

Captain Miniotis's Memoirs

“Greece is one of the countries for which a full account of the clandestine war remains to be written... When it appears, some of the brightest pages in it will deal with the caique operations, as they threaded their way through the sun-drenched Aegean islands under a hostile sky.”



1. A pirate caique sailing in the Aegean (Adrian Seligman)

The preceding words are borrowed from M.R.D. Foot's book about MI9, a section of the British secret service engaged in helping British military personnel escape from Axis-occupied countries. To give you a taste of this unknown war of the caiques, I would like to relate some incidents of the war, as recorded in the memoirs of Captain George Miniotis.



2. George Miniotis while serving his term just after World War II

In the autumn of 2008 George Miniotis, a distant relative of mine, came to Athens due to a health problem and I undertook to accommodate him. In the evenings we sat together in the garden and, over a glass of ouzo, he recounted various episodes of his adventures during the German occupation of Greece. Some of these stories I had already heard from his father, Captain Stamatis Miniotis, when he had been visiting my family in Athens when I was a kid.

One evening, I learned that George had recorded his adventures on paper. Shortly after that, on the occasion of a short trip of mine to the island of Chios, his place of residence, I asked him to show me the manuscript. I began browsing, and soon I was enchanted. I begged him to lend it to me to prepare it for eventual publication, and he soon agreed.

ΤΑ ΑΠΟΜΝΙΜΟΝΕΥΜΑΤΑ ΜΟΥ 1

Η Ιστορία μου θα διαβάσετε είναι Αμερικνή!
~~Ονομάστηκε Γεωργίος Μηνιάνης. Σήμερα~~
 Είμαι χίο Νεοεὶν 21 Προσημασία χίος!
 Έχεν δὲ με εὐχάριο Νένητα Νίκο χίου τοῦ
 1926. Αὐτοῦ μετὰ ἀρχὴς τοῦ 1942 ματανοίκα' εἰσελθεῖν
 τὴν οἰκογενεῶν μου, αὐτοῦ μετὰ ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν Πάτε-
 ρα μου - Εὐαγγέλιον! - τὴν Μητέρα μου - Αἰροδίτη - καὶ τὴν
 διεκέναν τὴν δύο χερσίδες μου τὴν Μάρκα καὶ τὴν Πάτρε-
 ρα μου καὶ τὴν Μητέρα μου! αὐτὰ εἶχα
 αὐτοῦ τρεῖς Ἀδελφούς! αὐτοῦ... Νίκο... Αἰροδίτη, καὶ ἔπειτα
 γόννα. Ὅπως εὐχάριο μετὰ ματανοίκα' καὶ τὴν
 Γονυγενεῖς μου, αὐτοῦ τὴν Πάτρετα μου καὶ Ἀδελφούς
 με τὴν οἰκογενεῶν μου!... ὁ Νένητα - ὁ Νίκο...
 καὶ ὁ Μιχαήλ! ὁ δὲ Νίκο... ὁ δὲ Νίκο... ὁ δὲ Νίκο...
 αὐτοῦ ὁ δὲ Νίκο... ὁ δὲ Νίκο... ὁ δὲ Νίκο...
 Νένητα εὐχάριο Πάτρετα. τὸν ἔχουν Ἀμερικανὸν
 καὶ ἔχουν εἰσελθεῖν αὐτοῦ αὐτὰ χρόνια! τὸν αὐτοῦ
 Πάτρετα εἶναι ἀναγκὴ νὰ τὴν νάνη, διότι τὴν ἱστορία μου
 αὐτοῦ ἀρχὴν αὐτοῦ τοῦ 1938, ἀφ' ὅπου τὸν ἔχουν τὴν
 οἰκογενεῶν μου, αὐτὰ καὶ αὐτοῦ Γονυγενεῶν μου!...
 αὐτοῦ... ἔχουν... ἔχουν...
 εὐχάριο Νένητα ἔχουν ὁ δὲ Νίκο... ὁ δὲ Νίκο...
 Μητέρα μου ὁ Ἀδελφός, με τὴν οἰκογενεῶν μου!
 τὴν ἱστορία μου αὐτοῦ ἀρχὴν αὐτοῦ τοῦ Β. Πάτρετα
 Πάτρετα! τοῦ 1938 αὐτοῦ μετὰ γὰρ ἔχουν τὴν δύο
 εὐχάριο χρόνια! διότι τὴν ἔχουν τὴν δύο εὐχάριο
 χρόνια. ὁ Πάτρετα μου τὴν Νένητα. ἔχουν
 τοῦ μετὰ ἀναγκὴ νὰ νάνη τὸν αὐτοῦ
 ἔχουν Μιχαήλ αὐτοῦ τοῦ, καὶ αὐτοῦ μου

3. The first page of the manuscript

The memoirs of Captain George deal with the adventures of himself, his father Stamatis and his uncle Michael, who all worked for a British intelligence agency based in Çeşme, under the guidance of the Levantine Noël Rees.

