

Misunderstood and Forgotten: The Greek Naval Mutiny of April 1944

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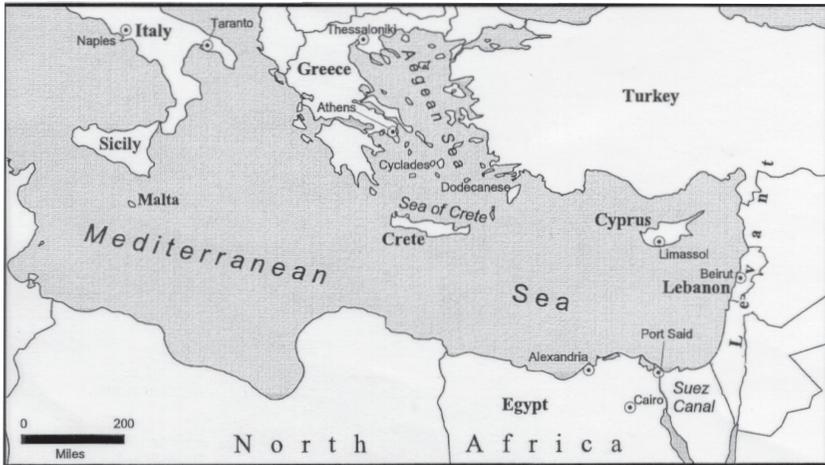
Abstract

After being driven from Greece by the German military in 1941, the Royal Hellenic Navy (RHN) operated alongside Britain's Royal Navy (RN) from bases in Egypt, Lebanon, and Malta. In April 1944 the RHN experienced a widespread mutiny, which began in Alexandria, Egypt, over the political composition of the Greek government. This essay explores the importance of the Alexandria mutiny to the RHN. It investigates the role of the navy in the royalist/republican rivalry of the 1920s–1930s, the wartime return to service of republican officers, the RHN's operations under British direction in the eastern Mediterranean, the political orientation of the government-in-exile, disturbances in the RHN prior to the mutiny, the events of the mutiny itself, the aftermath of the mutiny, how the mutiny affected the RN-RHN relationship, and the significance of the mutiny within the context of naval history in general. Wartime RN records held at the Public Record Office outside London, United States Navy intelligence reports held at the National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland, as well as unpublished and published secondary sources, provide the basis of this investigation.

Multinational naval operations are a common occurrence in today's world. While the United States Navy is presently the most powerful in the world, it frequently operates with ships from allied navies to reach its security goals. Such allied cooperation dates back to World War II when escort groups in the Battle of the Atlantic were composed of ships from the U.S., Canadian, and Royal Navies along with a handful of Polish, Free French, Norwegian, and Dutch ships. Allied naval cooperation also occurred in the Mediterranean Sea with Australian, Canadian, Polish, Free French, Dutch, and Greek ships operating alongside the Royal and later the U.S. Navies.

After being driven from Greek home waters by the German air force and army, the Royal Hellenic Navy (RHN) operated with the Royal Navy (RN) from bases in Egypt, Malta, and Lebanon (Map 1). While individual ships achieved notable successes and suffered grievous losses,

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Map 1.

one of the most notable events during this time remains the April 1944 mutiny at Alexandria. After a similar mutiny by the Greek army, enlisted naval personnel seized all RHN ships in Alexandria harbor to protest the Greek government's refusal to allow leftist parties to join the government. Loyal Greeks with British assistance eventually boarded the mutinous vessels to crush the protest. Incidents leading up to the mutiny and the mutiny itself sharply altered the Anglo-Hellenic naval relationship and can be seen as precursors to the Greek Civil War (1946–1949). Though the mutiny was a seminal event for the RHN, it is largely undiscussed in the general literature on military and naval history, especially that written in English. This essay uses archival and other sources to build a comprehensive understanding of the mutiny and to explore its significance, both for Greece and for the broader analysis of naval mutinies.

The literature

The experiences of the RHN in World War II are largely unknown to English-speaking naval historians. No history of the Greek navy after the Greek war of independence (1821–1828) has appeared in English. Nor has there been a comprehensive English-language account of the RHN during World War II.¹ The significance and distinctive character of the Alexandria mutiny therefore lies outside most general analyses of modern naval history. The general literature on naval history largely contains scattered references to individual Greek ships or actions in campaign histories (e.g., Roskill 1954–1961 on the RN; Morison 1947–

1962 on the U.S. Navy), notations in naval chronologies (e.g., Rohwer and Hümmelchen 1992), brief mention in wartime publications intended to bolster morale and identify Allied contributions (e.g., Divine 1944:216–249; Robinson 1944), or short commentaries in reference books like *Jane's Fighting Ships* (annual editions between 1940–1946) or *Conway's All the World's Fighting Ships 1922–1946* (Gardiner 1980). The official British multi-service history of the war in the Mediterranean, one volume of which is by Molony (1984), includes brief references to Greek ships but makes no mention of the mutiny.

Neither has the Alexandria mutiny made its way into basic scholarly works on the role of the Greek military in national politics in the twentieth century (e.g., Dertilis 1977; Papacosma 1977; Veremis 1997). Veremis dedicates a chapter to World War II and the civil war that immediately followed, but he makes only one oblique reference to the mutiny. This is a curious omission since the Alexandria mutiny is an obvious example of the military intervening in Greek politics.

The mutiny is also absent from more general works on naval mutinies. Mutinies on HMS *Bounty* (1789), in the RN at the Nore and Spithead in 1797, in the German and Russian navies at the end of World War I, and in the RN at Invergordon in 1931 have all received much attention. Even though the Alexandria mutiny was small, brief, and did not happen in the navy of a major world power, one might nevertheless expect to find it discussed in encyclopedic works on mutinies. Guttridge's (1992) volume, however, does not mention it even once its 300 pages.

The biographies and autobiographies of the British politicians, diplomats, and military officers involved in the Alexandria mutiny also reveal relatively little about it. In April 1944 the two principal RN officers with immediate oversight of the RHN were Admiral John H.D. Cunningham (naval Commander in Chief, Mediterranean) and Vice Admiral Bernard H. Rawlings (Flag Officer Levant and Eastern Mediterranean or FOLEM).² The two senior British Army officers with responsibility for Egypt were General Henry Maitland Wilson (Supreme Allied Commander Mediterranean Theater) and General Bernard C.T. Paget (army Commander in Chief, Middle East). Of these officers, only Wilson published any memoirs and no biography of any of the four top officers has been completed. Wilson's memoirs focus on the larger campaigns in which he took part and mention the mutiny only briefly (1951:206, 214). The British ambassador to the Greek government-in-exile in Cairo was Sir Reginald W.A. Leeper. His memoirs also make just brief mention of the mutiny (1950:45–46), focusing instead on the larger political conflict and the Greek Civil War. Volume 5 of Prime Minister Winston Churchill's (1951) wartime memoirs contains the most extensive discussion of the mutiny for such sources. It includes a chapter called "The

Greek Torment,” which explains the situation in Greek national politics that spawned the mutiny, and how the British government responded diplomatically and militarily to it. The text of the instructions on dealing with the mutiny that Churchill issued directly to senior army and navy commanders are also found in this chapter.

Other than this chapter, there are only eight sources that directly address the Alexandria mutiny in any depth. Of these, Spyropoulos (1993) and Kitroeff (1979, 1980) go into greatest detail on both the political background and the actual events of the mutiny. Each of the others, however useful, has limitations. Stavrianos’s (1950) article was written just six years after the mutiny, insufficient time for documents to be declassified. In addition, his article focuses on the situation in the army, which also rebelled at this time, with just a few paragraphs about the navy. Roskill (1960:328–329) devotes only one paragraph to the subject. His account also mentions communist sympathies as the source of the trouble without considering the political history of opposition to King George II or how the mutiny affected Allied naval operations. Fleischer (1978) goes into great detail on the innumerable twists and turns as the military plotted and politicians tried to stay on top of the situation, yet his article devotes only two pages to the navy. Alexander (1989) uses British wartime documents to analyze the army mutiny in great detail, but treats the naval mutiny only when necessary to explain events in the army. Furthermore, his study remains unpublished. Papastratis (1992) summarizes the experience of the RHN based in Egypt but devotes just one paragraph to the mutiny. He assesses the political motivation for unrest but gives no details about the mutiny or thoughts on how the mutiny affected the RN-RHN relationship. Finally, Syrett (1988) combines political background with explanation of the mood of the RHN, however, his article explores the British handling of political unrest among Greek personnel assigned to commission two “*Hunt*” class destroyers at Chatham a week after the Alexandria mutiny was crushed.

