

## THE LAST STAGE OF THE CRIMEAN EVACUATION: FRICTIONS BETWEEN THE ARMY AND THE NAVY

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*At the beginning of May 1944, the German 17<sup>th</sup> Army, with its German and Romanian troops, was in a tight spot, stuck in defending Sevastopol. It was quite clear at that time that soon it would have to take another step back, in the Chersones position, the last area from where it could be extracted by sea.*

*This last task was assigned to Admiral Black Sea and its mixture of German-Romanian ships. The unit had already completed the first stage of the evacuation from Crimea in April 1944. In this difficult circumstances, the last stage of evacuating the stranded Axis units from the peninsula was much harder and sparked controversies among the services.*

*Keywords: Brinkmann; 1944; fortress of Sevastopol; Crimea; Romanian ships;*

From the issuance of the order to completely stop the shipments until the completion of the first phase of the evacuation on April 27, a total of 3,973 people were transported to the West coast, of which 2,078 Romanians (A.M.N R., S.S.M., 26, f. 27). By all standards the first phase was a genuine success. Here too the sources differ and we must take into account both natural errors when counting those landed at Constanta and other ports of destination, as well as the tendency equally explainable to report the best results. The reports of the Maritime Naval Force, taken by most of the Romanian naval history volumes, give a total of 73,058 evacuees "by sea", of which 20,779 Romanians and 20,494 Germans, along with 723 Slovaks and 21,302 Soviet volunteers, prisoners, civilians, etc. Compared to the modest start in terms of the number of Romanians, it is clear that the Admiral Black Sea (A.S.M.) compensated after April 20, substantially increasing the share of Romanian servicemen who were sailing on transport ships to Romania. The 17<sup>th</sup> Army reported in turn that a total of 85,836 men were evacuated with the Navy alone, plus another 16,027 by air (AOK 17, KTB no. 10, 150, f. 22). The division of evacuees according to German sources was as follows: 44,322 Germans (of whom 15,339 wounded), 29,096 Romanians (of whom 3,641 wounded). The difference between the two reports is explained by the fact that the Germans also took into account the shipments from 10-14 April, while the documents of the Romanian side start with the latter date.

Between 14-27 April there were several submarine attacks and more significantly 14 air attacks on the Axis convoys to Sevastopol. Regarding the loss of human lives, most of them were from "Alba Iulia" and from the barge "Leo", about 500 Romanian and German evacuees. The high death toll in the case of "Leo" is noted, because the ship was overloaded and the enemy bombs fell in full (A.M. N.R., C.F.N.M., 33, f. 27).

The Royal Romanian and German navies in the Black Sea had reasons to be proud following the first stage of the evacuation of the Crimean bridgehead. The Naval Maritime Forces report showed that of those carried, only 0.19% had been lost. Although true, it was only one facet of the coin. The axis suffered significant losses in terms of floating material. The oil tanker "Ossag", of over 2,700 tons was sunk, and three other important transport ships, "Alba Iulia", "Ardeal" and "Oituz", were taken out of action for the next stage of evacuation. "Danubius" was also damaged, but was still able to participate in subsequent evacuations. Of the warships, the most important blow was the damage to "Regele Ferdinand" on 23 April, following

repeated air attacks. Two pontoons with artillery were also damaged, and the Germans lost a transport/antisubmarine ship – “U. J. 104”, seriously damaged (A.M.N.R., C.F.N.M., 33, f. 27). It was clear both to Vice Admiral Helmuth Brinkmann, Commander of the A.S.M., and to Rear Admiral Horia Macellariu, commander of the Romanian Maritime Naval Forces, that the inevitable resumption of troop transports in Crimea would be much more difficult. If the Soviets had managed to force a retreat to the positions at Chersones their artillery would have posed serious problems at the wharves and other craft sites. On the other hand, the reduction of the transport capacity, by damaging and sinking ships, meant that the Axis had to call on military ships or organize several convoys, thus exposing itself to the dangers of Crimean waters.

