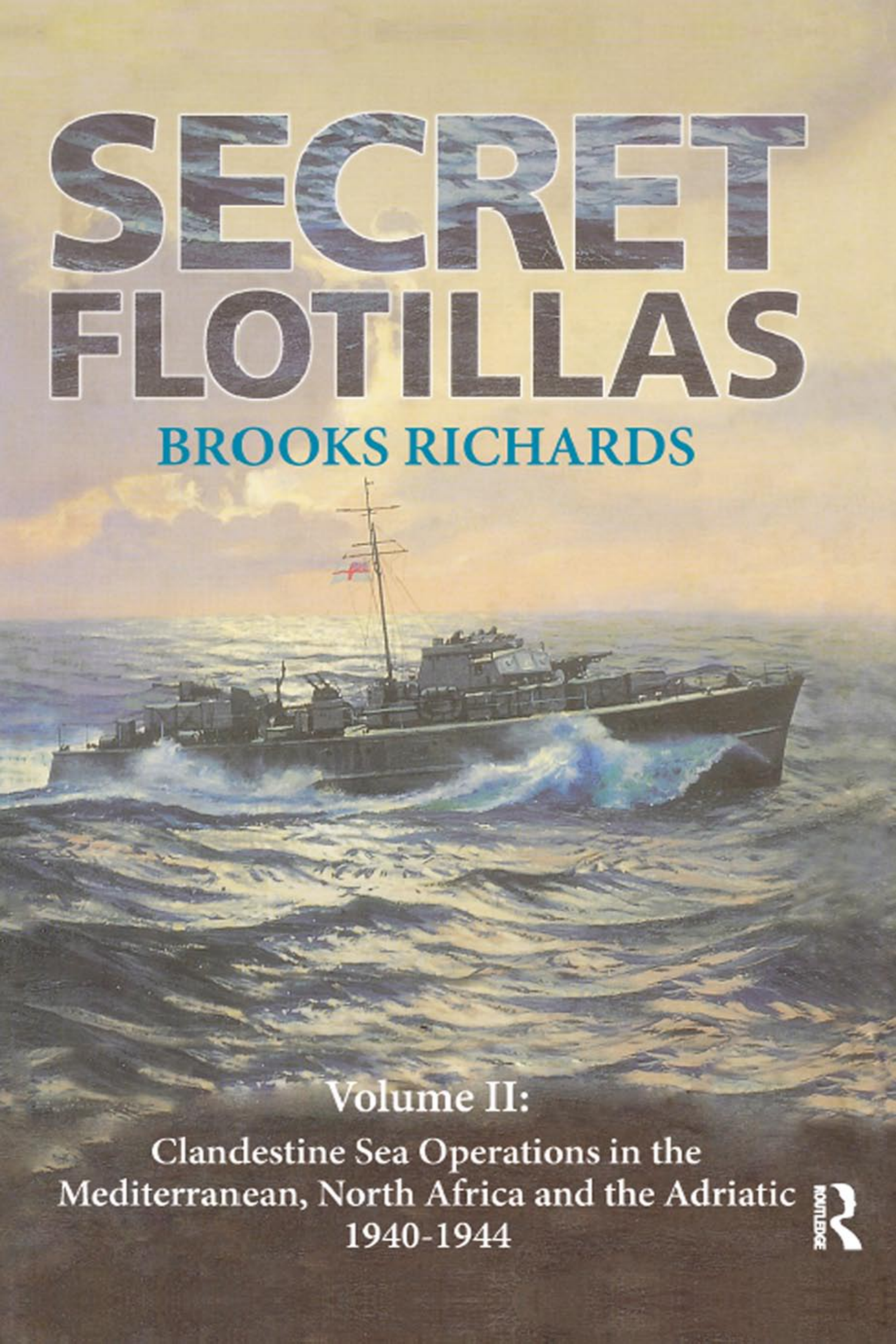

# SECRET FLOTILLAS

BROOKS RICHARDS

## Volume II:

Clandestine Sea Operations in the
Mediterranean, North Africa and the Adriatic
1940-1944

ROUTLEDGE

# SECRET FLOTILLAS

## Volume II: Clandestine Sea Operations in the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Adriatic

1940–1944

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# SECRET FLOTILLAS

## Volume II:

## Clandestine Sea Operations in the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Adriatic

1940–1944

BROOKS RICHARDS

FOREWORD BY M.R.D. FOOT

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# Preface to the Second Edition

This second edition of *Secret Flotillas* differs from its predecessor in two respects:

1. Whereas the 1996 book covered only the clandestine sea lines to France and what was in 1940–44 French North Africa, the present one includes operations to and from Italy in 1943–45.
2. Though written in two parts covering missions from United Kingdom ports and those from Gibraltar and other bases in the Western Mediterranean respectively, these were published as a single volume. This has now been divided into two.

The reasons for these changes are that the ships and crews operating to the south of France in 1943 and 1944 from Corsica were working at the same time to the west coast of Italy and the adjacent islands and that the same flotillas operated in the Adriatic and the Tyrrhanean.

To have included all this in a single volume would have made an already large and expensive book unmanageable and unsaleable. The division will also provide visitors to the coasts of the West Country and Brittany with a conveniently-sized account of the part of this epic likely to be of the most interest to them.

A further consideration which weighed heavily with the author in deciding to include Italy in this edition is that more than half of the 390 operations in Italian and adjacent waters were carried out by Italian vessels with Italian crews. It was a contribution to the Allied war effort which, like the shelter and the succour of the *contadini* to Allied ex-prisoners after the Armistice of 1943, ought not to be forgotten.

# Foreword

Sir Brooks Richards wrote most of this book in the early 1990s – that is, half a century or so after the events described in it took place; but he had the enormous advantage of having been present in person at many of the crucial occasions he discussed. In an age when not many military historians have had a chance to hear shots fired in anger, it is an extra delight to find a participant who thinks so clearly and writes so well.

He took part in running agents to and fro across the Channel between Cornwall and Brittany, and earned the first of his two DSCs for gallantry under fire while doing so. The second of them was awarded for operations behind the German right flank in the Tunisian campaign. He could still, when he wrote this book, recall precisely the difficulties that in the pre-satellite age attended on navigation close to shore, when Breton rocks and tidal streams, or Moroccan surf and indistinguishable dunes, not to speak of enemy land, sea and air patrols, presented incessant dangers. Every sortie had to be most precisely timed, to fit in with the known perils; for the unexpected, one could do nothing but improvise and hope.

He moved on in 1943 from his seaborne career to land-based work for SOE, running agents into southern France from Algiers, and next year began a long and distinguished diplomatic career, which culminated in his own embassy in Athens from 1974 to 1978. Retirement from the diplomatic service, on reaching the age of sixty, did not mean for him retiring from public life: he had held several responsible posts in Whitehall already, and became the Crown's adviser on security in Northern Ireland.

Sir Brooks Richards never forgot those who had served with him in the war. He was long one of the pillars of the Special Forces Club. In this book, he recaptures with wonderful vividness the minute details of secret sea operations; and in this second edition, which alas he did not live to see in print, he expands it beyond the Tunisian campaign to cover small boat work on to the coasts of Italy, both before and after the Italian change of sides. Some of this was conducted by his friend Andrew Croft, from bases in Corsica, with exceptional daring. Over and over again, he uses his knowledge of the personalities involved to illuminate what went on.

This is one of the books that brings out the horror, the exultation and the chanciness of war, by one who knew what he wrote about from inside, and used the most secret surviving archives, sealed off from me forty years ago. This is not a piece of history that will need writing again: it is conclusive.

*M. R. D. Foot*

# Acknowledgements to the First Edition

This book grew out of a chance encounter with Professor Guy Vourc'h in Paris in 1979. It was a name that awoke echoes: we had met soon after the Liberation. I knew that he and his three younger brothers had escaped in turn from Brittany to England during the Occupation and that he had been one of the first Frenchmen to fight their way ashore on D-Day. I told him that I had been involved in contacts with Brittany in 1941 and 1942: he knew more of the Breton side of my first operation than I did. And he sent me Roger Huguen's *Par les Nuits les plus Longues.*

The book was a professionally researched account of wartime escapes from Brittany, which I found fascinating. It covered a number of British-organised evacuations by sea and he had had help from various British sources. But most naval and paranaval operations to Brittany did not concern evacuation of escapers and evaders and fell outside the scope of M. Huguen's researches. I knew too that Brittany was not the only part of France to which sea lines had operated. I found myself regretting the lack of a comprehensive record of clandestine sea transport into and out of French territory during the war years. This lacuna seemed anomalous since Hugh Verity, who commanded the Lysander and Hudson Flight of 161 Special Duties Squadron in 1943 when it was at the peak of its activity, had long since published a history of the corresponding air operations. This had been translated and published also in France, where it evoked much interest. Unless a maritime counterpart were produced promptly, it would be too late to draw on the testimony of surviving participants to amplify any surviving official records. Since no-one seemed better placed to tackle the job, I decided to set about it myself.

My especial thanks are due to Gervase Cowell, SOE Adviser to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, for his help in enabling me to gain access to the essential records on the terms applied to Official Historians. He later helped me to surmount pitfalls on the way to publication. I am grateful to Professor M.R.D. Foot and John Debenham Taylor for helpful advice and briefing.

The records provided an indispensable armature of fact and chronology, but they contained important gaps and were too lacking in detail to yield a satisfactory narrative on their own. I have had help from many quarters in redressing these deficiencies.

Operations to the west coast of Brittany had to be carried out by fishing boats or a combination of submarines and fishing boats as the distances involved were beyond the reach of high-speed vessels such as motor gunboats. In dealing with the sea lines to this area I have received invaluable help from Daniel Lomenech, Steven Mackenzie, Patrick Whinney, Richard Townsend, Jean Le Roux, Roger Huguen, René Pichavent and Capitaine de Vaisseau Jean Pillet. Daniel Lomenech's assistance extended beyond his own remarkable involvement to that of Hubert Moreau, his precursor, the first man to return to France on an intelligence mission. He found copies of an incomplete series of articles by Moreau published in the 1950s. Lt-Col. Moreau, Hubert's son, who was approached on my behalf by Claude Huan, produced a most interesting unpublished article in which his father carries forward his account of the three missions he undertook in July, August and September 1940.

I am most grateful to Steven Mackenzie for allowing me to reprint his scintillating account of the MARIE-LOUISE operations, which appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* not long after the end of the war.

Operations on the north coast of Brittany by motor gunboats from Dartmouth or Falmouth enjoyed spectacular success from October 1943 onwards. In this field, papers in the possession of the late David Birkin, longest-serving of the specialist navigating officers attached to the 15th MGB Flotilla, are by far the most important supplementary source. Not only did he keep copies of 33 official reports of operations in which he was involved, but he and his widow, Judy, have allowed me to make use of two unpublished articles by David, track charts, diagrams and photographs from his collection. I am much indebted to them for their help.

I am also most grateful to Peter Williams, Charles Martin, Lloyd Bott, Tom Long, Michel Guillot and Derek Carter for help with this section of the book.