This essay aims at pulling together these scattered sources to render a more complete understanding of the Alexandria mutiny, combining these materials with two sets of primary documents: RN records held at the Public Record Office near London and U.S. Navy intelligence reports held at the National Archives and Records Administration (see References Cited, Primary Sources). The analysis focuses on three basic questions. How did the national political schism affect the RHN? What actually happened during the mutiny? How did the Alexandria mutiny alter Anglo-Hellenic naval cooperation? In contrast to the many sources that emphasize the rebellion in the Greek army or the political background of such military discontent, this investigation

focuses quite specifically on events in the navy and how these broader political themes played themselves out within the RHN. The discussion begins with consideration of the role of the navy in the royalist/republican rivalry of the 1920s–1930s, and then turns to the wartime return to service of republican officers, the RHN's operations under British direction in the eastern Mediterranean, the political orientation of the government-in-exile, disturbances in the RHN prior to the mutiny, the events of the mutiny itself, the aftermath of the mutiny, how the mutiny affected the RN-RHN relationship, and its overall significance for understanding the role of the navy in Greek politics and naval mutinies more generally.

The Greek military's involvement in domestic politics

Two related yet distinct consequences of the Greek military's involvement in domestic politics must be understood in order to comprehend why the Alexandria mutiny occurred. A political schism within both Greece and the officer corps led to alternating mass dismissals beginning in 1917 and continuing for almost two decades. When dismissed officers later regained their commissions, there were too few officer billets to absorb all the available officers. This surplus of officers created intense professional rivalry for seniority, promotion, and appointment to prestigious posts. This professional rivalry, in turn, exacerbated the political schism.

This schism reflected the conflict between supporters of the monarchy and supporters of political leader, Eleftherios Venizelos.³ The original dispute concerned Greece's involvement in World War I but later evolved into a conflict revolving around political factionalism and whether Greece should be a monarchy. After multiple changes of government during the 1920s and 1930s, the situation took a sustained turn toward one side in 1935.

On 1 March 1935, a coalition of anti-monarchists and Venizelos supporters staged a military coup d'état in order to prevent the restoration of the monarchy and to dismiss their professional rivals in the military. While these plotters gained control of the navy, they did not use this to influence land forces into joining them. The coup rapidly fell apart, and the royalist party restored the monarchy, with King George II taking the throne in November 1935. Instead of eliminating the royalist threat, the failed coup resulted in officers with republican or Venizelist sympathies being dismissed en masse. Malakasses reports that the RHN had 660 officers on active duty in 1934–35 but only 549 on active duty a year later, a reduction of roughly 17% (1995:103). Another set of figures paints an even more drastic picture. Malakasses states that 13 of 40

(32.5%) lieutenant commanders and 14 of 31 commanders (45%) were dismissed (1995:105). By 1936 the officer corps was solidly royalist in orientation (Stavrianos 1950:303).

For republicans, the situation went from bad to worse when retired army General Ioannis Metaxas suspended the constitution on 4 August 1936 with the blessing of the King. Metaxas instituted a quasi-fascist government (Sarandis 1993). Since King George II backed Metaxas, most members of the officer corps were now both royalist and authoritarian. As a result, most RHN officers were loyal to the Metaxas regime, and no anti-government conspiracies developed. The government did not yet fully trust the navy, however, prohibiting it from having live ammunition until 1938 (Close 1993:33–34).

Two points should be drawn from these developments. First, the dismissals of royalist officers (in 1917 and 1923) and then republican officers (in 1926, 1933, and 1935) created more officers than positions to be filled. This resulted in rival cliques maneuvering to obtain select positions and gain seniority on the officers' list.⁴ Second, despite recent dismissals, some personnel in all three branches of military service were opposed to the monarchy and its support of Metaxas. The professional opposition and sharp political conflict among Greek officers created optimum conditions for internal disunity.

The return of the Venizelists

While the royalist/Metaxist faction dominated the RHN prior to Greece's involvement in World War II, that situation changed substantially after 1940. The rivalry and competition that had been temporarily quashed with the royalist successes of 1935 very quickly became active again.

Italy attacked Greece on 28 October 1940 after several months of military harassment.⁵ Internal political differences were set aside in order to unify the country and fight the Italians, but republican officers dismissed in 1935 were still largely prohibited from returning to active duty. Some Venizelist officers were allowed back into the navy but as reservists (Higham 1993:237). Those junior officers who were allowed to resume naval service generally were assigned shore duty or sent to oversee weapons production. Prestigious assignments such as sea commands were left to royalist officers (Malakasses 1990:91).

Metaxas remained in power until his death on 29 January 1941. The King then appointed Alexander Koryzis, a prominent Athens banker, as prime minister. Once Germany invaded Greece on 6 April 1941 and drove the Greek government into exile in Cairo, old political hatreds and professional rivalries reemerged.

A sizable proportion of the modern ships of the RHN escaped

from Greece to Crete and then Alexandria. Most of the officers manning these ships were royalists. However, increasing numbers of officers from all three branches of service and of various political beliefs escaped from Greece to join the Royal Hellenic Forces in the Middle East (also known by its Greek initials as VESMA).

After May 1941 officers who had been dismissed for republican views were allowed back into the armed forces to make use of their talents and to attempt to reconcile past divisions (Spyropoulos 1993:98). Those readmitted were often commissioned at ranks at least equal to what they would have held if they had remained in the service and been promoted with their peers (Fleischer 1978:7). Spyropoulos states that the readmitted officers were promoted to ranks *higher* than they would have held if they had remained in constant service (1993:116). This readmission and promotion of the dismissed officers angered the Metaxist/royalist faction that viewed the republicans as rebels and as their juniors in rank (Syrett 1988:52).

The competition between officers of the two political camps was most severe in the army, where secret societies were established with the express purpose of forcing the government to dismiss all officers of the opposing political movement (Veremis 1997:136). The royalist army officers formed a group called Nemesis while the republican counterpart was the Anti-fascist Military Organization (known by its Greek initials as ASO).⁶ The Metaxist/royalist group was dominant early in the war and used extreme methods to preserve their position. High-ranking officers regularly relieved subordinates simply on the grounds of their political views. They also disobeyed their superiors in attempts to favor their own movement. A favorite tactic of royalist officers was to threaten the government with mass resignations unless republican officers were dismissed. Competition between officers was heightened because of their sheer number. Officers escaped from Greece at a higher rate than enlisted personnel, so that eventually more than 10% of all Greek service personnel were officers (Veremis 1997:135).

This internal struggle was apparently less of a problem in the navy, which was much more politically homogeneous and generally royalist. This homogeneity and royalist inclination was the result of the actions of Deputy Prime Minister Rear Admiral Alexandros E. Sakellariou and navy commander Rear Admiral Epaminondas Kavadias who blocked the return of republican navy officers before 1943 (Fleischer 1978:15).⁷ Sakellariou appointed naval Captain Panayiotis Konstas as director of intelligence for the Greek armed forces. Konstas had control over the escape routes from Greece and, at Sakellariou's direction, only permitted royalist officers to escape to the Middle East (Spyropoulos 1993:98). Sakellariou was also Minister of the Navy and used his control over

appointments to favor royalist officers (Spyropoulos 1993:101). This obstruction of republican appointments ended in March 1943 when both Sakellariou and Kavadias were replaced due to their association with the former dictator Metaxas (Spyropoulos 1993:229). Newly appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Panayiotis Kanellopoulos then promoted the RHN attaché in London, Captain Konstantinos A. Alexandris, to Rear Admiral and named him Commander in Chief (CinC) of the RHN (Fleischer 1978:18). In 1935 Captain Alexandris had been one of the highest-ranking naval officers dismissed for participation in the Venizelist coup d'état, so his appointment was a setback to the royalist campaign to purge republicans from the armed forces.⁸

The Renaissance of the RHN

While the RHN suffered heavy losses to the Germans, chiefly due to air attack, a substantial portion of the fleet escaped to Egypt. Once the last ships straggled in from Greek waters, the RHN possessed the elderly armored cruiser *Averoff* (built 1910), the modern destroyers *Vasilissa Olga*, *Kondouriotis*, *Spetsai*, the submarines *Katsonis*, *Papanikolis*, *Glavkos*, *Nereus*, and *Triton*, the old large torpedo boats *Aetos*, *Ierax*, *Panther*, the old small torpedo boats *Sphendoni*, *Aspis*, and *Niki*, and assorted auxiliary vessels.

