

## The wreck of the lighthouse ship

### “ORION”

After reviewing for a while the events that led to the sinking of the ship "Orion", in the bay of Kedros, Donoussa and in order to restore several inaccurate and incorrect information that I had included in the first article I had posted, I decided to compile and republish it. but this time, with all the data I managed to draw from mainly primary sources.

The research on the role and use of "Orion" as a ship of light missions, allowed me to know - among other things - a few facts about the lighthouses 1 of Greece and I could only begin with a small exclusion from the subject, in order to kind of introduction, to make a brief review of their history.

From ancient times the needs of seafarers to be able to know their geographical location, to be able to travel between islands and avoid dangerous reefs, especially at night, led among other naval inventions of navigation aids, and the construction of lighthouses.

The first possible reference to torches<sup>2</sup> as a naval aid, is recorded by Homer in the Iliad (T375) and confirms their use in the Greek seas since antiquity. There are reports from Herodotus that there were torches near Cape Sigio of Troy which was built 8th - 7th BC. century, marking the entrance to the Dardanelles, as well as the Myrmix reef (Lefteris reef), in the Skiathos Magnesia canal built by Xerxes before 480 BC. to descend his fleet from Thermaikos to the Pagasitikos, etc. The lighthouse of Alexandria was also famous, which with a height of 156.9 meters and a radiance of about 30 nautical miles, deservedly won a place among the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was the work of the Greek architect Sostratos and its construction was completed in 280 BC. It stopped operating in 1303 after an earthquake, while its complete collapse is estimated around 1349. From the 15th century begins the development of a rudimentary lighthouse network in Greece. In the Ionian state from 1822 to 1825 5 lighthouses were built while the first lighthouse of the newly formed Greek state was built at the entrance of the port of Aegina and was put into operation in 1829. The development of trade and the needs of navigation, contributed to the parallel development of a more organized lighthouse network, where until 1917 it numbered 252 lighthouses and lanterns<sup>3</sup>. The lighthouse network continued to expand, and before World War II numbered 388 torches.



The lighthouses had permanent staff - the Lighthouse Keepers - who were obliged to be in the lighthouse cage (light chamber at the top of the lighthouse tower) throughout the night, periodically winding the lighthouse rotation machine and maintaining constant fuel pressure using a manual air pump. They took care of the cleaning and maintenance of the lighthouse building. From 1887 the lighthouse keepers were permanent executives of the Hellenic Royal Navy (EBN) and were administratively and organically subordinated to the Lighthouse Service.

Once a year, the lighthouse ship approached the lighthouse, where a lighthouse crew was on board and supplied the lighthouse with fuel (lighting oil), medicines, stationery, cleaning materials and maintenance materials of the lighthouse building (paints, brushes, construction materials). The head of the Lighthouse Service crew inspected the staff and accommodation, and finally the ship's doctor examined the lighthouse keepers and made a sanitary inspection of the lighthouse premises.

The ship "ORION", which since 1936 had joined the auxiliary ships of the Greek Royal Navy, had been assigned exactly this role. Ship of light missions and was specially modified for this purpose.

It was originally built as a cargo ship in the Netherlands and was launched in January 1920 under the name "HEERENVEEN" 4. The ship was sold in 1922 to the French company Nantaise de Navigation à Vapeur, changing its name from Heerenveen to "BOURGNEUF". In 1934 it was bought by the Samian Steamship of the Sons D. Iglesi SA and was renamed "KARLOVASSI" until 1936 when it joined the Greek Royal Navy and turned into a ship of light missions with the name "ORION".