When I arrived in Gibraltar at the end of October 1942, a brilliantly successful run of operations by Polish-manned feluccas was just coming to an end. Little has appeared in print about them, but, on the advice of Professor M.R.D. Foot, I approached Dr Josef Garliński, who remembered seeing records of the Polish Naval Mission at Gibraltar in the Sikorski Institute. I am most grateful for that tip; the Institute possessed an almost complete set of operational reports and related correspondence in Polish, which I was able to sample thanks to the kindness of Dr Andrjez Suchcitz, who is in charge of the collection and who most helpfully summarised their contents. Full translations of all the key documents were needed, so I enlisted the help of Dr Keith Sword of the School of Slavonic and Eastern European Languages. I am most grateful for his translations, researches and background advice. I hope that we have between us rescued a small-scale epic from oblivion. Captain Marian Kadulski has added valuable personal details to the narrative represented by reports and correspondence that he wrote, under very great pressure, at the time. I am most grateful to the Sikorski Institute for permission to publish material of which they hold the copyright.

In relation to operations to and from Corsica, I am much indebted to Pat Whinney and Andrew Croft and Michael Lumby.

Throughout my researches, I received much help and advice from Capitaine de Vasseau Claude Huan, the well-known French naval historian. His knowledge of the French naval archives and his energy and skill in extracting information from them and other documentary and human sources only accessible in Paris helped my project forward very greatly. I am particularly grateful to him for compiling a list of the special operations undertaken by French submarines from Algiers in 1943 and 1944 for the French clandestine services and for obtaining from Capitaine Paul Paillole the names of more than 100 of the 150 passengers who travelled to or from France by this route.

The subject of operations by British submarines for SOE and SIS also required basic research. I am grateful to David Brown, Head of the Naval Historical Branch at the Ministry of Defence; to Commodore Bob Garson; to Commander Compton-Hall and Commander Jeff Tall, successively Directors of the RN Submarine Museum; to Gus Britten; and to Charles Beatty for their help in this connection. It was the last-named who kindly lent me Jean L'Herminier's book.

I am much indebted to Roger Huguen for generous advice and help and allowing me to make use of maps prepared for his book; to Daniel Lomenech, Richard Townsend, Derek Carter, Pat Whinney, Judy Birkin, Andrew Croft, Charles Martin, Lloyd Bott, Mary Holdsworth, Hilary Rust, the Musée de la Marine and the Etablissement Cinématographique et Photographique des Armées (ECPA) in Paris for help over photographs. My thanks are due to Mrs E.A.G. Davis for permission to use a painting of MGB 318 on the dust jacket; and to my brother Robin for resolving various problems of chart-work and nomenclature. It is to him and to Mrs Honer that I owe the drawing of *Seawolf* by the late Eric Honer. My brother and his wife, Kate, kindly photographed and transcribed the panels in the museum on the Ile-de-Sein recording escapes by Breton vessels during the Occupation.

While the project was still trying to make its way, the Imperial War Museum gave it unconditional backing, whether publication ensued or not. On the strength of this the Leverhulme Foundation gave it an invaluable two-year grant. Without their generous help it could never have come to maturity.

At a critical stage, the interest of Admiral Sir Julian Oswald, the First Sea Lord, and of Kenneth Carlisle MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, were a great encouragement, as was that of Amiral Emile Chaline, historian of the Free French naval forces.

I owe an immense debt to Patricia Andrews, Head of the Historical and Records Section of the Cabinet Office; without her

support the book would never have been published. I am most grateful to Margaret Russell, who undertook the task of putting the text on to word processor and seeing it through many revisions of detail.

I am much obliged to Ingrid Cranfield for her careful editing of the text; to Steven Carruthers and HMSO for further editing and proof-reading; and to my wife for critical advice and much practical help.

HMSO wishes to acknowledge with grateful thanks the following for their kind permission to reproduce photographs: Beken of Cowes, marine photographers for the photograph of S502; Mrs. Mary Collins, for the photographs of RAF 360 and *Sunbeam II*; Conway Maritime Press for the photograph of *Minna*, taken from *Model Shipwright* (Vol. II, No. 3, Spring 1974); M. le Capitaine de Vaisseau Jannot, director of the Service d'Information et de Relations Publiques des Armées/Établissement Cinématographique et Photographique des Armées (SIRPA/ECPA) of the French Ministry of Defence for the photographs of Capitaine de Frégate Jean L'Herminier and Admiral Darlan; the Musée de la Marine in Paris for the photographs of Capitaine de Frégate Jean L'Herminier one taken in the wardroom of *Casabianca* and the other of Capitaine de Frégate Jean L'Herminier and Admiral Darlan; the Musée de la Marine in Paris for the photograph of Capitaine de Frégate Jean L'Herminier standing by *Casabianca*'s periscope and the photograph of *Casabianca* at Algiers; Universal Pictorial Press & Agency Ltd. for the photograph of Commander F.A. Slocum at his CMG investiture in 1953; Tom Maxted for the photograph of the Felucca *Seawolf*; M. Sebastien Briec for his painting used on the frontispiece. Extracts from *Michelin Green Guide to Brittany*, 1991 edition, are reproduced by permission of Michelin, authorisation no. 95-027.

The author and publisher have attempted to trace Gordon Ellis, the artist whose painting *Mayflower* has been used on the dust jacket for this publication. If the copyright holders of this (or other material not acknowledged above) wish to contact HMSO, we shall ensure that the correct acknowledgement appears in any future edition of this book.

*Brooks Richards, 1996*

# Acknowledgements to the Second Edition

Sadly my father died shortly after completing the text of the second edition of *Secret Flotillas*, but I know that he would have wished to acknowledge again all those whom he thanked for helping him produce the first version and the extensive acknowledgements to the first edition are reproduced here unamended.

I am sure that he would also wish me to extend warm thanks to those who were in any way involved in helping him to get this updated and extended version prepared for publication. In particular he would have wished me to thank: Capitaine de Vaisseau Pierrick Roullet, the translator of the French edition of *Secret Flotillas*; Tessa Stirling, Richard Ponman and Sally Falk of the Histories and Records Unit of the Cabinet Office, without whose help and support the revised editions of *Secret Flotillas* would never have been published; Christopher Woods, who provided him with his research on SOE in Italy; Duncan Stuart and Mark Seaman, who gave valued help and support; and Geoffrey Hudson, who provided some of the photographs and diagrams for the new sections of the book.

An attempt has been made to trace the source of the photographs and diagrams which are reproduced in this edition, but not in every case successfully. I know my father would have wished to have thanked and acknowledged those who supplied the material. If the copyright holders of any of the material reproduced in this edition wish to contact the Cabinet Office, we shall ensure that the correct acknowledgement appears in any future edition of this book. And to anybody else – there must be a number – whose help deserved a personal acknowledgement but ignorance has prevented me from giving it, I can only express my gratitude and my apologies.

*Francis Richards*
*March 2003*

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# I

# The Polish Predicament

Under the terms of the armistice concluded in June 1940 between the Axis powers and the French government formed by Pétain at Bordeaux, the Germans completed their occupation of France's Atlantic seaboard, but left the Mediterranean coast in French hands.

Vichy was hampered by severely restricted numbers of armed forces and shortages of fuel. The controls it exercised over this residual coastline and that of the unoccupied French North African territories were therefore less effective than the defences that the Germans proceeded to develop from the Hook of Holland to Hendaye. Gibraltar, the nearest base in British hands, was 1,100km (700 miles) or more from the beaches of Languedoc and the *calanques* – the long deep creeks on the coast of Provence. It was thus some time before the British clandestine services sought to exploit what was for them a rather roundabout route to and from occupied France.

For the Poles, who faced genocide at the hands of the Nazis, and, on a lesser scale, the Czechs, the problem of organising escape routes from unoccupied France was more urgent.[1] In the eight months between Hitler's conquest of their homeland and the fall of France, the Poles had set up a government-in-exile in Paris and proceeded to regroup and re-form Polish forces on Allied territory. A number of their naval vessels and the bulk of their merchant fleet had found refuge and a new operational base in Great Britain. It was in Britain, too, and with the support of the RAF, that senior Polish air force officers would have preferred to concentrate the effort to rebuild an air force. But General Sikorski, who was both Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief, believed profoundly in France as he remembered it from 1918 and wished this to be done in France. Under the terms of a compromise reached at the end of October 1939, Polish air force personnel who had made their way to the West were divided equally between the two countries. The new Polish army was wholly raised and equipped in France, however, though one brigade had been reconstituted in Syria, then French mandated territory.

To extricate Polish troops from the neutral countries where they had taken refuge and been interned at the end of the campaign in Poland was no easy task. They had first to escape from internment and then find civilian clothes, identity documents and transport. There were about 40,000, including most of an armoured brigade, in Hungary and 30,000 troops and 20,000 civilian refugees in Romania: many of the latter had had military training and were of an age to be called up. Some 13,800 had sought refuge in Lithuania. By June 1940, 22,000 had been extricated from Romania and 21,000 from Hungary. From these two countries the escape line to France ran through Yugoslavia and Italy, which, despite Mussolini's alliance with Hitler, showed sympathy with the Poles and respected their Embassy. The French authorities also allowed Sikorski to mobilise suitable age groups from the Polish community in France, which was almost half a million strong, many still Polish citizens. Though this process of re-forming and training the new Polish armed forces was still far from complete at the time of the German breakthrough north of the Maginot Line, those under arms in France or serving with the Podhalańska Brigade at Narvik numbered about 82,000.

It had been agreed between Sikorski and Gamelin, the French Commander-in-Chief, that Polish units, when ready for action, would form their own corps and operate as a single unit, but this had still not been done when the battle of France began and such Polish units as were ready for action were widely dispersed. The 1st Grenadier Division formed part of the French 20th Corps and was deployed south-west of Nancy in defence of the Maginot Line. The 2nd Infantry Fusiliers was in the Belfort area, not far from the Swiss border, and became part of the French 15th Corps. The 10th Armoured Cavalry Brigade was partly available and there were eight Polish infantry companies and two anti-tank batteries serving in French regimental formations. The still untrained 3rd Division and two equally untrained battalions at Coëtquidan in Brittany were drawn into the battle eventually, but none of these units, whose strength totalled approximately 40,000, was in action before 14 June, the day Paris was occupied. They were all determined to fight, and the 1st and 2nd Divisions both did so with distinction, but the battle was already lost and organised French military resistance crumbled around them in growing confusion.

The Polish government had by this time moved to Angers, but General Sikorski, wishing to be as near as possible to the two Polish divisions then in action, went forward to his field headquarters near Nancy but then only added to the confusion by moving from place to place and becoming difficult to find. His faith in France was such that he had never considered the possibility of its defeat or made any plans for the withdrawal of Polish forces – which their dispersion and integration in French formations made impracticable in the prevailing chaos.

By 17 June, the Polish government and President had retreated to Libourne and their French counterparts to Bordeaux, where Pétain succeeded Reynaud as Prime Minister and asked the Spanish government to ascertain Hitler's terms for an armistice. Sikorski met

Pétain next day and subsequently issued a declaration of Polish determination to fight on at the side of Great Britain. He flew to London in an aircraft provided by Churchill, who, at a conference on 19 June, confirmed that Great Britain would continue the war, receive the Polish President and government and do what was possible to evacuate Polish troops from France. In a radio bulletin broadcast that same day by the BBC, General Sikorski ordered his men to break through to ports in southern France or cross into Switzerland.