Many of the ships that escaped to Alexandria were too old for active combat service or lacked essential equipment. For the RHN to take an active role in the war, it required assistance from the RN. An Anglo-Hellenic military cooperation agreement signed in London on 9 March 1942 obligated the RN to supply the RHN with two submarines plus materials and food for the surface fleet. All ship repairs and munitions were to be paid for by the RN. New ships would be transferred to the RHN provided trained crews were available to man them (Spyropoulos 1993:139–141).⁹ To take advantage of the trained Greek crews, the RN began transferring destroyers, corvettes, and submarines to the RHN in June 1942 with the escort destroyer *Pindos* (ex HMS *Bolebrook*). In the meantime, existing RHN ships were sent to British-controlled ports in Egypt, Sudan, and India for refitting. The fire control equipment was modernized, and anti-submarine weapons fitted, with the ships returning to active service in early 1942.

While the RHN was still rather small, its ships were a welcome reinforcement to the RN. The armored cruiser *Averoff* initially served as a convoy escort in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean until retired to guardship duties at Port Said in late November 1942. Greek submarines were active on combat patrols, with four of six original boats being lost

between 1940 and 1943. The two surviving submarines served until mechanical problems forced their retirement to training duties. They were eventually replaced on active duty by two transferred units, one British “U” class and the other a captured Italian. In addition to these two submarines, the Royal Navy transferred six “Hunt” class escort destroyers and two older fleet destroyers plus four “Flower” class corvettes, establishing a prominent role for the Greek navy in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Later in the war, small craft such as motor minesweepers (MMSs) were also provided to the RHN. This modern equipment and the well-trained crews allowed the RHN to be the most active of the three Greek services (Fleischer 1978:31fn).

The RHN achieved a number of successes once established in Egypt and re-equipped with modern ships. The pre-war, British-built fleet destroyer *Vasilissa Olga*, with the assistance of the British destroyer HMS *Petard*, sank the Italian submarine *Uarsciek* south of Malta in December 1942. The *Vasilissa Olga*, operating with several British destroyers, destroyed two Italian convoys to North Africa in June and September 1943. The escort destroyer *Pindos*, in conjunction with another escort destroyer HMS *Easton*, sank the German submarine *U-458* in August 1943, while escorting a convoy in the central Mediterranean.

The RHN also suffered losses in addition to those experienced during the German invasion. As already mentioned, the submarine service was particularly hard hit. The *Glavkos* was sunk during an air raid on Malta in April 1942, and German escorts sunk the *Triton* in the Sea of Crete in November 1942 and the *Katsonis* off Euboea in September 1943.

The fleet destroyer *Vasilissa Olga*, after an active and diverse service career, was sunk in September 1943 with heavy casualties by German dive-bombers while moored off Leros in the Aegean. The escort destroyer *Adrias* survived a mine explosion in October 1943 in the Aegean Sea through remarkable damage control efforts. After losing its bow up to the bridge, Commander Ioannis N. Toumbas grounded the ship in shallow waters off the Turkish coast. He later pulled the *Adrias* off in order to seek shelter in a more secluded cove. A month later, *Adrias* sailed stern first under escort from three British motor gunboats to Limassol, Cyprus, and then on to Alexandria. It was too badly damaged to be worth repair but the crew was saved and the RHN demonstrated its bravery and seamanship.

*The political orientation of the Greek government*¹⁰

While the initial focus of the RHN upon arrival in the Middle East was preparing to fight the Axis powers, as time went on, the political

orientation of the Greek government became increasingly important to all three of the Greek armed services. The prime minister during the German invasion, Koryzis, committed suicide and was replaced by Emmanuel Tsouderos. Prime Minister Tsouderos was seen by many as controlled by the king, which made him unacceptable to republican and leftist personnel (Stavrianos 1950:305).

In an attempt to broaden the political base of the government, a prominent republican politician was added to the cabinet. Panayiotis Kanellopoulos escaped from Greece to Egypt in April 1942. He was invited to become Deputy Prime Minister. He accepted on condition that he also become minister of each of the three armed services. The three separate ministries were thus combined into a new Ministry of Defense under Kanellopoulos in May 1942. Kanellopoulos attempted to end the political maneuvering by dismissing the most vociferous and rebellious officers of the royalist movement. He also tried to unify the armed services by appointing officers from both groups to key command positions, so that neither movement would feel as if they were being marginalized. The Minister of Defense also sought to motivate the Greek armed forces by personal visits to military units (Fleischer 1978:11–12; Spyropoulos 1993:155).

Kanellopoulos's actions were somewhat successful in the short term but he unwittingly worsened the situation in the long run. His compromises satisfied neither the royalists nor republicans, and the emerging leftist movement was also unhappy. False rumors concerning the motivations and actions of both sides and bitter denunciations of Kanellopoulos created a hostile situation. Kanellopoulos resigned as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense in March 1943, leading to the next round of political intrigue (Veremis 1997:136–137).

With Kanellopoulos's resignation, the Ministry of Defense was split into three separate ministries. In May 1943 Sophocles Venizelos, son of Eleftherios Venizelos, was appointed Minister of the Navy, while Tsouderos remained Prime Minister. While additional political maneuvering occurred between March 1944 and April 1944, Venizelos and Tsouderos remained in their respective positions until the very beginning of the mutiny.

Disturbances in the Royal Hellenic Navy

Active service and the homogeneous political views of the navy initially allowed it to avoid some of the internal problems suffered by the army. However, as the resistance movements in Greece gained military strength, they also began to call for inclusion in the government-in-exile. Since the resistance movements were overwhelmingly leftist in character, the

right of center government opposed efforts to establish a coalition administration. This position was challenged by the republicans, who supported a national unity government despite their wariness about the communist tendencies of many resistance groups. There was also increasing support for a coalition government among members of the RHN. The resistance group called the National Liberation Front (known by its Greek initials as EAM) enjoyed widespread support in the Greek merchant marine, many of whose sailors had been drafted into the RHN when their ships were sunk (Kitroeff 1980:89). This created greater political diversity within the RHN and ultimately led to the April 1944 mutiny at Alexandria.

There were quite a number of disruptions and disturbances of a political nature in the RHN prior to the Alexandria mutiny (Table 1). The earliest occurred in April 1941 during the German invasion, when the crew of the destroyer *Vasilissa Olga* refused to transport the household wealth of the royal family and government ministers to Crete or Egypt. In each case of political unease, only one or two ships were involved at one time. No serious situation developed such as refusal to sail as ordered or imprisonment of officers, but the disturbances were still a hindrance to smooth deployment of ships, and they occurred with some frequency. Given the steady occurrence of problems in RHN ships, the Alexandria mutiny could not have come as a complete surprise to either the RHN or RN.

Because of the operational deployments of its units, the RHN was not involved in the disturbances of February and March 1943 that occurred throughout the army (Spyropoulos 1993:237). However, unrest on RHN ships began to occur not long after these incidents. The most noteworthy incident happened in July 1943. The old torpedo boat *Ierax*, operating as a convoy escort out of Haifa, had experienced political activity for a month with perhaps half the crew supporting EAM. For operational reasons, the RHN leadership chose not to deal with the problem until 16 July when the ship was due at Alexandria for work on its boilers. Senior RHN officers boarded the ship to demand an end to the political activity. The crew stated that they did not recognize the authority of the Greek government or the Commander in Chief of the RHN. The officers returned the next day to determine if the crew had backed down. Approximately 40 men locked themselves in their quarters until overcome by tear gas. Those involved were immediately court-martialed (NARA 38/98/225/E9C, naval attaché report #GR-1-43 of 4 August 1943).