Even so, on April 26 Brinkmann received the official message for A.S.M. from the Navy Command, which he also forwarded to subordinate units. Admiral Donitz remarked “*the orderly transfer of Navy personnel to Sevastopol with insignificant losses, the implementation of transport plans, the remarkable successes of commanders, General Staff, naval units and crews*” (KTB A.S.M., R 2592, c. 51). Before reaching the main idea the message praised the efforts made by the Navy in strengthening the Sevastopol bridgehead, which was justified if we take into account the fact that for a few days the line “*Gneisenau*” was defended by marine and Romanian units. It remained the Black Sea Fleet’s task to supply the Fortress of Sevastopol, once Hitler decided that it should be preserved because it had “*the greatest strategic importance in the broad context of the battle on the Eastern Front*” (KTB A.S.M., R 2592, c. 51). The message reinforced, therefore, for the Axis naval forces, the idea that, at least for the moment, the evacuation of troops from the peninsula was given up and the situation was returned to before April 1944 – supply convoys with men and materials for the 17<sup>th</sup> Army.

The disruption to transport was undoubtedly sudden and created big problems in turn. The order did not affect convoys that were already at sea or in the process of departing, so for several days the evacuation continued. By April 29 more than 3,000 Romanian troops arrived, most of them able men, but also over 400 Germans (A.M.N.R., S.S.M., 3055, ff. 165). The figures demonstrate unequivocally that despite the order to cease the evacuation the Romanian side continued to withdraw troops from the fortress. It is not an exaggeration to say that with the shortening of the front following the withdrawal of the Axis troops on a western alignment and leaving the exposed areas (especially in the northern sector), it was decided at the local level by the 17<sup>th</sup> Army to continue the removal from the area of the forces considered incapable of contributing to the defense of Sevastopol.

On the other hand the wounded and even some civilians and auxiliaries left in the combat zone could not be withdrawn further limiting the maneuvering space of the army in an increasingly smaller area (Koslinski, Stanescu, 1997, p. 240). Convoys carrying predominantly Romanian troops continued to suffer air and naval attacks. Such was the case with a German convoy on April 27, attacked with torpedo stars. A torpedo hit the submarine hunter "U. J. 104" at the bow, breaking a hatch and killing 50 boat soldiers below deck along with 17 crew members. Two others were seriously injured. The ship was towed to Sevastopol for repairs. Towards evening an "R-Boot" and the tugboat "Tissa", which was operating in search of a Romanian armed barge, were attacked by Soviet aircraft, which wounded two sailors (KTB A.S.M., R 2592, c. 518).

The commander of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army, General Erwin Jaenecke, could hope that his forces would be evacuated and there were good reasons for this, but he personally was not going to see the salvation of the army from the Crimean hell. His report on 27 April was sent by Schorner to the General Staff of the Army from where it reached Hitler. As a result Jaenecke was summoned to Berchtesgaden to report exactly the situation of the army and the prospects for the coming period (Buttar, 2020, p. 319). After preliminary talks with Schiffner in Galati, on 28 April, he flew to Austria to Hitler's headquarters. Although it had the support of the direct chief and that of Zeitzler, the Chief of the General Staff, Jaenecke's report could not please the German dictator as it led to the need to abandon Sevastopol. The discussions were apparently tense, especially because the arguments of the commander of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army did not convince Hitler. In turn, he promised reinforcements far from the necessary invoked by Jaenecke-instead of a division only four battalions (Ib., p. 642). In his place was appointed General Kurt Allmendinger, the former commander of the 49th Corps, who probably made a fine figure at the discussion he had had with Hitler just a few days before. Jaenecke was accused of "*no longer being fully trusted to carry out the BATTLE for Sevastopol, according to orders received*". Allmendinger, on the other hand, enjoyed his confidence, and it could be thought, following his performance at the conference on April 25, that he would carry out the orders without much protest<sup>1</sup>.

For its part, the Romanian Royal Navy was working feverishly on preparations for the resumption of evacuations from Crimea. The analysis of that period, regarding the possibilities in terms of available ships, concluded that in the next period one could count on five ships with large capacity – "*Ardeal*", "*Danubius*",

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<sup>1</sup> KTB H.Gr. 'Südukraine', Abt. Ia, No. 3, vii. 202 ff. (21 Apr. 1944), BA-MA RH 19 V/26, fos., 203 ff., apud Klaus Schonherr, op. cit., p. 485.