The evacuation of Polish troops began forthwith from ports on the west coast of France. Some 3,000 left Brest before it fell into German hands on 19 June. Others embarked at Saint-Malo and La-Rochelle. Two days later the process continued from Bordeaux, Bayonne and Saint-Jean-de-Luz, where the Polish liners *Batory* and *Sobieski* took off 4,000 troops and 500 civilians. The evacuation continued until 25 June from south-western French ports while British naval vessels kept the Luftwaffe at bay. Polish airmen embarked meanwhile at Port-Vendres and Sète in the Mediterranean. Estimates of the numbers rescued vary between 16,000 and 23,000: the official figure quoted in London at a meeting of the Polish National Council some weeks later was 19,457.

As Garliński, historian of Poland in the Second World War, has pointed out, this was not a bad result given the chaos of the time, the lack of transport and the dispersion of Polish units. Moreover, a significant number of men mobilised in France were *émigrés* living there who would have preferred to stay. There remained however many thousands who had no roots in France and who were extremely bitter at finding themselves abandoned by their senior officers and civilian authorities in a foreign country, without money, papers or advice.

One of those who had failed to get away from Saint-Jean-de-Luz was a professional Polish intelligence officer named M.Z. Slowikowski, who had been serving at Kiev under consular cover when war broke out and had then, with his wife and 13-year-old son, quickly made his way to France via Finland, Sweden, Norway, Great Britain, Holland and Belgium.[2] Slowikowski, who held the rank of major and was already 53 years old, was given the job of second in command of one of the new Polish divisions being formed in France. Four months later, in February 1940, with the Russians in occupation of eastern Poland and the Russo-Finnish War in full swing, he was brought back to Paris to serve in the intelligence section of the Polish General Staff, where his knowledge of the Soviet Union could be put to use.

Early on, Slowikowski foresaw the outcome of the battle in France and sent his wife and son for safety to Salies-du-Salat, a small town south of Toulouse. On the day before the Germans entered Paris he was put in charge of a group of officers from the General Staff and told to evacuate them by train to Saintes in the Charente-Maritime, not far north of Bordeaux, which he did with considerable difficulty. Together with another professional intelligence officer named Captain Jankowski, who had served in Germany before the war, he found lodgings and took stock of the situation, in which everyone seemed panic-stricken and obsessed with a desire to get out of France as quickly as possible. Slowikowski and Jankowski found it hard to decide whether to attempt to join in the evacuation or to stay on in France, where they felt there would be great opportunities for successful intelligence collection while the Germans digested the spoils. In any case, they drove to Toulouse next morning, having obtained permission to collect their families from their refuge. The Polish Consulate at Toulouse was packed up, expecting to be evacuated to Spain, but they persuaded the Consul to issue them passports, collected their families and somehow all reached Saint-Jean-de-Luz. There, the question whether to leave or stay was taken out of their hands because the Polish general acting as port commandant had decided to embark soldiers and airmen in priority and to relegate officers of their age with families to the back of the queue. The weather was most unpleasant, with heavy showers and strong winds, and they had to sleep in the open.

While awaiting embarkation, Slowikowski and Jankowski went down to Hendaye to have a look at the Spanish frontier. There they ran into a French Deuxième Bureau officer whom they knew. He told them that, under the terms of the armistice, the Germans would occupy the whole of the French Atlantic coast, but that there would be a 'free zone' under French government control and he advised them to make their way into it if they had to remain in France. Realising that the possibility of their being evacuated from Saint-Jean-de-Luz had vanished, the two families returned to Salies-du-Salat, where they found their previous accommodation still available. Moreover, the town and nearby Toulouse lay, in what was to be the unoccupied zone.

Slowikowski was soon in contact with another Polish secret-service officer named Zarembski, who had also worked in the Soviet Union under consular cover and had subsequently been briefly in charge of the Polish counter-intelligence post in Paris, this time with commercial diplomatic cover. They went together to Toulouse, which they found packed with refugees: Polish could be heard spoken everywhere and Polish uniforms were much in evidence. The Consulate was overwhelmed by soldiers seeking documents and advice: the other ranks were bitterly hostile to officers, particularly those of senior rank. Slowikowski, who had been born near Warsaw in what was then part of Czarist Russia, was unpleasantly reminded of the behaviour of Russian troops during the 1917 Revolution. Fortunately, the appointment of a diplomat named Bitner to take charge of the Consulate defused this explosive situation: his concern for the troops' welfare was unmistakable.

Bitner accepted in principle Slowikowski's suggestion that he and

Zarembski should organise the evacuation to Great Britain of as many of the stranded Polish servicemen as possible, but he was less happy to cooperate in practice when he learned of Slowikowski's and Zarembski's secret-service backgrounds. The arrival of Colonel Kobylecki, pushing a bicycle that had borne him south from the Breton battlefield, resolved the question. Kobylecki had been Slowikowski's chief on the latter's arrival in France and he had gone on to command the Podhalańska Brigade at Narvik. After the evacuation of the Allied Expeditionary Force from Norway, the Brigade had been disembarked at Brest and thrust immediately into the battle, notwithstanding the loss of all its heavy equipment. The active support of so senior an officer settled Bitner's qualms and the procedure began. Zarembski assumed responsibility for security vetting of candidates for evacuation.

During the first two months – as Szumlakowski, the Polish Ambassador at Madrid, subsequently told General Sikorski – anybody, irrespective of age, could and did travel through Spain – even those who bore arms and wore uniforms.[3] The Spanish authorities allowed Poles in without the Portuguese visas for which would-be evacuees later had to wait for weeks on end. The Ambassador considered that, because the evacuation from France had been inadequately organised, this period was not used to full advantage. After this there were two possible ways to get the evacuees across Spain to Portugal, whence passages to the United Kingdom were available. The evacuee could be equipped with a Polish passport and granted a visa to some exotic country such as China. This gave him the right to a Portuguese transit visa and a Spanish conditional visa. To obtain the Portuguese visa, he needed to produce a receipt from the Cook's travel agency showing that he had paid part of the cost of the passage by sea to China. Provided the Polish passport proved the bearer to be less than 20 or more than 45 years of age, he could then travel to Perpignan and obtain, through the Polish Consulate there, a French exit permit from the local Prefecture. Anyone who had surmounted this series of bureaucratic obstacles could then travel to Lisbon legally.

The alternative was to introduce the evacuees illegally into Spain and hope to get them through to Portugal without their being arrested by the Spanish police. This became increasingly difficult. Szumlakowski had argued strongly against methods such as the use of false documents and visas, which he considered compromised his mission and damaged Polish interests in Spain. Police controls had been much tightened up following a change of Spanish Foreign Minister and of pressure from the Gestapo. He complained that, in spite of this, Poles were still being sent over the border from France without adequate preparation and that of every 16 crossing the 'green frontier', not more than four succeeded in reaching Madrid.

There was, indeed, a great deal of mutual recrimination amongst the Polish authorities involved in the evacuation scheme. One of the officers concerned, Major Adam Szydlowski, who had been imprisoned in Spain, wrote subsequently to his former commanding officer that, thanks to the complete incompetence of the authorities in France responsible for organising the evacuation and to the lack of coordination between the Polish authorities in France and in Spain, many wasted months passed; moreover, there was no prospect that the situation would improve in future.[4]

A more comprehensive appraisal, and one markedly more appreciative of Slowikowski's and Bitner's efforts at Toulouse, is contained in a report by a former staff officer of the Polish 2nd Infantry Division who managed to leave France at the end of July. His name appears at the head of the report as Lt Cdr Czeslaw Chieconski but he signed it Chiconski. In the report, written in London two months later, he recorded his own experiences and made his own recommendations to General Sikorski's Chief of Staff on ways of evacuating Polish troops left behind in southern France.[5]

Those who had not managed to leave France in June were, he reported, grouped in a few centres, which should be regarded as reservoirs of potential military manpower. The most important centres were Toulouse and Marseilles but there were smaller concentrations at Lyons, Nice and a camp near Port-Vendres. He estimated the number of Poles at Toulouse in July at 5,000: after dispersal of the soldiers who were inhabitants of France, there might possibly be 3–4,000 still left there.

The attitudes and quality of the men at Toulouse varied. They had been subjected to Gestapo and Soviet propaganda, to which some of the weaker characters – both officers and other ranks – had succumbed. Some were prepared to return to Poland; others shrank from active service and preferred to await the outcome of the war. Still others, however, of more robust outlook, were constantly looking for opportunities to leave for England to continue the fight against the Germans. The soldiers at Toulouse were very short of money and, if left there long, might be lost to the cause.

Chiconski predicted that relations between the French authorities and the Poles, which in most cases were at present quite good, would probably deteriorate. Quartering and food were bad. The Polish Consulate at Toulouse was working efficiently and with tremendous dedication, but under very difficult circumstances.

At Marseilles the military element was prepared to take any risks to find ways of getting to England. Morale here was very high. The total number of officers and men in the Marseilles area was estimated at 600–700. The material circumstances of the officers were good because they had received their pay for June and some for July as well. For the other ranks, by contrast, living conditions were abysmal: they had been left to find their own quarters, as best they could, in hospices and places of refuge. Food was unsatisfactory and the French authorities were passive and unfriendly. The Polish Consulate at Marseilles was performing poorly and unproductively by comparison with the one at Toulouse.

Lyons was no more than a staging post for men on the way to Toulouse, Marseilles or other centres where Poles had congregated.

Nice was an assembly point for officers hoping to leave for Italy and thence travel to Poland. Some hoped to pursue their journey from Italy to Yugoslavia, Greece and Turkey with a view to joining the Polish forces in Palestine, but this was a very unrealistic plan. Chiconski did not know how many soldiers were in the camp at Port-Vendres. Quarters and food there were not bad and the soldiers there were prepared to continue the fight against the Germans.

After describing the formalities for evacuation through Spain by the legal route, Chiconski set out in detail how to avoid trouble with the authorities while on Spanish soil. These ranged from tips about the currency regulations at the Spanish and Portuguese frontier posts to advice to the evacuee not to carry weapons or any part of his uniform, not to carry any documents about his real reason for travelling through Spain, not to stay in Spain even for the most plausible reasons, to avoid restaurants, coffee-houses and brothels; and to avoid any form of conflict with members of the public and particularly with the authorities. Any breach of Spanish law or currency regulations would lead to immediate arrest and incarceration. On arrival in Barcelona, the British Consulate would issue a third-class ticket to Madrid and the Polish Consulate would provide a small allowance and all necessary information. Evacuees should not overstay in Madrid without a valid reason. The Polish Consulate there would issue third-class tickets to the Portuguese border, but their advice that travel was allowed without payment in Portugal was incorrect: permission for free travel had to be obtained from the Polish Consulate in Lisbon. The Consulate in Madrid did not work well and tended to dismiss enquiries in a perfunctory and slapdash manner. Cooperation between the Consulates in the two capitals was very unsatisfactory, but the Consulate at Lisbon was very active and all matters concerning the evacuation of Polish military personnel were handled by Col. Mally, the Military Attaché, or by Dubicza, the Minister, who was the most approachable official Chiconski had ever encountered.