While there was only one more mutinous act on a Greek warship before the April 1944 crisis, tensions remained. Prince Paul, brother of King George II, took a trip on a Greek destroyer to Italy. Rear Admiral

Alexandris, Commander in Chief of the RHN, discouraged future ship visits or trips by members of the royal family, knowing the dislike of many RHN personnel for the royal family. The U.S. naval attaché who reported this development to his government stated that Greek naval officers interpreted the frequent ship visits and appearance of Prince Paul in the uniform of a Rear Admiral as a ploy to curry favor with the RHN and increase the likelihood that the royal family could return to Greece after the war (NARA 38/98/153/30, naval attaché report #GR-11-44 of 3 August 1944).

Although there were fewer instances of unrest aboard RHN ships in early 1944, the navy's involvement with politics was not over. Two naval officers (retired Vice Admiral Ioannis N. Demestichas and Captain S. Roufopoulos) were consulted by the group of army and air force officers who approached Prime Minister Emmanuel Tsouderos on 31 March 1944 to demand a national unity government. In addition, retired naval Captain Gerasimos Vasileiadis arrived from Greece in March as an emissary from the pre-war Liberal Party (i.e., Venizelist party) (Spyropoulos 1993:330).

By this time, the right of center Greek government-in-exile appointed by the king enjoyed little popular support (Iatrides and Rizopoulos 2000:89). In occupied Greece, the military branch of EAM (known from its Greek initials as ELAS) was in control of much of the countryside. EAM sponsored an umbrella organization of groups interested in forming a national unity government. This organization, the Political Committee of National Liberation (known from its Greek initials as PEEA), was formed on 10 March 1944. In the cities, quisling Greeks were nominally in control though under the direction of German, Italian, and Bulgarian occupation forces. Many of these were more interested in repressing leftists and guaranteeing the post-war future of the monarchy than in fighting the occupation forces. Among the Greek forces in the Middle East, the majority of the personnel, whether they were leftist or republican, were opposed to the king.

When Prime Minister Tsouderos received the petition advocating a national unity government, he was pressured by the republican members of the cabinet to resign. Tsouderos initially agreed to do this, then was temporarily persuaded by the King and Churchill to remain in office, but finally resigned on 6 April 1944. Minister of the Navy Sophocles Venizelos became acting Prime Minister just as the mutiny was beginning.

The April 1944 mutiny

With tensions rising in the armed forces (especially the army¹¹) because of the government's reluctance to create a national unity coalition, Commander in Chief Rear Admiral Alexandris consulted the captains of RHN ships at Alexandria on April 3 (Table 2). The captains reported that the majority of their crews supported the resistance groups in Greece and the idea of a national unity government (Spyropoulos 1993:341). Later that day, the escort destroyers *Miaoulis* and *Pindos* refused to sail when scheduled. The crew of the *Pindos* also threw their officers into the harbor (ADM116/5088, p. 32). After an exchange of angry messages, Rear Admiral Alexandris agreed on 3 April to pass along the ships' views to the government (Stavrianos 1950:309). Retired Captain John O. Campbell, a British liaison officer to the RHN, intervened in the dispute. The *Pindos* agreed to sail provided a new complement of officers was assigned to the ship. Rear Admiral Alexandris agreed to this demand in order to ensure that the *Pindos* would complete its mission (Kitroeff 1979:129). As a result, both ships sailed on 6 April. Meanwhile, on 4 April at Port Said, shots were fired at the officers of the destroyer *Koundouriotis* to prevent them from coming on board. On 5 April, unrest also began at the Greek naval camp in the Suez Canal area. With no progress made toward a national unity government, on April 8 the escort destroyer *Kriti* refused to sail and took the further step of holding its officers hostage, something observed by visitors Commander Stylianos G. Benas of the RHN and Captain Campbell.

An attempt to dissuade the mutineers was made by Commanders Benas and Ioannis Toumbas of the RHN when they visited the tender *Hyphaestos* where the ringleaders were gathered.¹² When the group of Greek minesweepers next returned to Alexandria, against British orders, they bypassed their usual anchorage and moored near the other Greek ships to join the rebellion. The corvette *Apostolis* then arrived and refused to put to sea again. The Greek merchant ships at Alexandria also supported the rebellion. Once the escort destroyer *Pindos* arrived at Malta, the Greek ships there joined the mutiny as well. The ships at Port Said and in Lebanon followed suit. The only ships not to participate were the submarine *Pipinos* and the landing ships (LSTs) *Chios*, *Lemnos*, and *Samos*, all four of which were on missions at the time.

While almost all ships and shore establishments of the RHN joined the mutiny, the amount of support is unclear. Kitroeff argues that while the official position of the RHN was that a small group of extremists had forced the majority of each crew into supporting the mutiny, sources

reveal that about 50% of the crew on each ship actively supported the mutiny without pressure (1979:131–132).

By 7 April, the severity of the situation was obvious to the British, and Prime Minister Churchill decided that Britain would back King George II in the crisis (Churchill 1951:544–545). Iatrides and Rizopoulos argue that Churchill was concerned that allowing a communist presence in the Greek government would result in a post-war situation where the Soviet Union and Britain would be brought into conflict over Greece (2000:93). Though prepared to use force against the Greek ships, the British nevertheless preferred that the Greeks end the rebellion themselves.

To this end, the British took a number of countermeasures to weaken support for the mutiny and to protect themselves in case the crisis worsened. Greek ships were to be sent to sea so that they would not become involved in the crisis (ADM116/5088, p. 14). The RN also positioned its ships at Alexandria to isolate RHN ships and cut off food and water to the RHN (ADM116/5088, p. 47). Additional ships including the light cruiser HMS *Ajax* and the fleet destroyer HMS *Urania* were sent to reinforce the RN squadron at Alexandria. Later, a British escort group of corvettes and frigates arrived with its convoy (ADM116/5088, p. 59). British ships were told to be ready to use light weapons against Greek ships and motor torpedo boats were deployed in case of offensive actions by mutinous ships. British naval liaison officers (BNLOs) were withdrawn from Greek ships, perhaps to prevent hostage taking. A plan to torpedo the tender *Hyphaestos*, where the mutiny's leaders were stationed, was considered but abandoned as impractical. The Flag Officer Levant & Eastern Mediterranean (FOLEM), Vice Admiral Bernard Rawlings, offered the RHN the chance to serve directly under him if the Greek ships were unhappy serving a government that excluded the resistance groups (ADM116/5088, p. 44).

At a conference of British and Greek politicians and officers on 16 April, Admiral Cunningham told the Greek government to end the mutiny or he would sink the entire RHN in Alexandria harbor (Spyropoulos 1993:366). If the Greek authorities failed to regain control of the mutinous ships, Admiral Cunningham planned to establish a deadline of 7:00 AM on 24 April at which time the RN would use force itself (ADM116/5088, p. 177). Prime Minister and Minister of the Navy Venizelos ordered Rear Admiral Alexandris to use force to retake the rebellious ships. Alexandris sought to avoid the use of force and was promptly relieved on 17 April. Vice Admiral (retired) Petros Voulgaris, Minister of the Air Force, was appointed as the new commander of the navy on 21 April (Stavrianos 1950:311). He issued a statement to all Greek ships on 22 April announcing his assumption of command and stating his resolution to end the mutiny. "I am determined to spare no

effort in imposing discipline. I call on everyone to embrace his lawful discipline and duty” (ADM116/5088, p. 175).