The protagonists

At this point I'd like to give you some facts about two of the protagonists of the memoirs, first about Noël Rees, and then about the author's father, the legendary Captain Stamatis Miniotis.



4. Noël Rees with his horse at the racetrack of Alexandria (Tom Rees)

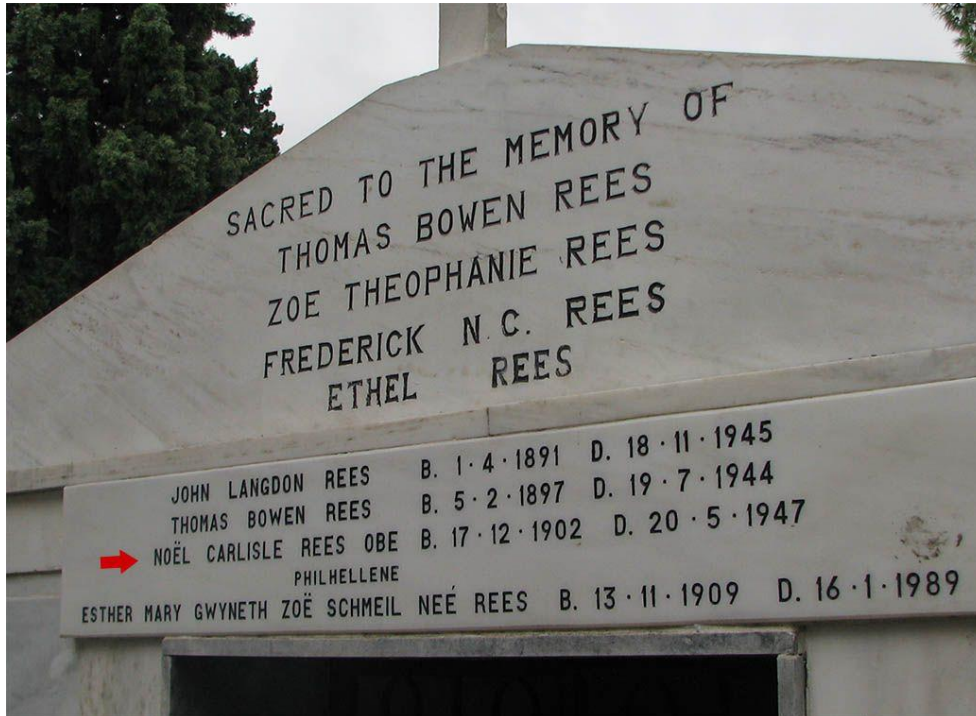
Noël Rees was born in the Smyrna suburb of Budja in 1902. He was a scion of the well-known Levantine ship-owning family of Welsh origin, settled in Smyrna since the 19th century. After 1922 Noël Rees left Smyrna to continue the family business in Egypt. Some years later he was married to a Greek wife, and had thus the opportunity to improve his Greek.

At the outbreak of World War II Noël Rees joined the British Navy, and after the Italian attack on Greece in 1940 he was appointed Vice-Consul for the island of Chios, where his duties included intelligence work.

Shortly before the island's occupation by the Germans in early May 1941, Rees left Chios to seek refuge first in Çeşme and then in İzmir.

