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**THE SECOND WORLD WAR  
1939 - 1945**

**ROYAL AIR FORCE NARRATIVE**

**THE R.A.F. IN MARITIME WAR**

**VOL. VII**

**PART II**

**MEDITERRANEAN**

**NAVAL CO-OPERATION: THE END OF THE SUBMARINE WAR:  
OPERATIONS IN THE ADRIATIC, GREECE AND THE AEGEAN  
1944 - 1945.**

**Air Historical Branch (1) (RAF)  
Ministry of Defence.**

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## PREFACE

This volume represents Part II of the record of maritime war in the Mediterranean and brings the entire history of air participation in naval operations to a close with the cease fire on 2 May 45.

In Chapters 1 and 4 it reviews air and naval operations in the Eastern Basin from 1 Jan. 44 onwards, describes the Allied re-entry into Greece and the Aegean Sea, Allied air preparations for the amphibious landings, the air drops and troop reinforcement flights and the short but highly significant Allied air, land and sea effort over the period of the Greek civil war. It must be realised that the combined British effort saved Greece from a Communist take-over. Air H.Q. Greece and the Navy thereafter mopped up the remaining German fortress islands and the whole Eastern Basin was then in Allied hands.

In this volume, with the back of the U-boat offensive already broken, the end of the submarine war has been related. The last stage was reached when U.S. heavy bombers hit the submarine bases at Skaramanga in Greece.

In Chapters 2 and 5 the air campaign in the Central Mediterranean against enemy shipping at sea and in ports from 1 Jan. 44 to the end of the war is covered. As in this campaign in the other two Mediterranean inland seas, the change from large and medium tonnage to low tonnage merchant and naval craft is made apparent, an important factor to remember when calculating inroads on the enemy sea transport system and the changing nature of communications in a long war.

In Chapter 3, the maritime war in the Adriatic is followed closely, with special emphasis on air participation by Balkan Air Force after its formation. The record of the whole proceedings from 1 Jan. 44 until the end of the war is important in the study of a highly specialised form of maritime warfare with decisive air participation.

The sources consulted are the same in width and depth as those employed in Part I, including liberal quotation from official German and Italian records.

All the air operations recorded in this part II go to prove once more the oft-repeated saying that the Mediterranean was the great cauldron of experience. Measure and counter-measure, patience, ingenuity, the sound application of classical air doctrine after trial and error and a willingness to co-operate

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with a sister Service towards a common end led to the complete defeat of the Axis on many fronts, each with their peculiar problems. Not least among the sources for self-<sup>congratulation</sup>~~gratulation~~ and the reasons for the thanks of the free world come the facts of our liberation of France, Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece. In these costly and dangerous undertakings, the record of the R.A.F. and the other Allied Air Forces will stand high in history.

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# S E C R E T

## ABBREVIATIONS

A.A.	Anti-aircraft
A.A.F.	Army Air Forces (U.S.)
A.A.I.	Allied Armies in Italy
A/C	Aircraft
A.C.M.F.	Air Command Mediterranean Theatre
A.C.V.	Escort carrier (British)
A.F.H.Q.	Allied Forces Headquarters
A.H.B.	Air Historical Branch (R.A.F.) Ministry of Defence
A.H.S.	The old Admiralty Historical Section, renamed Naval Historical Branch (N.H.B.)
A.O.C.	Air Officer Commanding
Appx.	Appendix
A/S/R.	Air/Sea Rescue
A.S.V.	Air to surface vessel signals system
A-20	Boston aircraft (U.S.)
A-36	Mustang 'Invader' aircraft (U.S.)
Aux.	Sailing vessel with auxiliary engine
B.A.F.	Balkan Air Force
B-17	Beeing Fortress aircraft (U.S.)
B-24	Liberator aircraft (U.S. and Br. adaptations)
B-25	Mitchell aircraft (U.S.)
B-26	Marauder aircraft (U.S.)
<u>B.d.U.</u>	<u>German Director of U-boats</u>
Br.	British
C.	circa - approximately
C.A.S.	Chief of Air Staff
C.C.S.	Combined Chiefs of Staff
C.G.	Commanding General
C.H.L.	Chain Home Low (British radar station)
C.O.L.	Chain Home Low (for overseas use) - <del>C.H.L.</del>
C.V.	Fleet Carrier (Br.)
D.A.F.	Desert Air Force
D/F	Direction finding
<u>Do.</u>	<u>Dornier</u> - German bomber aircraft type
E-boat	Enemy motor torpedo boat
F.	Prefix for German word for ferry barge
F.A.A.	Fleet Air Arm
F.A.F.	French Air Force
F.D.S.	Foreign Documents Section. Naval Dept., M.O.D.
F.O.	Flag Officer
Fr.	French
<u>F.W.</u>	<u>Focke Wulf</u> - a German aircraft type
<u>F.X.</u>	<u>Early type</u> of German radio-controlled bomb
G.C.I.	Ground Control Interception (radar)
Ger.	German
Gk.	Greek
G.R.	General reconnaissance (by maritime aircraft)
<u>He.</u>	<u>Heinkel</u> - type of German bomber aircraft.
H.F.	High Frequency
H2B	Radio navigational aid (Allied)
<u>He.291</u>	<u>Henschel 291</u> - German glider bomb.
I.A.F.	Italian Air Force
Int.	Intelligence
Is. Isl.	Island(s)
It.	Italian

NOTE: German and Italian terms are underlined.

/ J.P.S. ...

S E C R E T

<b>J.P.S.</b>	<b>Joint Planning Staff.</b>
<b><u>Ju.</u></b>	<b><u>Junkers</u> - type of German aircraft.</b>
<b><u>K.T.</u> (with No. or Name).</b>	<b><u>Kriegstransporter</u> - German war freighter.</b>
<b><u>Lbt.</u></b>	<b>German landing boat.</b>
<b><u>L.G.</u></b>	<b>Landing ground.</b>
<b><u>Ma.</u> (<u>MA</u>)</b>	<b><u>Macchi</u> - type of Italian aircraft.</b>
<b>M.A.A.F.</b>	<b>Mediterranean Allied Air Forces.</b>
<b>M.A.C.A.F.</b>	<b>Mediterranean Allied Coastal Air Force.</b>
<b><u>Me.</u></b>	<b><u>Messerschmidt</u> - type of German aircraft.</b>
<b>M.E.</b>	<b>Middle East.</b>
<b>Med.</b>	<b>Mediterranean.</b>
<b>m.t.b.</b>	<b>Motor torpedo boat.</b>
<b>M.T.O.</b>	<b>Mediterranean Theatre of Operations.</b>
<b>(N) NI.</b>	<b>(Night) night-terms applied in air operations.</b>
<b>N.I.D.</b>	<b>Naval Intelligence Division.</b>
<b>N.O.I.C.</b>	<b>Naval Officer in Charge.</b>
<b><u>N.F.</u></b>	<b><u>Navi-Fardute</u> - Italian Admiralty publication on shipping losses. }</b>
<b>nr.</b>	<b>Near.</b>
<b><u>O.B.S.</u></b>	<b><u>O.-in-C. South</u> (German).</b>
<b><u>O.B.S.W.</u></b>	<b><u>O.-in-C. South-West</u> (German).</b>
<b>O.R.B.</b>	<b>Operations Record Book (Form 540) R.A.F.</b>
<b>P.I.U.</b>	<b>Photographic Interpretation Unit (Allied).</b>
<b>P.R.U.</b>	<b>Photographic Reconnaissance Unit.</b>
<b>P.(s) W.</b>	<b>Prisoner(s) of War.</b>
<b>P-38</b>	<b>Lightning - type of U.S. aircraft.</b>
<b>P-39</b>	<b>Airacobra - type of U.S. aircraft.</b>
<b>P-40</b>	<b>Warhawk (U.S.) or Kittyhawk (Br.) type of aircraft.</b>
<b>P-47</b>	<b>Thunderbolt - type of U.S. aircraft.</b>
<b>P-51</b>	<b>Mustang - type of U.S. aircraft.</b>

/ R.A.A.F.

S E C R E T

SECRET

R.A.A.F.	Royal Australian Air Force.
<u>E-boat</u>	German minesweeper.
R.C.A.F.	Royal Canadian Air Force.
<u>Re.</u>	<u>Reggiani</u> - type of Italian aircraft.
R.H.A.F.	Royal Hellenic Air Force.
R.P.	Rocket projectile.
R/T.	Radio telephony.
S.A.A.F.	South African Air Force.
s.c.	Surface craft.
<u>S.F.</u> (with No.)	German <u>Siebel ferry</u> .
S.N.O.	Senior Naval Officer.
<u>S.</u> (with No.)	German E-boat.
<u>T.</u> and <u>TA</u> (with No.).	German torpedo boat.
T.F.	Task Force.
T.G.	Task Group.
<u>U.J.</u> (with No.)	German submarine chaser.
U.S.N.	United States Navy.
U.S.S.	United States Ship.
W.I.S.	Weekly Intelligence Summary.
W/T	Radio.
Y.M.S.	'Y' Class minesweeper (U.S.N.).
Y.S.	Jugoslav.

SECRET

SECRET

CODE NAMES

ACCOLADE	Proposed operations against Rhodes.
APLOMB	Allied landing on Kithera Is. (16.9.44)
ARKFORGE	British force in Greece - H.Q. Athens (Dec.44)
BODYGUARD	Overall Allied strategic deception plan.
BOWLER	Air attack on Venice docks (21.3.45).
BRASSARD	Allied seizure of Elba Is. (17.6.40)
CHARLTON	Air drop on Florina (6/7-10.44).
DIADEM	Allied offensive in Italy (11.5 - 22.6.44)
DRAGOON	(Previously 'Anvil') Allied operations against S. France. August 44).
EDGEHILL	Allied reoccupation of Poros Is. (1.10.44).
ENDOWMENT VI	Commando landing on Hvar Is. (22.3.44).
FLOUNCED	Allied raid on Brac Is. (1-4 Jun.44)
<u>FREISCHUTZ</u>	German plan to re-conquer Vis Is.
GOLDFLAKE	Series of naval inter-Mediterranean personnel movements (1945).
GRAPESHOT	French raid on Pianosa Is. (May 44).
HARDIHOOD	Aid to Turkey.
HERCULES	Planned Allied operation against Rhodes.
MANNA	Allied occupation of Athens area. (16.10.44).
MERCERISED	Commando landing in Albania (23.9.44).
NEPTUNE	Assault stage of 'Overlord'.
NITWIT	R.N. mining off Leghorn (16.5.44).
NUTCRACKER	Air/Naval co-operation in 'Swamp' (14-17 May 44).
OVERLORD	Allied entry into N.W. Europe (6.6.44).
QUADRANT	Quebec Conferences (Aug.45).
SATURN	Preparations for Turkey's entry into the war.
SEXTANT	<sup>Cairo</sup> <del>Gave</del> Conference (Nov.1943).
SHINGLE	Anzio landings (22.1.44)
SWAMP	Air/naval submarine hunt.

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SECRET

CODE NAMES (contd.)

TELEPHONE

R.N. raid on Symi Is. (13-15 July 44).

TOWANBUCKET

R.A.F. airborne drop on Aramo A/F. (23-26 Sept. 44).

TRIDENT

Washington Conference. ( May 1943.)

SECRET

**SECRET**

**CHRONOLOGY**

**1944**

1 January	Gen. I Eaker appointed Air C.-in-C. M.T.O.
2 "	Commencement of 'Shingle' air operations
9 "	B-17 raid on Pola naval base
12 "	First night U.S. Marauder operation
22 "	Allied landings at Anzio ('Shingle')
23 "	German reinforcement of S. France L.R.B. bases begun
ni 23/24 "	Enemy air attacks on Anzio shipping
end January	Last of G.A.F. H.B's left Greece for Italy
January	Allies bombed Greek ports
January	22 enemy merchant ships (12,657 G.R.T.) and 28 warships (1,859 tons) at least sunk by Allied aircraft
January-April	Heavy G.A.F. attacks on Allied convoys
1 February	Air H.Q. E. Mediterranean set up at Alexandria (an amalgamation of No. 201 Gp. and Air Defence E. Med.)
2/3 "	No. 38 Squadron sank S.S. <u>Leda</u> , supply ship
4 "	B-17/B-24 raid on Toulon 1st R.A.F. landed on Vis Is. and began strip H.M.S. <u>Penelope</u> sunk by <u>U.410</u> Allied military stores for Turkey suspended
5 "	G.A.F./62nd Fighter Wing boundary changed
22 "	Successful R.A.F./U.S.A.A.F. attack on S.S. <u>Lisa</u> convoy
29 "	2nd German shipping break-out from Adriatic frustrated
February	Allies stepped up air attacks on enemy ports 28 merchant ships (23,045 G.R.T.) and 12 warships (2,080 tons) at least sunk by Allied aircraft
ni 8/9 March	Successful fighter interception of G.A.F. attack on convoy N. of Algiers
ni 14/15 "	Enemy air raid on Naples
ni 19/20 "	R.A.F. attack on Monfalcone shipyards
22 "	Allied landings on Hvar Is. ('Endowment VI')
29 "	R.P. Hurricanes began operating
29/30 "	<u>U.223</u> destroyed in 'Swamp' operation
March	Steady increase in Allied air anti-shipping operation 40 merchant ships (48,771 G.R.T.) and 50 warships (6,406 tons) at least sunk by Allied aircraft

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S E C R E T

CHRONOLOGY (contd.)

1944

28 April	S.S. <u>Luneburg</u> sank by H.M. submarine
April	Several G.A.F. attacks on convoys Allied air attacks on enemy ports and shipping 14 merchant ships (9,930 G.R.T.) and 19 warships (2,595 tons) at least sunk by Allied aircraft
3/4 May	<u>U.371</u> destroyed in 'Swamp' operation
ni 12/13 "	Successful G.A.F. raid on our Corsican airfields
14-17 "	<u>U.616</u> destroyed in 'Swamp' operation
17-19 "	<u>U.960</u> destroyed in 'Swamp' operation
19 "	Success of 3rd German shipping break-out of Adriatic
19/20 "	<u>U.453</u> destroyed in 'Swamp' operation
May	Doenitz (E.d.U.) abandoned U-boat reinforcement Allied anti-shipping campaign intensified 26 merchant ships (27,237 G.R.T.) and 34 warships (4,985 tons) at least sunk by Allied aircraft
1 June	Decisive R.A.F. attack on '1st of June' Crete convoy Formation of Balkan Air Force
4 "	Rome entered by Allies
6 "	D Day Normandy landings
10 "	Pescara captured
17 "	Allied landings on Elba Is. ('Brassard')
June	19 merchant ships (19,998 G.R.T.) and 30 warships (5,486 tons) at least sunk by Allied aircraft
June-July	Reduction of strength in A.H.Q. E. Mediterranean
19 July	Loughorn captured by Allies
25/26 "	Unauthorised Russian flight to Elas G.H.Q.
29 "	Schnorchel <u>U.596</u> put to sea from Pola
July	Heavy Allied air attacks on Toulon U-boat base 13 merchant ships (60,709 G.R.T.) and 24 warships (6,652 tons) at least sunk by Allied aircraft
July-August	Reduction in M.A.C.A.F. strength

S E C R E T

SECRET

CHRONOLOGY (contd.)

1944

1-5 August	Air Operation 'Fence' the hunt for <u>U.596</u>
1 "	Allied raid on Korzula Is ('Decomposed II')
4 "	Italian Fascist Air Force attack <sup>on</sup> Allied convoy
8 "	<u>U.596</u> escapes from the Adriatic
10 "	M.A.C.A.F. began its role in Operation 'Dragon'
15 "	D Day Operation 'Dragon' the landings in S. France
25 "	Rumania declared war on Germany
26/27 "	Allied raid on Korzula Is. ('Grandfather I')
31 "	G.A.F. withdrawal from S. France complete All U-boats in Central Basin accounted for
August	27 merchant ships (43,613 G.R.T.) and 31 warships (5,199 tons) at least sunk by Allied aircraft Wholesale scuttling by Germans of ships in S. France ports M.A.C.A.F. clashes with German E-boats
1-7 September	Air dislocation of German communications in Yugoslavia ('Ratweek')
5 Sept.-23 Oct. 44	G.A.F. transport evacuation effort from Greece
6-24 September	Combined operations against German in Hvar and Brac
8 "	S.S. <u>Rex</u> sunk by No. 272 Beaufighter Squadron
9-20 "	Escort Carrier Force first outing in Aegean
11-16 "	'Octagon' Conference at Quebec
14 "	Disbandment of No. 242 R.A.F. Group
16 "	Operation 'Aplomb' - landing on Kythera Is.
19-28 "	German naval offensive in Adriatic: counter measures by Wellingtons and Fleet
19 "	Schnorchel <u>U.407</u> sunk near Milos
22/23 "	Operation 'Mercerised' - landing at Sarande (Albania)
24 "	U.S.A.A.F. destroy last U-boats in Salamis
23-26 "	Operation 'Towanbucket' - air drop on Araxes A/F and naval landing at Katakolo
26/27 Sept.-3/4 Oct.	Aegean operations by Fighter Direction Ship H.M.S. <u>Ulster Queen</u>
30 Sept.-4 Oct.	Escort Carrier Force second outing in Aegean
September	Allied bombing of Greek/Aegean ports. M.A.C.A.F. clashes with German E-boats 22 merchant ships (64,683 G.R.T. and 37 warships (18,440 tons) at least sunk by Allied aircraft

S E C R E T

CHRONOLOGY (contd.)

1944

1 October	Operation 'Edgehill' - Allied naval landing on Poros Is.
6 "	Operation 'Charlton' - air drop on Florina area
8-13 "	Escort Carrier Force 3rd outing in Aegean
12 "	Operation 'Delivered' - Allied naval landing on Aegina Is.
12-18 "	Operation 'Manna' - Allied occupation of Athens and adjacent airfields
14-30 "	Escort Carrier Force 4th outing in Aegean
15 "	No. 337 Wing (B.A.F.) arrived at Hassani (Greece) A/F
24 "	Adv. H.Q. D.A.F. moved to Rimini
October	G.A.F. withdraw its remaining units from Southern Balkans, Greece and the Aegean Allied bombing of Greek/Aegean ports 8 merchant ships (10,392 G.R.T.) and 18 warships (4,233 tons) at least sunk by Allied aircraft
1/2 November	German troops clear of Greek frontier
5 "	Air party arrives on Salonika/Sedes A/F
20 "	No. 337 Wing re-enters Crete at Kastelli Pediada A/F
November	3 merchant ships (367 G.R.T.) and 9 warships (2,288 tons) at least sunk by Allied aircraft
2 December	No. 286 Wing reduced in preparation for move to Zadar Negotiations with left wing Greeks broke down
3-4 "	Outbreak of hostilities in Athens
4-5 "	1st air transport of troops to Greece
5 "	British Army 'Arkforce' formed in Athens R.A.F. H.Q. at Kifissia (Adv. H.Q. Athens)
6-7 "	No. 337 Wing's aircraft in action in Greece
8 "	Ravenna captured
12 "	F.M. Alexander appointed Supreme Commander
12/13 "	Major air lifts to Greece
16 "	Military Command Athens H.Q. created at Phaleron
16 Dec.-3 Jan. 45	Rocket Beaufighter support in Athens-Piraeus area
16-31 December	Allied air attacks on Sanió River defences
19 "	Capture of Air H.Q. Greece at Kifissia by <u>E.L.A.S.</u>

S E C R E T

CHRONOLOGY (contd.)

1944

19 Dec.-20 Jan.	The long march of Allied Pa/W from Kifissia
21-26 December	<u>E.L.A.S.</u> threat to Hassani A/F.
21-31 "	Air co-operation in relief of Pallini radio station
26 "	New H.Q. of A.H.Q. Greece opened in Athens
28-30 "	Clearance of S.E. Athens
December	Air support, supply and reinforcement for our forces in Greece 3 merchant ships (187 G.R.T.) and 1 warship (130 tons) at least sunk by Allied aircraft

1945

1-19 January	Air supply drops to Allied Pa/W from Kifissia
3 "	German tanker ' <u>Prometheus</u> ' sunk by our aircraft H.M.S. <u>Ajax</u> at Patras
1-5 "	Final victorious offensive against <u>E.L.A.S.</u>
5-15 "	R.A.F. joins pursuit of <u>E.L.A.S.</u>
11 "	Signature of Truce with <u>E.L.A.S.</u> signed
15 "	Cease fire in Greece
16 "	Italian torpedo craft released by Spain arrived at Algiers
30 "	Agreements to reopen Black Sea
January	Fleet bombardments of Riviera and coastal patrols. Naval Adriatic patrols in bad weather. Naval agreements with Tito. Fleet operations in Greek and Dodecanese waters 2 merchant ships (7,463 G.R.T.) and 1 warship (80 tons) at least sunk by Allied aircraft
4-11 February	'Argonaut' Conference at Yalta
12 "	Enemy explosive M.B. attack on Split Settlement in Greek civil war signed
15 "	Opening of heavy bomber attacks on enemy's Adriatic ports
17-20 "	Major M.A.S.A.F. attacks on Trieste, Pola and Fiume.
19 "	1st Black Sea convoy reached Odessa
23 "	Turkey and Egypt declared war on the Axis

S E C R E T

CHRONOLOGY (contd.)

<u>1945</u> 24 February  25       "  February   1 March  3       "  4       "  11       "  12       "  16       "   18       "  21       "  27       "  28/29     "  March     6 April 10-20     "  12       "  24       "  27       "  28       "  29       "  30 Apl.-1 May 30 April  April	Minelayer S.S. <u>Kuckuck</u> sunk by Beaufighter  Combined Operations H.Qs established at Zara  Fleet bombarded Riviera and Coastal Force patrolled. Coastal Force successes in Adriatic. 5 merchant ships (9,008 G.R.T.) and 19 warships (45,178 tons) sunk by Allied aircraft   Allied capture of Piskopi Is.  Venice and Pola mined by our aircraft  Anglo-Yugoslav naval agreement signed  German evacuation of Khalkis Is.  British N.L.O. took over at Zara and Split  A.M. Sir Guy Garrod appointed Deputy Air C.-in-C. M.A.A.F. and C.-in-C., R.A.F. Med. M.E. vice A.M. Sir John Slessor Wellington attack on Monfalcone  Successful participation by R.A.F. radar station on Cap Corse in disabling of German destroyer <u>Premuda</u>  R.A.F. attack on Venice docks ('Bowler')  Alexandria Naval command change  Italian surrenders in Crete  Fleet operations off Riviera and Corsica and in Adriatic M.A.S.A.F. attacks on Trieste and Pola continued 3 merchant ships (4,451 G.R.T.) and 2 warships (1,261 tons) at least sunk by Allied aircraft   Pag and Karlobag captured  Alpine Front Command offensive operations  Rab Is. captured  Eighth Army crossed R. Po. Spezia captured  Genoa captured  Mussolini executed  Venice captured. Surrender instrument signed, effective 2 May 45.  Last C.A.F. operations against enemy surface craft  Trieste/occupied  2 merchant ships (71 G.R.T.) and 1 warship (120 tons) at least sunk by Allied aircraft.
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SECRET

CHRONOLOGY (contd.)

1945

1 May	Death of Hitler reported
2 "	Cessation of hostilities in Italy. Nearly 1,000,000 Axis troops surrender.
7 "	Surrender of Germany
8 "	V.E. Day. Dodecanese surrendered
10 "	Crete surrendered
15 July	B.A.F. disbanded
1 August	M.A.C.A.F. became M.C.A.F.
19 October	M.C.A.F. became Air H.Q., R.A.F. Italy

SECRET

~~RESTRICTED~~

CHAPTER 1

OPERATIONS IN GREECE AND THE AEGEAN  
(JANUARY TO NOVEMBER 1944)

503

A.

THE PERIOD OF EROSION

Strategic survey (January to August 1944)

Allied plans and policy (1)

When 1944 opened, the Allies had not relinquished hopes of restoring the situation in the Aegean. It had been ruled on 6 Dec. 43 at the "Sextant" conference at Teheran that operations in that area, in particular the capture of Rhodes, were still desirable provided that they did not prejudice Operations "Overlord" and "Anvil". (2) The operation for the capture of Rhodes was expected to be launched soon after 1 March. It was desirable, too, that Turkey should enter the war on the side of the Allies. Plans for British movements outside Turkey itself were decided on, while discussions preceded at Ankara on preparations for Turkey's entry. After Rome had been captured in January, 1944, the Prime Minister's minute optimistically stated, three groups of medium bombers were to be moved to Cyrenaica for bombardment of the enemy's airfields and shipping in the Eastern Mediterranean, and to cover the later arrival in Turkey of the seventeen squadrons of fighters offered. Once, these squadrons were established in Turkey, air operations were to be conducted from thence and Cyrenaica against the enemy in the Aegean, while two divisions from the Middle East prepared to attack and garrison Rhodes, in March 1944: if not, possibly Kos or Leros was to be attacked. Supplies were to be passed into Smyrna and through the Dardanelles, while British submarines were to stand by to sail for the Black Sea. The preparations were given the codename Operation "Saturn" and the capture of Rhodes the codename Operation "Hercules".

During January 1944, changes in the general situation led to a more realistic attitude to the problem of the German hold on Greece and the Aegean. The stern German defence in Italy deferred all hopes of an early capture of Rome. The Anzio landing absorbed all available landing craft and ended in a stalemate.

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(1) Ehrman. Grand Strategy Vol.V (A.H.B.1 copy): Air H.Q. E. Med. O.R.Bs. Kirk Survey of International Affairs 1939-1946, The Middle East in the War. Oxford University Press 1952.

(2) Signal Frozen No. 387 of 7 Dec. 43. (A.H.B.IIA/9/248(D)).

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The mounting needs of the parallel invasions of France from the United Kingdom and the Mediterranean and the Spring offensive in Italy tied up ground and sea forces and called for increased concentration in the Central Mediterranean. The Turkish attitude stiffened in reaction to the thrusting British approach and the fear of Russian expansion: the attack on Rhodes was postponed indefinitely.

So long as the German Air Force in Greece held any long range bombers, dive bombers and long range fighters, there was a serious risk to Allied naval forces by day. Furthermore, Aegean waters were heavily and increasingly mined.<sup>(1)</sup> No major Allied surface forces operated north of Crete in daylight between January and August. The Navy's contribution to the erosion of German power was, however, to be by no means negligible. Submarines waged continuous warfare on supply shipping and an ambitious plan for commando operations against the Dodecanese Islands and the mainland of Greece was put into action.

During the first half of 1944, the main Allied air policy was to impede the Germans by harrying their shipping at sea, by bombing Piraeus and other supply ports and bases, by mining and by intruder operations over Rhodes and Crete. In this they met with considerable success; but, on the other hand, the Germans still managed to feed and man the islands and transport strategic materials. Air and submarine attacks disposed of most of their large ships and drove them on to the use of small merchant ships and caiques and the construction of small, well-armed naval craft. Heavy bomber attacks on Belgrade and Ploesti whittled down fuel supplies to danger point and created grave distribution problems. Then the wheel of fortune turned in the Germans favour when, at the end of May and in early June, valuable cargo ships and craft passed through the Dardanelles from Black Sea ports with strategic materials for the German effort.

With reduced air forces and Turkey still obdurately neutral, none of the major Allied plans could be put into execution. It was believed that the campaign against the German ports and convoys would weaken them and so create, as the air forces had so often done before, a favourable situation of which ground

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(1) See Admiralty C.B. 3306(2) for charts of German minefields laid Sept. 43 to Nov. 44.

and naval forces might eventually take great advantage. Before the Allies could completely restore the situation in the Aegean, and pierce the southern German flank, three events were essential, namely the capture of Rome, a major Russian advance into the Balkans and the entry of Turkey into the war on the side of the Allies. The first of these conditions, and the only one the Western Allies could fulfil themselves, was accomplished on 4 June. The other two events could only come about outside their orbit and they made plans during the summer of 1944 for suitable action when they did come about.

These measures were known as Operation "Ratweek", "Noah's Ark", and "Manna". "Ratweek" comprised measures by the Western Allies and the Partisans to exploit a German withdrawal through Yugoslavia by paralyzing communications between North and South. In this, the Balkan Air Force was to play an important role in cutting railway lines between Belgrade and the frontiers with Bulgaria and Greece. The British had never hoped to expel the Germans from Greece unaided, but rather to harass a withdrawal precipitated by events elsewhere. British action in Greece was defined by the two plans, "Noah's Ark" and "Manna". "Noah's Ark" comprised operations by guerillas against the retreating Germans and "Manna" landings by British forces in the South, once the Germans had left Athens, to prevent a coup d'etat by the Greek political party E.A.M.

At the end of August, the situation was ripe for major action by the Western Allies. Strenuous air and submarine action by the small Allied forces had brought about a crisis in the Germans' sea communications which must before long render it impossible for them to feed all their numerous garrisons, maintain their hold over the Aegean intact and protect the sources and transit of strategic materials.

German plans and policy (1)

All through the first eight months of 1944, the Germans' policy was to consolidate their hold on the southern flank, both on the Balkan mainland and throughout the Aegean, to build up the defences of the whole area against any offensive by the Western Allies to garrison all strategic points, cover essential shipping routes and, lastly, to keep Turkey neutral. The consistency with which they adhered to this pattern throughout was in keeping with their system at its best. In spite of internal stresses and external pressures of the severest nature, the pattern survived as a whole, until, overwhelmed by major external events, it collapsed as a whole. Whether it could have survived for long is very doubtful.

The operations of late 1943 centering round Leros had depleted the Germans' naval forces and supply shipping and dockyards were crammed with vessels for repair. There were not enough troops to garrison all strategic points. In January, all bomber and dive bomber forces in Greece were withdrawn, leaving only about one hundred mixed operational aircraft for multifarious tasks, and some transport aircraft. They remained very much on the defensive. Admiral Aegean, confronted with an impossible task, saw clearly that the materials for retaining the recently-won initiative were absent. Nevertheless, with unceasing enterprise, he carried out his mission with a force of some 35,000 officers and men. Simultaneously with the flow of Army and Navy units into the whole Aegean, a large number of prisoners-of-war was evacuated, so that only essential mouths remained to be fed. The primitive defences were improved, signals stations erected and reserves of fuel, supplies and ammunition built up. Merchant shipping, including many local caiques, was repaired or requisitioned and put into service. First, large cargo vessels were employed. Then, as these were progressively sunk by Allied aircraft, submarines, motor torpedo boats and commandos, smaller vessels were put into service, caiques used increasingly after the end of winter and construction of armed naval supply-carrying craft accelerated. Continuous pressure ensured small, fairly steady and effective air cover of important convoys and an increasing lift by transport aircraft.

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(1) Admiral Aegean war diary (FO/46162 - series and Naval Group South war diary (FO/46067-series, both at F.D.S./Admty.

Captured Italian naval vessels were repaired and reconverted to escort and minelaying tasks and occasional reinforcements brought in from the Adriatic and the Black Sea. Sometimes the islands were faced with the threat of starvation, Greek dockyard workers and crews deserted. Key ships were sent to the bottom. Indeed, the whole course of German operations was anything but a mere paper exercise. The greater part of this period, as will be seen in the account of operations in this chapter, was marked by violent action; and the predominant impressions which remains after a close study of it is one of ships, submarines and aircraft locked in a highly specialised type of battle, with the advantage passing from one side to the other and each side deriving its peculiar advantage from the neutrality of the Turks.

An example of the fluctuations of fortune came in May. On the 11th of that month, the German evacuation of the Crimea was concluded. The Germans thereupon began to transfer some 8,000 tons of shipping from the Black Sea to the Aegean to relieve the serious supply reserve situation from the mounting losses inflicted by Allied aircraft and submarines.

— This shipping was a godsend to the Admiral Commanding Aegean and Naval Group South, who thus scored a minor triumph over the diplomacy of the Western Allies. By the first week in July, some of the ships from the Black Sea were already armed and carrying war material from Greece to the Dodecanese and the Ems-class craft were operating as armed escorts.

The continuous fleabites of Allied commandos were never treated as a major threat by the Germans. They rightly adjudged that the Allies were, even in early August, not in a position to attempt any full-scale amphibious or airborne operations

or commit cruisers, carriers or destroyers on any full-scale enterprise in daylight. But these commando raids were a great strain on German temper and the risks run replacing dead and kidnapped troops, wrecked signals stations and other installations were an additional burden to a machinery strained almost to breaking point.

The German Command South-East never lost sight of the importance of air operations which had rendered their hegemony over the whole Aegean possible in the first place and limited the exercise of Allied naval power thereafter. When their operational air forces were reduced and they had lost their superiority they continued to use the balance to considerable effect, fighting at short range from a number of airfields strung across the area at an advantage sometimes against forces superior in numbers and performance but of limited combat endurance, and carrying out reconnaissance of Allied ports.

The policy of using transport aircraft considerably eased the situation. Hitler himself showed an example of foresight when, on or just prior to 20 Jan. 44, he gave full powers to the German Command South-East (comprising Army, Navy and Luftwaffe) to utilize all transport aircraft in their area for the following tasks, in the given order of priority: troop movements to strengthen island defences, supplies for the islands, evacuation of prisoners-of-war, movement of men on leave, and other urgent supplies. The air transport units were reinforced and at a late stage as many as one hundred Ju.52s were engaged. (1)

Fliegerkorps X were frequently criticised for not achieving more, but it will be accepted that with so many more pressing commitments elsewhere, the increasing manpower shortage, the dearth of trained pilots and the mounting fuel crisis (largely brought about by Allied air attacks), there could be no hope of reinforcements. They were lucky if they received replacements.

The exposed position of Corfu and the other Ionian Islands off western Greece was a source of constant apprehension. In early April, the increase of Allied air activity over Corfu, added to the material of Intelligence reports, led to the conviction that the Allies intended to try to capture the island as an advanced

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(1) Luftwaffe transport operations in the Aegean are dealt with in detail in a later section.

base for the supply of the Partisans: troops, ships and aircraft were held in readiness for such a contingency. On 12-13 May, at an Army conference at Salonika, the C.-in-C. Army Group 'E' expressed the view that the war was about to enter its decisive stage. An attack on Corfu and Southern Albania was the next most likely move by the enemy. Minelaying in Corfu waters and the strengthening of coastal batteries ensued. The Allies had Corfu under continuous study, but it was not until June that Allied Force Headquarters seriously weighed the advantages of taking and holding Corfu and decided it was not a profitable idea, even if the Germans evacuated. <sup>(1)</sup> Thus, German miscalculations of Allied intentions and timing again confused the issue and wasted valuable effort and material. Had they possessed deeper insight into, and more exact information on, Allied capabilities and intentions, the whole Aegean area and the waters round Greece could have been held with a more strictly strategic occupation of a few key points instead of the actual expensive under-nourished system of complete occupation of practically every island.

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(1) P/180 (Final) Mediterranean Joint Planning Staff, A.F.H.Q. 2 July 44 (A.H.B.II J.1/273/7/42 Encl. 16A).

The Neutrality of Turkey

It was a disadvantage to the Western Allies in their military planning that a neutral state was established at both the western and eastern ends of the Mediterranean; in considering the course of events in the Eastern Basin, due allowance must be made for the overlapping of political and military factors resulting from this fact. The political aspect has been dealt with in detail elsewhere in the Official History of the Second World War; <sup>(1)</sup> but a brief résumé of its impact on the military aspect will assist in the preservation of a correct perspective.

It would not be an over-simplification to say that the Russians were in favour of drawing Turkey into the war "by the scruff of the neck", that the British went to the limits of etiquette to bring this about while taking every possible advantage of the hospitality of those territorial waters, that the Americans favoured a staged abandonment of neutrality as expediency dictated and that the Germans did all they could to keep Turkey neutral.

Turkey's policy of non-involvement was prompted by the desire not to jeopardize the results of the economic reorganization inaugurated by the Kemalist revolution and not to see South-Eastern Europe dominated by either Germany or Russia.

In the first half of 1944, a deadlock in Anglo-Turkish relations developed. On 31 Jan. 44, the British instructed Air Marshal Sir Francis Linnell to return forthwith from Ankara, (where he was acting as the emissary of the Western Allies) to Cairo, and stopped all military supplies to Turkey. The Americans and the Russians agreed to both measures within a week. By the 4th, deliveries of military stores had ceased. The British (though not as yet the Turks) gave up all idea of Turkey entering the war in the near future; but they, with the Americans, continued to exert diplomatic pressure, with the result that the Turkish export of chrome ore and other strategic war materials to Germany was stopped. In June, the passage of German shipping through the Dardanelles was stopped.

In August, Turkey, noting the steady deterioration in the German general position, broke off diplomatic relations with the Reich; but this did not in itself prove entirely unfavourable to Germany in the Aegean. She continued (unlike the British) to respect Turkish territorial waters and refrained from mining the Dardanelles; but she reinforced Lemnos and other islands in the area, and unified <sup>her</sup> the naval command.

(1) Ehrman. Grand Strategy Vols V and VI.

The opposing Forces (January 1944)Air Defence Eastern Mediterranean

So long as a strong German Air Force was based in Greece and the Aegean, defensive precautions had to be taken to cover Allied shipping ports, airfields and installations over the whole Eastern basin. This defensive function still rested in January 1944 with Air Defence Eastern Mediterranean, whose extensive though dwindling responsibilities must first be considered. Operational control, (in most cases coincident with administrative control), was as follows:-

- (a) Air defence of Egypt, Libya and the Levant, exercised through Nos. 209, 212 and 219 Groups respectively.
- (b) Fighter protection of the Fleet and merchant shipping sailing within 40 statute miles of the coast.
- (c) Air defence of the Suez Canal, the naval base of Alexandria, the ports of Suez, Port Said, Haifa, Beirut, Tripoli (Syria), Famagusta (Cyprus), Tobruk, Benghazi and Tripoli (Tripolitania), the city of Cairo, the oil refineries at Haifa and Suez and airfields all along the Eastern Mediterranean littoral.
- (d) Air reporting organization, comprising 7 filter rooms, 52 *radar* ~~filter~~ stations and wireless units.
- (e) Fighter defences, comprising 15 day fighter squadrons and 1 night fighter squadron controlled by 9 sector operations rooms and 10 G.C.I. stations.
- (f) Anti-aircraft defences, comprising 11 heavy A.A. regiments, 7 light A.A. regiments and 1 searchlight regiment, controlled by 8 A.A. operations rooms.
- (g) Balloon barrage defences, comprising 1 balloon wing and 5 balloon squadrons.
- (h) Decoy and deceptive devices, including 4 smoke screens.
- (i) Issue of civil and military air raid warnings by group and sector operations rooms.
- (j) Aircraft safety organization of Cyrenaica and Cyprus.
- (k) The Middle East Fighter Controllers Training School at Heliopolis and Filter Training School at Ismailia.
- (l) Anti-aircraft co-operation for units of the Fleet and merchant shipping and the Twelfth Army.

- (m) Night flying lights organization throughout Egypt, Libya and the Levant.
- (n) Operation of Royal Egyptian Air Force fighter and balloon squadrons.
- (o) R.A.F. ground defence of Egypt <sup>by</sup> ~~and~~ 3 squadrons of the R.A.F. Regiment.
- (p) Temporary control of formations and units in transit or training, then comprising 1 fighter wing H.Q., 1 medium bomber wing H.Q., 4 sector H.Q.'s, 4 fighter squadrons and 2 medium bomber squadrons.
- (q) Training of fighter sector, G.C.I. controllers and filter officers from Mediterranean Coastal Air Force and South East Asia Command.

Group Tasks within Air Defences Eastern Mediterranean

No. 212 Group's headquarters were at Benina. Its area extended from Agheila to the Cyrenaica/Egypt frontier and was divided into three Sectors - No. 17 Sector Operations in the Benghazi area, No. 16 Sector Operations at Cyrene and No. 15 Sector Operations at Bu Amad. The tasks of its squadrons were shipping protection and defence of the vulnerable areas at Benghazi and Tobruk.

No. 219 Group's headquarters were at Alexandria. Its area extended from the Cyrenaica/Egypt frontier to the Egypt/Palestine frontier and was divided into four Sectors - No. 29 Sector Operations at Mersa Matruh, No. 13 Sector Operations at Smouha (near Alexandria), No. 12 Sector Operations at <sup>Gamil</sup> ~~Gamil~~ (near Port Said) and No. 21 Sector Operations at Shandur. The tasks of its squadrons were short range fighter protection of shipping, defence of Alexandria, Port Said and Suez areas, defence of the Canal and general defence of the Delta.

No. 209 Group's headquarters were at Haifa. <sup>its area</sup> ~~It was~~ extended from the Palestine/Egypt frontier to the Turkish frontier and included Cyprus. It controlled No. 24 Sector Operations, Haifa, No. 23 Sector Operations at Beirut and No. 25 Sector Operations at Nicosia (Cyprus). The tasks of its squadrons were short range fighter protection of shipping, defence of the port and refineries of Haifa, the port of Beirut and the island of Cyprus. <sup>of Air Defences Eastern Mediterranean</sup> The A.O.C. was ~~Mr. V.M.~~ <sup>Mr. V.M.</sup> R.E. <sup>(Air Vice-Marshal)</sup> Saul.

If the German Air Force continued to withdraw air units from Greece, Crete and the Aegean, then some of the fighter squadrons were certain to become redundant.

No. 201 (Naval Co-operation) Group

<sup>201</sup>  
No. 201 Group's headquarters were at Alexandria alongside C.-in-C. Levant's headquarters. Operational control was exercised from a combined Navy and R.A.F. operations room. Its area extended eastward from a line Misurata to the north-west corner of the Grecian Peloponnese and was divided into three wing areas.

No. 247 Wing was located at Berka, No. 235 Wing at Gambut (with a detachment at Mersa Matruh) and No. 245 Wing at Haifa (with a detachment at L.G. 94). The tasks of the squadrons were the long range fighter protection of shipping, anti-submarine patrols for shipping, and offensive and reconnaissance operations in the Aegean and off the coasts of Greece and Crete. The A.O.C. was <sup>Air Vice-Marshal</sup> ~~A.F.M.~~ T.A. Langford-Sainsbury.

For some time past, its role had been largely offensive and intimately linked with decisive events in the Aegean. Where major convoy escort was involved, its function linked up with the short-range cover provided by Air Defences Eastern Mediterranean and Air H.Q. Malta. It alone could provide the aircraft for long range reconnaissance in the vast areas now occupied by the Germans which were to be the object of bitter contention until almost the end of 1944.

Amalgamation of No. 201 Group and Air Defences Eastern Mediterranean (1)

An air force in the Eastern Mediterranean on the lines of Mediterranean Allied Coastal Air Force was felt to be a necessity in the Middle East, where the autonomy of these two major units was fast becoming an anomaly. Unification of command was a major policy at that period and the theatre had just seen the simplification of its entire military structure under the Supreme Commander. The various air commands had been absorbed into Mediterranean Allied Air Forces from 1 Jan. 44.

The amalgamation of No. 201 Group and Air Defences Eastern Mediterranean was discussed at a meeting of senior air and naval officers on 19 Dec. 43 at which the A.O.C.-in-C., A.C.M. Sir W.S. Douglas presided; and the amalgamation was agreed on as a progressive move.

With effect from 1 Feb. 44, a new headquarters with the title of Air Headquarters Eastern Mediterranean (2) was set up at Alexandria, in a combined headquarters with Flag Officer Levant and Eastern Mediterranean. A.V.M. Langford-Sainsbury became its A.O.C.

The main maritime areas of the new command were broadly those of the three defence groups of Air Defences Eastern Mediterranean, viz. Nos. 212, 219 and 209. The three wing areas of No. 201 Group were discarded on paper, but in practice strict conformity by long range general reconnaissance units to the new areas was impracticable. There had been, and would be, overlapping of areas between units of the old No. 201 Group.

The process of change from the old order to the new may be easily followed from a glance at the orders of battle on 1 Feb. and 1 June 44 given at Appendix 38 to this volume. In particular, it will be noticed how two of the three naval co-operation wings resolved themselves into two R.A.F. stations viz. R.A.F. Stations, Gambut and Berka. These stations were the best bases for the counter-offensive in the Aegean, for it was only half the distance from Cyrenaica to Crete of that from Cyprus to Crete.

/Reduction .....

(1) File S.25023/ORG No. 201 Group, Admin. (A.H.B.IIJ6/88/2/43): Air Staff M.E. O.R.B. Appendices Jan. 44.

(2) Short title A.H.Q.E.M.

Reduction of Short Range Fighter and Light Bomber Forces

The threat from the German Air Force bombers ended, when in January the last of them were transferred to Italy, leaving only fighter, coastal and reconnaissance units. It was therefore a logical move on the part of M.A.A.F. to transfer a high proportion of the short range fighter squadrons from the Eastern Basin to Italy, where many tasks awaited them, to Corsica, where the build-up for the next major amphibious operations had begun, and to the Heel of Italy, where No. 242 Group was very short of aircraft. <sup>(1)</sup>

The Allied Air Forces began their campaign to loosen the German stranglehold on the Aegean with diminished forces; but none of the transferred fighters could have been used offensively (except off Crete), since the Allies had no effective bases within range of the target system to employ them. The loss of Crete began to make itself felt increasingly. The distance from base affected all air operations. Gambut, the nearest airfield in use, was more than 200 miles from Crete, where possibilities of targets began. This shortened the time available for patrol or offensive action, and the great space of open sea imposed the constant apprehension of coming down in the water if damaged and often spelt days of tedium when no action resulted.

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(1) A view of the moves as recorded on 1 Mar. 44 may be had by reference to the statement in section B of Appendix 39 to this volume. Twelve fighter and two light bomber squadrons in all were transferred.

SECRETAllied Submarine Forces in the Aegean (1)

The Allied naval offensive in this period was carried out by the 1st Submarine Flotilla, based at Beirut in January 1944 and at Malta thereafter. On 1 Jan. 44, the force comprised nine submarines, of which six were British, two Polish and one Dutch. In February and March, the force was reinforced by four Greek submarines. By the beginning of August, the Flotilla comprised six British and two Greek submarines. The vigorous operations of this flotilla were an outstanding feature of the campaign. Acting on pooled intelligence, which included the vital ingredient of air reconnaissance, their operations were of a more individual character than those of surface craft. Frequent examples of very intimate co-operation with aircraft such as developed in the "Swamp" hunts will not be found in records, but the co-operation existed nevertheless and the success of the air forces and submarine forces were enhanced by the offensive nature of the efforts of both.

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(1) Admiralty C.B. 3306(2).

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Allied Light Naval Forces in the Aegean (1)

In January 1944, various regular and irregular Allied forces in the Middle East were engaged in raiding and harassing operations and there was sometimes a clash of interests between the agencies involved. These forces included the Levant Schooner Flotilla, (with its caiques), the First Raiding Force, (2) which used a group of M.L.'s, H.D.M.L.'s and schooners, and the Special Boat Squadron. (3)

Reorganisation, long overdue, was initiated in February and the system of naval command modified. Lieutenant Commander A.C. Seligman took charge of the naval side of raiding force work at Headquarters, Alexandria.

On 22 Feb.44, the Aegean was divided into three operational areas, east of longitude  $24^{\circ}30'E$ :-

- No. 1. South of latitude  $37^{\circ}25'N$ , including the islands of Seriphos and Milo.
- No. 2. Between latitudes  $37^{\circ}25'N$  and  $38^{\circ}53'N$ , including the islands of Mykonos, Syra, Thermia (or N.Kities) and Zea (or Kea), Rhénia and Delos (the last two lie close S.W. of Mykonos).
- No. 3. North of latitude  $38^{\circ}53'N$ , including Skyros.

The command of all naval forces was unified under one officer in each area carrying the short title Comaro.

The general codename of Operation "Fire-eater" was given to raiding force operations, the main objectives of which were defined as follows:-

- (1) The enticement, destruction and possible abduction of enemy shipping, to deny its use to the enemy.
- (2) The reduction or destruction of installations and the killing of enemy forces.
- (3) The establishment of look-out posts.
- (4) Transportation of supplies of food and medical stores to the Greek population in conjunction with (1).

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- (1) Information supplied by Admty Hist. Section.
  - (2) C.O. Lieut. Cdr. A.C. Seligman.
  - (3) C.O. Maj. Lord Jellicoe up to 9 Feb.44; Maj. I.N. Patterson from 10 Feb.44.

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(1)

German Sea Transport Situation in January 1944

By January 1944, German shipping movements in the Aegean area were assuming something approaching a regular pattern. With Piraeus as the hub, routes radiated westward to Patras and the Ionian Islands, southward to the southern Peloponnese and Crete (with intermediate harbours at Monemvasia, Melos and Thera), eastward to Leros, Rhodes and the other islands of the Sporades (with an intermediate harbour at Syros) and northward to Salonika. A secondary system of routes ran from Salonika to Stratoni (for the manganese ore mines), Mudros, Mitylene and Khios.

The transport requirements for January called for a lift of 3,000 tons from Piraeus to western Greece, 17,000 tons from Piraeus to Crete, the Dodecanese, Samos, Mitylene and Lemnos and 10,000 tons from Piraeus to Salonika. While shipping space available might fulfil these requirements, it would not yet provide for lifting another 54,500 tons needed by the Army. The tonnage of large ships available at that period in the area was 24,769 tons, but it was hoped to increase this by the end of January to 48,330 tons by repairs and reinforcements. The arrival of a wave of small craft from the Black Sea helped to improve the general position considerably. Although Allied air and naval attacks made only small inroads into the total tonnage, the narrow margin between <sup>increasing</sup> demand and shrinking supply was growing threatening.

The new Table of Priorities

Towards the end of January 1944, Hitler granted to C.-in-C. South-east full powers of intervention in all matters of transport and indicated a plan for aid by transport aircraft. Any air transport available in his area was to be employed mainly in the Aegean, both for troops and material. Priority for all sea and air transport was to follow in the following order: reinforcement of defence forces, supply of war material, removal of prisoners-of-war, transport of men on leave and lastly the transport of other urgent supplies. New minimums <sup>for</sup> supplies were laid down - about 6,300 tons a month for Crete <sup>(2)</sup> and about 2,300 tons a month for Rhodes and the southern Sporades.

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(1) Admiral Aegean war diary (F.D.S./Admalty.)

(2) Further reduced in February after the sinking of S.S. Patrella, Leda and Sieglinde.

Growth of the German Navy in the Aegean

After the Italian surrender, little reorganization of the German Navy was necessary in Greece and the Aegean, as there existed already a strong organization under the Admiral Commanding Aegean, (subordinate to Group South). But reinforcement and expansion grew increasingly urgent as the Aegean was taken over. The Germans were sensitive to the end for the security of this southern flank, not only on account of Russian pressure in the Black Sea area, but of perennial fear of an Allied thrust in the Mediterranean. Thus, from October 1943 to August 1944, they continued to strengthen their defences and forces throughout the area. It will give a clear idea of the material changes effected and the organization against which the inadequate Allied air and naval forces pitted their strength in the slow counter-offensive from January to August 1944 if comparison is made between the enemy naval organization as it stood in October 1943 and in August 1944. (1)

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(1) Refer to Appendix 39.

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Allied Operations (January to May 1944)Air Anti-Shipping Operations at Sea in January (1)

During January, in spite of bad weather, No. 201 Group's aircraft attacked over one hundred vessels, but were rewarded with no outstanding results. It was a transitory period of experiment in what was fast becoming a highly specialised type of archipelago warfare, in which the enemy used every natural defensive measure to his own advantage. Both sides were continuously improvising. Allied aircraft were busy bombing shipping in the numerous small harbours and havens, minelaying, escorting convoys and reconnoitring, so that the number actually available for convoy attack was still small. The only record of sinkings at sea is of a small motor lighter (2) on the 28th by four Beaufighters at Port Ornos (Mykonos) and three patrol vessels (3) on the 13th by four Beaufighters on a sweep in the area Spetsai - Hydra - Monemvasia - Kythera. The Beaufighters had a foretaste of the heavy opposition which became a feature of the campaign. Three of them were hit by anti-aircraft fire and one forced to ditch.

Port Bombing in January (4)

Port bombing operations were more successful and the loss and damage inflicted were a check to German efforts to build up a supply fleet adequate to maintain and reinforce their bases. The heaviest blows were dealt against Piraeus, which was both the chief Aegean supply base and the southern terminal of the vital strategic line of communication running through Larissa, Salonika, Skoplje, Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana into Austria. The first attempt was made in daylight on 11 Jan. 44, when 72 Fortresses of the Fifteenth Air Force, escorted by Lightnings, caused explosions, fires and considerable damage. There were collisions in very bad weather and opposition by 30/40 enemy aircraft; as a result, the mission lost 8 Fortresses and 2 Lightnings, but claimed the destruction of 8 of the defending fighters. The attack was renewed that night by 21 Wellingtons of No. 205 (H.A.A.F.) Group and 8 Liberators and 7 Halifaxes of No. 240 Wing. They left big fires behind them. Photographs revealed extensive damage

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- (1) No. 201 Group O.R.B's.
  - (2) Seerose, 210 G.R.T.
  - (3) GA.62, GA.67 and GA.72.
  - (4) H.A.A.F. and H.E. Air Staff O.R.B. Appendices.

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ways, warehouses and installations. German sources record the sinking of the anti-submarine vessels U.2143, the small Greek steamer Elli and over twenty caiques and the port rendered temporarily useless. Anti-aircraft defences were reported as very intense and effective.

The second attack, planned for the night 15/16 January, was foiled by bad weather; but the third and fourth attacks of the series (both on a smaller scale) were carried out. On the night 22/23 January, 7 Liberators and 6 Halifaxes and, on the night 23/24 January, 8 Liberators and 3 Halifaxes (all of the Middle East No. 240 Wing) bombed the railway station, factories and warehouses, destroying a few caiques in the harbour. Piraeus was not bombed again during the period under review because the policy of concentration on the Italian campaign was being pursued to an intense degree. That policy was in turn a direct result of pressure by the Combined Chiefs of Staff for a reduction of Mediterranean resources in their efforts to maintain global equilibrium.

As a direct consequence of this disturbing series of air attacks, the Germans began a process of dispersal of the central on-loading and off-loading facilities. Signs appeared (not always fully interpreted) of the development of minor adjacent harbours such as Lavrion and Porto Rafti and, in March, of Volos at the head of the Gulf of Volos. This displacement of the focal point of balance by air attacks was in itself no mean achievement, although not conclusive. During January, small formations of aircraft attacked Salamis harbour, railways at Salonika and Rhodes harbour once each to little effect.

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(1) Sinking of S.S. Leda by Wellingtons (2/3 Feb. 44)

The enterprise of the shipping strike units was at last rewarded in early February. S.S. Leda (the ex-Italian Leopardi), of 4,573 tons, with a speed of 16 knots, was the most modern transport in the Aegean. After leaving Samos Island, she was sighted at 2120 hours on 2 February some distance south, to the west of the small island of Arki, covered by four escort vessels. Two of the six Wellingtons which had located her attacked from 50-100 feet, claiming two bomb hits. The convoy, however, continued its course, increasing speed to 15 knots and was attacked again an hour later by two more Wellingtons of No. 38 Squadron. It will never be known which of the bombs proved fatal. A torpedo Wellington that was not placed for attack saw intense anti-aircraft fire being directed from the vessels at one of the last bombers attacking; this aircraft caught fire and passed over the bows of S.S. Leda just before a violent explosion of ammunition in the ship, which became enveloped in flame and smoke. The escorts, endangered by the explosions, stood off and eventually returned to Piraeus without the Leda.

The Sinking of S.S. Lisa by Beaufighters and Mitchells (22 Feb. 44) (2)

The supply position on Crete was critical in February 1944. To relieve the situation, the largest available dry supply ship S.S. Lisa, <sup>(3)</sup> (of 5343 G.R.T.,) was loaded up to her decks with a mixed cargo, including heavy guns, and sailed from Piraeus on 21 February for Candia escorted by destroyers and Me.109s. At 0912 hours on the 22nd, the convoy was sighted some 10 miles south of the small Cycladean island of Pholegandros, on a southerly course, by a Baltimore (A-30) on reconnaissance.

On receipt of the Baltimore's report, a tactical plan was hastily drawn up and 4 Mitchells <sup>(4)</sup> carrying 75 mm. cannon, 6 torpedo Beaufighters, 7 rocket Beaufighters and 11 cannon Beaufighters were despatched to strike. Meanwhile, the convoy's air escort was increased and now numbered 6 Me.109s, 4 Ju.88's and 6 Arado 196's.

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(1) A.H.Q. E. Med. O.R.B/Ops Appendices.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ex-Italian Livenza

(4) Of the 340th U.S. Bombardment Group, still on loan to the Middle East.

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The 14 Mitchells steered west of Crete and went in for a feint attack at 1415 hours, just as the convoy neared Dia Island (north of Candia). They drew off the fighter escort, except the Arados, while the Beaufighters (less 6 who failed to rendezvous) came in round the east side of Crete on time. The Ju.88s and Me.109s joined battle with the Mitchells, who were victorious, shooting down two enemy fighters and leaving another smoking for the loss of one aircraft.

Meanwhile, the Beaufighters passed between Dia and Crete at sea level, flying through a barrage of heavy 'flak' and losing one aircraft. Turning north round Dia, they saw the convoy about 3 miles off, with the 6 Arados circling at 200 feet. The formation leader, ordering the anti-flak and fighter aircraft to climb and draw ahead, took the torpedo Beaufighters in. They hit the merchant vessels and one of the destroyers and the anti-flak aircraft raked the destroyers with cannon fire, subduing the "flak". One Arado was reported shot down, one probably destroyed and one chased off and damaged. One Beaufighter was shot down over the convoy and another lost when the formation broke away, by 2 Me. 109s intercepting from Herakleion. A large hole was observed amidships on the starboard side of the Lisa. As the surviving Beaufighters and 4 Mitchells left for base, the whole convoy was shrouded in smoke, one destroyer was in flames, the second smoking. S.S. Lisa was never seen again.

This fine achievement at a critical period is to be noted as a small tactical masterpiece. The loss of the Lisa was a heavy blow to the Germans and led to more devious routing and delays. A similar convoy of four escorted merchant ships running from Piraeus to Meles a week later put back on being sighted by a Baltimore aircraft.

Further serious German shipping losses in February (1)

February was disastrous in other ways for Admiral Aegean. On 5 February, the motor vessel Sieglinde, (2) of 2,500 G.R.T., the only really suitable troopship in the Aegean, was disabled in a gale in Port Laki (Leros) and lost. On the 7th S.S. Petrella, (3) of 4,600 G.R.T., loaded with troops, prisoners, guns and ammunition, was sunk by H.M. submarine Sportsman near Suda (Crete). Of the 3,000

/Italians

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- (1) Information supplied by F.D.S./Admiralty.
  - (2) Ex-Italian Citta di Savona
  - (3) Ex-Italian Cape Pine.

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Italians and 1,500 Germans aboard, very few Italians and only about 500 Germans were saved. On the 13th, S.S. Oria, (1) of 1,920 G.R.T., ran on the rocks in the Saronic Gulf in an effort to evade what she took for a submarine attack. (2) In the disaster 4,000 Italians and 50 Germans lost their lives. On the 19th, S.S. Peter, (3) loaded with bunker coal from the Black Sea, was torpedoed and seriously damaged by an Allied submarine near Skiathos Island. On the 25th, S.S. Isis, (4) of 316 G.R.T., was sunk north of Navarino by an Allied submarine torpedo.