Voulgaris had trouble collecting the 250 volunteers (mostly officers) he needed, but then was able to attack the ships at 2:30 AM on 23 April (Fleischer 1978:31). Machine gun fire and smoke screens were used (Kitroeff 1979:137). Boarding party #1 under Captain Vasileios Kyris attacked the old torpedo boat *Ierax* from the adjacent anti-aircraft cruiser HMS *Phoebe*. The second and third boarding parties were delayed and thus faced alerted opponents. Boarding party #2 led by Lieutenant Commanders Platon A. Livas and Dimitrios N. Fifas from two nearby minesweepers seized the corvette *Sakhtouris* without casualties. Boarding party #3 under Commander Ioannis Toumbas from the frigate HMS *Nadder* captured the corvette *Apostolis*. Casualties included Lieutenant Nikolaos A. Roussen (captain of the submarine *Papanikolis*) of the boarding party who was killed and six mutineers who were wounded. Total casualties from the three assaults were seven killed and 37 wounded, mostly mutineers (Alexander 1989:42). With the successful seizure of these three ships, the remaining ships at Alexandria surrendered by 10:00 PM that day.

Two hundred of the volunteers used at Alexandria then proceeded on HMS *Ajax* to Port Said where the armored cruiser *Averoff*, aware of the events at Alexandria, had hoisted a red flag and adopted a revolutionary uniform for the crew. Loyalists demanded the surrender of the remaining ships on 25 April but were ignored. On 27 April the old small torpedo boat *Sphendoni* was boarded by Commander Konstantine V. Skoufopoulos and Lieutenant Commander Elias P. Veriopoulos who were taken as hostages to the *Averoff*. The mutineers then abandoned the other ships and retreated to the *Averoff*. Since the army and the ships at Alexandria had already surrendered, the *Averoff* surrendered on 29 April.

As for the several hundred men stationed at shore facilities, the personnel of the naval cadet school and detention barracks ended their refusal to follow orders on 21 April (ADM199/42, p. 131). The 500 men at the recruit depot surrendered on 27 April and were marched to a detention camp (ADM199/42, p. 137). At Malta, RHN personnel learned of the mutiny at Alexandria when the *Pindos* and *Miaoulis* arrived. Although there was no mutiny there, many of the enlisted men left their ships as a show of support for the mutineers when news reached Malta that the mutiny was over. The Vice Admiral at Malta judged the Greek ships there to be under the control of their officers (ADM116/5088, p. 200).

While the mutiny at Alexandria had ended by the end of April, there were still some aftershocks to be felt. On 28 April 1944, a group of

six officers and 300 other ranks (from a total group of 428) at Chatham Naval Barracks outside London announced that they supported the demands of the EAM for inclusion in the Greek government. The RN then refused to transfer the two escort destroyers *Aigaion* (ex HMS *Avon Vale*) and *Admiral Hastings* (ex HMS *Cowdray*) that the personnel had come to Chatham to take over (ADM1/17126; Syrett 1988:55–56).¹³ Then on 11 May the landing ship *Lemnos*, under repair in Italy, delivered a declaration of support for a national unity government to a British headquarters ashore. The crew also refused to sail the ship (NARA 38/98/225/E9B, liaison to FOLEM report #607–44 of 22 June 1944).

The aftermath of the mutiny

The end of the mutiny in the RHN squadron at Alexandria created far-reaching effects in the Greek armed forces. The RHN was temporarily removed from operations due to severe personnel shortages, though some of the men initially suspect were later returned to duty.

As a result of the mutiny, the commander of the submarine force, Captain Stefanos I. Tsimokos, who was sympathetic with the mutineers, was replaced by Commander Pericles Antonopoulos. Rear Admiral Grigorios Mezeviris was assigned to command all Greek ships at Malta replacing an officer who had supported the PEEA (Spyropoulos 1993:358). Beginning 17 May, leaders of the mutiny were removed from the ships starting with the cruiser *Averoff*. The escort destroyer *Pindos* and the landing ship *Lemnos*, which had mutinied after the Alexandria mutiny, had mutineers removed on 20 May while at Taranto, Italy (ADM 199/290, A). On 6 June at Naples, the escort destroyer *Miaoulis* had 26 sailors removed causing another 55 to leave the ship in sympathy. Together with 33 men removed from the escort destroyer *Themistocles* and 14 men from the patrol vessel *King George II*, a total of 128 men were sent to Alexandria (ADM 199/290, B). Trials began in mid-June 1944 on the tender *Ionia* and lasted for one month (Spyropoulos 1993:396).¹⁴ Several men were sentenced to death, but due to British and U.S. pressure the executions were not carried out (Kitroeff 1980:89). Additional personnel were sent to internment camps in the Middle East (Libya, Egypt) and East Africa (Sudan, Eritrea, Kenya).

The need to remove mutinous personnel seriously affected the RHN's ability to deploy operational units. Political purges of naval personnel were not as sweeping as in the army because of a lack of suitable replacements and the need to keep the ships in operation. In a report to the Admiralty on the status of RHN ships dated 9 June 1944, Mediterranean naval Commander in Chief Admiral Cunningham wrote that of the Greek ships under his command, only the escort destroyer

Themistocles, the submarine *Pipinos*, and four motor minesweepers were operational. All ships had been purged of mutineers but some ships were still short of crew, others were completely manned but needed time to train, while others were under repair (ADM 1/19547, A). No replacement personnel were available for submarine duty as of 20 June, although ships began to return to service by early July (Spyropoulos 1993:396).

The RHN took several steps to alleviate the personnel shortage caused by the imprisonment of approximately 2,600 men. First, once it became final that the RN would not relent and permit Greek crews to commission *Aigaion* and *Admiral Hastings*, the 450 men assigned to Chatham Naval Barracks were shipped to the Middle East for political screening and possible reassignment. Second, Greek naval officers were secretly sent to occupied Greece to recruit former RHN personnel who had not escaped in 1941 (ADM 199/290, C). Third, on 1 August 1944 Vice Admiral Voulgaris ordered all RHN personnel in Great Britain, with the exception of the naval attaché and twenty men to provide replacements for the three ships in British waters, to the Mediterranean (ADM 199/290, D). Fourth, of the roughly 2,600 men detained after the mutiny, some 800 men were subsequently reassigned to active duty, while 230 were court martialed and 1,500 imprisoned (ADM 199/290, E).

The destroyers, submarines, and corvettes that comprised the core of the RHN continued the same duties as before the mutiny. By June the naval war in the eastern Mediterranean was winding down as Italy had surrendered in September 1943, and the Allies were pushing inland. In addition, the major portion of Allied naval strength was being transferred to the west for use in the invasions of Normandy and southern France. Greek ships participated in both landings. RHN participation in the Normandy landing in early June was limited to the corvettes *Kriezis* and *Tompazis* that escorted troopships. The *Kriezis* survived being mined and an attack by German dive-bombers. By mid-August 1944, the RHN contribution to the invasion of southern France totaled three "Hunt" class escort destroyers and the ex-British fleet destroyer *Navarinon*, which escorted convoys and aircraft carriers respectively.

The most noteworthy action of the RHN after the mutiny was the sinking of a German (ex-Italian) torpedo boat by the submarine *Pipinos* (ex HMS *Veldt*). The *Pipinos* left Malta on 28 July for the central Aegean Sea, and on 8 August it sank the *TA-19* with four torpedoes off the island of Samos.

While ships of the RHN were now back in active service, political differences remained. The memoirs of the U.S. ambassador to Greece, Lincoln MacVeagh, mention the possibility of trouble in the RHN in September 1944. EAM published death threats against RHN Commander

in Chief Vice Admiral Voulgaris and others who crushed the mutiny (Iatrides 1980:603).

The steady advances of Allied ground forces in Italy and Eastern Europe caused the Germans to withdraw from Greece in September and October 1944. This followed the May conference in Lebanon of representatives of the major Greek political parties and the formation of a government of national unity under George Papandreou. On 18 October the cabinet left Cairo for Athens and arrived in Greece aboard the old armored cruiser *Averoff*. While the Greek government faced opposition from leftist political parties and resistance groups, and was still dependent upon the British government for military support, it was now based in its home territory. The RHN now had the ability to expand its ranks through conscription and was employed in fighting communist guerilla groups as well as the remaining pockets of Germans on scattered islands in the Aegean Sea.