*“Durostor”, “Dacia” and “Romania”, which could carry in optimal conditions about 12,000 troops. The ships under the German and Hungarian flags were added, with about 20,600 more troops (A.M.N.R., fond S S.M., 3055, f. 199).*

The ships represented only one dimension of the problem. As the events of the coming period will prove, the issue of Crimean boat facilities proved to be a very important factor. That is why the A.S.M. has ordered a series of measures to improve the situation on the coasts of the peninsula, anticipating of course the big problems that it will encounter in the craft of the troops. During the German occupation of Crimea, the development of port facilities both at Sevastopol and at other ports and in the bays around the city was ignored. As a result, some improvisations were required, or rather, desperate measures, such as drowning barges to be used as wharves and identifying areas for easier unloading of barges type *“M.F.P.”*. The Army was to contribute by providing bomb disposal ships, for faster unloading of steamboats at the wharves and transportation to other unloading places. As long as the large port of Sevastopol was still operational, fast tugboats could use the facilities there provided there were Army land vehicles to transport them. This possibility soon expired, however with the onset of the Soviet offensive and the retreat to Chersones (KTB A.S.M., R 2563, c. 14).

It was clear that the last variant of the evacuation conceived by Jaenecke’s general staff had to be implemented as early as April 28 – operation *“Wildkatze”* (wild cat). It is interesting to note the direction followed by the codenames given to successive 17th army response operations: from *“Tiger”* to *“Leopard”* and ending with *“wild cat”*, that is, names of felines of ever smaller size. It is somewhat natural, given the substantial diminution of the forces at the disposal of the axis in Crimea.

*“Wildkatze”* did not differ radically from *“Leopard”*, and the implementation of the plan meant shortening the front by withdrawing across the Severnaya Bay forces from the northern side of the line of contact with the enemy. Allmendinger decided to execute the plan on May 7 with a two-stage withdrawal the next day on May 8 and then on May 9. In parallel, in the southern sector despite the retreat to an intermediate and clearly insufficiently prepared position – the so-called Nikolaievka line, he was preparing to counterattack the Sapun Heights, captured by the Soviets. To A.S.M. and for the Crimean Naval Command (Seeko Krim) it was obvious that the loss of the coverage area north of Severnaya Bay was a heavy but anticipated blow. The loss of the Port of Sevastopol was compensated somewhat by the landscaping works, mostly improvised, in the adjacent areas. The Romanian sources correctly assess that Admiral Otto Schulz had the difficult tasks of simultaneously ensuring the transport of the 49<sup>th</sup> Corps across Severnaia,

to mine the port and to execute its destruction (Koslinski, Stanescu, 1997, pp. 248-9). His mission during the 3rd stage of the evacuation was going to be a much more difficult one no doubt. But plans for destruction and mining were being made and the fact that they were implemented very quickly was a success on itself.

Brinkmann summarizes well the situation he faced in the new circumstances in the theater of battle: *“The Port of Sevastopol is from this moment forward inoperable for our supply (unloading and loading) traffic. We have to rely from 9.5 on the outer bays, in which wharves and anchorages were arranged and in which barges were drowned. After occupying the northern coast, the enemy will cover with artillery what is left of the bridgehead, including these bays. We must expect losses of floating material due to artillery fire during port operations. If the enemy artillery will also annihilate the two remaining airfields – Sevastopol 3 and Chersones, the situation will become critical, because he will have air supremacy and the ships will be exposed to air attacks when approaching Sevastopol or when stationed in the bays.”* (KTB, A. S.M.R 2563, c. 36).

The special preparations for the evacuation from Crimea, as reported by A.S.M. to the Superior Naval Command south and to the War Navy Command, showed that upon receipt of the evacuation order, all the floating means available to the axis in Romanian ports were organized in several convoys totaling a capacity of 18,000 men and that were to arrive at Sevastopol on the evening of 11 May (KTB A.S.M., R 2563, c. 50).

Although at this stage, which bore the name *“Operation 60.000”* for the Romanian side, a good part of the transport organization was delegated to the Maritime Naval Force, the A.S.M. still held the supreme authority in naval matters. In this regard, the directives for the first convoys, which were issued on May 9, were also preserved in the following days and defined the parameters in which the transport missions were to be carried out. Taking into account the desperate situation and the imperative to recover the troops as quickly as possible, it was decided to create as large convoys as possible for anti-aircraft protection without sacrificing as much speed if possible. The old considerations regarding the allocation of sufficient escorts were now no longer applicable. The bypass road to the south was also abandoned, preferring the direct route (KTB A.S.M., R. 2563, c. 51).