On the 29th, Spitfires from south-east Italy caught the naval R.194 marking the mined channel off Corfu and sank her. Additional Allied air successes in February included S.S. Eliaki (of 108 tons), the anti-submarine vessel W.2124 (of 100 tons), at least three caiques, one patrol boat and a barge: two tugs were lost on mines laid by aircraft. These losses wiped out the advantage acquired in January of more than twenty small craft permitted by the Turks to pass out through the Dardenelles.

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- (1) Ex-Norwegian St. Julien.
  - (2) There was no Allied submarine anywhere in the vicinity.
  - (3) Ex-French P.L.H.16, ex-German Elbe.
  - (4) Ex-Spanish.

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Port Bombing (January to May 1944) (1)

The pattern of German sea supply increased in intricacy, the state of the island defences was unpredictable and the weather so often bad during the first five months of 1944 that the small air forces available to No. 201 Group and Air H.Q. Eastern Mediterranean for port bombing could do no more than deal with a few selected harbours, staging posts or terminals on the supply routes in the Aegean and a few mainland ports. (2) None of those attacks were in any great weight, for this was not available; and the results - the sinkings of a few small craft and damage to installations - taken individually, show little or no returns. Aided by attacks from S.E. Italy on the Corfu area, they did have, however, as German records prove, a steady detrimental effect on the German supply organisation.

Results in January were negligible; the few sinkings in February have been recorded above. In March, in spite of the reduction of the strength of Air H.Q. Eastern Mediterranean, there was rather more to show for the continuous and extended effort, although it was clear that the full measure of the German

/enterprise

(1) No. 201 Group, Air H.Q. E.Med., M.A.A.F. and M.E. O.R.Bs and appendices.

(2) Port Bombing Operations Jan. - Apr. 44

Note 11/12 = date 11th / 12 aircraft.

Jan. Rhodes 5/4; Salamis 9/10; Salonika Communications 15/16.

Feb. Herakleion 9/10; Hydra 13/2; Igoumenitza 21/4; Portolago (Leros) 2/6, 14/6, 24/5; Rhodes 1-2/8, 2-3/6, 4-5/2, 18/6, 19/3; Suda (Crete) 1-2/16, 3/6.

March Corfu 22/4; Portolago 5/6, Rhodes 6-7/1, 30-31/9; Santorin 5-6/3, 6/3, 6-7/2; Skarpanto 6/3; Suda 4/6.

April Corfu 3/24, 3-4/1, 4/4, 7/4, 8/18, 12/18; Githion 11-12/1; Herakleion 2-3/1, 16/12; Igoumenitza 15/10; Kalamata 7-8/1, 8-9/1; Leros 13/5;

Menemvasia 30-1/3; Portolago 15-16/46; Rhodes 8/11, 9/6.

May Adamas 12-13/2, 13-14/3; Corfu 30-31/1; Herakleion port and airfield (Candia) 12-13/1, 31-1/9; Igoumenitza 11-12/1, 16-17/1, 19-20/2; Kalamata 8-9/3, 14/4, 18/3; Kastelli port and airfield 6-7/4, 8-9/4, 20/3, 31-1/10; Melos 10-11/29-30/1, 31-1/1; Portolago (Leros) 6-7/2; Preveza 17-18/2, 18-19/2; Rhodes 3-4/3, 4-5/2, 29-30/6; Syros 10-11/1, 12-13/1, 17-18/4.

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enterprise had not even yet been fully taken. Altogether, 4 caiques, (1) 1 naval ferry barge, (2) 2 small auxiliary sailing vessels and 3 small steamships (3) were destroyed by aircraft. A welcome success was the sinking of the destroyer TA.15 (the ex-Italian Oripi) on the night of 8/9 March. Fourteen Beaufighters from R.A.F. Gambut were intruding in the area Rhodes - Kos - Crete, when they sighted a convoy near Dia Island, outside Candia. One of the aircraft hit TA.15 with rocket projectiles; she blew up and was considered lost. (4)

Three small vessels were the only sinkings in April, a month which brought the Germans a welcome respite. No large ships were sunk by any of the Allied air or surface units. S.S. Centaur, (5) a tanker carrying 1200 tons of fuel oil, was wrecked on the 1st off Leros.

It cannot be traced that any shipping was sunk as a result of the various port and harbour attacks in May. The 11 caiques and 1 small fishing vessel sunk by aircraft were lost to small formations sweeping over the sea areas or off the approaches to small harbours. It is important to note at this point, however, that from the 19th onwards, many aircraft were locked up in the watch on the "First of June" Crete convoy loading in Piraeus and <sup>in</sup> the assembly of important formations in the bases of Air H.Q. Eastern Mediterranean to attack it when put to sea. They wisely neglected the small fry for the big fish.

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(1) Phelino (200 tons), SAL.11 (200 tons), Teti 200 tons) and PATR.196 (tonnage unknown).

(2) M.F.P. 124.

(3) S.S. Sifnos (315 G.R.T.) sunk by 2 Wellingtons N. of Suda on the night 3/4 March, HY.4 (Agios Nikalaos) (300 G.R.T.) and S.S. Calido (unknown tonnage) carrying food from Patrasto to Kephallonia Island off Western Greece.

(4) She was salvaged and taken to Piraeus.

(5) Ex-Italian Cerere.

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Provision of Escort for the Marauder Squadron (1)

At the end of January, the forces then under the control of No. 201 Group were reinforced by the arrival of No. 24 (S.A.A.F.) Medium bomber Marauder Squadron on detachment from Mediterranean Allied Air Forces. During February, this squadron was employed on daylight operations without escort against shipping in harbours in the Dodecanese and Crete, mainly the former. Cloud and bad visibility spoiled many of these attacks, often forcing the aircrews to bomb alternative targets. In the main, little damage was inflicted. But the German reaction was sharp and noticeable. Up to 23 February, there was no opposition to these attacks, but from 24 February to 6 March, enemy fighters came up in strength, as many as twelve being encountered on one occasion. Seven of them were reported shot down, one probably destroyed and three damaged for the loss of six Marauders.

It was then decided to equip some of the fighter squadrons employed on the defence of Cyrenaica with long-range tanks to provide escorts for the Marauders, which were temporarily withdrawn from operations. The enemy cut down the period of stay in port <sup>for ships</sup> from about fourteen days to seven. The Marauders returned to operations during April with Spitfire escorts fitted with long-range tanks. They attacked shipping in harbours and airfields on Crete and Rhodes; but by now the Luftwaffe was closely husbanding its meagre aircraft strength and they seldom reacted with fighters.

The Germans, although themselves short of aircraft, took all possible alternative steps to render Allied intervention hazardous and costly. A large part of the Aegean was covered by an efficient Fighter Defence System and it was never possible for our aircraft to enter the Aegean without being detected and plotted. They progressively increased the volume of armament on all types of craft down to the smallest, and used every device of concealment.

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(1) Paper on the Air Aspect of the Aegean Blookade. S.58173/33/AIR H.Q. R.A.F. M.E. 30 Oct.44 (A.H.B.II J8/40).

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The Sinking of S.S. Lunenburg by H.M. Submarine Sportsman.

On 28 April, the only notable Allied success of the month was recorded. S.S. Lunenburg <sup>(1)</sup> (4697 G.R.T.) had been repairing for nine months in Piraeus. She was one of the few remaining large ships in the Aegean. With a full mixed cargo of 5,300 tons she sailed from Piraeus for Crete. H.M. submarine Sportsman sighted her approaching Candia, very heavily escorted by three destroyers, T.A.16 (ex-Castelfidardo), T.A.17 (ex San Martino) T.A.19 (ex-Catatafimi), the minesweeper R.210, five UJ boats and a number of Arado 196 aircraft. The Sportsman carried out a daring, accurate torpedo attack in the face of depth charge and machine gun attack and hit her squarely. At 1703 hours on the 28th, she broke in two and sank. Sportsman, after a close shave at the hands of another convoy, which included the famous Gertrud (Gerda Toft) returned to Malta on 6 May having crowned her Mediterranean Service with a remarkable effort <sup>(2)</sup> against the Crete blockade runners.

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(1) Ex-Greek Constantinos Louloudis : also once named Luxembourg.  
(2) Details from Admiralty C.B.3306(2).

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The Pendulum of Air Superiority

The numerical strengths of the German and Allied operational aircraft throughout this period remained more or less evenly balanced. The Germans were aware of their own advantages in bases and operational range and confident in their continuous practice in combined air/naval operations in defence of convoys. They exhibited none of the coyness bred by the sense of inferiority in other areas and it was the aggressive tactics of their limited and hard-pressed air formations in fighting the convoys through that gave a special mark of hazard and difficulty for the Allied aircraft whose task it was to neutralise and destroy them. Transport aircraft, used in increasing numbers, were often escorted by Arado floatplanes and land based unescorted fighters, although these latter were limited in numbers. Although the Allied air threat remained steady and visible, the Luftwaffe could furnish no reinforcements. This situation grew worse as the months passed.

A record of Allied successes alone such as has been already outlined, can give no real measure of the nature of the continuous ding-dong strength which proceeded. There were failures and disappointments and the losses in Allied aircraft were often hard to bear and to replace. It will, therefore, assist in a true understanding of events if a few encounters in the early part of 1944 are selected for examination. (1)

On 11 Feb. 44 two South African Baltimores on reconnaissance over the Nisero - Tilos - Symi - Rhodes harbour area, sighted a convoy near Rhodes escorted by three Arado 196s and five Ju. 88s, too strong a force to engage on reasonable terms.

On 9 February, a normal day for R.A.F. Stations Berka, Gambut and Matruh (the new titles for the old wing bases of No. 201 Group) twenty-six Beaufighters operated. Four rocket Beaufighters of No. 252 Squadron sighted a convoy south-east of Arki Island (close to Patmos) consisting of two large merchant vessels escorted by one naval vessel and two Arado 196s. On turning to attack, the formation was jumped by three Me. 109s. Two Beaufighters were missing after the engagement and another was seen to crash in flames by the sole survivor.

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(1) Details from R.A.F. M.E. operational summaries, Air H.Q. E.Med. Wing and Squadron O.R.Bs.

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On 11 February, Nos. 454 (R.A.A.F.), 680 and 15 (S.A.A.F.) Squadrons reconnoitred harbours and airfields. Two Baltimores of No. 15 Squadron were airborne at 0630 hours and about three hours later, their mission in the Dodecanese drawing to its close, they sighted a convoy off Rhodes escorted by three Arado 196s and five Ju.88s. A Ju.52 transport was also airborne and three Me.109s were moving up from Maritza airfield (Rhodes). An Arado first attacked from 800 yards, but broke away under the superior fire from a Baltimore. The four Ju.88 fighters then made a swift attack in pairs; when one of them was hit in the starboard wing and engine and side-slipped into the sea, the other three withdrew. The three Me.109s then opened a running attack which lasted over 15 minutes, firing continuously from close range while the destroyers and the 'flak' defences at Rhodes harbour put up an intense barrage. As a result of the Baltimores display of spirit and good manoeuvring one Me.109 was put out of action; they left the area for base with damage to one aircraft and a wounded gunner.

On many days, a few losses of our aircraft were recorded and the toll mounted. In engagements with enemy escorts and patrols, they did not always have things their own way, although they usually gave a good account of themselves. On 24 February, a formation of five S.A.A.F. Marauders of No. 24 Squadron were running in to attack ships in Portolage Bay (Leros). When 15 miles south of Kos they were attacked by five enemy fighters who harried them approaching and over the target. The Marauders dropped their bombs, hitting the jetty and scoring near misses on two schooners and shot down an Me.109 and damaged another. A third Me.109 was destroyed by the enemy's own 'flak'. Three Marauders were damaged and one crash-landed at base.

These are only a few out of a multiplicity of incidents illustrating the continuous clash between opposing air formations. The toll on both sides was appreciable, but to this point the flow of replacements and the evenly-matched spirit of the crews on both sides held the issue in suspense. The greatest battles were still to come. In the background of these more obvious encounters, the steady work of patrol and long and short range reconnaissance and uneventful

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convoy escort continued. The Germans took photographs of some of the Allied ports, on the watch for any significant massing of forces. Their aircraft hopped from field to field between the mainland, Crete, Rhodes and Kos; and a new strip on Nisero Island between Kos and Rhodes was planned. A most important feature of the situation to note is that the Germans conquered the Aegean because they had air superiority, but they were able to hold it for a long period afterwards without air superiority.

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German Shipping Reinforcements from the Black SeaThe Montreux Convention

Articles 19 - 21 of the Montreux Convention of 1936, in the negotiation of which there had been a serious tussle between Britain and the U.S.S.R., had provided that in time of war, if Turkey were not a belligerent, warships might pass through the Straits in fulfilment of an obligation arising out of the Covenant of the League of Nations, or to assist a state victim of aggression in virtue of a treaty of mutual assistance which was binding on Turkey and had been concluded within the framework of the Covenant. If, however, Turkey were belligerent or considered herself threatened by the imminent danger of war, she had complete discretion about allowing warships through the Straits. (1)

The ambiguity of Turkey's political attitude and her dislike for the Russian brand of democracy were never more clearly exemplified than in the case of the passage of German ships from the Black sea to the Aegean in May and June 1944. At that time, Turkey was not belligerent, but she could say that she considered herself threatened at the time, principally by the U.S.S.R. Her examination of so-styled German merchant ships and transport barges was cursory. ~~So~~ She considered herself within the bounds of the Montreux Convention if they appeared to be peaceful, without enquiring too deeply as to the ultimate purpose of the transfer. The Allies on the other hand, construed such lack of interest as tantamount to an unfriendly action. The Germans had no illusions. They not only firmly intended to use as many as possible of the ships and craft for military supply or naval escort, but concealed arms and ammunition below floorings in the holds of some ships.

German Decision to transfer Black Sea Shipping (2)

The passage of unarmed barges through the Dardanelles into the Aegean in January 44 and the occasional mutual exchanges of tonnage between Admiral Aegean and Admiral Black Sea have already been noted. Towards the end of April, the Germans' situation in the Crimea was so serious that a plan for complete evacuation was drawn up. On 20 Apl.44, Admiral Aegean was advised that after evacuation of the Crimea an important complement of ships engaged thereon would, if Turkey were agreeable, be sailed through the Dardanelles and placed at his disposal.

/This

- (1) The Middle East in the War. (Survey) R.I.I.A. Oxford 1952 p.444 footnote 1.  
(2) Information from F.D.S. and A.H.S./Admiralty.

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This should go far to relieve the chronic shortage of transport, and repair increasing inroads into their strength. On 9 May 44, the Russians captured Sevastopol. On 11 May, the German evacuation of the Crimea was completed. The leak of shipping through the Dardanelles (1)

On 26 May, Naval Intelligence at Istanbul reported that S.S. Mannheim (2) had passed there for the Aegean; that she was clearly a Kriegstransport ship, with gun platform fore and aft and several anti-aircraft guns; and that "Ems-class" ships (3) with cargoes of timber and "Saarosee" -type barges were also passing down for Aegean ports.

The next day, the Flag Officer, Levant and Eastern Mediterranean stated that air photographic evidence proved that German craft had already passed through the Dardanelles with guns concealed, their armament being subsequently mounted and the vessels converted to offensively-armed minor warships after they had reached the Aegean. He asked for the matter to be brought again to the notice of the Turkish authorities, and for Admiralty support.

Following the protest, the Turkish authorities, on 29 May, pleading the Montreux Convention, declared they had thoroughly examined K.T. Mannheim and five "Ems-class" vessels and found no reason to detain them. They passed into the Aegean on 29 May. On 31 May, the Admiralty pointed out that the Germans were committing a fraud upon the convention, for in accordance with their practice, they would arm them after passage.

On 14 June, Mr. Eden informed the House of Commons that four K.T. ships (S.S. Mannheim, Heidelberg, Pelikan and Erpel) and eight "Ems-class" vessels had passed through the Dardanelles. S.S. Lola (1200 G.R.T.), the small tanker Dresden, the tug Fingua and a few auxiliary sailing vessels also passed.

On 15 June, a breach in the Turkish Cabinet led to a more than superficial examination of another K.T. ship, S.S. Kassel, at Istanbul: they discovered a concealed hold in which were depth charges and anti-submarine mortars.

/ S.S. Kassel

(1) Ibid.

(2) 759 G.R.T. These K.T. ships were particularly valuable owing to their relatively high speed and their special heavy loading gear, which enabled them to effect a very quick turn-round even in ports where loading facilities were not normally adequate.

(3) Armed trawlers, but disguised as pilot cutters.

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weapons, # S.S. Kassel, as well as some "Ems"-class trawlers, were refused permission to pass and returned to the Black Sea. From thence onwards, the Turks prohibited the passage of K.T. ships and "Ems"-class craft. Examination procedure was tightened up, but before the Dardanelles was finally sealed at the end of June, two more auxiliary sailing vessels, two cargo-towing vessels and one tug had trickled through.

This affair brought down the Turkish Foreign Minister, <sup>(1)</sup> whose interpretation of Turkey's duty under the Montreux Convention was not approved by the rest of the Cabinet. But his fall and the final prohibition were little consolation to the Allies in the Middle East; for the accession of over 7,000 tons of shipping to the German strength in the Aegean had undone much of the work on which our air and submarine forces had been for so long and so successfully engaged.

The Future of the Reinforcements from the Black Sea <sup>(2)</sup>

The first reaction of Admiral Aegean to the eagerly awaited Black Sea shipping was one of disappointment. Some of the freight space would be out of operation for some time. The seven principal ships required overhaul and three of them had to go in dock. There was some delay, too, before the armed trawlers (KFK's) were ready, as most of the essential parts were missing, including cables and radio equipment. This was unknown to the Allies and the air reconnaissance units <sup>were</sup> saddled for some time to come with the onus of reporting the expected activities of the new tonnage.

The barges and tug which left the Black Sea at the end of June proceeded to Greece. One K.T. ship left Piraeus on 2 July. The K.T. ships Pelikan and Erpel both reached Leroc in early July with supplies, the former surviving attacks by submarine and aircraft. Two barges reached Piraeus but the rest were held up at Syros. S.S. Pelikan then made another successful return voyage, <sup>this</sup> time to Crete, in the quick time of 36 hours, thus proving the value of this type as a first-class transport.

/This

(1) M. Menemenjoglu.

(2) Admiral Aegean war diary (PG/46162 series FDS/Admty). R.A.F., M.E. weekly Intelligence summary for period ending 4 July 44 (M.E. Air Staff O.R.B. appendices).

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This was followed by a run by S.S. Erpel. At the end of July, Air Intelligence Middle East estimated that the contribution of the two K.T. ships to Crete supplies for July had been in the region of 2,000 tons. When this was added to the intensive Caique contribution, a total of some 5,500 tons was arrived at, i.e., almost 90 per cent of the minimum monthly requirement. The position on Crete was, therefore, no longer critical, thanks to the Turkish authorities at Istanbul.

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K.T. Mannheim lay repairing until sunk on 15 September at Salamis by Fortresses. K.T. Heidelberg was refitted with heavier armament and renamed U.I.217A. As such, she escorted K.T. Pekikan to Leros on 31 July and arrived back at Piraeus with her on 3 August.

German hopes ran high with three K.T. ships in service, but continuous work and damage from air attack told on their serviceability. On 26 July, K.T. Ernal, escorted by TA.19 back from Suda to Piraeus, breached to in heavy northern seas, was reduced to speed of 4 knots because of bad coal and was taken in tow. Attempts to take on water from TA.19 failed. Heating power and pressure fell. TA.19 transferred one or two drums of oil at sea to provide more power. At the Phleves barrage (near Phaleron Bay) she was handed over to a tug. Her anchor fouled the deep nets of the barrage and she was only freed after 4 hours effort. The tug Dimitrios herself, who took over from TA.19, with decks awash in a beam sea, could make no headway and her crew had to be taken off by K.T. Ernal. (1)

This account furnishes evidence of the advanced state of depreciation in the German organization, due to the continuous pressure of Allied operations in this and other areas and should be borne in mind in any estimate of how much longer the Germans could have held the Aegean.

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(1) Admiral Aegean war diary (PG/46162 series F.D.S./Admty).

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(1)

The Text of the Turkish Report on S.S. Kassel

As the political and military fields of interest overlapped at this point to the temporary advantage of German shipping, it must be of interest if the results of Allied diplomatic action are traced to the turn of Turkish <sup>policy</sup> ~~ambivalence~~. The terms of the Turkish Foreign Ministry's report to the German authorities stated that in the course of a "chance" (2) examination of S.S. Kassel, armament was discovered below deck under a pile of apparently innocent cargo. It consisted of armour plate 9 mm. thick, 81 depth charges and 12 anti-submarine mortars. This definitely brought the vessel, said the report, within the category of a warship. This discovery of the real character of S.S. Kassel, continued the Foreign Ministry, more than justified suspicions concerning certain types of German vessels, concerning which the Government of the Republic reserved the right to take suitable measures to prevent infringement of Article 19 of the Montreux Agreement. It regretted having been misled by the guarantees given and lodged a formal protest to the German Embassy in Ankara, promising to submit all German ships to a thorough examination in future. The Germans took this as an unfriendly action. These ships, they said, were purely freighters, outside the Montreux Agreement. They themselves would not class an American Liberty ship as a warship, in spite of its heavy armament.

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- (1) Admiral Aegean war diary 30 June 44 (PG/46162 series F.D.S/Admity).  
(2) Admiral Aegean's inverted commas.

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Zenith of the Air Campaign against the Crete and Dodecanese ConvoysThe Cost of Crete (1)

The island of Crete, with its valuable harbours and airfields, lay like a shadow across the entrance to the Aegean, delimiting all efforts by sea or air to break the German control of their southern flank, which, according to a Fuehrer order, was next to the Channel coast, the most threatened area.

The Army put the monthly requirements of the Crete garrison on 15 Feb. 44 at 5,000 tons; but, owing to air and submarine attacks and marine misadventure, only a little over 1000 tons had been received by that date. Air and surface transports had been saddled with the transfer of about 25,000 prisoners of war to the mainland, so to reduce the number of mouths to be fed; reserves were reaching danger point. During March, the Admiral Commanding Aegean struggled with the prodigious task of supplying the island; he delivered, between the 1st and 12th, about 3,600 tons, which considerably relieved the situation. By the end of the month, by temporarily stopping supplies to the Dodecanese, this figure was raised to 8,800 tons. One of the most vital cargoes reached Suda Bay on S.S. Gertrud (ex-Gerda Toft) escorted by two torpedo boats, 2 motor minesweepers, 2 anti-submarine vessels and 15 aircraft. In this convoy, barrage balloons were employed for the first time in the Aegean. On 19 March, Gertrud evaded attack by an Allied submarine and landed safely a cargo of 100 tons of supplies, 1,000 tons of fuel oil and 200 tons of coal etc., so ensuring stocks for Crete for another 150 days. Two 150 mm guns for coastal defence were lost in a naval ferry barge sunk by Allied surface craft on the night 18/19 March about 12 miles S.W. of Pyrgos.

At the end of April, the monthly requirements for Crete were placed at 7,000 tons and, for the Dodecanese, 4,500 tons, not taking into account the demand for large reserves. With the oncoming of Spring, more Greek caiques were brought into commission, but the erosion into these forces by Allied aircraft, submarines and raiding forces was out-stripping construction and requisitioning. During April, 6,400 tons of supplies reached Crete in spite of the loss of the Lunenburg. The situation there was, therefore, not critical, so supplies to the Dodecanese were recommenced.

/During

(1) Information from PG/46162 and PG/46067 series at F.D.S. Admiralty.

During May, a series of crises set off by Allied air force inroads into Balkan fuel supplies and the rail distribution system had a direct effect on sea and air transport in the Aegean. Crete received only 950 tons and the Dodecanese 1,000 tons, transported mainly by caiques in the first half of the month. Toward the end of May, bad weather stopped all traffic by small sailing craft. It was now clear to Admiral Lange (Admiral Aegean) that the Army's demands could not be met without the use of merchant ships. Large, medium and small steamships were to be used.

In a report to Naval Group Command South, Lange stated that for island supply he now had only 26 ships with an aggregate tonnage of 34,000 G.R.T. and that of these only 16 steamers totalling 15,000 G.R.T. were seaworthy. At the end of May, Crete, he reported, had 4 months' supplies;<sup>(1)</sup> but this was not enough. Reserves were essential, for the wear and tear of operations and the fuel shortage promised ultimate breakdown if a solution was not found. Acting on a suggestion by Naval Group South that he should sail small ships and motor sailing vessels in well-escorted convoys in preference to sailing them independently, Admiral Aegean assembled in Piraeus one of his most important convoys to that date, determined to stock Crete up to capacity once and for all.

The "First of June" Convoy assembles<sup>(2)</sup>

The convoy consisted of S.S. Tanais,<sup>(3)</sup> S.S. Sabine<sup>(4)</sup> (ex Italian Salvatore) and S.S. Gertrud<sup>(5)</sup> (ex-Danish Gerda Toft), carrying between them some 8,500 tons of ammunition, fuel oil, coal, stores, lorries and equipment. Every suitable operational naval vessel was assembled to protect it and the escort included the torpedo boats TA.14 (ex-Turbine), TA.16 (ex-Castelfidardo), TA.17 (ex-San Martino), TA.19 (ex-Calatafimi), the anti-submarine vessels UJ.2101,<sup>(6)</sup> UJ.2105<sup>(7)</sup> UJ.2110, R.211, twelve Arado 196s and several Ju.88s. It was ready to sail under the command of the Senior Officer 9th Torpedo Boat Flotilla on the evening of 31 May, 44, after nine days of delays.

/Allied Air Watch .....

(1) Also other Aegean Islands 4 months, Salonika 5 months, Attica 4 months, the Ionian Islands 2 months and the Peloponnese 1-2 months.

(2) Information from PG/46162 and PG/46067 series at F.D.S./Admty.

(3) 1,545 G.R.T.

(4) 2,252 G.R.T.

(5) 1,960 G.R.T.

(6) ex-Strymon.

(7) ex-Aertha.

Preliminary Dispositions (1)

S.S. Gertrud, after repairs in Candia of the damage inflicted on her by Marauders of No. 24 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron in late April, was back in Piraeus on 5 May and loading on 12 May. S.S. Sabine and S.S. Tanaïs loaded; and photographs indicated their readiness for departure from the Salamis Straits. On 19 May, S.S. Gertrud moved out to the Salamis Straits, although not yet ready to sail.

19 May was adjudged a day of great significance and combined air/naval plans were drawn up for strikes on the convoy as it proceeded, as was believed, towards either Suda Bay or Herakleion (Candia) in Crete. An air striking force was to be assembled at R.A.F. Station Gambut under the control of the A.O.C., No. <sup>2/2</sup> ~~2121~~ Group. Submarines operating in the Aegean were to be so disposed as to intercept the convoy. The Flag Officer Levant and Eastern Mediterranean decided to use the force of high speed destroyers in Alexandria to strike the convoy if it approached within range at night.

The air forces available for reconnaissance were:-

- (a) A detachment of Spitfires of No. 680 P.R.U. (which covered the Aegean as part of Routine Strategical Reconnaissance).
- (b) A squadron of long range Baltimores (No. 454 R.A.A.F.).
- (c) Wellingtons of No. 38 Squadron.
- (d) Beaufighters of No. 603 Squadron.

Limitations of Reconnaissance Aircraft in the Aegean (2)

The Baltimore had to be operated with discretion in the face of enemy fighter defences. It was not fast enough to get away if "jumped" by single engine fighters and therefore the timing of reconnaissance <sup>within</sup> the Aegean had to be varied from day to day to lessen the chances of interception. It was considered certain that every aircraft entering the Aegean was detected by enemy radar. The Baltimore was not suitable for accurate navigation by night, or for departure before dawn when there was no moon.

The Beaufighter, although strong, adaptable and long range, had poor rearward armament and was even more vulnerable to enemy fighters (the Arado 196 included) than the Baltimore. It operated at night, but its wireless telephonic facilities were only moderate.

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- (1) A.H.Q. Eastern Med. O.R.B. App. D 10 July 44: R.A.F. Station Gambut O.R.B. App. 1 June 44: FG/46162 and 46067 series at F.D.S/Admty.  
(2) A.H.Q. Eastern Med. O.R.B. App. D 10 July 44.

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The Wellington, comparatively large and slow, had to be out of enemy territory by daylight.

Baltimore sightings were all made from sea level, often in cloudless conditions. Accurate estimation of range in the clear Aegean air was always very difficult. Fighter opposition was certain to render estimates of positions difficult. If the convoy passed through the archipelago, the fixing of positions would become even more difficult, for there were so many islands and they all looked similar at sea level.

#### The Task of the Air and Naval Forces (1)

The air reconnaissance task was to cover the Piraeus - Salamis port area until the convoy sailed, and thereafter to locate and report it so that it might be intercepted by air and sea striking forces. It was not intended to operate the naval striking force in daylight inside the Aegean: its effective fighting radius was about 3 hours from Kaso Straits. (2)

An estimate was made of the possible routes the convoy might take; the most likely of these was from Piraeus, north of Agios Georgios Island, then close West of Milos Island, to Candia. The naval strike could intercept if the enemy sailed between 0400 and 1000 hours. The problem was complicated by the distance of Alexandria from the operational area, an 11 hours transit. Each night that the enemy did not sail, the destroyers were to return to Alexandria for refueling, in time to sail again the following morning.

The range of the air striking force was limited by the range of the long range Spitfire escort (although a few Mustangs were available). The air strike could only intercept if the convoy came South of 36°00' in daylight.

#### The early Plan of Air Reconnaissance and its Execution (22 May to 31 May/1 June)

A comprehensive plan for the air cover of the convoy while it lay off Salamis was prepared, put into effect on 22 May and continued until 28 May.

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/From

- (1) A.H.Q. Eastern Med. O.R.B. App. D 10 July 44.
- (2) Position 'A' in Figure 16.
- (3) R.A.F. Station Gambut O.R.B. App. 1 June 44.

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From then until the convoy sailed the scale was reduced. It will be seen from the diagram at Figure 16 that reconnaissance comprised photographic cover of Piraeus twice daily, early morning Baltimore searches up to  $37^{\circ}20'N$ , Baltimore searches of shipping routes between  $36^{\circ}00'N$  and  $37^{\circ}00'N$  to make sighting or nil reports by 1900 hours, last light Beaufighters searches between  $37^{\circ}00'N$  and  $37^{\circ}40'N$ , and Wellington night searches between Piraeus and  $37^{\circ}00'N$ .

The convoy sailed at about midnight on 31 May. Wellington "C" of No. 33 Squadron made the first vital sighting at 0020 hours on 1 June in the position  $37^{\circ}25'N$ ,  $24^{\circ}05'E$ . Their report, twice amplified soon afterwards, was received in the operations room at 0050 hours. Before leaving the convoy at 0210 hours, "C" dropped its bombs, straddling the convoy, as it believed, but in no way impeding its progress. The air reconnaissance was thereupon completely relocated.

Indications of the imminent departure of the convoy had been found in the reports of two Beaufighters on a last light reconnaissance on the previous evening of <sup>the</sup>sighting of three Me.109s and five Arado 196's north of Milos Island, flying on a course of 150 degrees. These were probably bound for a rendezvous with the convoy. Their base might have been Crete or Paros Island. Crete had been reinforced with fighters: the Luftwaffe appeared to be using the newly constructed landing ground on Paros for fighter aircraft in distress and it might well be serving as an advanced airfield.

The German intercept service picked up the first Wellington sighting report and circulated a warning to the Convoy. The Senior Officer was instructed to make every effort to reach Herakleion before dark. The Chief of Staff of the Luftwaffe South-East ordered his aircraft to remain with the convoy until 2000 hours. (1)

Composition of, and brief Operations by, Alexandria Naval Forces (1)

Before proceeding to the operations of the redirected air reconnaissance force, a brief digression on the course of naval surface ship co-operations must be made.

The force comprised the French destroyers Le Malin, Le Fantasque and Le Terrible and during the last few days, the cruiser H.M.S. Aurora and the destroyer H.M.S. Kimberley.

From 22 May, when the combined operational scheme was put into force, the naval force made daily sorties towards the Aegean. Each evening, as a "Nil Report" was received from the searching aircraft, the ships turned back. On 28 May, owing to mechanical defects and other more important operational commitments, the ships were forced to withdraw from these operations. The air reconnaissance crews continued their patrols over the ports of departure.

Relocation of the Convoy and Shadowing Operations by No. 454 Squadron (2)

The last sighting of the convoy by No. 38 Squadron between Kithnos (3) and Kea Islands (4) was both fortunate and timely, for it indicated an unexpected convoy course. The problem of reorganizing the pattern of air reconnaissance immediately arose, for there were now many alternative courses among the numerous islands open to the enemy and relocation of the convoy was certain to be difficult. If the Baltimores took off at first light to search, they could not be expected to make a sighting before 0845 hours. By that time, the convoy would have travelled about 50 miles on an unknown course among the islands. Bearing in mind that such a large convoy could enter none but the large ports and could not sail except along the deeper channels, the possible courses were reduced, it was estimated, to five. The shrewdness of this judgement may be readily appreciated from study of the pattern of air reconnaissance then organized by No. 454 Squadron.

It was Baltimore "Q", one of three aircraft despatched from Berka at first light, that first found the convoy steaming on a southerly course about 10 miles N.W. of Antiparos Island. "Q" had time to amplify their report before being compelled to withdraw by four escorting Me.109s. This valuable sighting, so early in the day, gave ample time for the assembly and initial briefing of the

/strike

(1) A.H.Q. E. Med. O.R.B. App. D. 10 July: R.A.F. Gambut O.R.B.

(2) No. 454 Squadron O.R.B.; R.A.F. Gambut O.R.B.; A.H.Q. E. Med. O.R.B. App. D. 10 July, 1944.

(3) Or Thermia Island.

(4) For the course of the convoy and the reported positions of sightings and the pattern of reconnaissance patrols by No. 454 Squadron refer to Figure 16.

strike force at Gambut. It was not yet possible to forecast at what time the target would come within range and it was uncertain whether Candia or Suda Bay was the destination.

Baltimore "T", on intercepting "Q"s sighting report, set course for the area and reported the convoy at 1000 hours as about half-way between Despotiko and Pholegandros Islands, flying balloons and escorted by four Me.109s and three Arado's, from whom he had a very narrow escape.

The next Baltimore, "T"/454, was airborne at 1030 hours at Berka and detailed to search from Santorin (or Thera) Island northwards through the channel between Sikinos and Nios, thence northwards on a square search and West of Pholegandros. "T", molested by enemy fighters, sent a vital and gallant sighting report before being shot down, a report which gave the operations room at Gambut more definite material with which to brief the strike crews.

It was still uncertain whether the convoy would anchor at Santorin and where was its ultimate destination. These doubts were disposed of when the captain of "E"/454, the second of the next two Baltimores despatched, signalled a fix on the convoy as in the position 36°20'N, 25°03'E, i.e. about 17 miles W.S.W. of the south-western tip of Santorin (Thera) Island, a probable error of only 3 miles. In a context of reconnaissance remarkable for its pattern and continuity, it could be said that this sighting was the most important of the day since those of Wellington "C", for it rendered it possible to arrange a precise time and position for the air strike. Aircraft "D" sent the last sighting signal at 1430 hours, which confirmed to the strike leader that his briefing stood unchanged. "D", as did "E", evaded intercepting fighter escorts.

The chain of reports initiated by Wellington "C" had been almost unbroken and the estimated time of the convoy's arrival in the approaches to Candia so nicely calculated that the strike force arrived at the psychological moment for their attack. 1 June was considered to mark the best day's work No. 454 squadron had ever accomplished.

#### The Air Striking Force assembles and attacks

The bombing force, which attacked first, comprised 12 (1) Marauders and 18 Baltimores (2) and was escorted by 13 Spitfires (3) and 4 Mustangs. (4) The

/Beaufighter

- (1) No. 24 Squadron.
- (2) 15 from No. 15 (S.A.A.F.) and 3 from No. 454 Squadron.
- (3) 7 from No. 94 and 6 from No. 213 Squadrons.
- (4) No. 213 Squadron.

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Beaufighter striking force which followed comprised 8 strike aircraft (1) and 14 anti-flak aircraft (2) and was escorted by 2 fighters. (3)

At 1903 hours, the bombing force came on the convoy about 30 miles North of Candia (4) proceeding towards Candia; they went in to attack.

/The

- 
- (1) No. 252 Squadron.
  - (2) 2 from No. 252, 8 from No. 603 and 4 from No. 16 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron.
  - (3) No. 227 Squadron.
  - (4) The position given in the O.R.Bs of R.A.F. Gambut is incorrect.

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The Baltimores straddled S.S. Sabine leading, and hit her aft, scoring near misses on the second merchantman. The Marauders' bombs fell just ahead of S.S. Sabine, while another cluster fell round one of the smaller escorts. At 1908 hours, strike Beaufighters came in low out of the sun to attack with rockets and cannon. They hit S.S. Sabine several times and set her afire, hit UJ.2101 with at least twelve rockets and UJ.2105 and TA.16 several times. They also hit S.S. Gertrud in the engine rooms, set her on fire and put her out of control.

/At

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<sup>1920</sup>  
At 1820 hours, UJ.2105 burning fiercely, capsized and sank. At <sup>1930</sup>1830 hours,  
UJ.2101 sank.

Admiral Aegean reported that his own aircraft did not come to action, but Allied formations did in the event engage and claimed to have destroyed one Me.109 and one Arado 196, probably destroyed one Arado and damaged two others. The Allied losses were one Baltimore, four Beaufighters and the Wellington already mentioned.

At 1917 hours the Senior Officer Convoy reported their position as 35°40'N, 25°07'E, making for Herakleion. TA.19 had S.S. Gertrud in tow, while TA.14 stood by S.S. Sabine. At 2210 hours, S.S. Tanais reached port safely, while efforts were being made to save S.S. Sabine and Gertrud.

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Air Attack on the "First of June" Convoy in Herakleion

At 2248 hours that night, a force of nine Wellingtons <sup>(1)</sup> attacked Herakleion (Candia) harbour. In addition to other damage, they completely destroyed the naval fuel oil and petrol dumps, losing one aircraft on the operation, but saving three of the crew. Meanwhile, a tug was sent out from Herakleion to tow in the blazing Gertrud which by 0405 hours on 2 June was berthed in the inner harbour; but late in the afternoon she was aground in the outer harbour, still on fire aft. S.S. Sabine, completely burnt out, was sunk by one of their own torpedoes. It was still hoped to salvage the shattered T.16. The three other escort destroyers TA.14, TA.17 and TA.19 sailed at 1415 hours on 2 June for Piraeus.

Another bombing force, this time of Marauders and Baltimores, was standing by for a daylight attack on the harbour. Unfortunately a mechanical failure in one of the photographic reconnaissance aircraft prevented cover of the harbour in the morning: two ~~M~~ Mustang aircraft <sup>(2)</sup> were therefore airborne from Bu Amd to carry out visual reconnaissance of the harbour. The pilots returned reporting a merchant ship burning there. Pilots on afternoon reconnaissance added that another merchantman believed to be S.S. Tanaïs, a destroyer and a possible salvage vessel were also present. This information was passed to the leaders of a newly assembled bomber force.

This fresh bomber force comprised eleven Marauders <sup>(3)</sup> and eleven Baltimores <sup>(4)</sup>. They reached Herakleion at 1742 hours, coming in from the West. The Baltimores appear to have hit S.S. Gertrud amidships, causing the fire still burning below decks to spread forward. The Marauders bombs fell on warehouses and gutted them.

At 1920 hours, the ammunition in S.S. Gertrud exploded and the ship was blown to pieces, causing heavy damage in the dock and city areas. As a result of the explosion, TA.16 sank in harbour. With the Gertrud alone, 1,000 barrels of oil and 195 tons of bunker coal went up in flames.

A striking force assembled for a final attack on the 3rd was disbanded on receipt of reports by photographic reconnaissance pilots that only sunken and burnt out ships were in the harbour.

- 
- (1) No. 38 Squadron.
  - (2) No. 213 Squadron.
  - (3) No. 24 Squadron.
  - (4) 9 from No. 15 and 2 from No. 454 Squadron.

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The fate of S.S. Tanais and the end of the convoy (1)

S.S. Tanais sailed from Candia on 8 June and, escorted by R.11, R.14 and R.211 and an anti-submarine schooner proceeded northwards on her return journey to Piraeus.

On the same date, H.M. submarine Vivid on her first patrol after leaving Malta on the 5th was passing through the Anti-Kythira Channel (N.W. of Crete). By the evening of the 8th, she was on patrol 40 miles north of Candia. At 0230 hours on 9 June, she encountered the Tanais convoy (about 35 miles north of Candia.) attacked by moonlight from periscope depth with torpedoes and sank S.S. Tanais. No counter-attack followed and Vivid was ordered to the vicinity of Kandeliusa to intercept Leros-Rhodes traffic.

The combined efforts of air and naval forces had thus resulted in the destruction of the entire convoy of three merchant vessels, one destroyer, two anti-submarine vessels and at least two aircraft. One hundred and twenty-six aircraft sorties had been flown.

/ German

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(1) Admiralty C.B.3306(2).

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Human Destroyer and Torpedo Boats crippled by Beaufighters and British Naval Party (18 - 19 June). (1)

In June, the entire operational force of minor warships - one destroyer and three torpedo boats - was crippled by Allied action. On 18 June, a British Naval Party raided Port Laki (Leros), damaged the destroyer T.A.14 (ex-Turbine) and the torpedo boat T.A.17 (ex San Martino) and sank the naval tug Titan and the patrol vessel C.D.21.

On 19 June, the torpedo boat T.A.19 (ex Calatafimi), escorted by two R-boats and three Arado 196's, was attacked by Beaufighters from R.A.F. Station Matruh at 1554 hours S.W. of Kalyunos. The ships, probably intended as escort for S.S. Arathe back to Piraeus, were raked with cannon fire and rockets and it was claimed that all were damaged, as well as one Arado. One Beaufighter came down in the sea; the crew were seen in their dinghy. The convoy returned to Leros; by the 25th, T.A.19 was under repairs in Skaramanga dockyard (near Athens). On 30 June, all the four available minor Fleet warships were under repairs, three damaged and one unserviceable for some time to come. With an increase in their minelaying operations pending, the enemy's escort position was now anything but reassuring.

Unsuccessful Air Attacks on June Convoys for the Dodecanese (2)

Since mid-April, owing to concentration on Crete supplies, only minor vessels had reached the Dodecanese, whose turn was now to come. On 9 June, a convoy of small craft, escorted by the two torpedo boats T.A.17 and T.A.19, reached Port Laki (Leros). Another far more important convoy was assembling in Piraeus, the most important since 23 April, when S.S. Arathe successfully reached Rhodes. This convoy, which left Piraeus during the night 11/12 June, comprised the following vessels:-

S.S. <u>Arathe</u>	(ex-Italian <u>Aprilia</u> )	1,259 G.R.T.
S.S. <u>Anita</u>	(ex-Italian <u>Arenzo</u> )	1,165 G.R.T.
S.S. <u>Carola</u>	(ex-Italian <u>Corso Fougier</u> )	1,348 G.R.T.
Coaster - <u>Celsius</u>		250 G.R.T.
1 "F" Lighter		6,400 G.R.T.
	<u>Total</u>	<u>11,422 G.R.T.</u>

/Escort Vessels

(1) Air H.Q. E. Med. O.R.Bs: Aegean Shipping Review, in R.A.F. E. Med. Air Staff O.R.B. appendices: PG/46162 and PG/46067 Series at F.D.S./Admty.

(2) R.A.F. E. Med. O.R.B. appendices: Air H.Q. E. Med. No. 247 Group O.R.Bs and appendices: information from F.D.S./Admty.

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Escort Vessels:-

Destroyer <u>T.A.14</u>	ex-Italian <u>Turbine</u>
Torpedo boat <u>T.A.19</u>	" <u>Galatafini</u>
Torpedo boat <u>T.A.17</u>	" <u>San Martino</u>
2 R-boats,	

The convoy, as two sightings by aircraft on the 12th proved, steered a devious course across the Central Aegean, passing Kea (Zea) and Patmos, beyond the range of any sizeable force from Cyrenaica. It was photographed entering Port Laki (Leros) at 0700 hours on 13 June. S.S. Carola began unloading at once; the others kept their hatches closed; Rhodes was their destination.

(1)  
Fourteen Baltimores moved to Nicosia (Cyprus) to prepare to attack. On the night 14/15 June, two Beaufighters (2) sighted S.S. Agathe and her escort 5 miles S.W. of Kos, but were chased off by two Me.109s. Ten Beaufighters despatched to attack the convoy were forced back by stormy weather. The next morning - 15 June - 12 of No. 15 Squadron's Baltimores, covered by ten Mustangs and four Spitfires, made an unsuccessful attack on the convoy when it was 2 miles West of Villa Nuova (Rhodes). A later attack by twelve more escorted Baltimores had no better luck. S.S. Agathe seemed to bear a charmed life, for repeated attacks over the next four days and nights on her as she lay unloading proved fruitless.

S.S. Anita left Port Laki (Leros) on the night 20/21 June, escorted by two R-boats, and, on reaching the Commercial Port of Rhodes, began to unload. In spite of five attacks by R.A.A.F. Venturas (3) and three by Wellingtons, (4) S.S. Agathe slipped out of harbour on the night 2/3 July, with an escort.

- 
- (1) No. 15 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron.
  - (2) No. 603 Squadron.
  - (3) No. 459 Squadron.
  - (4) No. 38 Squadron.

Destruction of S.S. Agathe by Beaufighters (2/3 July 44) (1)

S.S. Agathe (2) and S.S. Anita (3) escorted by three R-boats and two mine-sweeping cutters, were observed by a night Beaufighter outside Rhodes late in the evening of 2/3 July. Shortly before midnight, a small force of Beaufighters from R.A.F. Station Matruh responded to the sighting report by proceeding to the area north-west of Rhodes. They set S.S. Agathe on fire from stem to stern with rocket projectiles and cannon fire and sank her. S.S. Anita escaped, sheltered in Piskopi and re-appeared in Leros on the 4th.

Destruction of S.S. Anita by Submarine (10 July 44) (4)

S.S. Anita sailed on the evening of 5 July from Leros to Khios and survived an attack by four Wellingtons south of Khios. H.M. Submarine Vox was ordered to patrol off the eastern side of Steno Pass (between Andros and Tinos) through which it was expected originally S.S. Anita would proceed from Leros to Piraeus. Vox left the area on learning from air reconnaissance that S.S. Anita was in Khios, but had to wait until 10 July for a sighting. At 0900 hours, S.S. Anita, escorted by three R-boats, who were weaving about, and by aircraft, approached the Pass from the north, hugging the coast. Vox torpedoed S.S. Anita at 1000 hours. At 1100 hours, she saw S.S. Anita beached. At dawn on the 11th, there was wreckage and oil drums, but no signs of S.S. Anita, who had slipped off into deep water and sank.

Destruction of the last Refrigerator Ship by Submarine (14 July 44) (5)

H.M. submarine Vivid patrolling in the Nisero area for interception ~~off~~ of Leros - Rhodes traffic, while the raid on Symi of 13 to 15 July was being carried out, was ordered to examine Livadia Bay on the island of Piskopi daily, as it was believed to be used as a staging point. At 1000 hours on 14 July, Vivid arrived off the bay to find it occupied by S.S. Suzanne and one U.J. anti-submarine boat. In spite of a head-on attack by the U.J. boat, Vivid torpedoed and sank S.S. Suzanne (552 G.R.T.) the only remaining refrigerator ship in the Aegean.

/Allied Submarine .....

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- (1) Ibid.
  - (2) 1,259 G.R.T.
  - (3) 1,165 G.R.T.
  - (4) Admiralty C.B.3306(2)
  - (5) Ibid.

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← Allied Submarine Successes in the Aegean  
(January to August 1944) (1)

While this account must continue to concentrate on air policy and operations, the contribution to the Allied effort made by submarines must be borne in mind. In addition to a large, although undetermined number of German-operated raigues of tonnages ranging from 30 to 200 tons sunk by them in the first eight months of 1944, there must be added the five important transports named in the footnote<sup>(2)</sup>. At the time and under the conditions ruling, as has already been demonstrated, the value of this contribution in the campaign against the island convoys cannot be over-estimated.

(1) Detailed records of Allied submarine operations in the Mediterranean may be found in the Naval Staff History Second World War - Submarines Vol. II 1955 (Admly CB.3306(2)).

Date	Submarine	Area	Name	Nationality	Tonnage
8 Feb.	<u>Sportsman</u>	Crete	<u>Petrella</u> (ex-It. Cape Pino)	Germ. ex It.	4,785
28 Apl.	<u>Sportsman</u>	Crete	<u>Luneburg</u> (ex-Fr. Luxembourg) (ex-Greek C. Louloudis)	Germ. ex Fr. ex Gk.	4,697
9 June	<u>Vivid</u>	Aegean	<u>Tanaïs</u>	Ger. ex Gk.	1,545
10 July	<u>Vox</u>	Aegean	<u>Anita</u> (ex Maria Nomikou ex Arezzo - It)	Ger. ex Gk ex It.	1,165
14 July	<u>Vivid</u>	<sup>e</sup> Aegean	<u>Suzanne</u> (ex San Juan II)	Ger. ex Span.	552

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The German Caiques Contribution to Island Supply  
in mid-1944 (1)

At the end of March, the caique force was augmented and formed into the 4th and 5th Transport Flotillas. As the larger cargo ships were progressively sunk and weather conditions improved, this force played an increasingly significant part in the supply of the islands. During June, which had begun disastrously with the destruction of the Gertrud "First of June" convoy at Gaidia, they landed 57.7 per cent of the 3,935 tons of supplies for Crete and 15 per cent of the 6,433 tons of cargo for the Dodecanese. Their contribution to Crete was important, for the run was very sensitive to air attack. It was less important in the case of the Dodecanese, for the Germans found, owing to the extreme range from Allied air bases, no problem in the passage of convoys as far as Port Laki (Leros). The situation at the end of June was satisfactory; the estimated transport performance for Crete had been almost attained and that for the Dodecanese exceeded.

Future prospects, however, were far from encouraging. The total strength was only 31 caiques of 4,000 deadweight tons. <sup>(2)</sup> These might accomplish each one and one-half round trips monthly and carry 1,500 tons to Crete, although in face of the increasing awareness of Allied aircraft and submarines of the German routes and vessels employed, this was an optimistic forecast, even if the hoped-for strength of 43 for July were attained. At the actual rate of casualties to the larger cargo vessels, there would soon be few or none of them left. Larger caiques would have to be replaced by smaller ones and the turnover would drop. To continue supplying Crete, caiques would have to be taken off the Dodecanese run. There were, of course, three fresh K.T. ships. There were plans for the construction conversion or supply of about 100 small naval craft <sup>(3)</sup> during the succeeding months, but so great did Admiral Aegean consider the Allied threat by air, submarine and raiding parties that he called for transport submarines. Four of these - U.J.4, U.J.5, U.J.6 and Beilul - were nearly ready in Italian yards. They, he considered, were the only safe guarantee of continuing indefinitely that build-up of reserves he considered essential to a state of preparedness for the certain, ultimate Allied offensive.

/The Super .....

(1) Admiral Aegean war diary (PG/46162 series F.D.S./Admty).

(2) Or 2,000 "Aegean" tons.

(3) 9 naval ferry barges (M.F.P's), 28 naval supply barges, 17 naval gun barges, 38 Siebel ferries and 10 transports.

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The Super-Caique Doga attacked by Aircraft and sunk by Submarines <sup>(1)</sup>

On 27 July, the big caique Doga, an old hand at long-distance runs, had been switched from the Dodecanese route to the passage to Crete in company with the small tanker Dresden <sup>and</sup> escorted by R.34. At 2230 hours, four Wellingtons of No. 38 Squadron on armed reconnaissance came on the convoy under a low moon in uncertain light and rough weather in a position about 52 miles north of Ganea (Crete). Three aircraft attacked in the light of flares at intervals, but the only observation recorded suggesting a hit was of a large flash and a column of smoke. German naval records do not admit any damage from the attacks.

At 0130 hours, the Dresden and R.34 were out of sight of the Doga. Their search for her was broken off because of bad weather and they headed south. At 0300 hours on 27 June, gunfire and explosions were heard over the horizon.

At 2300 hours on 26 July, H.M. submarine Virtue <sup>patrolling</sup> in an area off Melos Island <sup>(2)</sup> when she sighted the Doga, Dresden and R.34 silhouetted in the light of No. 38 Squadron's flares. She fired four torpedoes in a rough sea, but all of them missed. <sup>(3)</sup>

H.M. submarine Vigorous <sup>(4)</sup> arrived on the 26th off Suda Bay (Crete) to patrol. On the point of attacking a caique convoy, she was depth charged by aircraft and forced to break off. Shortly after 0100 hours on the 27th, the Doga was sighted, following a radar contact and the sighting of flares and explosions to the northward, where the Wellingtons were attacking. Doga, who was subsequently found to be extremely well armed, was attacked with the guns and heavily hit. There was no opposition and the crew were seen to abandon ship. Vigorous, in attempting to board in a strong wind and rough sea, got foul of the caique and sustained damage, whereupon she hauled off, fired again and left Doga on fire and sinking. With her went down 400 tons of provisions, ammunition and equipment, 8 Germans and 2 Greeks. The loss was deeply regretted by the Germans, who were unlikely to be able to replace her or her cargo.

(1) No. 38 Squadron, R.A.F. M.E. and Air H.Q. E.Med. O.R.Bs and appendices; PG/46162 series (F.D.S/Admty); Admiralty C.B.3306(2).

(2) In error owing to a mistake in decoding a signal.

(3) Admiralty C.B.3306(2).

(4) Ibid.

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Air Operations in August

(1)

Because of the reduction in squadron strength the whole effort of Air H.Q. Eastern Mediterranean lacked weight and effectiveness. The balance of its forces had been seriously disturbed, the squadrons needed a break after the intensive operations of June and July and there were very few large enemy merchantmen left within range. Ships of heavy tonnage now operated exclusively in the Northern Aegean.

R.A.F. Station Gambut, shorn of the support of its Nos. 15 and 24 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron, turned the rest of its force to training for one-half of the month, its total operations were only one-half those for July. In the last week of the month, the two day squadrons joined in a hunt for a U-boat operating off the Cyrenaican Hump, which had torpedoed a merchantman. In the last three nights of the month, their intruders patrolled for air transports reported to be operating between Crete and Athens, but they claimed no concrete results.

R.A.F. Station Berka, although it lost Nos. 227 R.A.F. and No. 16 S.A.A.F. Squadrons, had more squadrons in reserve than Gambut and benefited to a small degree by the effort from the 20th onward of the newcomers in No. 459 R.A.A.F. Baltimore Squadron; but even then, the total sorties for the month were only 197 as against 313 for July.

S.S. Carola (the largest merchantman operating in the South Aegean) and the three K.T. ships were closely followed by Air Intelligence and photographed at points on the Crete and Rhodes runs, but the only possible attacks on major transports by Beaufighters on the nights 6/7th and 30/31st North of Candia - achieved nothing. The work of No. 38 Squadron's night Wellingtons did not go entirely unrewarded. On the night 10/11th, two of their Wellingtons searched the Melos - Suda route. One of them sank the naval R. 34, a minesweeping escort, about 30 miles North of Suda, but failed to return to base. A German book on wartime shipping losses compiled by Herr Groner <sup>(2)</sup> since the end of the war records that the aircraft crashed on to R. 34, sinking her, so aggravating the German escort vessel shortage.

/The

- (1) R.A.F. Stations Berka and Gambut and No. 38 Squadron O.R.Bs.  
 (2) A.H.B. copy.

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The most noteworthy operation by the new Baltimore squadron (No. 459) was undertaken on the 20th. Six Baltimores from Berka, escorted by eight Spitfires (1) were airborne to attack a radar station at Leonda (Crete) with the object of bringing the Me.109s based on Kastelli Pediada to action: but the station was not located and no Me.109s were seen. The full significance of the fighters on Crete was not yet understood.

The only important success which fell to our submarines was the sinking of the Italian torpedo boat Galatafimi (T.A.19) by the Greek submarine Pipinos on 9 August.

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(1) No. 94 Squadron at Savoia airfield.

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Air Strength and Effort and Counter-Air Operations

(1)

Progressive Reduction of Allied Air Strength

As 1944 passed, the pressure of events in North-Western Europe, the Central Mediterranean, Turkey and Yugoslavia was increasingly felt in the Middle East. It was very unfortunate for Air H.Q. Eastern Mediterranean that just as they were getting the measure of the Germans they should be again stripped of some of their most valuable squadrons and their effort be consequently hamstrung: but as over-all strategy dictated a standstill in their area, there was nothing more they could do.

After March, when most of the single-engined fighters had gone, a two months' respite followed. In June, a Marauder squadron went. In July, the axe fell heavily: two Baltimore, two Beaufighter, one Mustang and one Spitfire squadron left to reinforce the Central Mediterranean: two South African Liberator squadrons were trained in the Middle East and transferred to Italy. (2) In August, the Air Ministry decided to recommence a limited supply of aircraft to Turkey, who broke off economic and diplomatic relations with Germany at midnight on 2 August. This led to the earmarking of 36 Spitfires and 48 Baltimore aircraft and quenched any hopes of sustaining the anti-shipping campaign.

The position on 1 August of the air units responsible for offensive maritime operations (3) can be seen from the footnote as inadequate to conduct any decisive

(1) R.A.F. M.E./C.M.S.O. O.R.Bs.

(2) Refer to correspondence in Appendices A.180, 185 etc. of R.A.F. M.E. O.R.Bs for July 44, where it is reported that the C.-in-C. Mediterranean was opposed to the reductions in air offensive operations in the Aegean and the Air C.-in-C. Middle East deeply regretted the loss of his squadrons.

(3)

Unit	Aircraft	Location	Serviceable Aircraft 27/7
<u>R.A.F. Station Gambut</u>			
No. 603 Sqn. (LRF)	Beaufighter X	Gambut 3	3
No. 252 Sqn. (TEF)	Beaufighter X (R.P.)	Gambut 3	9
<u>R.A.F. Berka</u>			
No. 38 Sqn. (GR/LR)	Wellington XIII	Berka 3	12
No. 459 Sqn. (GR/LR)	Baltimore IV/V	Berka 3	12
No. 46 Sqn. (NF/TEF)	Beaufighter VI	Edeu & Det. St. Jean	14
No. 9 Sqn. (SEF)	Spitfire V/IX	(Gamil & Dets. St. Jean ( and Lakatamia	20
No. 10 Sqn. (SEF)	Spitfire Vb/Vc	Edeu & Det. Matruh	18

/ series

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series of operations against the elaborate German naval organization. What they could and did <sup>do</sup> was to render the state of balance precarious for the Germans, ensure that <sup>their</sup> ~~there~~ hold was nowhere entirely secure, that reserves were nowhere at a safe level and that a high price was paid for any rash block movement of material.