As the RHN was settling into its home ports, it was also grappling with the reunification of its personnel. Substantial numbers of officers and men had not escaped from Greece and had spent the war under enemy occupation. In addition to the political division, the RHN now had to bridge the gap between those personnel who fought while in exile and those who remained under occupation.

The highest-ranking naval officer to remain in Greece was Vice Admiral Economou. In a memorandum submitted to the Ministry of Marine on 2 November 1944, he articulated the interests of the personnel who spent the war in Greece. While acknowledging that some officers had not done their duty while under occupation, Admiral Economou argued that officers should not be prosecuted for having remained in Greece since orders to escape were not given in April 1941. Economou also stated that future court martial panels should include officers who remained in Greece, that officers who remained in Greece should be promoted so as to not lose seniority compared to their peers who served in exile, that there should be no forced retirements of officers until the war ended, and that an admiral's council should be formed with members of all political persuasions (NARA 38/98/225/E9B, liaison to FOLEM report #580-S-44 of 24 November 1944).

The return to Greece of the government-in-exile and its armed forces resulted in a brief skirmish in the Athens region during December 1944 in what turned out to be one of the first engagements of what was to become the Greek Civil War. The RHN was active in fighting the armed forces of EAM, known as ELAS. Destroyers were assigned to visit harbors to raise civilian morale, escort convoys between Alexandria and Greece, and, with corvettes, bombard ELAS positions. Other ships carried out a variety of surveillance and transportation tasks. The RHN

also raised a naval infantry unit of roughly 700 volunteers who cleared the area adjacent to the main port of Piraeus (NARA 38/98A/1221/P4A, naval attaché report GR-89-45 of 15 February 1945).

A U.S. Navy intelligence report from April 1945 regarding RHN personnel observed that morale was excellent between the return to Greece and the end of the December disturbances. However, there were some areas of concern. First, there was a surplus of unmotivated officers who needed and/or wanted to be demobilized. Second, recent pay cuts lowered the living standards. Third, Greeks of Egyptian origin wanted to be demobilized so they could return home. Finally, older officers needed to be replaced by younger officers with experience operating alongside the RN (38/98/225/E9B, JICAME report #11,027-45 of 8 April 1945).

The RN-RHN relationship

While the RN and RHN had cooperated closely prior to the mutiny, that relationship was threatened by the events of April 1944. From the Greek perspective, Vice Admiral Cunningham, as the British naval commander in the Mediterranean, had obligated the Greeks to end the mutiny by force, British naval vessels had been deployed to contain the mutiny, and British assistance had been provided to the RHN leadership in their efforts to purge the navy of mutinous sailors. From the British perspective, the RN had been obligated to turn its attention from fighting the Germans to “cleaning house” at its major base in the eastern Mediterranean. While it did not suffer any casualties in the mutiny, its confidence in the RHN was surely shaken when virtually the entire RHN refused orders for the better part of a month.

Ship transfers are an obvious means to assess the post-mutiny status of the RN-RHN relationship. Not only were the escort destroyers *Aigaion* and *Admiral Hastings* not transferred to the RHN, but the RHN did not receive additional submarines as promised by the RN under the March 1942 Anglo-Hellenic agreement governing the employment of the Greek armed forces. The deal promised two submarines, which were transferred (the ex-Italian *Perla* and the British ‘U/V’ class boat *Veldt*), plus more boats if crews were available to man them. The RHN received the two boats, named *Matrozos* and *Pipinos*, in October 1942 and July 1943 respectively. By the time the disturbances ended in June 1944, British submarine production was such that the transfer of additional boats to the RHN could have been easily accomplished. Crews were available as the old Greek submarines *Nereus* and *Papanikolis*, employed on training and secondary duties due to their age and mechanical problems, could have been decommissioned.

The British government feared, however, that ships transferred to the RHN would be inactive if further disturbances broke out. In addition, the purge of malcontents might have reduced the available personnel below the necessary manning level. The British considered the transfer of submarines a waste of resources since there were relatively few enemy ships in the Aegean by mid-1944, and the bulk of new British submarines were being sent to the Pacific to fight Japan. Furthermore, Britain did not want to offend Greece's long-standing rival, Turkey (Papastratis 1992:366). Admiral John Cunningham, in a signal to the Admiralty about the status of the RHN, said that the decision to cancel the planned transfer of two escort destroyers to the RHN had produced a beneficial effect in Greek personnel after the mutiny (ADM 199/290, C). Presumably, Cunningham meant that Greek personnel were reminded how beholden the RHN was to the RN for support, and that additional political disturbances would incur further penalties.

On the other hand, transferring additional ships would show a new confidence in the RHN and signal the beginning of a new period in the Anglo-Hellenic naval relationship. Ultimately, the British government announced plans for such a middle course, contingent on certain developments. If the May 1944 Lebanon conference of major Greek political parties produced a government of national unity and there were no further mutinies, the RN would transfer more destroyers to the RHN (Syrett 1988:64). However, ships transferred would be vessels that were not needed in the Far East. This decision was made in light of the fact that Greece had not declared war on Japan and that Greek vessels operating outside of the Mediterranean had not performed nearly as well as vessels operating in the Mediterranean (ADM 199/290, F). Also, any future ship transfers were to take place in the Mediterranean rather than in Great Britain (ADM 199/290, G). While British policy in July 1944 was still not to transfer additional ships, within a few months such transfers were occurring again.

To ensure that there would not be a recurrence of political activity on RHN ships, the RN also adopted a six-point plan. Greek ships would be assigned away from the eastern Mediterranean so that they would not come into contact with other Greek ships or expatriate communities in Egypt or Lebanon. When Greek ships passed through Malta, any personnel who had served in the sailor's committees would be removed from the ship at that time. If a ship needed to refit or have its boilers cleaned, it would have to do so in the central or western Mediterranean. The submarine *Papanikolis* (one of the more radical ships) would be deployed to Gibraltar for use in anti-submarine training. When Greek destroyers or corvettes were part of an escort group, a Greek vessel could

not serve as senior officer of the group. Finally, shore-based personnel were to be moved out of Alexandria harbor and stationed in camps away from the naval base (ADM116/5088, p. 201).

The extent to which the RHN relied upon and remodeled its organization after the RN is another indicator of the changing relationship between the two services. With the return to Greece, the Commander in Chief, Vice Admiral Voulgaris, initiated sweeping organizational changes as explained in a memo of 10 October 1944 to FOLEM. While the RHN had partially adopted the organization of the RN due to their close relations since early in the century, Voulgaris now wished to follow the RN system even more closely. The current RHN system concentrated power in the hands of one officer who could simultaneously be Minister of Marine and Commander in Chief, or some other combination of top positions. This concentration of power allowed one officer to implement decisions no matter how ill conceived and it also permitted favoritism. In addition, the Greek system contained competing administrative bodies that Voulgaris believed resulted in inefficiency and contradictory instructions.

Voulgaris planned to adopt the RN system of having a standing Board of Admiralty. While the current RHN Supreme Naval Council of admirals met occasionally, it was not a standing body. Under the new system, three signatures would be required for important orders, reducing the potential for abuse of power and favoritism. The Supreme Naval Council would continue to exist but would handle governmental/legislative matters while the new Board of Admiralty would address advisory and executive functions (NARA 38/98/225/E9B, naval attaché report #T-9-44 of 27 October 1944).

In addition, plans were also made to reduce the RHN's reliance on the RN in seven areas. The RHN lacked a communications system, having used the RN system during the war. They also lacked an intelligence branch. All RHN security personnel were reservists who would soon be demobilized, thus leaving the RHN without a crucial branch of service. Supplies, including fuel oil, ammunition or spare parts, were also provided by the RN. Greek shipyards and harbors were in poor condition and needed RN assistance to be restored. Finally, the RHN also depended upon RN technical assistance in sweeping the many mines in Greek waters (NARA 38/98/225/E9B, JICAME report #11,029-45 of 8 April 1945).

