

2020

www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk

Author: Robert PALMER, M.A.

CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS

GREECE 1944 – 1948

A chronology of the key events which occurred in Greece from 1944 until 1948 that were connected with the deployment of British troops.

Copyright ©www.BritishMilitaryHistory.co.uk (2020)

Chronology of Key Events – Greece 1944 - 48

	E.L.A.S = Greek People's Liberation Army (communist) E.D.E.S. = National Republican Greek League (non-communist)
1944	
19 th August	H.Q. 23 rd Armoured Brigade redesignated as Force 140 for the reoccupation of Greece. Brigade H.Q. received an increment to the staff for the operation.
September	German forces commence withdrawing from Greece due to the advance of Russian forces through Eastern Europe.
18 th September	H.Q. III Corps redesignated as Force 140 for the reoccupation of Greece. Under command are: 2 nd Independent Parachute Brigade; (under the command of Brigadier C. H. V. PRITCHARD) 23 rd Armoured Brigade.
24 th September	Members of the Special Boat Service under command of Major Earl JELICOE land and seize Ararxos airfield unopposed.
25 th September	British special forces land by plane at Araxos airfield, and then combine with Greek E.L.A.S. partisans to attack the German garrison at Patras. 1,600 German troops surrender.
7 th October	British S.B.S. troops reach Corinth. A company from the 2 nd Parachute Brigade is dropped by parachute at Megara.
13 th October	British forces arrive offshore the island of Poros aboard H.M.S. Orion, H.M.S. Black Prince, eight destroyers, minesweepers and coastal craft. On board H.M.S. Orion is Lieutenant General R McK SCOBIE, General Officer Commanding III Corps and Commander Land Forces Greece (Designate), Harold McMILLAN (British Government's representative in the Mediterranean and members of the Greek Government in Exile.
14 th October	2 nd Independent Parachute Brigade lands in Greece.
16 th October	23 rd Armoured Brigade lands in Greece, under the command of Brigadier R. H. E. ARKWRIGHT.
16 th October	H.Q. III Corps opens in Greece.

25 th – 26 th October	Under command of Earl JELLICOE, 'Pompforce' comprising one battalion of the Parachute Regiment, Royal Engineers, R.A.F. Regiment personnel in armoured cars and a battery of 75 mm guns head north from Athens to pursue the German rearguards.
26 th – 27 th October	'Pompforce' catch up with German rearguard at Kozani. Engagement takes place but Germans too strong for 'Pompforce' and German retreat continues.
Late October	23 rd Armoured Brigade occupies Athens and Piraeus.
3 rd November	<p>7th Indian Infantry Brigade arrives in Greece from Italy by sea comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st Bn. The Royal Sussex Regiment; • 2nd Bn. The Sikh Regiment; • 1st Bn. 2nd Gurkha Rifles; • 31st Field Regiment; • 12th Field Company, Sappers and Miners; • 11th Field Park Company, Sappers and Miners. <p>The brigade was deployed into Macedonia in northern Greece. Brigade later reinforced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central India Horse; • Machine Gun Battalion, 6th Rajputana Rifles
5 th November	Lieutenant General SCOBIE reports Greece clear of German troops. The Greek Brigade (which had served with Allied forces in the Western Desert) is now deployed in the Athens area.
6 th November	The Times reports rising tensions between E.L.A.S. and Greek government.
3 rd December	General strike organised by Communist parties takes place in Athens. Greek Police open fire on protesters.
9 th December	5 th Indian Infantry Brigade diverted from the Dodecanese Island to land at Piraeus, to support the elements of 'Block Force' holding the quay area, and Greek Naval Headquarters.
10 th December	7 th Indian Brigade ordered to disarm the E.L.A.S. forces in Macedonia and reform the Salonika National Guard.
17 th November	<p>Two squadrons of Spitfires and one of Boltimores of the Greek Air Force arrive in Greece from Italy.</p> <p>Units from the 11th Indian Brigade are flown into Patras in the Peloponnese.</p>

22 nd November	5 th Indian Infantry Brigade arrives in Greece.
3 rd December	<p>Violence erupts in Athens, commencement of Greek civil war. E.L.A.S. soldiers begin marching on Athens. E.L.A.S. 2nd (Attica) Division aims for Athens and 3rd (Peloponnesse) Division makes for Piraeus.</p> <p>139th Infantry Brigade (2nd/5th Bn. Leicesters, 5th Bn. Sherwood Foresters and 16th Bn. Durham Light Infantry comes under command of 23rd Armoured Brigade.</p>
4 th December	<p>23rd Armoured Brigade and 2nd Independent Parachute Brigade formed as 'ArkForce' for operations in Greece. Brigadier ARKWRIGHT given local rank of Major General and a separate staff. Colonel R. A. HERMON appointed with the local rank of Brigadier and assumed command of 23rd Armoured Brigade.</p> <p>139th Infantry Brigade commences landing in Greece under the command of Brigadier A. P. BLOCK.</p>
5 th December	Lieutenant General SCOBIE orders full offensive action by British troops against the E.L.A.S. soldiers. 23 rd Armoured Brigade ordered to clear central Athens, and 2 nd Parachute Brigade ordered to clear northern Athens. The Greek Mountain Brigade was ordered to secure southern Athens.
7 th December	Central Athens secured by British troops.
9 th December	<p>1st/4th The Hampshire Regiment disembarks in Greece. SCOBIE cables for the urgent dispatch of the rest of 46th Infantry Division to Greece.</p> <p>The 11th Bn. The King's Royal Rifle Corps fights its way into the suburbs of Athens.</p>
10 th December	E.L.A.S. troops are reinforced around Athens and Piraeus. Road between Athens and port of Piraeus cut by E.L.A.S. forces, leaving British forces surrounded in Athens.
11 th December	<p>Fighting intensifies in Athens. The 6th Bn. The Parachute Regiment lost one-hundred and seventeen men, mainly because of gunshots or grenades injuries.</p> <p>The Headquarters British Forces in Greece comes under artillery fire, and damage caused.</p>