The Rise and Fall of Allied Air Effort (February to 31 July 1944) (1)

The pattern of the growth and decline of Air H.Q. Eastern Mediterranean and the changes of emphasis in its operations between 1 Feb. 44, the date of its creation, and 31 July, 44, when it had been reduced to little more than a token force, are clearly defined by study of a monthly analysis of sorties against operational tasks.

After the back of the U-boat flotilla had been broken in May, convoy escort, U-boat hunts and independent anti-submarine patrols fell, although since there <sup>were</sup> always <sup>one or</sup> ~~was~~ two ~~ex-three~~ U-boats available for operation at Salamis, escort and patrols continued, albeit on a low scale.

Short-range fighter protection of convoys, which demanded 1479 sorties in February, was never again possible on that scale after the loss of the major part of the fighter forces: it fell in harmony with that loss, and with the diminution of the threat from German aircraft, to 616 in April, 467 in June and 259 in July. Long-range fighter fighter protection fell in sympathy from 212 sorties in February to 43 in July.

There is a sharp contrast when the anti-shipping campaign effort is examined, for the main effort was directed here. Shipping reconnaissance, after falling to 47 sorties in March and April, rallied to 136 in May; but the reduction of forces reduced the effort and in July it was only 19 sorties. Fighter sweeps by single aircraft or small formation, after fluctuating between 70 and 25 up to the end of June reached the record figure of 221 sorties in July. This effort compensated to some extent for the drop in shipping strikes due to lack of bomber aircraft. The shipping strike <sup>effort</sup> began well in February with 167 sorties. With

<sup>/fewer</sup>  
(1) For full monthly analysis of sorties by aircraft of Air H.Q. E. Mediterranean consult Appendix 40 to this volume.

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few aircraft and handicapped by bad weather, only 62 strike sorties were flown in March. But from early April, with a clearer picture of the pattern of German supply targets <sup>ing</sup> emergency, the effort rose to 164 sorties. In May, the figure was 211 and in June, with convoy attacks the main preoccupation, it reached 407 sorties. In July, with seriously reduced forces, the command did well to achieve 182 sorties on strikes.

Most of the German Air Force offensive effort consisted in reconnaissance flights over Egyptian and Levant area ports and the Cyrenaican coastline, the Egypt-Malta shipping route and the escort of convoys. The R.A.F. Middle East met their standing commitments over this wide area with fighter defense and, when enemy convoys were within range, accompanied bomber formations sent to attack them. This effort consumed no less than 244 sorties in February; after falling somewhat over the following three months, it was back to 254 in June; but, with depleted forces, fell to 126 in July.

Minelaying has already been touched on. A dozen or more sorties were usually carried out monthly. Air/Sea rescue absorbed 449 sorties over the seven months under review and this was considered a good investment. The only other activity of operational significance not already dealt with is the operation of night intruder aircraft and attacks on enemy airfields. Intruders alone absorbed a total of 376 sorties, declining monthly to 44 in July from 112 in March.

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SECRETAttacks on German Airfields and Intruder Operations (January to July 1944) (1)

Small though the German Air Force was in 1944 in Greece, Crete and the Dodecanese, it remained a cardinal point in Allied air policy to take the most vigorous possible action against it on its bases. (2) Left unchecked, it might have got out of hand, increased its convoy cover and interfered with Allied submarines and raiding forces. It was in the second quarter of 1944 that the Middle East air forces began in earnest, although on a modest scale, to pay attention to airfields on Crete and Rhodes: In April, (as the footnote indicates) the offensive against the Cretan bases opened on the night of the 2nd/3rd with a small attack by five Wellingtons on Maleme: it was followed by another on the night 19th/20th by 12 Wellingtons. On the 20th, came the first attack on Kastelli Pidiada (Crete): this was by twelve S.A.A.F. Mitchells escorted by twelve Spitfires.

On 11 April, activity had been noticed on a new strip on the island of Paros. Here was a useful staging and refuelling point for convoy and escort fighters. It was attacked on 20 and 25 April by four Beaufighters on each occasion. A third attack on 7 May concentrated on the fuel dumps near Marmara Bay, reporting explosions and smoke. Paros was not attacked again until June. On the nights 2/3 (two aircraft), 4/5 (eight aircraft) and 7/8 June (1 aircraft), it was bombed and does not seem to have functioned afterwards to any effect. In the absence of any admission of losses, (3) it may be safely considered that

/the

(1) A.H.Q., E.Mediterranean and R.A.F. M.E. O.R.Bs.

(2) Air attacks (by more than 2 aircraft) on Greek and Aegean airfields 1944

Jan. - Nil.

Feb. Galato (Rhodes), 11th - 6 a/c. 11/12th - 3 a/c.

Mar. Nil.

Apr. Kastelli (Crete) 20th - 12 a/c. Maleme (Crete) 2/3rd - 5 a/c. 19/20th - 12 a/c.

May Herakleion 31st/1st June - 9 a/c. Kastelli 6/7th - 4 a/c. 8/9th - 4 a/c. 20th - 3 a/c. 31/1st June - 10 a/c. Maleme 4th - 8 a/c. 7/8th - 12 a/c. 8/9th - 4 a/c. 12th - 15 a/c. 21st - 24 a/c.

June Galato 7/8th - 5 a/c. Paros 4/5th - 8 a/c.

July Galato 13/14th - 15 a/c. 14/15th - 8 a/c. (Op. Tenement) Kastelli 22/23rd )  
Maleme 8th - 12 a/c. Maritza (Rhodes) 14/15th - 12 a/c. (Op. Tenement). (8 a/c. )

Aug. Nil.

(3) German Air Force records of the South East Command for the period surviving are incomplete. (A.H.B.6).

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the Germans found it too exposed for the air forces they were husbanding so carefully.

During April and May, months of meagre air transport activity by the Germans, up to 60 Beaufighters in a week intruded over Crete, Rhodes and Kos, on the watch for stray aircraft, but the tangible results seemed poor.

A new aircraft appeared in the Mediterranean on 3 Apr. when five high-altitude Ju.188s were photographed on Kalamaki airfield on the mainland. The first visual sighting of a Ju.188 in flight was obtained by a Mosquito, who reported seeing one at 16,000 feet. Although these pressurised reconnaissance aircraft did not go entirely unscathed they gave the Germans a rough idea of Allied movements. But as time passed, even this effort declined to a point at which it was only a gesture.

During July, Beaufighter intruders in small formations intruded at night in the Kos - Leros - Rhodes area, but beyond the deterrent effect of their effort, there was little to point to in the way of results. It would have needed a far wider pattern of effort to have effectively hampered the movements of the German Air Force.

It was not often that Allied aircraft caught a concentration of German aircraft, for these moved with great rapidity from field to field to meet fortuitous problems. In the first week of July, probably stung by the pinpricks of Allied air intruder attacks on local radar stations, a small force of Me.109s collected on Crete. On 8 July, 12 Baltimores of No. 15 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron, escorted by Spitfires (No. 94 Squadron) attacked Maleme (Crete) airfields. After seeing their bombs burst, they turned back towards Gavdos Island and base and were met by some eight Me.109s. The Spitfires engaged them, claiming the destruction of two Me.109s at the cost of only slight damage to themselves. Next day, aircraft (of No. 680 or 454 Squadron) photographed 11 Me.109s on Crete fields. On 10 July, a similar formation of Baltimores, escorted like the last by

/Spitfires,

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Spitfires, attacked Kastelli Pediada airfield, hitting the runway; but no fighters intercepted them. (1) Soon afterwards, thirteen single-engined fighters were photographed on Kastelli. Eight Wellingtons of No. 38 Squadron attacked the airfield on the night of 22/23 July with apparent damage to the runway and a large explosion.

The big reduction in air forces in July enforced a drastic curtailment of operations in August and there is no record of any counter-air ~~force~~ operations whatever for that month.

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(1) R.A.F. Station Gambut, A.H.B. E.Med. and R.A.F. M.E. O.R.Es.

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SECRETThe Effects of Allied Operations on the German System

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Introduction

The period from January to August 1944 was, then, marked by intensive Allied effort: highly specialised forms of air and naval warfare were developed, although the forces engaged were not massive. The Allied reconnaissance and shipping strike forces showed steady improvement in methods and, although with weakened forces could not claim to have mastered the problem of small enemy ships, did bring about a precarious situation in the German system and reduce their hold on the Aegean to extremest tenuity. When the Germans decided to evacuate, the southern flank, lacking military stability, collapsed. Nevertheless, the success of the Germans in holding and maintaining an important strategic area for so long without local air superiority remains a remarkable achievement: the methods they employed cannot therefore fail to be worthy of study. It only remains now there, to examine briefly the testimony of the records of Admiral Aegean and Naval Command South. The periods chosen - the end of February, early June and late August - represent stages when the effects of Allied pressure were most significant.

The Situation at the End of February 1944 (1)

February 1944 was one of the worst months for Aegean shipping during the German occupation. A run of misfortune led to the loss of several major cargo ships and seventeen caiques. Supplies delivered fell far short of requirements. There were still 14,365 prisoners-of-war to be evacuated. Some harbours might have to be destroyed, although all were valuable as refuges against air attack and reconnaissance. The plan to bring two cargo vessels in from the Adriatic failed. Routes, harbours, composition of convoys and names of ships were becoming increasingly familiar to Allied Air Intelligence. Although the northern route to the Dodecanese from Piraeus along the 38th parallel had not so far been compromised, Crete waters were wide open to Allied aircraft. The German Air Force, greatly reduced in numbers, could not hope to meet all its commitments, although the use of transport aircraft might offset partially the shortage of ships.

/On

- 
- (1) PG/46162 and PG/46067 series (F.D.S./Admty).  
 (2) Ibid.

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On the other hand, great hopes were placed on long-term plans for the supply, construction and conversion of a large number of small craft. The Germans had, since the evacuation of Sicily and Corsica, come to pin great faith in their possibilities, and, in the event, their faith proved well-founded. But at the end of February, the immediate outlook was tinged with pessimism. The next three months were to be the time of testing, the melting pot into which the antagonists were to throw their best endeavours. They would show whether the Germans still possessed their old resilience, whether they could keep pace with Allied science and enterprise and produce counter-tactics to each new hostile measure in a theatre with a few parallels for territorial complexity.

#### The Situation in early June (1)

Following a week of unusually bad weather at the end of May which confined many merchant ships and naval vessels to port, came the disaster of the "First of June" convoy. (2) This led to a wholesale German revaluation of the situation. It was the last and worst of a series of well planned operations that had highlighted all the weaknesses of the German position - lack of air and surface escorts, big ships and safe routes.

In January 1944, the total tonnage of merchant shipping in the Aegean was 50,000 G.R.T., of which 40,000 G.R.T. was under repair; coastal defences were primitive and naval forces at a low ebb. On 5 May, there were 26 ships with an aggregate tonnage of 34,000 G.R.T. at the disposal of Admiral Aegean, and of these, 16 ships with an aggregate tonnage of 15,000 G.R.T. were seaworthy: coastal defences had been much improved and the naval strength was increasing satisfactorily. On 5 June, the merchant shipping available for island supply traffic (excluding caiques) had shrunk to:-

/4 serviceable ...

(1) FG/46162 series (F.D.S./Admlty).

(2) 2 transports, 1 torpedo boat and 2 anti-submarine vessels sunk by aircraft and 1 transport sunk by submarine.

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4 serviceable ships of over 1,000 tons	=	7,100 deadweight tons. (1)
10 " " " less than 1,000 tons	=	4,300
3 armed (K.T.) transports	}	from Black Sea = 4,690 " "
1 steamship		
9 coasters.		
	<u>Total</u>	<u>16,090</u> " " (or <u>10,500</u> Aegean tons).

and circa 30 caiques.

The available aircraft on 31 May were listed as:-

8 reconnaissance  
14 fighters  
16 defence  
103 transport  
5 air/sea rescue  
9 minespotting  
2 night fighters.

Total 157 aircraft.

The <sup>Lesson</sup> ~~loss~~ of the "First of June" Crete convoy was that large convoys were not expedient, for they invited the Allies to concentrate strong air formations, employing tactics (such as anti-flak manoeuvres and rocket projectiles) new to the Aegean and highly effective both at sea and in harbour. The German anti-aircraft and air defences <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ inadequate to deal with the attacks then being organized with increasing thoroughness.

#### New German Naval Policy (2)

Convoys were to be made inconspicuous from the air. Steamships were to be sailed with two or three escort vessels, coasters and caiques with German crews in pairs without escort on a zigzag course, and Greek caiques in groups of three to four, each group escorted by a patrol vessel. For this plan to work, there must be permanent close fighter escort for steamship convoys, fighter patrols for small convoys and fighter cover over harbours (a hope destined to be unrealised).

Surface escorts were a problem, for there were at the moment only three torpedo boats (all damaged), one anti-submarine vessel and five motor mine-sweepers. The <sup>three</sup> K.T. ships and two more anti-submarine vessels were to join the strength in June.

The ideal solution, given adequate air cover, would be one hundred caiques or naval ferry barges (3). At the time, there were only thirty suitable caiques and three naval ferry barges. The Italian and Black Sea theatres both had sixty or more naval ferry barges (the best type of all), whereas, even by autumn, the Aegean could only expect another nine. The building programme was ambitious,

/but

(1) Deadweight tonnage = the total lifting capacity of a vessel, expressed in tons of 2,240 pounds.

(2) PG/46162 series (F.D.S./Admiralty)

(3) Siebel ferries were too slow and unsatisfactory.

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but if the Allies bombed the shipyards at Piraeus and Salonika (1) the losses might bring about a crisis and perhaps bring the supply traffic to a standstill. Fortunately for the Germans, Allied <sup>plans</sup> insight did not extend to such profitable targets until it was too late.

The Mounting Fuel Crisis (2)

Until the end of April, a high proportion of oil fuel supplies for the Aegean passed in tankers through the Dardanelles. None passed in May. At the end of the month this routine traffic was stopped by order of Admiral Deenitz and under the compulsion of the political situation. This was by no means the only cause of the fuel crisis prevalent all over the area in mid-summer 1944. Tankers such as the Centaur had been lost at sea or sunk by Allied action and consignments of petrol in bulk had gone down with the other cargo on vessels and craft destroyed by aircraft and submarines.

In mid-April, the effect of strategic air attacks on Balkan centres such as Belgrade, Sofia and Ploesti was being felt. <sup>Matters</sup> ~~we~~ could hardly improve until a new bridge had been built over the Save River at Belgrade - a two months' task. These area attacks, in turn, aggravated the over-all fuel shortage which had been creeping up for some time past because of the U.S. Army Air Force's concentrated attacks on oil production. Only three trainloads of fuel oil from Rumania reached Greece in May.

Admiral Aegean was not getting his full supplies of B4 (high octane aviation spirit) for his Siebel ferries. On 16 May, Naval Groups South informed him that damage to oil wells in Rumania and refineries in Germany enforced an immediate reduction in supplies to the Navy; strict economy was enforced. Torpedo boats could no longer be used for transporting troops; after urgent representations in the interest of essential island supplies, he was allowed 150 tons of B4 for his Siebel ferries. Supplies to shore establishments were cut by 20 per cent. 1391 tons of fuel oil was lost in the "First of June" convoy. ~~An~~ <sup>the</sup> organisation crippled by fuel shortage could only have a limited life-span in face of an enemy who had no such problem.

- 
- (1) Where ferry boats and barges were built.  
 (2) PG/46162 and PG/46067 series (F.D.S./Admlty).

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Shipping held up by Allied minelaying (1)

The Allied air minelaying programme proved by 18 April to have achieved positive results in holding up shipping in frequented waters. The position was as follows: the Paros-Naxos passage had been closed since 4 Dec. 43, Kalymnos harbour since 12 Jan. 44, Mudros Bay (Lemnos) since 15 Feb. 44, Rhodes harbour since 31 Mar. 44, Syros harbour since 2 Apr. 44 and Steno and Burji Channels (Khalkis) since 6 Apr. 44. Suda Bay (Crete), closed on 16 Mar. 44, had been re-opened to small ships on 20 Mar. 44, but was still closed to large ships without anti-mine escort. In early June, the sea-bed at Kos was being searched by Greek fishermen for mines. In spite of all this, the Germans' general situation appeared to their authorities to be improving. The restrictions imposed by this aerial minelaying must be noted however. It was not in itself, any more than was any other specific form of Allied offensive activity, sufficient ~~in itself~~ to force a decision: what was important was the combined effect of them all on the German system.

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(1) PG/46162 series (F.D.S./Admty).

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Allied Raids on Aegean Islands

Raiding was recommenced in January 1944 in earnest. In the first quarter of the year, thirty-seven raids were carried out on twenty-one different islands. During these operations seventeen German-controlled caiques were captured. As this number represented about half the number in commission during that period, it will be understood, bearing in mind the chronic need of the enemy for small craft, that the results were materially worthwhile.

The work continued until late August. A number of representative operations are listed below.

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(1) January: 9th - M.L.'s sank 2 caiques S.W. of Syml. 12th - 13th - M.T.B's sank a schooner in Piskopi. 20th - Special operations ("Coastguard") on Crete. February and March: "Fire-Eater" series of raids on islands. In March, units of the Greek Sacred Squadron joined in raids from Mitylene in the North to Syml in the South and as far West as Nikaria. April: Epirus and Peloponnese, Crete, Cyclades. May: Charki, Paros, Naxos, Samos etc. June: Coastal forces were handicapped by maintenance difficulties and a number of M.T.B's were in bad shape. M.L.'s operated in the extreme northern sector (area 3), patrolling the Mitylene - Khios area on anti-shipping sweeps, landing raiding patrols etc. July: 13th to 15th - Raid on Syml (Operation "Tenement"). August: 3rd - 150,000 gallons of petrol destroyed on Crete. 6/7th - Mitylene. 17/18th - cable station on Piskopi destroyed. 26th - H.D.M.L. 1381 captured at Sirina; as signal books were probably compromised, all patrols were recalled to base.

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(1)

German Minelaying in the Aegean.

Among the measures decided on by the Germans for the defence of the Aegean had been the mining of waters likely to be used by Allied surface craft and submarines. These measures continued all through to August 1944. In addition to the laying of shallow minefields off the Gulf of Attica, Suda, Candia, Syros, <sup>and</sup> the Gulf of Salonika, the Sporades were closed with mines and minesweeping activity pursued without respite.

Shipping held up by Allied minelaying (1) (2)

The Allied air minelaying programme, although inconspicuous, proved by 18 April to have achieved certain positive results <sup>in</sup> holding up shipping in frequented waters. The position was as follows: the Paros <sup>Naxos</sup> passage had been closed since 4 Dec. 43, Kalympes harbour since 12 Jan. 44, Mudros Bay (Lemnos) since 15 Feb. 44, Rhodes harbour since 31 Mar. 44, Syros harbour since 2 Apr. 44 and Steno and Burji Channels (Khalkis) since 6 Apr. 44. Suda Bay (Crete), closed on 16 Mar. 44, had been reopened to small ships on 20 Mar. 44, but was still closed to ~~and~~ large ships without anti-mine escort. In early June, the sea-bed at Kos was being searched by Greek fishermen for mines. In spite of all this the Germans' general situation appeared to their authorities to be improving. The restrictions imposed by this aerial minelaying must be noted however. It was not in itself, any more than was any other specific form of Allied offensive activity, sufficient in itself to force a decision: what is important to discover is the combined effect of them all on the German system. This will become more apparent when the German contemporary records are examined a little later in this account.

(1) For a chart recording these operations, refer to Plans 5 and 6 at the end of C.R. 3306(2) Admiralty.

(2) F.D.S./Admty. PG/46162 series (...)

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German Reactions to Allied Island Raids (1)

The Germans considered the efforts of the raiding forces during January and February as no more than a nuisance; but the considerable increase in Commando raids in March and April give cause for concern. A solution was rendered more difficult by the failure of the Army and Navy to agree on the extent of their responsibilities, the correct positioning of forces and the need for garrisoning small islands. On many of these small islands the Navy had set up small signals stations. Where the Army did have garrisons - some reinforced with Italian volunteers - these were invariably positioned too far inland for them to react quickly to Allied hit-and-run attacks. The Army and Naval Group Command South were both in favour of abandoning some of the smaller islands and in opposition to Admiral Aegean, who took an all-or-nothing viewpoint.

The state of disagreement was aggravated by the April raids on Mitylene, Paxos, Santorin, Mykonos and Nios, in two of which vital naval radio stations were completely destroyed. The capture and abduction of Major General Kreipe, O.C. 22nd Infantry Division on Crete at the end of April did nothing to heal the breach. After a good deal of bickering, Admiral Aegean agreed to draw on his force of about 35,000 personnel in an endeavour to build up the island garrisons, while Army Group "E" assumed responsibility for the protection of naval signals stations on islands garrisoned by the Army.

During May, Allied M.T.Bs, submarines and armed caiques were active in support of Commando raids on small islands. On the night 1/2 May, a Commando destroyed the radio station and killed the crew. Other raids were carried out on Charki, Paros, Naxos and Samos. Although recognized as not constituting a serious threat, they tied up mobile forces that had to be supplied and armed. Hitler himself believed these signals stations essential and accepted the losses. O.K.W. ordered their removal, when feasible, to high ground.

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(1) PG/46162 - and PG/46067 - series (F.D.S./Admty.)

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Attack on Allied Convoy by Italian Fascist Air Force (1)

The movements of the Italian Fascist Republican Air Force seldom gave Allied Intelligence any cause for concern, but their moves in July and August were watched with special interest. On 8 July, about 10 torpedo-carrying S.M.79s were transferred from Northern Italy to Greece. ~~That~~ <sup>They</sup> they were observed all back in Italy by the 12th. Six of them had been seen on an unsuccessful search for Allied shipping off Cyrene early on 11th July. The Germans and Italian Fascists were well aware of the presence of attractive shipping targets in the Eastern Mediterranean, on the Alexandria - Malta run, for example. It was, therefore, no surprise when, on 3 August, eight S.M.79s were photographed on Eleusis airfield.

Shortly before midnight on 4 August, an eastbound convoy was attacked North of Benghazi by two or three of these aircraft. S.S. Sansylvania was hit, but made port successfully. One of the S.M.79s was shot down by ship's anti-aircraft fire. No. 294 Wellington Squadron Detachment at Berka located the disabled vessel and so ensured safe contact thenceforward. Evidently the Italians considered the risks involved too great, for the S.M.79s were soon returned to Italy.

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(1) R.A.F. M.E. Air Staff O.R.B. appendices: R.A.F. Station Berka O.R.B.

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THE ALLIED RE-ENTRY INTO GREECE AND THE AEGEAN (SEPTEMBER TO NOVEMBER 1944)Strategic developments in the South-Eastern areaMilitary and political changes in August (1)

In early August 1944, although Russian advances had been slowed down, the German position on the southern flank was growing more insecure. The Governments of Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria were frightened and divided and the basis for effective co-operation had gone. Turkey broke off diplomatic relations with Germany on 2 August. If the Russian attack in Rumania was successful, general disintegration in the Balkans might follow. Their offensive was successful from the moment it opened on 20 August. King Michael formed a new Government and pledged loyalty to the Allies. On 25 August, Rumania declared war on Germany. German resistance broke. Galatz was occupied by the Russians on the 27th, Pleesti on the 30th, Bucharest on the 31st. On 26 August, Bulgaria withdrew from the war: but Russia declared war on her to prevent a German retreat. On 6 September, the Russians reached the Yugoslav frontier. On 9 September, Bulgaria capitulated. Within three weeks, the Russians had entirely altered the situation in south-east Europe and had opened the way to the northern frontier of Greece.

British Policy on Greece (2)

The Prime Minister, with the C.I.G.S. and the Chief of the Air Staff, visited the Mediterranean in late August to confer on the changing situation and prepare for the "Octagon" Conference, due to open on 11 September in Quebec. As regards Greece, the British faced three problems, namely, the respective action to be taken if the enemy were to shortly withdraw from, or surrender in, Greece and Yugoslavia, or so capitulate throughout south-east Europe; and, thirdly, the strategy to be followed if he did not surrender. They decided that he would withdraw.

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- (1) Official History of the Second World War. Ehrman. Grand Strategy Vol.V.  
 (2) Ibid.

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The British began to stimulate action by Greek guerillas in furtherance of their "Noah's Ark" plan, <sup>(1)</sup> although relations between the headquarters of E.L.A.S. <sup>(2)</sup> and the British Mission were bad. They decided to put British forces into Greece without delay, with the object of supporting the Royal Government as soon as it returned, restoring order and consolidating the territory behind the German retreat. Military measures to support the project were backed by the sanction given by the War Cabinet to the use of a force of 10,000 men, with some three squadrons of aircraft. <sup>(3)</sup>

On 19 August, General Maitland Wilson submitted his detailed plans, known as Operation "Manna", which included the drop of a British paratroop brigade near Athens in advance of the main force. They were approved and D Day was fixed provisionally for 11 September. The President agreed to the loan of American air transport. "Manna", it was decided, must go in without opposition and the Combined Chiefs of Staff's directive of 8 September confirmed that it must await the Germans' departure, as the forces were not available for a fresh campaign.

Early Moves:

German Decision on Partial Evacuation <sup>(4)</sup>

The German High Command came reluctantly to the decision to thin out their forces in Greece and the Islands. They never abandoned territory unless compelled to do so. Greece and the Aegean had proved favourable to defence by forces deprived of air superiority. Even if driven to partial evacuation, they could still see some advantage to themselves. They believed, with reason, that there were differences between the Western Allies and the Russians on the future of the whole area, that Russia would, with Rumania (and perhaps Bulgaria) out of the war, forestall the Western Allies by advancing on Greece and the Aegean. The Germans might then obtain the tacit assent of the Russians for a German re-deployment of forces in Western Greece and Yugoslavia, so as to form a barrier to possible British movements from Italy. Furthermore, the integrity of Greek soil was as yet unimpaired. Notwithstanding the attraction of these considerations, there was no ignoring the fact that the Russian threat to their

/Bulgarian

(1) Assembled in April 1944.

(2) Commanding the guerilla forces of the powerful Republican movement E.A.M.

(3) War Cabinet J.P(44)218(Final) 28.8.44 (A.H.B.1D5/226/1 - unnumbered enclosure.

(4) Admiral Aegean war diary; Räumung Aege's and Deutsche Kriegsführung Schwarzes Meer (Balkan) (all at Foreign Docs. Sec./Admiralty): Ehrman, Grand Strategy. Vol.VI. H.M.S.O.

Bulgarian and Thracian flank was a reality. The High Command and the whole south-eastern theatre were very much on the alert in late August.

It was true, as Allied Air Intelligence pointed out in mid-August, that the movements of infantry landing craft were always a sign of German tension, but what they saw, in the third week as abnormal shipping movements were preliminary dispositions before the receipt of a directive from the highest levels. The evolution of the final decision on the Aegean proceeded on the following lines.

As early as 24 August, Admiral Aegean, always realistic, asked whether the supply of the islands was still justifiable: he was told to continue with the policy of supply until the Generals Commanding Army Groups E and F had returned from a conference with Hitler. On the same day it was announced that the 117th Jaeger Division was probably to be moved out of the Peloponnese.<sup>(1)</sup> The Sea Defence Commandant Peloponnese suggested a general retirement eastwards to the Gulf of Corinth. Admiral Aegean, determined to waste no time, prepared to transfer his own personnel office back to Germany.

By 27 August, Hitler's decisions were made known in a directive.<sup>(2)</sup> Owing to the threat from Bulgarian territory to his area and the Thracian coast, it was essential that the Supreme Commander South-East should hold the Central Balkans, keeping open the vital lines of communication to and from the South-East area. Evacuation of the Ionian and Aegean islands, coastal areas and big harbours south of a line Corfu - Jannina - Kalabe - Olympus<sup>(3)</sup> was to be initiated. All redundant German, Volksdeutscher and Italian units were to be withdrawn. Only essential supplies were to be moved south of the Salonika line. All redundant airfields south of the general line Corfu - Olympus, as well as Navy installations in evacuated areas, were to be demolished.

Execution of the plan was not long delayed. The same day, arrangements were made for shipment of Army equipment from Crete, air lift for troops and the move of a division from the Peloponnese. Patras was warned the next day - 28th - to stop all sea supply operations but the most urgent. Admiral Aegean prepared for a move back of the main defence line in stages, protection for the roads to Corinth and Patras, a partial evacuation of Crete by air and surface craft transport and a temporary stoppage of supplies and reinforcements for the islands.

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(1) Leaving the 41st Fortress Division (not up to strength) as the only German division in the Peloponnese.

(2) Directive K.R.GWNOL/Qem.61771/78 of 27 Aug.44 (FG/32904 p.579 F.D.S./Admiralty.)

(3) Shown on G.S.G.S. maps as Kalabaka.

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By 30 September, the general tactical plan was assuming form. Greece and the islands were to be thinned out of troops and the Northern Balkans and Northern Greece strengthened to resist the Russian threat to the Belgrade - Salonika railway from Bulgarian-occupied Macedonia and the guerilla threat to Salonika from Bulgarian-occupied Thrace to the East. Ten per cent of troops on leave from the islands were to stay on the Greek mainland. Every available means of transport was to be used - aircraft, steamships, minelayers, naval surface craft, coasters, and caiques. Transport aircraft were to evacuate men and ships were to evacuate equipment. The official date for the opening of the evacuation from the south and west coasts of the Peloponnese, the Ionian islands and the Thracian area was fixed at 5 September, but the organization was in motion before that date:

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plenty of evidence was forthcoming to prove that. If there were clashes, there were to be no truce negotiations. Hitler's order to fight to the last was repeated.

The rough order of evacuation was first taken as the Ionian Islands, Crete (partially) and the Dodecanese, Mitylene and Khios Islands, the Cyclades, in that order of priority. Leros was to be the assembly point for the Dodecanese.

The thinning out of the islands was initiated within the existing pattern of convoy traffic, but it soon became necessary, because of Allied air and sea activities, to concentrate everything on the single task of evacuation.

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Allied Intelligence on the partial Evacuation

The accumulation of evidence pointing to a partial German withdrawal was unbroken, expanding in volume and conclusive. The contribution of air reconnaissance to the general volume of Intelligence was irreplaceable.

The increase in troop movements in the week ending 27 August was rightly taken to be a sign of tension. A big convoy seen in Patras<sup>(2)</sup> on the 23rd was reported to have sailed from there to Preveza (in Western Greece). The coaster Silva carried 300 German troops, all arms and equipment; and four Siebel ferries carried supplies: four I-boats (infantry landing craft) and two small vessels escorted the convoy. Some of the loaded Siebel ferries were seen arriving on the 25th in Preveza. Considerable activity was photographed and seen in the Kyklades Islands. Five I-boats had arrived in Syros by the 21st and four of these were in Melos on the 25th. These craft usually figured in troop movements. There were many caique sailings. Twelve newly assembled launches 45 to 50 feet long arrived in Piraeus on the 20th. The hospital ship Gradisca was reported to have loaded fit troops, as well as wounded, on 26 August at Rhodes. There was a considerable stir among vessels under 1,000 tons.

At this juncture, evidence affecting Greece began to come in from a new quarter, namely from Balkan Air Force Intelligence. They noted the unusual activity in the Greek ports of the Ionian Sea in particular at Preveza, Patras, Argostolion and Zante. The idea was mooted that something more than the routine supply of the island garrisons was contemplated, <sup>and that</sup> The setting for a partial German evacuation was now complete.

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(1) R.A.F., M.E. Air Staff O.R.B. appendices August and September 44.

(2) Balkan Air Force / Air Staff O.R.B. E.Appendices.

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The Sequence of Allied Operations (September to November 1944)

It was a week after the German preliminary withdrawal operations began on 5 September that the Allied plans first found expression in accelerated action and the pattern of air, land and naval operations departed from the inconclusive form it had retained since the fall of Lerós. The major moves which followed fell under eight main headings:- namely:-

- (1) The intrusion of the Naval forces into the Southern and Northern Aegean.
- (2) Operations by aircraft based on carriers.
- (3) Anti-shipping operations by R.A.F. Middle East and submarines.
- (4) Combined air and amphibious operations against islands and the mainland.
- (5) Strategic air operations against airfields, ports and communications.
- (6) Airborne seizure of airfields.
- (7) Air operations against enemy air transport units.
- (8) The main unopposed Allied landings in Greece.

Although it was the Naval forces and the Strategic Air Force that made the first decisive moves, before long some of these engagements were proceeding simultaneously, while others fused into combined operations. So much happened in so many places that events must be related in broad chronological order under the various categories such as port and airfield bombing, carrier operations and so forth. It must be realised that it was not merely a question of following out the terms of Operation "Manna", the main and unopposed entry of Allied forces into Greece. It was a case of regaining the lost initiative, coming to close quarters with the enemy and engaging him at every possible point within the limits of our own resources, harassing his evacuation, neutralising his communications and destroying his ships, aircraft, airfields, and troops.

It is the intention at this point to enumerate briefly the various operational plans which developed in September and October. It will be correspondingly easier to retain the thread of events. The map of Greece and the Aegean given at Figure will serve throughout this record and is essential to anyone unfamiliar with the topography of the area.

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(1)

Chronological Short Table of Major Allied Operations in September and October

The following brief list of major Allied combined operations is given in chronological order, with the exception of the operations of the Naval Escort Carrier Force "A" and Force 120. It will be understood that while these operations were proceeding, the air units of R.A.F. Middle East were carrying out without remission their normal tasks of shipping strikes, reconnaissance and, as long as necessary, anti-submarine patrols. The following details present briefly the order of initial occurrences. (2)

Operation "Amplomb" was the amphibious landing on 16th September on Kythera Island with the object of establishing a naval base.

Operation "Mercerised" was the amphibious landing on the night of 22/23 September at Sarande (Albania) to accelerate the evacuation of Corfu.

Operation "Towanbucket" was an air drop on Araxos airfield in the north-western Peloponnese, supported by a naval landing at Katakolo, between 23 and 26 September, with the object of <sup>opening an air base</sup> occupying Patras, exploiting eastward and facilitating progress of the Operation "Manna" forces towards Athens when they landed.

Operation "Charlton" was an air drop on the Florina area on 6 October with the object of plugging the Florina Gap.

Operation "Manna" was carried out between 12 and 18 October. Paratroops were first dropped on Magara and later on Kalamaki airfields. A British force was landed from ships on 16 October, with the object of introducing into the Athens area forces ground and air personnel to maintain law and order, establish the Greek Government and arrange relief. It was mounted in two parts, one from Malta and the Heel of Italy ports, and the other from Alexandria.

Operation "Delivered" was a naval landing on Poros and on Aegina (or Aiyina) Island launched on 1 and 12 October respectively. It was a late development arising logically from the capture of Kythera.

The Naval Escort Carrier Force "A", formed early in September with the object of hampering the enemy evacuation, carried out its first sweep on the night 12/13 September.

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(1) The system of orthography for the spelling of Greek geographical names selected for use in this volume is the R.O.S.II system adopted by H.M. Admiralty and employed by them in all Hydrographic publications such as the Mediterranean Pilot.

(2) Fuller details of <sup>airborne</sup> air, naval, and air plans are given later.

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The Naval force 120 incorporated Force "A" and carried out carrier-borne aircraft, anti-shipping and bombardment operations in the Aegean. Naval Coastal Forces also operated.

The Plan for Operation "Aplomb", the landing on Kythera Island (1)

The original outline plan for Operation "Aplomb", as it stood on 30 August, defined its object as the destruction of the radar coast defence guns on Kythera. A small force from Taranto, protected by naval craft, was to be landed, provided with air cover for two days and then withdrawn. In its final form, it was preceded by a parachute drop on 11/12 September of a reconnaissance party, known as Operation "Geography". This party's report that Kythera Island was already evacuated moulded the ultimate form of Aplomb at a late hour. Air cover to the main landing of Foxforce was to be provided by an aircraft carrier. The troops were to stay for some time, establish an advanced base for light naval forces at Avlemon before undertaking further operations against objectives in the Saronic Gulf.

The Plan for Operation "Mercerised", the Assault on Sarande. (23 Sept.44) (2)

The evacuation of Corfu and the Ionian Islands would bring the Sarande area in Albania on the mainland, just across the frontier with Greece, into immediate prominence as a traffic hub. This amphibious operation, with important air support, was planned with the initial object of harassing the German garrison at Sarande and, by creating demolitions on the Sarande - Delvine road, <sup>of</sup> interrupting enemy communications back to his next defensive line. The capture of Sarande would, by cutting the last escape route from Corfu, force the surrender of that key island and open the road north to Valona.

Following a naval bombardment of Boroh (to coincide with an attack by Partisans) Land Forces Adriatic were to land a Commando on the night 22/23 Sept.44 with the task of capturing Sarande. Aircraft of three wings of Balkan Air Force were to take part. No. 283 Wing was to detail rocket-firing Beaufighters to attack coastal defence guns at Aikaterini at last light on D Day. No. 281 Wing was to provide armed reconnaissance and close support with Spitfires on D plus 1 Day. No. 254 Wing was to detail Venturas to bomb Sarande on D plus 1 Day. Control of fighter aircraft over the beach-head was to be by a R.A.F. Controller in the beach-head area.

(1) Inter-Service Secretariat File ISS/6123 (A.H.B. II J.20/5/12/136:  
LFA/983/G - 30 Aug.44 (Balkan Air Force O.R.B. App.Aug.44).  
(2) Balkan Air Force O.R.B. App. C.44 Sept.44.

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The Plan for Operation "Towanbucket", the Capture of Araxos Airfield (23 Sept.44) (1)

Operation "Towanbucket". was perhaps the most important of the series of preliminary operations designed to clear all opposition from the path of Operation "Manna", the main landing of the Western Allies in Greece; for not only was it to plant troops in the Peloponnese, but it was to secure an advanced landing ground and introduce the first elements of the headquarters which was to control all future air operations in Greece, viz. Air H.Q. "X" Force (later to be named Air H.Q. Greece) and the first aircraft to operate from Greek mainland soil since 24 Apl. 41. (2)

Although it had been reported that the garrison of 300 Germans in the big port of Patrès, only a few miles away, had been evacuated, the ground situation was by no means clear: but, as the airfield was needed for attacks on the heavy enemy sea traffic evacuating men and supplies from the islands, much of which was beyond the range of escorted formations from North Africa, plans were brought rapidly to a head and the risks accepted.

The successive phases of the plan were, firstly, the parachute drops of men of the Special Boat Squadron on 23 and 24 September from aircraft of No. 267 Squadron, with the object of securing the airfield area and organizing local labour to construct a strip and repair the demolished airfield. The air units of the new Air H.Q. "X" Force were, to fly in on to the strip and as soon as the airfield was serviceable, operate from it with any units of Balkan Air Force who might be called in to the new campaign. Meanwhile, the remainder of Bucketforce (3) and equipment was to be disembarked on 26 September at Katakolo, (the nearest workable port in the Northern Peloponnese), repair the road, proceed to Araxos and reconnoitre Patras.

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- (1) Balkan Air Force Air Staff and Operations O.R.Bs App. B45 Sept.44.
  - (2) Except Special Operations aircraft.
  - (3) The ~~whole~~ Army force consisted of 1 Squadron of the Special Boat Service and 1 Platoon of 579 Field Coy., R.E. The R.A.F. force consisted of the Airfield Party, No. 2908 Squadron, R.A.F. Regiment (under command of Task Force Commander) and 1 Flight of an R.A.F. Regiment Squadron. The Naval force consisted of 2 L.C.I's, 4 L.C.T's, with mine sweepers and escort vessels as detailed by F.O.T.A.L.I.

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The Plan for Operation "Edgehill", the Landing on Poros (1 Oct. 44) (1)

Before the main forces in Operation "Manna" could pass in security through the sea approaches to Athens, it was essential for the Western Allies to secure strategic points on the Saronic Gulf and so to eliminate certain enemy batteries and facilitate the vital task of minesweepers preceding the naval expedition. The three points ultimately chosen for seizure were Poros Island, (off the S.E. Peloponnese), Aegina Island (almost halfway across the Gulf) and Phleves Island (close to the eastern land flank). Resistance by the mobile enemy must determine the ultimate order of attack. In the event Poros fell first.

Operation "Edgehill", the capture of Poros, was purely a naval undertaking. On 1 October, Commandoes from Foxforce, which had already seized Kythera (Operation "Aplomb"), were to be landed on Poros by a naval force. Weather prevented any kind of air co-operation.

After a plan for a landing at Kalamai had fallen through, it was planned that troops of Foxforce were to land, as soon as possible after the capture of Poros, on Aegina Island and on Phleves Island. This operation was not supported by aircraft. It was known as Operation "Delivered" and was carried out on 12 Oct. 44.

The list of plans for special operations designed to clear Corfu, Patras and the Peloponnese, to open up the sea approaches to Athens and to establish a small advanced air base on the mainland has now been completed and explained. Their primary

/objectives

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(1) B.A.F. O.R.B. Air and Ops. O.R.B. and App. O.R.B. and App: Admiralty draft preliminary narrative.

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objectives were clear, but developments after their attainment depended on the degree of enemy opposition. D Day for the launching of Operation "Manna" could, therefore, not be defined until a late date. The outline air plan and the broad outlines of the intentions of that operation and the forces employed will now be given, followed by an examination of Mediterranean strategy as it affected the delay in following up the German evacuation.

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The General Plan for Operation "Manna" and the main Re-entry into Greece of British Forces (1)

When the Germans evacuated Greece, British and ground forces were to be sent to the Athens area and later, if required, to the Salonika area. The primary object of the land forces was to disarm German forces, secure the port of Athens, organise relief and provide for the maintenance of Allied forces. Lieut. Gen. R. Mack Scobie (2) was appointed to command the British land forces. The object of the air forces in Greece was to defend Athens, and later, possibly Salonika, against German air attack; to cover and co-operate with the land forces; and, in conjunction with the air forces operating from Italy, to do what they could to prevent German formations withdrawing intact with their arms and equipment. Air Commodore G. Harcourt-Smith (3) was appointed to command the air force under the orders of A.V.M. W. Elliot, A.O.C. Balkan Air Force.

The restoration of order was to follow immediately on the withdrawal or neutralisation of the Germans. Advanced forces were to consist of paratroops dropped on or near airfields in the Athens area at about the same time as the arrival of seaborne forces at the port of Athens, followed by fighter squadrons, and by equipment and personnel transported by air. D Day was the day on which either airborne or seaborne forces arrived in Greece. (4) It was altered several times. On 10 October it was set for the 15th. On 12 October, Balkan Air Force clinched the matter by carrying out a limited air drop on Megara.

The occupational land force intended for service in Greece consisted of Headquarters III Corps, with the 2nd British Parachute Brigade, the 23rd Armoured Brigade (organized as an infantry brigade) and other units.

/The

(1) Outline operational and administrative plan for entry of A.H.Q. "X" Force into Greece - Operation "Manna" BYPS(44) 14 11 Sept. 44 (Balkan Air Force O.R.B. App. B 85 Sept. 44); M.A.A.F. directive to A.O.C. B.A.F. 26 Aug. 44 (A.H.B. II J.1/103/160(A) Encl. 24A.)

(2) C.B., C.B.E., M.C.

(3) C.B.E. M.V.O.

(4) In the event, D Day proved to be 12 October, when 8 aircraft of 10th Troop Carrier Squadron dropped a party on Megara.

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The air order of battle for Operation "Manna", which was sent in as Force 276, (1) (known first by the code name of Air H.Q. "X" Force and from 15th October as Air H.Q. Greece), was drawn from Italy and the Middle East. No. 337 Wing was to control operations by two Spitfire, two Wellington and one night Beaufighter Squadrons. The amalgamation into the force of the general reconnaissance Wellington squadron and the night Beaufighter squadron from the Middle East was certain to bring more shipping targets within range if the struggle moved into the North Aegean.

Fighter cover for the troop carrier aircraft employed in the seizure of airfields was to be provided by long range fighters of the Fifteenth Air Force when available because operating in the area, or by a detachment of a Spitfire squadron operating from a Greek airfield held by the partisans, and when flown in, by the fighter squadrons mentioned above. Very full arrangements were planned for transport by air and sea of essential fuel supplies and equipment: a 42 days level of stocks was to be built up and maintained, a process which would take 32 days, it was estimated.

Cover for Allied shipping was to be provided by Wellingtons based in Italy and North Africa, (until those squadrons moved into Greece) and by carrier-borne aircraft. On arrival in Greece they were to be prepared to attack Aegean shipping and for tasks presented by the military situation.

#### Plans and Preparations for Airborne Operations (operation "Manna") (2)

The plans for the ferrying in of paratroops and glider troops of the 2nd Independent Parachute Brigade (British) and supplies were formulated early in September. A decision on D Day was not forthcoming until 10 October. Then the Wing was notified that it was to be 15 October, when it was expected the Germans

/would

#### (1) Force 276 Order of Battle

<u>UNIT</u>	<u>SOURCE</u>	<u>REMARKS</u>
A.H.Q. "X" Force	Italy	
H.Q. No. 337 Wing	Italy	
No. 5 F.P.C.U.	M.E.	
No. 32 Sqn. (Spit)	Italy	16 U.E. aircraft
No. 94 Sqn. (Spit)	M.E.	16 U.E. aircraft
No. 108 Sqn. (Beau. N.F.)	M.E.	14 U.E. aircraft
No. 38 Sqn. (Well. G.R.)	M.E.	16 U.E. aircraft
No. 221 Sqn. (Well. G.R.)	Italy	20 U.E. aircraft
A.S.R. Detachment	M.E.	3 Wells & 4 H.S.L's.
H.Q. No. 1321 Wing and R.A.F. Regt.	Italy and M.E.	
Light A.A. Sqn. A.M.E.S's and ancillary units.		

(2) Troop Carrier Operations 1944 H.Q. XII Air Force (A.H.B.IIR/31):  
B.A.F. O.R.B. and Apps.

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would have withdrawn from the Athens area. Troops were to maintain order pending the arrival of Greek officials in exile and seize local airfields. Glider-borne airfield construction equipment was to be flown in and used to convert the demolished airfields to operational use.

On 10 October, assembly of aircraft and personnel began. Brindisi, San Pancrazio and Manduria were selected as the Italian staging airfields. Late on 11 October, aircraft alerted for an operation on 15 October were told the date of D Day had been advanced to 13 October; difficulties arose, since most units were engaged in other missions, but these were overcome. Up to the last hour, there were gaps in the plan occasioned by the absence of exact intelligence data on military conditions in southern Greece. Particularly vague were the locations of the actual dropping and landing airfield zones and the precise signals organisation to be employed in the initial phase. In the plan itself, only Eleusis, Tatoi and Kalamaki were named as potential airfields in the Athens area, and of these Kalamaki was thought the best proposition: but, in the event, all three turned out to be too close to German units in the area. Megara airfield was the only airfield used from D to D plus 4 Days.

Communications were at first rather elementary. One aircraft and crew were first stationed at Megara (Greece) as radio control; and on 16 October, ground control was established at Kalamaki airfield and landing operations were thereafter greatly simplified. The 60th and 62nd Squadrons of the 51st Troop Carrier Wing were the formations engaged. The 10th Squadron of the 60th Group was, at the time, under operational control of Balkan Air Force; and it was assumed by the 51st Fighter Wing that co-ordination of their effort would be a matter of mutual agreement.

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The course, when Megara was ultimately chosen as the initial dropping zone, was Wing Departure Point (near Taranto in the Heel of Italy) - Cape Maria di Leuca (the south-eastern tip of Italy - Cape Doukato (Levkas Island), Araxos airfield (in British hands since 23 September) - Cape Dhrepanon (near Patras) -  $37^{\circ}55'40''\text{N.}$ ,  $23^{\circ}02'10''\text{E.}$ , (near Loutraki on the Corinth Canal -  $37^{\circ}56'20''\text{N.}$ ,  $23^{\circ}18'22''\text{E.}$  - Megara airfield. The return route was reciprocal. (1)

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(1) Drop altitude and release altitude for gliders was at 800 feet, with the return altitude at 3,000 feet. Outward paratroop and glider tug aircraft ~~was~~<sup>were</sup> flown at 140 and 120 miles per hour; and all returned at 150 miles per hour. Drop speed for paratroops, cannisters etc was, at 110 m.p.h. Aircraft carrying paratroops were in a formation of VEE of VEE's of 3 aircraft, echelon to the right, with 15 seconds between elements. Glider tow aircraft were in 2 aircraft elements, echelon to the right, with 15 seconds between elements.

SECRET

The Balkan Air Force (1)

Since the record will, at this point, become temporarily concerned with the operations of Balkan Air Force, it becomes timely to briefly define the structure of this body.

The Balkan Air Force was formed on 1 June 44 to create a centralized control over area air operations and to co-ordinate the operations of its own forces with those of Land Forces Adriatic and Force 399. The Air Officer Commanding Balkan Air Force (2) was responsible for this over-all task, including operations by such Naval forces as were assigned to Adriatic operations under Flag Officer Taranto. The common political and strategic objectives and the lines of the future employment of all these forces was defined. In early June, Greece was not one of its major problems, although air patrols operated against specific targets and kept a watch on the Ionian Islands.

Balkan Air Force commenced operations on 1 July 44 with No. 281 Wing, comprising two squadrons of Spitfires (3) and two squadrons of Macchia (Italian Air Force). (4) On 14 July 44, No. 254 Wing (5) (with Baltimores, rocket-firing Beaufighters and Mustangs) and No. 283 Wing (6) became operational. There were no significant changes during August.

Formation of Allied Naval Force "A" and Force 120

Force "A" was specially created to hamper the German withdrawal in the Aegean. It was commanded by the Rear-Admiral, Escort Carriers (Rear-Admiral T.H. Troubridge). It consisted of the cruisers H.M.S. Royalist (flagship), and Aurora; the escort carriers H.M.S. Hunter, Stalker, Emperor, Attacker, Searcher, Pursuer and Khediye; seven destroyers (included the Greek Navarinon and Polish Garland and other British ships.

Force 120 was formed at Alexandria under command of the Flag Officer, Escort Carriers, for service in the Aegean. It incorporated all the above mentioned ships of Force "A", with the addition of the cruiser H.M.S. Black Prince, the anti-aircraft cruiser H.M.S. Colombo, the fighter direction ship Ulster Queen and six more destroyers. Three further "Hunt" class destroyers were temporarily attached. The strength of the Force was never constant for long, for ships

joined it and left it as the situation developed.

/German

- (1) Balkan Air Force O.R.B.
- (2) A.V.M. W. Elliot, C.B., O.B.E., D.F.C.
- (3) At Cannes.
- (4) At Nuova.
- (5) At Biferno.
- (6) At Leverano. Initially on a R. and R. basis only.

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90German Warships and Merchant Vessels available on 1 September 1944

In view of the planned incursion of Allied naval forces into the Aegean, Allied Intelligence presented a reasonably accurate statement (based principally on months of observation by reconnaissance aircraft) of the warships and active merchant vessels likely to be available to the Germans on 1 September. (1)

Of the warships available, the following were believed with good reason to be active or serviceable:- 2 destroyers, 2 U-boats, 1 S-boat, 4 small S-boats, 11 R-boats, 2 minelayers-cum-troop transports, 3 auxiliary minelayers, 20 Siebel ferries, 10 sixty foot landing craft, 25 I-boats, 8 naval ferry barges, 2 corvettes, 2 naval auxiliaries, 8/10 trawler escorts, 100 armed caiques and 3 Kriegs-transport ships.

Active merchant vessels remaining were S.S. Bourgas (2,940 G.R.T.), S.S. Tzar Ferdinand (1,994 G.R.T.), S.S. Carola (1,348 G.R.T.), S.S. Salomea (751 G.R.T.) and S.S. Orion (700 G.R.T.), 8 coasters, 2 small tankers, 2 river barges, 21 Este Lighters, 21 Magda barges, 18 concrete barges and a large assortment of small craft.

This force contained few elements likely to present a serious offensive threat, apart from the minelayers (official or auxiliaries) but their defensive powers, were considerable. Unless they could be caught in concentrations they would be found elusive, but mobile surface craft in numbers would be often better adapted to deal with them than aircraft handicapped by their lighter armament and the restrictions imposed by range and weather.

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(1) It is interesting to compare the above Intelligence estimates of merchant vessels available for use in the evacuation with German tallies made on 13 and 20 September after sea defence commandants had been ordered to drop all other special tasks (including anti-guerilla operations), in order to ensure that every available ship was used on the vital task of evacuation. On 13 September, the effective strength of German-manned steamships, motor vessels and tankers of 200 tons capacity or over was stated to be 30 ships, totalling 20,000 tons capacity. From 20 September onwards, they counted (losses excluded) on 39 ships, totalling 26,000 tons and 202 Greek auxiliary sailing vessels (caiques etc.) totalling 15,000 tons capacity; some weeks previously, only 30 armed caiques were recorded on the strength of Admiral Aegean. There must have been some rapid requisitioning. In practice, the carrying capacity proved much less than expected and losses to Allied action rent big gaps in the strength. On balance, Allied warships were to enter the Aegean with naval superiority: but, and it was a big "but", there were many uncharted minefields, minelaying was certain to be intensified and there were two active U-boats in the area.

SECRET

Land-based Air Operations against German Transport Airfields(September - October 1944)Vigorous Effort by German Ju.52's <sup>(1)</sup>

Such deep inroads into the German shipping had been made by Allied air and naval units that when evacuation became urgent, it was natural that air transport should exert its maximum effort. In the first place, aircraft were to transport men. The Ju.52 transport aircraft, of which some 80 - 90 were normally available in the Athens and Salonika areas, were the obvious choice for the task. A few Ju.52 seaplanes were included in the strength. For the initial evacuation, they used as bases the three Athens airfields at Eleusis, Takoi (or Menidi) and Kalamaki (alternatively known as Hassani) and the Sedes airfield at Salonika.

For months past, air transport had been used on a quiet, routine basis, but it became apparent to Air Intelligence that the effort was rising steeply, especially between Athens and Crete and between Athens and Rhodes. Continuous efforts by night intruders over airfields and by patrolling Beaufighters to reduce the normal flow had met with disappointing results. The reasons for this were several in number. The lightly armed Ju.52s flew mostly at 300 feet or less, sometimes as low as 50 feet, at speeds of 110 - 140 miles per hour. This placed the faster Beaufighter at a tactical disadvantage, especially in combat near sea level. The Ju.52s were usually airborne at twilight periods, i.e. those periods most difficult for Allied aircraft at long range bases to cover. The Beaufighters had only a short potential combat period. On dark nights, without close range radar control, contacts were infrequent. Radar conditions in the Aegean were classed as poor to very bad.

A solution had to be found to overcome this new threat and normal methods would not suffice. Two important decisions were made. Firstly to use the day and night bombers and long range fighters of the Strategic Air Force in Italy to bomb the air bases; and secondly, to position a fighter direction ship

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(1) Information supplied by A.H.B.6: R.A.F., M.E. Air Staff O.R.B./App  
September and October Vol II.

equipped with radar and other devices off Crete where she was to control night-flying Beaufighters for interception. Both were successful in practice locally and for a period. Neither was continued long enough to be decisive and bring the traffic to an end everywhere.

The attacks by the Strategic Air Force on the mainland air bases will be recorded first.

Strategic Air Force Attacks on Airfields:  
First Phase (13 - 15 Sept. 44) (1)

The great virtues of the series of attacks between 13/14 and 15 Sept. 44 was their continuity and weight. Continuous experiment in Italy was underlining the vital character of day and night bombing following in such quick succession as to not only inflict the maximum damage, but to neutralise the efforts of the repair units and to deter future employment of the target.

On the night of 13/14 September, 61 Wellingtons and 24 Liberators preceded by Halifaxes illuminating with special equipment and Wellingtons dropping visual markers, attacked Eleusis, Tatoi and Kalamaki. Their bombing was well concentrated around the markers. (2) The next night, another attack was made on the three bases, this time by 60 Wellingtons and 25 Liberators. (3) On 15 September, these attacks on the three airfields were followed by a ten-minute attack by 109 Fortresses and 167 Liberators from groups of the Fifteenth Air Force, who encountered and lost no aircraft.

Photographs, when interpreted, pointed to the destruction in the three attacks of no less than 77 aircraft (of which 60 were transport Ju.52s) and damage to 20. Opposition was virtually non-existent and only one Wellington was lost. Well over 900 tons of bombs were used to what was reasonably good effect. The landing areas at Eleusis and Kalamaki were thought temporarily

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(1) M.A.A.F. Operations O.R.B./App. Sept.44 : R.A.F. M.E. Air Staff  
O.R.B./App Sept.44 : No.205 Group O.R.B./App.

(2) 67 $\frac{3}{4}$  tons of bombs were dropped on Eleusis, 67 $\frac{1}{2}$  tons on Tatoi and 63 $\frac{1}{2}$  tons on Kalamaki. Anti-aircraft opposition was inoffensive.

(3) 6 Halifax illuminator aircraft also bombed.

unuseable, but Kalamaki came back into service 24 hours after the last attack. It was almost a week before the next attacks were launched.

Reports indicated that air transport continued after 15 September from the islands to Athens and northwards to Salonika and Belgrade, but at first on a reduced scale. Ju.52 seaplanes began to figure more in particular between Leros and Crete and Athens. As the days passed, the traffic picked up by leaps and bounds. On the 24th no less than 221 transport sorties were recorded. (1)

Strategic Air Force Attacks on Airfields:  
Second Phase (25 Sept.44) (2)

During the period, the main preoccupation of the Mediterranean Allied Strategic Air Force was to assist the Russian offensive (now pointing at Hungary), by interdicting the German lines of communication to the south-eastern front and it was another exception proving the rule of concentration so tightly held to when the Strategic Air Force diverted for two days to Greek targets on 24 and 25 September. The Germans had not only replaced the losses inflicted in the middle of the month, by importing Ju.88 and He.111 bombers and even obsolete Do.24s for transport duties but very substantial reinforcements were received. The three Athens airfields were serviceable again. Aircraft were clearing the islands of men and equipment and proceeding northwards to Salonika, which was fast replacing Athens as the military centre of gravity.

The Strategic Air Force began its effort over Greece on the night 21/22 with attacks on the port of Salonika, (3) on the 24th, a major Liberator attack was launched on the group of three airfields near Athens. Eighty-four aircraft dropped 163.7 tons of bombs on Kalamaki, fifty-one aircraft dropped 94.7 tons on Eleusis and one hundred and seventeen aircraft dropped 214 tons of bombs on Tatoi, suffering no losses and meeting no enemy fighters. The photographs showed good coverage of the vital features of the targets. (4) The attacks

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(1) Refer to Figure 17.

(2) M.A.A.F./Ops. O.R.B./App. Sept.44.

(3) These operations will be described in a later section.

(4) That these Strategic attacks were effective is provided by the drop in the nightly sortie total from 221 to 118. Refer to Figure 17.

were concentrated in periods ranging from 3 to 6 minutes, a system calculated to produce damage in depth. Interpretation of photographs seemed to prove that of the 100 aircraft on the ground, 38 had been destroyed and 11 damaged. Of the total casualties, 41 were Ju.52s.