With the RHN back in Greece and the civil war temporarily over, the RN began to plan for strengthening the RHN to the point where direct British assistance would not be needed. The RN intended to transfer additional ships to the RHN including cruisers, destroyers, submarines, motor launches, and motor torpedo boats with destroyers

forming the core of the post-war fleet. The British Naval Mission would provide instructors for the Greek naval academy, and RN liaison officers would remain on Greek ships, both actions to raise the operational effectiveness of the RHN (NARA 38/98/180/C10K, naval attaché report #43-S-45 of 18 May 1945).

Conclusion

The political dispute of 1916 between King Constantine I and Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos led to an enduring antagonism that divided the RHN into two competing factions, one royalist and the other republican. This split was largely decided in favor of the royalists after the failed 1935 Venizelist coup with admirals Sakellariou and Kavadias controlling the RHN until March 1943. The RHN, once established in the Middle East and re-equipped with modern ships, contributed to the Allied naval effort in the eastern Mediterranean. It also became more politically diverse. The political orientation of the government-in-exile satisfied neither the royalists, republicans, nor leftists, which led to continual attempts to obligate the prime minister to alter the membership of the cabinet in favor of a particular movement.

The rise of the leftist resistance group EAM in occupied Greece created a crisis for the Greek government-in-exile when many in the RHN supported the group's demand for inclusion in the national government. While RHN officers were a mix of royalists and republicans, the enlisted personnel were strongly in favor of EAM. The mutiny of April 1944 at Alexandria and Port Said almost forced the RN to use force against its ally. Just days before the British deadline, loyal Greek boarding parties crushed the mutiny with British assistance.

After being sidelined for the months of April-June 1944, RHN ships resumed their pre-mutiny duties until Greece was liberated in October 1944. The mutiny clearly strained but did not break the close relationship between the RN and RHN. The RHN remained reliant upon the RN for ships, supplies, and organizational guidance. Naval ties between Britain and Greece remained close for several years after the war until the U. S. replaced Britain as Greece's dominant military supply source and ally.

The Alexandria mutiny has great importance for the history of the RN-RHN relationship. While the RN-RHN connection was temporarily shaken by the mutiny, British-Greek naval relations were not severed by the event. The mutiny was crushed by Greek forces, not British. Had the British used force themselves, it would have poisoned the relationship between the two services. Once Greek ships were fully manned, they returned to active duty. RN command structures were more closely

followed in the RHN, and British support in communications, intelligence, logistics, and port clearance and operation remained in place. In addition to wartime ship transfers, the RN transferred three "U" class submarines to the RHN later in 1945. Two more "U" class boats were handed over in 1946 plus three "Hunt" class escort destroyers. Seventeen motor torpedo boats were also supplied to the RHN either in 1945 or 1946. This British largesse did not extend to more valuable units like cruisers or fleet destroyers of which the Greeks desired one and two respectively (ADM 1/19547, B). British post-war assistance included the assignment of a naval mission to Greece that recommended a reduction in size and reorganization of the RHN (ADM 1/19547, C).

Though the Alexandria mutiny lasted less than a month, its legacy in the Greek naval service persisted long after. Officers who led or served in the boarding parties, such as Vasileios Kyris and Ioannis Toumbas, proved their loyalty to the government. While promotion to higher rank normally is based upon leadership ability and professional competence, loyalty to the service in moments of crisis did not hurt their careers. Both Kyris and Toumbas were promoted to flag rank after the war, Toumbas retiring as a Vice Admiral in 1955 (Haratsis 1985).

The mutiny at Alexandria also helps explain the unsuccessful 1973 coup attempt by the RHN against the military regime of 1967. Elements of the RHN, mostly in the officer corps, retained a loyalty to the monarchy. The navy did not take part in the 1967 military coup against the government but its neutrality in politics turned to opposition to the military Junta when the Junta ousted King Constantine II. Senior naval officers, both active duty and retired, sought to restore the monarchy if the opportunity arose. In 1973 the plot was discovered and the conspirators arrested except for the commander of the destroyer *Velos*. The ship's commander took the *Velos* out of NATO exercises off Sardinia and sailed to Italy where the officers tried to contact the exiled king (Guttridge 1992:289–290). The monarchy was not restored when the military Junta lost power and was finally abolished by referendum in 1975. At this point the Greek naval service changed its name from the Royal Hellenic Navy to the Hellenic Navy (HN).

Finally it is important to recognize that the 1944 mutiny evolved the way it did because of the different institutional memories of the two naval services involved. The various pre-war seizures of power by competing military factions in Greece usually resulted in dismissal and sometimes also exile for opponents but generally not prison or execution.¹⁵ In the RHN, involvement in coup attempts and mutinies was conceived and handled differently than in navies without regular histories of political involvement. In addition, large numbers of enlisted

men had been drafted from the merchant marine and may not have fully understood the consequences of disobeying orders in naval service.

The British, on the other hand, were likely influenced by memories of the RN strike at Invergordon in 1931 (Guttridge 1992:chap. 14), the Chilean mutiny of 1931 (Sater 1980; Somervell 1984), and the mutiny on the Dutch coast defense ship *De Zeven Provinciën* in 1933 (Raven 1991). The British also had genuine concerns about the effect of the mutiny on the conduct of the naval war in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Questions of motivation aside, the British obligated the Greek government to use force which in turn solidified support for the original protesters. The mutiny then spread when word of the British-imposed retaliation was transmitted by radio between ships or when ships arrived from Alexandria. The events at Alexandria and Port Said were a mutiny but the term should be used with care. A comparison of the Alexandria mutiny with other modern-era mutinies might result in a greater understanding of the range of military insurrections.

In turn, the importance of the Alexandria mutiny for understanding mutinies in general indicates that greater attention be paid to the Hellenic Navy in the general scholarship on naval history. The importance of Greece as a member of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization dictates that information about important events in Greek history be available in English as well as Greek. This study has attempted to be a step in that direction.

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Table 1. Chronology of Disturbances in the RHN 1941–1944

23 April 1941

During the German invasion of Greece, the crew of the destroyer *Vasilissa Olga* refused to transport the royal family and government ministers to safety. The protest occurred because the intended passengers sought to bring all their wealth and property with them (Spyropoulos 1993:67).

29 June 1941

Unrest on the old armored cruiser *Averoff* while at Suez (Haratsis 1985[2]:38–40).

(Late?) 1941—The crew of a destroyer called the *Sakelariou* (such a ship did not exist—perhaps this refers to the *Spetsai*) protested against bad food, overwork, and irregular pay (NARA 38/98/225/E9C, JICAME report #2198–43 of 15 December 1943).

11 January 1942

Unrest occurred on the *Averoff* while in the Indian Ocean (Haratsis 1985[2]:45).

1942

Various discipline problems occurred, possibly due to the presence of merchant marine sailors drafted into the RHN who were not used to strict military discipline (Spyropoulos 1993:114).

March 1942

Unrest occurred on the submarine *Papanikolis* (Spyropoulos 1993:170).

May 1942

Unrest occurred among crews for new ships at Royal Navy Barracks, Chatham, England (possibly escort destroyers *Kriti* and *Themistokles*) (Spyropoulos 1993:171).

13 May 1942

Unrest occurred on the *Averoff* while at Bombay. Eighteen officers and 25 enlisted men received sentences of various lengths (Haratsis 1985[2]:51–60).

(June?) 1942

Poor conditions on the submarine *Katsonis* caused unrest, which was corrected by replacing the commanding officer with Commander Laskos (NARA 38/98/225/E9C, JICAME report #2198–43 of 15 December 1943).

16–17 July 1943

The old torpedo boat *Ierax* had had several disturbances. Since it was due for repairs at Alexandria, the Commander in Chief Rear Admiral Konstantinos Alexandris decided to remove five troublemakers. Forty of the 140 crew members on board attempted to block the removal of the sailors and had to be overcome with tear gas. Several sailors on the escort destroyer *Miaoulis* voiced support for the *Ierax* at this time (Spyropoulos 1993:246) (NARA 38/98/225/E9C, JICAME report #2198–43 of 15 December 1943).