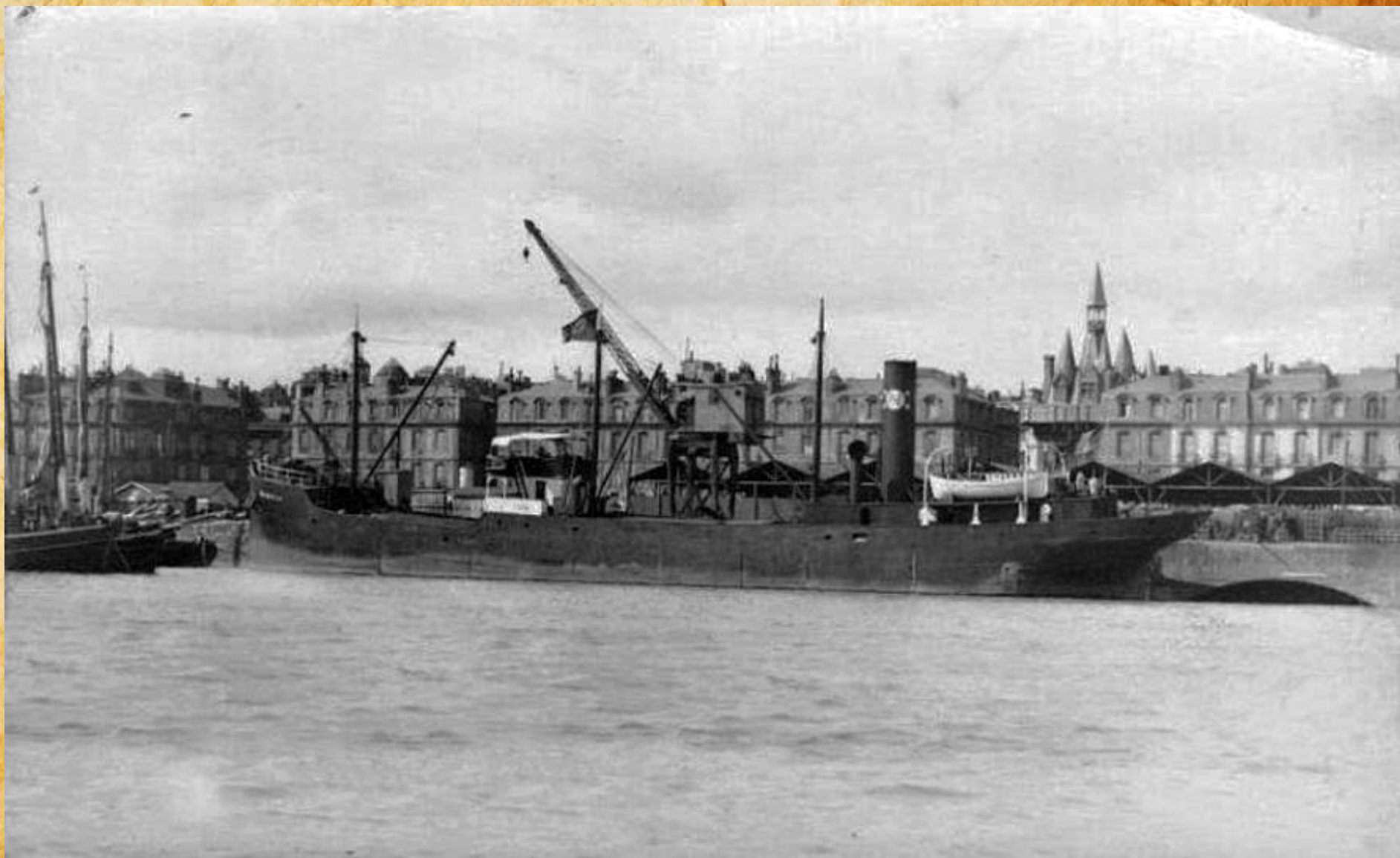
On July 12, 1940, a few months before the official declaration of the Greek-Italian war, the first hot episode took place on the part of the Italians and concerned the attack of Italian aircraft against "Orion", which supplied the lighthouse of Gramvousa in the bay of Kissamos in western Crete. . Specifically at 06:30 in the morning, a swarm of three aircraft unsuccessfully bombarded the area where "Orion" was located, without fortunately causing any damage or casualties.

The attack was announced via radiograph, as a result of which the departure of the destroyer A / T "Hydra" (D97), which was chartering with 3 more destroyers, in Milos was ordered. When the ship arrived in the area, around 10:00, it was attacked by a swarm of Italian aircraft, which made two crossings, dropping bombs aimed at sinking the "Hydra". THE

The commander of the destroyer, Lieutenant Theodoros Pezopoulos, realized in time the intentions of the aircraft and ordered the firing of anti-aircraft gunships, while the ship performed bomb-avoiding maneuvers. The Italian aircraft did not achieve their goal, while during their second passage, the Greek destroyer was better prepared, firing well-aimed anti-aircraft fire, thus forcing the Italians to leave. The enemy bombers were flying at a height of 500 meters - according to the report of the commander of "Hydra" - a fact which was disputed by the Fleet Headquarters. The Greek officials considered that the Italian aircraft had to fly at a higher altitude, taking into account that the ship's crew could not clearly identify their type, and that the dropped bombs failed.