#### German Air Transport Traffic Survival and Continuance

Although the emphasis was moving from the southern to the northern Aegean and movements by air more and more concentrating in the direction of the new defensive line north of Corfu - Olympus - Salonika, aircraft were operating in all areas. This heavy <sup>by Allied bombers</sup> blow, at a critical period might have been expected to prove mortal. But this was not the case. The airfields were again repaired. Reinforcements arrived. The traffic dropped sharply and then picked up again. Even well-aimed 4,000 pound bombs had proved unable to stop it. The error the Allies made was not to continue the heavy bombing long enough without intermission; but target policy was not to be diverted for long to what was considered a minor theatre of war. The Germans profited by the following lull to restore the situation to some extent and ~~the~~ troops were still flown northwards.

#### Strategic Air Force Attacks on Airfields: Third Phase (4 to 13 Oct. 44)

No heavy bombers were diverted after September to Greek mainland targets. The October phase was carried out by Mustangs and Lightnings and by night-flying Wellingtons and intruders as a last effort to reduce the air evacuation and any possible fighter opposition to Operation "Manna" (launched on 15 October) or threat to the naval Force 120 operating in the Aegean. The movements of German offensive operational aircraft in this period were difficult to follow. There were few now left in the area and these were very mobile. The exact strength of the Arado 196s was still problematic.

On 4 October, i.e. nine days after the last attack, 39 Mustangs (P-51's) of Strategic Air Force made what they reported as a successful attack on the

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three Athens airfields, claiming to have destroyed 9 aircraft and damaged 21. (1) On the 6th, 55 more Mustangs made another sweep over the three airfields and Megara between 1354 and 1425 hours. (2) In addition to the reported destruction of five aircraft and damage to ten on the ground, an oil dump was set on fire at Eleusis and an ammunition dump blown up at Megara. Three Mustangs were destroyed (one not included in the 55 who bombed) and two others were missing. Most of the enemy aircraft destroyed were Ju.52's. The local flak was evidently more effective against lighter types of aircraft flying lower. On the same day, for the first time in the period under review, the Salonika airfields were attacked. The effort proved timely, for, as has been noted, Salonika was a very active centre for all types of traffic. On that occasion, 35 Lightnings of the Strategic Air Force attacked Sedes and Megalomikra airfields, claiming the destruction of 13 aircraft and damage to 8 on the ground. The local flak took a toll of five Lightnings. (3)

The last attacks before the main landings were made on the night of 9/10 October by small formations of Wellingtons of No.205 Group. (4) The three attacks seem to have come as a surprise to the Germans. At Kalamaki, 10 Ju.52s were seen in the light of flares on the north side of the field. The 10 Wellingtons attacking saw their bombs burst across the runways and dispersal areas. Six Wellingtons attacked Tatoi, where the flarepath and boundary lights were only doused as they approached. They, too, reported hits on the vital areas. A small attack by three Wellingtons on Eleusis reported good and comparable results. As usual, it was impossible to define the full extent of the damage (at night) occasioned (by just over 44 tons of bombs, which included three 4,000 pound bombs). It is worthy of note that night flying facilities were

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- (1) M.A.A.F./Operations O.R.B./App. Oct.44
  - (2) Ibid
  - (3) M.A.A.F./Operations O.R.B./App. Oct.44
  - (4) No.205 Group O.R.B./App. Oct.44

/now

now available at Araxos, <sup>(1)</sup> airfield, occupied in Operation "Towanbucket". An attempt must now be made to judge to what extent the avowed intention of this three series of harassing attacks on airfields, namely, to disrupt the enemy's evacuation activities, had been realised.

Gradual Luftwaffe Strength Reductions and Withdrawal. <sup>(2)</sup>

All German bombers had long left the area when September opened. The types of aircraft involved in the evacuation were the transport aircraft (Ju.52s and Ju.52 floatplanes), 90 - 100 in number based in the Athens area; about 25 long range reconnaissance <sup>aircraft</sup> (Ju.188s, Ju.88s and Me.109s), which were based at Tatoi and Kalamaki; a staffel of about 5 Me.109 fighters based at Kalamaki; about 5 twin-engined Ju.88 night fighters based at Eleusis; and some 50 coastal Arado 196s, with (a few BV.138, included in the number) for shipping convoy escort.

A week later, the strength stood very much at the same level, except for the addition of 10 fighters at Salonika/Sedes and Larissa. On 19 September, after the first phase of air attacks, the handful of night fighters had departed and there were a few less reconnaissance aircraft. The coastal aircraft, who were always operating between the mainland and the islands were using Velos, Suda Bay and Skaramanga among other temporary staging seaplane stations.

On 26 September, just after the second phase of air attacks on air bases, reconnaissance and coastal aircraft strength was fairly steady, but the fighter strength had risen to 20 Me.109s. These were operating from Kalamaki and Larissa. The shrinkage of the airfield perimeter is to be noted; the reasons and causes for this will be made clear in turn.

On 10 October, the day the third phase of air attacks ended, most of the Me.109 fighters and Arado 196s had been transferred to other theatres. The force of reconnaissance Ju.188s and Ju.88s remained steady at 20 aircraft and operated from Salonika/Sedes. The few fighters were based at

/Gida/Polykastren

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(1) Position 38°09'N, 21°25'E.

(2) Intelligence estimates of strengths of German air units from R.A.F., M.E./Air O.R.B. App. Sept. and Oct. 44

Gida/Polykastron (1) and the <sup>few</sup> Arados at Volos and Salonika. The position on 17 October was the same. On 24 October, the only German aircraft left in Greece were a few long range reconnaissance Junkers on Salonika/Sedes. The following week saw the final evacuation of Greece by the German Air Force. All the Salonika airfields, with Gida and Polykastron, were cratered. The G.A.F. headquarters had gone with most of the aircraft, (including the remaining transport aircraft) to Skoplje in Yugoslavia.

Having considered the movements of the air units, the course of the airfield demolition programme must now be briefly traced. It will then be simple to assess the actual air threat to Allied naval forces during the re-entry into the Aegean and the progressive effect of air attacks and other operations on the enemy system and to judge how much was voluntary tactical manoeuvre by the Germans and how much was forced upon them by Allied pressure.

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(1) 30 miles N.W. of Salonika.

SECRETProgressive demolition of German airfields (1)

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Araxos airfield was partially demolished in mid-August. Preparations for withdrawal went ahead during September. Aircraft went first. On 8 October, demolition charges at Megara were blown, and destruction of installations at Kalamaki had begun. This added to the reduction of the Tatoi anti-aircraft defences, was taken to indicate an imminent withdrawal from the Athens group of airfields. Demolition had also begun in the dispersal areas at Larissa (Greece) and Herakleion (Crete). Some 12,000 troops were reported soon after in the western end of the island awaiting air transport. Herakleion was unserviceable by 12 October.

By 13 October, Kalamaki and Tatoi were unserviceable; at Eleusis only runway was operational. There was no sign of aircraft in the area, with the exception of Ju.52's for the final evacuation party. All the rest had been withdrawn. Demolition proceeded at Larissa.

The Salonika airfields were bearing the brunt of air transport, (with He.111s still carrying an appreciable share of the task) and directing operations northward to Austria and Hungary. Daily reconnaissance was still being flown from Salonika.

During the week ending 24 October, the Allies were established in the Athens area. Salonika was preparing for evacuation. Air photographs on 21 October showed a large building on fire at Sedes and partial demolition at Gida. The next day, Larissa was completely out of use, the dispersal area at Megalomikra was being demolished. These measures affected only dispersal areas; the main airfields were still serviceable and in use. In the meantime, Allied units were repairing the German airfields in the areas they held.

The end of the chapter had been reached by the last days of October. All the Salonika airfields (with Gida and Polykastro) were cratered and their buildings destroyed. German Air Force Headquarters and the remnants of the transport and

/ reconnaissance

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(1) R.A.F. M.E./Air Staff O.R.B./App. September-October 1944.

SECRET

reconnaissance units had left Greece. The few remaining airfields in Southern Yugoslavia were busy keeping open the escape routes to the North.

With the evacuation of Salonika and its airfields, the German garrisons left behind in Crete, Rhodes, Laros, Kos, and Milos were sealed off. The only foreseeable air activity would be limited to small scale liaison flights including postal air services from Germany to the island garrisons.

Effect of Allied Air Attacks on Greek Airfields

The principal effect of the three short series of attacks on the Greek air bases was, in each case, significant destruction of aircraft - mostly transport aircraft - and airfield facilities; this played an important part in slowing up the air evacuation from 25 September onwards and, by implication, in the German decision to leave some garrisons and equipment in the islands. A secondary effect was to hamper the German repair and replacement effort and increase the speed of withdrawal of air units. More frequent attacks in equivalent or greater weight would certainly have multiplied the German's difficulties.

Operations by Beaufighters and Fighter Direction Ship H.M.S. Ulster Queen (1)

Lack of Success of Intruders in September

By the beginning of September, it was recognized that a sizeable force of Ju.52s was being used on transport tasks between Crete and the Athens area. These slow, low-flying aircraft were difficult targets for the faster Beaufighters. Detachments of the two Beaufighter squadrons Nos. 46 and 108 intruded for the best part of the month over Cretan airfields, but with very little success. They approached to the southwest corner of Crete, entered the Aegean by Anti-Kythera Channel some distance to the West and patrolled at 200 feet over Herakleion and the air route to Athens. As the moon waned, the perennial difficulty of picking up the Ju.52s increased. On 13 September, a brief period of intrusion controlled by H.M.S. Royalist (the flagship of Force 'A') ensued without result. In the meantime, plans for co-operation with a specially equipped Fighter Direction Ship were maturing and on 22 September, orders were received for Nos. 46 and 108 Squadrons to provide a small joint force to work under control of H.M.S.

Ulster Queen.

/H.M.S. ....

(1) No. 108 Squadron, O.R.Bs: Air H.Q. M.E. O.R.B/App: Admiralty File.  
M/011972/44.

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H.M.S. Ulster Queen, the Fighter Direction Ship (1)

The only vessels in the British Mediterranean Fleet fully equipped solely for fighter direction were H.M.S. Palomares and H.M.S. Ulster Queen. Both had figured in previous major operations with credit, but without achieving any exceptional results. The American Navy was much better placed than the British, for, stated the Rear Admiral Escort Carriers in Force "A", all American destroyers were equipped for fighter direction, whereas the British were not. A few British cruisers, such as H.M.S. Royalist, the flagship of the Escort Carrier Force - Force "A" - , carried a limited range of equipment.

The experiments at night fighter direction on 18 and 19 September by H.M.S. Royalist led to no interceptions, but proved of value. They showed the need for a greater range of special equipment. H.M.S. Ulster Queen (2) was therefore detached from Force "A" late in September with the object of discouraging the night air transport traffic and preventing the transfer of German troops (believed to number about 20,000 men) from Crete to the mainland.

The Air Defence Room was manned by one Senior Fighter Direction Officer with two assistants and an R.A.F. G.C.I. (radar) Controller (3) with two R.N.V.R. Filter Officers assisting. This radar team was largely responsible for the successes. Four radar sets were fitted, designed to give continuous coverage round the ship from sea level. Two sets were intended for direct control of fighters and two sets to give early warning of the approach of fighters. (4) Additional facilities included control of gunfire while Beaufighters were operating in the vicinity, height finding from comparison of plots and hourly broadcasts to aircraft of barometric pressures.

/Naval.....

(1) A.H.Q., E.Med./Air Staff O.R.B/App. D.12 Oct.44: Admiralty File M/011972/44 (See Appendix 42 in this volume).

(2) In peace time she was an Irish Sea passenger ship. In the early years of the Second World War she was converted to an anti-aircraft ship. Again converted to a fighter direction ship, she operated as such in the landings at Sicily, Salerno, Anzio and the South of France. She was armed with four 4 inch guns forward, two 4-barrelled pom-poms aft and a number of Oerlikon guns.

(3) F.L. F.W. Thirlaway, R.A.F.

(4) A fairly full description of the 4 sets may be found in the report in Appendix D/12 for Oct.44 of Air H.Q. Eastern Mediterranean O.R.B.

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Naval and Air Plan

The ship was to sail <sup>through</sup> the Kaso Strait to Kythera Island, tie up during the day and proceed into the Aegean each night. The nightly location was, after the first night, to depend on the previous night's enemy air traffic. Every morning, she signalled her intentions and suggested the Beaufighter programme to Air H.Q. E. Mediterranean. As soon as the latter had decided on their night fighter intentions, details of co-operating aircraft for the next sortie were sent to H.M.S.

Ulster Queen.

The two night fighter squadrons engaged were Nos. 46 and 108. The strength of them both on 25 September, 1944, was nine Beaufighters Mark VI.F. (1) These aircraft were to be temporarily relieved of their commitment to the night fighter defence of Egypt and the Levant. No. 108 was standing by <sup>for</sup> a move into Greece as part of Force 276 and only about one-half of her aircraft were available for these operations and those only from the fourth day onwards.

The Beaufighters arrived in the area chosen for the first phase, i.e. North North of Crete, one at a time for a patrol of 90 minutes. The only exception made to this plan proved a failure. For the first three nights, only four aircraft were available, but thereafter seven or eight aircraft a night were available and for most of the operation continuous cover with one aircraft was maintained.

Dusk cover of H.M.S. Ulster Queen and her escort was provided by two day Beaufighters and dawn cover by one day Beaufighter on most outings.

While in the area to the North of Crete, Beaufighters patrolled near the ship on the side from which it was anticipated the next batch of enemy aircraft would appear. The advantage of the two warning sets was that the first of them to pick up a "Bogey" and to have a good picture of both fighter and target took over the interception.

Interception Operations North of Crete (26/27 Sept. to 1 Oct. 44) (2)

H.M.S. Ulster Queen, with H.M.S. Liddesdale in company, sailed from Alexandria in the forenoon of 25 Sept. 44. She made contact with the first Beaufighter of No. 46 Squadron at 2016 hours on the 26th, arriving soon after at the rendezvous about 37 miles N.N.E. of Ganea (Crete) (3) During the night, an estimated 32 Ju.52s

/were

(1) Fitted with Mk. VIII A.1.

(2) Report at App.D/12 of A.H.Q. E.Med. O.R.B. Oct. 44.

(3) 36°00'N., 24°15'E.

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were plotted flying at about 200 feet. When fired on by the ships, they increased altitude and altered course. They were all flying southwards and the red flares and searchlights seen in the direction of Maleme indicated their destination. Four of them were shot down in flames by Beaufighters.

The next night's operations, from a new rendezvous (1) a few miles to the North, were disappointing in view of the large flow of enemy traffic flying at 200-1000 feet, mostly all as soon as darkness fell and at early dawn. Beaufighters however, shot down one Ju.52 and one Ju.52 floatplane.

The next night, 28/29 September, only 37 tracks were plotted. Contacts were more difficult for pilots to exploit. The enemy was more wary; he varied his altitude between 50 and <sup>9,000</sup> ~~90,000~~ feet. Nor were the German aircrews always elusive. Two of them returned the ship's fire. An Allied destroyer was hit but not seriously. Beaufighters shot down a northbound Ju.52 and a Ju.88 over Milos Island. ~~There was~~ <sup>B</sup> bad weather at Gambut base which forced some aircraft to operate from Derna. After a not very successful night, in which only two aircraft were destroyed out of the 81 hostile tracks plotted and ship's gunners <sup>fired</sup> ~~had~~ on one of the Beaufighters following a Ju.52, H.M.S. Ulster Queen returned to her usual anchorage at St. Nikolo Bay in Kythera; <sup>F</sup> where she was reconnoitred in the afternoon of the 29th by a Ju.88.

To this point, Beaufighters had always arrived at their rendezvous too late to pick up the early air transports. On the night 29/30 September, the first of seven arrived at 2000 hours. Although there was only about two-thirds of the previous night's enemy traffic, the Beaufighters shot down three Ju.52s and damaged three others. A new rendezvous (2) was arranged, in the hope that more traffic might be picked up at dusk, on a route which turned in to Crete further to eastwards. But bad weather at Gambut prevented Beaufighters from reaching the ship before midnight, too late. The plan of operating two fighters concurrently caused confusion which was increased by a breakdown in the ship's controlling instruments. One obsolescent Do.24 was a poor return for so much effort. The night ended badly. At about 0600 hours on 1 October, a Beaufighter was closely pursuing an enemy aircraft flying northwards towards Milos. After he had twice given his callsign to the ship, nothing further was heard from him and it was presumed he had been shot down by a Ju.88.

/The

(1) 36°15'N., 20°15'E.

(2) 36°00'N., 24°50'E.

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The next night - 1/2 October - the ship, covered as usual at dusk by a patrol of two Beaufighters, returned to the same position North of Crete. During the night, enemy signals were received from Flag Officer Levant and Eastern Mediterranean giving areas which the enemy had broadcast as prohibited areas for their aircraft, presumably owing to the presence of H.M.S. Ulster Queen and the mounting losses of aircraft. The ship was kept all night to the eastward of the rendezvous and the prohibited areas, a move which proved more successful than might have been expected.

The Germans were feeling the loss of the Ju.52s destroyed in the first two series of Strategic Air Force attacks on the three Athens area bases and had drafted in faster types of aircraft. These, as was to be proved, were uneconomical for the reasons that they could only carry a small load and their speed favoured an attacking Beaufighter.

Before H.M.S. Ulster Queen shifted her position to a point 18 miles 090 degrees to eastward of the rendezvous, Beaufighters had reported the destruction of one Ju.52, one southbound Ju.88 and one northbound He.111. By the end of the night, of the thirty-one enemy tracks plotted, day and night Beaufighters had accounted between them, to the knowledge of the control, two Ju.88's, one He.111, one He.115 and one Do.24 and damaged one Ju.52.

Interception Operations Northwest of Milos Island (2/3 and 3/4 Oct.44)

It was rightly judged that <sup>his</sup> ~~much~~ mastery of the situation by teams of ship control and aircraft would discourage the traffic, at any rate <sup>on</sup> the Crete run. On the night of 2/3 October, H.M.S. Ulster Queen, H.M. Themistocles and the Beaufighters rendezvoused in a new position some 58 miles from Athens and 25 miles N.W. of Milos Island, on the direct route to Crete. But the traffic had been cut to a mere trickle, only six tracks being detected. Of them, Beaufighters shot down one He.111 and damaged a Do.24. The next and last night was equally quiet, only one Ju.52 falling to the Beaufighters.

A serious defect in the evaporator cooler of H.M.S. Ulster Queen developed and her Commanding Officer, satisfied that the scarcity of enemy targets spelled success for the Allied enterprise, decided to return to Alexandria for the necessary repairs.

/Results

SECRETResults of the Operations (1)

In eight nights of operations, Beaufighters destroyed 19 enemy transport aircraft (2) and damaged a few more. These figures do not accurately measure the tactical results, which were decisive. The air evacuation from Crete was crippled and stopped in face of the blockade by sea imposed by the Allied naval Force 120 with its seven aircraft carriers (3) and the Beaufighter threat: ~~to sea~~ <sup>transport</sup>, the Germans were obliged to abandon the remaining garrisons on Crete and a few other islands to their fate.

The mixed fighter direction team had used a first class selection of instruments with imagination and Beaufighter pilots were unanimous in their praise of the control: ~~and~~ confident in their opposite numbers on shipboard, <sup>they</sup> had shown great pertinacity under adverse conditions. The value of specialised fighter direction ships had been established, as well as the ability to control night fighter aircraft to good effect even under very difficult radar conditions. (4)

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(1) A full analysis of operations, contacts and claims compiled by Nos. 108 and 46 Squadrons is given in Appendix 42 to this volume.

(2) 11 Ju.52s, 3 Ju.88s, 2 He.111s, 2 Do.24s and 1 He.115.

(3) German sea traffic from the mainland to Crete and the Dodecanese was stopped on 19 Sept.44.

(4) See comment by Director of Air Warfare and Flying Training, Admiralty in Appendix 42 to this volume, page 10.

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The Slow Tempo of Allied Strategy

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Germans profit by Delay in Western Allied Reaction (1)

Although signs of an impending major evacuation were already clear to the Allies in late August and the Germans were well aware of this, of the daily air coverage and of agents' reports of their convoy movements (2) prolonged delay by the Allies in reassuming the initiative occasioned some surprise. There was nothing unusual in the daily operations of the small air forces of R.A.F. Middle East; in any case their strength was much too low to be decisive, although they acted with renewed zest. The same applied to the Allied naval forces.

The Germans, having had plenty of practice in large-scale amphibious and Air evacuation, lost no time. Between 23 August and 15 September (the day destroyers first operated north of Crete) the Navy (with the help of transport aircraft) had already transported <sup>from the Aegean</sup> 11,885 men, 1,125 horses, 3,381 tons of equipment, 1,107 tons of ammunition, 252 lorries and armoured cars, 841 other vehicles, 100 guns and about 1,100 tons of fuel. The total of men evacuated <sup>from the Aegean</sup> by that date represented no less than some 32 per cent and the guns some 25 per cent of the grand final total.

In view of the previous failures in Sicily and Corsica by the Western Allies to prevent a German evacuation, this question of long delay requires clarification. Certain exchanges of the period between the Supreme Allied Command and the British Chiefs of Staff throw light on the tempo of Allied strategy.

Exchanges between the Supreme Allied Commander and the Chiefs of Staff (14 to 22 Sept. 44)

On 14 September, the Chiefs of Staff first imparted their misgivings to General Maitland Wilson, in whose Grecian Sector no new offensive operations to hinder the massive German retirement had yet been carried out. The Foreign Office considered it a political necessity that British forces should be moved into Greece with the minimum delay. They were afraid that if German forces were cut off by the Russians, they might be "left to wither" away and so delay the entry of "Manna" forces into Athens. Could not an operation be mounted to instal

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(1) Admiral Aegean War Diary (FG/46162 series FDS/Admty).

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The Greek Government in the Peloponnese? "Manna" of course could still not be undertaken while strong German forces remained in the Athens area. (1)

The Supreme Commander Mediterranean Theatre, who saw Greek operation in the context of the whole of the Balkans and had already launched Operation "Ratweek" aimed at cutting Balkan communications further north, had got as far as asking for the shift of responsibility for the islands in the sea approaches to Athens, the Ionian Islands and the mainland of Greece from the Cs-in-C, Middle East, leaving them to control operations only in the Aegean Islands, Crete and the Dodecanese. He examined the idea of a small operation to instal the Greek Government but reported that the loss of 10 to 14 days in planning and mounting would not justify it. More positive action was called for. All available forces should be used, he wrote, to harass the enemy in Greece and to effect his piecemeal surrender; but he put forward no definite plan. (2)

After five days' silence, the Chiefs of Staff revealed their anxiety for action of some kind and asked what concrete steps were being taken to harass the enemy as he had advocated. The Greek Government in exile was accusing them of abandoning Greece to the Russians and the Communists.

/General

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- (1) Signal COSMED 183, 14/9/44 (A.H.B.I.D.5/226/2.)  
 (2) Signal MEDCOS 190, 16/9/44 (A.H.B.I.D.5/226/2).

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~~opposition was past on our side.~~ General Wilson must be aware of the importance of supporting the authority of the Greek Government and they knew he was taking all possible steps with what resources he had and that he would not hesitate to incur some risk in order to show the flag: and they called for an urgent report on progress to date and plans for the immediate future, to include operations in the Salonika area later. (1)

The next day - 22 September - the Supreme Commander sent his report on action so far taken and planned i.e. at a date when the Germans had been engaged for seventeen crowded days and nights in evacuating experienced troops and heavy equipment with losses easily bearable to themselves.

- (a) An advanced naval base had been established on Kythera Island and the first reconnaissance of Nauplia on the mainland was due to be launched that day. The Greek Commissioners for the Peloponnese and the Ionian Islands should be ready for landing before long.
- (b) Air and sea forces were doing their utmost to harry the sea and air evacuation from Crete and the Aegean Islands: and they had already inflicted heavy casualties on the shipping and transport aircraft.
- (c) It was intended to establish, within a few days, an advanced base for light naval forces on the island of Chios.
- (d) He had directed Balkan Air Force and Land Forces Adriatic to transfer the main weight of their offensive to Greece and Albania from the Dalmation coast, using vigour and boldness and taking calculated risks.
- (e) To further his policy of deceiving the Germans into believing Allied resources were greater than they actually were, he had approved the launching of Operation "Towanbucket"; the seizure of Araxos airfield would provide a base for intensified air attacks: the land forces were to capture Patras, facilitating operations in the north coast of the Gulf of Corinth.

Of these measures, the only two that were paying current dividends and bore the mark of full-blooded warlike operations were the air and naval attacks on shipping and transport aircraft. Land operations were in the theoretic stage. The forces for Operation "Manna" were at five days' notice, but as he once again reiterated, it would be an unjustifiable risk to launch it, as it stood, against German opposition. The general acceptance all the way through of this thesis of non-opposition by a retreating, closely threatened and partially disorganized enemy was oddly at variance with British military philosophy. Whether the unwillingness to submit the ground forces to the risks of armed combat and to allow well-established divisions to escape relatively scot-free to fight another day is open to criticism may be considered later when the full background of events is filled in. In the meantime, the narrative must now retrace its course to the

beginning

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beginning of September. Here the thread of air operations will be resumed and the occasional intervention of strategic air units on ports and airfields related and the results assessed.

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Operations by the Escort Carrier Force

Formation and Function

In mid-September, the land-based Allied air forces in the Middle East and the Heel of Italy were in a state of flux. Balkan Air Force began to assemble units for the occupation of Greece and operations from its airfields. The forces of Air H.Q. Eastern Mediterranean were called on for contribution to a new air force. Even when fully stretched, they could not cover the expanding area of operations. The Strategic Air Force began the intermittent series of attacks on the German-occupied airfields described in a previous section, but could not be spared to establish permanent local air superiority. Great gaps existed between the problems and targets suddenly thrown up by the German evacuation and the Allied ability to deal with them all with the land-based air forces available. The creation of a force of seven escort aircraft carriers (Force "A"), their incorporation in a larger, balanced naval force (Force 120) and the breakthrough into the Southern and then the Northern Aegean were therefore wise and timely moves. They were to greatly extend the range and striking power of Allied air units until Air H.Q. Greece was set up and Greek airfields occupied. They were to do this during the vital period when the maximum of maritime targets presented themselves and the war was being carried into the sea and land areas occupied by the enemy. They were to harry the retreating German in many ways, cause him grievous loss and casualties and do much to accelerate his eventual complete retirement, abandoning considerable garrisons to their fate.

The Escort Carrier Force's operations will now be recorded under the headings of their first four outings, (1) namely:-

- Phase I     9 - 20 September.
- Phase II    30 September - 4 October.
- Phase III   8 - 13 October
- Phase IV   14 - 30 October.

While, as far as possible, only the operations of carrier-borne aircraft will be given, it will occasionally be necessary to indicate the major operations

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(1) The official naval term. Outings included a variety of operations, including sweeps. The naval records refer to the first two phases as Operation "Outing", Phases I and II. In the precis of the reports and chronological summaries given in Appendix 43 of this volume, Phases III and IV have also been given the name Outing for the sake of consistency and grouping the series. There was a Phase V in November, but by then the Germans had finished their evacuation.

the larger controlling force, of which air operations sometimes formed only a part. The composition of Force 120 varied, sometimes from day to day.

Reduced German Air Threat permits first Allied Carrier Penetration into the Aegean <sup>(1)</sup>

On 9 Sept. 44, certain units of the Mediterranean Fleet were placed under command of the Rear Admiral Escort Carriers <sup>(2)</sup> as Force 120. On that day he proceeded in the cruiser H.M.S. Royalist with a proportion of Force 120 consisting of escort carriers and destroyers and known as Force "A" <sup>(3)</sup> with the object of interrupting sea communications in the Aegean.

At first, the Force remained to the southward of Crete. A profitable moment to enter the Aegean came on 12 Sept. 44, when intelligence was received from FOLEM <sup>(4)</sup> that German shipping movements between Crete and the mainland were expected. The first sweep was carried out during the night of 12/13 September. The ship left at daylight, covered by fighters from H.M.S. Pursuer, one of the carriers operating outside. Destroyers accounted for S.S. Toni <sup>(5)</sup> and three caiques <sup>(6)</sup> in convoy on the Crete - Santorin run.

In the evening of 13 September, the escort carrier H.M.S. Khedive was detached to proceed to the vicinity of 37°30'N, 26°30'E, to rendezvous with H.M.S. Prince David, and to provide fighter protection during Operation "Aplomb" (the landing on Kythera Island). H.M.S. Searcher joined H.M.S. Khedive on the 15th in providing this air cover to the 16th September.

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(1) Details from Admiralty File M/01027/45. See Appendix 43 to this volume for reports of proceedings and chronological summary of all the phases of Operation "Outing".

(2) Rear Admiral T. Troubridge, R.N.

(3) Force "A" at first comprised Royalist, Khedive (escort carrier) Pursuer (escort carrier) Searcher (escort Carrier), Troubridge, Tyrian, Termagant, Teazer, Tumult, Tenacious and Tuscans. The escort carrier Attacker joined this R.N. force: included in Force "A" were the Greek H.H.M.S. Navarinon and the Polish Garland.

(4) Flag Officer Levant and Eastern Mediterranean.

(5) 638 G.R.T.

(6) KAL.196, PI.017 and PI.687.

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The sweep on the night 13/14 was blank, but on the 14th the two K.T. ships Heidelberg and Erpel were sunk after a spirited engagement by H.M. Royalist and H.M.S. Teazer.

Then on 15 September, came an important decision, the exact terms of which <sup>noted</sup> must be ~~studiously not noted~~. In the words of Rear Admiral Troubridge,

"On 15 September, the operation having provoked no response from the Luftwaffe, I deemed it prudent to move the carriers into the Aegean".

The statement proves that the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean acknowledged the advantages that local air superiority bestowed on their operations and that they acknowledged the defensive limits of the squadrons on their own seven carriers. At this point, reference to preceding pages will provide a reminder as to the actual air threat. The Greek airfields were still intact. There were no bombers in Greece, but it would have taken the Germans less than a week to bring down a few groups for a limited period had they so desired. There were five or six Me.109s at Kalamaki and 10 Me.109s <sup>at</sup> ~~based on~~ Salonika/Sedes and Larissa, but they were for purely defensive purposes and could not, at the worst, because of their limited range, endanger heavily armed warships in the Southern Aegean. Even when a few more fighters were drafted in during the last week of September, their combined tasks in the defence of communications were so much beyond their strength that they presented no real threat. There was a handful of night fighters standing by for withdrawal. There were about 50 coastal Arado 196s employed exclusively on convoy escort. They might become aggressive at short range if their charges were attacked by surface craft or aircraft, but it was well known that they were never used for armed reconnaissance or intrusion. It may be concluded, therefore, that the contemporary air threat was very slight and that had it been rapidly increased, Allied Intelligence would have been aware of it and naval forces made their dispositions accordingly.

Crete was blockaded by destroyers by night and H.M.S. Royalist experimented, without result, in directing Beaufighters on to German transport aircraft flying northwards from Crete to the Athens area. The need for night flying aircraft was acutely felt, both for interception and twilight cover, although the Force was covered by a few Beaufighters from North Africa over the dangerous period.

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On 16 September, the island of Milos was bombarded and blockaded. Aircraft from the escort carriers Attacker, Emperor and Pursuer flew 76 sorties on reconnaissance of shipping routes and staging points and attacked shipping at Milos and in road traffic on Crete. On the 17th, 60 sorties were flown on reconnaissance over Crete.

In the evening of the 17th, the Schnorkel-fitted submarine U.407 was sighted in the position 36°14'N, 24°33'E (about halfway between Crete and Milos) and sunk by gunfire.

On the 18th, reconnaissance of Crete roads and the seaplane base at Suda Bay was carried out and 15 Ju.52 seaplanes were divebombed at the latter locality without knowledge of the results.

On the 19th, after ships had added to the German's difficulties by bombarding Maritza airfield, a "Balbo" formation of 45 fighter bombers (1) <sup>was</sup> ~~were~~ despatched to attack K.T. ship Pelikan at Rhodes. They sank one depot ship (2) <sup>and</sup> three small craft (3) but Pelikan escaped, only to be sunk the next day in Naussa Bay (Paros Island) by R.A.F. aircraft. The rest of the outing, which ended on 21 September, was uneventful. The first expedition, therefore, brought welcome relief in a valuable bag of ships and small craft, destruction of some 60 assorted vehicles and some installations ashore, air cover for the first amphibious landing and the sinking of an active U-boat.

Escort Carrier Operations, Phase II (30 Sept.-4 Oct.44) (4)

The second outing was prevented from breaking into the Northern Aegean because the Kinaros Channel (N.E. of Amorgos Island) had not yet been completely swept of the ~~mine~~ minefields. H.M.S. Attacker, Hunter and Emperor sailed from Alexandria with H.M.S. Royalist and a destroyer force on 30 Sept.44. By this time, many of the big merchant and all three of the active K.T. ships had been sunk by aircraft or surface ships and the whole area well harried. Results were unsensational. Wide areas were reconnoitred by aircraft, including

/Calato (Rhodes).

- (1) 24 Seafires, 10 Hellcats and 11 Wildcat VIs.
- (2) S.S. Pomenia, ex-Italian refrigerator ship, 639 G.R.T.
- (3) 1 naval ferry barge and 2 sailing vessels.
- (4) Admiralty File M/01027/45.

Calato (Rhodes), Crete, Santorin and Milos. *four islands* Ships blockaded all three and bombarded Maleme airfield. On 3 October, 16 aircraft from S.S. Attacker and Hunter attacked the radio station on Levitha Island, in ignorance of the fact that the garrison had withdrawn. Shortly after, at 1710 hours, 16 aircraft from S.S. Emperor ~~had~~ attacked a concentration of shipping in Port Laki (Portolago, Leros), losing 1 Helicat. The results cannot be traced.

The steady pressure on the garrison at Milos was continued; on 4 October, aircraft from H.M.S. Attacker bombed it hitting a 2000 tons ship aground. (1) Shore batteries were silenced by gunfire.

The Risks from Enemy Minefields (2)

As the Germans withdrew, they mined extensive sea areas, especially those most vital to any Allied advance: these were the Kinaros Channel, the Steno Pass and the Doro and Zea Channels, all entrances to the Northern Aegean. Before September 1943, the only extensive minelaying had been off the coast between Salonika and Dedeagach. In August 1944, the Germans laid a field in the Doro Channel. (3) In March, June and July, heavy laying had proceeded in almost all the channels between Amorgos and the limit of Turkish waters and, as October passed, more fields were laid in the Amorgos, Kinaros, Kos and Kalymnos Sea areas. These minefields explain to a great extent the Allied Fleet's delays in going over to the offensive. They influenced the Fleet Command in resisting demands to take the "Manna" forces into the heavily-mined Gulf of Athens before it was efficiently swept. The 5th Minesweeping Flotilla concentrated now on the Kinaros Channel and on 5 Oct.44, the carrier H.M.S. Hunter, H.M.S. Aurora, Tuscan and H.H.M.S. Navarinon were detached to give them air and surface cover. Aircraft sank the coaster Silva of 488 tons off Mudros (Lemnos).

Escort Carrier Operations in the Northern Aegean - Phase III (8-12 Oct.44) (4)

The escort carrier H.M.S. Emperor, with other ships in company, commenced the third outing on 8 Oct.44. They passed through Skarpanto Strait. Aircraft reconnoitred Santorin, Piskopi, Kos, Leros, the north coast of Crete and Khalkia and Alymnia Islands. Eight aircraft attacked caiques at Kos and six small ships on the slips there. (5) The next day, most of the Force remained in

(1) Name and actual date and cause of beaching untraceable.

(2) Refer to Plans 5 and 6 in Naval Staff History - Submarine Vol.II (C.B. 3306(2)A.H.B. Copy).

(3) Refer to Figure for this and all contemporary positions figuring in operations.

(4) Admiralty File M/01027/45.

(5) Owing to the evacuation and the activities of the Allied forces, German records of this period often lack continuity and detail. In many cases, such as this one, it is not possible to trace the results.

a position halfway between Khios and Mitylene without operating aircraft and keeping radio silence.

Aircraft were now operating with ease farther north in greater numbers than for a long time past. On 11 October, they concentrated on the ports of Khalkis and Volos on the mainland, where traffic from Attica, the Peloponnese and the archipelago was crowding in. South-east of Khalkis, a merchant ship (1) was set on fire. At Khalkis port, aircraft attacked E-boats, landing craft and other small craft in closely packed concentrations, leaving some smoking. At Volos, they attacked craft loaded with troops. The ships covered the Khalkis - Talanta Channel - Volos area to intercept incoming convoys. Aircraft began to interfere with mainland communications on the vital Larissa - Salonika railway-line. A formation of four reported blowing up three locomotives and an ammunition train, as well as cutting the lines. The range and striking power of the Hellcat aircraft were reported as very impressive and superior to those of Seafires. No. 800 Squadron in H.M.S. Emperor were specially mentioned for an effort achieved in spite of their fatigue after five months of sustained operations.

On 6 October, Rear Admiral T. Troubridge was replaced by Commodore G.N. Oliver, who assumed the rank of Commodore Escort Carriers.

Escort Carrier Operations in the Salonika area - Phase IV (13-30 Oct. 44) (2)

The fourth outing of Force 120 and Force A was an eventful one and fell into three main fields of operations, namely, cover for Operation "Manna", attack in the Salonika area <sup>and</sup> co-operation with ground forces fighting on Piskopi Island. The Salonika operations will be mentioned first and the other two under separate headings below.

The operations by carrier-borne aircraft had proved so effective that it seemed to the Flag Officer Levant and Eastern Mediterranean especially necessary to maintain an effort against enemy concentrations between Athens and Salonika until such times as the R.A.F. was established in Greece in strength sufficient for continuous operations. He therefore pressed the Rear Admiral Commanding the 15th Cruiser Squadron (3) to accept reduced fighter cover over the "Manna" area when the main amphibious operation was launched, by surrendering part of

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(1) Incorrectly reported as a K.T. ship. No trace of loss being recorded on that day.

(2) Admiralty File M/01027/45, Report by F.O.L.E.M.

(3) In command of the naval forces in Operation "Manna".

the covering carrier-borne air forces to operate north of the Doro Channel and to release the remaining escort carriers from Operation "Manna" as early as possible. This was accepted. On the evening of 16 October, the carriers Attacker and Stalker were released.

On the 17th, aircraft operating from H.M.S. Stalker attacked the Larissa - Katerini - Piera railway and shipping in Volos. H.M.S. Attacker did not return to operations until 19 October, but H.M.S. Stalker one of whose aircraft had shot down a Ju.88 on the 15th while covering the Athens area, patrolled the North Aegean with the carrier H.M.S. Emperor and H.M.S. Royalist, who had been there since the 14th.

Meanwhile, the carrier H.M.S. Emperor and H.M.S. Royalist patrolled the North Aegean, but without notable results. One of the few mishaps occurred on 17 October, when four aircraft of H.M.S. Emperor attacked in error four British m.t.b's engaged in special raiding operations, while lying up at Pelago Island. (1) All boats were damaged, two seriously, and there were some casualties, including two killed.

On 23 October, H.M.S. Attacker arrived in the area south of Salonika, some 40 miles south-east of Mount Olympus and, over the two following days, her aircraft were attacking roads and railways. On the 30th, she docked in Alexandria, so ending her participation in Aegean operations.

#### The Military Background to Aircraft Carrier Operations. (2)

By mid-October, when Operation "Manna" was launched, the Allies, although late off the mark, could point to an improving situation. Since early September, naval forces had been established in Kythera, Poros, Aegina and Phleves Islands, all covering the ~~entrance into the~~ southern Aegean and the sea approaches to Athens. Allied air forces had landed at Araxos and were now operational. Patras had been liberated and troops had moved across to occupy Corinth, finding the Canal blown up. A force had been dropped from aircraft to plug the Florina Gap in Northern Greece. Corfu had been evacuated and the Allies held Sarande. There had been airborne landings on Megara and Kalamaki /airfields.

(1) One of the Thessalian or Skopelos Islands lying in the approach to the Gulf of Salonika.

(2) This is merely general context to make the meaning of carrier operations clearer. More important military operations will be related later in adequate detail.

airfields. The last Germans had left Athens and men of the R.A.F. Regiment, Foxforce and Bucketforce had entered the city. The Germans were streaming northwards.

Out in the Aegean, islands had been falling to the Allies, sometimes after air attacks and demonstrations or naval bombardments or at the hands of British and Greek landing parties. Among these islands were Mitylene, Rhios, Lemnos, Samos, Levitha, Syros and Naxos.

Sea traffic from the mainland to Crete and the Dodecanese and most of the air transport traffic had been stopped. The Allied thrust by Force 120 with its carriers through the mine barriers south of the Peloponnese, off Levitha and Kinaros into the Northern Aegean had tied down the convoy traffic in the Lemnos, Leros, Trikeri and Salonika areas, tightened the blockade and endangered most of the road and rail communications in the coastal areas. Shipping was piling up in Volos and Khalkos; and the Germans, ~~caught in a trap~~ were scuttling many valuable ships that could be neither used nor saved.

Allied land-based air forces were still in no position to apply any decisive weight of effort anywhere. The escort carriers role was one of filling the vacuum and in so doing they gave extended proof of the possibilities of a seaborne mobile trained air force in meeting a variety of situations on a wide and swiftly moving front.

#### Carrier Aircraft Cover for Operation "Manna"

Although there was no immediate air threat to the Allied convoys approaching Athens on 15 October, fighter cover was, correctly, provided as a measure against any sudden switch of German aircraft against such attractive targets as ships and troops landing. Part of the Spitfire cover came from Araxos airfield in the western Peloponnese, but cover from the carriers was also provided. On 15 October at dawn, H.M.S. Attacker and Stalker took up their datum position some 60 miles south of Athens. They provided fighter cover alternately and continuously except for a suspension of flying for three hours on account of heavy thunderstorms: they shot down a Ju.88. (1) During the night, the Force retired to the southward, returning at dawn. On 16 October, when H.M.S. Stalker was released, H.M.S. Attacker provided day fighter cover over the Athens area. No ships were attacked by aircraft or surface craft. In all, aircraft from the two carriers flew fifty-two sorties on cover patrols. (2)

/Allied Failure .....

(1) On reconnaissance.

(2) Admiralty File M/01027/45. An outline of the full proceedings in Operation "Manna" is given later in this chapter.

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(1)

Allied Failure at Piskopi (26-30 Oct. 44)

The island of Piskopi (or Tiles) in the Dodecanese lies about 22 miles north-westward of Rhodes. The main haven used was Livadhia Bay. On the night of 26/27 Oct. 44, the cruiser H.M.S. Sirius landed a small force - known as Force 142 - on Piskopi. By 1630 hours on the 27th, the garrison was reported to have surrendered. The Germans reacted speedily. They rushed in troops by small craft from Rhodes on the 28th. By the evening, the Allied situation was serious. The only British forces available - one major and twenty-five men - were shipped from Khios to Piskopi.

While these events were taking place, H.M.S. Attacker had sailed to Lemnos and Mitylene with a naval force to show the flag. Demonstration flights of eight Seafires were flown over both islands. On the 29th, H.M.S. Attacker and H.M.S. Navarino sailed at dawn for Piskopi, to give air and ground cover to the Allied troops. Ninety-five miles out, four Seafires flew off at 1230 hours and machine-gunned two landing craft in Livadhia Bay. Three following missions of aircraft attacked them and claimed to have put them out of action. (2)

During the afternoon, H.M.S. Navarino reported that the enemy had captured, and was using, our mortars and machine guns. He had, furthermore, an appreciable superiority in numbers, and our own troops were disorganized, having lost their two senior officers and all their heavier weapons. The ground situation presented no definite concentrations for aircraft attack nor were there the elements for a worthwhile combined operation. Piskopi could not be recaptured with the forces at our disposal. H.M.S. Navarino rescued as many troops as possible and remained patrolling to prevent further German infiltration. It was many months before the recapture of the island was deemed worthwhile.

(3)

Statistics of Carrier Aircraft Sorties in September and October 1944.

In the Aegean, aircraft from Allied carriers showed a versatility comparable with that <sup>displayed</sup> in the liberation of Southern France. Their operations included fighter cover for ships at sea and amphibious landings, exhibition patrols

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- (1) Admiralty File M/01027/45: Aegean, Dodecanese, Greece Telegrams (A.H.B.1 D.5/226/2 Encl. 152).
- (2) Confirmation unobtainable for these craft and the two claimed as sunk by H.M.S. Navarino.
- (3) Refer to Appendix 43 p.14 to this volume for an analysis of aircraft sorties.

to impress the local German and E.L.A.M. forces, fighter bomber attacks on shipping and communication targets such as roads and railways, reconnaissance and spotting for naval gunfire.

The first outing was the busiest; 368 sorties were flown. The second and third outings, which came after the enemy evacuation traffic had been seriously impaired, were on the much reduced scale of 60 and 48 sorties respectively. Activity rose in the fourth outing, which spanned the main landings in Greece and on a number of islands, and wide-scale operations in the Northern Aegean and the Salonika area at the time of the German withdrawal to a northern defence line. *One hundred and sixty-five sorties were flown.*

The total sorties flown during the four <sup>outings</sup> ~~sorties~~ were ~~exactly~~ approximately 640. The total casualties in the first three outings were only one pilot and two aircraft lost, and ten aircraft damaged by enemy action and four by decklanding accidents. These light figures are an indication of great improvements in the handling of aircraft and carrier gear since Salerno, with its poor serviceability record. (1)

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(1) Refer to the R.A.F. Narrative on the Italian Campaign Vol. I p.123 (A.H.B.)

Air Operations against Shipping (September and October 1944)

Port Bombing, Phase I (15 Sept. 44) <sup>(1)</sup>

During the first phase of the diversion of strategic bombers to Greek targets, only one mission attacked a naval target: but the effort was timely and the losses inflicted on the German naval strength were important. On 15 September, 51 Fortresses dropped 150 tons of 500 pound bombs in the span of four minutes on the area of the submarine base at Salamis. <sup>for they were at Skaramanga</sup> No U-boats were hit, but the following ships were destroyed, or put permanently out of action:-- the Kriegs Transport ship Mannheim <sup>(2)</sup> (intended as a dual-purpose transport and anti-submarine escort); one of the few destroyers left in the area, viz. T.A.14 (the ex-Italian Turbine), which had troops and cargo on board; the submarine chaser U.J.2107, <sup>(3)</sup> <sup>(4)</sup> one concrete barge and one caïque.

Port Bombing, Phase II (21/22 - 25 Sept. 44)

The second series of heavy bomber attacks was as much concerned with the destruction of port facilities and harbour installations as with shipping. Its object was to slow down the clearance of cargoes and vessels and the movements of troops and equipment in the Athens - Larissa - Salonika sector.

It opened on the night of 21/22 September. Seven Halifaxes illuminated and marked Salonika. Three markers exposed the port area, the south edge of the marshalling yards and the north jetty. Fifty-one Wellingtons and thirteen Liberators of No. 205 Group dropped 162 tons of bombs (including some of large calibre) and covered the area with incendiaries. Major fires started were still visible 100 miles from the target. Two Me.109's were seen, one of them attacked ineffectively. One Wellington was missing. There is no record of any loss of shipping.

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- (1) R.A.F. M.E. O.R.B. Appendices Sept. 44: Enemy Shipping Losses *Nominal List* (A.H.B.)
  - (2) Previously KT.29. Was under repairs and refitting. She appears to have been given the new tactical number of U.J.2172, indicating the intention to convert her to the role of anti-submarine escort, as well as transport, as had been done with K.T. Heidelberg.
  - (3) Probably 300-400 tons displacement.
  - (4) Probably an oil carrier.

/ The

The day attack of the 24th on Skaramanga achieved the destruction of important naval shipping. Fifty-two Liberators of the Fifteenth Air Force made an attack of two minutes' duration on harbour installations. Photographs showed hits on the main jetty, both seaplane hangars, the workshop, slipways and on what were reported as 'possible' submarine pens. These were pens and they housed the last two U-boats in the Mediterranean, U.565 and U.596, which were both destroyed. Other important sinkings there were the 800 ton anti-submarine corvette UJ.2108,<sup>(1)</sup> the Marathon (a small converted water tanker) and two patrol boats.<sup>(2)</sup>

On the same day, 58 Liberators dropped good concentrations of bombs on the west marshalling yard at Salonika. The town was not defended by fighters. Two Liberators were lost. The damage to a large part of the yard, lines and rolling stock undoubtedly helped to slow down movement.

A last blow at the Athens port areas, the days of which were now numbered, was aimed by day heavy bombers of the Fifteenth U.S. Air Force on the next day - 25 Sept. 44. The main force was preceded by eight Lightnings, which remained in the area from 1318 to 1355 hours at 10,000 feet. There were no defending fighters. Seventeen Liberators intensified the damage effected on the previous day by dropping 42.5 tons of 500 pound bombs on Skaramanga harbour installations, hitting the docks. Ten Liberators which bombed Piraeus harbour missed the target and their bombs fell into the water. This was perhaps all to the good, for in three weeks' time the Allies were to need the port themselves. Results of an attack by 24 Liberators on Salamis harbour installations were reported as only fair. The weather at base the previous night had been reported as non-operational. It is very possible, although not recorded, that visibility was still poor, hence the disappointing results here and at Piraeus.

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(1) The ex-Greek Aura or Avra.

(2) G.P.05 (ex V.307) and G.P.08 (ex Sultana), tonnage unknown.

/ Progress

(1)

Progress of Evacuation of Ports

Spectacular demolitions had been carried out at the Corinth Canal and the port areas below Athens. All active shipping had left Piraeus harbour by 12 October and all heavy guns had been removed. All day, the demolition parties worked at high pressure and by next morning, harbour, airfields and seaplane bases were extensively damaged. Quays were cratered, dry docks, cranes and breakwaters blown and several big cargo vessels scuttled, some to block the approaches, others at the jetties. (2)

The evacuation of Athens led to a very heavy shipping concentration in Volos. On the morning of 13 October at 1010 hours, photographs were taken which revealed over 70 active vessels in the harbour. (3)

Brilliant Venture Attack on Volos (13 Oct. 44) (4)

Balkan Air Force immediately ordered No. 254 Group to attack Volos. Eleven Ventures of No. 25 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron, escorted by three Spitfires (No. 253 Wing), were despatched from Brindisi. Nine of the Ventures reached Volos at 1225 hours and achieved a ~~spectacular~~ success out of all proportion to their numbers. (5) The first stick of bombs ended on the quayside, causing three explosions and two fires. The second stick undershot, ending at the south end of the jetty. Explosions continued for ten minutes. Large fires were started. The final reckoning of damage was imposing: it included S.S. Adriana, S.S. Anna, the torpedo boat T.A.38, the small anti-submarine escort UJ.2102, the naval ferry barge F.123, the small S-boat L.S.10, six patrol boats the net tender NT.37, (6)

(1) R.A.F. M.E. O.R.B. (Appendices Oct. 44.

(2) S.S. Ypanis (1,459 G.R.T.), John Knudsen (9,071 G.R.T.) Carola (1,348 G.R.T.) Vera (5,000 G.R.T.), Celestus (250 G.R.T.), tanker Marienne (400 G.R.T.), General Meise II (400 G.R.T.), motor vessels Nordsee and Pionnier II (both 260 G.R.T.). (7)

(3) Including S.S. Adriana (4,352 G.R.T.), S.S. Lola (1,193 G.R.T.), 2 destroyers, 2 corvettes, 7 coasters and Danube barges, 17 caiques and nearly 40 small escort vessels of various types. (8)

(4) R.A.F. M.E. and Balkan Air Force O.R.B. Appendices. (9)

(5) They dropped 27 x 500 and 36 x 250 pound bombs from 10,000 feet.

(6) 5,000 G.R.T., not active in the period.

(7) The ex-Italian Spada.

(8) Ex fishing vessel Brighte.

(9) CK.57, CK.91, CK.92, GD.92, GV.80 and GA.03

three tugs, ten caiques and three transport barges. (4) There were other small scale air attacks in the following days, but none anything like so successful as that of 13 October.

Here the record of northerly progress of the mainland evacuation and the Allied air effort to retard it must be temporarily left, while accounts are given of the Allied airborne operations in Greece and the Middle East air effort against Aegean evacuation shipping.

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(1) Danube barge London, Irene and Nordpol.

Allied Airborne Operations in Greece (September-October 1944)

Operation 'Towanbucket' (23-26 Sept. 44) <sup>(1)</sup>

The first Allied landing in the Peloponnese took place on 23 September, when aircraft of No. 267 Squadron covered by B.A.F. fighters dropped 60 parachutists of the Special Boat Service in the vicinity of Araxos airfield. <sup>(2)</sup> They seized it and organized its repair. The next morning, tools, ~~and~~ equipment and additional personnel were dropped on a nearby airstrip from three aircraft; and the remainder of the main force (known as Bucketforce) sailed from Bari that afternoon, escorted by fighters, and landed at Katakolo on D Day - 26 September. Some of the parachuted force repaired bridges and roads. Araxos airfield was serviceable for fighters on that day and for Dakota transport aircraft on 1 October. Spitfires and Hurricanes began to operate. Greek workmen were paid with quinine. On 2 October, Bucketforce entered Patras, ~~and~~ liberated the area and took many prisoners; ~~and~~ on 8 October its patrols were in Corinth. Bad weather from 28-30 September severely curtailed air operations.

Air Headquarters 'X' Force was formed on 1 Sept. 44 at Bari as a subordinate force under operational and administrative control of Balkan Air Force. It was set up at Araxos at an early date and, on 15 October, became A.H.Q. Greece. Its mission was to control the R.A.F. during the period of the occupation of Greece.

Operation 'Charlton', the Drop on Florina (6/7 Oct. 44)

The advance party of Plugforce was dropped on 6/7 Oct. 44 at Argos Orestikon in Central Greece, with the mission of plugging the Florina Gap. Later, they blew up the road west of Florina and held up a large enemy column of vehicles. On 22 October, seven Spitfires of Balkan Air Force attacked this column, claiming to have destroyed 23 vehicles and damaged 36.

Airborne Operations at Megara (12-16 Oct. 44) <sup>(3)</sup>

On 11 October, the Dakota aircraft of the 51st U.S. Transport Command Wing were assembling in the Heel of Italy for the airborne drops on Megara and Kalamaki forming part of Operation 'Manna'. These drops were to ensure control of the

(1) Balkan Air Force/Air Staff O.R.B. appendices Sept. 44.

(2) 38° 09'N, 21° 24'E.

(3) Balkan Air Force O.R.B.: Airborne Missions in the Mediterranean 1942-1945, U.S.A.F. Historical Div. (A.H.B. IIF 2/59/74): Troop Carrier Operations 1944, H.Q. XII A.F. Vol. 1. (A.H.B. IIR/31).

land areas around Athens before the main forces moved in, and prepare airfields for use.

On 12 October, Balkan Air Force decided to drop the first section of the 2nd Independent Parachute Brigade before the main drop. Using the 10th Squadron of the 60th Group, which was under its operational control, they despatched 14 Dakotas full of troops, escorted by Hurricanes from the new airfield at Araxos and Mustangs from Italy. Six Halifaxes, escorted by Mustangs dropped the first supplies and a Lysander, escorted by Spitfires landed for special tasks. The mission was carried out without incident until it ran into high winds over the dropping zone. Many paratroops were injured on landing, but received first aid from the Greeks.

The 51st Troop Carrier Wing reported that they were not advised of this decision to drop on the 12th. Their operations began on the 13th. The paratroop flights scheduled for this day were cancelled on account of the dangerous high winds; but nine aircraft towing National gliders, <sup>(1)</sup> unescorted by fighters, flew to Megara and released them. All gliders landed safely. A few Halifaxes escorted by Mustangs, dropped more supplies. The returning aircraft stepped at Araxos to refuel.

In spite of more bad weather on 14 October, the main body of the 2nd Parachute Brigade (British) reached Megara without mishap. Sixty-eight aircraft, escorted by fourteen Lightnings of the Strategic Air Force, manoeuvred round the bad weather. An advance Dakota landed to find the field full of craters and potholes. Mass landings of aircraft were impossible, in spite of the efforts of local Greeks labouring under the orders of men of the Airborne Engineers dropped on the 12th. On the same day, 20 aircraft towing gliders were forced back to Italy by the bad weather. On 15 October, 14 Dakotas, escorted by fighters, dropped bundles and canisters on Megara. All the aircraft refuelled at Araxos. Another aircraft flew from San Pancrazio to Araxos and landed the men and equipment to set up a control tower.

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(1) CG - 4A.

On 16 October, the largest scale operation of the period was carried out. (1) Sixty-four aircraft from Italy and Araxos and twenty-one gliders from Italy carried troops, jeeps, small arms and medical supplies to Megara. The operation was a success. One glider broke loose.

Airborne Operations at Kalamaki (17-18 Oct. 44)

By 17 October, Kalamaki was ready for the reception of transport aircraft. Thirty-seven Dakotas, escorted by eight Mustangs and sixteen Spitfires, (flown to Araxos for the task) dropped supplies. On 18 October, (the last day of Operation 'Manna'), 36 Dakotas from Italy, escorted by Strategic Air Force fighters, carried out another supply-landing operation to Kalamaki: and, on the same day, 20 Dakotas from the Middle East landed more supplies, while Spitfires from Araxos patrolled the Athens area.

From then on, Kalamaki, nearer Athens than Megara, was built up as an operational base. Squadrons Nos. 32 and 94 flew in on the 19th and No. 108 Squadron Detachment on the 20th. The forces of A.H.Q. Greece began to assume sizeable proportions and look for targets.

During all the airborne operations to Megara and Kalamaki, no losses of aircraft or troops were sustained and all troops and equipment were safely delivered to their respective destinations.

The approximate deliveries between 12 and 18 October by the 51st Troop Carrier Wing were 2,000 troops and 327 tons of supplies in 224 successful sorties.

The series of airborne operations over Greece beginning with Araxos and ending with Kalamaki proved once again the flexibility of air power when correctly applied and by ensuring the occupation of vital air bases, and dropping troops at strategic points in advance, ensured the smooth occupation of Greece.

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(1) Balkan Air Force O.R.B. states 84, but U.S. records give 64 Dakotas as the total of aircraft.

Anti-shipping Operations from the Middle East and by Submarines  
(September - October 1943)

German Shipping Movements in early September 1944

Even before the main evacuation began officially on 5 September, Allied air reconnaissance aircraft had reported a thinning-out and reconcentration of island garrisons. During the week ending 3 September, barges, ferries, lighters and coasters were seen moving troops from Patras back to Preveza. In Otranto, the K.T. ship Heidelberg had sailed loaded with equipment; <sup>her</sup> other sister ships Erpel and Pelikan had arrived to load and air attacks had failed to stop them. In the Central Aegean, S.S. Toni, the coaster Sybille and S.S. Orion (700 G.R.T.) were busy trooping between the Cyclades and the mainland. In the Northern Aegean, S.S. Salomea was trooping from Lemnos Island; the two minelayers S.S. Dracha and S.S. Zeus carried troops between Athens and Salonika and S.S. Tzar Ferdinand north from Khalkis to Salonika; the total effort went far to relieve the congestion on the railways which air attacks further North were accentuating. Even at this late date, S.S. Bourgas was on the way to Stratoni to ship the last cargoes of iron pyrites. Behind the activities of these well-known transports, a universal and feverish activity almost everywhere by coasters, ferries, barges and caiques must be visualised. S.S. Carola (1348 G.R.T.) one of the most valuable transports remaining, had lain repairing in Leros for some time, but was now seen to be loading. (1)

Early September Successes by Middle East Aircraft

Whatever the delays in implementing Allied grand strategy in the first critical phase of the German evacuation, no reflection of them fell on the operations of Air H.Q. Eastern Mediterranean. The R.A.F. at Gambut and Berka, who had striven to bring the withdrawal about and had forecast it, acted at once with complete realism. Their forces were inadequate for complete coverage, but, with the formation of the carrier force to exert pressure in the Central and Northern Aegean, their contribution was certain to be of importance. Individually, neither force could bring a decision, but as their efforts were integrated, the end would be certain.