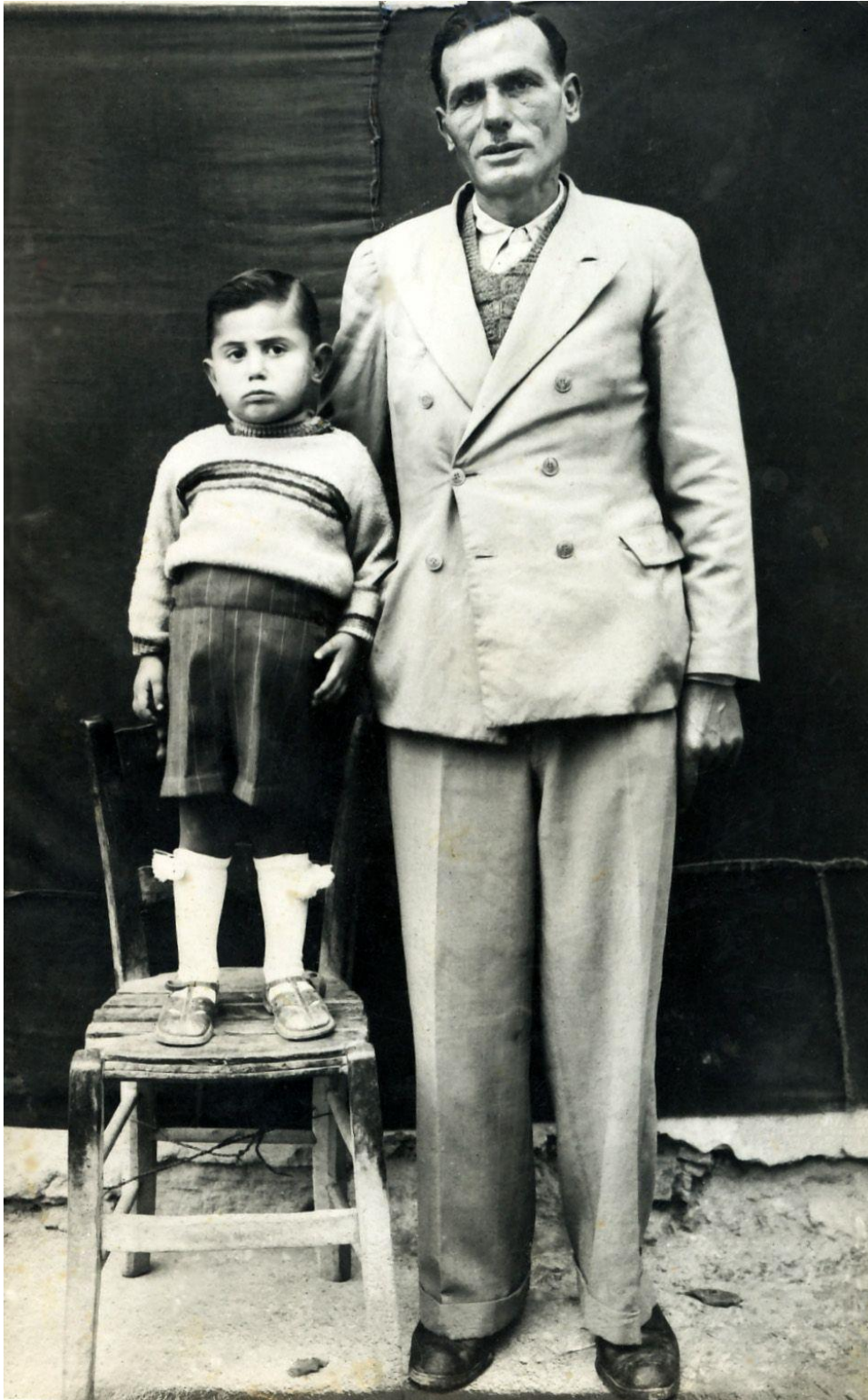
There he acted as British Vice-Consul, a position that afforded him diplomatic protection. Simultaneously, he organised a secret agency, a

branch of MI9, whose main tasks were to help British soldiers stranded in Greece to escape, as well as try to collect intelligence about the enemy. To this end he recruited many seamen, mostly Greek, who were crisscrossing the Aegean in their caiques. Towards the end of the war, more than 30 vessels were active under the leadership of Commander Rees, based on two bays in the vicinity of Çeşme and on various other Turkish ports on the Aegean coast.



5. *The Rees family tomb in Athens. Noël Rees is referred as “Philhellene”*
(Craig Encer)

After the war Noël Rees was awarded the Medal of the Order of the British Empire, along with two Greek medals. He died in London in 1947 after a long illness. Some years later, his remains were transferred to the family tomb in Athens.



6. *Captain Stamatis Miniotis with his son George, the author, ca. 1930*

The second protagonist, Captain Stamatis Miniotis, was born in today's Çiftlik, the westernmost village of Turkey towards Chios Island. After participating in the Greco–Turkish war, he settled on Chios in 1922, where

he was engaged in trade and tobacco smuggling, according to the family tradition.

For his smuggling activities he was pursued by the Greek authorities, and for a period he did not dare to set foot on the island. He was spared from prosecution though, thanks to a document he obtained from an acquaintance, a Turk whose life he had saved during the Greco–Turkish war. Stamatis’ friend was at the time working at the Turkish consulate in Marseilles. The document he provided Captain Stamatis certified that during the time he was allegedly doing contraband, he had actually been working permanently in Marseille on behalf of the Turkish consulate. Thus, he couldn’t at the same time be present in the Aegean, involved in illegal activities.

Just before the war Captain Stamatis had been fishing for a living, and in this capacity, as a fisherman, he met Noël Rees, offering him the finest fish for free. Once Rees fled to Turkey, he sent for Captain Stamatis and asked him to join his agency.

Before long Stamatis, pursued by the Germans, slipped to Çeşme, soon bringing his entire family after him. There he emerged as one of the most important associates of the British Vice–Consul, successfully carrying out dozens of dangerous missions until the end of the war. In this he was assisted by his brother Michael and his eldest son George, the author of the memoirs, then aged 15.



7. The British ambassador in Athens decorating Captain Stamatis, 1947

After the war he was decorated with the British King's Medal for Courage in the Cause of Freedom, as well as a corresponding Greek medal.

Until his death in the 70s, together with his sons, Captain Stamatis continued to command his vessels, which among other things did the regular communication between Chios and Çeşme.