Holders of Chinese, Portuguese and Spanish visas who lacked French exit permits might cross the French frontier illegally near Andorra or near a small town named Saint-Laurent, where the French authorities were usually cooperative. Soldiers crossing in such circumstances should report to the Spanish Customs. The Spanish authorities would respect all visas even when the French exit visa was missing.

In Chiconski's opinion, group travel with the permission of the French authorities would not be practicable because of pressures exerted by the Gestapo, but it might be feasible, with the cooperation of the British Navy, to evacuate large groups of Poles assembled on the Mediterranean coastline, as already at the camp near Port-Vendres.

How far this report influenced official thinking at General

Sikorski's headquarters in London is unclear: probably not very much, since an annotation in longhand, dated 1 October 1940, at the bottom of the document records the Chief of Staff's opinion that the above person was not trustworthy and was the subject of a pending criminal case.

The Polish government-in-exile managed to establish, rather precariously, an Embassy at Vichy when the Pétain government moved there from Bordeaux. Within it, General Kleeberg, the Military Attaché, assumed overall control of evacuation arrangements in July. But, by the autumn of 1940, under increasing German pressure, the French authorities had virtually ceased to cooperate over the issue of exit permits. At the beginning of October, moreover, Kleeberg had to order the route through Spain to be closed, owing to the complete lack of co-operation by the Polish agencies on the Spanish side of the border. As he subsequently reported to General Sikorski, anyone who attempted to escape by that route and whom luck did not favour generally found his way into Spanish internment camps or, if not, might be thrown back to the French side of the border, sometimes from as far away as Madrid or even the Portuguese frontier.[6]

Internment in Spanish camps such as that at Miranda-del-Ebro was a serious matter for Poles. The British Embassy was able to secure the release of British evaders and escapers within a few weeks, since the Spanish government badly needed British cooperation over the contraband control of essential commodities such as flour and petrol. The Poles had no such leverage, however, and many of the 700 or so Polish escapers from France who were interned in Miranda languished there for two years or more.

Little wonder, then, that those concerned began seriously to consider the alternative of evacuation by sea from southern France. Even before the end of July 1940, Kleeberg had elaborated a scheme for removing several hundreds of soldiers by sea in one fell swoop. Having bought a cargo ship lying in Marseilles, he asked Slowikowski to transfer 250 men from the Toulouse area, for which he was responsible, to Marseilles for embarkation.[7] The men duly travelled by train in groups of ten, under the noses of the French gendarmerie, and once in Marseilles, were escorted to the English Seamen's Hospital to await embarkation. Kleeberg had, however, based his plan on the mistaken assumption that it would receive official approval by the Vichy authorities. Instead of granting Kleeberg permission, General Dentz, who, after surrendering Paris to the Germans, had become the general officer commanding the south-east military region, threatened to arrest him and anyone else using the ship for such a purpose. This turn of events, which ought to have been foreseen but was not, left the organisers with the acute administrative problem of dealing with the men assembled in the English Hospital, which also served as a reception centre for Polish troops arriving to be demobilised.

After this disaster, Kleeberg offered Slowikowski command of Polish evacuation from the whole of France – an offer which the latter felt unable to refuse. Having taken stock of the situation, Slowikowski, who adopted the alias 'Dr Skowronski', decided that Marseilles was the obvious centre for organising departures by sea. When he got there he found that nearly 300,000 Francs had been spent locally on 'research' but that not one man had as yet actually been evacuated. One officer was planning to ferry evacuees out to Gibraltar by motor boat. Slowikowski wanted him first to report to him on the cost and likely results but this advice was disregarded and a small party of officers set off anyhow, though Slowikowski noted that the organiser himself preferred to travel by the land line into Spain. Before leaving Marseilles he claimed to have been robbed at gunpoint by the Frenchmen who had helped him purchase the boat; for obvious reasons, he had been unable to report the matter to the police. Reproaching Slowikowski for forbidding evacuation by sea, the officer also maintained that by dispatching the boat to Gibraltar, he had proved this method to be possible. Slowikowski subsequently discovered that the boat had in fact been intercepted by the French maritime gendarmerie and its passengers sent to a special penal camp in the Pyrenees.

This was not the only unsuccessful attempt by Poles to escape by sea in small vessels. A fishing boat named *Marie-Thérèse*, of a type known locally as a *bateau boeuf* (because two worked together towing a single trawl, like yoked oxen with a plough) lay at the Quai-Aspirant-Herbert at Sète in November 1940.[8] Some 200 Polish soldiers were to be involved in this operation, which was headed by a Polish sapper Captain. He was assisted by a lieutenant and a naval sub-lieutenant, who had left hospital clandestinely with the help of two Bretons who hoped to use this Polish venture to leave the country themselves. They were denounced by local fishermen and the two Bretons were arrested on board the *Marie-Thérèse* by two police inspectors from the crime squad, who had come all the way from Vichy. René Poujade and Raymond Cauvel, the Bretons, admitted that they planned to escape to Gibraltar but they said nothing about the Poles involved in the enterprise, all of whom got away to Nîmes in a hurry.

The cargo ship bought by General Kleeberg for the abortive mass evacuation still lay in Marseilles port and, in due course, Slowikowski decided that, since the French police seemed to have lost interest in her, it was worth trying again to use her for an escape operation, this time without informing the French authorities.[9] Her holds were filled with bunks, which were supposed to be racks for oranges. The plan was that the ship would sail from Marseilles in ballast and would embark the evacuees by night from a nearby point on the coast. After dropping them at Gibraltar, she would put into a Spanish port and pick up a genuine cargo of crates of oranges before returning to land these at Marseilles. A French crew and captain were signed on and preparations were far advanced when news leaked out to the port authorities, who sealed the ship and denied access to her by anyone other than the crew. Since there was no longer any hope of reviving the project, the ship was sold, which realised a small profit.

On 1 October 1940, the Germans compelled Vichy to close down the Polish Embassy and all the Polish Consulates. With the Ambassador's departure, General Kleeberg lost his diplomatic status and was able to stay on in France as unofficial head of the Polish forces only by invoking his friendships with a number of high-ranking French officers. He moved to Marseilles and from then on all plans and arrangements for evacuation had to be pursued on a wholly clandestine basis.

The Germans tried several times to infiltrate agents into the Polish evacuation network; the network at least twice foiled the attempt by executing the individuals concerned. Fortunately Slowikowski had links with a pro-Allied French inspector of police at Marseilles who was prepared to lend them support and protection. Soon afterwards, warned by the Poles that his name was on a blacklist at Vichy, this officer was able to get himself transferred to Morocco, where he eventually became one of Slowikowski's most valuable contacts in organising an intelligence network.

Direct evacuation by sea to Gibraltar proved extremely difficult. Permission to buy a boat had to be obtained from the port police and no ship could sail from a French port without the approval of the German Armistice Commission. There was, moreover, an acute shortage of fuel even on the black market. Nevertheless, Slowikowski felt that it was well worth evacuating men to French North Africa, from which escape might well prove easier. As early as October 1940, he had predicted that there would be an Allied landing in North Africa because of its strategic value. Poles who could get there would thus find themselves among friends sooner than would be the case if they remained in metropolitan France. Kleeberg agreed that in French North Africa they would be safer from the risk of falling into German hands. Lieutenant Kiersnowski, commander of the Polish naval outpost at Marseilles, was therefore ordered to establish friendly contacts with French merchant seamen on the Marseilles–North Africa run and to find out whether they would help stowaways. Kiersnowski knew his way around the waterfront bars of the Vieux-Port and spoke their argot; he soon gained their confidence and reported that evacuation by this route and method would be possible at a price of between 100 and 300 Francs per transportee, depending on the number to be carried.

The next step was to organise a network of evacuation outposts in French North Africa to receive men on arrival and direct them to safe houses pending their transfer to Casablanca, which Slowikowski judged would prove the best and safest port of refuge. Given the distances involved and the administrative division of French North Africa into three separate territories, each with guarded borders and the requirement for a permit to travel between them, there were substantial problems to be overcome. Five officers were selected to set up these outposts at Tunis, Algiers and Casablanca. They left for North Africa in November 1940 to make the necessary contacts and reported that conditions were rather better, and the officials more helpful, than in metropolitan France. Kleeberg therefore authorised Kiersnowski to begin shipments.

Batches of up to 40 evacuees would be assembled at the English Hospital reception centre when a suitable ship was due to sail and the necessary payments had been made. Late at night, they were collected and moved to waiting boats, which, with all due precautions, rowed them round to the side of the ship remote from the quay. They climbed on board via a rope ladder hanging down the ship's side and were immediately ushered to their hide-outs in parts of the ship rarely visited by officers, such as the shaft tunnel and coal-bunkers. Conditions were often extremely uncomfortable and made great demands on the physical stamina of the stowaways, who needed to remain hidden for several days before being disembarked at a North African port with similar speed and secrecy. Any man who broke bounds and ventured forth from his cramped quarters to stretch his legs or snatch a breath of fresh air might ruin the whole venture. This is doubtless what happened in December 1940 when an early RAF evader, the future Air Chief Marshal Sir Lewis Hodges, whose Hampden bomber had made a forced landing in Brittany, arranged to be smuggled on board the *Ville-de-Verdun*, to Casablanca.[10] On their first day at sea, the ship's captain was alerted to the presence of other stowaways. The subsequent search brought to light altogether 40 illicit travellers. He turned the ship round and handed them all over to the Vichy police at Marseilles, who interned them, with the result that Hodges ended up with other British officers in what had been the French Foreign Legion transit depot in the Fort-Saint-Jean, instead of in Casablanca as he had hoped.

The Czechs had also had troops in France, though far fewer than the Poles, and these were equally subject to internment at the hands of the Vichy authorities. Among the places used for this purpose were camps on the coast between Sète and Perpignan, which had been built to accommodate interned Spanish Republican refugees. Gradually, groups of both Czech and Polish demobilised internees were transferred under armed guard into the Alps and Massif Central to do forestry work.

When the Polish Embassy had to be closed in November 1940, Kleeberg sought an audience with General Huntzinger, Pétain's Secretary of State for War, to discuss with him the status and future of the Polish soldiers in France. On 16 January 1941, when Huntziger refused to see him, Kleeberg wrote to him instead.[11]

The situation imposed on the Poles, he wrote, seemed incompatible with the real feelings of the French population for his compatriots and with the mutual engagements, both moral and material, contracted between Poland and France. Polish soldiers had been called up, trained and engaged in combat in accordance with agreements concluded between the two Governments. On the orders of the French High Command, Polish units had been thrust into battle: the First and Second Infantry Divisions and even the Third, which was in process of being formed, the Northern Brigade, and the scarcely trained and formed Maczec Motorised Group. These units had all, without exception, done their duty. On the Polish side, all engagements had been fulfilled. Despite this, these soldiers, who had contributed unflinchingly to the vital task of holding back the enemy and saving honour, were now considered superfluous foreigners and treated on the same basis as the Spanish Republicans (law of 27 September 1940). Not surprisingly therefore, Polish officers and soldiers, rejected by their erstwhile brothers in arms, sought to leave France.