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(1) All details of shipping from R.A.F. M.E. O.R.B./Appendices Sept. 44.

First blood was drawn by Beaufighters. For three days, Wellingtons had tried, but failed, to hit S.S. Carola. She left Port Laki (Leros) on 5 September for Piraeus. On the 6th, a formation of 12 Beaufighters, operating at extreme range, came on S.S. Carola, escorted by an Arado 196 and some Ems-class armed trawlers. They damaged S.S. Carola so badly that, although she made Piraeus, she went directly into dry dock and was never operational again.

On 9 September, Beaufighters from R.A.F. Gambut sank the anti-submarine vessel UJ.2142 (ex Filio Pi) between Crete and Milos and claimed damage to a 'decoy' ship. Further incursions into the enemy naval strength were recorded on 14 September, when Beaufighters (of Nos. 252 and 603 Squadrons) sank the minesweeper Nordstern (260 tons) off Paros Island. On 19 September, Beaufighters of No. 252 Squadron sank the small tanker Ellis (272 tons) off Gavriou (Andros Island) while en route from Syros to Salonika.

#### Enemy Shipping Movements in late September 1944

During September, there was first a gradual shift of traffic to North-Eastern Greece. Large vessels were taken off the Crete run and replaced by small craft. The Allies put out feelers. Troops of the Greek Sacred Squadron landed on Mitylene and Khios Islands.

Having removed his garrisons from the smaller, and (to the Allies) more inaccessible islands, the enemy now concentrated on Crete and lost, as has been already noted, two K.T. ships and a coaster to Force 120. The K.T. Pelikan, anxious to escape the fate of the Toni near Santorin, changed course from Crete to Rhodes. The minelayers Zeus and Drache returned to the South Aegean after successful trips in northern waters. The latter was shelled by naval forces in Milos on the 17th, but escaped.

#### Late September Successes by Middle East Aircraft

The week ending 24 September was a profitable one for the Allies in the Aegean. The Germans continued thinning-out garrisons in the Cyclades and Dodecanese, withdrew troops from mainland staging points such as Monemvasia and intensified traffic on the Piraeus - Salonika run. But the Allies were overtaking the tempo of their organization.

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(1) 8 of No. 252 and 4 of No. 603 Squadron, from Gambut.

(2) She was scuttled on <sup>or</sup> about 13 Oct. 44. She was the ex-Italian Corsico Fougier

On the 19th, the K.T. ship Pelikan lay in Port Laki (Leros) scarred from air and naval attacks over the past weeks. That night, the port was attacked by a Wellington of No. 38 Squadron, but K.T. Pelikan managed to leave port. For five days, she could not be traced. No further aircraft attacks on her were recorded. She was eventually seen lying wrecked in Phillenghi Bay (Paros Island). It was considered probable that she had struck a mine en route; to what extent air raid and ship's gunfire damage contributed to her loss is impossible to compute, but they had almost certainly reduced her operational value.

22 and 23 September were days of success for the two Beaufighter squadrons at Gambut. S.S. Drache (1,870 G.R.T.) - the ex-minelayer - having made two fast trips to the Cyclades, was despatched to Port Vathi (Samos Island). On 22 September, she was sighted by a Beaufighter (No. 252 Squadron) on a reconnaissance flight. Twelve Beaufighters <sup>(1)</sup> from Gambut attacked, leaving her a black hulk. <sup>(2)</sup> Two caiques were also destroyed. On the same day, the collier S.S. Peter (3,754 G.R.T.), pressed into the evacuation service, was sunk by H.M.S. submarine Vampire off the north coast of Skopelos Island, close to the approaches to Volos.

There was still a desperate need to clear the Dodecanese of waiting troops. On the 22nd, therefore, the German S.S. Orion (700 G.R.T.) was despatched to the Eastern Aegean. She was seen by a Baltimore of No. 459 (R.A.A.F.) Squadron from R.A.F. Station Berka and shadowed to Chendro Bay, Demusa Island. <sup>(3)</sup> This squadron, a relative newcomer to the area, had already reported the movements of S.S. Garala, S.S. Zeus, S.S. Drache, and the three K.T. ships and these reports had led to their destruction or neutralization. Twenty Beaufighters from Gambut attacked S.S. Orion with rocket projectiles. She was gutted and beached, a wreck. One Beaufighter and its crew were missing. On 27 September, Beaufighters of No. 252 Squadron attacked shipping at Andros Island, and in addition to <sup>causing</sup> damage to craft, sank the small transport S.S. Holly. <sup>(4)</sup>

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(1) 8 of No. 252 and 4 of No. 603 Squadron.

(2) Mimi and Mina.

(3) 10 miles East of Naxos Island.

(4) Ex - Ismini of 314 G.R.T.

These successes in September must be seen against a strenuous effort throughout the month. Not all the operations led to immediate results.

German warship reinforcements break out of the Adriatic

As the tempo of evacuation heightened, the German shortage of naval escorts for the northerly traffic became acute. There was only one active torpedo boat in commission - TA.14. (1) Temporary relief was brought by an audacious attempt at the impossible, at the time when Allied submarine forces were appearing in increasing numbers in the Northern Aegean. It succeeded.

In late September, the three ex Italian torpedo boats TA.37 (ex Gladia), TA.38 (ex Spada) and TA.39 (ex Daga) sailed from Trieste, evaded the close Allied air and naval watch, broke out of Otranto Straits, passed through the Corinth Canal and reached Piraeus on 25 September. Photographs of them occasioned surprise at the Middle East Interpretation Unit, for such operations had proved disastrous on the several previous occasions. The passage was a tactical triumph for the German naval command.

The three torpedo boats were used to lay a defensive minefield off Piraeus and for escort and patrol. TA.39 assisted in the evacuation of Syros on 10/11 October and was sunk on 15 October while attempting to fetch wounded from Volos. TA.38 had a rough passage both at the hands of aircraft and through misadventure and was scuttled. TA.37 was sunk on 7 October in an action with H.M. destroyers Ternagant and Tuscan.

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(1) The fate of the destroyer TA.16 (ex-Italian Crispi) and the torpedo boat TA.17 (ex Italian San Martino) cannot be definitely fixed. The Italian Admiralty's 'Navi Perdute' suggests that both were finally destroyed in an air attack on 12 Oct.44 on Piraeus. There was no such attack on that date, but it may be that they were destroyed in one of the air attacks of 15, 24, 25 September. Both were, it is believed, repairing. The Crispi had been sunk by aircraft on 8 Mar. 44 at Candia, salvaged and sailed to Piraeus. One report says the Germans scuttled the San Martino on 18 Sept.44, but air records do not confirm this.

Last Days of the Evacuation Shipping in October 1944

Piraeus was cleared of active shipping and prepared for demolition: and blockships were sunk. Loaded transports converged on Salonika, Khalkis and Volos and unloaded. Those that survived the passage were marked for sinking as blockships. The one destroyer and S.S. Zeus laid mines to hinder pursuit by Allied naval forces.

During the third week in October, Volos and Khalkis were evacuated: all enemy shipping in Greece withdrew to Salonika. Cross-Aegean and inter-island traffic was by now almost impossible. Three lighters made one of the last dashes from East to West, from Leros to Salonika. There was no movement in the harbours of Rhodes or Crete. Melos was now the last enemy base in the Cyclades. On the 19th the Solferino, the last enemy destroyer, was sunk by naval forces near the Sporades.

The Ventura attack of the 13th had sown havoc among the shipping concentrated at Volos. Allied naval forces and submarines sank the tanker Bertha, the concrete ships S.S. General Jacob II and S.S. Achilles, S.S. Tsar Ferdinand, the torpedo boats TA.37 and TA.39, two patrol boats, the anti-submarine UJ.2144, six small craft and two small transports.

At Salonika, the last mainland port then in German hands, all shipping in the harbour not already destroyed was scuttled. <sup>(1)</sup> They had no alternative. In the afternoon of 30 October, British patrols were reported in Salonika and in contact with the retreating Germans. Mines had been laid in the Gulf and the two hospital ships Gradisca and Tubingen escorted to Alexandria. Apart from the fighting at Fiskopi and Milos, all was quiet in the Aegean.

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- (1) The ex-Italian minelayers Albana and Rovigno (113 tons each), the minelayer Zeus (ex-Italian Francesco Morosini - 2,423 tons), S.S. Lola (1,193 G.R.T.), S.S. Bourgas (2,940 G.R.T.), S.S. Ville de Toulon (1,944 G.R.T.), the barge Engeray (381 G.R.T.), the salvage tug Irene Vernison (663 G.R.T.), S.S. Nafisika (250 G.R.T.), S.S. Sybille (350 G.R.T.), and the small auxiliaries Gesina, Luba, Merkur and Seeadler.

/ Reduced

Reduced October Air Effort by Middle East Aircraft

As the Carrier Force 'A' extended its range, as H.M.S. Ulaten Queen and her Beaufighters discouraged air transport, and as the Germans retired northwards, there was less and less active shipping left in the Southern Aegean for Middle East aircraft to attack. No sinkings by them can be confirmed, although they undoubtedly caused some damage among small craft in the early part of the month. Their effort was confined to uneventful sweeps, anti-air transport patrols, cover for the Naval Force 120 and photographic reconnaissance. This unspectacular work was the source of much exact information on the state of affairs in the Aegean and the islands still occupied by Germans. Three squadrons were transferred to the strength of Balkan Air Force for employment in Greece.

Pre-'Manna' Operations by Balkan and Coastal Air Forces from Italy  
(1 - 14 October 1944) (1)

The withdrawal from Greece and the Aegean was only a part of a major redistribution of German troops. Not only did they take up a new defensive line on their Balkan Russian front, but staged a fighting withdrawal from <sup>Albania and</sup> Southern <sup>and</sup> Dalmatia along the Adriatic coast. The Balkan Air Force's main effort in the last quarter of 1944 was devoted to the pursuit of the Germans and the destruction of their land and sea communications outside Greece: but during the critical weeks of October, they employed small active forces in a variety of tasks arising from the fluid situation.

Between 1 and 14 October, small formations of rocket-firing Beaufighters <sup>(2)</sup> and Mustangs <sup>(3)</sup> of Balkan Air Force swept the sea areas from the Gulf of Corinth to Salonika and the Khalkis - Volos Channel. Mosquitoes <sup>(4)</sup> and Beaufighters of the Coastal Air Force intruded, with occasional small successes, over Araxos and the Athens and Salonika airfields. A patrol vessel <sup>(5)</sup> was sunk on the 8th in the Gulf of Salonika but no targets of great interest materialised until the 11th. On that day, a mission of four Beaufighters <sup>(6)</sup> caught up with a convoy of I-boats

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(1) B.A.F. and M.A.A.F./Operations O.R.B's.

(2) Of No. 19 (S.A.A.F.) 39 and 16 Squadrons.

(3) Of No. 213 and 249 Squadrons.

(4) Of No. 256 Squadron.

(5) GN. 91 (KFK.28)

(6) Of No. 16 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron.

(infantry landing craft) proceeding northwards from Khalkis, loaded with troops and stores. They attacked with 24 rocket projectiles, reporting at least ten underwater hits. Troops jumped overboard and many of them were hit in the water. Two boats (I.05 and I.55) were destroyed; the others pulled in to shore. One Beaufighter was shot down. A Siebel ferry <sup>(1)</sup> was sunk on or about the same date at the entrance to Voles.

Naval Co-operation by Coastal and Strategic Air Forces (October 1944) (1)

The Coastal Air Force squadrons based in south-eastern Italy found some new and urgent tasks before them as the Allied naval forces prepared to transport ground, naval and air troops and equipment to Greece. They first intervened in the campaign on 4 October, when three Wellingtons (2) searched the Gulf of Patras for shipping. On 5th October, six Mosquitos (3) intruded in the Salonika area and destroyed two Ju.52s and some lorries.

Mines were fast becoming a priority problem. On 5 October, a programme of minespotting was initiated. Two Catalinas (4) engaged on this task sighted 264 mines in the Gulf of Patras at less than 15 feet depth; some of them were of Italian design. The work continued on the day and night of the 6th. On the night 6/7 October two Liberators of the Strategic Air Force laid twelve 1000 pound mines in Khalkis Straits in the path of German evacuation shipping bound for Volos or Salonika. After a few days of prohibitive weather, minespotting was resumed (on 14 October) when Catalinas searched the waters off Salamis Strait, Cape Themis, Phleves Island and Cape Turlo (Aegina). Over 100 mines were spotted in the last-named area. In spite of these efforts, there were casualties on the minefields off Cape Turlo when the Allied naval forces approached Athens on 15 October. But for the work of the Catalinas and wise delays by the Naval Commander, there would have been many more serious losses. The minespotting was necessary even after the landing at Athens on 16 October. Then, on 18 October, two Catalinas patrolled the areas of <sup>Cape</sup> ~~Cape~~ Turlo, Themistocles breakwater and Cape Karamo (Gulf of Petali), no less than 119 mines were sighted. At this point, Coastal Air Force reverted to its normal duties in the Adriatic.

Balkan Air Force Operations from Italy over Greece - (7/11 Oct. 1944) (5)

Small formations of Mustangs and Beaufighters continued to watch shipping as it concentrated in the direction of Salonika. They looked <sup>in vain</sup> ~~vainly~~ for air transport; those activities had <sup>almost</sup> ~~ceased~~ over the sea areas. Liaison between the Fleet and Balkan Air Force was closer than ever before, for many tasks of co-operations could no longer be met by R.A.F. Middle East. (6) On 7 October, four Mustangs (7) found what they described as a destroyer off Kassandra Hook.

/It

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- (1) M.A.C.A.F., M.A.A.F. and B.A.F./Operations O.R.Bs.
  - (2) Of No. 221 Squadron.
  - (3) Of No. 256 Squadron.
  - (4) Of 8th U.S. Emergency Rescue Squadron.
  - (5) Balkan Air Force and M.A.A.F/Operation O.R.Bs Oct.44.
  - (6) Admiralty File M/01027/45.
  - (7) No. 213 Sqn.

It was, in fact, the anti-submarine vessel UJ.2144: surface craft sank it the same day. After a spell of violent weather, Balkan Air Force continued its sweeps in the Volos - Khalkis - Salonika sector and began, from the 14th, to turn its attention with excellent results to the Larissa - Lamia - Korca railway sector. Venturas hit a few craft near Volos, Beaufighters <sup>(1)</sup> and Mustangs swept as far as the Northern Sporades Islands in the approaches to Salonika, attacking such defence craft as net boomlayers without notable results. As the scale of effort diminished, the embryo of a more effective air campaign was <sup>formed</sup> ~~born~~ on Greek soil. No. 337 Wing established on Greek Bases <sup>(2)</sup>

In September 1944, No. 337 Wing <sup>was</sup> shipped from Oran to Naples, from whence it proceeded to Bari under command of Balkan Air Force. It was transferred to Greece. Its advance party left Taranto by sea and reached Kalamaki (Hassani) airfield on 15 Oct. 44. There it joined up with the 2nd Independent Paratroop Brigade, who were in possession and were laying a dirt strip. Spitfires of No. 32 Squadron and No. 5 Forward Fighter Control Unit arrived on the 18th and 19th. No. 94 Squadron (Spitfires) and the first party of No. 108 Squadron (Beaufighters from Middle East) arrived on the 19th. The rest of the Wing followed rapidly. Work on the base continued round the clock. During the night of 18/19 October, all communications and signals facilities were completed. A Fighter Direction Tender <sup>(3)</sup> <sup>anchored</sup> ~~was anchored~~ close to the airfield. Fuel and rations were brought in by air lift.

No. 337 Wing in Pursuit of the Germans.

The directif given to the Air Forces gave the following priority for operations. Firstly, the air defence of Athens and Piraeus; secondly, general reconnaissance and fighter protection of our convoys; thirdly, maintenance of law and order; fourthly, aid in the rehabilitation of the country; and fifthly, subject to the first four requirements being fulfilled, offensive action against enemy forces.

According to the terms of this brief, it was now open to No. 337 Wing <sup>(5)</sup> to attempt the maximum destruction of enemy forces. But, at first, the situation was delicate. Apprehensions had, as has been noted, already found expression in the interchange of the <sup>strategists</sup> ~~strategist~~, lest the Germans be forced back into

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- (1) No. 39 Squadron.
  - (2) No. 337 Wing and Balkan Air Force O.R.Bs.
  - (3) F.D.T.B./3.
  - (4) No. 337 Wing O.R.B.
  - (5) Part of A.H.Q. Greece, itself under control of Balkan Air Force.

the Athens area and driven to full-scale defensive operations. In applying pressure from the air, it was a question of a nicely calculated more or less. Care had to be taken that the German escape routes were not so severed that the Germans, having no alternative, might return south to Athens.

The first operations by No. 337 Wing from Kalamaki were carried out on 19 Oct. 44, when Nos. 32 and 94 Squadrons flew a few tactical reconnaissances in the Athens - Larissa - Trikkala sector, where roads and railways were choked with traffic, fields packed with cars and mule trains, and trucks and buildings burning. After a day of bad weather, the now fully-installed three squadrons resumed operations. It soon became apparent, that the enemy had no intention of returning to Athens. So intensely did he fear a rearguard action that he was carrying out such thorough demolitions on every road and railway that they remained impassable to normal traffic for some weeks.

On 24 Oct. 44, ten Wellington crews and their aircraft of No. 221 Squadron and three Warwicks of No. 283 Air Sea Rescue Unit landed; on 26 October, three Swordfish of the Fleet Air Arm landed.

The two Spitfire squadrons operated every day in variable weather against road and railway traffic as far north as Katerini and Servia. Daily sorties ranged from as low as six<sup>up</sup> to thirty-three on the 22nd. Beaufighters operated in small numbers at dusk to intercept air transport flying north from Salonika. From the 21st to the end of the month, they flew twenty-seven sorties but destroyed only one He.111. This is not surprising in face of the low Beaufighter strength and the extent of country open to the Ju.52s still carrying the brunt of the fast diminishing air traffic northwards. Spitfires of Nos. 32 and 94 Squadrons, while on a sweep on the 23rd destroyed two He.111s on the ground at Larissa and lost one aircraft to anti-aircraft fire.

As the Germans withdrew, the anti-aircraft batteries moved with them, intensifying the concentration of fire they knew well how to turn to tactical advantage. Aircraft reported especially dense opposition in the neighbourhood of big road convoys. They nevertheless pressed home their attacks all over the area of Central Greece within their range; and their claims of 12 locomotives, 32 motor vehicles, 3 trucks and 2 petrol tanks destroyed and many more vehicles, locomotives damaged may be accepted as close to the facts.

/They

They attempted three times on the 25th to reconnoitre Salonika, where the Germans were still in force, but were stopped by very heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire. On the 26th, No. 32 Squadron reported Larissa free of the enemy and the airfields completely demolished. The trail of ruin ran north in the track of the enemy - burning towns, smoking wrecks of motor convoys, cratered roads and broken bridges. Reconnaissance aircraft watched and reported the evacuation of Salonika until 30 October, when it was entered by Allied patrols.

Summarising, the small forces of No. 337 Wing had effected notable destruction on the Salonika - Katerini and Larissa - Katterini railway lines and along the southern roads, but had less success along the main road in the very mountainous northern stretches. For several days, a very heavy concentration of road transport remained in the precipitous pass between Servia and Elasson, probably awaiting supplies of petrol. Many attempts were made by fighter bombing and medium bombing to destroy the road bridges over the River Aliakmon, (just north of Servia). Had the destruction of this bridge been accomplished, the Germans would have been forced to abandon all their road transport south of it. Unfortunately, this operation was seriously hampered by bad weather and low cloud and its object was not achieved, although much damage was inflicted on the motor transport.

Disappointing delays were enforced by the thorough German demolitions on Larissa airfield. They prevented the wing moving forward its fighter bombers which, owing to their restricted range, were unable to operate beyond Katerini and Servia. However, from November, fighter bombers operated from Sedes (Salonika) airfield against German rearguards. Opposition from anti-aircraft artillery was fierce round every target. At Larissa, Servia, Katerini, Guida airfield, Bitolj, Axioupolis and Devdelisa and also, in the early stages, at Volos, 88 mm flak was encountered, and it grew extremely severe as the final phase opened.

No. 337 Wing reports Germans clear of Greece. (1)

The operational boundary for No. 337 Wing terminated at the Greek frontier. On 3 November, permission was sought to extend its operations as far as Skoplje, in order to harass the enemy columns during their retreat through Jugoslavia. Balkan Air Force aircraft based in Italy were being hampered by bad weather, but a more favourable cycle prevailed in the south-east. The request was granted

/and

and later extended. The possession of Sides airfield extended aircraft range considerably. Operations over the mainland cannot be followed <sup>at</sup> from this point, as they fall within the scope of a separate study. (1)

All <sup>though</sup> 2 November, reports by reconnaissance aircraft made it increasingly clear that during the night 1st/2nd, the last German rearguards had passed over the Greek frontier into Yugoslavia and that, after nearly four years of German occupation, Greek soil was at last free of hostile forces. A signal was sent to Army Headquarters, that it was believed that the war in Greece had been successfully completed. (2)

Owing to the mountainous country and thorough enemy demolition, Army reconnaissance forces had only been able to maintain irregular contact with enemy rearguards and then only at a few points. Throughout the retreat from Greece, the Royal Air Force had provided the greater part of the information regarding enemy movements, in fact, a clear and detailed day-to-day picture of the land situation.

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- (1) Some bare details may be found in the brief History of the Balkan Air Force (A.H.B. 1181/130).  
(2) Air operations during the civil war on Greece will be dealt with in a later chapter.  
(3) Including S.A.A.F. and R.A.A.F.

The amphibious Landings

The Landing on Kithera Island: Operation "Aplomb" (16 Sept. 44) (1)

It remains to record briefly the course of the five amphibious landings, of which three were supported by air operations.

The first was launched to secure an initial advanced naval base. On 15 September, aircraft of the carriers Searcher and Khadiya provided fighter cover for the small naval force approaching the island of Kithera (or Cerigo), south of the Morean Peninsula. Ships swept the Kithera Channel into the Western Aegean.

16 September was D Day for Operation "Aplomb". The naval force made an unopposed landing and established a temporary Coastal Force base at Kapsali for motor gunboats and motor launches. Another base was set up, with Greek assistance, in the island of Khios on the far side of the Central Aegean.

The force landed on Kithera was known as Foxforce and was joined by Greek troops.

The Landing on Poros Island: Operation "Edgehill" (1 Oct. 44) (2)

On 23 September troops were dropped by air on Araxos airfield and the remainder of the force (Bucketforce) in Operation "Towanbucket" landed at the port of Nauplia on the 26th. (3)

On 1 October, Foxforce sailed from Kapsali and landed on Poros (in south-eastern Greece in the approaches to Athens) and moved the advanced coastal base there. The party was fired on for a few days from a German battery at Perdika on the island of Aegina (also in the approaches to Athens). By the 12th, Aegina had been evacuated and was occupied. (4) There was no air support.

The Fleet now controlled the maritime approaches to Athens. Before the naval expedition which formed part of Operation "Manna" could be launched, the channels had to be swept clear of mines, airfields seized and an air force established, the Peloponnese had to be cleared of opposition and those forces engaged in this latter task had to be ready to support the main occupation forces. The air operations have already been related. The air, ground and naval operations at Sarande (Albania) and Corfu must now be outlined.

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- (1) H.Q. Land Forces Adriatic Operation Instruction No. 8, 13 Sept. 44 in File I.S.S. (Inter-Service Secretariat (B.A.F.) Encl. 22A (A.H.B. II J.20/5/12/136) Balkan Air Force/Air Staff O.R.B. Appendix C47, Sept. 44.
  - (2) Admiralty Historical Section.
  - (3) Operations related in full in a previous section.
  - (4) Operation "Delivered."

/ Operations

Operations against Corfu and Sarande : Operation "Mercerised"  
(22 Sept. to 12 Oct. 44) (1)

Operation "Mercerised", a landing on the South Albanian coast opposite the island of Corfu was opened on the night of 22/23 September. It was hoped to capture the town of Sarande and its environs, so controlling enemy movements from Corfu back to Greece. The first phase failed in the main for the reasons that the forces employed were too weak, although air attacks destroyed the coastal guns in Corfu covering Allied movements. The second phase opened on 8 October with air preparations for the landing of a large force on the 9th and it gained its main objectives.

The local defences were very strong. The whole area was covered by heavy batteries of coastal guns at Aikaterini in north-eastern Corfu, at Delvine near Sarande and on Cape Kiephali as well as by numerous smaller batteries in the Sarande area. These guns were the targets for small formations of aircraft on all but four days of bad weather from 23 September to 8 October. The guns on Corfu were the first silenced. The first two attacks of 23 and 25 September by Beaufighters, although several direct hits on Aikaterini battery were claimed, did not silence it. Meanwhile the influx of guns from Corfu, in course of evacuation, hardened the stalemate. On 2, 3 and 4 October, the value of the rocket projectile was once again demonstrated. Hurricanes, escorted by Spitfires, attacked to such good effect that similar formations despatched on the 5th reported the guns destroyed and the pits empty.

Relief from attack to seaward was, however, offset by the incessant activity of the augmented Sarande defences.

This period was one of frequent very bad weather, but whenever conditions allowed, small formations of aircraft controlled by Balkan Air Force attacked the defences of Sarande. Operations began on 24 September, when Mustangs, Spitfires and Beaufighters silenced batteries near Sarande. On the 25th, Venturas made an attack on Delvine batteries: Hurricanes and Spitfires bombed guns, a bridge near the town of Sarande and the town itself; rocket-firing Beaufighters, Italian Macchis and Airacobras attacked guns or swept the area. 30 October saw the last troops and guns from Corfu landing on the mainland: these reinforcements heightened the pace of the fighting and rendered the Allied situation critical.

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(1) B.A.F. O.R.B. Appendices E series Sept. and Oct. 44: Report of Proceedings Operation "Mercerised" (Admiralty File M/058499/44)

Little help was available from Balkan Air Force but warships bombarded Delvine from the 4th.

It was clear now that the beachhead must be reinforced if any progress was to be made. Troops and shipping were assembled and an air programme organized. On 7 and 8 October, rocket-firing Hurricanes escorted by Spitfires attacked the beaches and guns round Sarande and on Cape Kiephali (near Santi Quaranta, opposite Corfu). On D Day - 9 October - the new landings began with Assyrian paratroops. All day, while Hurricanes attacked the guns with rockets, heavy fighting proceeded. The troops at last entered Sarande, which fell in the evening after heavy street fighting. While Delvine and the area were cleared of Germans, attention veered to Corfu, still an uncertain quantity.

At 1415 hours on the 12th, the Naval Liaison Officer with Balkan Air Force signalled the C.-in-C. Mediterranean that white flags and crosses were out in Corfu. The Germans had evacuated most of their forces on the night of 9/10 October. Houndforce was evacuated between 16 and 22 October and crossed the Peloponnese.

German Decision to evacuate all Greece

Faced with disaster, the Germans decided to evacuate what remained of Greece as well as Southern Albania and Southern Macedonia. This was confirmed in a Fuehrer order dated 3 Oct. 44. (1) Athens, Khalkis, Lemnos and Volos were evacuated. The last effective torpedo boat - TA.18 - was destroyed by H.M. ships on 19 October while attempting to fetch survivors from Argyronese Island in the Ores Channel North of Enboea.

The Landing in Athens: Operation "Manna" (16 Oct. 44) (2)

Operation "Manna" had opened on 12 Oct. 44 with the air drop on Megara. On that day the last German rearguards were leaving the northern suburbs of Athens, which they declared an open city. The Greek flag was reported flying over the Acropolis in the afternoon. On the night 13/14th advanced units of the forces landed on Poros Island (Foxforce or "F" Force) landed at Piraeus and reported the

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- (1) Chiefsache Aegeis V (Leander) PG/46136 (F.D.S./Admty).
  - (2) Signals FX.39084 16 Oct. and FX.42552 22 Oct. 44. SACED to C.O.S. (A.H.B. ID.5/226/2 Encl. 149 and 150): Admty File M/O4189/45: B.A.F. and R.A.F.M.E. O.R.B's.

port clear, but badly damaged. The troops dropped at Megara were moving towards the capital and the forces who had secured Patras were occupying the Paleoponnese, accepting the surrender of the Security Battalions. On 14 October, troops of the R.A.F. Regiment, Foxforce and the 2nd Paratroop Brigade marched into Athens, where they received a tumultuous welcome. The field was now open for the approach of the seaborne forces of Operation "Manna", the armed occupation of an evacuated Greek area. There was no German air or land threat, but there were mines in the approaches to Athens.

(1)

Ships from Alexandria, Taranto and Naples converged on the rendezvous. On 15 October, the force was in the Saronic Gulf ready to land. Fighters from the escort carriers H.M.S. Attacker and Stalker were patrolling the area. A solitary Ju.88 reconnaissance aircraft was shot down. The armada was held up by the minefield East of Cape Turlo (Aegina) on which two minesweepers were mined and four mined and sunk.

It was not until the morning of 16 October that the first elements landed at Port Herakles, Athens. Kalamaki airfield was secured and as has been recorded, began receiving Dakotas. Air Headquarters Greece was established in Athens and assumed control of the air force units fast occupying Kalamaki. Paratroops followed up the German withdrawal northwards and moves were made for the occupation of Salonika when it was clear of Germans. Air force supplies continued to flow in: Naval and Balkan Air Force aircraft continued the search for mines in Northern waters and the latter harried the remnants of the columns moving to and beyond Salonika. This last great centre of operations was clear of Germans by 30 October. The town, and Megolo Mikra and Sedes airfields were swiftly occupied. To all intents and purposes the campaign against the Germans in Greece and the Aegean had ended.

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(1) The order of ships was Orion, Teazer, Tenacious, Ajax, Black Prince, Aurora, Adrias, Zetland, Derax, Crete, 2 L.S.G's, 2 L.S.T's, 1 M/T ship and F.D.T.13, Averoff, Ionia, Tetcott, 2 merchant vessels and the water tanker Petronella with water for Athens.

The End of the Evacuation

The Royal and Royal Hellenic Air Forces enter Crete (1)

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In mid-November, No. 337 Wing was strengthened by the arrival of three squadrons of the Royal Hellenic Air Force, viz. No. 13(H) flying Baltimores and Nos. 335(H) and 336 (H), flying Spitfires. The wing was now admirably equipped for a maritime role, although it could still turn its attention landward if desired.

Operations against German forces in the Balkans ceased on 22 November (2) as there was a lack of adequate information regarding the position of Russian forces and some resulting confusion. The wing's attentions were switched to maritime operations in the southern maritime sector. Beaufighters patrolled and intruded over Crete at night and Spitfires reconnoitred by day. Having combed the island, they made it clear by the end of 19 November that the Germans had evacuated the eastern and central parts of Crete and were concentrating in the northwest sector. Canea and Maleme were still in their hands and the local defences were strong.

At 1100 on 20 Nov. 44 the Officer Commanding the wing (3) was airborne from Kalamaki in a Hurricane and landed at Kastelli Pediada in Crete, the first R.A.F. landing since the capture of the island by the Germans in 1941. After an enthusiastic welcome by the Cretans, he contacted an officer of the British Military Mission, obtained full particulars of the land situation and the state of serviceability of Herakleion airfield and harbour and returned to Kalamaki.

It was very desirable to take over Herakleion airfield as soon as practicable and so contain the German garrison, while extending Allied control over the southern Aegean. While a day and night watch on the German sector was maintained, preparations were accelerated. On 25 November, one of the wing pilots landed on Herakleion, reporting two-thirds of the runway serviceable. Work also proceeded on Kastellion airfield. The former was first occupied and the port opened up for equipment and relief supplies by sea. Air operations began on 28 November, when Spitfires of Nos. 94 and 335(H) Squadrons carried out the first tactical reconnaissance.

/When

- (1) No. 337 Wing O.R.B.
- (2) Ibid.
- (3) Gp.Capt. M.F. Pedley.

When December opened, the prospects were mixed. A good air base had been obtained with a wide radius of operational possibilities. No large-scale engagements with the Germans were envisaged but political relations with a section of the liberated Greeks were growing uglier daily and pointing to the need for consolidation of the air forces' position. The islands of Milos and Rhodes were still in German hands.

Allied Landings on Milos Island (1)

On 22 October, the small German garrison on the island of Milos, in the Southern Cyclades, was still holding out. Photographs of its defences and terrain were taken on that day by a Baltimore from R.A.F. Gambut and plans for its speedy capture laid. Prominent among the defences was the Lakhida coastal defence battery of four 150 mm guns, set in steel and concrete emplacements. It was a difficult target for aircraft or ships to hit and had the same range as a cruiser of the Aurora type and a wide arc of fire.

A naval reconnaissance patrol was landed on the night of 24/25 October and a landing party the next night. These forces secured a bridgehead in the Vouthia area and fought their way, against stiff resistance, towards the town of Adhamas. While the preliminaries for a surrender were being opened, morale was stiffened on the arrival by air of a new Nazi commander.

Air and Naval Attacks on Milos Defences. (2)

On the 26th, a formation of Baltimores (3) opened the air attacks on Lakhida battery, repeating the effort on the 27th. Only one gun was silenced. Between 26 October and 2 November, seven attacks were made by the same squadron, usually in formations of six to eight aircraft. (4) Although the bombing was assessed as good, the guns resisted and the local anti-aircraft defences put up a spirited resistance. No aircraft were lost; but the moral was once again evident that the German capacity for constructing fortress-like gun sites called for heavier weapons of attack. On the 29th, eight Hellcats from the escort carrier H.M.S. Emperor led a formation of eight Beaufighters (5) to the battery and made a

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*of naval operations* *well-timed*

(1) Details supplied by Admiralty Historical Section. Air details of naval operations from R.A.F. Berka, R.A.F. Gambut, Nos. 459 (R.A.A.F.) and 603 Squadron O.R.Bs.

(2) Ibid.

(3) No. 459 (R.A.A.F.) Squadron from Berka: 7 aircraft.

(4) Bombs were released from 6,000 feet altitude.

(5) No. 603 Squadron from Gambut.

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well-timed and effective anti-flak attack. The Beaufighters went in with rocket projectiles. Two only sighted the targets and although this type of operation deserved greater success, the three guns continued to fire. Later attacks by Baltimores and Hellicats, hampered by the defences, failed to score the kind of hit, direct or very near, which alone could have silenced them.

The ships outside bombarded the guns and strong points - H.M.S. Aurora's ammunition was getting low on the 27th. The cruiser H.M.S. Black Prince added her weight to the bombardment from the 29th onward. In spite of bad weather, the south coast of the island was cleared, and a Naval Force Commander established ashore at Probato Bay. On 30 October, a naval force of about 160 men landed and made contact with Army detachments of Force 142. In spite of the air and naval attacks, all that could be done was to contain the garrison in Adhames town and to "keep the heads of the coastal gunners down".

Allied Withdrawal from Milos

After a last attack on 2 November by Baltimores, it was clear that nothing short of an attack in force, involving heavy fighting, would effect the surrender of the garrison on Milos. A decision was therefore made not to land reinforcements, to leave elements of Force 142 on the island to watch the enemy, and to withdraw the other land and sea forces during the night of 4/5 November. This was done. On 12 November, the Supreme Commander reported the complete withdrawal to the Chief of Staff (1) and the intention to employ the battleship H.M.S. King George V on the bombardment of Likhadia battery while working up for operations with the Eastern Fleet. On the 15th, H.M.S. King George V bombarded the battery out of its range of 26,000 yards but failed to put it out of action. On 14 November, a small Commando landed and endeavoured, but failed, to occupy the radar station. It was withdrawn on 19 November.

The German decision to remain on Milos was forced upon them, but their success in holding still another of their fortresses remains a theme for instructive research.

The German Fortresses in the Aegean

It would be interesting to follow, if space allowed, the course of Allied progress into the Aegean. Naval and military forces, sometimes aided by air attacks or demonstrations, established themselves on all but a few of the islands.

/After

(1) Signal FX.51527 (A.H.B. 1.D.5/226/2 Encl.153).

After the conclusion of the German withdrawal, there still remained about 37,000 men who could not be evacuated. (1) They were distributed among the three fortresses of Leros, Rhodes and the western half of Crete (2) and the islands of Milos, Kos and Piskopi and were fairly well provided with small naval and supply craft. They lived off the country, cut off from the motherland until the war ended.

Statistics of the German Evacuation Effort (3)

Viewed as an operations, the German evacuation of Greece and the Aegean can only be considered as a success in the face of overwhelming Allied superiority in arms. They exploited with customary skill the terrain, their air and small surface craft transport, and the Allied disadvantages of range, full commitments elsewhere and their constitutional time-lag between strategic exchange and tactical action. Characteristic of them was their getting away to a flying start, so saving about one-sixth of the available manpower before the Allies moved in any appreciable weight.

Between 23 August and 23 October, they evacuated:-

37,137 troops (of which some 30,000 by air in just over 2,000 sorties).

5,978 sick and wounded by hospital ships.

374 guns.

11 tanks.

2,104 horses.

760 motor vehicles.

1,174 various vehicles.

29,981 tons of equipment.

/Statistics of .....

(1) Comprising some 26,000 Germans and some 11,000 Italians.

(2) It is not exact to say that Crete could not be evacuated. The idea of holding it as a fortress was under consideration from the first days of the initial thinning-out process. Although the Germans exploited the propaganda value of their retention of the other islands, it was really a case of force majeure

(3) PG/33073, PG/46088 and PG/46124 (F.D.S./Admty).

Statistics of German Evacuation Losses (1)

Of the officers and men transported, only 380 officers and men were lost - about 1 per cent. Of the guns, tanks, vehicles and equipment transported, an aggregate of about 30 per cent was lost. (2) Of the naval personnel engaged in the operations, 641 officers and men were lost.

Of the 52 merchant ships of an aggregate total of 27,230 tons available at the outset, 29 ships totalling to 19,434 tons were lost. The remainder, mostly of low tonnage, were used as harbour blockships.

Naval shipping losses were one destroyer, four torpedo boats, one minelayer, one R-boat, one LS-boat, three anti-submarine escorts, four coasters, ten ferries and thirteen cutters.

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(1) FG/33073, FG/46088 and FG/46124 (F.D.S./ Admty.)

(2) 60 guns, 8 tanks, 156 motor vehicles, 34 other vehicles and 12,296 tons of equipment were lost.

S E C R E T

CHAPTER 2

OPERATIONS IN THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN  
(JANUARY TO DECEMBER 1944)

AIR DEFENCE OF CONVOYS

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Introduction

German bomber attacks on Allied convoys at sea in Home Waters petered out in the Spring of 1943. All through the rest of the year, enemy reconnaissance and minelaying aircraft and the natural need for defensive precautions tied up considerable Allied air forces, but no attacks on convoys at sea developed. The Germans were conserving against the day of an Allied landing in Northwest Europe. The heyday of such operations in Home Waters and the Atlantic had ended, <sup>(1)</sup> although an intermittent air threat to Arctic convoys persisted.

The course of events was very different in the Mediterranean, where the war was being fought on an unprecedented scale. Allied offensives caused a radical re-distribution of the German bomber forces, to whom the vast, increasing volume of Allied shipping proceeding through those waters offered an embarrassing choice of targets.

German anti-shipping strike forces pursued their campaign against Allied seaborne supplies in the Mediterranean with increasing vigour all through 1943, developing their methods to such successful conclusions in the closing weeks of the year as to force on the Allied command a drastic reappraisal of the situation and a sweeping reorganisation of air and naval defences. But the greatest testing time was still to come. With the Allied lead in radar, better aircraft, closer air/sea co-operation and an enemy going over to the defensive, it might be concluded that the advantages were all on the side of the Allies. This was not so; and it was clear to the Allied commanders, when 1944 opened, that the enemy lacked neither the ingenuity nor the forces and determination needed to improve on all previous enterprises and that he would present a constant most serious threat to the security of our shipping.

It is, therefore, through the period of January to August 1944 in the Central Mediterranean that the war's final phase of the enemy's campaign against convoys at sea and the Allies' countermeasures are to be studied with most advantage. It was the consummation in the West of this branch of warfare, in which only land-based aircraft were engaged.

/ Mediterranean

(1) R.A.F. Narrative - The R.A.F. in Maritime War Vol.IV pp 560-565 (A.H.B.)

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The opposing Air Forces

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Mediterranean fighter sectors (Jan. to Aug. 44) (1)

By the end of January 1944, the defence system of Coastal Air Force had assumed a pattern it was to retain for many months to come. From West to East, the coasts of Algeria and Tunisia were divided into five sectors grouped under H.Q. Coastal Air Force until 9 July, when No. 210 Group was reformed and became the controlling formation. These five sectors areas were Oran (Sector H.Q. Oran), Algiers (Sector H.Q. Reghaia), Djidjelli (Sector H.Q. Taher), Bone (Sector H.Q. Bone), and Bizerta (Sector H.Q. Sidi Amour). Air H.Q. Malta (now a part of Coastal Air Force) operated three sectors, viz. Malta, Palermo and Catania. No. 242 Group in the Adriatic area operated two sectors, viz. Taranto (Sector H.Q. Grottaglie), and Foggia (Sector H.Q. Foggia). The 62nd U.S. Fighter Wing at Naples operated that sector and the 63rd U.S. Fighter Wing, now in Corsica, operated sectors at Borge (H.Q. Bastia), Ajaccio, Alghero and Cagliari (H.Q. Elmas). The geographical sector limits for these Coastal Air Force sectors as well as those for the fighter sectors of Air Headquarters Eastern Mediterranean are set out in full in Appendix 44 and may be traced on Figure 20.

Allied fighter aircraft and their performance (2)

In any close analysis of convoy defence tactics, it is essential to be able to refer to a list of particulars relating to the fighters employed.

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(1) Mediterranean Joint Air Orders Part 5 (A.H.B.IIJI/78/547). These orders cover the following aspects of air/naval co-operation in great details:- co-operation in general, recognition, anti-submarine aircraft, reconnaissance and striking, fighter protection, communications, air/sea rescue and exercises.

(2) Mediterranean Joint Air Orders (A.H.B.IIJI/78/547).

The list in question is given as footnote (1) and covers all the fighters employed in the Mediterranean in the first half of 1944. The figures are approximate and varied with weather conditions and heights and with different squadrons. The times of operational endurance endurance relate to the cruising speed (Buster) or all out speed (Gate). Rates of climb in formation have also to be taken into account.

The maximum range from base at which fighter defence by Spitfire and Beaufighter could be given was:

by short-range Spitfires - 60 miles  
by long-range Spitfires - 120 miles  
by Beaufighters - 250 miles

within

Convoys sailed with a 40 miles line from the coast. ~~Visibility in good Mediterranean weather was 4 miles.~~

/Fighter Squadrons

(1) Particulars of fighters (S.R. and L.R. = short and long range)

Type	Operational endurance in hours	Cruising Speed (Liner)	Full Speed (Buster)	All out Speed (Gate)
Hurricane S.R.	1 hr. 30 m.	160 knots	185 knots	275 knots
Hurricane Mark I				
Hurricane Mark II				
Hurricane L.R.	3 hrs. 30 m.	155 knots	175 knots	265 knots
P.40 Tomahawk	2 hrs.	175 knots	195 knots	285 knots
Beaufighter	4 hrs.	175 knots	235 knots	295 knots
Fulmar	2 hrs. 30 m.	130 knots	180 knots	210 knots
Seafire	1 hr. 30 m.	230 knots	305 knots	317 knots
F4F Martlet	2 hrs. 45 m.	140 knots	200 knots	250 knots
Spitfire Mark I	1 hr. 30 m.	190 knots	235 knots	315 knots
Spitfire Mark II	1 hr. 30 m.	190 knots	235 knots	315 knots
Spitfire Mark V	1 hr. 30 m.	190 knots	235 knots	330 knots
Spitfire Mark IX	1 hr. 45 m.	230 knots	355 knots	355 knots
Spitfire L.R.	3 hrs	160 knots	215 knots	285 knots
P.40 Kittyhawk S.R.	1 hr. 45 m.	185 knots	200 knots	295 knots
P.40 Kittyhawk L.R.	2 hrs. 45 m	170 knots	195 knots	285 knots
P.40 Warhawk	1 hr. 45 m.	175 knots	230 knots	310 knots
P.38 Lightning	4 hrs. 45 m.	255 knots	315 knots	325 knots
P.39 Aircobra	2 hrs	210 knots	245 knots	265 knots

Fighter Squadrons employed on Convoy Defence

Examination of the location list of Coastal Air Force in early January 1944, shows, working from West to East, the following disposition of fighter squadrons, in the sectors already named, employed on the defence of convoys. In practice, the system was very flexible, allowing for a continuous interchange of base facilities when an immediate tactical situation called for it.

<u>Base</u>	<u>Squadron</u>	<u>Aircraft</u>
<u>North Africa</u>		
La Senia	No. 32 Flight	Spitfire
Tafaroui	417th U.S.	Beaufighter (night)
	No. 500	Hudson
	I/3 French	Airocobra
La Passet	III/6 French	Airocobra
Reghaia Reghaia	No. 153	Beaufighter (night)
	No. 39	Beaufighter (rocket)
	No. 32	Spitfire
	II/3 French	Hurricane
	I/4 French	Airocobra
	No. 256	Mosquito
Algiers	M.A.C.A.F. H.Q.	
Djdjelli	No. 328	Spitfire
<u>Sardinia</u>		
Alghero	No. 23	Mosquito
Cagliari	414th U.S.	Beaufighter (night)

/The

The German Strike and Reconnaissance Forces in Southern France (1)

On 10 Jan 44 the German Air Force in the South of France could count, for operations against convoys in North African waters, on 14 reconnaissance Ju.88s (2) (5 serviceable) at St. Martin (3) and 95 bombers (70 serviceable). Of these, 37 (28 serviceable) were torpedo-equipped He.111s, (4) 37 (31 serviceable) torpedo-equipped Ju.88s, (5) all at Montpellier and Salon, and 21 (11 serviceable) He.177s, equipped with radio-controlled bombs, at Bordeaux/Mérignac. At Lorient and Bordeaux, there were 16 (9 serviceable) long range Ju.88 (C-6) heavy fighters (6) for day or night escort: they sometimes staged at Istres.

Four months later, on 10 May, there were a few less reconnaissance aircraft - 9 (of which 4 were serviceable), but considerably more bombers, which now numbered 125. Considering all the handicaps, it was remarkable that 99 of them were serviceable. Some units had been replaced. There were still 18 He.177s, 8 Do.217s at Toulouse, (7) and the Ju.88 total had risen to 99. (8) There were still 18 escort fighters, now at Cazaux. It was over this period that the Germans made their heaviest efforts. The Allies knew that strength was high, but the continuous movements of units made it hard to say how high. The whole organisation was highly flexible and moves were made at short notice away from the Mediterranean as the situation in Biscay and North European waters demanded, and back to the Mediterranean, as soon as released. A growing shortage of experienced aircrews was evident. The landings in Normandy had a swift and serious effect on the bomber strength. Several units were moved northwards and one Geschwader - K.G.77 - was disbanded, handed over its Ju.88s to K.G.26 and, by 31 July, no longer figured on the Quartermaster's returns. On the latter date, the bomber strength had dropped to 81, (of which 53 were serviceable), belonging to Geschwaders K.G.26 and K.G.100. There were <sup>now</sup> not no He.177s or He.111s on the strength. The fighter escort, too, had been pulled out. A few reconnaissance aircraft still lay at St. Martin. New bomber bases at Valence, Nîmes and Montelimar were

/signs

- (1) Information from German documents supplied by A.H.B.6. See Appendix 47)
- (2) Unit 1(F)33.
- (3) They also used Les Chanoines and Montpellier.
- (4) Of I/K.G.26.
- (5) Of III/K.G.26.
- (6) Stab.III and 7/Z.G.1
- (7) 6/K.G.100. These could employ Hs.293s.
- (8) III/K.G.26, I and III/K.G.77 and 4/ and 6/K.G.76.

signs of the withdrawal up the Rhone valley. The end was clearly near at hand.

The state of the bomber strike forces reflected throughout the recognized virtues of enterprise, mobility and a wide variety in armament and tactical ingenuity. In addition to bombs, torpedoes and radio-controlled bombs, a liberal range of flares and markers was employed with developing finesse.

Through reconnaissance was a consistently strong feature and maintenance must have been first class. It was also evident that the force was progressively milked of experienced planners, pilots and navigators. Fuel was rationed, reinforcements unpredictable and there were bottlenecks in equipment, all due to the cumulative pressure of air attack on vital centres and communications.

As time passed, careful plotting by the Allies of the movements of reconnaissance aircraft revealed a systematic pattern.<sup>(1)</sup> Interception of aircraft within this pattern was to become a high priority task. A heightening of reconnaissance activity was often noted to precede a strike and the aim, seldom ~~to be~~ fully realised, was to prevent any reports on the size and position of a convoy reaching strike headquarters in Provence. Only a degree less in importance was the interception of the pathfinders and markers by aircraft and the radar plotting of the strike force far enough from the convoy to allow of the timely marshalling of the air convoy defences.

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(1) Refer to Figure 20.

Operations (January to April 1944)

A. Attack on Convoy "Decade" (10 Jan. 44) (1)

At dusk on 10 January, the two convoys "Decade" (2) and "Across" were in close proximity some 10 miles North of Cape Carbon (Algeria). "Decade" was escorted by 6 Airacobras (3) and 3 Beaufighters. (4) "Across" was escorted by 6 Airacobras and 1 Beaufighter. Both had been shadowed by aircraft of the F.33 long range reconnaissance unit (5) during the day. Beaufighters of No. 39 Squadron on "Stopper" patrols over gaps between the Balearic Islands reported destroying one of these Ju.88s in the morning and probably destroying another in the afternoon. (6) When it became clear that an enemy bomber force was approaching, the Fighter Sector Controller at Oran scrambled further aircraft for the protection of the two convoys - 4 Airacobras on "Decade" and 4 on "Across". Two Beaufighters, (7) on patrol between Algiers and Cape Tenex, were despatched to intercept enemy aircraft coming from the direction of Iviza Island. One U.S. Beaufighter was added to the convoy cover later.

The two Beaufighters of No. 153 Squadron came upon part of the enemy force - nine Ju.88s - about 30 miles S.E. of Formentera Island and about 185 miles from the convoy "Decade". They made five attacks, forcing them to jettison their torpedoes and retire northwards, for the loss of one Beaufighter. The rest of the strike force, some 15 He.11s and an undetermined number of Ju.88s, were identified 10 miles North of Cape Carbon. They orbited convoy "Decade", attacking at about 1850 hours. The Heinkels and Ju.88s were attacked by the Airacobras and Beaufighters, who claimed damage to two of them. Ships claimed the destruction of two He.111's. A Ju.88 came down in the sea at 1819 hours - 25 miles S.E. of Iviza Island. Total enemy losses were anything from five to eight aircraft. (9) Two ships were torpedoed. The British S.S. Ocean Hunter was sunk. S.S. Daniel Webster continued with the convoy to Oran.

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- (1) M.A.C.A.F. Air and Ops. O.R.B's and appendices: No. 337 Wing O.R.B.
  - (2) K.M.S.37.
  - (3) Of III/6 French squadron.
  - (4) Of 417th U.S. Squadron.
  - (5) Based at Montpellier/Frejorgues in Southern France.
  - (6) Aircraft of KG/26 were looking for survivors the next day.
  - (7) Of No. 153 Squadron.
  - (8) 7,178 G.R.T.
  - (9) No confirmation from German documents (A.H.B.6).

Air Attack on Convoy "Topical" (1 Feb.44) (1)

The Germans spent a long time planning the next attack on a convoy. When ~~it was~~ launched, it proved both subtle and ambitious; and if it only partially succeeded this was due as much to the imaginative organization of Coastal Air Force as to the inherent weaknesses in its execution.

The forces engaged were of several types. Five Ju.88s from Frejorgues, on reconnaissance from dawn until midnight, located and shadowed the convoy. A strike force of Ju.88s (2) and He.111's (3) from Salon, La Jasse and Frejorgues (the He.111's escorted by Ju.88 heavy fighters) were supplemented by some He.177's (5) armed with radio controlled bombs from Bordeaux/Merignas on the Atlantic. There were about 40 <sup>reported</sup> bombers in all. The fighter escort was to rendezvous at sea with the combined strike force, which would avoid our Balearic patrols by coming down east of Minorca. The attack on the convoy was to be a simultaneous one by low-flying torpedo bombers and high level He.177's carrying Hs.293's. It was timed for conditions of failing light, in which the convoy fighter escort could not see the strike aircraft.

Twenty-four Airacobras (6), eight day Beaufighters (7), and five night (8) Beaufighters were detailed to the defense of the convoy. The Allied aim was to intercept the enemy long before he reached the convoy. In this the long-range squadrons were successful, sowing such confusion in the enemy forces that only six or seven bombers broke through to attack. Apart from the strong fighter escort, No. 337 Wing laid on a pattern of patrol known as Operation "Tentacle" (9) with night U.S. Beaufighters of 417th Squadron to close the gap between Iviza

/Island

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(1) M.A.C.A.F./Air and Ops. O.R.Bs and appendices: No. 337 Wing O.R.Bs: M.A.C.A.F. file CAF/15/Air (A.F.H.Q/282/5 at Cabinet Hist. Archives).

(2) Of III/K.G.26

(3) Of I/K.G.26

(4) Of the Ju.88 C-3, unit Z.G.1

(5) Of II/KG.40

(6) From I/5, III/6 and 1/4 French Squadrons.

(7) Of No. 39 Squadron.

(8) 3 of 417th and 2 of No. 153 Squadrons.

(9) M.A.C.A.F. operational order (unnumbered) of 14 Jan.44 (M.A.C.A.F. file CAF/15/Air-encl.29B) (A.F.H.Q/282/5 at Cabinet Hist. Archives) defines the plan for employment of Beaufighters and Airacobras flying at sea level to seawards of convoys. As the torpedo bombers flew at a height of 10 feet above the sea there was practically no early radar warning of enemy aircraft. Visual detection by day by these long-range aircraft was therefore of great importance. Interception at the distances reached in these patrols might take place up to 200 miles from the North African coast, beyond the range of ordinary light fighters.

Island and the Spanish coast. No. 338 Wing laid on a patrol of six day Beaufighters of No. 39 Squadron from the easterly tip of Formentera, on a south-easterly course, to attempt the stoppage of the gap between Iviza and Majorca and also to intercept the enemy if they approached (as they did) off the East end of Minorca.

The enemy was first sighted at 1755 hours on a south-westerly course about 100 miles North of Algiers by Beaufighters of No. 39 Squadron. At this time, the enemy escort fighters had not finished forming up above their He.111 charges, who were flying close to the water. The Beaufighters, mistaking the Ju.88s for torpedo bombers (for fighter escort was practically unknown in such operations in the area) attacked them, but were roughly handled themselves in tactics which surprised them. One Beaufighter was shot down and two so badly damaged by machine gun fire that they crash-landed at base. The U.S. 417th Squadron were warned of the combat to their south-east and made a sweep, but missed the chance of engagement. Two other U.S. Beaufighters, controlled from a shore station, were vectored on to a Ju.88, which they destroyed. At 1755 hours, the time of the first visual sighting, activity began to show up on No. 338 Wing's table: Two sections of French Airacobras of I/4 Squadron scrambled. Two of them made contact at about 55 miles North-east of the convoy (1) After a long engagement, in the course of which it was believed a Ju.88 was damaged, the enemy escaped into low cloud and was lost in the gathering darkness.

At 1815 hours, Beaufighters of No. 153 Squadron had their first sighting of enemy aircraft some 30 miles North of the convoy and, between 1820 and 1915 hours, had contacts with Ju.88s and He.177s. <sup>first</sup> ~~The earlier sightings and engagements were with Ju.88s, possibly of one of the formations intercepted by Nos. 39 and I/4 Squadrons, who, after their combats, set course for base.~~ No. 153 Squadron concluded with claims of one Ju.88 and one He.177 destroyed, one Ju.88 probably destroyed and a He.177 damaged. Another Ju.88 was shot down into the sea about 15 miles West of Cape <sup>Tenez</sup> ~~Tenez~~ by the 417th (U.S.) Squadron.

/As

(1) U.G.S.30

As a result of the various Allied attacks, only six Ju.88s and one He.111 appear to have got through to the convoy. The He.177s that escaped took their "glider" bombs back to base. By about 1900 hours, when those few <sup>aircraft</sup> Ju.88s attacked with torpedoes, they could no longer be seen by the patrolling day fighters. Two ships were hit, S.S. Edward Bates (1) was lost, but S.S. Richard P. Hobson was able to proceed with the convoy, whose gunners shot down one He.111. The position of the convoy at the time of the attack was 40 miles North-East of Oran. (2)

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- (1) 7,200 G.R.T. with a cargo of flour.  
(2) 36°38'N., 00°50'E.

SECRET

Allied air moves after the attack on the "Topical" convoy (1)

657

Although sound air tactics combined with an element of good fortune had saved the "Topical" convoy, new dispositions of the air forces were called for to cover the wide areas open to the Luftwaffe anti-shipping forces. In January No. 328 Wing headquarters at Ghisonaccia (Corsica) was administering all British air units in Corsica and those at Alghero (Sardinia). Operational control was exercised by the 63rd Fighter Wing U.S.A.A.F., at Bastia. In the first half of February, to make room for single-engined fighters in Corsica, No. 328 Wing was transferred to Alghero. On 14 February, a new directive was issued. Its primary tasks were intruder operations, shipping reconnaissance and shipping strikes. It was also involved in the interception of German air attacks on Allied convoys soon after the "Topical" convoy incident. The wing was to consist of one Mosquito intruder squadron (2) and a detachment of Mosquitos, (3) one squadron of rocket-firing Beaufighters, (4) one squadron of anti-flak Beaufighters, (5) one French squadron of Marauders (6) and one flight of R.A.F. Marauders. (7)

The three squadrons involved in the protection of Allied convoys were Nos. 23, 39 and 272. In case of an attack, they were to be placed on a patrol line East of Minorca - an operation known as "Hamper". (8)

/Air

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- (1) M.A.C.A.F./Air Staff G.R.B. Appendix G.4.
  - (2) No. 23 Squadron.
  - (3) Of No. 256 Squadron. 4 aircraft (Mosquito Mark XIII).
  - (4) No. 39 Squadron (Mark X aircraft).
  - (5) No. 272 Squadron (Mark X aircraft).
  - (6) No. 1/22 Squadron.
  - (7) Of No. 14 Squadron.
  - (8) Expected lines of approach to be patrolled were:-
    - (a) Cape St. Martin 38°44'N, 00°14'E to Ivisa Island.
    - (b) Ivisa Island to Majorca.
    - (c) Majorca to Minorca.
    - (d) Minorca to 30 miles East.