At the level of the land and marine commands, tensions reached new dimensions during this period. In the foreground was Schorner, naturally worried about getting his forces back from Crimea. He was outraged by Allmendinger's reports and in a message to the A.S.M. he remarked the lack of involvement of the Romanian ships. The phrase is important because Romanian sources correctly point out

that Brinkmann and Schulz were able very quickly to debunk the allegations. But it is equally relevant that, along with Allmendinger and the leadership of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army, the matter was raised by Schulz himself on 10 May in a radiogram to Brinkmann. Seeko Krim demanded the use of all available forces in the Black Sea, *“including Romanian destroyers”*.

It is perfectly true that throughout the German-Romanian cooperation in the Black Sea, the Maritime Naval Force sought through various methods to protect these precious resources, but the accusation was tendentious. The Army sought to show through it that the Navy, especially the Romanian one, was not willing to commit all the forces, thus forcing the soldiers to stay at Chersones longer than would have been necessary. Brinkmann and then Schulz denied the accusations and showed that all the Romanian ships, going up to the destroyers, had already been used in transport missions. Commander A.S.M. it even reported that the very good partnership relationship with Admiral Macellariu ensured a superior level of understanding, and the maritime naval force engaged all *“available units up to all limits, for the success of our joint mission. There were no difficulties”*. (KTB A.S.M., R 2563, c. 50).

The day of 10 May began with the news that *“Teja”* and *“Totila”* had been attacked by Soviet aircraft after they had been evacuated. *“Totila”*, escorted by three *“R-Boot”* was attacked around 09:30 by Soviet aircraft and sunk quickly without a chance of a rescue intervention at 10:30. Of the 5,000 on board 2,000 were Romanians. There were no reports of rescue or even attempted rescue of people on the ship (KTB A.S.M., R 2563, c. 60).

*“Teja”* was attacked several times by enemy aviation. First at 07: 10 she suffered a fire as a result of shelling. Then at 11: 25 she narrowly escaped further attacks and was able to get men on board, nearly 5,000 (German sources mention 4,700). On the way back to Constanta, the ship was hit by aerial bombs at 12:32, the engine room being destroyed. *“Teja”* sank at 15:00, 55 miles SW of Chersones. The *“R-boots”* recovered around 400, another 130 by torpedo boats and an unknown number by the ship *“Romania”* (KTB A.S.M., R 2563, c. 60).

The loss of the two ships represented the biggest disaster of the entire evacuation mission that began in April. More than 8,000 Axis soldiers lost their lives in this attack (Forczyk, 2014, p. 290). For the A.S.M., which had accepted that losses were inevitable, the fact that the two ships nevertheless managed to approach the embarkation points as to load the thousands of evacuees, showed however that the reports of the ship commanders were exaggerated, at least for the conditions of 8-10 May.

By the afternoon the convoys “Artist”, “Thrush” and “Prophet” also suffered air attacks, fortunately with no hits on the ships (KTB A.S.M., R 2563, c. 60). The situation took a negative turn on the night of 11/12 May and during the morning, when enemy bombing planes sank the improvised minesweeper “Romania” (3,152 TRB) and the freighter “Danubius” (1,489 TRB). The German freighter “Helga” was badly damaged and put ashore. The escort tried to retaliate, mostly with the 40 mm “Bofors” guns of the destroyer “King Ferdinand”, but the ship was also repeatedly attacked by aircraft. A bomb killed 11 crew members, and then the intervention of Soviet artillery made staying in the area impossible. The conclusion was obvious: Axis ships could not linger too long in Crimean waters during the day (Forczyk, 2014, p. 290).

“Romania”, which was the main ship in the convoy “Ovidiu”, had recovered a large number of shipwrecked from a sunken German “M.F.P.”. As in the case of “Danubius”, the ship carried ammunition for the defenders of the bridgehead (Koslinski, Stănescu, 1997, p. 257). Brinkmann notes that all Constanta-Sevastopol convoys were leaving partially loaded with munitions. Once in Crimea, the assumption that they were not fully unloaded is plausible. The boat commanders and officers had orders to speed up the men’s embarkation and resend the ships back to the West. At least some of the successes of Soviet air missions can also be explained by the fact that the attacked ships had ammunition on board (KTB A.S.M., R 2563, c. 61). The reason was the insistence of the Army Group South Ukraine, which wanted the forces in the bridgehead to continue to be supplied.