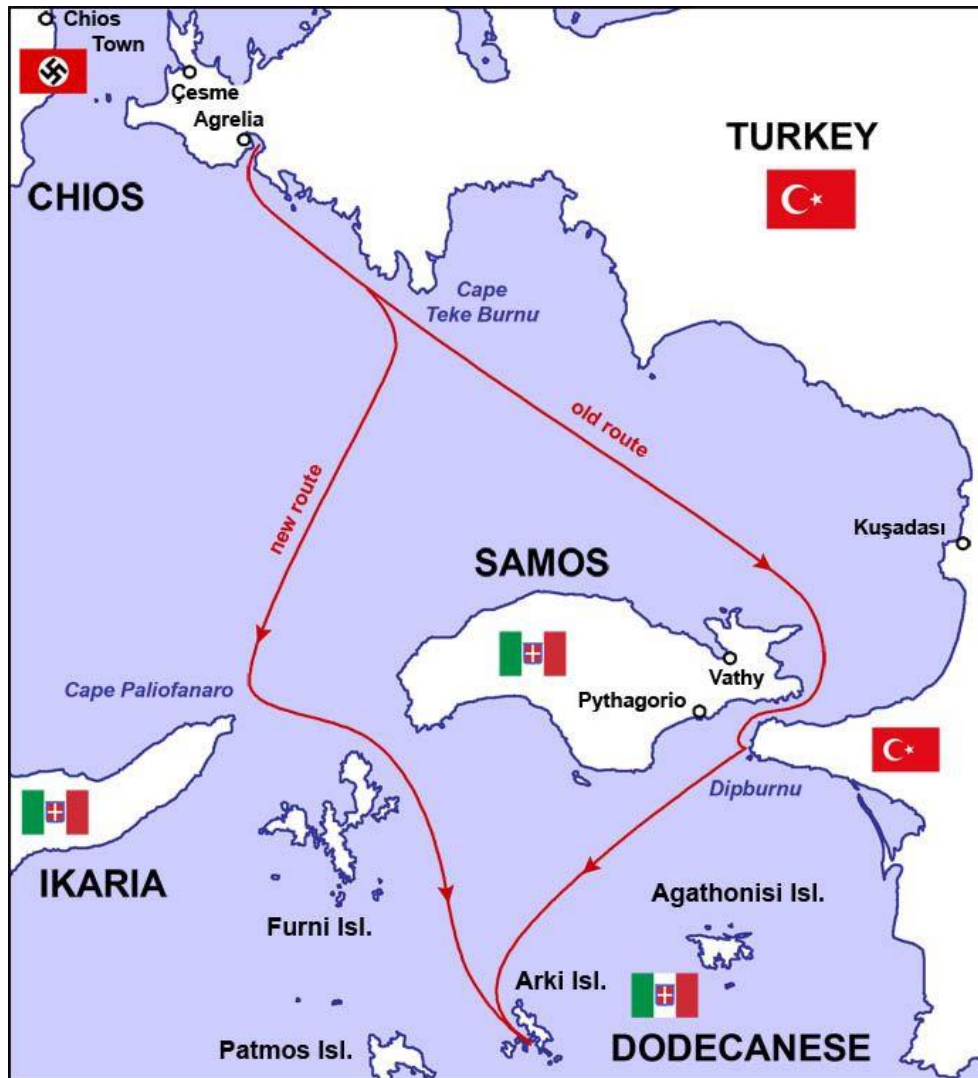


8. On this map you can follow the routes taken by the Miniotis team while on missions for the Rees organisation in the years 1941–44.

Dipburnu

One of the first tasks Noël Rees assigned to Captain Stamatis was to create an intelligence network in the Italian-held Dodecanese Islands. For this purpose Captain Stamatis contacted an old friend in Arki, a small northern Dodecanese island near Samos, and persuaded him to set up such a network, gathering intelligence from nearby islands as well. He used to visit Arki twice a month, always at night, receiving an envelope containing information and delivering it to Çeşme.

During their frequent trips to Arki Island, they used to make a stop at Dipburnu, a Turkish promontory just opposite Samos, where there was a Turkish outpost. They had established good relations with the Turkish guards there, and they even used to exchange various gifts.



9. The routes to Arki Island

Once, on a return trip from Arki, they had an engine failure. After doing an impromptu repair, they approached Dipburnu, but there a surprise awaited them. The old sergeant had been transferred, and his replacement was looking for trouble. They showed him the permit they had, allowing them to sail in those waters, but he ignored it. He commanded them to empty their boat and bring forward whatever they were carrying. However, it was impossible for Captain Stamatis to comply with the sergeant's request, since the boat was full of weapons and ammunition, skilfully hidden. So, he declared they did not carry anything at all.

The new sergeant didn't believe him. He brought a saw and an adze and began taking the vessel apart, in order to search it. Finding nothing, he sent them under custody to his Captain in Kuşadası. Fortunately, in the

meantime one of Captain Stamatis' crew managed to release two carrier pigeons, informing their agency in Çeşme of their perilous situation.

In Kuşadası the Turkish captain seized the vessel's crew and interrogated Captain Stamatis. Stamatis maintained he was working closely with Turkish Security. The captain searched him though and found the sealed envelope with the information he was carrying. However, on seeing that the envelope was indeed addressed to the Head of Turkish Security in İzmir, he did not dare to open it.