This operation was originally designed for No.23 Squadron.

SECRET

Air Attack on Convoy "Hannah" (8 Mar.44) (1)

The Coastal Air Force applied the lessons learned from previous experiences when the next serious German anti-convoy attack was launched on 8 Mar.44. This time, the enemy's target was the East-bound convoy "Hannah" and he again attacked at dusk. Again, Allied long-range fighters made an advance attack and intruders from one of the squadrons just established on Sardinia did good work against the enemy bombers on their homeward journey.

Again, German preparations were thorough. On the early morning of the day of the attack, the Luftwaffe moved down about 10 long range Ju.88 G-6 fighters from Lorient to Istres (Southern France). During the day, at least three reconnaissance aircraft were engaged in locating and shadowing the convoy, neglecting all the West-bound shipping off the North African coast for the troopships in "Hannah". A force of some 30 Ju.88s, He.111s and Do.217s carrying torpedoes and <sup>He.</sup> the 177s carrying radio-controlled Hs.293s was assembled ~~in Southern France~~. The plan appears to <sup>have</sup> include advanced reconnaissance by a Ju.88 of K.G.26, in accordance with a practice of sending an aircraft to locate the target and home the main force on to it. As on the previous occasion of a convoy attack, two-engined fighters escorted the torpedo bombers.

The United Kingdom slow convoy "Hannah" was escorted by six French Airacobras (2) and two French Hurricanes, (3) with two Beaufighters (4) on patrol. As further cover, as enemy aircraft approached, four more French Airacobras and four Beaufighters (6) were scrambled. Good radar warning was given on all the hostiles plotted. The first sightings may well have been the key effort which led to the complete frustration of the enemy's plans.

At 1820 <sup>hours,</sup> Airacobras of I/4 F.A.F. Squadron sighted a single Ju.88 (probably the scout) and, about 5 minutes later, other Airacobras (7) shot it down. At 1854 hours, the main force of bombers in three waves was plotted 50 miles North

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(1) M.A.C.A.F. Air and Ops O.R.B. and appendix F/INT 2: Nos. 328 and 337  
Wings O.R.Bs.

(2) Of I/5 and I/4 F.A.F. Squadrons.

(3) Of II/3 F.A.F. Squadron.

(4) Of No. 153 Squadron, fitted with Mark VIII A.1.

(5) Of I/4 Squadron.

(6) Of No. 153 Squadron.

(7) Of I/4 Squadron.

Of Algiers, i.e. 45 miles from the convoy. Enemy aircraft were engaged by Airacobras and Beaufighters between 1900-1909 and 1935-1955 hours; and when they had turned for home, they were intercepted again.

Only the first wave seems to have reached the convoy; they caused no damage to ships. Algiers had its first red air raid warning for some months past. Two radio-controlled bombs fell at Guyotville at 1932 and 1939 hours, one in a flower garden, one on a football pitch. One Beaufighter and crew and one Airacobra were lost. It was claimed that one He.177, two Ju.88s and one Do.217 were shot down by the fighter cover. <sup>(1)</sup>

Mosquitoes from Sardinia attack returning German Bombers.

The wisdom of stationing No. 23 Squadron with its long-range and highly manœuvrable Mosquitoes at Alghero now became apparent. Two of the four aircraft detailed to intrude over the South of France were forced back by bad weather. Aircraft "Q" attacked and destroyed a He.111 in the Marseilles/Montpellier region. Aircraft "K", intruding over Bordeaux, sighted five He.111s and destroyed one of them. If No. 23 Squadron was given sufficient warning, it was concluded, it would effect seriously the peace of mind of enemy squadrons returning to base after exhausting operations. This idea led to another, namely the feasibility of night fighters, fitted with the latest interception radar, freelancing in the returning stream of enemy bombers to seaward of the French coastline.

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(1) No evidence from German sources available (A.H.B.6).

Air Attack on Convoy "Elicit" (19 Mar. 44) (1)

After the failure of the attack on convoy "Hannah" and the heavy proportion of aircraft losses suffered, the Germans went over to night attacks. The second of the four March convoy attacks was made on 19 March on the slow eastbound convoy "Elicit" (K.M.S. 44) off Cape Sigli. Fighter escorts were dispensed with and reliance placed on an original system of flare and beacon laying. The forces engaged were a mixed force of some 25-30 flare-dropping, torpedo and glider bomb-carrying aircraft. (2)

It was believed that the eastbound convoy was shadowed during the day. Late in the evening, it was hugging the coast, when, at 2126 hours, a "Blue" warning of enemy aircraft was passed to it. By 2140 hours, nine Beaufighters (3) had been scrambled from Reghaia and Bone. At 2150 hours, the enemy were detected by H.M.S. Colombo, acting as Fighter Direction ship (with limited equipment), 15 miles to the northward.

The methods employed by the Germans in this and succeeding night attacks <sup>were</sup> closely studied. (4) There were five factors in their execution. Firstly, long-range reconnaissance aircraft; secondly, pathfinders, the first of the force to be airborne at zero hour; thirdly, the master of ceremonies, ~~who was~~ airborne at zero plus 20 minutes; fourthly, target illuminators, airborne at zero plus 30 minutes; fifthly and lastly, the strike force, airborne at zero plus 60 minutes. There were variations in the marker system. In the case of the operation of 19 March, a white flashing beacon was sighted about 80 miles North of the convoy, the first point on the approach path. It seems certain that correct positioning was assured by the enemy aircraft taking fixes from the "Sonner" beacons at Arles (S. France) and Seville (S. Spain). After the pathfinders had laid marker buoys in a North-South direction pointing to the convoy, they looked for the convoy with A.S.V. and, having located it, remained in an area slightly to the North, where they homed the target illuminators and strike force. In this case, a red flashing beacon was seen 10-15 miles North of the convoy during the attack

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(1) M.A.C.A.F. Air and Ops. O.R.B. and appendix F/INT. 3: Nos. 328 and 337 Wings O.R.Bs.

(2) Of K.G. 76 (pathfinders and flare dropper) I/and III/K.G. 26 K.C. 100 and perhaps K.G. 40. No evidence from German documents (A.H.B. 6).

(3) Of No. 153 Squadron.

(4) Refer to M.A.C.A.F. Operational Instruction No. 5 in M.A.C.A.F. Air O.R.B. June 44 Appendix C.8.

attack and four orange lights in the shape of a cross were seen with another group of lights in a straight line running North-South 25 miles to the North-East.

The pathfinding tactics appear to have been relatively effective, but something went wrong with the control, for only four aircraft made contact with the convoy. Six others missed 30-60 miles East, while the remainder turned away northwards 10 miles North of the convoy. The convoy was sailing close inshore at the time of the attack and this may have upset the enemy A.S.V. The attack began at 2204 hours off Cape Sigli with an attempt to illuminate the convoy: altogether four groups of eight flares each were laid, two of them along the inshore flank of the convoy. While naval escorts were making smoke across the van and seaward flank of the convoy, and Beaufighters of No. 153 Squadron sought for the enemy, four aircraft made a straggling and poorly executed attack, which caused no damage. Three glider bombs and two torpedoes were seen and twelve underwater explosions felt. The presence of night fighters appears to have played a part in upsetting enemy plans. A Beaufighter claimed to have shot down a He.177 after the attack about 60 miles North-East of Reghaia at 4,000 feet. Other contacts and visual sightings were obtained as low as 100 feet and as high as 9,000 feet as the enemy left the target area. One Ju.88, flying low, crashed into the sea.

Air Attack on Convoy "Thumbs Up" (29 Mar.44) (1)

On the night of 29/30 March, two convoys, roughly 60 miles apart, were in the area North of Dellys (Algeria). One was "Neighbour", westbound and the other "Thumbs Up", eastbound. The Germans had used some ten reconnaissance aircraft during the 28th and 29th shadowing the latter, losing one of them on the 28th to a U.S. Beaufighter of the 417th Squadron. The strike force was a small mixed one of He.111's, Ju.88's and Do.217's preceded by a pathfinder and flare layer.

At 2058 hours, a plot was picked up of an aircraft, possibly the pathfinder. Eight Beaufighters VI's (2) were scrambled from Reghaia, two from Taher and one from Bone, to meet the threat. The pathfinder dropped six flame floats. The illuminators dropped five brilliant flares, each of which broke into four, about midway between the two convoys, i.e. roughly 30 miles from each convoy. The radar plot, showed the pathfinder weaving an apparently distracted course as he layed his flares in a useless position. Some time elapsed before the arrival of the strike force in two waves of 6 - 8 bombers each.

Both waves bombed about 30 miles west of the target - convoy "Thumbs Up". (3) The Beaufighters were engaged in several engagements over a wide area, which resulted in claims of two Do.217's destroyed and one Ju.88 probably destroyed. (4)

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(1) M.A.C.A.F. Air and Ops O.R.Bs and appendix F/INT.5.

(2) Mark VIII A.1., of No. 153 Squadron.

(3) K.M.S. 45.

(4) No information on strength or losses from German records (A.H.B.6).

Coastal Air Force's responsibility for Allied convoys

While making every allowance for the ability of ship's gunners and smoke units to give a good account of themselves, the Coastal Air Force was well aware of its responsibilities for the safety of the massive amount of Allied shipping passing through its territory and the imperative need, while a threat from the Luftwaffe in Southern France existed, to dispose its day and night fighter force accordingly. The high cost of this effort may be assessed from consideration of a few figures. During the month of February, 1944, seventy-five convoys were protected by Coastal Air Force. These tasks involved 774 sorties on patrols in protection and 1062 sorties as fighter cover. In March, over 100 convoys and in April over 75 convoys, were protected by M.A.C.A.F. aircraft.

Study was progressively devoted to the functions, habits and early interception of German reconnaissance and pathfinder aircraft. Apart from casualties inflicted on these aircraft in their major attacks on our convoys, certain projected attacks were nipped in the bud by the vigilance of Coastal aircraft who attacked so early and to such effect that the German's timing and plan of approach was thrown out of gear.

The supreme value of this work by Coastal Air Force was not apparent to many in the Fleet at the time, but must not be overlooked. It is not possible to measure it by ordinary criteria, for it comes under the study of probabilities. Yet if all the facts relating to the previous and succeeding convoy defence operations are retained, the conclusion cannot be escaped that great advances were being made from the old-fashioned concept of simple fighter escort.

Air attack on convoy "Tennant" (1 Apr. 44) (1)

Although German air attacks on convoys during March met with little success, their losses were lower than in dusk attacks, hence the continuance of night attacks in April. There were four such operations; most of them frustrated, but one of which underlined the continuance of a lively threat from that quarter and the need of modernising tactics.

/The

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(1) M.A.C.A.F. O.R.B/Appendix F/INT.7.

The anti-shipping forces in the South of France despatched at least three aircraft on 31 March to locate and shadow the convoy "Tennant", eastbound along the Algerian coast. A force of some 30 Ju.88s <sup>(1)</sup> was assembled. Good radar warning was given of this strike force at 90 odd miles from the convoy by Reghaia and Oran stations. One of the two enemy formations missed the convoy. The other formation waited in the area 95 miles N.N.E. of the convoy, then turned towards the target at altitudes ranging from 400 to 10,000 feet.

Eleven Beaufighters <sup>(2)</sup> were scrambled, but this number proved too unwieldy for the two radar controls to handle. Meanwhile, enemy flare droppers proceeded to mark a path and illuminate the convoy <sup>(3)</sup> skilfully. Six red marker floats were laid about 8 miles ahead of the convoy, in its path, placed in two lines of three, spaced 10 miles apart in each line, the lines about 5 miles apart. One large concentration of flares, consisting of two groups of six each, was dropped slightly inshore of the convoy.

The actual attack on the ships began at 0400 hours and lasted for about 40 minutes. It was more determined than that on the "Elicit" convoy of 19 March and there were more low-flying aircraft. Only torpedoes and bombs were used - no "glider" bombs. The main attack came from the seaward flank with the convoy <sup>(4)</sup> silhouetted against the inshore flares in a position about 60 miles West of Algiers.

Beaufighters encountered exceptional evasive action by the enemy aircraft, who succeeded in out-maneuvring them. Contacts were picked up and lost. Aircraft were pursued as high as 11,000 feet, but escaped. The radar tracks of friendly aircraft crossed and confused their own colleagues. So successful were the enemy crews that efforts were made later to determine whether they were not operating backward-looking radar. <sup>(5)</sup> The American S.S. Jared Ingersoll (7191 G.R.T.) was torpedoed and set on fire, but reached Algiers in tow and the fire was put out. The Beaufighters made no claims and lost none of their company. The escort vessels made smoke, but not the convoy. Ship's gunners claimed to have destroyed one enemy aircraft. In the event, at least three Ju.88's were destroyed. <sup>(6)</sup>

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- (1) Of I and III/K.G.26 (A.H.B.6).
  - (2) Mark VIII. A.1: 9 from No. 153 Squadron and 2 from 417th (U.S.) Squadron.
  - (3) U.G.S.36.
  - (4) 36°46'N, 01°44'E.
  - (5) Some aircraft of K.G.26 were actually equipped with Neptun apparatus. (A.H.B.6)
  - (6) A.H. B.6.

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This operation focussed attention again on the importance of destroying the pathfinders and illuminators and of not mixing freelance with radar-controlled night fighters; and it set a new problem in advanced evasion tactics.

A U-boat was reported in the vicinity shortly before the air attack.

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Air Attack on Convoy "Aertex" (11/12 Apl.44) (1)

The success of some of the German formations in penetrating to the "Tennant" convoy on 1 April proved to both sides the paramount importance of good path-finder procedure following accurate reconnaissance reports. During 10 and 11 April, a total of seven or eight aircraft from the South of France were engaged in locating and shadowing the slow eastbound convoy "Aertex", (2) ~~which was~~ approaching the Algiers area. Although the French squadron I/5 shot down two of them, sufficient evidence was provided for a well-planned attack just before midnight on the 11th. ~~The~~ Radar-equipped Beaufighters were on escort patrol before warnings of the presence of enemy craft were received at 2229.

The enemy aircraft were first plotted about 67 miles North of Cape Tedles and assumed altitudes ranging from sea level up to 9,000 feet and over. One enemy aircraft was picked up at 2238 hours 83 miles due North of Cape Tedles, was chased by a Beaufighter ~~when 30 miles North-East of the convoy~~ and shot down 15 miles North-East of the convoy. At 2308 hours, another enemy aircraft was picked up ~~at 2308 hours~~ 70 miles North of Port Gueydon. It reached the convoy. The strike force, which was counted as between twenty and twenty-five aircraft, consisted mainly of Ju.88s (3) but included some He.111s (4) and a few Do.217s. (5)

At 2245 hours, six extra Beaufighters were scrambled and at 2320 hours another two. These patrolled about 40 miles North of the convoy on the enemy's line of approach. (6) Two Mosquitoes (7) from Sardinia patrolled airfields in Southern France. Red warnings were issued to the ships at 2241 and 2307 hours.

At 2335 hours, a smoke screen was commenced by the escort vessels and it proved very effective. The sea was flat calm; weather was very good, with visibility up to 20 miles. At 2301 hours, the moon, in its last quarter, rose.

The enemy's tactics followed closely the now normal lines for a night torpedo attack, with one unusual factor. A white flare was dropped N.N.E. of the convoy at 2315 hours, about 5 miles ahead, it burst into a cluster of red flares, which fell rapidly and burnt for not more than 30 seconds. For about 5

/minutes

- (1) M.A.C.A.F/Air and Ops O.R.B/Appendix F/INT.8.
- (2) U.G.S. 37.
- (3) Of III/K.G.26.
- (4) Of I/K.G.26.
- (5) Of II/K.G.100.
- (6) Under G.C.I./C.O.L. control.
- (7) Of No. 23 Intruder Squadron.

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minutes before the first of the two attacks, brilliant white "thunder" flashes (1) were reported. The illumination for the second attack was different and neatly <sup>timed</sup> turned and placed. First, a large concentration of bright white flares was dropped over the convoy. Then three green ones were planted in this cluster, presumably a visual signal to the torpedo bombers that the white flares were correctly positioned.

At 2340/2341 hours, the first attack developed in 37°01'N, 03°50'E (2) and at 2343 hours, the escorting U.S. destroyer Holder was torpedoed. She was towed to Algiers by the tug Mindful and repaired. Allied night fighters were more successful on this occasion. The claims by No. 153 Squadron were one Do.217 and two Ju.88s destroyed and one Ju.88 damaged. (3) Five Luftwaffe prisoners were picked up.

Two points were again stressed after this attack. The first was that the pathfinder aircraft must be either destroyed or so hampered that they failed in their task. The second was that strict control ought to be exercised in the scrambling of night fighters. Interceptions could only be successfully carried out in a clear field.

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(1) These gave a momentary flash of great brilliance accompanied by a considerable report.

(2) About 40 miles E.N.E. of Algiers.

(3) No evidence available from German documents (A.H.B.6).

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Air Attack on Convoy 'Whoopee' (20 Apr. 44) (1)

Late in the evening of 20 April, convoy 'Whoopee' (2) was proceeding eastwards in the Algiers area. The convoy 'Donaghue II', (3) bound for Algiers from Corsica, was approaching a point some 60 miles North of Djidjelli. For two days, German aircraft had been engaged in shadowing 'Whoopee', losing an aircraft at about 2000 hours on the 20th to I/4 French Air Force Squadron in the Oran sector. After four nights <sup>attacks</sup> ~~attacks~~ resulting in negligible successes, the Germans decided to go back to a dusk or last light attack. They judged that the timing would impose the greatest handicaps on the Allied defences and present an element of surprise favourable to themselves. The strike force, according to a prisoner-of-war, was composed of over 50 Ju.88's, (4) a few Do.217's (5) and perhaps a few He.177's. (6)

During the 20th, the convoy 'Whoopee' was provided with continuous cover by one section of Airocobras, patrolling well North of the convoy. For the last daylight patrol, the close escort was doubled; and these two sections of Airocobras were reinforced by two Beaufighters (7) equipped with radar. The weather was good, with no cloud. It was very hazy below 2,000 feet and there was no horizon after dark.

The radar plots suggested that the strike force flew well East of the Balearics, (to avoid Allied patrols), on a course which took it within visual range of convoy 'Donaghue II', steaming S.W. from Corsica to Algiers. Some 8 - 12 aircraft peeled off here to attack this surprise target; (8) the main force dropped to deck level and proceeded on course to the position of convoy 'Whoopee'. This turn in events dated from 2025 hours, when the first radar plots of enemy aircraft appeared. (9)

One minute later, Djidjelli Sector plotted hostile aircraft. Four minutes later, the plot revealed 10 plus aircraft at something over 80 miles North of Djidjelli and, shortly after, 12 plus aircraft a little nearer the coast. These plots faded at about 40 miles from the coast, probably because the enemy aircraft /were

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- (1) M.A.C.A.F. O.R.B. Appendix F/INT 9 and 10.
  - (2) UCS. 38.
  - (3) CAF. 31
  - (4) Of I and III/KG. 76.
  - (5) Of II/KG. 100.
  - (6) One was reported shot down by a Beaufighter.
  - (7) Of No. 153 Squadron.
  - (8) The attack on convoy 'Donaghue II' will be related in a later sub-section.
  - (9) No evidence of the composition of the force or casualties from German documents .(A.H.B.6).

were flying at deck level. Indeed, at 2040 hours, 9 plus of them were sighted West of Cape Sigli on the deck about 3 miles from the coast: and between 2050 and 2057 hours, 20 plus aircraft were sighted by a Beaufighter<sup>(1)</sup>, flying low in formation on a westerly course towards convoy 'Whoopee'.

The attack on 'Whoopee', according to naval signals, was with torpedoes dropped mainly by Ju.88s and some Do.217s and carried out at very low level, so rendering it difficult to count them by radar. No. 153 Squadron's Beaufighters reported destroying one Do.217 and one He.177: and ships' gunners claimed one bomber. One Beaufighter <sup>was</sup> ~~and its pilot~~ were lost. The position of the convoy was 37° 02'N., 03° 41'E. off Cape Bengut (40 miles E. by N. of Algiers). The time of the attack was 2115 hours. The U.S. destroyer Lansdale, the British S.S. Royal Star<sup>(2)</sup> and the U.S. S.S. Paul Hamilton<sup>(3)</sup> were torpedoed and sunk. The British S.S. Samite<sup>(4)</sup> and the U.S. S.S. Stephen F. Austin<sup>(5)</sup> were damaged, but succeeded in reaching Algiers. The bombers waited until about 10 minutes after the day fighters had left for base, leaving the convoy defense to ships' gunners, the Beaufighters of No. 153 Squadron and the smoke screen dispensers. The loss of life was severe. One of the merchant vessels blew up and sank with no survivors, but a considerable number of the destroyer's complement were rescued.

Conclusions from Enemy Successes against Convoy 'Whoopee'

The C.-in-C. Mediterranean considered that the enemy owed his success in this operation to his skilful execution and timing, thorough reconnaissance and the failure of the convoy to make timely and adequate smoke. The pilots, obviously well-trained, had avoided the night fighters and attacked from the landward side in the absence of day fighters, who could hardly have seen them in any case.

Coastal Air Force underlined this latter point and the little reliance that could be placed on close day air convoy escort in such well-timed attacks. Free-lance night fighters were again ruled out as more of a hindrance than a help. The radar control of night fighters would have to be improved and the interception patrol pattern extended. The new pattern of patrols evolved will be dealt with after the following account of the subsidiary attack on convoy 'Donaghue II'.

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- (1) Of No. 153 Squadron.
  - (2) 7,900 G.R.T.
  - (3) 7,177 G.R.T.
  - (4) 7,249 G.R.T.
  - (5) 7,176 G.R.T.

Air Attack on Convoy 'Donaghue II' (20 Apr. 44) (1)

Convoy "Donaghue II" as daylight ended on 20 April was escorted by two Spitfires (2) and one night Beaufighter. First radar warnings of <sup>a</sup> force of German aircraft, at 2025 hours, proceeding due South about 10 miles West of 'Donaghue II', developed into evidence of a small force leaving the main stream to attack. One Beaufighter was scrambled and two more passed (too late) to Reghaia from Djidjelli as reinforcements.

In cloudless weather, Spitfire pilots could see enemy aircraft orbiting and climbing North of the convoy and engaged them without results. They did not see the attack. When about 3 miles from the convoy, the enemy aircraft turned to port towards their target, going at once into line astern, the second wave closing in on the leading one, so producing a formation of eight aircraft in close line astern. Then followed a remarkable and successful effort by the radar-equipped Beaufighter in breaking up the whole bomber formation.

When the enemy aircraft seemed set to carry out a bombing run, the Beaufighter pilot closed in, climbing towards the centre of the formation. Hit, but not seriously damaged by continuous fire, he closed to 250 yards firing on, and hitting, the two centrally-placed aircraft. When he passed under the formation they broke up, two of them flying to northwards while the other six cruised around, apparently aimlessly. During this passage, a torpedo was launched. The Beaufighter attacked one of the formation of six for about 10 minutes and claimed a probable. The two who broke away first were intercepted and attacked by the scrambled Beaufighter. The last contact was about 135 miles North of Taher at 2120 hours, when they vanished into haze and dark cloud. The French S.S. El Biar (3) was sunk.

Convoy Defence Policy Developments  
(January to April 1944)

Early Moves

By the opening of 1944, both the Fleet and the Air Force realised that the security of maritime operations was becoming increasingly a joint affair.

/Coastal

- (1) M.A.C.A.F./Ops. O.R.B. Appendix F/INT.10.
- (2) No. 328 Squadron.
- (3) 4,678 G.R.T.

Coastal Air Force made the first realistic move of the year 1944 when, on 22 January, the amount of fighter defence accorded to convoys was reduced to two priorities - 'A' and 'B', affording a greater and less degree of cover under normal conditions but allowing for swift reinforcements to the cover in case of emergency. (1)

Signals procedure was streamlined progressively to eliminate errors experienced. On 25 January, regular night fighter protection was withdrawn from the Palermo area and escort of convoys along the west Sardinian coast was passed to the 63rd U.S. Fighter Wing. (3)

On 11 February, Air H.Q. Malta issued its own area policy of escort priorities - three in number, viz. 'special', 'high and normal' and 'low' (no escort). (4)

Naval reactions to the growing German effort against Allied convoys was slow and methodical. Reliance was still firmly placed on the ships' <sup>armament</sup> artillery and smoke, with air cover a highly desirable but fluid and not always reliable element of support. On 14 February, the dividing line between the areas of responsibility of Air Headquarters Eastern Mediterranean and the Mediterranean Allied Coastal Air Force was adjusted by agreement between the Naval and Air Commanders-in-Chief Mediterranean, to conform with the current naval boundaries and tighter procedure laid down for border line operations in defence of convoys threatened by enemy aircraft or submarines.

It was a pity that no representative from the C.-in-C. Mediterranean's staff was able to attend the conference on the fighter protection of convoys held on 9 Feb. 44, at which many aspects of the serious air threat were examined. The mechanisms of warnings, communications and smoke screens, all susceptible of improvement, came under discussion, but the evidence provided was naturally incomplete.

The Fleet, however, continued to study the problem. Struck with the continued use of <sup>Hs</sup> BS.293 radio controlled bombs against convoys, Admiral Cunningham asked Sir Hugh Lloyd on 25 March to consider fitting sets for jamming these controlled weapons in aircraft on defensive patrol. Two sets, (5) originally

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- (1) File CMF/15/AIR encl. 43A (at Cabinet Hist. Archives ref. AFHQ/282/5).
  - (2) Ibid Encl. 47A.
  - (3) Ibid. Encl. 51A.
  - (4) Ibid. Encl. 66A and 67A.
  - (5) Known as Dinamates.

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designed for jamming radar from the air, were already in the possession of the Commander, U.S. Naval Forces, N.W. African Waters. But the idea was considered impracticable. The pace of aircraft re-equipment was already too slow for <sup>U.K.</sup> local needs.

Acting on an Air Ministry order of 12 April, convoys were informed what escort they could expect for the next 24 hours after arrival of the first aircraft. Air H.Q. Malta reserved its controlled night fighters on moonlit nights for special and high priority convoys with troopships. On 20 April, Coastal Air Force extended its Anzio convoy patrols from Ponza Island up to within 10 miles of Nettuno, so relieving the Tactical Air Force in Italy and improving the efficiency of their protection.

The series of four April attacks on convoys, the effect of which was heightened by increased U-boat activity, forced a drastic extension of the patrol system on Coastal Air Force and increased co-operation by Naval units in the interception of enemy convoy reconnaissance aircraft. The air plans were put into execution first.

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(1)

Improved Interception Air Patrols

Coastal Air Force reorganized and strengthened its system of anti-strike force patrols. The old 'Hamper', 'Tentacle' and 'Ambush' patrols were abolished. In their place appeared two general types of patrol, viz, anti-reconnaissance patrols and anti-strike patrols. (2) The general pattern of enemy reconnaissance, so methodical in its practice, was well-known. Most of the courses ran down close to the Spanish coast down to the extreme South before sweeping eastward over the convoy lane. (3) A standing patrol known as 'Dolphin' was to be, therefore, maintained during the hours of daylight until last light by one section of Beaufighters or Mosquitoes from Cape Bagur (4) (in N.E. Spain) to maximum visibility distance from it. Lacking insufficient forces to patrol the whole of the reconnaissance flight courses, the air force arranged for anti-reconnaissance forces to fly in the convoy's vicinity, changing their position from an East-West line North of the convoy by day to a North-South line over the last light period 30 miles East of it, with other aircraft standing by as reliefs. This patrol (5) was flown by Mosquitoes. Every day, two Mosquitoes were maintained at 30 minutes readiness, with four other aircraft available to take over.

The anti-strike patrols were stronger numerically and covered a wide area. Patrols 'Trapper One' and 'Trapper Two', (a joint effort by No. 328 Wing and the 414th U.S. Squadron) covered an East-West line 60 miles eastward from Cape Negro, Minorca, the wide lane down which the strike force (6) was believed to fly. All aircraft were maintained at a high pitch of readiness. The three gaps between Spain and the Balearic Islands were covered by 'Shuttlecock One, Two and Three', from 30 minutes before the enemy strike was expected to take place until last light. These last three 'Shuttlecock' patrols might be replaced by night fighters on a 'Longarm' patrol 80 miles from the estimated dusk position of the threatened convoy on the expected line of approach of enemy aircraft at right angles to it and

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- (1) M.A.C.A.F. Operational Instruction No. 3, 25 Apr. 44 (File CAF/15/AIR at Cabinet Historical Archives ref. AFHQ/282/5).
  - (2) For the full instruction and complete details of the patrols refer to Appendix 44, 45.
  - (3) By No. 328 Wing.
  - (4) Just below the 42nd parallel.
  - (5) One section from No. 256 Squadron. Beaufighters of No. 153 Squadron might fly this patrol in emergency.
  - (6) Gaps One (Cape San Martin to Iviza). Gap Two (Iviza to Majorca) and Gap Three (Majorca to Minorca) were patrolled by aircraft of No. 256 or No. 153 Squadrons.

/ extending

extending 30 miles towards the East. On receipt of a 'Trapper' signal by No. 328 Wing in Sardinia, aircraft of No. 23 Squadron were to stand by for intruder operations over the South of France and, on receipt of exact information on the strike force and their estimated time of arrival back at their bases, operate over those bases ~~in Southern France~~.

The whole new pattern of patrol was given the codename of Operation 'Barricade'.<sup>(1)</sup>

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(1) Refer to Figure 21.

(1)

Naval Listening Watch for Enemy Reconnaissance Aircraft

Co-operation from the Fleet was forthcoming when on 2 May, the Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean put up to Coastal Air Force for approval his orders to all ships and submarines carrying a certain search receiver to establish watches to intercept radar transmissions from German reconnaissance aircraft. These watches were to be set on advice of a sighting report, for one hour either side of dusk and dawn, when cloud conditions were seven-tenths or more or when sector reported an unidentified contact. If an intercepted signal left little doubt that enemy shadowing or reconnaissance aircraft were in the vicinity, an immediate signal was to report the fact, so that shore authorities could take counter-action.

The headquarters of C.-in-C. Mediterranean were also studying the question of more up-to-date fighter direction ships. They felt strongly that fighter escort was of little account unless the fighters were soundly controlled. Coastal Air Force knew well the complications involved, but these matters were not to be brought to a head until after the enemy had again attempted his worst.

Operations (May 1944)

(2)

Air Attack on Convoy 'Element' (11 May 44)

The Luftwaffe attack on the eastbound 82-ship convoy 'Element' on 11 May was in several respects a critical one for both sides, for it put to the test the utmost the Allies had been able to achieve in convoy defence with the means available in the theatre.

(3)

Convoy 'Element' sailed along the North African coast between 9 - 12 May, escorted by aircraft. The aircraft available for this operation totalled to 36 Airacobras, 12 - 14 Mosquitoes and 43 - 45 Beaufighters, in all 36 single-

(4)

- (1) C.-in-C., Med. memo 00510/9 dated 2 May 44 (File CAF/15/AIR Encls. 106A, 106B and 107A - at Cabinet Historical Archives ref. AFHQ/282/5).
- (2) M.A.C.A.F./ops. O.R.B. Appendix INT/F.14: Report on convoy protection to M.A.A.F. 17 May 44 (M.A.C.A.F. File CAF/15/AIR Encl. 119A - at Cabinet Hist. Archives ref. AFHQ/282/5).
- (3) U.G.S.40.
- (4)

From La Senia	1/5 French Squadron	17 Airacobras
	No. 256 Squadron	12 Mosquitoes
From Reghaia	1/4 French Squadron	19 Airacobras
	No. 153 Squadron	13 Beaufighters
From Cagliari (Sard.)	414th U.S. Squadron	6 Beaufighters
From Alghero (Sard.)	No. 39 Squadron	12 Beaufighters
	No. 272 Squadron	12 Beaufighters
	No. 108 Squadron	4 Beaufighters/Mosquitoes
	(Det. from Malta)	

Engined and 59 twin-engined aircraft, in the North African and Sardinian sectors. The main geographical problems were the 200 mile gap between Minorca and Sardinia, down which the strike force might choose its own route, and the wide areas to seaward of the convoy uncovered by Allied radar stations. <sup>a</sup>Aircobras could only be used for scrambles and convoy escort and could not deal with low-flying enemy aircraft or see them in the dark when they were picked up by radar.

The convoy was screened by 16 naval escorts. The anti-aircraft cruiser H.M.S. Calydon gave all-round protection at 4,000 yards from the convoy. Fire discipline in escorts and merchant vessels was good. At the time of the attack, air cover consisted of four Aircobras and two <sup>G.C.I.</sup>radar-controlled Beaufighters. Operation 'Barricade' was in force.

Enemy reconnaissance of the convoy was very thorough, lasting from the time when the convoy was in the Oran sector (2) until <sup>it</sup>~~shortly before the strike force was plotted by radar late on the 11th, when the convoy was off Dellys.~~ Coastal Air Force fighters were scrambled on ten occasions and patrolling aircraft were vectored on two occasions on these aircraft, all without success. Two or three shadowers maintained contact with the convoy during the last hours before the attack. One of them was destroyed at about 20 minutes before the torpedo attack, but the surviving aircraft homed the bombers on to the convoy.

The enemy strike force despatched was formidable, no less than 62 Ju.88s. (3) From an interrogation report on the officer taken prisoner and a report of the Fighter Direction Officer on H.M.S. Calydon, it was concluded that the main force of bombers rendezvoused at a point about 100 miles South of Montpellier. Fighter cover was provided by 24 Ju.88 C-6s, (4) some flown in specially from Lorient to Istres. The main force flew at sea level, the fighter escort astern at 500 feet altitude, on a south-easterly course to a point midway between Minorca and Sardinia, by-passing the 'Traffic' and 'Shuttlecock' patrols. When no Allied fighters were met, the Ju.88 C-6s returned to base: they lost one aircraft on the operation, the cause unknown. The strike force ~~reset course and flew on a~~ south-westerly course. No flares or markers were used.

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- (1) 6 sorties very low, just beyond visibility and to the North of it (anti-recce) 8 sorties on Balearic patrol: 18 sorties East of Balearics: 10 sorties Gulf of Lions, 6 sorties East and just to North of convoy beyond radar range of it to intercept strike on run in.
- (2) Periods of intense activity were 0400-0530/11th and 1500-1530/11th.
- (3) From I and III/K.G.77 and III/K.G.26 (A.H.B.6).
- (4) From Z.G.1

The enemy were in the convoy area before shore-based radar could 'see' them and only just in time for our aircraft to intercept. The first evidence of the strike force was at 2044 hours, when three plus <sup>hostiles</sup> hostilities were plotted 65 miles N.N.E. of the convoy, flying S.S.W. A 'Red' warning was passed to the convoy. Aircraft were operating in full strength. The two Beaufighters on East-West patrol North of 'Element' were moved round to the East of it (1) and eight Mosquitoes patrolling N.E. of it were vectored on to the approach path. (2) One Beaufighter (3) was scrambled at 2050 hours and, at 2053 hours, a further section of Airacobras. The second of the two enemy formations was plotted at 2100 hours, about 36 miles N. of Cape Tedles: a second Beaufighter was scrambled at 2105 hours and held East of the convoy in reserve. Shadowers homed the bombers on to their target. These special aircraft were positioned about 20 miles from each end of the convoy. Just before 2110 hours, at a point about 10-20 miles N.E. of the convoy, the torpedo bombers formed up for a run-in at 20 - 50 feet, splitting into four closely following waves, each attacking from a different angle. (4) After the attack they retired very low between the ships.

Before they reached the point of torpedo release, the Beaufighters and Mosquitoes shot down three bombers in flames. Most of the strike force got through to the convoy: (5) there were several air combats; ships' gunners claimed to have hit two Ju.88s. The Mosquitoes (6) claimed to have destroyed two Ju.88s and probably destroyed another; and the Beaufighters (7) claimed two Ju.88s destroyed and two damaged.

There was no moon, the sun had set and visibility was up to 10 miles, but poor in places. There were 5 to 7 tenths cloud at 1,000/1,500 feet and some haze. The weather was fair to fine. These conditions were in every way perfect for the smoke defences and very rare for the African coast. Full advantage was taken of them; later, Sir Hugh Lloyd affirmed that the formidable enemy attack was mainly frustrated by smoke and gunfire of the convoy, although credit was due to the spoiling tactics of the night fighters.

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- (1) 'Horizon' patrol.
  - (2) 'Longarm' patrol.
  - (3) No. 153 Squadron.
  - (4) From port bow, ahead and starboard, port quarter and port beam.
  - (5) In position 37°03'N, 04°14'E.
  - (6) Of No. 256 Squadron.
  - (7) Of No. 153 Squadron.

One Beaufighter was lost on a 'Trapper' patrol East of Minorca; another was lost on an intruder patrol and one Mosquito was damaged when landing with burst tyres caused by return fire from a Ju.88.

The two Geschwader launched separate attacks. K.G.26 attacked with 24 aircraft which launched 33 torpedoes at the convoy, losing 7 Ju.88s. I and III/K.G.77 attacked with 29 Ju.88s, which launched 58 torpedoes, losing 9 aircraft. One aircraft crashed on the Spanish coast North of Alicante: this may have been the lost fighter of Z.G.1.

Allied estimates of about 60 enemy aircraft involved were reasonably close to the exact figures of 62 despatched and 53 striking: it would have gratified them to have known that <sup>16</sup>the torpede bombers were destroyed, not "at least 10", as they believed at the time. It must be emphasised that the loss of 16 bombers was a really severe blow to the enemy at this stage in the war, when bomber production was running down in favour of fighters and replacements were hard to come by. The Germans did not analyse their losses, but referred to the anti-aircraft fire as heavy and of all calibres.

Enemy claims were exaggerated as usual, but, in fact, no ships were hit or damaged by the 91 torpedoes launched. This operation has been described in detail as one of the most important at the end of an interesting series. From it the Navy and Coastal Air Force drew their final conclusion on convoy defence against air attack in the Mediterranean.

Air Attack on Convoy 'Earphone' (31 May 44) <sup>(1)</sup>

The next air attack on an Allied convoy was on the night of 30/31 May, by some 30 - 40 Ju.88 torpedo bombers with homing aircraft and flares. The route ran between Minorca and Sardinia, then S.S.W. to the convoy. In relation to the effort and in view of the enemy's losses, the sinking of one small freighter was a poor result, but it was proved possible again for bombers to pass through our defences.

Late on the evening of 30 May, there were three Allied convoys in the area Northwards of Cape Bengut (Algeria), viz., 'Earphone', <sup>(2)</sup> 'Ghost' <sup>(3)</sup> and 'Stinker'. Enemy reconnaissance of 'Earphone' was maintained by 12 aircraft from the evening of 29 May until late on the 30th. One of them, (carrying A.S.V. aerals), was intercepted and reported destroyed off Cape San Sebastian <sup>(4)</sup> (N.E. Spain) by a <sup>(5)</sup> Beaufighter at 0622 hours on the 30th. While the convoy was shadowed in the early hours, a Mosquito was scrambled to intercept an aircraft 20 miles North of Oran, but failed to make contact. After a break of several hours, reconnaissance of the convoy was renewed and a Ju.188 was shot down into the sea in flames about 60 miles North of Cherchell. The full anti-reconnaissance and anti-strike air patrols of Operation 'Barriade' were then laid on, with an extension of the 'Trapper' patrols still further towards Sardinia by six Beaufighters. <sup>(6)</sup>

At 2238 hours, homing signals to the bombers were intercepted. The convoy was warned at 2244 hours. There were at the time 7 Beaufighters (No.153 Squadron) and 2 Mosquitoes (No. 256 Squadron) on patrol covering the three convoys and 2 more Beaufighters of No. 153 Squadron were despatched at 2250 hours to improve cover of 'Ghost'. A few of the enemy strike force turned back well before entering the convoy area. Flots of single aircraft were picked up between 33 miles North of Algiers and 95 miles North of Cape Bengut. At 2339 hours, another 'Red' warning was passed to the convoys cancelling the 'White' issued at 2325 hours. <sup>(7)</sup> Four more Beaufighters of No. 153 Squadron were scrambled. At 0024 hours on the 31st, nine aircraft of No. 153 Squadron were airborne. At this moment, the attack began to develop.

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- (1) M.A.C.A.F./Operations O.R.B. Appendix INT/F.15.
  - (2) K.M.S.51.
  - (3) U.G.S.46.
  - (4) A few miles North of Palamos.
  - (5) On a 'Dolphin' patrol.
  - (6) Of 414th U.S. Squadron.
  - (7) No. 153 Squadron was based at Taher, but was mobile.

The target illumination, not very efficiently done, followed approximately the following course:-

- (i) First, a single brilliant white was dropped.
- (ii) Then, followed two red flares which seem to indicate the spot where the target illuminators were to drop the white flares, for
- (iii) Two or three bunches of six white flares were then dropped and fell west of the convoy. This illumination was followed by

- (iv) A brilliant white star bomb, which burst into about 30 white lights. It was, likewise, west of the convoy and that might have been the reason why it was followed by a
- (v) single red flare dropped further east and much nearer the convoy. This sequence of whites and reds was continued, in that the single red was followed by six more white flares much closer to the western end of the convoy, but not over it.
- (vi) The next flares found the target and the cluster of six whites, dropped after a single red flare, was over the stern half of the convoy.

The single red flares were apparently intended to show that the whites had been wrongly placed and to indicate the correct position. Further, it seems that the Master of Ceremonies <sup>(1)</sup> took a hand in the convoy illumination by using, on occasions, a brilliant white flare, two reds and a star-bomb.

After orbiting and 'milling around' for two periods at some 50 - 60 and again at some 20 - 25 miles from the convoy, (perhaps to evade the Coastal night fighters), a number <sup>(2)</sup> of enemy aircraft approached the convoy. Several torpedo tracks were seen. Right at the end of the attack, at about 0040 hours, a Beaufighter contacted a Ju.88 climbing towards the convoy and claimed to have destroyed it. The attack seems to have been concentrated into the period 0025 to 0040 hours on the 31st. The position of the convoy was 37° 02', 03° 47'E. One freighter - S.S. Norddeffling <sup>(3)</sup> - was sunk, but no other loss or damage was inflicted <sup>on</sup> to the convoy. Coastal Air Force suffered no aircraft losses. If reports were correct, the enemy lost two reconnaissance aircraft, one bomber in <sup>(4)</sup> the attack and one over Istres airfield later.

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- (1) Verbandsfuehrer.
  - (2) Which could not be determined.
  - (3) 2,973 G.R.T.
  - (4) no evidence from German documents (A.H.B.G.)

Convoy Defence Policy Developments  
(May to July 1944)

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The Need for Radar Ships

Existing in the context of a serious submarine threat, the problem of enemy air attacks on convoys was one of the toughest confronting the Allied command. In early May, the A.O.C., Coastal Air Force and the C.-in-C. Mediterranean reviewed the entire situation and found themselves left with certain insoluble residues. It was debatable whether the enemy's losses in aircraft really justified his efforts, but certain that he thought they did. The advantages on his side, wrote Sir Hugh Lloyd on 11 May 44 (the day of the break-through to convoy 'Element'), were several in number. He could still change his approach and tactics at will, coming down the 200 mile wide gap between Minorca and Sardinia with a very good chance of dodging our patrols. Once within workable range of the convoy before land-based radar picked him up, he could operate sufficient reconnaissance aircraft to confirm the precise position and composition of the convoy and had proved the existence of an efficient homing, pathfinding and marking organization. Because of limited fighter range, convoys had to pass along a well-worn lane within 40 miles of the long North African coast. In failing light, the crews of these aircraft could not see him clearly, if at all, and by flying at deck level, he could evade radar and, to some extent, ships' guns. He had ample air room and his bases were beyond the range of almost all available aircraft. His sizeable force in the South of France could be reinforced at short notice from the Toulouse, Bordeaux and Lorient areas. Most of these advantages seemed likely to remain available to him for some time to come, unless the Allied lead in radar could be applied on an adequate scale.

This led to frank admissions that the best use was not being made of radar. A convoy passed from the sector controlled by one shore-based unit to another. It was unlikely to be in contact with more than three at any given moment. There was no seaborne radar. In practice, only one Beaufighter could be controlled at a time by one radar station. Therefore, three controlled Beaufighters were the maximum practicable over one convoy - not enough. It was more nuisance than it was worth to scramble extra freelance non-radio-controlled night fighters in the same area, for these only raised false trails, confusing the whole issue and neutralising the efforts of those under control. As Rear Admiral

/ T.H.

(1)  
T.H. Troubridge had commented on 3 Feb. 44, fighters alone did not constitute  
(2)  
fighter cover and were almost valueless unless properly directed.

Both the Fleet and Coastal Air Force arrived at the same conclusion, namely that their greatest weakness was the defence to seaward of the convoy. The means of strengthening this flank and extending the 'vision' of radar was, logically, radar ships and escort carriers. These carriers should be dual in function, directing day fighters and controlling night fighters.

(3)  
There had been instances of fighter direction ships operating with success and, as has been related in the previous chapter, H.M.S. Ulster Queen was to demonstrate in the autumn of this year how efficiently night fighters could be controlled from shipboard. But the very few up-to-date direction ships in existence were not so equipped with radar for control of night fighters. It will be of interest, therefore to trace very briefly the efforts of the Mediterranean commands to come by what they felt should be a standing element in their defenses.  
(4)  
Repeated Appeals for Radar Ships

As far back on 18 Nov. 43, Sir Hugh Lloyd had affirmed that it was only a matter of time before they were forced to provide ships with radar to shuttle with convoys off the North African coast.

On 4 Dec. 43, the C.-in-C., Mediterranean, in agreement with the A.O.C., Coastal Air Force, advised the Admiralty that it was of the utmost urgency that more radar was needed within or to seaward of convoys. He asked for two of the latest type radar instruments to be sent out as a matter of the highest priority for fitting in H.M.S. Ulster Queen and H.M.S. Palomares; also that four merchant ships should be fitted with ground control interception sets to protect major through convoys over the hazardous part of their passage. Eventually, <sup>16</sup>these two <sup>named</sup> ships were fully equipped and a number of others partially so. Day fighter <sup>and</sup> direction ships began to accompany major convoys, at least one Very High

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- (1) Report No. 420 dated 3 Feb. 44 to C.-in-C. Med. (File CAF/15/AIR Encl. 85B at Cabinet Hist. Archives ref. AFHQ/282/5).
  - (2) He wrote this in the context of combined operations, but it was of wide application.
  - (3) At Salerno and Anzio, for example.
  - (4) File CAF/15/AIR Encl. 14A (File AFHQ/282/5 at Cabinet Hist. Archives).

Frequency radio telephone set was fitted to a ship with each less important convoy. But no radar night control ships escorted the convoys along the North African coast.

During the landings at Anzio, night fighters were directed for a few days by a G.C.I. set mounted in an L.S.T. H.M.S. Ulster Queen directed day fighters. Months followed, with no reaction from the Admiralty or Air Ministry to the theatre's representations of 4 Dec. 43 for radar escort ships. Now, in the first half of May 44, it was decided to make another strong appeal based on the continuance of a threat made apparent to everyone. The Naval and Air Chiefs were still unanimous that radar ships were needed to increase the limited coast-based radar's range.

Sir Hugh Lloyd presented his views on the general situation to Headquarters Mediterranean Allied Air Forces on 17 May 44 and pressed home the point. They had, he reminded them, made repeated requests for shipborne radar. This would give not only more distant radar cover, but fighter direction facilities to day fighters at such a distance from the convoy that the enemy might be attacked in daylight and the dangerous last light attacks frustrated. For attacks at night, he urged, shipborne radar would also increase the number of night fighters (only three) which could operate in the convoy area and enable them to place their night fighters in the stream of enemy attack and at a greater distance from the convoy. The provision of ships with radar was long overdue, he continued. Those then fitting were untried and some considerable time would elapse before they were used on operations.

Action was not forthcoming until the autumn, too late to improve the convoy situation in the Central Mediterranean, but in time to bring the air evacuation of Crete to a standstill and to suggest what might have been achieved if convoy protection had attained a higher priority.

(1)

Coastal Air Force sums up the Convoy Defence Situation

Sir Hugh Lloyd's report of 17 May put the whole question of air defence of convoys in a nutshell. Coming at the period of the height of Coastal Air Force's strength and influence, of the last major Luftwaffe campaign in the <sup>Mediterranean</sup> West against Allied shipping and of far-reaching scientific measures and counter-measures, his conclusions are of considerable importance, not only as they applied to the

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(1) Report by M.A.C.A.F. to M.A.A.F. 17 May 44 in File CAF/15/AIR Encl. 119A (At Cabinet Hist. Archives ref. AFHQ/282/5).

Mediterranean but to the study of convoy defence as a whole.

Interceptions by aircraft well to the North of the convoy could never be certain, owing to the freedom of choice in time and route open to the enemy. Day fighters were out of business in last light raids in the convoy area, and hence radar became essential. They only functioned in good light beyond the convoy and out of radar range. There was very little radar warning of the very low enemy approaches and fighter defence was at a great disadvantage. The most that the three controlled night Beaufighters could be reasonably expected to achieve was the destruction of three enemy bombers on the way in and three on the way out. The remainder of the enemy strike force was, therefore, unmolested. Again, he wrote, additional freelance Beaufighters were more nuisance than they were worth. Hence, one was led to the inescapable conclusion that more radar was needed and that to seaward - in other words, in radar-equipped ships.

In this state of affairs, which he qualified as 'parlous', every available aircraft had been thrown into the defence and the whole strategy of interception widened so as to afford the maximum chances of interception far to the North of the convoy. These latest patrols had produced concrete results in disturbing the enemy reconnaissance and strike forces and destroying aircraft. But in spite of good work by aircraft, ships' gunners and smoke units, a determined, accurate strike usually penetrated to the convoy. This possibility would continue. The only chance of ensuring a measurable increase of security for convoys lay in adding to the present defence system two more twin-engined or night fighter squadrons and some radar ships. He was given neither. His forces were progressively reduced.

Meanwhile, the threat itself diminished. The growing air threat to Germany from United Kingdom bases called for increases in the fighter defences of the Reich and aircrews were recruited from other fronts, leaving the Mediterranean theatre with fewer experienced Luftwaffe personnel. The problem was abruptly solved in August 1944 when Allied forces landed in the South of France and the German bomber force withdrew. ~~In Home Waters there had been no bomber attacks on Allied shipping since March 1943. It is in operations in the Mediterranean, therefore, that the height of achievement by both Allies and Germans must be sought.~~

(1) R.A.F. Narrative 'The Air Defence of Great Britain', Vol. V, Appendix 25 and 'The R.A.F. in Maritime War', Vol. IV pp. 560-564.

(1)

Rejection of Admiralty's proposal to reinforce Surface Escorts

The air threat to Allied convoys had long pre-occupied the Admiralty. On 16 May, they suggested to the C.-in-C. Mediterranean that he should shift the balance of his escort forces in favour of the Central Mediterranean. An analysis of merchant vessel casualties from the beginning of August 1943 to the end of April 1944 showed that 72 per cent of casualties from U-boats occurred in the Western Basin, with over 57 per cent between longitude  $5^{\circ}$  and  $8\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  E (i.e. from Bougie to beyond Bone). About 93 per cent of casualties from aircraft occurred between the longitudes of Oran and La Calle. Hence some reduction in the Eastern Basin was justified.

The C.-in-C. Mediterranean agreed that the threat to convoys was greater in the Western Basin, but statistics were often misleading: they did not take into account, for instance, the steady loss of Allied caiques, a constant source of anxiety in the Levant. Owing to the loss of the Greek warships after the Greek naval mutiny and the ban on the use of American escorts in the Eastern Mediterranean, escorts in that area had fallen to an irreducible minimum, even though he was using all available minesweepers as escorts with the resulting risks.

The suggested transfer of surface escorts to the Western Basin did not, therefore, materialise. Meanwhile, the air and naval commands were busy sifting the lessons from the latest enemy success in reaching convoy 'Klement'. Before examining their findings, the last Luftwaffe effort of the Spring of 1944 will be related. This attack resulted in the sinking of a merchant vessel.

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(1) Admlty Hist. Sec. draft narrative 1944 (A.H.S./Admiralty).

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German airborne rearward Warning Radar (1)

In October 1943, the receiver of a specially developed rearward warning radar device known as Neptun (2) was first noted in a crashed enemy aircraft; and in November, a receiver in good condition was recovered from the wreckage of a Ju.88. Further evidence confirmed its use as a "backward-looking" defence against night fighters. This was the device, the presence of which had been suspected by Mediterranean pilots as the key to a succession of failures at interception. The new apparatus was a source of embarrassment to Headquarters Air Defence of Great Britain. Allied counter-measures were at once initiated and culminated in the "Meerschaum" scheme of jamming which was complete and ready by the end of May 1944 for use in the Northwest European area. By that time, however, the use of Neptun in that area had declined to a very low level. Prisoners-of-war stated that indications from other bombers in the same stream so confused crews that they preferred to rely on visual warnings. "Meerschaum" in its final form was, for this reason, never used operationally. There was another system of control of night operating aircraft by radar beacon - known as "Egon" the development of which was accelerated in Germany during 1943. In April 1944, the Commanding General of the Luftwaffe in Italy proposed it for use with his night ground attack units: but it was not given a trial in Italy until the beginning of 1945. (3)

It cannot be traced how many bombers based in the South of France were equipped with Neptun, but it is a fact that some aircraft of K.G.76 were equipped with it and they probably figured in Mediterranean strikes. (4)

~~Air Attack on Convoy "Chest" (12 July 44) (5)~~

~~The Allied landings in June 1944 on the Normandy coast had wide repercussions on the whole German Air Force, and some aircraft were withdrawn from Mediterranean operations. It was hardly surprising therefore, that there were no attacks on Allied convoys during June in the Western Basin. The reduced bomber force remained based in the South of France, but its problems must have been grave, for of all the tempting Allied shipping targets constantly calling for attention, only one convoy was attacked in July.~~

/The

- (1) R.A.F. Signals History Vol.VII p.53 (A.H.B.).
- (2) Fu Ge 220. It was also used by U-boats as a search receiver (167 megacycles per second) against A.S.V.
- (3) C.S.D.I.C. (Air) C.M.F. Reports No. A.596/F.N.935 in the Von Pohl series of reports (A.H.B.6).
- (4) Information supplied by A.H.B.6.
- (5) ~~M.A.C.A.F./Ops. O.R.B. Appendix F/INT.20~~

SECRET

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Operations (July and August 1944)

Air Attack on Convoy 'Ghost' (12 July 44) <sup>(1)</sup>

The Allied landings in June 1944 on the Normandy coast had wide repercussions on the whole German Air Force, and some aircraft were withdrawn from Mediterranean operations. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that there were no attacks on Allied convoys during June in the Western Basin. The reduced bomber force remained based in the south of France, but its problems must have been grave, for of all the tempting Allied shipping targets constantly calling for attention, only one convoy was attacked in July.

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(1) M.A.C.A.F./Operations O.R.B. Appendix F/INT.20.

/ The

SECRET

The eastbound convoy "Ghost" (UGS.46) consisting of 65 merchant vessels, 15 escort vessels, 1 anti-aircraft cruiser, 1 tug and 1 submarine was proceeding through 11 July in the direction of Oran. Five enemy aircraft are believed to have reconnoitred the convoy on the 11th. One of them was plotted 75 miles North of Cape Figalo at 1719 hours, intercepted by two scrambled Spitfires 50 miles North of Oran and attacked, but it escaped: it does not appear to have been within 30 miles of the convoy. One of the aircraft reached the convoy area that day. One more at least continued the watch until the early hours of 12 July.

The easiest route to the Oran area was down the Spanish coast. According to prisoners-of war picked up, the bomber force was airborne from Salon in ones and two's throughout the night and flew low between the Spanish coast and the Balearics to an assembly point about 10 miles off Cape Palos,<sup>(2)</sup> where there were several white light buoys<sup>(3)</sup> and where they were directed by another aircraft to the convoy. The force was composed of 26 aircraft.<sup>(4)</sup> An Allied pilot reported six groups of three white lights 75 miles W.N.W. of Cape Tenez (Algeria).<sup>(5)</sup>

Between 2110 hours/11th and 0315 hours/12th, four Mosquitoes were on patrol to the North of the convoy and between 2250/11th and 0435 hours/12th, seven more Mosquitoes were scrambled and four Beaufighters<sup>from Reghaia.</sup> airborne. At any given time, there were 4-5 fighters operating.

The general pattern of radar plots, which began at 0107 hours on the 12th at a point 120 miles North of Cape Tenez, revealed an original pattern of attack with single aircraft operating at very low altitudes and an attack from different directions spread over a long period. Great difficulty was experienced in divining the enemy's intentions. So much futile manoeuvring was performed that there was clearly some confusion in making the decision to attack. The convoy was first alerted at 0131 hours and again at 0147 hours. A smoke screen was started which lasted three hours. The Germans recorded its effectiveness in enveloping the convoy and ascribed their failure to it.

At 0430 hours, the convoy sent a "Help" signal. A naval signal stated that

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(1) M.A.C.A.F/Ops O.R.B. Appendix F/INT.20.

(2) Near Cartagena.

(3) Reported by an Allied pilot.

(4) From I and III/K.G.77 (17 aircraft) and III/K.G.26 (9 aircraft) (German records at A.H.B.6).

(5) All Mosquitoes from No.256 Squadron at La Senia: they occasionally used Reghaia.

No bombs were dropped and that two torpedoes passed ahead of one of the rearward ships. The attack, if attack it could be called, was, after several aircraft had passed over the ships, finally launched at 0450 hours. Only seven aircraft of the strike force attacked. The position of the convoy was 36°42'N 01°00'E. No ships were hit or damaged. The whole operation, whatever its original plan, was muddled in execution and a failure. Our night fighters had little luck. Only four contacts were obtained. None of them led to an engagement, although one Mosquito pilot was drawn into the enemy's slipstream and hit the sea with his starboard propeller. The engine caught fire and he had to return to base, on one engine. Another Mosquito, while being vectored, investigated the lights on the sea mentioned above - its presence may well have interfered with an attempt by the strike force to form up for a concerted attack, although no actual contacts were obtained in that area. Rearward tail radar was suspected, but no aircraft of K.G.76 were engaged.

None of the enemy aircraft were claimed as shot down by our fighters, but one Ju.88 flew into the sea shortly after launching its torpedo. Four of the crew were picked up 15 hours later by an American vessel. According to the preliminary interrogation, the prisoners were on their first operational mission; flying a new aircraft (1)<sup>thly</sup> were attacked by a night fighter and fell into the sea. The only possible explanation, in view of the lack of Allied claims, is that the pilot, with a night fighter on his tail, ditched his aircraft, either accidentally or deliberately. In the event, three bombers were lost. (2)

Changes in Convoy Composition and Speed. (3)

Convoy U.G.S.42 of 103 ships was the last of its size to pass through the Mediterranean. On 19 May, a limit of 90 ships was imposed on East-bound U.G.S. convoys. The risks from aircraft and submarines to ships in convoy were further diminished when, on 12 June, the minimum declared convoy Mediterranean speed of acceptance for U.G.S. and G.U.S. ships was raised to 9½ knots. The only exception to this new order was that, on occasion, ships of 8½ knots might be accepted for the Algiers - Bizerta run. (4) Ships were to be shuttled along the North African coast in preference to a reduction of convoy speed.