Senior officers and soldiers with long service stripes, who had committed no other crime than to wish to fight on and to fulfil their duty as soldiers, found themselves in chains and treated as common criminals. Although the tribunal at Aix-en-Provence had recently set them free, the police were now about to send them to the camp at Le-Vernet with Communists, thieves and crooks. One of them, a senior officer of the greatest merit, had gone out of his mind. These soldiers asked for no favours. They wished only to be treated as ex-servicemen, with dignity.

Lastly, Kleeberg argued, it ought to be possible to avoid exposing these men to the risk of falling into enemy hands once more. It was clear, from reports of officers and other ranks who had escaped, that Polish soldiers captured in France by the Germans were particularly ill treated. He concluded:

> I know that I am only doing my duty, General, in begging you to take the necessary steps to ensure that Polish soldiers, who have merely carried out the orders of their commanding officers, are not once more surprised by the enemy, as were, among others, the troops of the Narvik Brigade in Brittany.
>
> I ask you to facilitate their transfer to North Africa where they will know how to make themselves useful, whatever the circumstances.
>
> I beg you to believe, General, that I am not acting in a spirit of recrimination but from a sense of my responsibility as a chief, from a love of my soldiers and from my attachment to France, which long residence entitles me to consider my second homeland. We are at a moment of history where our actions are of more than passing consequence, for they will determine the future.

This plea seems to have elicited no response.

Slowikowski reckoned that almost 3,000 more Poles had been evacuated from France to the United Kingdom by one means or another before the beginning of May 1941. Several hundreds more had been smuggled to French North Africa. By Christmas 1940, Kleeberg thought he should send a more senior officer there to take charge and recommended Major Wysoczanski. Slowkowski did not know Wysoczanski, but he briefed him, explained his duties and told him he was expected to report on the local situation and on progress in carrying out his mission. He gave him funds and a list of the officers already actively engaged on the problem, but made it clear that Wysoczanski was free to make such changes as he thought necessary.[12]

Wysoczanski arrived at his post in North Africa at the end of 1940 with a team of his own associates and proceeded to replace most of the existing outpost commanders. Flouting orders, he sent no reports either to Slowikowski or to Kleeberg but instead sent telegrams demanding money. Slowikowski noted dourly that he and Kleeberg both thought it would be unwise to send money for unknown purposes.

Evacuation from the south of France to North Africa continued with reasonable success until mid-March 1941. It had been Slowikowski's policy to regroup the evacuees in North Africa according to their service of origin; the airmen had been concentrated in Tunisia, where good accommodation was available and Admiral Esteva, the French Resident-General, was particularly well disposed.

Unfortunately, the Polish commandant of this camp overreached himself by staging military parades on festive occasions. Alerted to this, the Italo-German armistice commission took the matter up officially with Esteva and a full-scale enquiry was launched, which brought to light not only the illegal camps in Tunisia but the clandestine sea traffic from France that had led to this concentration of Polish airmen in the Protectorate. A number of French officials who had been helpful to the Poles lost their jobs, while the airmen were transferred back to France and interned under penal conditions. The French sailors who had been involved in smuggling Poles into North Africa on merchant ships were arrested. Slowikowski had no choice but to suspend evacuation by this method.

Shortly afterwards, Slowikowski was himself appointed to North Africa to organise an intelligence network to cover the whole range of French territories from the Tripolitanian border to Dakar. He handed over the evacuation work in metropolitan France to his deputy, Major Mizgier-Chojnacki.

# II

# Mass Evacuations from the Marseilles Area and the *Fidelity* Tragedy

A quite separate scheme for a large-scale evacuation by sea of Polish ex-servicemen immobilised in southern France had been under discussion in London since December 1940 between the Polish General Staff and the British Admiralty.[1]

Sikorski's staff reckoned that there were still at least 3,000 officers and other ranks to be brought out. The original plan aimed to evacuate in a single operation all the internees in two main camps in the Marseilles area by means of a cargo steamer, the *Czardasz*. Slocum was in close touch with the Directorate of Naval Intelligence and it seems inherently likely that he was involved in these discussions as he was at the same time fitting out another small cargo steamer for an expedition to the south coast of France on behalf of the British clandestine services. He was quite prepared to meet Polish and Czech operational needs in the course of this projected voyage as well.

As a result of the *Czardasz* scheme, a Polish naval lieutenant named Marian Kadulski was sent out to Gibraltar in March 1941. Kadulski, who is one of the real heroes of this book, was born in December 1909 in Nowy Sacz, south of Kraków, in the foothills of the Tatras. His father soon thereafter obtained a job in the Austro-Hungarian Imperial dockyard at Pola (now Pula) on the Adriatic coast of what subsequently became Yugoslavia. At the end of the First World War, in the resurrected Poland, Kadulski Senior joined the army, pieced together from ex-Austrian-German – and Russian – trained personnel. For the three Kadulski children, of whom Marian was the eldest, their father's changing assignments meant changing schools, which had also quite recently begun to merge satisfactorily. His mother often recalled in later years how surprisingly Marian caught up each time in the new surroundings and was always top of the class or very near it. When he was 13, his secondary schooling at Lwów (now L'viv in the Ukraine) was on the lines of a German *Realgymnasium*, with a curriculum which stressed mathematics, physics and natural history. Again he was at the top. Languages came to him easily. He matriculated at 18, second out of about 30. He could well have been first, but he had a handicap, which also plagued him at naval college: he looked much younger than his age and, while not short of stature, did not look 100 per cent 'The Good Soldier Schweik'.

At the naval college (in Torun), where the three-year course was interspersed with summer cruises in warships, Kadulski was top in English and French, with quite good German as well. Having read Jules Verne's *The Fifteen-Year-Old Ship's Captain*, he longed to learn astronomical navigation. Indeed, thanks to the manuals available at the school, he mastered the subject before the first lectures on it began, taking observations of Jupiter and Saturn in the morning watch on the training ship in order to identify them by the reversed mathematical process. It was a skill that, as will become apparent, stood him in good stead during his Gibraltar appointment in 1941 and 1942.

At the time of his arrival on the Rock, Kadulski was 31 years old and had been in the Polish navy since 1928. He had done an extra year's training on the French navy's *Jeanne d'Arc*, where the cadets were required to take observations at noon each day and work out a fix, served in submarines and received some training in intelligence work during the summer of 1939. After postings to the Polish Naval Missions in Copenhagen and Amsterdam during the early months of the war, possibly on intelligence duties, he had become temporary first lieutenant of the destroyer *Blyskawica*, a post in which he was subsequently confirmed. He remained in this ship until November 1940 and saw active service in the Norwegian campaign. His appointment to Gibraltar on 3 March 1941 was nominally as head of a new Polish Naval Mission there, but this was no more than cover: he had in fact been detached from the navy to the branch of the Polish clandestine services dealing with evacuation operations. In this new capacity he was responsible to Colonel Frederyk Mally, whose cover post was Military Attaché in Lisbon, rather than to the Polish naval authorities. He adopted the name Krajewski for this new job and will be so described hereafter.[2]

Within a very few weeks of Krajewski's arrival at Gibraltar, it became evident that the Czardasz plan was no longer practicable: mass escapes from the camps would be impossible in view of the enhanced French security measures adopted after Slowikowski's escape line to French North Africa was exposed. However, Commander Slocum's planned operation went ahead and it included a small-scale attempt to pick up Polish or Czech escapers from the coast of Languedoc. It also landed Bitner, previously Polish Consul at Toulouse, who was being sent back to investigate, in conjunction with SOE (Special Operations Executive), whether the large Polish population in the Nord and Pas-de-Calais Departments could be drawn into active resistance.

The vessel to be used for this, Slocum's first operation in the Mediterranean, was an unusual ship which has passed into history as HMS *Fidelity*. For better security, *Fidelity* was to be sailed on this voyage direct from the United Kingdom, where she had been fitted out and commissioned, rather than from Gibraltar. She was built in 1920 at Hartlepool as a cargo vessel with an overall length of 270 feet, a beam of 41 feet and a gross registered tonnage of 2,450. Her triple-expansion Mackie and Baxter engine, yielding 1,100h.p. from two boilers, had originally given her a top speed of 9.5 knots; 21 years later, in wartime service with poor coal, this was reduced to nearer 6 knots. Fitted to carry 20 passengers in seven cabins, she was put into service as *Le-Rhin* by the French firm of Devéry et Chaumet, who in 1923 sold her to the Compagnie Paquet of Marseilles. She was then used to transport vegetable oils from Senegal and general cargo to Morocco, the eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea ports.[3]

In June 1940, as organised French military resistance to the German onslaught was collapsing, *Le-Rhin* lay at Marseilles unloading a cargo from North Africa, when a French naval officer of Corsican origin, Claude André Péri, engaged on special service for the French Admiralty and the Cinquième Bureau, arrived there armed with an *ordre de mission* and looking for a ship to take him to Gibraltar to join the British.

Péri had a previous connection with *Le-Rhin*: indeed, he had used her only six weeks earlier as a mobile base from which to mount an attack on a German merchant ship, the SS *Corrientes*, lying in Las Palmas harbour in the Canaries. This operation was carried out on 10 May, the day on which Hitler launched his western offensive into the Low Countries. Péri used limpet mines and plastic explosive, a novelty of Czech origin, in this attack. As *Le-Rhin* sailed from the neutral Spanish port, Péri had slipped back in her launch and placed the mines. He then rejoined the ship and was well offshore before they detonated. How much damage was caused is not clear: some accounts say Péri sank her, but an SIS report casts doubt on this.

Finding that almost all the evacuees had already gone, Péri took charge of the *Le-Rhin*, although he was a mere sub-lieutenant, while her regular captain held the rank of Corvette Captain in the naval reserve. Helped by a handful of junior officers, he reloaded *Le-Rhin* with whatever lay to hand on the quay and joined a belated convoy sailing to Morocco. As the convoy was passing through the Straits of Gibraltar, Péri altered *Le-Rhin*'s course and brought her into Gibraltar harbour, complete with her cargo of silks, wines, bicycles, blankets and refrigerators. There she was kept idle for some months. Meanwhile, Péri was joined by a Belgian army doctor named Albert Guérisse, who shared his determination to fight on. The ship was finally sailed to Barry Docks to be refitted. In Britain Péri, who had scorned an attempt by the French Consul at Gibraltar to enlist him to carry out a sabotage attack on HMS *Hood*, opted to join the Royal Navy, rather than the Gaullist forces; so did his officers and they were, accordingly, granted RN (Royal Navy) ranks equivalent to their French ones. The ship had been visited by Admiral Muselier while she lay at Gibraltar, however, and the decision to allow Péri and his crew to join the Royal Navy caused great resentment at de Gaulle's Carlton Gardens headquarters – so much so that SOE decided not to take over the ship. They reckoned they already had enough trouble on their hands in the form of opposition from Passy and de Gaulle to their Independent French Section, which, however, they were determined to maintain because they could not be certain that their view of the need for paramilitary action in France would always coincide with de Gaulle's.