Turkey was at that time officially neutral, although Turkish authorities sometimes turned a blind eye on British undercover activities and occasionally even cooperated with the Allies. Some Turks however sympathised with the Germans and participated in their schemes, just like the captain of Kuşadası and his sergeant at Dipburnu.

Eventually, Noël Rees himself rescued the Greek crew, hurrying to Kuşadası accompanied by Selahattin Bey, the Head of Turkish Security in İzmir. The latter severely reprimanded the captain for his conduct. Later the two German-sympathisers, the captain and the sergeant, were sent to Ankara, where they were sentenced to several years in prison for disobedience.

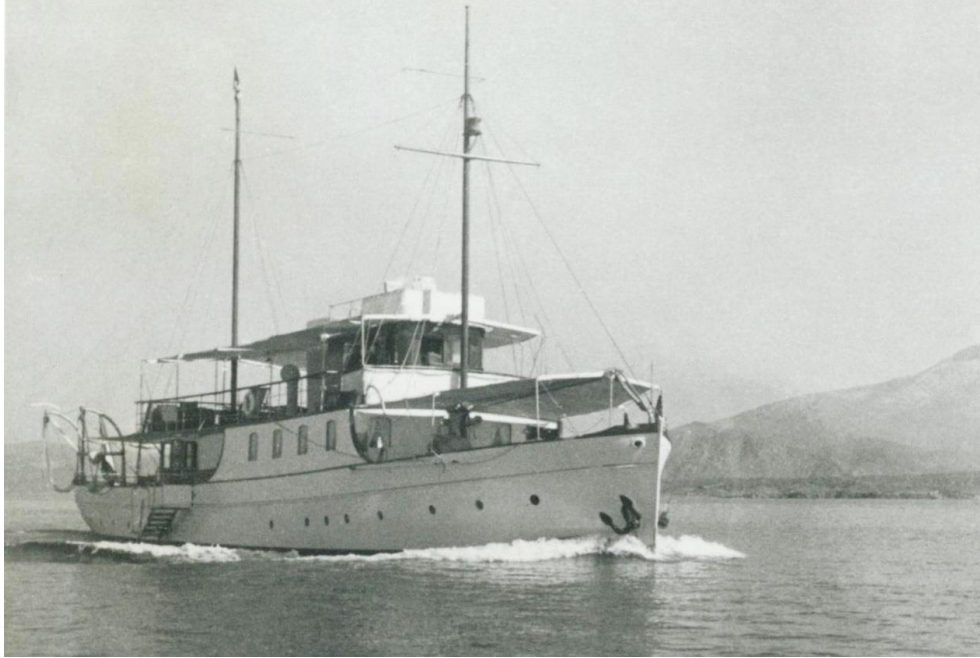
After this misfortune, Captain Stamatis Miniotis took appropriate measures. From that moment on they changed their route to Arki Island, never approaching Cape Dipburnu again.

Uzunadalar

Another incident occurred early in 1943. One day, the Turkish military commander of Çeşme informed the Greek responsible for refugee reception that a lot of people, apparently Greek refugees, were stranded on Uzunadalar, a tiny island north of Çeşme.

During the German occupation of Chios, many of its inhabitants were forced to leave the island due to famine. They were escaping in small boats and ending up at the beaches of Çeşme.

Now, Captain Stamatis was instructed to select a suitable vessel and pick up the refugees.



10. The “Lady May” in 1935 (Mark Giraud)

Captain Stamatis selected the “Lady May”, a large motor yacht belonging to Edmund Giraud, of the well-known Levantine family from Smyrna. Before the war this yacht was based in Chios. However, shortly before the occupation of Chios by the Germans, it was moved to Çeşme, together with the luxury sailboat “Lillias”, likewise Giraud-owned, just in time to avoid confiscation by the Germans. There, the two yachts were made available to the Noël Rees agency.

After being provisioned with food and water, Captain Stamatis sailed to Uzunadalar and anchored a short distance from it.



11. The rescue mission to Uzunadalar

As soon as the desperate refugees set eyes on the ship, they started plunging into the water and swimming towards it. Captain Stamatis however advised them to move away from the shore. He would send two rowboats to take them, 20 at a time in each boat. Only 40 persons should remain at the shore, just children and elderly people. Not more than 20 people were to enter each boat, or else it could sink.