October 1943

EAM supporters on the escort destroyer *Miaoulis* refused to be transferred off the ship. As a subterfuge, the RHN announced that the ship would be fumigated and so the entire crew left the ship for the RHN drafting office (personnel depot) in Alexandria. The RHN then sent a completely new crew to the ship, effectively removing the EAM supporters from the ship (NARA 38/98/225/E9C, JICAME report #2198–43 of 15 December 1943).

Table 2. Disposition of RHN Ships in Early April 1944

Alexandria

escort destroyers *Adrias* (severely damaged), *Kanaris*, *Kriti*, *Miaoulis*, *Pindos*; corvette *Sakhtouris*; old torpedo boat *Ierax*; 8 minesweepers; tenders *Hyphaestos* and *Ionia*

At sea on way to Alexandria

corvette *Apostolis*

Port Said (mostly vessels out of commission)

old armored cruiser *Averoff*; fleet destroyer *Koundouriotis*; submarine *Papanikolis*; old torpedo boats *Aetos* and *Panthur*; old small torpedo boats *Aspis*, *Niki*, and *Sphendoni*

Malta

fleet destroyers *Navarinon* and *Spetsai*; escort destroyer *Themistokles*; submarine tender *Corinthia*; submarines *Nereus*, *Matrozos*, *Pipinos*

Beirut

8 minesweepers

Great Britain

Scapa Flow: fleet destroyer *Salamis*; Portsmouth: corvettes *Kriezis* and *Tompazis*

SOURCES: ADM116/5088, p. 35; Spyropoulos 1993:356; Syrett 1988:54.

NOTES

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¹ In Greek, however, there is the two volume official history of the RHN during World War II written by Vice Admiral Dimitrios G. Phokas in 1953. See also Haratsis 1985.

² Admiral John H.D. Cunningham should not be confused with his predecessor as naval Commander in Chief, Mediterranean, the much more well-known Admiral Andrew B. "ABC" Cunningham who later became 1st Sea Lord. The two officers were not related.

³ For a thorough explanation of the political schism, see Veremis (1993).

⁴ Malakasses (1995) paints a damning picture of the RHN between the wars. Political factionalism and mass dismissals resulted in sabotage to and/or negligence of the ships, an officer corps so under-strength that staff officers had to be sent to sea to man the fleet during exercises, an absence of training that led to failed fleet maneuvers, and an organizational structure designed not for combat effectiveness but to prevent the navy from being used by coup plotters against the government.

⁵ For instance, Italian aircraft based in the Dodecanese Islands routinely bombed Greek ships at sea. The most blatant example of Italian aggression occurred on 15 August

1940 when the old minelaying cruiser *Helli* was torpedoed at anchor off the island of Tinos in the Cyclades. The Italian submarine *Delfino* sank the *Helli* with one torpedo hit while the majority of the crew was ashore for religious services. The nationality of the submarine was promptly identified as Italian by fragments of the torpedoes, two of which missed the target.

⁶ The equivalent republican organization in the navy was AON and the air force AOA.

⁷ Some variety exists in the English spellings of Greek personal names and words. For instance, Rear Admiral Kavadias's name is sometimes given as Cavadias or Kavvadias. When more than one spelling exists, I have used the spelling that appears most often.

⁸ Alexandris had even been sentenced to death in 1935 but had escaped to Italy on board a warship. *Who's Who in Greece 1958–1959* gives details of the careers of selected high-ranking officers. Haratsis (1985) contains brief biographies of Greek naval officers who attended the naval academy and had some involvement with twentieth-century coup attempts.

⁹ In 1943 the RHN received four LSTs (Landing Ship Tank) and one PC (Patrol Craft) from the U.S. Navy. U.S.-built Liberty ships were also transferred to the Greek merchant marine, which had suffered tremendous losses.

¹⁰ Much of the material in this section is drawn from Fleischer (1978).

¹¹ For an account of the disturbances in the army, see Alexander (1989), Fleischer (1978), and Spyropoulos (1993).

¹² Both Commander Benas, a negotiator for the RHN, and Commander Toumbas, leader of boarding party #3, had been dismissed from the RHN in 1935 during the purge against non-royalist personnel. The employment of Benas and Toumbas, rather than royalist officers, may have been an attempt to reduce opposition by the mutineers. However, Benas had led the boarding party that ended the July 1943 mutiny on the old torpedo boat *Ierax*.

¹³ *Admiral Hastings* was named for a former RN officer, Frank Abney Hastings, who commanded Greek ships against the Turks during the Greek war of independence (1821–1828). Though killed in action at the age of 34, he began a pattern of Royal Navy influence in the RHN that included two RN rear admirals reorganizing the RHN during the Balkan Wars (1911–13) and Greek purchases of new warships from British yards.

¹⁴ English-language summaries of the court martial testimony can be found in NARA 38/98A/673/E9C, JICAME report #6913–44 of 29 June 1944 and naval attaché report #T–8–44 of 27 October 1944.

¹⁵ In addition, Stavrianos (1950:309) claims there existed in the Greek armed forces a long tradition of expressing political views by assuming command for 24 hours, though Alexander (1989:46fn) disputes this claim.

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Primary Sources

The United Kingdom's Public Record Office (PRO) at Kew, outside London, holds older records passed along from various departments of the British government. Admiralty records are labeled with the prefix ADM and are organized into files and sub-files. For files that do not utilize a page number system, individual documents are identified with letters.

ADM1/17126

No page given, document titled "H.M.S. Avonvale, Debate on the Adjournment"

ADM1/19547

- A. Report of 9 June 1944 from naval CinC Mediterranean to Admiralty, "Composition of Interim Fleet"
- B. Report of 15 March 1946 from naval CinC Mediterranean to Admiralty, "Policy Toward the Royal Hellenic Navy"
- C. Undated report (1945?) from Head of British Naval Mission, Greece to Greek Admiralty

ADM116/5088

- p. 14, undated signal from Admiralty to FOLEM
- p. 32, signal 071457C of 7 April 1944 from FOLEM to Admiralty
- p. 44, signal 081746C of 8 April 1944 from naval CinC Mediterranean to Admiralty
- p. 47, signal 082020C of 8 April 1944 from FOLEM to Admiralty
- p. 59, signal 091847C of 10 April 1944 from naval CinC Mediterranean to Admiralty
- p. 175, signal 221248 of 22 April 1944 from FOLEM to Vice Admiral, Malta and others
- p. 177, signal 221629C of 22 April 1944 from uncertain author to various commands
- p. 200, signal 251411B of 26 April 1944 from Vice Admiral, Malta to naval CinC Mediterranean
- p. 201, signal 251935C of 26 April 1944 from naval CinC Mediterranean to Admiralty

ADM199/42

- p. 131, logbook of FOLEM, 21 April 1944
- p. 137, logbook of FOLEM, 27 April 1944

ADM199/290

- A, Memo of 25 May 1944 from 1st Sea Lord to 1st Lord of Admiralty
- B, Signal 060928 of 6 June 1944 from naval CinC Mediterranean to Admiralty
- C, Signal 201205 of 20 June 1944 from naval CinC Mediterranean to Admiralty
- D, Signal 311645C of 1 August 1944 from Greek naval CinC to RHN attaché, London
- E, Signal 251945C of 26 May 1944 from FOLEM to Admiralty
- F, Report of 4 April 1944 by Head of Military Branch II
- G, Report of 7 July 1944 by Head of Military Branch I

The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) holds older records of the federal government at several locations. The documents cited in this paper are all held at the College Park, Maryland location. Files are organized by Record Group/Entry/Box/File. The documents cited were written by the naval attaché to the Greek government-in-exile at Cairo, by a naval officer attached to the Joint Intelligence Collecting Agency, Middle East (JICAME), or by the USN liaison officer to the Flag Officer, Levant & East Mediterranean (FOLEM).

38/98/153/30, naval attaché report #GR-11-44 of 8 March 1944 on politics of RHN

38/98/180/C10K, naval attaché report #43-S-45 of 18 May 1945 on British-Greek naval planning

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- 38/98A/673/E9C, JICAME report #6913-44 of 29 June 1944 on Greek naval court martial
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