For reasons of security, Péri and his crew joined the Royal Navy under assumed names. Péri became Lt Cdr Jack Langlais, RN, and remained in command, with Guérisse as first lieutenant under the name Lt Cdr Patrick O'Leary, RN.

Slocum had fewer inhibitions than SOE and was ready to take over responsibility for *Le-Rhin*, which Langlais had proposed should be refitted as what would have been called in the First World War a Q-ship – a disguised armed merchant cruiser. Slocum's idea from the outset was to use her for clandestine sea-transport operations in the western Mediterranean. The refit at Barry was carried out under the direction of Langlais and with the help of one of Slocum's staff officers, Lt Patrick Whinney, RNVR. Whinney, like his colleague Steven Mackenzie, had been a member of the British Naval Mission at Admiral Darlan's headquarters at the Château de Maintenon before the fall of France. When they reached London and reported for duty at the Admiralty, they were sent by Ian Fleming, special assistant to the Director of Naval Intelligence, to join Slocum's Section of SIS (Special Intelligence Service).

At the end of her refit, *Le-Rhin* was renamed *Fidelity* and, with her French crew, commissioned under the white ensign, de Gaulle's objections notwithstanding. The programme for her first operational voyage in April 1941 involved landing two parties of agents and embarking three groups of evaders and escapers on the south coast of France. She needed to put into Gibraltar briefly to refuel and disembark some officers of SOE's Spanish Section, but it was decided to do this under cover of darkness, since ship movements in and out of the port could be observed from adjacent Spanish territory and it had to be assumed that the daily influx of 4,000 Spanish workers included a quota of Axis spies. Thereafter, she proceeded through the Straits before dawn and up the Spanish coast.

*Fidelity* had been equipped with several disguises of Spanish and Portuguese character and her crew had been trained in altering the ship's appearance overnight. She passed inspection by German aircraft more than once and arrived on 25 April at her first pinpoint, the Etang-du-Cannet, close to the eastern end of the Pyrenees, where Bitner and an elderly Maltese civil engineer named Rizzo were landed by night. Rizzo had worked in Paris as a science teacher: he hated the Germans and was being infiltrated for Leslie Humphreys's Section of SOE, to establish a two-way link across the Pyrenees in conjunction with the professional Spanish smugglers working in the area. These were, for the most part, Republican exiles who made a living by carrying contraband tobacco into Spain. Rizzo accomplished his mission with great success and his trans-Pyrenean Spanish 'passers' formed an essential part of the land lines run by Humphreys into and out of France.

The next day *Fidelity* arrived off the small French port of Cerbère, which lies close to the Spanish frontier. She was due to collect a party of Polish evaders. The arrangement was that a boat would put into the harbour in daylight, embark passengers from the jetty in quick time and leave again before too many questions were asked. A small fishing boat of local type was carried for this purpose in the *Fidelity*.

On 26 April 1941, this boat entered Cerbère under command of 'Pat O'Leary' (an alias of Albert Guérisse). A Polish agent met them and went off to collect his party, which was waiting nearby. But while he was doing this, two French gendarmes arrived and asked awkward questions, which forced O'Leary to leave hurriedly. His boat was pursued by a French *chasseur* and captured. O'Leary and his crew, with the exception of one man who got away by swimming into Spanish territorial waters, were taken prisoner by the Vichy authorities – but not for long. Guérisse and a fellow-member of *Fidelity*'s crew named Lalande were interned in Fort Saint-Hypolite-du-Gard, but their potential value as native French speakers was soon spotted by a Scottish officer named Ian Garrow, who had himself escaped from internment and was building an organisation to repatriate members of the British forces left behind after Dunkirk and airmen who had been shot down and evaded capture. Garrow decided to arrange for the escape of Guérisse and Lalande to work with him if London agreed. Having secured MI9's approval, Garrow got them out and incorporated them into his escape organisation. In the spring of 1942, he sent them to Gibraltar via Spain for consultations with MI9's representatives. They returned by sea (see page xxx). Lalande was supposed to work as the escape line's radio operator, but the arrangement was not a success and he was eventually sent home. In July 1942, Garrow was arrested – having been betrayed by a British sergeant named Cole, who had become a double agent. Guérisse took over Garrow's escape line and became one of MI9's most successful agents, though he repeated Garrow's mistake of trusting Cole. He became Belgium's greatest hero of the Second World War. Not long before Guérisse's death in 1989, the King of Belgium broke with precedent and conferred on him the title of Count, in recognition of his outstanding services to the Resistance.

*Fidelity*'s first voyage is not well documented. She had been due to pick up a group of British evaders and escapers from a pinpoint in the Gulf of Lyons but was prevented from doing so by the appearance of a French seaplane. Slocum's 1946 report on his Section's wartime activities says of *Fidelity*'s voyage only than that 'she completed her programmes satisfactorily and returned to the United Kingdom with a long list of defects and complaints.' The fact that he did not list any of the five operations that had been planned does not suggest that they were notably successful, apart from the landing of Bitner and Rizzo.

A major refit proved necessary and there were constant political squabbles over the crew, owing to continued Free French objections to the employment of Frenchmen in the Royal Navy. In September 1941, *Fidelity* was again ready for sea and this time her programme included operations on the Algerian coast. Again she sailed direct from the United Kingdom. The SOE records show that she once more made a stop, presumably nocturnal, at Gibraltar.

She had lost time on the outward passage owing to bad weather and poor coal. The first pinpoint in the Gulf of Lyons was reached 24 hours late on 14 September and the British evaders and escapers who should have been there could not be found. She then sailed for the Algerian coast, where she was due to embark a second party of escaped British prisoners of war and evaders for MI9 on 16 September, but she again found no one at the pinpoint. However, two other operations were, according to Slocum's 1946 report, carried out before *Fidelity* returned to the first pinpoint for a further attempt to embark the British evaders and escapers. She tried twice – on 20 and 21 September – but again failed.

The SOE files provide confirmation that four of their agents were successfully landed in the course of this voyage. This seems to have taken place at Barcaire, near Perpignan, on 19 September: the agents were F. Basin ('Olive'), R. Leroy ('Louis'), R.B. Roche and A.J.R. Dubourdin – all of whom were destined to join the de Vomécourt brothers' AUTOGYRO circuit, the first such group that SOE's independent F Section had got going. They appear to have been landed as a single party. No details of a second disembarkation, as suggested by Slocum, have emerged.

*Fidelity*'s September sortie to the western Mediterranean was thus not entirely fruitless, but Slocum apparently decided at this point that enough was enough and that she could not be further employed for his purposes. Apart from her slowness, she was too large and conspicuous for repeated clandestine ventures in the confined waters of the western Mediterranean. She was refitted once more towards the end of 1941, this time by Messrs Harland and Wolff at Southampton under the guidance of the Admiralty's Plans Division for work in the Far East, the 'spirit and personality' of her commanding officer having attracted the attention of the new C-in-C (Commander-in-Chief) Eastern Fleet, Admiral Somerville.[4] Langlais, now promoted Acting Commander, knew the area well, having worked there before the war for the French Colonial Intelligence Service. The plan was that *Fidelity* should operate in this theatre as a proper Q-ship, carrying, for offensive purposes, Royal Marine Commando personnel, two small amphibious aircraft and a 45-foot motor torpedo boat of a type based on a First World War Coastal Motor Boat (CMB) design, capable of giving a top speed of 52 knots when fully loaded or 58 knots without armament, under the impulsion of a Rolls-Royce Merlin main engine of the type used in Spitfire and Lancaster aircraft. This thorough refit was followed by intensive working-up with the Royal Marine Unit, which had been training at Chale on the south coast of the Isle of Wight.

In December 1942, *Fidelity* sailed for Panama as part of convoy ONS 154 on what proved to be her last voyage. Despite her apparent offensive capability, she was not considered a member of the escort. In fact, an Admiralty directive of November 1941 had said that, even if she were refitted (as she now had been), she was considered 'a most unsuitable ship to work on regular convoy escort as long as she is manned as she is at present'. Eight days later the two groups of German U-boats that had been shadowing ONS 154 since it emerged from St George's Channel pressed in and the biggest wolf-pack attack yet experienced began: it was to reduce the convoy of 45 ships to 30.

At the most critical moment of this running battle, at dusk on 29 December, Langlais was asked by the senior officer of the escort, Lt Cdr Windeyer, RCN, in HMCS *St-Laurent*, to fly off one of his two Kingfisher seaplanes to cover an alteration of course against submarine attack. Langlais, only too delighted to take part in the fight, complied and *Fidelity* hove to while the aircraft was hoisted out over the starboard quarter and deposited in the water. The pilot, Lt Cdr (A) Ben Schröder, RNVR – a distinguished Paris dentist in peacetime – and his observer/gunner, Sub-Lt J.-J. Allen, RN, clambered into the tandem cockpits. Schröder realised that his chance of making a safe take-off in the prevailing conditions was poor. He shouted to Langlais to request the cooperation of the *St-Laurent*. The destroyer duly obliged and set off to steam at full speed into the wind, thus creating by her wake a broad strip of smooth water to provide a runway for the seaplane, but to no avail, the sea was altogether too rough and the Kingfisher became unstable. One wing-tip float dug into the water and broke off. The aircraft slewed round almost 90° and came to a standstill pointing back towards *Fidelity*. Very quickly, the seaplane settled into the water. Schröder and Allen extricated themselves from their harness and clung on as long as they could to the waterlogged fuselage. Allen's attempt to inflate the dinghy was unsuccessful and he was swept away, sustained only by his Mae West. It was two hours before first Schröder and then he were picked up by the *St-Laurent*.

The Kingfisher had been equipped with six aircraft-type depth charges, three slung beneath each wing. They were set to go off at 50-foot depth and, as the aircraft sank, there was a series of explosions, which were felt with great force in *Fidelity*'s engine-room. The condenser was extensively damaged and the engines had to be shut down in some haste, leaving the ship disabled and dead in the water. The convoy pressed on with a Canadian corvette, HMCS *Shediac*, detached to stand by *Fidelity*, though she was forced to leave in the early hours of 29 December as she was short of fuel.

The U-boat pack had followed the main convoy, which continued to lose merchant ships. *Fidelity*, in improving weather, launched her MTB at about noon on 29 December and an hour later the second

Kingfisher seaplane was able to take off for a brief reconnaissance, which revealed an apparently disabled U-boat on the surface some 16 miles to the south-west and two heavily laden lifeboats in the same area. The aircraft was hoisted back aboard and the MTB was sent to investigate the sightings, though only her auxiliary engine was working. Langlais subsequently ordered her to resume her anti-submarine patrolling and sent the two landing craft carried by *Fidelity* to search for the lifeboats.

In mid-afternoon, the fractured condenser pipes had been temporarily patched up and *Fidelity* got underway again at a speed that eventually rose to 5 knots. In due course, the landing craft returned with some 40 survivors including the commander of the convoy.