However, every time the boats approached, the refugees, about 350 people in all, would rush to board them. Eventually, one of Captain Stamatis' men was ordered to shoot into the air to frighten them away. Then a sailor

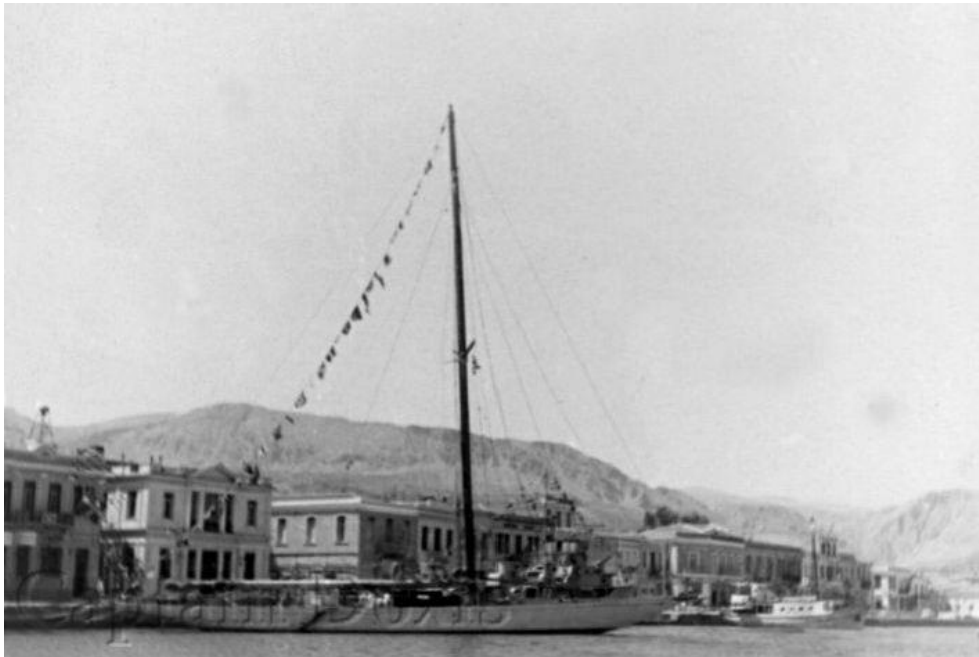
carrying a machine gun was placed on land, since only under threat of force could the refugees be kept at a distance.

These people had been on that islet for 3 or 4 days without provisions. Had they remained there a few more days, surely everyone would have perished. The boatmen from Chios brought them by night, abandoned them on the beach and sailed away, withholding the fact that this was an island, because they were afraid to disembark them on the mainland.

Eventually, little by little the refugees were transferred to the “Lady May”. After being given water to drink and 2 boiled potatoes and 5 figs each to eat, they were transported to Çeşme.

Since then and for a long time a caique sailed twice a week to Uzunadalar to collect refugees. Overall, 15 to 18,000 people fled during the war from Chios to Çeşme, which at times resembled a huge refugee camp. From Çeşme, all men of military age were eventually conveyed to Egypt to join the Greek army forming there, and the remainder was forwarded to Cyprus. The “Lady May”, being the largest vessel employed by Noël Rees, took part in several clandestine missions until the end of the war.

As for the second Giraud yacht, the “Lillias”, it was occasionally used as headquarters of a sister British organisation, the Levant Schooner Flotilla.



12. The “Lillias” in Chios, 1947 (Doxis Milidakis)

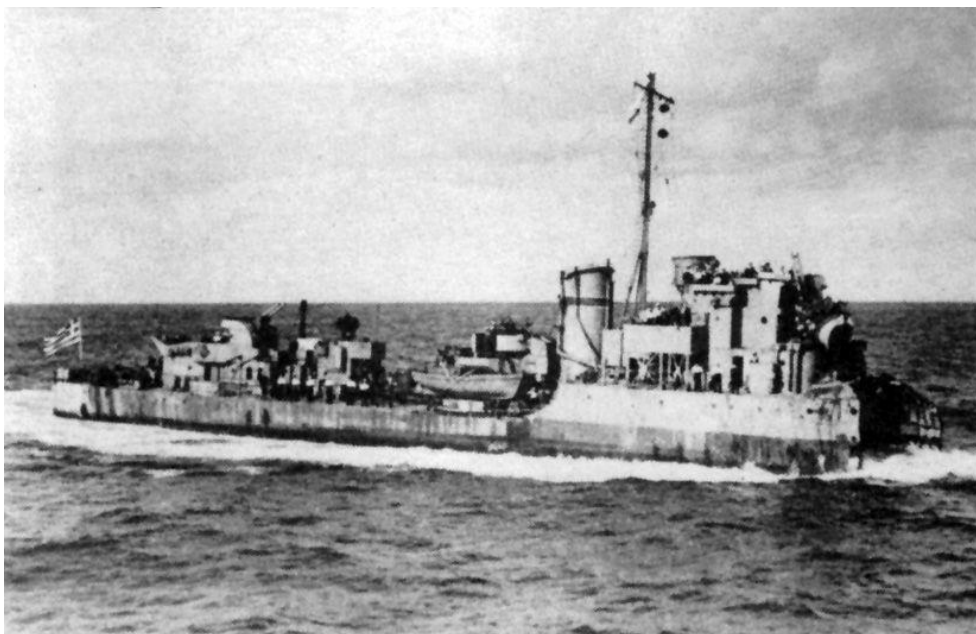
The contribution of the Giraud yachts to Allied activities was very important. According to other sources, many Levantines did their bit for the war effort working for Noël Rees, among them Brian de Jongh and Willem Whittall.