/Air Attack ...

- (1) Ju.88 A-4 series.
- (2) This and other references to German records from documents at A.H.B.6.
- (3) Admiralty draft narrative Vol.V (Admty Hist.Sec.)
- (4) Provided that the C.-in-C., Mediterranean was informed 48 hours before the convoy was scheduled to pass Europa Point.

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Air Attack on Convoy "Tambourine" (1 Aug. 44) (1)

The eastbound convoy "Tambourine" (2) was sighted in the afternoon of 31 July by the last of four reconnaissance aircraft. This aircraft's report at 1436 hours was intercepted. The details it gave of a heavily-escorted convoy and a detailed weather report of the area suggested a dusk attack. None of the reconnaissance aircraft were intercepted by the fighters scrambled.

In anticipation of a dusk attack, the patrols of Operation "Barricade" were despatched, including those off N.E. Spain. One Mosquito was on patrol over the convoy. No dusk attack developed. The strike force, of some 40 torpedo bombers and 5 pathfinders (3) came down the gap between Minorca and Sardinia. The first aircraft was plotted by radar at 0022 hours 70 miles North of Cape Sigli, flying South, then Southwest, the remainder following at about 5 minutes intervals at various heights. Some of them dalled a little in the area of two other convoys, but most seem to have made for "Tambourine". Warnings were sent to the convoys. (4) A smoke screen was laid by all escorts and ships in the convoy, which was well obscured before the attack developed. Three more Mosquitoes and four Beaufighters were scrambled.

/Extremely

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(1) M.A.C.A.F/Ops. O.R.B. Appendix F/INT.21

(2) U.G.S.48, composed of 54 merchant vessels, 14 escort vessels, 1 submarine, 1 A.A. cruiser, 1 tug and 1 L.S.T.

(2) Almost certainly all from K.G.26. K.G.77 was being disbanded (German documents at A.H.B.6.).

(4) Red.II at 0029 hours, Red IV at 0035 hours and White at 0228 hours.

Extremely bad weather played a decisive part in the proceedings, that ~~followed~~. There was 10/10 cloud at 400 feet altitude with some clear patches. The moon was at half. Below the cloud the visibility was poor, with some mist. The weather hampered the operations of the night fighters. From time to time their home bases closed down completely and they were withdrawn prematurely from patrol and diverted to Maison Blanche (Algiers), Blidah and Bone. When on patrol, contacts obtained above the cloud were followed down to sea level through a 10/10 layer extending from 700 to 400 feet. Contacts on enemy aircraft, when they retreated down to deck level, were confused with contacts on ships and lost in "sea returns". One ~~Allied~~ Mosquito, without a radio altimeter, avoided flying too close to the sea; single-engined fighter aircraft had always been forced to take the same precautions.

The peak of the attack came at about 0100 hours, when the convoy was about 42 miles N.W. of Beugie. (1) Neither flare path nor master of ceremonies tactics were observed, but medium strength orange-red markers were reported close to the convoy. These were probably incorrectly placed owing to smoke and mist and perhaps faulty navigation and annoyance by night fighters. Twenty underwater explosions were recorded by the convoy. (2) The attacks lasted over a period of 30 minutes: they caused no damage or casualties on the convoy, who claimed the probable destruction of one bomber.

Apart from the bad weather and the enemy's practice of flying very low, the night fighter pilots again expressed the belief that the enemy bombers were equipped with a tail warning device, which enabled them to take violent evasive action at ranges of two miles and less. This development was the third new problem still unsolved <sup>after</sup> when this, the last enemy air attack on a convoy in the Central Mediterranean. Nothing had happened to alter the Allied view that radar ships and more night fighters were needed for convoy protection.

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- (1) In the position 37°10'N, 04°30'E.
  - (2) All between 5 and 7 minutes after each attack.

Diminution and End of the Threat with Luftwaffe Withdrawal

The diminution and end of the air threat to shipping from the South of France was precipitated by the pressure of two major events, namely, the landings in Normandy in June and the landings in Southern France in August. The first lay behind the complete absence of anti-convoy strikes in June and the feeble effort in July. The second overshadowed any future once held possible. During July, the idea of an Allied landing along the Riviera hardened to certainty and a slow process of withdrawal of bombers to new, more easily defensible bases out of Allied aircraft range was begun. Gradually Salon, Istres and La Jasse became dead letters. Orange, Montelimar and Valence functioned first as bases, then as emergency airfields. The main bomber base complex was built up in the Lyons - Dijon area. (1)

Coastal Air Force Intelligence began soon after the landings to call attention to the gradual withdrawal. The Ju.88's radius of action from the gradually receding bases was at the most 450 miles. Convoys off the North African coast were therefore immune from attack from any quarter except Toulouse: and when Franczal airfield was evacuated of its Do.217s, the air threat to convoys along the Gibraltar - Cape Bon route came to an end. On 24 August, there was no trace of bomber units in the Montpellier/Frejorgues - Salon - Montelimar/Ansone triangle. On 31 August, there were certainly no bomber or long range reconnaissance units South of latitude 46° North and possibly none South of 47° North. (2)

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(1) R.A.F. narrative (first draft) on The Campaign in Southern France pp. 44-45 (A.H.B.)

(2) M.A.C.A.F. <sup>Operations</sup> O.R.B. Appendices F/INT. 24, 25, 26 and 27.

THE SUBMARINE WAR

The End of the U-Boat War

(1)

The Schnorchel Programme

But for the Allied landings in Southern France in August and the re-entry into Greece in October, a renaissance of U-boat activity would certainly have presented a heightened threat. On 23 May 44, the German Naval High Command (2) ordered the 29th Flotilla to build Schnorchel apparatus into all operational U-boats. It was hoped to complete the first fitting by 8 July and the rest some time between 12 July and 15 August. Schnorchel improved the scope of U-boats by enabling them to re-charge batteries and renew air supply without surfacing, giving them considerably greater immunity from radar or visual location by aircraft. Work at Toulon was accelerated. On 20 June, U.642 had been fitted and was due to put to sea on 1 July. Her departure was deferred: she was put out of action in the air attack of 6 August. Work went ahead on three boats, but the Allied landings in Provence stopped it and no Toulon boats ever operated with a Schnorchel. In Salamis, in spite of frequent air attacks, a Schnorchel was fitted into U.407 and she put to sea, (as will be related below), on 19 September.

In Pola U.596 was fitted with a Schnorchel, first tested on the Fasana Canal on 3 July. Training was carried out on 8 July. The captain was Kolbus, formerly commander of U.407. Both boats had been in the Mediterranean since November 1942.

Heavy Losses in Air Attacks on Toulon Base (July and August 1944)

On 1 June, there were three U-boats at sea in the Central and Western Mediterranean, four in Toulon and one in La Spezia in various states of overhaul - a total of eight boats. Whatever hopes may have been entertained of

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- (1) War diary of F. d. U. Mediterranean (PG/30936 at F.D.S./Admty).
  - (2) As fitted in May 44 in the 30 operational boats in Biscay ports, the Schnorchel consisted of an air induction trunk and diesel exhaust pipe enclosed together in a metal fairing. The whole mast was 26 feet in length and was raised or lowered by hydraulic power. For fuller details on the development of Schnorchel refer to pp. 240-241 and 476 of Vol. IV of this series.

/ equipping

equipping these boats with improved search receivers and Schnorchels were shattered by the heavy Allied air attacks on 5 and 11 July and 6 August: in these attacks, six of the eight boats were either destroyed or so gravely damaged as to be unfit for further operations. Toulon submarine pens and harbour were bombed by 233 U.S. Liberators (1) for the loss of 7 aircraft. They attacked the heavily defended ~~and protected~~ targets in two waves at 1234/1232 hours and 1316/1322 hours from 2100/2600 feet. Photographs gave a fair indication of the success of the attack, which is confirmed from German records. (2) U.586 was sunk and never returned to operations. U.642, 471, 952, 969, 466 and 967 were all damaged, two of them (3) so badly that they were paid off shortly afterwards. Only one boat - U.230 - was undamaged. Although Mourillon and Missiessy basins suffered only slight damage and there were no casualties to staff, there was heavy damage in the dockyard and to cranes and workshops.

On 11th July, 87 U.S. Liberators, well escorted as was the previous strike force, dropped 798 x 500 bombs in Toulon harbour for the loss of two Liberators, between 1228 and 1236 hours. On this occasion, U.967 was hit and badly damaged so that although she was repaired to some extent and could eventually proceed on a short course, she never returned to operations. (4) There was some damage in the dockyard, but none to any other U-boats.

The last attack was made on 6 August. 146 U.S. Liberators dropped 105 tons of bombs on the submarine pens, losing 2 aircraft. U.471 and U.969 were sunk and never returned to service. Three docks at Missiessy were permanently put out of action. Water supplies and telephones were cut. Orders were given to make U.230, 466 and 967 for sea without Schnorchels. If by the date of their state of readiness, the Allies had not landed, the fitting of them with Schnorchels was to be proceeded with. It seems clear now that U.967, badly damaged in the pen on 11th July, could be made seaworthy, although Allied records have treated her as finished with operations on 5th July. It is, notwithstanding, true, that she never again operated at sea against the Allies, nor can any plans for her specific employment on operations be traced, apart from the mention of the Schnorchel. It was most unlikely, with the base largely

/destroyed

- (1) 573.75 tons of bombs, comprising 170 x 1000 G.P. and 1955 x 500 G.P.
- (2) Fd.U Med. war diary (FG/30936 at F.D.S/Admty).
- (3) U.642 - paid off 12th July and finally put out of action by aircraft on 6 August; and U.952 - paid off 8th July.
- (4) FG/30936 at F.D.S/Admiralty. She was blown up on 19 Aug. 44.

destroyed and the strength down to almost zero that there ever could be a renewal of effort. It is, nevertheless, certain that a breathing space of a week or two would have enabled them to operate Schnorchel U-boats against invasion shipping targets.

June and July effort drops to low record (1)

The air attacks of February, March and April, the heavy losses in "Swamp" and other Allied attacks and the need for re-equipment were all accountable for the fact that the U-boat activity for June was the lowest recorded. Only three boats - U.471, 586 and 952 - patrolled during the month in the Central Mediterranean. Their effort was token and ineffective, no successful attacks being made on Allied shipping. U.239 moved from La Spezia to Toulon on 30 June. All boats were now in Toulon, except U.596 at Pola and U.407 and U.565 at Salamis.

The lull continued through July and was rendered permanent by the heavy air attacks on Toulon. There were no boats operating at sea. Anxiety over the chances of an imminent landing in Southern France called for urgent concentration on plans for escape. On 12 July, it was ordered that no more boats were to use La Spezia; and the three supply U-boats building there were to proceed to Genoa.

Pola Schnorchel U-Boat mits to sea (29 July 44) (2)

U.596, based at Pola, had already broken out of the Adriatic once. (3) Between 11 and 19 April, in spite of air cover unbroken except for one day and patrols and attacks by destroyers, she had made the passage over the "unclimbable" fence" of Otranto Strait (4) and proceeded to operate in the open sea. Using the natural advantages of a largely friendly and rocky coastline, she exercised extreme caution. Once detected, she remained still, in the probable hope of wearing down her pursuers or profiting by weather conditions unfavourable to them.

/ At

(1) B.d.U.Med. war diary (PG/30936 at F.D.S./Admty.) Submarine Tracker's Log, O.I.G., G.-in-C.Med. (Admty Hist.Sec.).

(2) Full report in U.A.C.A.P/Ops. O.R.B. Appendix F/INT.30.

(3) No. 242 Group report 242 G/55/1/2/AIR, 24 Apr. 44 in File CAF/3/4/AIR at Cabinet Hist. Archives ref. AFHQ/277/3).

(4) Full details of this 'Fence' and of the August 'Fence' may be found in File No.242 Group 5/1/2/AIR (A.H.B.II.J.1/116/142.)

At 0935 hours on 28 July 44, an aerial photograph was taken of Pola, revealing that she had moved from her normal position and was moored alongside an oiler in the outer harbour. Further coverage was requested; during the next reconnaissance sorties, at 1325 hours on 30 July, she was no longer discernible. Newly equipped with a Schnorchel, she had put to sea at 2100 hours on 29 July, with orders to patrol the Malta-Benghazi route. (1) It was the full moon period. If she broke through the Strait and then found the open sea too dangerous, she could, it was suggested by Allied Intelligence, still see clearly to navigate the difficult North Corfu (or Korkyra) Channel between that island and the mainland with a fair chance of reaching Salamis unharmed. Most of the way down the Adriatic she could count on many friendly havens.

She put to sea with two decisive advantages. Firstly, the Allied estimate assumed the time of her departure as about 1600 hours on 29 July, whereas, in the event, she sailed 5½ hours later, at 2130 hours. The Allied interception plans were, therefore, wrongly geared from the outset. (2) Secondly, U.596 was now fitted with a Schnorchel. The Allies were unaware of this: even when they entered in October into Salamis, where she had been sunk by aircraft, it would appear that they failed to discover the fact. (3) It was not realised until the U-boat log, which was fortunately recovered, was studied.

The existence of a Schnorchel in U-596 throws an entirely different complexion on the proceedings and explains, among other things, why she was never actually sighted. The methods by which a U-boat can pass through Otranto Strait in the face of strong air and sea patrols exercised the Allies in the First World War; and the fact that there is at this date a Communist submarine base at Valona in Albania suggests that the ~~subject~~ subject is contemporary, too. A brief summary of the Allied effort and the U-boat's course will give the main lines of the very latest operation of this nature in the war in the western hemisphere. (4)

/Captain

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(1) F.d.U. war diary (FC/30936 or F.D.S/Admty). Her appointed billet is shown on Figure 22.

(2) They were based on an advance of 90 nautical miles in 24 hours, i.e. at an average speed of 3.75 nautical miles per hour.

(3) Had the fact been reported, it would almost certainly have been recorded, either in the C-in-C. Mediterranean's Anti-U-Boat summary or in the log of the Submarine Tracker on his C.I.C. staff. It figured in neither.

(4) The course of U.596 with contacts, patrol areas and attacks by aircraft and destroyers are all shown in the diagram at Figure 22.

Captain Kolbus correctly assumed a very strong air watch on his progress and at 2310 hours on 29 July, just two hours after departure, decided to clear the Adriatic under water and to charge batteries with the aid of his Schnorchel at early morning or late at night. His journey was marked by a series of mechanical troubles and he recorded that his escape was made considerably easier by his Schnorchel, which, he rightly noted, was unobserved by the Allies. He employed even greater caution than he was given credit for and, from time to time, was fed with information from his own Signals Intelligence units on the presence of Allied surface craft and aircraft.

Operation "Fence" (1 - 5 Aug. 44)

The air contribution to Operation "Fence" over the Otranto Strait area was organized by No. 242 Group in South-eastern Italy. The units employed for patrol and escort comprised two Wellington squadrons (1) (with some aircraft carrying Leigh Lights), two Spitfire squadrons, (2) one night Beaufighter squadron (3) a detachment of Marauders (4) and some Cant. 506's of the Italian Wing. Twelve destroyers, including H.M.S. Aldenham, Beaufort and Whaddon, co-operated. The "Fence" was operated for  $7\frac{1}{2}$  days, with anti-fighter escort in the latter stages.

Four Wellingtons opened proceedings on the night 31 July/1 August with patrols near Pelagosa Island; eight others en route from Reghaia (Algeria) to Grottaglie (S. Italy) made sweeps in passage. Operation "Fence" proper began at 1200 hours on 1 August and was steadily expanded, aided by five destroyers. After an empty day, the patrol pattern was extended so as to embrace the probable U-boat course via the area of Saseno Island (Albania), south-eastwards from Port Palermo to Santa Quaranta Bay, thence westward along the North Corfu coast to Fano Island.

Contacts recorded on the night of 3/4 and on 4 August proved fruitless. At 0845 hours on 5 August, a Marauder reported a probable U-boat (5) and again at 1245 hours H.M.S. Aldenham, who had proceeded with other ships to the area of this sighting, signalled that she was in contact some 5 miles North of it and later carried out two attacks, but lost the contact. U.596 was still a great distance from this scene.

/In

- 
- (1) Nos. 36 and 221.
  - (2) Nos. 73 and 1435.
  - (3) No. 255.
  - (4) No. 14 Squadron.
  - (5) In 40°10'N, 19°24'E.

In the latter part of the afternoon of the 5th, a Wellington ~~ET~~ on leaving the area was attacked by two Me.109s. With one engine damaged, she was escorted back to Brindisi by a Marauder. Plans were made to provide fighter cover the next day.

Operations in the "Fence" Area (5/6-7 Aug.44)

Up to the evening of 5 August, the air and naval forces had been patrolling outside and to southward of the U-boat's area. Now the Fence area was so extensive that it was almost inevitable that U.596 should enter the pattern. This must have happened at some time in the region of midnight on 5 August. U.596, avoiding the coastline, proceeded on an even course southward, schnorchelling for about 2 hours every early morning and late evening.

The air forces on patrol on 6 August consisted of 8 Cants, 3 Marauders and 2 Wellingtons. Cover was provided by a total of 28 Spitfires <sup>(1)</sup> and 2 Beaufighters <sup>(2)</sup>. Again, a Marauder's crew thought they saw a submarine. Close examination suggested a periscope one foot out of the water, travelling at 5 knots in a northerly direction, as if it were turning back on its tracks. Four depth charges were dropped. <sup>(3)</sup> U.596 was at the time nowhere in the vicinity.

Several times during the day 6 August and the following night, U.596 heard the sound of Allied 'foxers' and <sup>her</sup> their Hochpeilung instruments recorded A/S/V waves and what <sup>she</sup> ~~they~~ mistook for depth charge explosions.

At 1135 hours on 7 August, Allied destroyers obtained a contact on an object West of central Corfu <sup>(4)</sup> and carried out three depth charge attacks and one creeping attack. But they later expressed the contact as doubtful, as indeed it was, for at the time U.596 was still several miles to the Northwest of Corfu.

From late on 29 July, when U.596 had put to sea, until midnight on 7 August, not a single authentic contact on her had been obtained. She had attained her primary objective of breaking out of Otranto Strait and her whereabouts were still unrealised.

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- (1) <sup>223</sup> Of No. 223 Squadron.
  - (2) Of Nos. 1435 and 73 Squadrons.
  - (3) Of No. 14 Squadron.
  - (4) In the position 39°51'N. 19°38'E. North of Corfu and West of Sarande.
  - (5) ~~In the position~~

The critical Day of 8 August off Corfu (1)

During the whole of 8 August, the Allied air and naval units, had they known it, held the fate of U.596 in the hollow of their hand. They made two contacts on objects in the same latitude and only a few miles from her and may have sighted jetsam ejected from her: but time ran out and they seem to have reached a point of material and psychological fatigue after  $7\frac{1}{2}$  days continuous search, <sup>which</sup> ~~They abandoned the search~~ while she was lying close at hand. In such operations, the factor of personalities plays a vital part, and ~~and~~ <sup>In</sup> this long battle of wits, the laurels must be conceded to the seasoned Captain Kolbus. He used his few advantages with great resource against superior forces; and his timing was so accurate that he was able to proceed southwards from Corfu in security.

The German-held island of Corfu provided a convenient haven where he could lie up, recharge his batteries, renew his air supply, overhaul his faulty equipment and obtain intelligence on local conditions. There was water so deep close inshore that no instruments could ever contact him on the bottom.

At 2055 hours on 7 August, he entered Liapade Bay (2) on the West coast of Corfu and learned from the local Army commander that Allied destroyers had been patrolling daily off the island. The boat was thoroughly overhauled and cleaned up.

Between 2144 and 2400 hours,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  tons of rubbish was dumped overboard (3) Local winds are northerly and easterly. If easterly at the time, in the absence of any strong currents, some of the jetsam may have been impelled seaward, but this cannot be confirmed. It was a period of normally fine weather, but a violent electric storm developed and continued through the night. (4)

At 0200 hours on 8 August, while she lay presumably surfaced in the bay, Wellington XIV/No. 36 Squadron obtained a contact on an object about 30 miles S.W. by S. of the U-boat, (5) which was amplified as "7 miles for 7 seconds". (6) This was reported, but no other action was taken.

/From

(1) U.596 proceedings from her log (PG/30628 at F.D.S/Admty): Allied operations from No. 242 Group and No. 14 Squadron O.R.Bs and M.A.C.A.F/Operations O.R.B. Appendix F/INT.30 1944.

(2) The log of U.596 gives Lingada Bay, but the course chart leaves no doubt that it was the bay named as Liapade in Mediterranean Pilot Vol.II. Prevailing winds are northerly and easterly.

(3) This apparently menial detail represents a tactical error on the part of the crew and may conceivably have presented a vital clue to their presence, although this is not certain.

(4) No. 36 Squadron O.R.B.

(5)  $39^{\circ}30'N$ ,  $19^{\circ}12'E$ .

(6) No. 36 Squadron O.R.B. states it was held for 10 seconds.

From midnight, the weather, which had been fair, worsened. Thunder clouds were followed by ~~the~~ thunder storms and electrical storms, ~~which covered the area.~~ Low cloud developed. Aircraft had trouble with their instruments. One Wellington XIV reported that the storm hampered the use of its special centimetric radar equipment. (1)

At 0020 hours on the 8th, Wellington E/No. 36 Squadron obtained a disappearing contact about 30 miles off Liapade Bay (2) amplified as "7 miles for 7 seconds". (3) This could not have been on U.596.

At 0207 hours, U.596 submerged and lay on the bottom in 96 metres of water about 100 yards off the cliffs which surrounded her on three sides. There she lay until 1505 hours. The contact reported at 0600 hours by a Wellington (4) "at 8 miles for 180 seconds" at a point about 15 miles off Liapade Bay (5) could not possibly have been on the U-boat: it might have been on a Cant.

Between 1700 hours/<sup>18th</sup> 7th and 0755 hours/<sup>16</sup> patrols were maintained by a total of 9 Wellingtons. Six more Wellingtons were engaged from 0425 hours (6) and four Cants from 0425 hours (7) in a continuation of the search over a wide area extending as far as the Greek coast. (8) A total of <sup>16</sup> Spitfires patrolled as cover along the Greek coast during the day, the last two finishing at 2020 hours. The area watched was the critical area West and South-West of Corfu. (9)

The two contacts obtained by aircraft at 0020 and 0600 hours were reported to Naval forces. These ships reported "considerable floating debris", which could transpose A.S.V. contacts. It would be of great interest if it could be proved that this debris was actually part of the rubbish dumped overboard the previous night, but in view of the negligible currents in the area of the landlocked U-boat, it seems most unlikely that it was. Floating debris was common all the way down the coast from the Northern Adriatic. It was clearly not identified by the destroyers.

/These

- 
- (1) No. 36 Squadron O.R.B.
  - (2) In 39°30'N, 19°12'E.
  - (3) In the O.R.B. it is noted as held for 10 seconds.
  - (4) Of No. 221 Squadron.
  - (5) In 39°31'N, 19°31'E.
  - (6) To 2035 hours/<sup>18th</sup> 8th.
  - (7) To 1940 hours/<sup>16</sup> 8th.
  - (8) 39°N - 39°45'N - 18°50'E.
  - (9) All air details from No. 242 Group, No. 36 Squadron O.R.Bs and M.A.C.A.F/Operations O.R.B. Appendix F/INT.30.

These destroyers and No. 36 Squadron's aircraft returned to base. Four Spitfires covered two Wellingtons over a reduced area round the intersection of 39°N and 19°E, South-West of Corfu. At 2240 hours the operation was terminated.

The Escape of U.596

At 1505 hours on 8 August, U.596 rose from the bottom of Liapade Bay and preceeded on her journey southward, hugging the coast of Corfu. At 1720 hours, she began to "Schnorrehel". At 2400 hours, she had reached the southerly tip of Corfu. The last Allied destroyers and aircraft had returned to base. Aircraft search transmissions were no longer being received. The coast was at last clear. She proceeded unmolested on her course, arriving at her appointed billet some time late on 14 August. There she operated to no effect until 23 August, when she left the patrol area. She arrived off Salamis at 0600 hours on 1 September. (1)

The disappointment felt at the failure to catch U.596 over a sustained operation of 7½ days duration was keen. The time came when they were operating in the open sea without any proven contacts and it was a reasonable move to abandon the search at that point. The irony of the situation was that they were closer than ever before to the U-boat. The Wellingtons, Marauders and Cants of No. 242 Group had put out a total of 171 sorties involving 1086 flying hours. (2) This does not take into account the fighter cover.

Air and Naval commands had worked on incomplete intelligence material, which failed to indicate the exact time of departure, information on the U-boat's whereabouts and above all the fact that she had the overwhelming advantage of an undisclosed Schnorrehel. Continuous and flexible though the pattern of air patrol was, conditions were never such as to render it possible to get a contact on the Schnorrehel itself (3) or any other part of the U-boat. As regards the suggestion that closer investigation inshore at Corfu might have revealed the enemy's presence, it must be borne in mind that Corfu was strongly defended. The

			/untimely
(1)	Log of <u>U.596</u> (PG/30628 at F.D.S/Admty). Refer to Figure 22 for her course.		
(2)	<u>Squadron</u>	<u>No. of Sorties</u>	<u>Total flying hours</u>
	No. 36 Wells.	40	290½
	No. 221 Wells.	69	470
	No. 14 Marauders	23	157
	Cants.	39	168½
	<u>Totals.</u>	<u>171</u>	<u>1,086</u>

(3) This is only possible when the wave conditions are no higher than 3, i.e. in fairly calm water, and at close range.

untimely end of U.407 on her first day of operations with a Schnorchel gave no idea of the possibilities of this apparatus in the Mediterranean. The case of U.596 did give a most impressive idea of what could be done with it when handled by an astute and experienced commander.

The Sinking of the Schnorchel-equipped U.407 South of Milos (19 Sept.44)

At 1700 hours on 18 September, the Polish destroyer O.A. Garland sighted<sup>smoke</sup> at 8 miles distance in the area South of Milos Island (Cyclades) and closed down wind. No Asdic or radar contacts were found possible. At 400 yards, a Schnorchel and periscope were sighted and then "hedgehogged" without result. H.M.S's Troubridge, Terpsichore, Brecon and Zetland (1) joined in the attack. At 0438 hours on 19 September, U.407 surfaced; her crew abandoned ship and she was sunk by gunfire at 0521 hours in the position 36°27'N, 24°33'E. (2)

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(1) All of the 24th Flotilla (Force "A").

(2) Details of operations from Log of Submarine Tracker, O.I.C., C.-in-C. Med. (Admlty Hist.Sec.)

The Fate of the Toulon U-Boats (August 1944) (1)

On 6 August, it was ordered that U.230, U.466 and U.967 were to be made ready. On 12 August, the Director of U-Boats Mediterranean <sup>(2)</sup> left for Germany and was replaced. <sup>(3)</sup> On 14 August, all redundant staff were pulled out, leaving only the crews for the three boats. On 15 August, the first day of the landings (Operation "Dragoon") U.466 and U.967 were ordered to function as torpedo batteries at the entrance to Toulon harbour. U.230 was to stand by. On 16 August, U.466 and U.967 were ordered to Marseilles, but it was soon apparent that it was impossible to get through. On 18 August, U.230 put to sea, with orders to pass through the German minefields, scuttle in Spanish waters and land the crew in Spain; but she, too, found herself out off in the Marseilles area and on 21 August was scuttled after grounding on a sandbank in the Gulf of Hyeres. The Deputy Captain and his full crew were taken prisoners by U.S.S. Eriasson on 23 August before they could set out for Genoa.

On 19 August, owing to the increasing danger in Toulon, which was threatened by the French First Army, the situation was recognised as hopeless. U.466 and U.967 were blown up at 2030 hours. The 29th Flotilla Toulon force no longer existed.

The Fate of the Salamis U-Boats (September 1944)

The U.S.A.A.F. attack of 24 Sept. 44 on Skaramanga signed the death warrant of the last German U-boats in the Mediterranean. On the morning of 24 <sup>September</sup> ~~December~~, there were two U-boats lying in Salamis - U.565 and U.596 (the Schnorchel-equipped boat who had made the daring break-out of the Adriatic in August). There had been an air attack on the 15th, but no damage had been suffered. U.407 had patrolled until the 19th, when, rashly exposing her Schnorchel on the first day she had carried it at sea, she was sighted and sunk, as described earlier.

The attack of 24 September in Skaramanga harbour was part of a series of major attacks in that period on airfields, harbours and communications, from which troops and materials were being evacuated. At 1303/1305 hours, 52 Liberators bombed the harbour with successful results. A workshop and a hangar

/were

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(1) In the course of the fighting, the war diary of the Director of U-Boats Mediterranean for the period 1-19 August was severely damaged. The records for that period were comprised from memory and notes on telephone calls. (PG/30936 at F.D.S./Admty.)

(2) Kapitän zur See Hartmann.

(3) By Korvette Kapitän Schewe.

were set on fire and a corvette, a water tanker and two patrol boats sunk. Most important of all, one U-boat was sunk by the stern in her pen and another put out of action.<sup>(1)</sup> The C.-in-C. Mediterranean, in his Anti-U-Boat Summary for September 1944, states that the second boat was damaged but his Submarine Tracker, usually well informed, states that it was sunk. All official naval records treat both as destroyed.

Midget Submarines and the Small Battle Units

The U-boat campaign ended on 24 Sept.44 with the air attack on Skaramanga, but enemy submarine warfare continued until the end of the war in May 1945. Special midget and one man submarines, human torpedoes and other devices were employed by the German Small Battle Units in the Ligurian and Adriatic Seas and along the French and Italian Rivieras. Transport submarines to service them were under production until a late date.

It was not often that the air forces were involved in their operations and for that reason it is not intended to expand the theme. Where, at a later stage, aircraft were employed in combined operations to remove a threat, those operations will be mentioned.

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(1) F.B.S./Admiralty.

THE AIR CAMPAIGN AGAINST ENEMY SHIPPING (JANUARY TO AUGUST 1944)

Dispositions and Policy

Coastal Air Force at the Height of its Strength and Influence

The growth of the strength and commitments of Coastal Air Force through the winter of 1943/1944 was considerable. Yet in spite of its mobility and adaptability, the problem of stopping the flow of the enemy's seaborne supplies and the activities of his naval units was grave enough to call for frequent co-operation by both the Tactical and Strategic Air Forces. Coastal Air Force itself developed aircraft of increasingly greater range, weight and armament, capable of dealing with heavily armoured ships and of attacking ports. The advent of these aircraft and the existence of experienced fighter aircrews led to an increasing participation of Coastal Air Force in the land battle. Of this last development more will be related at a later stage. General dispositions and current policy tendencies will first be viewed, it being borne in mind that this picture was changing daily.

The total strength of Coastal Air Force in squadrons <sup>on 31</sup> during January was <sup>54</sup>55, a figure it maintained until March, when it declined to <sup>50</sup>54. Of the January total, 30 were R.A.F., 16 U.S.A.A.F. and <sup>8</sup>10 French Air Force. (1)

Expansion

The forward drift, begun in the autumn of 1943, continued away from the North African littoral into the newly won islands and superior strategic areas. At Naples, the 62nd U.S. Fighter Wing had set up its headquarters. At Bastia (Corsica) the 63rd Fighter Wing, which was to acquire important offensive responsibilities, had opened in November. The build-up of No. 242 Group in South-Eastern Italy to cover Adriatic operations has already been described. In mid-October 1943, Coastal Air Force had assumed operational control of A.H.Q. Malta and delegated to it certain responsibilities covering local areas to include Sicily. There were Coastal Spitfire squadrons on Monte Corvino.

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(1) Refer to Figure 23. *The peak had been reached on 1 January — 60 squadrons*

A look summary of squadron dispositions as they stood at the opening of 1944 is given in the footnote (1) and the geographical position is given in Figure 11.

On 10 Dec. 43, North-west African Coastal Air Force became Mediterranean Allied Coastal Air Force in line with the general unification of command, and, on 10 Jan. 44, A.H.Q. Malta was officially incorporated in the formation of Coastal Air Force.

The special dispositions made to meet the enemy's offensive against the Allied seaborne supplies have already been referred to. Another important and offensive step by Coastal Air Force arose from a combination of circumstances, among them the shortage of suitable targets for its ship-striking force consequent on the enemy's coast-crawling policy. It was decided, on military considerations, to open a vigorous offensive campaign with fighter and medium bomber sweeps against coastal and shore objectives in the Ligurian Sea, the Po Valley and the Adriatic. A great effort had already been devoted to these ends when a spell of bad weather lengthening into January limited operations.

The approach and duration of the Anzio landings was the cause of a local programme of air attacks on Ligurian ports feeding the German forces in that area, but once the beachhead was established, a more normal distribution of effort suited to a long term policy of starving the entire German army became necessary.

Effect of the Anzio Landings on German seaborne Supplies (2)

When the Germans lost the port of Nettuno in late January, the whole fabric of their seaborne system of supplies for the Armies was shaken. Premature demolitions

(1) <u>Local Theatre</u>		<u>Squadrons</u>
North African sectors		8 day fighter
		2 night fighter
		6 general reconnaissance
		3 detachments Air Sea Rescue
A.H.Q. Malta (including Sicily).		3 day fighter
		1 night fighter
		4 general reconnaissance
		1 Air Sea Rescue (plus det. of another)
Italy		7 day fighter
		3 night fighter
		1 general reconnaissance (one squadron less detachment plus detachments of 2 other squadrons)
		1 Air Sea Rescue
Sardinia and Corsica		8 day fighter
		3 night fighter
		5 general reconnaissance (including Mitchells)
		2 Air Sea Rescue (less 1 detachment)

(2) Information from captured German documents at F.D.S./Admiralty.

/in

in the port of Civitavecchia ruined plans for its enlargement<sup>is</sup> of a forward base. San Stefano now became the main supply base for the Rome front and all necessary steps towards this end were taken at the end of January. The Todt Organization constructed extra berths. Portoferraio (in Elba) and Piombino were used as staging ports to avoid overcrowding. These three were the ports used by war freighters (K.T. ships), peniches of all kinds and naval ferry barges, while, further south, Porto Ercole, Porto Clementino and Salina (near Tarquinia) were used by naval ferry barges alone, three or four at a time. Further to northwards, Orbetello, Talamone, Leghorn, La Spezia and the ports as far as Savona all played a role in the distribution of arms, equipment and supplies to the main front; and at the core of the <sup>system</sup> machine lay Genoa and its complex of minor ports.

The strain on the supply system of the German Armies may be imagined when it is realised that at the height of the battle for Rome, with land communications under continuous air attack, San Stefano, the chief supply port, was over 100 miles from the front line at Anzio. Its importance may be estimated from a single example. On 13 Feb. 44 there were, at various points, 26 naval ferry barges with over 2,000 tons of supplies, 17 peniches with 1,500 tons and 2 small steamships of about 400 tons capacity each loaded and ready to sail for San Stefano and its alternative harbours.<sup>(1)</sup>

#### Overcrowded Ports as Targets for Allied Air Attacks

As convoys could only run at night, there was frequent overcrowding, which enhanced the possible advantages to the Allies of air attacks. For example, there were 16 vessels in San Stefano on 4 February, and in Piombino 34 on 16 March, 22 on 24 April and 25 on 30 April. The usual convoy rhythm was maintained by groups of four ferry barges or peniches arriving in San Stefano at dawn, being discharged and returning north the following evening either loaded with manganese or light for Piombino. Usually the convoys were escorted by anti-submarine vessels<sup>(1)</sup> and battle ferries, while R and RA-boats<sup>(3)(2)</sup> carried out anti-motor torpedo boat patrols.

(1) Captured documents at F.D.S./Admiralty.

(2) U.J.-boats.

(3) From La Spezia and San Stefano.

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From these few notes, it will be seen how desirable it would have been if the Allied air and naval forces could have imposed a complete blockade of the German-held ports supplying the southern area; and the course of the air operations will become more explicit now that the German supply pattern has been defined.

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(1)  
German Naval Policy (May to August 1944)

It will assist in clarifying the background to the anti-shipping campaign of the Air Forces if it is shown how the changing military situation was affecting that part of the German Navy not actually engaged<sup>in</sup> carrying war supplies for the front. One of the points which emerge is that if there are few available surface escorts, fewer convoys sail and hence fewer targets present themselves, except heavy concentrations in port.

During May, June and July the German Navy was ~~too~~ busy assisting the evacuation of areas threatened by the long Allied Spring offensive. Assault craft and M.A.S. boats<sup>(2)</sup> were first sent to the Arno estuary: later, the assault craft were sent up to Viareggio and the M.A.S. boats to Lerici (near La Spezia), and both were put on defensive patrols. The Small Battle Units Command which usually employed assault craft and M.A.S. boats was recognized to have failed as an offensive element and some recommended posting them to some more profitable theatre. Elba operations interrupted routine for a week or more and a major effort was put into the demolition of Leghorn port and the sinking of blockships there and elsewhere.

(3)

The small flotilla of TA boats was usually engaged in defensive operations, such as escort. But on two occasions - 25/26 and 26/27 July<sup>(4)</sup>, three of them shelled Allied positions on the South bank of the Arno.

Evidence of Allied preparations for a major move accumulated fast during July. The Germans observed cruisers and destroyers in Algerian ports, heavy air attacks against traffic on the south coast of France and in the Rhone delta, and stronger supply-dropping activities by night-flying aircraft for the Resistance forces. Southern France, (with possibly diversions in the Adriatic and the Aegean) seemed the most likely target to the Supreme Command of the Navy. During the second week in August, the systematic destruction of the coastal radar and naval signals warning systems on the coast east of the Rhone delta confirmed existing apprehensions, as did the concentration of shipping in Corsican harbours.

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- (1) From information supplied by Admiralty Foreign Documents Section.
  - (2) Anti-submarine and general purpose motor boats.
  - (3) German torpedo boats of foreign origin.
  - (4) TA.24, 28 and 29.

The gradual narrowing-down of the threat increasingly tied up the whole of the naval forces under command of the 6th Defence Division, which controlled all the naval vessels, (including harbour defence vessels) in the South of France area. On 12 August, the Division ordered every seaworthy boat to prepare to put to sea immediately. (1)

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(1) These forces consisted of:-

2 torpedo boats	:	<u>TA.9</u> and <u>TA.13</u>
4 fast escorts	:	ex-French avisos <u>SG.16</u> , <u>SG.17</u> , <u>SG.21</u> and <u>SG.22</u> .
3 other escorts	:	<u>SG.23</u> (ex-yacht), <u>SG.24</u> (ex-cable layer) and <u>SG.25</u> (ex-French gunboat)

There were in addition a number of small auxiliary warships for coastal duties, such as ex-fishing vessels, tugs etc., equipped as anti-submarine vessels, minesweepers and harbour defence vessels.

Allied

(1)

Shore-based Radar Developments in 1944

The expansion of shore-based radar units to Italy in November 1943 was carried out at the expense of other areas where the enemy air threat had diminished. During the winter, the North African shore stations were sometimes put to a severe test when convoys were attacked. Generally speaking, reasonable service was provided, although, as has been seen, radar ships to seaward remained an unfulfilled solution. There were sporadic enemy night attacks on ports. Bari was attacked twice during December, Catania and Augusta in January, Naples in March and April and Vis Island in late March and early May. Controlled night fighters inspired a healthy respect for our controls during the series of Spring attacks on convoys and, as has been seen, sometimes spoiled an attack completely.

By April 1944, British high-powered centimetre equipment, which had been introduced in small quantities in the late winter preceding, was beginning to play an important part in the detection and interception of low flying enemy reconnaissance aircraft. During Spring and early Summer, radar coverage from Corsica was further improved in anticipation of the landings in Southern France. By August, a total of 30 British and American radar stations were operational in Corsica.

When, from mid-May onwards, enemy air attacks on ports and land targets slowed to a relative standstill, radar information on their air reconnaissance continued to flow. At the end of May, when the German front had been cracked, Coastal Air Force's radar organization became responsible up to a line joining Grosseto and Pescara. Mobile units for the defence of Rome and Civitavecchia and Allied shipping lanes to forward ports were rapidly transferred from other sectors.

During June, July and August, a considerable effort was made in forming and training British and American units for the defence of base areas in Southern France. The peak number of operational radar stations was reached in July 1944, with 77 British and 46 American. This radar force protected the vast invasion fleet from enemy air reconnaissance. Then, with the beachhead secured and air superiority established, the work of this closely-dovetailed Anglo-American chain declined. By mid-September 1944, the stations numbered only 30 British and 10 Americans.

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(1) Report in M.A.C.A.F./Ops O.R.B. Appendix F/INT.34.

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Airborne Radar Developments in 1944

The development of centimetric radar in aircraft followed a different tempo and one too slow for Coastal Air Force who were anxious to exploit ~~the advantages~~ our scientific advances in this field and create a truly up-to-date general reconnaissance force. As had so often happened, output did not match demand and high priorities connected with preparations for the invasion of N.W. Europe slowed down Mediterranean plans for expansion. Notwithstanding, solid, if slow, progress was made.

By early August 1943, the only units equipped with Mark VIII A.I. had been three squadrons of R.A.F. night fighters. This had increased by October 1943 to six Mark VIII A.I. equipped night fighter squadrons, <sup>(1)</sup> together with two night fighter squadrons in Malta partially equipped with Mark VIII A.I. In November, Ventura aircraft fitted with Mark VIII A.S.V. arrived in the North African theatre.

The position in January 1944 was that Coastal Air Force operated seven night fighter squadrons, all equipped with centimetric Mark VIII radar. The Force had acquired for anti-shipping and ancillary tasks seven A.S.V. squadrons, of which only one was about to re-arm with Mark VIII A.S.V. to be borne in Venturas instead of the Hudsons in actual use.

The general reconnaissance programme reached its peak in June 1944, when two Mark III A.S.V. squadrons, two Mark VI A.S.V. (A.S.D.) squadrons and seven Mark II A.S.V. squadrons were operating. One of these was a French naval squadron of Walrus aircraft (Mark II A.S.V.) based in Corsica, and another a squadron of rocket projectile Beaufighters.

As the U-boat menace declined after the month of May, the anti-submarine forces were reduced. The two original general reconnaissance squadrons (Nos. 500 and 608) folded up temporarily and were transferred from coastal work. This left Coastal Air Force with two Leigh-light Wellington squadrons, one Mark II A.S.V. Wellington squadrons, two rocket Beaufighter squadrons (Mark II A.S.V.) and two S.A.A.F. Ventura (Mark VIII A.S.V.) squadrons for convoy protection and anti-shipping operations.

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(1) Including 2 of the 3 U.S. night fighter squadrons.

/ After

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After the landings in Southern France in mid-August, the strength of the night fighter units was steadily reduced. One squadron was rolled up and another transferred to the Middle East. The remaining squadrons were reduced in aircraft strength. The total number of squadrons in Coastal Air Force is thus seen to be steadily declining; but as new tasks presented themselves, so the role of the Force became less defensive and more offensive in collaboration with the Tactical Air Force in Italy and the Balkan Air Force over the Adriatic, Dalmatia and Albania and in operations against enemy shipping targets along the Italian Riviera on the Alpine Front.

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Corsica and Sardinia as air bases

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The changing situation

The conquest of Elba between 17 and 19 June and the steady advance of the Fifth Army up the west coast of Italy led to a marked improvement in the strategic position. It gave more scope, in particular, to Allied naval forces, who could now be looked on to pursue their legitimate role against enemy sea supplies with greater tactical freedom.

The greatest value of Corsica and Sardinia to this date had been of an air base complex outflanking the Germans to the right of their positions in Italy. They now began to assume their preparatory role in the air/naval/army build-up for the liberation of Southern France. In the early summer of 1944, these two islands were hives of activity. Not only were many airfields carrying squadrons operating over sea and land areas at maximum tempo, and ports functioning in support of coastal naval operations, but engineers were extending air base facilities, erecting new radio and radar stations and improving defences. Negotiations with the French over responsibilities and manpower were proceeding and garrisons were being strengthened.

Airfield state in Corsica and Sardinia in January 1944 (1)

The physical handicaps overcome by the Allies in preparing for Operation 'Dragoon', the organisation as it stood on D Day - 15 August - and the development of events leading to the liberation of Southern France have been described in detail elsewhere. (2) It is only intended at this point to report the progress in airfield capacity achieved in Corsica and Sardinia in the first seven months of the year. In view of the shortage of manpower, poor communications and lack of suitable harbours, great praise is due to them for their achievement.

The state of affairs when 1944 opened was that Corsica air units (operationally controlled by 63rd Fighter Wing), came either under the two fighter sectors - Borgo and Ajaccio (3) - or under the General Reconnaissance No. 328 Wing at Ghisonaccia. Bastia, Calvi, Ajaccio and Ghisonaccia housed a few aircraft and some French Spitfires. Conditions were primitive and malaria was prevalent.

/On

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- (1) M.A.C.A.F./Administration O.R.B. Dec. 43 Appendix Q.
  - (2) R.A.F. Narrative (first draft) on the Campaign in Southern France (A.H.B.).
  - (3) Divided by the main mountain range.

Corsica and Sardinia as Air Bases  
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The physical handicaps overcome by the Allied construction and administrative units in preparing for Operation 'Dragoon', the exact organization as it stood on D Day - 15 August - and the development of the entire series of events leading to the liberation of Southern France have been described in detail elsewhere. (2)  
It is only intended at this point to indicate the measure of the Allied achievement in terms of the progress in airfield capacity achieved in Corsica and Sardinia in the first seven months of the year. In view of the shortage of manpower, poor communications, ~~shortages~~ and lack of suitable harbours, great praise is due to them for a major achievement.

The simple state of affairs when 1944 opened was that Corsica air units (operationally controlled by 63rd Fighter Wing), came either under the two fighter sectors - Borgo and Ajaccio - or under the General Reconnaissance No. 328 Wing at Ghisonaccia. Bastia, Calvi, Ajaccio and Ghisonaccia housed a few aircraft and some French Spitfires. Conditions were primitive and malaria <sup>was</sup> prevalent. No. 328 Wing undertook the administration of all the R.A.F. units on the island.

- (1) M.A.C.A.F./Administration O.R.B. Dec. 43 Appendix Q.
- (2) R.A.F. Narrative (first draft) on the Campaign in Southern France (A.H.B.).
- (3) Divided by the main mountain range.

On Sardinia, there was only one R.A.F. squadron - No. 23, the Mosquito intruders. The rest of the R.A.F. units there were radar, radio, anti-aircraft and balloon units. The garrison commander was General Webster, commanding officer of the 42nd Bombardment Wing. <sup>(1)</sup> The American area of air influence had its headquarters at Cagliari, the R.A.F. at Alghero, but R.A.F. units also functioned at Cagliari and La Maddalena. ~~An ambitious radar plan was to be implemented.~~

Airfield State in Corsica and Sardinia in August 1944.

By the eve of the ~~launching of the~~ air and naval assault on the coast of Provence, the number of airfields in Corsica stood at 13 <sup>(2)</sup> and their capacity was for a total of 1,613 aircraft. This figure was to include many kinds of tactical air units from Tactical and Coastal Air Forces, as well as two squadrons of long range fighters lent by Strategic Air Force. Sardinia, although its communications were in a much better state, had not been extensively developed: the main and obvious reason for this was one governed by aircraft range. The fighters had to be close to the mainland so as to enjoy the maximum combat period and to fly in as soon as landing grounds in France were ready for occupation. The 42nd Marauder Wing had attained its target of three U.S. and one French groups, using the two airfields already named as well as Oristano. Their isolated base rendered it possible to fly in along their own air lane, so minimising risks in a crowded sky.

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- (1) Steadily assembling at Villacidro and Decimomanna towards a target of 4 groups, totalling to some 400 Marauders.
  - (2) Calvi, Calenzana, St. Catherine, Borgo, Bavinco, Serragia, Poretta, Alto, Aghione, Ghisonaccia, Ajaccio, Alesan and Solenzara.

*August*  
Operations (January to March 1944)

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### Air Attacks on Ports in January

At sea the Air Forces only sank a single fishing vessel off Leghorn, a naval ferry barge and a tank barge off Civitavecchia and another barge in the Leghorn area. Their port attacks paid better dividends. On 18 January, Mitchells of the 310th Bombardment Group scored two hits amidships on a vessel off Diane Marina (near Porto Maurizio). This was probably S.S. Gilda <sup>(2)</sup> of 1,026 G.R.T., written off by the Italians as sunk off the adjacent port of Vada from unknown causes. On the same day, 36 U.S. Marauders <sup>(3)</sup> bombed Piombino harbour. Among damage done figured the sinking of two small tugs <sup>(4)</sup> and a small fishing vessel and a naval lighter. <sup>(5)</sup>

These successes during the first three weeks of the month left the enemy strength virtually unchanged. Intensive reconnaissance during the first fortnight revealed 63 merchant vessels of all sizes, 58 barges and ferries and over 100 S- and F-boats, mostly in the Ligurian Sea.

Mosquitoes of No. 23 Squadron, Spitfires of the 2nd, 4th and 5th U.S. Squadrons and Airocabras of the 345th and 347th Squadrons undertook more than 130 offensive sorties, which included attacks on shipping and dock and harbour installations from Marseilles to Civitavecchia. Although these efforts must have retarded shipping turn-over, they were by no means fatal. Much greater weight would have to be applied, but 63rd Fighter Wing <sup>was</sup> using its fighter bombers to the limit.

In all, seven merchant vessels of a total G.R.T. of 1,408 were sunk by aircraft in port. <sup>(6)</sup> In addition thirteen small naval craft were sunk by aircraft while in port. Most of them were lighters, but an R-boat (minesweeper escort) was reported lost to aircraft at Civitavecchia on the 28th. <sup>(7)</sup>

### Greater Weight of Air Attack in Ports in February <sup>(8)</sup>

Throughout the three weeks of good and the one week of bad flying weather in February, Coastal Air Force aircraft, aided occasionally by Tactical and Strategic aircraft, continued to disrupt the enemy's seaborne supply of reinforcements to the Italian front. A large number of vessels were attacked. Although only one naval

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- (1) Reports are conflicting, but C.A.F. claims coincide with Admiralty reports.
  - (2) Ex Page.
  - (3) Of 17th Bomb. Group.
  - (4) Capraie and Olaka, 43 and 23 G.R.T. respectively.
  - (5) FP. Marienburg 20 tons.
  - (6) Total displacement not less than 400 tons.
  - (7) The date may be an error, for no attack on that port on the 28th can be traced.
  - (8) M.A.C.A.F./Operations and Air Staff O.R.B. and M.A.A.A.F./Operations O.R.B.

/ ferry

(1)  
ferry barge can be traced as sunk at sea, sinkings by aircraft in ports amounted to 17 merchant vessels, tugs and similar vessels totalling to 6,699 G.R.T. and 9 naval craft (including one K.T. war transport) totalling to about 1,300 tons displacement were sunk in various ports.

Particular attention was paid to port installations on the North-West coast of Italy, the main effort in this area being directed against San Stefano and other ports between La Spezia and Porto Ercole. Mitchells of the 310th Bombardment Group participated and escorts were provided for Sardinia-based medium bombers of Tactical Air Force. The 63rd Fighter Wing, whose aircraft were mainly based in Corsica, took a very active part in the campaign and carried the offensive between Terracina and Savona. The Mitchells mentioned above made three attacks on Leghorn, eight on San Stefano, two on Port Ercole and one on Marina di Pisa. Spitfires of the 52nd U.S. Fighter Group, in addition to escorting these bombers, claimed to have shot down three F.W.190's and two Me.109's.

Some idea of the magnitude of these operations may be had by comparison of the weekly sortie totals in December 1943 and February 1944. In December, the mean for four weeks was approximately 80 sorties; for February, in spite of a week's bad weather, it was 580.

The month opened well, for on the 4th, when in the course of an attack by 72 Strategic Air Force Fortresses <sup>on Toulon,</sup> ~~sank~~ the French S.S. Strabon (4,572 G.R.T.) <sup>was sunk.</sup> She was kept afloat by salvage pumps, but sank in August and became a wreck. In spite of claims of hits on a destroyer, a minelayer and a merchant vessel, enquiries do not confirm their loss. Dry docks were damaged, sheds destroyed and one basin choked with debris. Mitchells (310th Group) sank, on the 20th, two large tugs <sup>(2)</sup> and eight small vessels <sup>(3)</sup> of a total tonnage of 1,319 G.R.T. at Viareggio. The same unit had already sunk three small vessels at San Stefano on the 14th and three more on the 17th.

Leghorn was attacked three times by the U.S. Mitchell group in the week ending 20 February. Although photographic cover did not reveal the facts, they sank three naval ferry barges and one tank peniche. On the 18th, K.T. 31, one of the <sup>(4)</sup> German's valuable war freighters was sunk by them in Leghorn. An important blow

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- (1) M.F.P. 770.
  - (2) Ursus and Nella, both of 338 G.R.T.
  - (3) Including Nettuno IV (auxiliary of 347 G.R.T.) and Nettuno V (a motor vessel of 344 G.R.T.)
  - (4) Most probably the 'munition carrier' confirmed by photographic reconnaissance as sunk (M.A.A.F. W.I.S. No. 66 - A.H.B. IIJ1/43.

a. Germany's naval escort forces was dealt on the 17th at Porto Ercole, one which like so many others went unnoticed at the time. Again it went to the credit of the 310th Group's Mitchells. Twenty-four bombers, escorted by five Spitfires and eight anti-flak Mitchells dropped 21 tons of bombs on the port, sinking two small warships R.39 and R.200.

#### Air Successes in March

The month of March, with its lengthening hours of daylight, saw a sharp rise in the air effort. A large number of attacks by small formations of fighter bombers and medium bombers enlarged the devastation already caused all along the enemy coast-line and the Strategic Air Force made one highly satisfactory attack on Toulon. At sea, too, air formations found more numerous targets. Twenty-two merchant class vessels of a total tonnage of 37,848 G.R.T. were lost to these air attacks on ports and two merchant vessels of a total tonnage of 4,047 G.R.T. were lost to aircraft at sea. Nine warships of a total displacement of 1,580 tons were sunk by aircraft in port and seven, of a total displacement of 1,868 tons, at sea.

The value of the heavy daylight attacks on ports by U.S. heavy bombers of the Strategic Air Force was again demonstrated on 11 March, when 122 Liberators, escorted by 51 Lightnings, attacked the heavily defended port of Toulon. In addition to claims of 12 enemy aircraft destroyed for the loss of 4 Liberators and a good bomb coverage of docks, repair shop, jetties and the arsenal, a heavy concentration of shipping was caught there. Seven merchant and patrol vessels<sup>(1)</sup> and one war freighter<sup>(2)</sup> (which they could ill afford to lose and had been using as an escort vessel) were destroyed.

The remaining sinkings of merchant shipping in port occurred in the Lagnhorn, Talamone, Piombino and Elba sector as did all the remaining<sup>(3)</sup> <sup>sinkings of</sup> warships sunk in port, with three exceptions.

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- (1) S.S. Casteriano (ex Italian Panama, tanker of 6,664 G.R.T.), S.S. Andre Lebon (French, 13,682 G.R.T.), S.S. Durance (French tanker of 94 G.R.T.), the Altino (ex Italian patrol vessel of 260 G.R.T., believed to bear the tactical number M.6000), S.S. Erable (ex French patrol vessel believed to bear the tactical number M.6024), S.S. Carmen (ex Greek Mairi Defterson of 1,383 G.R.T.) and S.S. Belle Isle (French, of 9,594 G.R.T. already damaged by air attack in February).
  - (2) K.T.42 also known as UJ.6080.
  - (3) Except K.T.42 sunk in Toulon and the two vessels mentioned in the following account of the Beaufighter attack on Port Saint Louis.

/ Sinking

Sinking of S.S. Kilissi and Ships at Port de Bouc (1)

Beaufighters of No. 39 Squadron came into their own again in March on two noteworthy occasions, demonstrating the advantage of their range and rocket armament. The first occasion was on the 12th. S.S. Kilissi, of 3,723 tons, was in use as a transport for ore from Spanish mines loaded at the small port of Sagunto, (North of Valencia). The importance attached by the Germans to this strategic material was indicated by the heavy armament of the ship, which included flak towers. Information of her departure for Marseilles reached the Allied command in time for a force of four Beaufighters (of No. 39 Squadron) with anti-flak escort of four more Beaufighters (of No. 272 Squadron) to be despatched from Reghaia (Algeria). They first sighted a Spanish ship, recognizing its nationality just in time to call off their planned attack. They went on, to find S.S. Kilissi steaming northwards off the north-eastern tip of Cape Tortosa, off the River Ebro estuary. They claimed to have hit her with 14 rocket projectiles and many cannon shells. She was set on fire and turned towards the coast, where she sank in shallow water. The loss of this valuable cargo on the fringes of Spanish territorial waters prompted the Germans to declare it a repetition of the attack on the Altmark, except that 'the murderers were not sailors but airmen'.

On the 16th, a similar strike of four Beaufighters (2) with another four (3) as anti-flak escort and a Warwick (4) as air sea rescue cover, attacked shipping in the St. Louis Canal at Port de <sup>Bouc</sup> ~~Bouc~~ (Southern France). They sank S.S. Maure (5) of 457 tons and damaged S.S. Kabyle (6) of 1,881 tons beyond repair.

Between 13 and 15 March, six naval ferry barges were sunk in the Talamone - Piombino area; and on 16 March, Mitchells of the 310th U.S. Group (7) sank U.J.2209, (8) one of the valuable German anti-submarine vessels, off Leghorn.

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- (1) M.A.C.A.F., No. 328 Group and No. 39 Squadron O.R.B.'s. and appendices.  
 (2) Of No. 39 Squadron.  
 (3) Of No. 272 Squadron.  
 (4) Of No. 284 Squadron.  
 (5) French, ex Polemis.  
 (6) French.  
 (7) Coastal Air Force, based in Sardinia.  
 (8) A large ex steam trawler of 1,148 tons displacement.

Air Successes at Sea (April, May and June 1944) <sup>(1)</sup>

The few air successes at sea in this period were in coastal areas. In April and May, no merchant shipping was sunk at sea. In June, the only noteworthy (but a questionable) success was the sinking of S.S. Erlangen <sup>(2)</sup> on the 15th north of Leghorn. A German broadcast described an attack by aircraft and the ship in flames and heavily damaged.

Allied submarines had more success against large transports and still ventured deep into danger areas. But the German tendency to revert to carriers of small tonnage was becoming increasingly evident.

Turning to air operations against naval vessels in deep waters, nothing was sunk in April and very little in May, when only one freight barge, one patrol vessel and three harbour defense vessels were sunk. A rather more important sinking was that of 13 May of the minesweeper escort vessel R.215 five miles off Rapallo by Spitfires of the 87 Fighter Wing <sup>(3)</sup> based in Corsica.