That same evening *Fidelity* was twice attacked. U 225 fired one torpedo, which missed. Langlais dropped a pattern of depth charges. The MTB sighted the U-boat on the surface and tried to close in on her, but at 7½ knots this proved impossible. The U-boat dived and broke off the action. Less than an hour later, U 615, which was making a sweep behind the convoy, sighted *Fidelity* and fired three more torpedoes, to no apparent effect. Once again Langlais dropped depth charges and the submarine withdrew. However, *Fidelity*'s engines broke down and, when she was able to get underway again, it was at no more than 2 knots. The MTB was in equally great mechanical trouble by this stage and lost sight of her mother ship during the night. With failing batteries, she lost R/T contact as well. Langlais had failed to make his position clear to the Admiralty when he left the convoy route, heading for the Azores; and in the forenoon of 30 December the Admiralty lost radio contact with *Fidelity*, which fell victim to two of three torpedoes fired by U 435 that afternoon. Langlais, belligerent to the last, fired two last depth charges as the ship sank.

Strelow, the U-boat commander, came up to periscope depth to view the destruction he had wrought. He estimated, with some accuracy, that there were between 300 and 400 survivors in the sea or on rafts in the gathering gloom, although he did not specify a figure in the signal he sent three hours later to his base at Saint-Nazaire, reporting the sinking. The reply told him in rather chilling tones to report if survivors were on board or whether 'their destruction in the weather prevailing can be counted on'.

Not one of the 406 souls on board *Fidelity* when she sank lived to tell the tale. Among those who died were Lt Cdr J.W.F. Milner-Gibson, her first lieutenant, who had played an important part in clandestine sea transport as one of only two navigators used by Slocum on all cross-Channel operations of this type before September 1941. One of the ten members of the ship's company who survived because they were either on board the first Kingfisher aircraft or on MTB 105 was Schröder's observer, 'J.-J. Allen', later known as J.-J. Tremayne, real name Gilbert. Eight months later he assumed command of MFV 2023, Slocum's high-speed version of a French west-coast sardine *pinasse*, when Daniel Lomenech brought his three-year career as a clandestine operator to an end and transferred to submarines.

*Fidelity* and her commanding officer hold a unique, if controversial, place in the annals of the Royal Navy. Even three years after her demise, Slocum was predicting that many a supply officer would blench, many a civil servant tear his hair for years to come at the mere mention of her name. Seldom, he continued, could a single ship have caused such diverse opinions in high circles. The Flag Officer Commanding North Atlantic in Gibraltar referred to her as HMS *Futility*, but the ship and Langlais were highly thought of by the Commanders-in-Chief of Western Approaches and of the Far Eastern Fleet. Reviled by many and loved by few, she was the first British warship to sail in wartime with a female officer (First Officer Madeleine Barclay, WRNS, was her cipher officer). Under the name Bayard, this woman is said to have worked as an agent for Péri in the Far East and to have followed him home. At one time she had certainly been his mistress.

Péri was the only Frenchman in modern times to become an Acting Commander, RN. His methods of maintaining discipline included kicking a defaulter down the ladder leading to the ship's bridge. Slocum, who knew him well, described him as having the appearance and mentality of an eighteenth-century buccaneer, but he considered Péri a great man and his death a real loss to Britain. Peter Kingswell, in his carefully-researched monograph *Fidelity Will Haunt Me till I Die,* written for the Royal Marine Historical Society, took a less charitable view: he deemed Péri a supreme opportunist who, in pursuit of his dream of personal glory and his insatiable lust for contest, caused vast sums of money to be squandered on converting an entirely unsuitable vessel into an armed merchant cruiser. He considered *Fidelity*'s very presence on convoy ONS 154 futile and her enormous armament pointless. For the loss of 406 lives and the waste of the invaluable assault troops in T Company of 40 Royal Marine Commando, Péri's megalomania and ability to bend people of influence and authority to his will qualify him, in Kingswell's view, for a heavy share of the blame.

# III

# Operations from Gibraltar to Morocco: July–October 1941

On 29 April 1941, after the plan to use the cargo steamer *Czardasz* to evacuate Poles from the Marseilles area was abandoned (see previous chapter), Krajewski, who had been sent to Gibraltar to organise that operation, received from Colonel Mally, his chief in Lisbon, details of a quite different plan, which the Polish General Staff had put to the Admiralty in London.[1]

The Poles suggested the British naval authorities should help them acquire a motor vessel that could be used to collect Polish internees from the Casablanca area. If a suitable craft could not be made available for their exclusive use from the existing stock of vessels at Gibraltar, a ship should be bought in Portugal or possibly Spain and sailed to Gibraltar. It would obviously attract undesirable attention if the Poles were seen to be the buyers. They would need help, too, in finding a crew for the vessel and a suitable place for it to be berthed at Gibraltar.

Once these conditions were fulfilled and they had been able to locate a suitable embarkation point at the Casablanca end, Mally would send a courier to Wysoczanski, their representative in Morocco, to discuss with him in secrecy how to put the plan into effect. The courier would take a letter from General Bohusz for Wysoczanski to give to Colonel Molle, Chief of Staff to General Béthouart, who commanded the French division at Casablanca, asking Molle to give them all possible help. On the courier's return to Lisbon, Mally would inform the British authorities of the proposed arrangements so that they could issue the operation orders.

The evacuees would not be told how they were to be evacuated: they would, indeed, be given the misleading impression that it would be organised via Gambia or Tangiers. They would be required, as a condition of embarkation, to sign an undertaking to join the Polish army in England. No families or other dependants would be taken off. Evacuation would be carried out in secret and at night. All immigration and security-vetting procedures would be applied on arrival in the United Kingdom and evacuees would be held incommunicado while in transit through Gibraltar. The Poles asked that the costs of fitting out and maintaining the vessel, cost of fuel, pay for the crew and subsistence for the evacuees should be met locally from British sources and recovered from the Polish treasury in London.

The Admiralty was prepared to back the venture and written confirmation of this would be forthcoming. They suggested that Krajewski liaise in Gibraltar with Flag Officer Commanding North Atlantic (FOCNA) who would probably be able to provide a suitable craft from local resources but, if not, would be able to help Krajewski buy one in Spain or Portugal.

The Admiralty thought it would be better for the crew to be Polish, in case the boat were stopped by French patrols, when the presence of British sailors might endanger the whole operation. The British Ministry of Shipping would, if necessary, send a crew of Poles out from the United Kingdom, but it might be possible instead to recruit crew from the Polish motor ship *Oksywia*, which had been seized by the French authorities in Morocco but whose crew were expected to be released. Krajewski could choose volunteers and one officer to take command of the vessel. This crew should be retained in Gibraltar even if the required vessel had not been handed over when they arrived there.

FOCNA would give Krajewski advice and instructions about the operational aspects of the scheme – choice of a suitable time to approach the French Moroccan coast, embarkation point and possible support by British naval forces.

The Polish proposals presented the Admiralty with a means not only of rescuing their troops interned in the Casablanca area but also of meeting longer-term needs. A vessel based at Gibraltar and its Polish crew might be used to mount similar operations to other points on the French coast.

Mally was instructed by General Sikorski's Chief of Staff to put the plan into effect, in close cooperation with the British authorities and with Krajewski. Mally cabled Krajewski and followed this up with a letter telling him to begin the search for a vessel and asking whether it would be possible to draw from the crew of the *Oksywia*. Krajewski was to establish and maintain contact with FOCNA.

This was not the first clandestine sea contact with Morocco. In September 1940, a British destroyer from Gibraltar had landed three Gaullist emissaries between Mogador and Agadir, but their mission had been short-lived: all had been arrested soon after their arrival.[2]

As well as the Poles, a number of Allied ships and their crews were detained by the Vichy French authorities in Morocco. The Belgians had made one abortive attempt, through their Consulate in Lisbon, to smuggle out a group of about 40 people from Port Lyautey on a 200-ton Portuguese merchant ship, but the executants fell into the hands of a double agent working for the Vichy administration. The Portuguese captain, who was not privy to the plan, was arrested and sent to France.[3] Local initiatives by the interned ship's crews had been rather more successful. Six Danes and a Belgian had escaped from Port Lyautey in January 1941 in a ship's lifeboat, followed on 11 March by four more Danes and a Norwegian, by ten Danes a week later, and by three Norwegians at the beginning of April.[4] On the other hand, two Norwegians, who left Casablanca on 15 January in a ship's boat, were cast ashore near Fedhala, and five Danes, who had stolen a yacht to get away from Safi, were arrested off Mazagan by a French naval vessel. The project that emerged from the Poles' discussions with the Admiralty, however, was different in kind from any of these previous enterprises, and more ambitious, in that it envisaged an ongoing series of clandestine sea-transport operations from the Gibraltar base.

Krajewski reported on 9 May that he had found a boat that he could use without charge.[5] It was a seagoing motor fishing vessel, which could be used without arousing suspicion. She would require a maximum of four crew – possibly fewer – apart from the captain, a role he would take on himself. He would like to have a W/T operator who could double as a deck-hand, so as to maintain communications with Gibraltar when at sea.

The crew of the *Oksywia* were not at Gibraltar, nor could he find any trace of their having been there in transit. Foreigners arriving at Gibraltar were sent on to the United Kingdom as quickly as possible. There were no communications between Gibraltar and French Morocco. Since crew might therefore have to be chosen in Lisbon, Krajewski spelt out for Mally the qualities he was looking for. An ability to keep one's mouth shut was the first prerequisite. He stressed the need for stability of character because of prevailing conditions in the fortress of Gibraltar, where a lengthy stay must be anticipated, for his operations would take place over some months. On the positive side, a pay supplement would be available.

There was no regular means of smuggling letters to Morocco, Krajewski reported, but he had promises of help and hoped to know more within a few days. He assumed Mally would send detailed information and instructions by letter to Wysoczanski and asked permission to append details of his seagoing technical needs. Obviously, rapid communications apart from these letters would be needed, W/T communications in particular, and these would need to be direct to avoid loss of time in decoding and recoding in Lisbon. But he confessed he was ignorant about conditions in Casablanca, and how much freedom their people enjoyed.

Krajewski knew that the British in Gibraltar had tried to evacuate a group of their own people by sending some form of naval vessel. The French authorities were terrified that, if they helped the Poles, the news would get back to Germany. While making these preparations for operations to Morocco, Krajewski had not lost sight of the far more important problem of evacuation from France. In a letter to Mally dated 17 May 1941, forwarding a report on communications to Morocco, he suggested that for urgent operational matters it would be better to use coded cable. Were there, he went on, direct communications between Lisbon and Marseilles? Was it General Kleeberg himself or his deputy who would be involved at the other end? He asked also if there had been any important change of status regarding the camps and what Kleeberg had replied to his earlier question about the delivery of people to certain places.