Leros

Another task assigned to Captain Stamatis by Noël Rees was to convey two British officers to Leros. After the capitulation of Italy in the summer of 1943, several of the Dodecanese Islands were occupied by the British, who were strengthening the islands' defences to avoid their recapture by the Germans. The most important of these islands was Leros, and to that island was Captain Stamatis to carry the British officers.

Before reaching Leros, Captain Stamatis and his crew halted at Gümüşlük, a small cove on the Turkish coast just opposite the island.

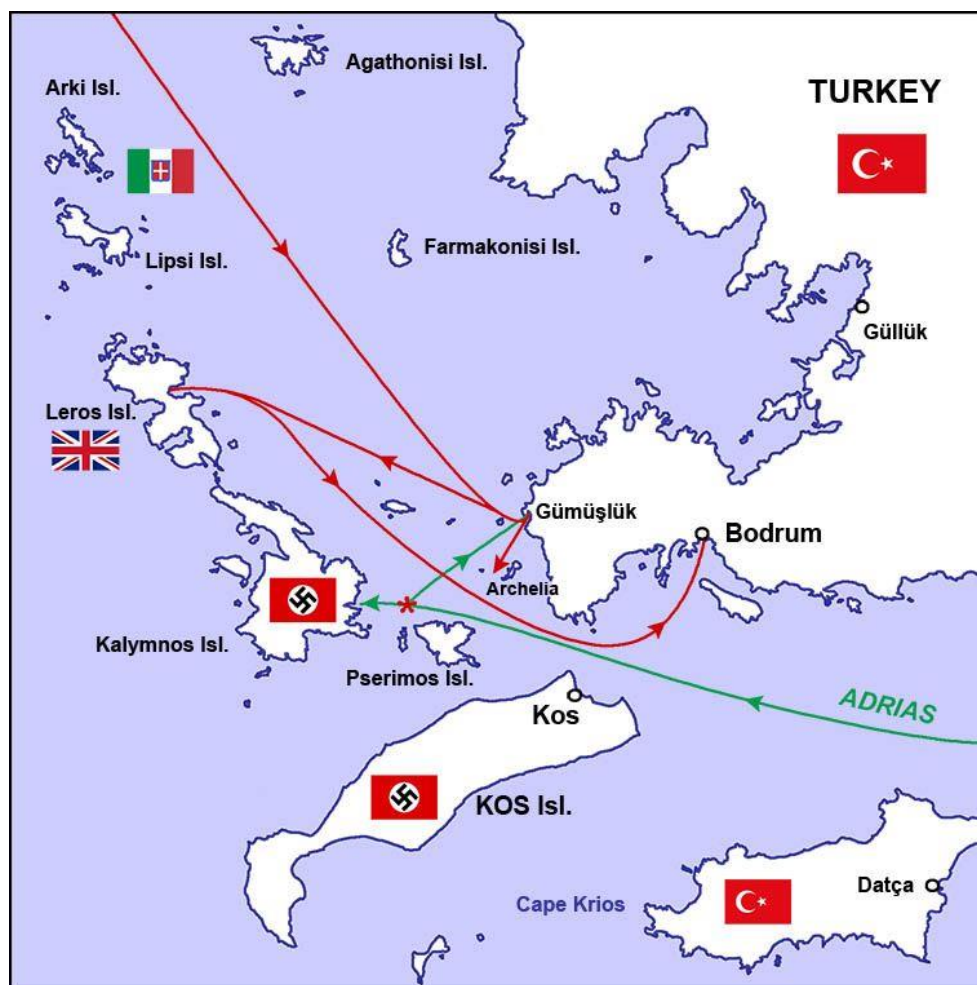
There they were greeted by a very strange sight: A destroyer was beached there, with its bow cut as if by a saw.



13. Half of the "Adrias" on its voyage to Alexandria

It was the Greek destroyer "Adrias". On its route from Yedi Adalar on the Turkish coast to Kalymnos Island, it had been struck by a mine a few days ago. Its front part had been completely severed by the explosion, the remaining ship however did not sink and managed to reach Gümüşlük. After

weeks of repairs, still missing its bow, “Adrias” succeeded in reaching Alexandria in Egypt entirely by its own efforts.



14. The voyage to Gümüşlük, Leros Island and Bodrum

That same night Captain Stamatis' son George was suddenly awakened. He was notified that a transport boat full of British soldiers headed for Leros had hit a reef, somewhere to the south. The survivors were in imminent danger.

Captain Stamatis, being familiar with these waters since his smuggler days, realised that this had happened at a dangerous reef 2 miles away, named the Archelia. Despite the very rough sea, he set off immediately and managed to save about 30 British soldiers who were hanging on to the partially sunken boat.

The next morning they forwarded the two British officers to Leros. They had to anchor their vessel in the middle of a bay and use their small rowboat to come ashore, because a German air strike was expected. Indeed, shortly

after that, a swarm of German planes started bombing the area. Before long some British airplanes appeared as well, and an air battle began.