	<p>Field Marshal ALEXANDER arrives for a visit and is conveyed in an armoured car to reach the Headquarters. Decision taken to reinforce the British forces in Greece.</p>
12 th December	<p>Headquarters X Corps (Lieutenant General J. L. I. HAWKSWORTH) arrives in Greece, and is designated Headquarters, Military Command, Athens. It takes responsibility for all military operations in Athens as a subordinate command to Headquarters Land Forces and Military Liaison (Greece).</p> <p>An E.L.A.S. delegation comes to the Headquarters of British Forces in Greece to discuss the surrender of British forces. No agreement reached on a ceasefire.</p> <p>S.S. Empire Dace hits a mine near Patras and sinks. 70 men killed and 40 injured.</p>
13 th December	<p>H.Q. 4th Infantry Division arrives in Greece from Italy, under command of Major General A. D. WARD. It comprises the 10th, 12th and 28th Infantry Brigades. The division comes under command of III Corps.</p> <p>A heavy artillery bombardment of the Infantry Barracks in Athens and an attack on this location, in which were based the Headquarters 23rd Armoured Brigade, Signal Squadron, 331 Company R.A.S.C., 1238 Field Company R.E., 463 Battery R.H.A. and some troops from 11th K.R.R.C.. About 1,000 E.L.A.S. soldiers attack the barracks but are repulsed.</p> <p>Troops from the King's Regiment (Liverpool) are driven straight from landing at Piraeus to Athens to help break up the E.L.A.S. attack, and tanks from 23rd Armoured Brigade are also used.</p> <p>The British troops are forced back into a small confined area, and the line only just held.</p>
14 th December	<p>British troops alter their defensive positions, with the 2nd Parachute Brigade occupying Omonia Square. The Greek Mountain Brigade is defending Lycabettus.</p> <p>At Piraeus, troops of the 4th Indian Division commence a limited counter-offensive to regain control of key locations in the area. Much of the fighting was house to house, and hand-to-hand. 'Block' Force is formed from 139th Infantry Brigade to secure the Piraeus area.</p> <p>In Salonika, troops from 4th Indian Division thwart a planned E.L.A.S. attack.</p>

17 th December	4 th Infantry Division transfers to command of Military Command Athens, under Lieutenant General HAWKESWORTH.
18 th December	E.L.A.S. forces attack the Averof Prison, guarded by men from the 64 th Light Battery, R.A.. A fierce fight develops and the prisoners either escaped, or captured, tortured and killed.
20 th December	<p>Political pressure from the United States and critical coverage from some elements of the British media push the deployment of British troops in Greece, fighting against Communists in what was a civil war places additional stress on Lieutenant General SCOBIE.</p> <p>As he feels sufficiently reinforced, he launches a major offensive to clear Athens and regain control of the city.</p>
21 st December	Some suggestions within the British politicians and their representatives in Greece that the British should make peace. Lieutenant General SCOBIE, took the decision not to do so and to continue to defeat the Communist forces.
22 nd December	Most severe fighting yet takes place in Piraeus between E.L.A.S. forces and British and Indian troops.
23 rd December	Most E.L.A.S. strongpoints in Piraeus are taken, E.L.A.S. commit their final reserves but to no effect.
24 th December	Troops from the 5 th Indian Brigade continue their offensive in Piraeus.
25 th December	Fighting continues. 'ArkForce' now clearing the road from Athens to Piraeus.
26 th – 28 th December	CHURCHILL arrives in Greece, and a multi-party conference takes place. By this date, the E.L.A.S. forces are in decline, and British military presence is gaining the ascendancy.
30 th December	Units from Piraeus assault the power station at St. George's Bay.
1945	
1 st January	All of southern Athens now cleared of E.L.A.S. forces.
3 rd January	New Greek government formed without any Communist members.
3 rd – 8 th January	British forces continue to clear the countryside and roads between Athens and Piraeus. Armoured columns strike out of the urban centres. E.L.A.S. forces retreat.

