of Command Cruiser *Averoff*.

Commander in Chief of the Fleet Admiral Kavvadias.

Chief of Staff of the Fleet Captain Zarokostas.

1. *Ibid*.

2. "Sakellariou was visibly sad. The Commanders of the Destroyers squadrons, Captains Angelis and Mezeveres had visited him complaining for the *coup d'etat* which had taken place in the name of the armed forces without being consulted. Mezeveres, as a matter of fact was protesting the abrogation of the (Parliamentary) institutions...Lieutenant-Commander Benas, talking with Admiral Kavvadias, intervened stating to me that he could not continue serving (in the Navy) when anyone who deems so brings down the political institutions, and then he submitted his resignation". Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton Ezesa*, p. 65. See also G. Mezeveres, *Tessares Dekaterides eis ten Hyperesian tou B. Nautikou*, Athens, 1971, pp. 116-131.

3. *National Archives of the United States*, War Department, Military Intelligence, Report No. 7200 of February 17, 1937.



Destroyer's High Command.

Captain Mezeveres, Commanding.

1st Destroyer Squadron.

Commander: Captain Leontopoulos.

Destroyers: *Vasileus Georgios, Vasilissa Olga.*

Launched	Disp.Ton.	Length	Beam	Draft
1939	1350	97 m.	10 m.	2.6
H.P.	Speed	Armament	Torpedo Tubes	
34.000	36 kn.	4-127 m.m. 3 A.A. guns	4-21	

2nd Destroyer Squadron.

Commander: Captain Antonopoulos.

Destroyers: *Spetsai, Koundouriotis, Psara, Hydra.*

3rd Destroyer Squadron.

Commander: Captain Vlachopoulos.

Destroyers: *Ierax, Leon, Panther, Aetos.*

Submarine High Command.

Captain Xeros, Commanding.

Submarine Flotilla.

Glaukos, Katsonis, Papanikolis, Nereus, Triton, Proteus.

Torpedo Boat High Command.

Admiral Oikonomou, Commanding.

Torpedo Boat Flotilla.

Thyella, Sfendoni, Nike, Aspis, Kios, Kydoniai, Kyzikos, Pergamos, Proussa, Aigle, Arethousa, Alkyoni, Doris.



Lt. Colonel Whitley, while he seems to underscore the work done by Metaxas in "reconstructing" the Navy: "During this two year period efforts have been made to improve the efficiency of the Navy and much has been accomplished under Metaxas", he could not but conclude that "... the Navy in 1937 can not be rated as competent sea arm prepared for combat sea duty on short call". And corroborating the contemporary Greek accounts he sums up the state of affairs in the Greek Navy:

There is a great lack of sea training and firing exercises under battle practice drills. Political dissension involving the military forces culminating in the armed revolt of two years ago seriously affected the discipline, efficiency and morale of those forces...¹

And if therefore, in professional training the Greek Navy had little to be desired in its naval officer corp, its material strength and their upkeep did not fare any better. The deficiencies mentioned above, had proportional repercussions on the state of seaworthiness of the Greek Fleet as the country was mobilizing for the approaching storm in the Balkans². Justifying and corroborating the conclusions of the C.-in-C. of the Greek Fleet admiral Kavvadias that the Greek Navy entered the war with only naval personnel, and that neither professionally trained or politically homogeneous but rather suffering from a fanatic factionalism.

The Greek Navy actually possessed, again according to admiral Kavvadias no fighting ships. Not only the great nucleus of the Fleet were boats of the Balkan wars vintage, pitifully lacking all the means to fight a demanding conflict with a non-Balkan state, but that their upkeep had immensely contributed to the gradual deterioration as worthwhile units.

The American ambassador at the time in Athens, the scholarly Lincoln MacVeagh, in a report to the Secretary of State on the Greek Fleet on June 8, 1939³, reported that the Greek Navy could not defend the shores of Greece, against any invader more powerful than its Balkan neighbours, whose navies were almost non-existent. And MacVeagh and his military advisors had not certainly, underestimated the potentialities of the Greek Fleet which by 1940 had only six destroyers capable of facing the requirements of modern warfare,

1. *Ibid.*

2. Kavvadias, *Ho Nautikos Polemos tou 1940 opos ton Ezesu*, p.105.

3. *National Archives of the United States*, Department of State, 868.30 30. Communication by MacVeagh to the Secretary of State of June 8, 1939.



at least on paper. For those six, actually only two, the *King George* and *Queen Olga* could be depended upon, the other four the "Italian" ones, the *Hydra*, *Spetses*, *Koundouriotis* and *Psara*, being from the very beginning deficient and a source of constant embarrassment and failure¹.

1. Of interest are the following comments of the American military attache in Athens Lt. colonel Whitley: "The Italian Destroyers have not given entire satisfaction, either through faulty design or faulty Greek seamanship. Recently, two were shlightly damaged during minor maneuvers". Communication by the Military Attache to the War Department of April 11, 1934. R.G. 165. Records of the War Department, General and Special Staffs. Military Intelligence Division.