Small debris that fell on the deck were later examined and identified as coming from Italian steel.





ORION as "BOURGNEUF" before 1934. Source: [www.photoship.co.uk](http://www.photoship.co.uk)



In his report, Pezopoulos noted that during his assessment, an aircraft was hit in the wing by the anti-aircraft, while he claimed that he witnessed a large jet of water that rose at a great distance and in his opinion came from the crash of the bomber at sea. The EBN officers, examining all the available data, considered that this did not happen and that the jet was due to the dropping of a bomb in an attempt to lighten the weight of the aircraft. After the attack, the then captain, Grigorios Mezeviris, ordered the other 3 destroyers to prepare for departure from Milos in order to engage them in war, but the Ministry of the Navy intervened by suspending all preparations and to help reduce the intensity of the order. "Hydra" and "Orion". The Chief of General Staff called the Naval Guards and the Italian denied the attack against "Hydra" and "Orion", but said that despite international law (at the time), there was a British oil tanker in the area of Gramvousa.

The "Orion" before the German invasion of Athens and Piraeus, in April 1941, had sunk<sup>5</sup>, like other ships, in Vouliagmeni in order to avoid their destruction by air raids. Before the autumn of 1941 it was raised by the Germans who considered it booty<sup>6</sup>, repaired it and joined the German Navy (Kriegsmarine) of the same name (ORION). It was used not as a warship but as a siege-transport ship.

On August 22, 1943, after sabotage in the port of Piraeus, the "Orion" sank, then was lifted, repaired and continued to operate under the command of the German Navy.

Almost a year later, on August 9, 1944, in Karlovassi, Samos, the "Orion" is moored with the German ships "Merkur" and "Horst" as well as the torpedo boat TA19 (former Italian Calatafimi). The TA19 at its exit (16:58) from the port moving in an East-Northeast course and while it had traveled a distance of 1.6 nautical miles is attacked (17:05) by the submarine "Pipinos" (Y8) with Lieutenant Commander Konstantinos Loundra. The "Pipinos" that ambushed while diving in the area for eight hours, fired a total of 4 torpedoes and managed a key blow to the "TA19" cutting it in two. After the successful sinking of the TA19, the submarine returns to attack the other ships that were still moored. Time 19:14. "Pipinos" fires 4 more torpedoes against "Orion" but in vain<sup>7</sup>, after 1 torpedo ended up on the shore without exploding, 2 more hit and destroyed the jetty while the 4th exploded next to the stern of "Orion". German records state that 2 of the torpedoes did not explode.





Y / B PIPINOS (Y8). Source: el.wikipedia.org

The fate of "Orion" was not to continue for long. On the morning of September 23, 1944, a Baltimore 459th Airborne Division of the Australian Air Force (RAAF), which had taken off from Benghazi Berka III Airport on a reconnaissance flight over the Aegean, spotted the Orion south of Donoussa island of Cyclades. What followed may have been routine for the Allied Royal Air Force (RAF) headquarters.

Time 11:40. From the 252nd RAF Squadron base in Gambut, Libya, 7 Beaufighter aircraft took off.

1. NV200 / N with their crew F / Lt. 8 Fowler C. W. Governor and Navigator F / O Kemp R. H.
2. NE479 / E piloted by P / O Underwood J. R. and navigated by Sgt. Walker G.
3. LZ239 / S with Canadian P / O Stevenson H. A. as pilot and F / Sgt as navigator. Thompson C.
4. LZ456 / D with pilot F / Sgt. Skippen S. C. and navigator F / Sgt. Truscott J. A.
5. NT966 / B piloted by F / O Deacon H. H. and navigated by P / O Anderson J. D.
6. NT993 / V commanded by Australian W / O Bates J. S. and navigated by F / Sgt. McAughtry B.
7. NT895 / H with pilot F / Sgt. Garnett J. D. and navigator F / Sgt. Linfield E. L.