The reaction of the command of the 17th Army, transmitted further high up by Schorner, is equally explainable. New allegations were made, showing that the order for ships to make the journey to Chersones had not been complied with regardless of the weather conditions. The “Thrush” convoy turned back due to the weather, then continued on its way, causing delays at the craft points. “Patria” loaded only 3,000 men instead of 9,000, the estimated maximum capacity, with Schörner fuming that the crews showed cowardice, preferring to leave with partially occupied ships rather than wait for full loading under enemy fire (KTB A.S.M., R 2563, c. 62).

This is the famous message mentioned by the Romanian sources, in which it is said that there were 35,000 Axis troops at Chersones (Koslinski, Stănescu, 1997, p. 258). The statement was part of a brief presentation of the situation on the ground and was meant to emphasize the importance of the transports for the rescue of the military forces there, as well as that of the munitions that the army insisted on requesting at any opportunity (KTB A.S.M., R 2563, c. 63). A.S.M. countered all these accusations coming from the land troops, pointing out that at the time

of issuing the code name “*Wildkatze*”, on May 8, a group of ships with an evacuation capacity of 20,000 people was immediately dispatched to Sevastopol. With Hitler’s approval for the evacuation of the bridgehead, other ships with a capacity of 35,000 men were added, raising the total in the period of May 8-9 (arrival on the 10th at the latest) to 55,000 men. A.S.M. showed that it did not rebate any ships, even using those with reduced mobility and those not completely repaired, etc. Naturally, there were also factors that limited the effectiveness of the measures, as was the case with weather conditions and the loss of extremely important craft points. The abandonment of Sevastopol, although planned, occurred faster and with greater consequences than anticipated for the German and Romanian forces. Brinkmann also stressed that both the German Navy in the Black Sea and the Romanian Royal Navy acted with conviction and at the limit of their possibilities, “*to carry out their tasks at sea and on land, with all efficiency and all the spirit of sacrifice*” (KTB A.S.M., R 2563, c. 63).

These explanations did not alleviate the state of strain that reigned at the higher land and naval commands. Brinkmann had to admit checks in the case of the convoy “*Patria*”. The fact that “*Teja*” and “*Totila*” had about 10,000 on board people indicated that it was not cowardice. On the contrary, the commanders and boat officers did their job very well, since in such a short time the loading of the ships was successful. The whole evening of 10 May saw feverish activity relating the General Staff of the Army to the Navy command and the Superior Naval Command South, requesting reports on the evacuation. Brinkmann notes that, perhaps under the influence of the 17th Army Command, the Naval Command in Crimea led by Schulz had adopted the pessimistic tone. Radio channels were flooded with a cascade of messages that had the effect of effectively blocking communications with German and Romanian ships, often provided only with a radiotelegrapher. Inconsistencies inevitably occurred and some ships actually had to blindly find their embarkation points. Soviet artillery and the danger of air attacks limited the action of the guidance ships, which were no longer able to guide the transporters to the Kasancha and Kamishevaya baths, the main embarkation points. The situation from hour to hour was constantly changing and these numerous messages added to the existing chaos (Koslinski, Stănescu, p. 257).

The arguments used by Brinkmann were correct. The schedule established with the 17<sup>th</sup> Army for the operation “*Wildkatze*” was not respected. The reality on the ground did not match the assumptions of the Army General Staff, whose resistance proved weaker against the Soviet onslaught. In these circumstances, as Brinkmann noted, “*all the A.S.M. can do is send as many ships as possible and as quickly*

as possible, regardless of the weather conditions and the actions of the enemy” (KTB A.S.M., R 2563, c. 64). His conclusion was that the naval forces could not anticipate the conduct of battles on land, and the army now sought to blame someone for its conspicuous failure.

After the end of the evacuation mission, which had obvious deficiencies in the organization and especially in the implementation, the disputes between the ground troops and the German Navy (involving the Romanian Navy) continued. Even on May 13, when the last survivors were being recovered in terrible conditions off the coast of Chersones, Allmendinger sent his conclusions about cooperation with the Navy during the mission to withdraw from the bridgehead. From the very beginning, he pointed out that from the point of view of the leadership of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army, the evacuation was affected by *“the lack of Organization of the Navy, which had profound effects”* (AOK 17, KTB no. 10, 157, f. 177). The first of his assessments, concerning the organization of the links between the army and the Crimean Naval Command, is easy to verify, and indeed the planning of the evacuation, from the number of ships involved, the wharves allocated, to the establishment of the units to be brought to certain wharves, was the result of joint work. Further, however, he overestimated the battlefield performance of the units under his command: *“The retreat from the Chersones position, the arrival to the embarkation points, the organization of Army communications and rearguard lines of resistance in the area of the craft points were made under strong pressure and under enemy fire, but according to plan.”* (AOK 17, KTB no. 10, 157, f. 177).