5 th January	A state of armed truce takes effect in the Peloponnese.
8 th January	'ArkForce' disbanded, Brigadier ARKWRIGHT and Colonel HERMON resume their previous appointments and ranks.
9 th January	Reinforcements from 139 th Infantry Brigade arrive off Patras. British forces land allowing the 5 th Indian Brigade to push out from the town to start clearing the countryside.
11 th January	The 5 th Indian Brigade moves from Piraeus to Volos, on the eastern coast of Greece.
12 th January	All key towns in Greece now under effective British control.
14 th January	H.Q. 46 th Infantry Division arrives in Greece from Italy with the two remaining brigades of the division. Under the command of Major General C. E. WEIR, comprises the 128 th , 138 th and 139 th Infantry Brigades. It comes under command of H.Q. Military Command Athens.
15 th January	Lieutenant General SCOBIE and four delegates from the Communist political parties sign a truce in Athens.
16 th January	The ceasefire becomes effective and is announced in the U.K. Parliament by CHURCHILL. About 75,000 British and Indian troops were deployed to Greece during the civil war. Of these, about 2,100 had become casualties, and 237 were listed as killed in action.
28 th January	2 nd Parachute Brigade Group leaves Greece by sea bound for Italy.
1 st February	H.Q. Military Command Athens closed. Headquarters X Corps returns to Italy. 4 th Infantry Division transfers to Headquarters Land Forces and Military Liaison (Greece).
March	The 4 th Indian Division concentrates in Northern Greece, with the 5 th Indian Brigade in Epirus, the 11 th Indian Brigade around Salonika, and the 7 th Indian Brigade in eastern Macedonia. The division starts to disarm E.L.A.S. soldiers, gather up German soldiers still in the area, and commence humanitarian support for the local population.
13 th March	The 2 nd /4 th Bn. The Hampshire Regiment from the 4 th Infantry Division arrives in Crete by ship to secure the island. 10,000 German prisoners of war are rounded up.

1 st April	H.Q. Land Forces and Military Liaison (Greece) redesignated as: H.Q. Land Forces (Greece).
7 th April	H.Q. 46 th Infantry Division, 128 th , 138 th and 139 th Infantry Brigades leaves Greece for Italy and then Austria.
December	13 th Infantry Division formed in Greece under the command of Major General A. D. ADAIR to take command of British troops in southern Greece to relieve the 4 th Infantry Division which is to move to northern Greece.
1946	
January	Artillery units and 1 st /4 th Bn. The Essex Regiment leave the 4 th Indian Division and sail for the United Kingdom.
22 nd January	Units from the 4 th Infantry Division land at Salonika to relieve the 4 th Indian Division; the remaining Indian units from which sail back to India.
November	Headquarters 13 th Infantry Division disbanded in Greece.
1947	
March	4 th Infantry Division disbands in Greece. One brigade remains in Greece.
1948	
September	2 nd Infantry Brigade arrives in Greece, from The Canal Zone comprising: 1 st Bn. Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment 1 st Bn. The Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire L.I.
1950	
February	Last British troops in Greece, the 1 st Bn. Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment leave Greece.

Bibliography and Sources

Services of British Army Officers & cc 1939 – 1945

Published by Savanna Publications 1999 as reprint of the Half-Yearly Army List January 1946
90, Dartmouth Road, Forest Hill, LONDON. SE23 3HZ [ISBN 1 902366 02 6]

Orders of Battle Second World War 1939-1945

Prepared by Lieut-Col H. F. JOSLEN
First Published by the H.M.S.O. in 1960 Reprinted 1990 The London Stamp Exchange Ltd
[ISBN 0 948130 03 2]

World War II unit histories and officers

<http://www.unithistories.com/> [Accessed 19th November 2011]

Generals.dk The Generals of WWII

<http://www.generals.dk/> [Accessed 19th November 2011]

Land Forces of Britain, the Empire and Commonwealth.

Author: T. F. MILLS

Available on-line at: <http://web.archive.org/web/20070622075214/http://www.regiments.org>
[Accessed 19th November 2011]

'Loyalty and Honour' – The Indian Army September 1939 – August 1947

Part I Divisions

Part II Brigades

Part III

By Chris KEMPTON

Published by the Military Press (2003) [ISBN 0-85420-228-5]

Scobie, Hero of Greece – The British Campaign 1944-45

By: Henry MAULE

Published by: Arthur BARKER Ltd, LONDON (1975)
[ISBN 0 213 16544 6]

Fourth Indian Division

By: Lieutenant Colonel G. R. STEVENS, O.B.E..

Published by: McLaren and Son Limited, TORONTO, Canada. (n.d. circa 1948)

The Red Beret – The Story of the Parachute Regiment 1940-1945

By: Hilary St. George SAUNDERS

Published by: Michael JOSEPH Ltd, 26, Bloomsbury Street, LONDON W.C.1 (1950)

British Airborne Troops

By: Barry GREGORY

Published by: MacDONALD and JANES, St. Giles House, 49-50 Poland Street, LONDON. W1A 2LG (1974)
[ISBN 0 356 04706 7]