At the same time, 4 more Beaufighters took off from the 603rd RAF Squadron, which was operating from the same base.

1. NV205 / W with captain F / O Bouneville C. M. and navigator F / Sgt. Potter A. E.
2. NT893 / P commanded by Sgt. Paling D. O. and navigator Sgt. Witham K. R.
3. NE593 / K piloted by W / O Harrison W. G. and navigated by F / O Silcock W. G.
4. LX864 / D with pilot Sgt. Arthurs L. E. and navigator Sgt. Richardson F. G.



Typical view of a Beaufighter aircraft equipped with rockets. Source: [www.militaryfactory.com](http://www.militaryfactory.com)



The formation followed a course from Kasos to Santorini, Amorgos and the target was found at 14:35 to have anchored in the Cedar of Donoussa. The Beaufighters circled the island and launched the attack from West to East. The NV200 / N (252nd Squadron) was the first to attack "Orion". The aircraft managed to fire a few shots at the ship, but was hit in the right wing and in the hydraulic system, by intense anti-aircraft fire that it received. He later managed to reach his base, making a forced landing on the fuselage. Then the NT993 / V (252nd Squadron) with targeted shots and rocket launches hit the ship, but it also came under fire in the tail of the fuselage. It also returned safely to its base. The fire against the "Orion" was continued by all aircraft. The LZ456 / D (252nd Squadron) also came under heavy fire and was forced to drop its rockets in order to escape. This aircraft was lost flying over the island and was the only allied loss of this attack. The Beaufighters began to leave, leaving the "Orion" in smoke, but without being able to see if it had really been destroyed. During his departure the formation of the aircraft and while flying over Amorgos, the crews heard a big explosion and saw flames in the area of Donoussa. Without the certainty of the complete destruction of the "Orion" a second air raid was attempted to deliver the final blow.

16:25 - 16:30. Eight more Beaufighters took off from the base in Gambut. Five of the 252nd Squadron and three of the 603rd Squadron.

1. NE520 / Z, 252nd piloted by F / O Cleggett N. J., and navigated by P / O Cowl I. P.
2. NV207 / I, 252nd with W / O pilot Ashley W. K. and F / Sgt as navigator. Gray P. J.
3. NV217 / F, 252nd with F / O Ward D. G. R. as pilot and F / Sgt as navigator. Whitby J. G.
4. NV243 / P, of the 252nd with W / O Legat S. E. as captain and F / Sgt as navigator. Paskell R. A.
5. LX932 / T, 252nd piloted by Canadian F / O Reid D. M., and piloted by F / Sgt. Ray R. C.
6. NT912 / H of the 603rd with F / Lt as captain. Keohans J. R. And navigator F / Sgt. Fielding A.
7. NT964 / X of 603 with New Zealand F / Lt as captain. Simpson D. G. and navigator F / Sgt. Bunn F. G.
8. LZ400 / Z 603rd with P / O Goodwin C. as pilot and F / Sgt as navigator. Warner H. J.

At 18:48 the Beaufighters arrived at the spot and located the "Orion" glowing, to have excelled on the beach of Kedros. The attack began with rocket fire and shelling, with no return fire. Each aircraft carried out at least 3 rounds of attacks with the NV217 / F and NV243 / P rocket launchers being more accurate.

All the aircraft had returned to their base by 21:30 without any loss, leaving the Cedar of Donoussa the now completely destroyed "Orion".



ORION in Kedros of Donoussa photographed after the attack. Source: Archive of the descendants of Georgios Sideris.



The wreck of the 'ORION' (800 tons) destroyed by Beaufighters of 252 and 603 Squadrons in CHENDRO BAY, DENUSA ISLAND on 23rd September, 1944. This photograph was taken by a Baltimore of 459 Squadron, RAAF, while on shipping reconnaissance.



The hull of the ship remained damaged in Kedros, until the beginning of the 50's where it was dismantled and sold as scrap by the Shipwreck Lifting Organization (OAN).

To this day at the bottom of the bay and at a depth of 5-6 meters, there are still the wreckage from the bottom of the ship, which due to rest, sometimes embanked with sand and sometimes visible, recalling memories of battles fought in the recent past.