It is easy to understand why he did so: it was an attempt to counter the accusations of the Navy, which claimed that the established plan was not followed and that the evacuation began earlier than agreed because the resistance of the army was too weak. The effects were seen on 9-13 May, when the hastily created, convoys were desperately led to the embarkation points where disorganized troops were huddled. Here, in fact, was the key to the partial failure of the evacuation of the second stage, the tragedy unfolding between the front line and the ships offshore. In this space discipline and organization often disappeared entirely, and the two major units involved, the 17<sup>th</sup> Army and the A.S.M. each tried to pin the blame on each other.

Further on however Allmendinger’s accusations become more concrete, referring to the disorganization of convoys, whose commanders did not know for sure which embarkation points to reach. It is also true that a significant number of ships returned to Constanta without having the maximum number of soldiers on board, although in most cases partial loadings were preferred to hasten

the departure back due to the threat of Soviet air attacks. Allmendinger concluded that: *“To clarify the situation and detail it, a large-scale hearing will be required. It is unfortunate that, due to the reported deficiencies, a good part of the defense troops that were still fighting at Chersones, were no longer evacuated. It is undoubted that their evacuation would have been in difficult conditions, but it could have been done according to the transport schedule and on a much larger scale than was achieved.”* (AOK 17, KTB no. 10, 157, f. 178).

On the same day, the Journal of Combat Actions of the A.S.M. included several points that explained in good part these shortcomings:

*“In addition to them, another 6,000 soldiers were boat and not recovered, being on ships lost in the attacks. In any case, the sending of ships lasted until 10 May. The supply of the fortress exceeded the requested average. Despite the use of all available ships, troops remained to be carried out, strictly due to factors outside the control of the Navy, such as:*

*1) insufficient time to prepare the floating material (at least 36 hours, minimum required for the bypass route chosen by A.S.M.);*

*2) hasty withdrawal of the Army because the enemy has penetrated the line of contact. The studies and plans prepared by the 17th Army provided for an orderly withdrawal, in 3 stages, each of which further shortened the line of contact and with evacuations at each step. In fact, however, the Army was forced by the enemy to immediately retreat to the Chersones (Chersones position), leaving behind the intermediate positions, so only 3 days were available for evacuation;*

*3) total air superiority of the enemy during the 3 days;*

*4) powerful artillery fire on all embarkation points, improvised positions; the batteries could not be deafened by our forces or our own aviation;*

*5) bad weather conditions on May 10, so the transports and “M.F.P.” units were delayed and did not arrive on time at times (especially at night);*

*6) boat problems were accentuated by artificial fog (fumigants), smoke etc., which made it difficult to find loading points even for commanders who were familiar with the area.”* (KTB A.S.M., R 2563, c. 86).

It is clear that the clarifications brought by the A.S.M., also assumed by the Navy Command in Berlin, were not able to block the efforts of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army leadership, which now even demanded that the Navy officers be court-martialed. That's because on May 21 Allmendinger formally requested the commander of Army Group South Ukraine to represent the interests of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army and initiate court-martial investigation proceedings, pointing out that the decoration of admirals

Brinkmann and Schulz with the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross was an offense for the sacrifice of soldiers who could not be evacuated by the two sailors themselves "organizers of the evacuation of Crimean fighters" (AOK 17, KTB no. 10, 157, f. 71).

Other arguments in favor of the idea that the naval units did not do their duty to their comrades in the land troops were brought later, as was the case with the criticism of the inability of the A.S.M. to evacuate the wounded early before the start of the large-scale evacuation operation. On the other hand, the claim that due to transport delays the army was deprived of the necessary reinforcements (two infantry divisions) was obviously tendentious. The same is the case for other charges; basically, Allmendinger was blaming the A.S.M. leadership that it misreported on 7 May of having sufficient transport space not only for the emergency withdrawal of the first wave (20,000 troops), but also of the rest of the forces at Chersones no later than 9 May. Here Allmendinger launched himself into supposition, because Brinkmann had in fact reported that he could secure the evacuation of 20,000 troops and, "if the ships are used at full capacity", perhaps even 25,000 (KTB A.S.M., R 2563, c. 43).