The Miniotis crew watched the dogfights from the relative safety of a cave. Suddenly they saw two planes plunge into the sea, and a British pilot slowly descending with his parachute to a spot very close to their vessel.

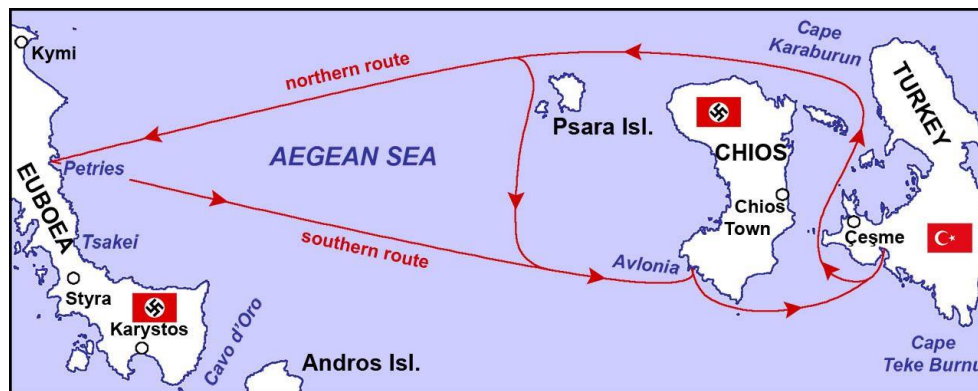
Captain Stamatis did not hesitate. Immediately, he ran to the boat and, ignoring the shower of bullets, rowed to where the pilot had fallen into the sea. He picked him up and brought him to the cave, where he was offered first aid and soon started to show signs of life. Before long a jeep arrived to collect him, while everybody congratulated Captain Stamatis for the pilot's rescue.

Shortly after the war, Captain Stamatis accidentally met the pilot's parents in Rhodes, where they had been searching for their son's saviour. The parents expressed their immense gratitude and invited Captain Stamatis to visit them in England whenever he liked.

Euboea

Another mission entrusted to Captain Stamatis in the autumn of 1943 was to try to contact the Greek partisans across the Aegean, on the island of Euboea.

Noël Rees had been sending several caiques for that purpose since the spring, but his attempts had been in vain. The partisans, being suspicious of everybody, had refused any contact. They had simply detained all captains and let the caiques return to Çeşme without them.



15. The routes from Çeşme to Euboea Island

Finally, Noël Rees assigned this task to Captain Stamatis, the ablest man in his service. Stamatis, however, in order to avoid the fate of previous captains, made sure not to go empty-handed: He filled his boat to the brim with weapons, ammunition, medicines, clothes and food, and on arrival offered everything to the partisans, thereby earning their trust. Captain Stamatis agreed to provide the partisans with whatever they'd need, and on his return trips pick up fugitives from mainland Greece and carry them to Çeşme. Moreover, he extracted the promise to be handed over all captive captains. On his return to Çeşme, Noël Rees congratulated Captain Stamatis for his success.

Already on his second trip, Captain Stamatis brought back all captive captains, to the delight of their families, who celebrated their return with drinking, dances and songs. The Turks were amazed seeing the Greeks feasting, and asked them how they could amuse themselves while their country was enslaved. The Greek response to that was, "We go to war with songs!"

The trips across the Aegean to Euboea Island continued for over 6 months, and during that period the Miniotis crew helped over 1.500 persons to escape to Çeşme, including British and Greek officers, politicians, and a lot of Jews, whose final destination was Israel.

Later, after the war, Captain Stamatis walked into a Jewish shop in İzmir to buy some clothes. On leaving, he asked for the bill.

The shopkeeper though said: "You owe me nothing! We have been instructed by the Jewish Community, that everything you get should be considered a gift, in gratitude for the Jews you rescued during the war, never accepting a penny!"

Following that, Captain Stamatis, who had no desire to benefit from his efforts, never set foot into a Jewish shop in İzmir again.



16. The Miniotis family at Captain Stamatis' decoration, 1947

These were some characteristic incidents from the activities of George Miniotis and his relatives, while they were serving in the Çeşme-based Noël Rees organisation during the German occupation of Greece.

While researching Captain Miniotis' memoirs, I discovered the Levantine Heritage web site. On the occasion of asking permission to include some photos in the book I was preparing, I came to know Craig Encer, and later a lot more members of the Levantine forum, most of whom sharing my historical interests. Craig was interested in this my first attempt in the historical domain, and he encouraged me to prepare an English summary of the memoirs, which was published on his site. Later I began to contribute to many forum discussions, and recently a further work of mine was posted on Craig's site, a translation of part of the memoirs of my grandfather, who was born in the same Asia Minor village as Captain Stamatis Miniotis, today's Çiftlik.

On closing, for the new horizons opened up by my collaboration with the Levantine forum I want to thank Craig Encer, the organisers of the Levantine Symposium, and of course all of you for listening.