Bay Kedros in Donoussa. The location of the wreck can be seen. Source: © Nicolas Bega.



### Technical characteristics and details of the ship

First name: HEERENVEEN (1920)

Next names: BOURGNEUF (1922), KARLOVASSI (1934), ORION (1936) Ship

type: Cargo

Flag: Dutch

Manufacturer: De Groot & v.Vliet

Yard location: Slikkerveer - Netherlands

Construction number: 69

Date of launch: January 1920

Completion date: February 1920

Tonnage: 744 GRT (Gross Capacity)

Total length of the ship: 55.1 meters

Ship width: 8.6 meters

Immersion: 3.6 meters

Number of propellers: 1

Engine: 78NHP three-cylinder

Indicative speed: 10 knots

Owners: 1920-1922 Neerlandia, The Netherlands

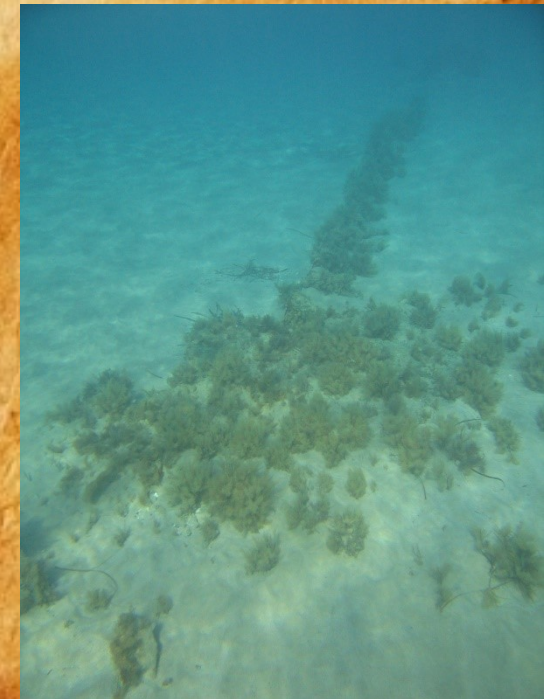
1922-1934 French company Nantaise de Navigation à Vapeur, based in Nantes.

1934-1936 Samian Steamship of Sons D. Iglesi SA,

1936-1941 Hellenic Royal Navy

1941-1943 Kriegsmarine German Navy

1943-1944 German company Mittelmeer-Reederei GmbH based in Hamburg.



That which remained on the seabed from the submarine of Orion. Source: © Nicolas Bega.



## Sources:

**NARA:** AIR 25/1509/18, AIR 25/1509/19, AIR 27/2080/18, AIR 27/2080/19

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#### Notes:

1. We mainly call the lighthouse the building that hosts the torch, which is used for seafaring, landing and coastal shipping.
2. A torch is any naval aid that emits a distinctive light and indicates a predetermined geographical point.
3. Fano is the torch used for coastal shipping, in the indication of the entrances of coves, ports and canals as well as in the indication of the head of piers or quays.
4. There has been a misrepresentation in some sources, as well as the reproduction of information from others, that this is the Swedish-made Orion (formerly Goethe, formerly Motala). This ship sank in the north of Scotland on 27 February 1940 and the important construction difference that distinguishes them is the position of the engine where in the first it was a spaceship, while in ORION (former Karlovassi, former Bourgnef, former Heerenveen) stern.
5. The "Submersion" did not cause the destruction of the ship. In fact, they opened the internal taps and immersed the ship in the shallows so that it could be easily lifted later.
6. The term "booty" in this case refers to a ship that falls into the possession of the enemy (enemy). The ship is now owned by the hostile State, or by individuals in the hostile state.
7. It is also incorrectly mentioned in several sources that Orion sank from the submarine Pipinos in Samos on August 9, 1944 because as it appears from all the above sources and the photo, the point of the wreck is located in the cedar bay of Donoussa.
8. Ranks of Royal Air Force Officers (RAF) mentioned in the text and correspondences: F / Lt. : Flight Lieutenant  
- Squadron Leader  
F / O: Flying Officer  
P / O: Pilot Officer  
W / O: Warrant officer  
F / Sgt. : Flight Sergeant - Epiminias  
Sgt. : Sergeant- Σμηνίας