The other points Allmendinger touched upon in his report to the Berlin superiors carry more weight. Much of the floating material was sent on May 10, too late according to Army leadership. What is omitted however is that Hitler only approved the evacuation of the remnants of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army on 9 May. The first convoys left in fact on the 9<sup>th</sup>, but other factors made it difficult to travel, as was the case with the need to group the ships into larger formations, in order to provide anti-aircraft protection at least partially (KTB A.S.M., R 2563, c. 51). Brinkmann also noted that an essential condition for the success of the mission was that the Army would hold out until 12 May, in order to keep the Kasancha and Kamishevaiy bays, which proved impossible.

Allmendinger's report included numerous testimonies from commanders and other officers and non-commissioned officers in army units, which essentially documented the chaos and lack of coordination that characterized the last two days of the evacuation. The answer to all the accusations can be considered Brinkmann's report, which we reproduce here: "On the consultations between the commander and the head of the Superior Naval Command south, I report that Colonel General Schorner's very violent accusations against the Navy relate to her inability to transport troops from the Crimea. He requested further information on naval actions, as he was due to send the final report to the Fuhrer by 13:00. The conversation with Colonel General Schorner was abruptly interrupted when I showed all the difficulties, provoked by weather conditions, the actions of the enemy

*and that the final figures are not available. I confirm that I have been ordered not to discuss naval operations and other similar information with the military. Moreover, I report that General Hartmann publicly approached the head of the Crimean Naval Command (in the Carlton Hotel) and criticized the Navy.*

*According to the general's statements, I suspect that the following allegations have been made against the Navy:*

*a) despite the close cooperation between Seeko Krim and the 17<sup>th</sup> Army, regarding the craft points and troops assigned to each, the ships did not arrive in time to retrieve them.*

*Answer: see the paragraph corresponding to the night of May 12. There is plenty of craft space at Chersones. Due to smoke camouflage and fog, identification of embarkation points was done by Seeko personally, sailing on torpedo boats, which guided the ships waiting at Chersones.*

*b) ships were not assigned embarkation points at times.*

*Answer: as much as possible due to significant crowding, Seeko informed the ships of the wharves and wharves in a timely manner. It should be pointed out that more than 60 boats arrived simultaneously and had to be routed by radio.*

*c) a few ships were too far from the coast to embark.*

*Response:*

*The allegations probably relate to the case of "Totila" and "Teja", which has already been clarified. Both ships had a total of 8,700, loaded to the limit, damaged by bombs shortly after the craft and sank.*

*d) Seeko left the command post at Maxim Gorki 2 before the completion of the craft.*

*Response:*

*Seeko left the command post on the last night of the evacuation at 21:00. Command of the troops there was impossible because ties were severed. He sailed on a torpedo boat and steered the arriving ships and the "M.F.P.s" to the loading points. He remained at Chersones until sunrise. Other boats were no longer possible because of the enemy. Seeko Krim's decisions were appropriate.*

*e) the transport ships were stopped on the night of 12 May at 32 degrees east and were no longer used.*

*Response:*

*After receiving the message that the craft should be stopped after the night of 12 May, the ships were still en route to Chersones and stationed at 32 degrees east, with orders to intervene if necessary to: a) provide support in case the transport ships suffered damage on 13 May; b) provide embarkation if despite the information*

*the embarkation points could be used. The ships moved immediately although they could not reach them until sunrise. There was sufficient tonnage for the forces that were identified at Chersones.*" (KTB A.S.M., R 2563, cc. 86-91).

In the end the complaints of the leadership of the 17<sup>th</sup> Army were without the expected result. Admirals Brinkmann and Schulz retained the decorations and the explanations given were convincing. Indeed, it should be pointed out that the loss of the several thousand soldiers who could not be evacuated was the result of a complex of factors that were difficult to predict, the effects of which proved even harder to avoid. From the temporary halt of the evacuation after the first phase, to the overly optimistic assessments and plans about the evacuation "*in one move*", to the loss of the defensive positions at Sevastopol, all inevitably led to greater losses than had been initially accepted. In the end, the situation on the ground, the total mastery of the air by the enemy and the inherent confusion could not but have negative effects on the evacuation mission in the Crimea.

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