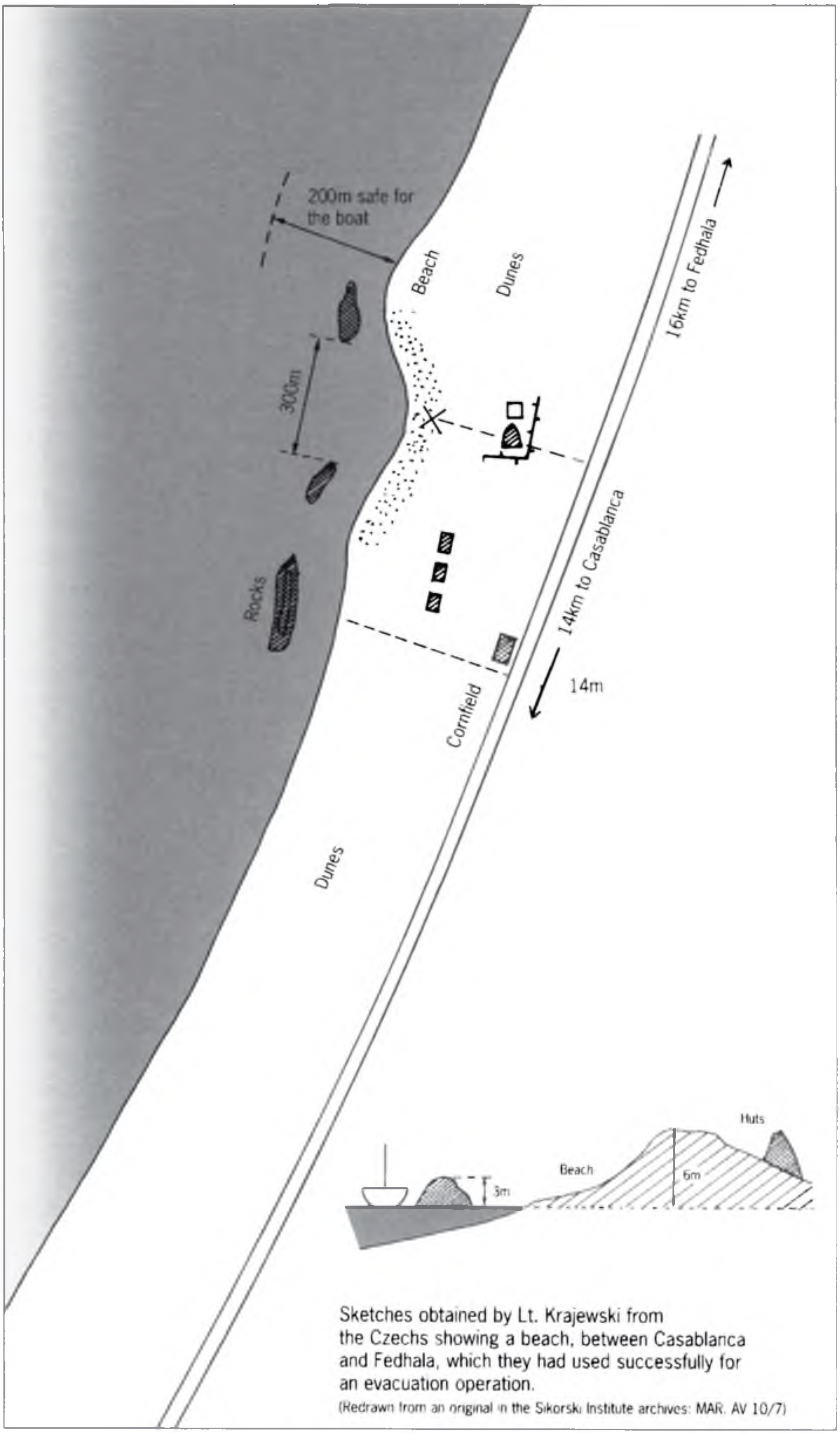
Mally replied on 21 May to both these letters.[6] He sent Krajewski Wysoczanski's address in Casablanca and an alternative means of contacting him through a bar. He had renewed a request to London headquarters for a code for use in direct communications between Mally and Casablanca which was indispensable for evacuation work. The Czechs, Mally continued, had recently been planning an evacuation of about 30 people from just north of Rabat, using a fishing boat. If this operation succeeded, they would be able to make use of the experience gained through it. Mally knew that there were at least 80 Poles to be evacuated from the Casablanca area, but this figure was some months out of date and he was convinced the total would turn out to be about 100. They were grouped in camps 150–200 km (95–125 miles) from the coast and their freedom of movement was restricted. There was considerable difficulty about getting hold of passes to Casablanca; and it would not be easy to get these people down to the coast.

Wysoczanski had reported to Mally the names of the officers in charge of the camps in French North Africa. He was pessimistic about the chances of organising even the smallest evacuation without French complicity and thought that any attempt to take people out would cause a worsening of conditions in the camps. Mally said he was insisting that Wysoczanski should persist, as this was the only hope of getting these valuable people out of Africa. Wysoczanski had made proposals for evacuation by legal means, all of which, however, would require interminable efforts to get visas.

On 2 June, Mally wrote to say that the French military and civilian authorities in Morocco were, for the time being, well disposed to the evacuation of the Poles from Africa.[7] This opportunity must be seized, for it was conceivable that the French would be obliged by the Armistice Commission to send the Poles who had reached Algeria and Morocco back to German-occupied France. Mally instructed Krajewski to get the British naval authorities to agree that, in that event, the ship carrying them would be intercepted and the Polish internees rescued: what had happened in Tunisia might equally well occur in Algeria and Morocco.

In a postscript, Mally wrote that a cable from London, just arrived, informed him that the British Admiralty had now issued the instruction for his own operations to France to begin. GHQ wanted Krajewski to report on progress. It was fairly typical that Mally's letter took three-and-a-half weeks to reach Krajewski from Lisbon.

On 14 June, Mally wrote again to Krajewski to say that he was still awaiting formal British Admiralty approval for operations to begin.[8] Wysoczanski meanwhile was urging the soonest possible evacuation because of the conditions prevailing in French North Africa. Mally repeated that they must abandon the idea of using crew from the


200m safe for the boat
Beach
Dunes
16km to Fedhala
300m
Rocks
14km to Casablanca
14m
Cornfield
Dunes
Huts
Beach
6m
3m

Sketches obtained by Lt. Krajewski from the Czechs showing a beach, between Casablanca and Fedhala, which they had used successfully for an evacuation operation.

(Redrawn from an original in the Sikorski Institute archives: MAR. AV 10/7)

*Oksywia,* as the French were refusing to release them; Krajewski must find an alternative crew in Gibraltar.

Mally had sent Wysoczanski technical details, such as recognition signals, and he told Krajewski he must be ready to carry out an operation to Algeria at seven days' notice and to Morocco at five. This letter must have crossed with one that Krajewski wrote on 15 June to Mally about the radio and courier problems he was experiencing in his communications with both Lisbon and Casablanca.[9] Friendly British Officers had just told him that a fishing vessel had arrived at Gibraltar from Morocco with Czechs on board. He attached a separate report on this subject, and sent another ten days later.

Particular circumstances accounted for the high cost of the Czech operation – 10,000 Francs per person. In fact, the price – a lump sum of 115,000 Francs – was to have covered the evacuation of 30 persons (i.e. 4,000 Francs per capita). This cost per head rose *de facto* when the police prevented 21 members of the expedition from making their way to the boat.

Krajewski's informants had been detained by the police with the other 21 Czechs. There was, however, no evidence against them, since they were not carrying any bundles of possessions. (Evacuees, against organisers' orders, sometimes carried packages of belongings or suitcases with papers in them; one man had too many layers of clothing on.) The informants simply told the police that they had 'come to the beach' and were released with orders to return to camp before 10 o'clock.

Krajewski thought these events of obvious significance for the Poles; Wysoczanski must be informed of them. The Czechs, with their experience of evacuations, had proved a useful source of information. They advised that the best time of day for concentration at the evacuation point was the afternoon; evacuees should be divided into groups of two to four and should travel to the beach by various means. The police were in the habit of checking the papers of everyone who got off a bus. Nevertheless, the Czechs believed that escape was easy so long as it was well organised. They gave Krajewski excellent sketches of the area. A person who knew the place well was a Czech Lieutenant named Riedel, who had organised matters competently at the Casablanca end. Krajewski suggested it might be worth using him in cooperation with their own local representative. He gave Riedel's address in Casablanca.

Krajewski wrote that he could evacuate as many as 110 people if he used a passenger vessel that was available to him in Gibraltar. For any number over 50, he could ask for a British naval escort. If it proved impossible to get as many as 50 to the embarkation point, he would use an unescorted felucca. As regards crew, he wanted to have three, or at least two, Poles, rather than foreigners he could not trust. An engineer was indispensable, but he could do without a W/T operator.

Krajewski replied on 26 June to Mally's letter dated 14 June, which had taken ten days to reach him. They ought possibly to use

Quennell's (SOE) bag.[10] He still had to find, requisition and fit out a vessel. He needed to hear from Casablanca about the place for the evacuation and the number of people, so as to decide on the most suitable type of boat. Then he would have to get Admiralty approval for the expenditure. All this would take time. He had suggested to Wysoczanski one possible pinpoint 14 km south of Casablanca, but this was subject to Wysoczanski's report back on any buildings or guard posts in the area. An alternative, which he preferred, was 14km from Casablanca towards Fedhala. The Czechs had used it and been able to find a hide-out on the coast while waiting for evacuation. The spot was so isolated that they did not even consider a silenced engine in the boat necessary.

Krajewski pointed out that Casablanca was 190 nautical miles from Gibraltar. He estimated (not entirely accurately) that, allowing 12 hours in hand for contingencies, the round trip would take 70 hours at 7 knots or 52 hours at 10 knots. Oran was 250 nautical miles and a round trip would require 85 hours at 7 knots or 62 hours at 10 knots. Algiers was 450 nautical miles and a round trip would take 132 hours at 7 knots or 85 hours at 10 knots. He would need two months' notice and a no-moon period would be necessary.

Krajewski asked whether it would be possible to recruit a couple of Poles in Lisbon as crew. If not, he would attempt to find Spaniards, with discreet help from the British. Anticipating this, he had been learning Spanish for some time. He had proposed to Wysoczanski that priority be given to evacuating the crew of the Oksywia, including an engineer, but only if they agreed to serve in evacuation operations. In that case, the Spaniards would be needed for the first mission only.

On 13 June, Hugh Quennell, SOE's senior representative at Gibraltar, had informed Krajewski, to whom he was helpful in a number of ways, of a plan he had elaborated, which would involve leaving Polish military personnel in French North Africa for eventual use in special operations rather than evacuating them.[11] He told Krajewski he had been in Lisbon a week previously and had discussed this idea with Mally: he showed Krajewski a document in English, which purported to summarise Mally's reaction. The Polish military personnel left *in situ* would be organised in case the Germans invaded French North Africa or France entered into the Axis camp. The Poles would then disperse and place themselves at the head of Arab groups to create diversions. He undertook to provide money in sufficient quantity and would that week be sending 100,000 Francs to a named contact in Casablanca. Quennell claimed that Mally had more or less accepted his plan. Asked his own position, Krajewski replied that he could not adopt any policy but that of his own headquarters in London, which, to date, had given him instructions to evacuate. He was not prepared to hazard a personal view, not being familiar with the terrain in French North Africa. He suggested that Quennell might wire SOE Baker Street to discuss the matter with Polish headquarters in London.