During May and June, the whole Italian front was in motion and the campaign against communications stirred up German supply movements by naval craft. The attempted German evacuation of Elba about the 18 and 19 June threw up a few small targets, too. In June, nine naval ferry barges, one small minesweeper, two freight barges, two patrol vessels, one assault craft and one tug were lost to Allied aircraft at sea.

Air Successes against Shipping in Port (April, May and June 1944)

Successes in a variety of air attacks in April, May and June on the long line of ports engaged in supplying the Italian front overshadowed those achieved at sea and made heavy inroads into the enemy's strength. Only one of the port attacks in April disposed of any big merchant tonnage. This was that of the 29th by strategic Fortresses and Liberators. A large hopper barge - Andromede II of 1,232 G.R.T. and the previously damaged Italian motor vessel Chisone of 6,168 G.R.T. were both sunk. Under the heading of naval vessels or warships, three naval ferry barges, three lighters and one

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- (1) All known enemy shipping losses are tabulated in the nominal list compiled by A.H.B. The Admiralty Historical Section has its own nominal list.
  - (2) Ex-French Gouverneur General Chambon (3,509 G.R.T.): found sunk at Genoa when the Allied Forces entered that port on 27 April 45. The only air operations which can be linked with this attack were those by Spitfires of Nos. 326 and 328 Sqns. (M.A.C.A.F.) who reported damaging a ship in the Gulf of Spezia, which, (at 1,000 feet altitude) they observed to carry Red Cross markings.
  - (3) Tactical Air Force co-operating with Coastal Air Force.

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of

Small auxiliary were sunk in various ports. The outstanding effort of the month of April was the sinking by a formation of 7 Liberators of No. 205 R.A.F. Group of the Strategic Air Force on the night 30 April /1 May of another valuable war transport - K.T.2 - in Genoa harbour, although cloud prevented the disclosure of this success at the time.

May saw an intensification of heavy strategic attacks on the major ports of Genoa and La Spezia by U.S. day bombers; and the results proved the worth of such operations. Both ports harboured a number of large merchant vessels taken over from the French and Italians. They might be used by night for limited supply operations, as storeships or as blockships. Destruction by aircraft prevented all three developments. In the course of the attacks on Genoa of 12 and 28 May, four large steamships (1) and a medium tonnage naval supply transport were sunk. (2) Among the successes achieved in attacks on La Spezia figured the sinking of <sup>the</sup> minelayer Kehrwieder (3) on the 18th, of the small S.S. Alma (4) on the 19th and of S.S. Vincenzina. (5) A good deal of small freight carrying shipping was destroyed in Porto Ferraio (Elba) in a series of attacks. The largest of these was S.S. Persia of 804 G.R.T. sunk on the 17th. The toll taken during the month of small naval craft by aircraft in various ports amounted to a total of 10 freight barges and lighters, 7 naval ferry barges, 1 minesweeper and 2 small vessels.

In June, their co-operation in the Spring offensive concluded, the heavy bombers of the Strategic Air Force returned to their normal routine operations beyond the frontiers of Italy, devoting only a very small effort to the Italian ports. The enemy's plan to increase his coastal shipping to offset the cuts in the railways was scotched by continuous harassing attacks by smaller aircraft. Thunderbolts of the 87th Tactical Wing in Corsica and Mitchells and Thunderbolts

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- (1) S.S. Argentea (ex-Italian, 3,302 G.R.T.), S.S. Asie (ex-French 3,561 G.R.T.) S.S. Verdi (ex-Italian, 2,423 G.R.T.) and S.S. Filippe Grimani (ex-Italian) - (3,451 G.R.T.).
  - 2. S.S. Vallalunga (ex Italian - 916 G.R.T.). It had already been scuttled, salvaged and repaired.
  - (3) 359 tons ex-Italian Crotone
  - (4) 598 G.R.T.
  - (5) Ex-Olena - 1,579 G.R.T., later salvaged and repaired.

(also of the 12th Tactical Air Command), swept the sea areas and bombed west coast ports from time to time. If the harvest was not sensational, it did much to offset the enemy's programme of building, reinforcement and conversion. Sinkings ran on parallel lines to previous months. Seven tugs, one naval ferry barge, three lighters and three small auxiliaries were sunk. An important, preventive move was the sinking of a big merchant vessel, the ex-French S.S. El Djazair,<sup>(1)</sup> during an attack by 287 heavy bombers of the Fifteenth Air Force on Sete harbour, oil installations and railway centre. A photograph showed her badly damaged, lying over on her side. Another report gave her as sunk and burnt out. The only other success worth mention was the sinking of the ex-Italian S.S. Campania (5,247 G.R.T.) on 22 June by 18 Tactical Air Force Mitchells.<sup>(2)</sup> Despatched to attack the blockships in the harbour, they claimed that patterns of bombs fell across the target, although cloud concealed detailed results. Anti-aircraft opposition was intense; two aircraft were shot down, five others holed. The value of the destruction of S.S. Campania is hard to assess, as she was not in service and the outcome was lost in the general confusion which awaited the Allies when they entered Leghorn on 19 July.

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(1) 5,790 G.R.T.

(2) Of 310th U.S. Bombardment Group.

Limited Air Successes against Shipping in July

In view of the changed activities on both sides during July and the preparations inspiring them, it was not surprising that no enemy merchant shipping was sunk by aircraft either at sea or in port and only one naval ferry barge at sea. Some inroads were, however, made into the enemy's naval strength in attacks on ports. The month opened with the destruction on the 1st of four naval ferry barges and an auxiliary vessel by Tactical Air Force Marauders <sup>(1)</sup> attacking an ammunition factory at La Spezia.

There were two attacks on Toulon which affected shipping. The first was on 5 July, when 233 Strategic U.S. Liberators bombed the submarine pens and harbour for the loss of five aircraft. The only traceable shipping destroyed was the submarine U.586, the anti-submarine vessel U.J.6070 <sup>(2)</sup> and M.6030, a small mine-sweeping tug. The attack of 11 July by 87 U.S. Liberators achieved damage to the harbour, but three tugs were all the shipping sunk (except U.967).

The modest attack of 24 July on Genoa by 37 Strategic Liberators was more productive, in that <sup>aircraft</sup> it sunk K.T.35, one of the diminishing fleet of war freighters, as well as a barge and two anti-submarine vedettes. <sup>(3)</sup> It is highly probable that the same attacking aircraft were responsible for the loss of the cruiser Cornelio Silla. <sup>(4)</sup> She had been captured by the Germans in September 1943 and the Italian Admiralty reports that she was fitting out when hit by aircraft bomb some time in July. As this was the only attack on Genoa in July, it is reasonable to credit the Strategic Liberators with her destruction.

Success of August Attacks on Ligurian Ports

The importance of Genoa, Savona and Porto Ligure to German shipping became even more manifest after the series of heavy bomber attacks in August. These were not only attacks on a vital naval and supply centre but diversions in aid of the plan to land in Provence. Both plans succeeded, for one provided fuel to the ~~Axis~~ school of thought that erroneously believed in an impending landing on the Ligurian coast and the other led to a rich harvest of sunken merchant, harbour and naval vessels.

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- (1) Of 320th Bomb Group/42nd Bomb Wing.
  - (2) Ex-Belgian yacht Cetonia, 147 tons.
  - (3) Believed to be VAS.203 and VAS.136.
  - (4) 3,362 tons displacement.

(1)

The attack on 2 August by 129 American Liberators of the Fifteenth Air Force was a notable success. All the 1,251 five hundred pound bombs were dropped around 1258 hours on the harbour. The recorded enemy losses were three steamships, (2) a war freighter, (3) two tugs, (4) six small craft, eleven tank barges, (5) two naval ferry barges, a patrol boat (6) and an anti-submarine vedette. (7) The effects of this attack, though not fatal, must have been felt all the way to the front line depots.

On the night 13/14 August, No. 205 R.A.F. Group organized the next attack on Genoa port, followed up the next day by U.S. Liberators, who attacked coastal batteries. The night attack was carried out by 48 Wellingtons and 2 Liberators. Crews reported good bomb coverage and fires. Shipping may have been dispersed since the sharp lesson of the 2nd: only one vessel is recorded as sunk, but it was a very important success in the eyes of the Mediterranean Fleet - the mine-layer Dietrich von Bern. (8) The Liberators which attacked guns on the 14th were frequently inaccurate and the sinking of two small craft may be a by-product. (9)

Of the two attacks on Savona, only that of the 8 August was worthwhile. (10) Fifty-seven Tactical Air Command Thunderbolts ranged the Ligurian Sea area for shipping and communications targets. At Savona they attacked a merchant vessel. (11) This proved later to have been a very big motor tanker - the Splendor of 12,175 G.R.T. The damage was so severe that she was grounded as a blockship. The other losses inflicted along the Ligurian coast in the period were (12) inconsiderable.

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- (1) Escorted by 40 Lightnings. Only 1 Liberator was missing.
  - (2) S.S. Cigno (440 G.R.T.), S.S. Ferrara (ex-French Tourquennois 2,993 G.R.T.) and S.S. Garibaldi (5,278 G.R.T.)
  - (3) K.T. 20 (795 G.R.T.)
  - (4) Cornigliano (59 G.R.T.) and Carlo (26 G.R.T.)
  - (5) VP. 7008.
  - (6) RA. 257 (ex Italian VAS. 302)
  - (7) The sinking of S.S. Dominante (907 G.R.T.) cannot be dated, but might well have been 2 August.
  - (8) Ex-Italian Mazara, former liner of 984 G.R.T.
  - (9) 8 and 12 August.
  - (10) Of 57th Fighter Bomber Group.
  - (11) Ex R.L. Hague, scuttled in Sept. 43 and salvaged.
  - (12) 1 tug on 12 August at Savona, a small motor vessel on 14 August at Pietro Ligure and 1 fishing vessel on 18 August at San Stefano.

/ Successes

Successes along the French Riviera in August

Some successes worth mention emerged from the various coastal attacks before, during and after the main landings in mid-August. Among them figured the following sinkings. On 7 August, the French S.S. Conde of 7,202 G.R.T. was sunk in Nice by U.S. Thunderbolts. On 6 August, in the course of an attack by 146 U.S. Liberators, the anti-submarine escort UJ, 6085 and the two ex-French avisos (a type of gunboat) La Curieuse and L'Impetueuse then sailing under the tactical number of SG, 16 and SG, 17 <sup>(1)</sup> were sunk in Toulon and four U-boats <sup>(2)</sup> put out of action. This fortunate stroke prevented the escape of all these naval vessels to reinforce the defences of the Italian coastal traffic. S.S. Cans, a French steamer of 2,384 G.R.T., was sunk on 13 August at Sete, but in the whole of the August coastal proceedings only two other small vessels were sunk. Nevertheless, if the combined results of this short period against the Provence and Ligurian shipping are assessed, it must be conceded that the air attacks, in particular those by the heavy U.S. day bombers, had made appreciable inroads into the supply, offensive and defensive naval strength of the Germans.

Wholesale Scuttling of French Merchant Shipping

Although the Germans had undertaken not to requisition French merchant shipping for warlike purposes it would have been unwise to consider these French vessels as anything but potential enemy forces. A few had been sunk, as has been noted, in Allied air attacks, but in the harbours of Southern France a massive fleet lay moored, in Marseilles, Port Vendres, Toulon, St. Louis on the Rhone, La Ciotat, Villefranche, Port de <sup>Bouc</sup> ~~Bouc~~, Caronte and Etang de Berre. The Germans, bent on denying the use of all this shipping to the Allies, and to obstruct <sup>the</sup> ports, decided to scuttle it. Before they left, they had scuttled close on one hundred ships totalling to about 300,000 gross registered tons.

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- (1) Both were 630 tons displacement. Under the Italians, they sailed as FR, 55 and FR, 54 respectively.
  - (2) Already referred to in a previous chapter.

*and Tactical*  
Summary of Coastal Air Force Anti-Shipping Effort

(1)

Before proceeding to the next phase of operations, a brief recapitulation of the various local air units and their general role in the anti-shipping campaign will recall the wide geographical distribution and continuous effort of Coastal Air Force in the first half of 1944. To this point, emphasis has been placed on local successes and results achieved. Against these, the great expense of effort must be balanced.

(2)

From its Corsican headquarters, 63rd Fighter Wing maintained a campaign against shipping in the Tyrrhenian and Ligurian Seas, the Western Mediterranean and along the coasts of Western Italy and Southern France. Its operations were similar in scope and purpose to those of No. 242 Wing of Coastal Air Force in the Adriatic. No. 242 Group's units were all R.A.F., but U.S.A.A.F., R.A.F., S.A.A.F., R.A.A.F. and F.A.F. squadrons were all included in 63rd Fighter Wing. Its aircraft attacked military installations, airfields and supply dumps as well as ship targets.

The 310th Medium Bombardment Group Mitchells (lent by Tactical Air Command) played a major role in the first quarter of 1944 in the offensive against seaborne supplies. Some of the Mitchells carried 75 mm cannon. They met with appreciable success at sea, but scored more heavily against the ports. While Porto San Stefano was the railhead for the Italian front, they attacked it 22 times, dropping 1,358 five hundred pound bombs on it. They bombed Leghorn 10 times and Talamone three times with cannon and three times with bombs. They attacked Cecina, Piombino and Portoferraio three times each and Giglio four times. Other targets included Grosseto, Sestri Levante, Follonica, Montenera, Pisa, Porto Ercole, Viareggio and Castiglione. In this whole effort from 13 January to 21 March, the Corsica-based group dropped 1,000 tons of bombs.

- (1) M.A.C.A.F. O.R.B. Appendix F/INT. 34 pp. 15 & 16.
- (2) It is hoped that this sketch of the patterns of operations by the various major units will give a more lasting impression of the Allied efforts than the practice of recording the aircraft and squadron for the sinking of every vessel, however small and unimportant.
- (3) Type G.
- (4) Dropping 261 tons of bombs.
- (5) It also shot 1,357 rounds of 75 mm shells and 118,235 fifty-calibre bullets.

/ The

The 52nd Fighter Group (Tactical Air Command) figured prominently in the anti-shipping campaign of early 1944 up to 20 April, when it left the Command. Putting forth 3,213 offensive sorties in all it employed its Spitfire fighters as dive bombers. They met with some success, but their light armament could hardly be expected to produce decisive results or inflict major damage. They, too, participated in the land battle (for which they were better adapted) and provided escort to Mitchells and medium bombers of other air forces on nearly a hundred missions.

The 350th Fighter Group (of the 63rd Fighter Wing) in the Borgo Sector of Corsica concentrated its Airocobras, with their 37 mm cannon and their 1,000 pound bombs, mainly on shipping and docks in April and bridges and roads and other land targets in March and April. The French Spitfire squadrons<sup>(1)</sup> of 63rd Fighter Wing were usually relied upon for a heavy commitment to harbour defence and convoy escort, but also occasionally operated against shipping and ground targets.

R.A.F. Spitfires of No. 253 Squadron (of No. 242 Group) moved into Corsica in March and carried out fighter bomber escort and defence missions. No. 6 Squadron sent a detachment of its rocket projectile equipped Hurricanes to Corsica. Its first operations on 13 May promised well. On 1 June, the whole squadron began operating at night against shipping targets and reported destroying ten craft in the first week of day and night effort.

For long range operations such as those against the ore ship S.S. Kilissi,<sup>(2)</sup> 63rd Fighter Wing used the Wellingtons, Venturas and Beaufighters of No. 328 Wing at Alghero (Sardinia). These brought the considerable movement of medium-sized shipping along the Spanish coast to French ports<sup>(3)</sup> to an end.

In addition to non-stop air attacks on their railways and roads, the Germans thus now had to face attack at sea by cannon-bearing Mitchells, rocket Beaufighters and Hurricanes, Airocobras with bombs and cannon, Wellingtons and Venturas with bombs, and by dive-bombing Spitfires. There were, in the background, the intermittent losses, considerable in themselves, to Allied submarines and naval vessels, the usual misadventures at sea and the deliberate scuttling of valuable ships which the Allies had rendered useless by prohibiting their

(1) Nos. 326, 327 and 328.

(2) Reported above.

(3) For an outline of the operational plans of 63rd Fighter Wing refer to M.A.C.A.F. File 45/Air Encl. 89A. (A.F.H.Q./291/2 at Cabinet Historical Archives).

service at sea. The enemy's tempo of supply was slowed up. He was forced into the installation of heavier armament, stronger escort forces and port defences. But he still carried on, adjusting his system to the greatest pressures, repairing damage round the clock, economising his limited means, but still feeding his armies and, to a more precarious degree, the civilian population. The Allies had still not succeeded in imposing anything approaching a complete blockade.

Coastal Air Force Effort in Operation 'Diadem', the Spring Offensive  
(May - June 1944)

The contribution of Coastal Air Force towards Operation 'Strangle', (the anti-communications campaign in preparation for the Spring offensive) was important, in that its Corsica - and Sardinia - based units demonstrated in concentrated form the role that a coastal air force might play in a land battle. The scope of this contribution was magnified in the contribution of this air force to Operation 'Diadem', the Spring offensive.<sup>(1)</sup> The maritime aspect of this effort has already been related and its results detailed. The statistics of the effort involved in the whole contribution will serve for assessment of the cost involved.

In the first week of the offensive, i.e. from 12 to 18 May inclusive, the supporting effort of Coastal Air Force reached a total of 1,982 sorties, including 1,551 by fighters. Photographic reconnaissance accounted for 150 sorties. In the second week, sorties amounted to 1,447, with a similar total<sup>(156)</sup> on photographic reconnaissance. In the third week, i.e. 26 May to 1 June, the total sorties were 1,617, with 186 more on photographic reconnaissance. The grand totals for Operation 'Diadem' achieved by Coastal Air Force were 9,221, plus 1,052 on photographic reconnaissance. In the course of air attacks on ports, 4,188 tons of bombs were dropped.

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(1) A full account of air operations in Operation 'Diadem' will be found in the R.A.F. narrative on the Italian Campaign, Vols. I and II.

(1)

Coastal Air Force's Role in the Liberation of Southern France

Before D Day

M.A.C.A.F.'s part in 'Operation 'Dragoon' began on the afternoon of D - 5 Day (10 Aug. 44), when the first assault convoys, naval forces and support troops moved out from Naples, Taranto and Oran towards the Corsican assembly area. Throughout that night, Beaufighters and Wellingtons of No. 242 Group provided cover against air or submarine attack for the units moving South-west from Taranto. Convoys moving from Naples were covered by day by Thunderbolts and Airocobras of the 62nd Fighter Wing and by night by Beaufighters. Anti-submarine cover was unnecessary. Convoys leaving Oran eastwards received night fighter cover by Mosquitoes of No. 210 Group. Bad weather held up air reconnaissance on both sides.

At daylight on 11 August, fighter escort for convoys was again provided by Thunderbolts and Airocobras; Wellingtons, Warwicks, Marauders and Cants combed the Taranto-Sicily waters for submarines. A Ju.88 reconnoitring Oran was chased into Spanish territory on the 11th by two Airocobras. Marauders from Sardinia swept the Gulf of Genoa and ports as far West as Nice. All convoys converging on Corsica received continuous air cover. This cover and the patrol of base ports doubled the 24 hours air effort. There were only two night Beaufighters left over to inspect the enemy night reconnaissance base at Bergamo on the night 11/12 August. (2)

No. 36 Squadron's Wellingtons and No. 256 Squadron's Mosquitoes completed their move up to better tactical positions at Alghero (Sardinia).

Late on 12 August, it was realised that all the Toulon U-boats were still in harbour. This held down several anti-submarine Wellingtons until the end of that day. A small force of night Wellingtons and Beaufighters had maintained an offensive against shipping all the previous night. Scrambles in the Naples and Ajaccio <sup>areas</sup> were ordered to discourage enemy reconnaissance aircraft who occasionally slipped through.

By the end of the night 12/13 August, some 17 assault convoys and gun-support groups were concentrated in and near Corsica and Sardinia. A more economical disposition of protective fighter cover now came into force. Convoy patrols fell and harbour defence rose. During the night and through the 13th (D - 2 Day),

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- (1) M.A.C.A.F. O.R.B.'s and Operations Appendix F/INT.33; R.A.F. narrative on the Campaign in Southern France (A.H.B.).  
 (2) No long range aircraft were reported there.

/-aircraft

aircraft watched for enemy shipping movements. All efforts failed to prevent *an* the enemy reconnaissance aircraft's visits to Ajaccio. Ju.188 aircraft were too fast for Beaufighters.

As the concentration of assault surface forces in the Corsican and West Italian areas neared completion on the night 13/14 August, defensive harbour air patrols doubled for the second time in 48 hours to 81 sorties. As the first assault convoys began to move away during the 14th, fighter escort sorties rose to four times those of the preceding day, to a total of 121 for M.A.C.A.F.'s own squadrons: in addition, fighters of the 87th Fighter Wing (temporarily under operational control of Coastal Air Force) provided 82 sorties. To make this effort possible, the 346th U.S. Squadron of Airocobras and Thunderbolts had moved from Western Italy to Alghero the same day. Other operations followed the pattern of the previous few days. Again, enemy reconnaissance aircraft eluded the screen of Mosquitoes and Beaufighters, and photographed Ajaccio. On D-1 Day, by 1800 hours, a total of 325 sorties <sup>(1)</sup> had been flown, bringing the total sorties <sup>(2)</sup> flown since the afternoon of 10 August to 674.

D. Day (1800 hours 14 August to 1800 hours 15 August)

Stratus patches drifted in towards the coast of Southern France and, though mainly thin, base fell occasionally to 200 feet. On the night before D Day, local weather deterioration occurred in Sardinia and Corsica. Valley fog over Alghero caused the loss of two Wellingtons and a Ventura during the night.

The surface forces moved in to the assault area. Day fighter protection by Coastal Air Force ended at a line 40 miles from the beachhead. Consequently, her total contribution fell to 223 sorties, but this figure involved an elaborate pattern of support. Eight Wellingtons co-operated with American PT boats in a special window-dropping operation designed to mislead the enemy as to the point of assault. Wellingtons and Venturas patrolled during the night 13/14 August in co-operation with motor torpedo boats to interdict ports and coastal routes from as far as East of Genoa. Enemy reaction in the assault area by surface craft was very slight and ineffective.

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- (1) Including the 82 sorties of the 87th Fighter Wing.  
 (2) To 1800 hours 11 Aug. 76  
       To 1800 hours 12 Aug. 148  
       To 1800 hours 13 Aug. 125  
       To 1800 hours 14 Aug. 325 ) Total 674

/ Mosquitoes

Mosquitoes and Beaufighters were fully stretched in night fighter cover of the convoys all along the route from Corsica to the beachhead and in fighter cover for the airborne task force from Italy, in intruding over enemy airfields and patrolling Corsican harbours. When five Wellingtons were completing their night sweeps for submarines, new forces of Thunderbolts, Airocobras, Spitfires and day Beaufighters were assuming their task of maintaining an air umbrella to within 40 miles of the beaches. There the commitment was taken over by the escort aircraft carriers. All landings proved successful, largely owing to thorough air and naval preparations. All the enemy's radar location stations had been bombed, but one powerful one bearing 285° from Calvi still functioned. Marauders guarded the sea flanks but no further hostile activity was observed that day. By 1800 hours, the first returning convoy had reached Ajaccio and Coastal Air Force's aircraft had flown 223 sorties.

D plus 1 Day onwards

In spite of the Allied watch, an enemy aircraft penetrated their air defences and sank an L.S.T. after dusk on D. Day. No attempt was made to follow up this attack but some 12 Beaufighters and 3 Mosquitoes patrolled the area round Toulouse from which the Do.217 carrying radio controlled bombs had come. During daylight on the 16th, 100 fighter protection sorties were flown along the outside convoy routes and, in the absence of firm intelligence on the whereabouts of all the U-boats, Wellingtons swept the flanks of the convoy lanes while Marauders watched for day surface movements without result. By 1800 hours, a total of 124 sorties of all types had been flown.

This total rose to 155 in the next 24 hours. Visits were again paid to Toulouse/Franczal airfield, but in vain, for the Dornier unit was withdrawing northwards. The same units watched for enemy surface units, for in the afternoon of 17 August small units were still in movement. Our surface forces engaged two enemy corvettes off Cape Corvisetto Light, destroying both. Movement of vessels of war and submarines inside Toulon harbour caused some anxiety and a few Wellingtons and a Ventura watched developments. The whole coastline was still held under aircraft observation. By tea-time on 16 August, the first Coastal Air Force radar station at St. Tropaz was operating. What threat from enemy bombers survived was reduced by a successful attack on the German base at Valence and Avon in the Rhone Valley.

The need for day cover fell off rapidly. No. 346 Squadron returned to its West Italian base. Operations steadily lost their sensational character and routine was re-established; Coastal Air Force continued to cover convoys into the liberated areas, maintain an air-sea rescue watch, defend Allied ports, harbours and airfields and keep a look-out for enemy sea forces.

Reduction of Coastal Air Force Strength (July - August 1944)

During July, it was correctly adjudged that the Germans could not now recover their lost initiative in the Western Basin and it was decided to make sweeping reductions in M.A.C.A.F.'s operational squadrons, rolling up a few and transferring most of them to sectors needing additional weight or scope. The total number of squadrons, which was at its peak of 56 at the end of February, fell in consequence from its June point of 46 to 41 at the end of July and 33 by the end of August.

/ The

The following was the pattern of redistribution. Balkan Air Force received three squadrons of Spitfires, (1) one squadron of day Beaufighters (2) and three squadrons of Italian Macchis. (3) Desert Air Force received one squadron of Spitfires, (4) and radar stations. Middle East received a squadron of night Beaufighters (5) and Tactical Air Force a French squadron of Airocebras (6) and a radar station. (7) Four squadrons of the R.A.F. Regiment were placed at the disposal of M.A.A.F. (8) Two anti-submarine/anti-shipping squadrons were temporarily rolled up and No. 325 Wing at Pemigliano, No. 3 General Reconnaissance Operations Unit at Borizzo (Sicily) and No. 4 Forward Fighter Control Unit at Palermo were closed. Desert Air Force also acquired from the Bizerta Sector No. 287 Wing, which took over the newly-formed Ancena Sector on the Adriatic.

In August, M.A.C.A.F.'s air defences were reorganized in harmony with the reduced air threat to North Africa, Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily and West Italy following the liberation of Southern France. On the North African coast, radar cover was reduced and fighter defence left at Algiers only. No. 337 Wing was pulled out from Oran and transferred to Balkan Air Force, to appear later in Greece. No. 332 Wing from the Taher sector was reduced to number only basis and No. 340 Wing from Bone moved to the South of France. Sardinia and Corsica were reorganised and plans formulated for the establishment of 63rd U.S. Fighter Wing (from Corsica) and a second Fighter Sector in Southern France. The fighter defence of the North African coast was handed over to the French Coastal Air Force. (9)

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- (1) Nos. 32, 249 and 253.
  - (2) No. 39.
  - (3) H.Q. 4th Stormo (Nos. 9, 10 and 12 Italian Squadrons, Macchis 202 and 205).
  - (4) No. 87.
  - (5) No. 108.
  - (6) No. I/4.
  - (7) No. 2857, 2861, 2864 and 2867.
  - (8) Nos. 500 (Venturas) and 608 (Hudsons).
  - (9) Letter to General Bouscat at Appendix A.3 of M.A.C.A.F./Air Staff O.R.B., August 1944.

Operations (September - December 1944)

With the last U-boat sunk, the German anti-shipping aircraft units withdrawn, and the whole of the Central Mediterranean seaboard (except the strip in N.W. Italy) in Allied hands, the great days of our offensive in this area were ended. Coastal Air Force stepped up Army support and confined its maritime effort to the ceaseless reconnaissance and the attacks on small shipping which had now become routine. Added to the effort of the U.S. day bombers against ports, their attacks made increasing inroads upon the German supply system, but nothing of moment occurred which had not already been described in detail before in these pages.

If research on any operations in the last four months of 1944 ever becomes necessary, the answers will be found in all the standard sources named on so many occasions in this history.

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CHAPTER 3

AIR OPERATIONS IN THE ADRIATIC  
(JUNE 1944 TO MAY 1945)

Introduction

The military situation in the Adriatic (June to August)

The military situation on the Italian coast of the Adriatic was moulded by the progress of the Allied armies and air forces in the Spring offensive. After the fall of Rome, the advance continued until the Germans dug in on the Trasimene line. It took some time to get the front into motion towards the Gothic line. In turn, the ports of Ancona, Senigaglia and Fano fell to the Eighth Army. A fighter group from N.W. Africa took over the Ancona Air Sector. (1) No heavy air attacks on East Italian ports were requested, for the Royal Navy needed them for their own purposes and they fell into disuse automatically when closely threatened by air.

Air forces available for Adriatic maritime operations became progressively less as a large section of Tactical Air Force prepared to move into Southern France. Desert Air Force took over cover of both Fifth and Eighth Armies. The rise in the impetus of the railway interdiction campaign and the offensive against oil installations and the German Air Force tied up day and night bombers of the Fifteenth Air Force, leaving practically no margin for Adriatic port attacks.

Meanwhile in Southern Italy, the old order was changing. Balkan Air Force was established on 1 June and commenced operations on 1 July. When June 1944 opened, the Germans held the entire Balkan coastline from Istria to the southerly tip of Greece. Their offensive, from which Tito narrowly escaped, set the clock back. It was only with the aid of an all-out offensive and supply-dropping by Balkan Air Force that the advance was blunted. In the Adriatic itself, the Germans, working on the narrowest of margins, gained a welcome respite; and troops, supplies and equipment were rushed through with greater immunity than for some time past. Their minelaying operations were accelerated.

No. 242 Group loses squadrons to Balkan Air Force

In June, four squadrons were transferred from No. 242 Group to Balkan Air Force. This number comprised three Spitfire fighter reconnaissance and one rocket-armed Hurricane anti-shiping squadron. While the Hurricanes did

(1) No. 287 Wing.

(2) Nos. 73, 249 and 253 Squadrons.

(3) No. 6.

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/ return

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return in July to shipping strikes, the transfer showed the shift of emphasis from diffuse and far from fatal attacks on enemy sea supply to land support for the Partisan forces and anti-road and railway strikes.

With so many changes in progress and little hope of relief, it is not surprising that from June to August the air record of anti-shipping operations was not very encouraging. Yet, if viewed against the general background, it had value as an attrition of the hard-pressed enemy supply system, and rendered his escort problem still more desperate.

Operations (June to August 1944)

Inconspicuous Successes in June against Shipping

Most of the few small craft sunk in June fell to Spitfires, Hurricanes and Beaufighters of No. 242 Group. Not a single ship of any size was destroyed. The total sinkings at sea amounted to two tugs, one infantry landing craft, one Siebel ferry, three small auxiliary sailing vessels and one patrol boat, divided about evenly among the areas of the Northern and Southern sea areas.

R.A.F. attacks on harbours at Cherso Island, Split, Fiume, Koraula and Ancona achieved small results in the destruction of two naval ferry barges, five small craft, and one small transport. A by-product of the heavy U.S. bomber attack of 10 June on Trieste oil refineries and railway yards was that two small craft and the small hospital ship S.S. Immsbruck (1) were sunk.

Improved Results in July against Shipping (2)

In July, more attention was paid to enemy shipping movements in the Northern Adriatic, where activity was heightening. The islands of Rab, Cherso and Krk and the Podgorski Channel were increasingly patrolled by No. 242 Group and Balkan Air Force, in particular by the rocket-equipped Hurricanes of No. 6 Squadron and sometimes by Marauders of No. 3 S.A.A.F. Wing. (3)

Wellingtons and Spitfires of No. 242 Group extended their armed shipping reconnaissance into the northern channels, hitting shipping and harbour

/installations

(1) Ex-Italian Limbara of 402 G.R.T. Refloated 1948 and went back into trading service as Limbara II.

(2) Details of anti-shipping operations from No. 242 Group and Balkan Air Force (A.H.B.II J.1/130). Statistics of sinkings from the nominal lists of enemy shipping losses (A.H.B.)

(3) Desert Air Force.

installations as far north as the Arsa Channel, Bakar Inlet, Lussimpiccolo and Capodistria.

The most striking success at sea was in this northern area. On 7 July, six rocket Hurricanes of No. 6 Squadron, escorted by four Spitfires (1) operating from Pescara, sighted, in the late evening, a large cargo vessel in the position 45°04'N, 14°14'E (in the Quarnero Channel in the Gulf of Fiume). Sixteen direct hits were reported on the vessel - S.S. Italia (ex-Italian) of 5,203 tons - which was destroyed. (2)

Two other cargo vessels were sunk in this period by aircraft, both in the attack on Trieste oil storage depot on 6 July by 114 American Fortresses. Both S.S. Duilio (23,636 G.R.T.) and S.S. Sabaudia (3) 28,000 G.R.T.) were so severely damaged as to be written off as total losses.

The losses inflicted at sea by the units mentioned above totalled to only one tank lighter, three small craft and an infantry landing craft. Attacks on harbours paid poor dividends, too. It is clear now that the reports of damage under-estimated both the armament of many of the enemy's small craft and the abilities of his repair units. The total certifiable enemy losses amounted to two small tugs, two Siebel ferries, two small steam vessels, one lighter, three harbour defence vessels and nine sailing and auxiliary sailing vessels.

Small scale attacks on small Italian harbours began to feature again in reports. Corsini, Rimini, Ravenna and Cittanova were all attacked without notable effect on the situation. The results amounted only to the sinking of two Siebel ferries, two small tugs, one lighter, one boom defence vessel and two small coasters. Attention was again paid to the Northern Adriatic, now within easy reach of airfields progressively occupied behind the Eighth Army advance. Cherso, Rab and Krk Islands were given little rest and Senj, the mainland port opposite Krk was twice attacked. (4) But this concentration on a small area was no substitute for a mass attack on the system as a whole and the net results amounted to only one small steamship, S.S. Slavija (5) one small motor vessel, - the Maria Gabriella II, (6) (both sunk by No. 6 Squadron) and six small coasters.

/No. 6

(1) Of No. 32 Squadron.

(2) Later efforts to refloat her failed. (Lloyds).

(3) Ex-Swedish Stookholm.

(4) The coastal area from Kraljevica to Senj opposite Krk and the Planinski Channel was a Balkan Air Force target area in Operation 'Ratweek' in support of the Partisans (B.A.F.O.R.B. appendix C.20, August 1944).

(5) 234 G.R.T.

(6) 358 G.R.T.

No. 6 Squadron's Hurricanes made a rocket attack on 27 July on what was believed to be S.S. Tenaci Genera (of about 100 G.R.T.) participating in the transfer of bauxite from Parenzo to the aluminium works in Trieste and Porto <sup>Marghera</sup> ~~Marghera~~. She was damaged, set <sup>on</sup> fire, towed out and laid up in Monfalcone until mid-December.

Operations in August, the last Month of the Stalemate

Until the Russian pressure on the southern sector of the Eastern Front shook the German hold on the Balkans, the Allies could no more than to arm and support the Partisans and render shipping movements in the Adriatic as precarious as possible. All through August the stalemate held. With what aircraft could be spared, No. 242 Group and the Balkan Air Force, with occasional help from Desert Air Force, worked over the northern Adriatic and Dalmatian waters. It was recorded as a busy and profitable month of anti-shipping operations and certainly the offensive effort rose. But the actual losses inflicted, although the figure included more transport craft, were unspectacular.

The enemy's small harbours were uneconomical targets for heavy bombing, but were kept under constant supervision by Balkan Air Force. Two of them, Arsa, the coal port and Parenzo the bauxite ports (both in Istria) received special attention. The attack of 27 July on Parenzo was followed up by a visit on 13 August by two Beaufighter missions (total four aircraft) of No. 39 Squadron escorted by four Mustangs of No. 213 Squadron from Biferno. (1) In the first attack on the 2,322 ton S.S. Cagliari, eight hits were registered and another six probables under water. One aircraft hit the mast and crashed into the sea, another had the hydraulic system shot away, but crash-landed safely at base. The escort machine-gunned and divebombed the ship's 20 mm guns. A follow-up by the second mission and escort scored eight hits amidships above water. The escort silenced a 20 mm. gun position south of the Bay and scored a possible hit on the stern by dive-bombing. One Beaufighter was hit in the port engine and ditched. S.S. <sup>Cagliari</sup> ~~Cagliari~~ sank, thus obstructing the best deep water berth in the harbour. But the bauxite traffic continued to flow until mid-September.

Some advantage was taken of the increasing activity in Northern waters. At sea, by day, one Siebel ferry, one tug, one lighter, and three coasters were sunk. Occasionally, one or two Wellingtons of No. 205 Group searched for shipping; and on the night of 17/18 August, one of these aircraft sank the Peter, a tanker of

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(1) Balkan Air Force, No. 39 and No. 213 Squadrons O.R.Bs.

100 tons off Spavira in the Trieste area. Attacks on small harbours at Pago, Rab and Bellaria (the fishing boat refuge harbour near Rimini) resulted in the sinking of a small tank barge, a small motor vessel and three coasters.

The Extent of the Adriatic Sea (1)

When considering maritime operations in the Adriatic Sea, it is most important to bear in mind its topography. It is no lake. It is a great expanse of water branching off north-westward from the main body of the Mediterranean Sea. From its southern limit between Cape Santa Maria di Leuca (2) and the island of Corfu, to its northern termination at the Venetian coast and Gulf of Trieste, it is about 460 miles in length. From Brindisi in Italy and Durazzo in Albania, the sea north-westward is bounded by two nearly parallel shores, the general breadth being about 90 miles, and the greatest, between Fano and Novi, 110 miles. The narrowest part is at the entrance between Cape Otranto and Cape Linguetta, rather less than 40 miles apart. The speed and range of many of the aircraft operating was very much less in 1944 than at the present day, it should be recalled.

The configuration of the eastern coastline, the presence of a great number of islands, havens and navigable channels all worked in favour of an ingenious enemy determined to keep open his sea communications at all costs and steadily bringing to a point of near-perfection the tactics of a war of small ships.

Balkan Air Force's vital Reconnaissance Effort (3)

The newly-formed Balkan Air Force got quickly into its stride. Correctly viewing the Adriatic Sea and Balkans as one theatre, it was soon working on the principle of sound intelligence as the basis of all operational planning, whether by its own units, or the associated Land Forces Adriatic and naval units under command of Flag Officer Taranto and Adriatic. It quickly proved by its extensive and constant air reconnaissance from 1 July onwards, on lines already established by Air Defence Eastern Mediterranean and the Coastal Air Force that the air forces alone were in a position to analyse and report fully on the enemy's sea communications, transport and naval shipping movements and the status of his ports, harbours, dockyards, fuel depots, coastal defences and signal stations.

/First

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- (1) Mediterranean Pilot Vol.III p.5 (Admiralty publication).
  - (2) 39°48'N, 18°22'E.
  - (3) B.A.F. Weekly Intelligence Summaries in O.R.Bs June-Aug.44.

First, the German retreat from the East Italian ports after the capture of Ancona was marked, then the growing importance of Venice and the Monfalcone - Trieste - Pola - Fiume complex, where large cargo ships still plied in relative immunity, where large numbers of new minor ships of war were constructed and repaired, and expeditions to the islands and mopping-up operations on the Balkan mainland mounted, troops, arms and equipment loaded ~~and equipment loaded~~ and important cargoes discharged.

As air and naval attacks ~~make~~ sea traffic more hazardous and attacks on harbours created blockages and delays, the resulting concentration of escort vessels was reported on and bomb and shell damage assessed. Convoy movements were reported. The decline of traffic in South Dalmatian waters showed that Allied activities had successfully interdicted that area and justified the disposition of forces in more northerly waters. But that this partial withdrawal had its limits was clearly revealed when photographs, reports of sightings and local ground agents pointed to the German intention to hold on to Split, Sibenik and Zara as long as possible and so sustain their troops, so bitterly engaged in the interior. Their intentions for the South Dalmatian islands were not yet clear.

It may be seen from this outline that although the available air forces were too weak to force a decision in the Adriatic, the system was sound at the core. A solid and exact <sup>body</sup> of information was being built up which was to put the Allies in a strong position when it fell to them to take the offensive in the Balkans. Indeed, no time was lost. Already in July and August, small-scale combined operations against the islands were acting as meters of the enemy's strength.

#### Allied Naval Operations (June to August 1944)

In June, light Coastal Force patrols continued. Their only success worthy of mention is the sinking of T7, an ex Yugoslav torpedo boat, which they drove ashore on the night of the 24/25th and blew up. British and French destroyers swept far up the sea as far as Quarnero Gulf (1), bombarded Lussinpiccolo and an Albanian look-out station and intercepted small convoy in the South Dalmatian area, sinking, it is known for certain, a small tanker, (2) an E-boat and a Siebel ferry and damaging others. The destroyer H.M.S. Quail probably hit a mine while in tow from Bari to Taranto, for she capsized and sank on 18 June.

(1) Between E. coast of Istria and Cherso, Unie and Lussino Islands.

(2) The Giuliana (350 G.R.T.)

During July, light Coastal Forces continued to dispute the passage of small convoys of escorted lighters and schooners in the Southern Dalmatians area, sinking a few craft <sup>(1)</sup> and inflicting and suffering casualties. Some of the transports were heavily escorted and armed.

During August, destroyers bombarded coast defences near Pesaro to aid the Eighth Army's advance. Coastal Forces increasingly attacked larger enemy convoys and were more than usually successful; in addition, they escorted L.C.Is carrying Allied troops on combined operations, which will be related in the following section. The week 14-20 August was the most successful experienced by Coastal Forces since their arrival in the Adriatic in the Autumn of 1943. Two very significant engagements must be mentioned which throw light on the German system. On the night 17/18 August, three M.G.Bs encountered what appeared to be an enemy convoy of eight or more vessels with an escort of four E-boats in the dangerous area <sup>(2)</sup> of the Mljet Channel North of Dubrovnik. It was southbound, presumably laden with valuable cargoes such as fuel oil. The escort included, to the surprise of the M.G.Bs, two ugly customers in the shape of Tintenfish Dora <sup>(3)</sup> and Tintenfish Jot <sup>(4)</sup>, heavily-armed flak schooners. After a running fight lasting over 3 hours, the two Tintenfish and perhaps an I-boat landing craft were sunk. On the same night, three Vospers of the 20th M.T.B. Flotilla operating along the West coast of Istria, torpedoed and sank S.S. Numidia (5,339 G.R.T.) off Rovigno. She was southbound, laden and unescorted. These northerly forays by Coastal Forces had become possible since Vis Island had now given way to Ancona as the advanced base. The destruction of the Numidia was the first successful strike by Coastal Forces on the principal artery of the Germans' remaining Adriatic shipping and was expected to lead to regular escort of German convoys in Istrian waters.

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(1) For example, the schooner Vega (333 G.R.T.) on the night 25/26 July, with 58 prisoners; returning northwards from Korzula after unloading wheat. Also the Tritone (320 G.R.T.) on the night 29/30 July, carrying food and fodder.

(2) To the Germans.

(3) G.231 (200 tons).

(4) G.232 (160 tons).

Coastal Air Force Clashes with E-Boats of the 1st S-Boat Division  
(August and September 1944)

In the summer of 1944, the principal offensive unit on the strength of Admiral Adriatic was the 1st S-Boat Division, which comprised four flotillas of what the Allies referred to as 'E-boats'. The total strength of the Division fluctuated round 30 S - and KS - boats, and there<sup>were</sup> always a few under construction. In August and September, before the Germans had begun their evacuation of the South Dalmatian islands and coastline, they still felt strong enough to make an occasional sally against busy Allied ports. There were some 10 ex-Italian torpedo boats and six corvettes on the strength of Admiral Adriatic but their function was almost entirely one of minelaying and escort. <sup>(2)</sup> These latter fell, like the rest of the organization, within the framework of land strategy (coastal defence and seaborne supply traffic).

Between 19 and 28 August, the 24th Flotilla based at Pola made several attempts to halt the process of Allied supply build-up in the port of Ancona. Our surface patrols made several inconclusive contacts with them before the night of 22/23 August, when, under the cover of a night of bad weather, three S-boats reached Ancona and launched torpedoes, hitting the outer mole, but causing no serious damage.

Coastal Air Force extended the night patrols of Wellingtons of No. 242 Group over the Upper Adriatic from Ancona<sup>to</sup> and Fiume. After several inconclusive efforts No. 224 Squadron attacked four S-boats off Trieste on the night 25/26 August. <sup>(3)</sup> On the next night, Wellingtons, on the alert, drove off four S-boats attempting to attack Ancona port. On the night 27/28 August, four Wellington crews sighted <sup>(4)</sup> three S-boats off the Po Delta and dropped ten 250 pound bombs among them.

This air offensive discouraged the German flotillas from attempting similar attacks for a month. On the night of 23/24 September, ground radar picked up <sup>(5)</sup> three plots, which proved to be S-boats, about 35 miles N.E. of Bari. Combined forces of Wellingtons and Beaufighters intercepted, illuminated and bombed them

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- (1) 3rd with 8 S-boats, 7th with 7 S-boats, 22nd with 9 KS-boats and 24th with 6 S-boats (converted ex-Italian MS-boats).
  - (2) Captured German document (PG/44255 at F.D.S./Admiralty).
  - (3) Their claim to have set one on fire cannot be confirmed among the enemy records of losses.
  - (4) Results unconfirmed.
  - (5) M.A.A.F. Air Intelligence Weekly Summary No. 98 2 Oct. 44 (A.H.B.II J.1/43).

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and drove them off. The eastern Adriatic coast was combed by aircraft, but all craft had by then left for the North to escape capture by the advancing Allies and to cover changes of disposition.

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Allied progress and combined operations in the Adriatic  
(August to December 1944)

Plans to establish an air base on Molat Island

In the original directive to the Commander Balkan Air Force, reference had been made to the importance of securing a land and air base on the Dalmatian coast as a means of intensifying attacks against the enemy in the Balkans, and to the seizing of a coastal strip in Yugoslavia through which sea supplies could be sent into that country. Much time was consumed in preparing plans for the occupation of either Zara, Split or Dubrovnik or of one of the Dalmatian islands north of Vis.

On 24 July, however, it was made clear at a meeting of the Supreme Allied Commander's Conference that there was little prospect of obtaining the necessary forces and resources from Italy, and planning was discontinued. It might still be possible to establish an air and raiding base on an island in the Northern Adriatic for use in increasing the tempo of operations against the Germans. The conclusion was reached that the island of Molat was the most suitable. In mid-August, the plan for Operation 'Bakelite', as it was designated, for the capture and holding of Molat and the neighbouring island of Ist was submitted (1) to Allied Forces Headquarters with 20 September as the target date.

The Allied commanders at Bari were enthusiastic over this bold plan. The holding of Molat, they contended, would enormously facilitate the launching of some bridgehead operation in the future, the chances of success of which would be greatly enhanced by the possession of a forward landing ground to provide air cover. Moreover, with both Vis and Molat in Allied hands, the enemy would be uncomfortably stretched in guarding his coastline from Pola to Kotor. In any case, Molat

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(1) A History of the Balkan Air Force pp. 13, 14. (A.H.B.II.1/130):  
B.A.F. O.R.B. Appendices D 21 & 22.

/ would

would serve as an advanced all weather air base for operations against the vital German communications in Slovensa. It would also provide a naval base for intensifying operations against enemy shipping sailing between Pola and Sibenik; it would provide Land Forces Adriatic with an additional forward base for fair weather winter operations, and provide ~~the Navy with~~ additional facilities for infiltrating seaborne supplies to the Partisans.

On 23 August, Allied Force Headquarters turned down the plan for Operation "Bakelite". Once again, the main reason was the superior claims of Allied Armies Italy on the limited resources of the Mediterranean; the airfield construction party and equipment, so essential to the project, could only be provided at the expense of Allied Armies Italy. Balkan Air Force could not be given an airfield in the Ancona area for mounting the operation, since all airfields in that area were required to give air support to Allied Armies Italy in their bitter autumn campaign. Ancona port could offer no space for ships other than those supporting that campaign. Certain essential signals units were not available and operations in Southern France would absorb all surplus shipping. (1)

Later on, in 1945, after enormous difficulties over the maintenance of a base at Zara, there were to be bitter regrets over the cancellation of "Bakelite" which, according to the Air Officer Commanding Balkan Air Force, would have proved a far more profitable investment than the series of small raids which followed and would have placed the real initiative in Allied hands instead of relegating them to harassing operations for the rest of 1944. (2) But the policy of concentration was pursued and it was thus tacitly recognized that until some exterior factor arose to disturb the German balance, the Allies were not strong enough to bring this about by their own efforts. August, therefore, ended in a climate of frustration and stalemate.

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(1) Signal SACMED F.86317 to B.A.F. 22.8.44 (A.H.B. II J.1/273/7/42 encl. 22A).

(2) A History of the Balkan Air Force p. 14 (A.H.B. II J.1/130).

German Withdrawal of Garrisons from the Dalmatian Islands and Albanian Ports

From early September to the end of 1944, the Allies improved their position in the Adriatic. It would be erroneous to define this improvement as an advance, although they themselves had done much to bring it about. It was the result of four main strategic components, namely the Russian advance in the East, the German planned withdrawal from the Dalmatian Islands in September, their planned withdrawal from the Dalmatian coast and part of Albania in October and, lastly, Allied intervention in these last two withdrawals.

The impact of Russian pressure on the German system has been made clear in a previous chapter. Faced with a desperate need of reinforcements, the German withdrawal of garrisons from the Dalmatian Islands followed logically upon it. This was planned and carried out methodically. The Allies could do little more than to hasten it and to slip troops in to the vacated islands. The evacuation of Korzula was completed by 14 September, that of <sup>Solta (or Sulet)</sup> Peljesac and <sup>Sulet</sup> four days later. The withdrawal from Brac <sup>and</sup> the eastern end of Hvar followed and, by the beginning of October, the Southern Dalmatians were clear of Germans. ~~By then~~ the presence of infiltrated troops behind the Germans <sup>now</sup> gave the Allies <sup>a degree of</sup> control over the sea route from the North to Southern Dalmatia and Albania and stopped all German shipping movement South of Sibenik. (1)

Early October saw the German evacuation from Greece drawing to a close and the Germans beginning a withdrawal from the southern part of the area controlled by Sea Defence Commandant Albania. Saseno was evacuated on the 11th and Valona on the 15th. The Army withdrew to a defence line running East from Durazzo. The Russians entered Belgrade on 20 October.

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(1) B.A.F. Air Staff O.R.B. September and October 1944. See Figure 12  
for positions.

← The Importance of Vis as a Base

During August, Land Forces Adriatic sublimated some of its frustration in combined raids on enemy-held islands and mainland areas. Vis Island continued to be the main base for these operations and its defence remained of paramount importance. One of the principal reasons for the raids on the neighbouring islands<sup>(1)</sup> was to ensure the defence of Vis as well as to enable naval operations, based on Vis, to be carried out. On Vis, a system of inter-service command was established responsible to Balkan Air Force, F.O.T.A.L.I.<sup>(2)</sup> and L.F.A.<sup>(3)</sup> Closely associated with the inter-service command was the local representative of 37 Military Mission, through whom the British Commander dealt with the Commander of the Partisan division<sup>(4)</sup> on Vis. The ground force commander was the co-ordinator of the inter-service command and his channel of communication on all matters of high policy was with Balkan Air Force as the senior of the three co-ordinating headquarters in Italy<sup>(5)</sup>. No.281 Wing maintained detachments of aircraft on the island.

The Raid on Korzula (1 Aug. 44)<sup>(6)</sup>

The object of the raid of 1 August on Korzula was to harass the garrison and destroy their gun emplacements. This was notable in being the only combined operation in which the Partisans were placed under command of a British officer. Ground troops landed on the east tip of Korzula, attacking ~~their~~ guns at Pupnat and Korzula, and aided by Partisans, Twelve Spitfires<sup>(7)</sup> provided air cover and escorted the expedition from and back to Vis. The effect of Allied artillery fire was reported with success by aircraft and enemy gun positions at Orebic (on Peljesac) were bombed by eight Spitfires. The combined operation was a definite success<sup>(8)</sup>. It was known as Operation "Decomposed II".<sup>(9)</sup>

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- (1) See Figure 12.
  - (2) Flag Officer Taranto and Adriatic and Liaison Italy.
  - (3) Land Forces Adriatic.
  - (4) 26 Division J.A.N.L.
  - (5) A History of the Balkan Air Force (A.H.B.II J.1/130)
  - (6) Operation "Decomposed II".
  - (7) Of No.281 Wing.
  - (8) B.A.F. Air O.R.B. Aug.44 Appendices E.78/80, 82/83, 110, 114, 117, 119.
  - (9) Refer to Figure 12 for topography of the South Dalmatians and Figure 13 for general Adriatic positions.

The Raid on Ocherse and Lussino Islands (9/10 Aug. 44) (1)

Operation "Gradient I" had as its object the destruction of the bridge at Ossero joining the Northern Dalmatian islands of Ocherse and Lussino (or Losinj). This would block the channel for shipping and the passage by road. The Force sailed from Ancona on the night of 9/10 August escorted by two M.G.B's. Fighter cover was to have been provided from first light by 12 Spitfires of No.281 Wing operating from Falconara in sections of four aircraft. Unfortunately Falconara airfield went unserviceable in bad weather and only two Spitfires were able to provide escort for a short period. But the bridge was destroyed and the object of the raid achieved without casualties to our forces.

The Raid on Korzula (26/27 Aug. 44) (2)

Operation "Grandfather I" had as its object an artillery attack on the enemy garrison of Pupnat on Korzula. The convoy, escorted by small naval vessels and six Spitfires, sailed from Vis on the night of 26/27 August. While the troops were attacking, the same Spitfires covered them and eight Hurricanes and four Spitfires attacked gun positions. In the course of these attacks, 32 rocket projectile hits in the area; the destruction of two guns and a direct hit on an ammunition dump were reported, as well as the reduction to silence of accurate enemy fire. The Force reported further damage to guns and a successful re-embarkation.

Plan for the Capture of Hvar and Brač Islands. (3)

On 25 August, on the basis of intelligence reports that an enemy withdrawal from the southern Dalmatian islands was imminent, Marshal Tito expressed his conviction that the most profitable move would be to capture the islands of Hvar, Brač and Korzula and the Peljesac Peninsula. In spite of the fact that the meagre air resources available were mostly earmarked for Operation "Ratweek" (4) in the first week in September, the utmost air, land and naval

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(1) B.A.F. O.R.B. and appendices August 1944; B.A.F. Operations Order No.4 dated 5.8.44 (A.H.B. II J.20/5/2/16 Encl. 2A).

(2)

(3) B.A.F. Air Staff O.R.B. and appendices: A History of the Balkan Air Force (A.H.B. II.J.1/130).

(4) The dislocation by the air forces and partisans of Yugoslav communications.

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support obtainable was promised to support the Partisans' attack on the two big islands. Not only were the Allies eager to prove their loyalty, but they saw certain material advantages in the idea. The Navy saw itself with a much freer hand for operations by light craft from Vis. The Air Officer Commanding saw that it would, if successful, provide them with stepping stones towards the Dalmatian coast and open a long needed channel for sea supplies for operations in Jugoslavia. Operation 'Floundered II' developed in two stages. Before proceeding to describe them, mention must be made of Operation 'Ratweek', which absorbed the major part of Balkan Air Force during 1 - 7 September.

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Operation "Ratweek" - the Dislocation of  
Jugoslav Communications (1 - 7 Sept. 44) (1)

Although the subject of air support for land operations in the Balkans lies outside the scope of this record, it must be reiterated here in the interests of military perspective that this continued to be the main pre-occupation of the Balkan Air Force, who in turn had inherited it from Mediterranean Allied Air Forces in June 1944. Communications in the Balkans had been for months past a priority target system. It was precisely in this context that concentrated air power could be most effectively brought to bear remote from the battlefield; and experience in Italy was steadily forging a philosophy of offensive warfare which was to find classic expression in France and Germany and in the great air battle of the Brenner over the winter of 1944 - 1945.

Air support for the J.A.N.L. - the Yugoslav Army of National Liberation - was stepped up after a meeting on 10 July between the Air Officer Commanding and Marshal Tito, at which its full advantages and implications were accepted with enthusiasm by the leader of the Partisans. The first real test came with Operation "Ratweek", an intensified and closely co-ordinated attack on enemy communications throughout Jugoslavia in order to render the German position in the country untenable and severely hamper any eventual attempt at withdrawal. The operation was to be a joint one by the Balkan Air Force and the Partisans. The target date was fixed as 1 September.

The development of Operation "Ratweek" goes far to explain why before, during and for a period after it, so few aircraft were available for island operations. There was something tangible about it. One could time and measure its phases and assess its results by proven methods. It was less dependent on support from the ground than any other comparable effort. The plan co-ordinated the effort of the Partisans, the Fifteenth (Strategic) Air Force, the Balkan Air Force and Land Forces Adriatic. Refuelling and re-arming facilities for all types of B.A.F. aircraft were made available at

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(1) Outline plan B.A.F./S.2100/QPS. 29 Aug. 44 in B.A.F. Aug. O.R.B. Appendix C.29 with target map.

/Brindisi

Brindisi, and for Spitfires and Hurricanes at Vis. A careful watch for coastal shipping was maintained by the Royal Navy and Balkan Air Force.

The results of the operations were assessed as follows:-<sup>(1)</sup>

(a) No through traffic was possible on any railway in Jugoslavia during the period 1 - 7 September, thus impeding the enemy's movement northwards.

(b) The enemy was forced on to the roads, and thus made to use his limited supplies of fuel and to accept the loss of motor transport through air attacks. In certain areas, when movement by day became too costly, he used the roads at night only, in spite of the greatly increased danger of Partisan attack. During the day, his convoys would lay up in the garrison towns, several of which were successfully bombed by the Fifteenth and Balkan Air Forces.

(c) As a result of the widespread damage done, and although the main physical damage was repaired fairly quickly by the highly competent German squads, the enemy never really recovered from the cumulative effects of these attacks.

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(1) A detailed summary of results may be found on pp.137-139 of *A History of the Balkan Air Force* (A.H.B.II J.1/130).

The combined Operation against Hvar (6 - 24 Sept. 44)<sup>(1)</sup>

An ambush party of 300 men, including some from the R.A.F. Regiment, landed on Hvar during the night of 6/7 September. Simultaneously, the Germans landed about 1,000 men at Starigrad and Vrbevska. A few more British troops and some Partisans, with guns and tanks, were then landed. During the 7th, 12 Hurricanes and 27 Spitfires from Vis<sup>(2)</sup> attacked naval ferry boats in the Hvar channel, claiming four damaged. Spitfires attacked gun positions on Hvar. Venturas and Baltimores<sup>(3)</sup> bombed jetties at Makarska on the mainland north of Hvar, causing large explosions. Two Beaufighters<sup>(4)</sup> scored many hits in the area of the German landings, one aircraft being lost in action. Coastal Forces covered the Allied reinforcements landing on the second night, while the Germans were evacuating their own forces. The situation remained obscure. The main ground forces appear to have made no contact, but there was some small scale fighting, with local Partisans involved.

On the 8th, 16 rocket-firing Hurricanes and 4 Spitfires from Vis<sup>(5)</sup> attacked naval ferry boats and landing craft evacuating troops. They claimed to have sunk one of a convoy of seven craft and damaged another near Makarska<sup>(6)</sup>. The next day, air operations ended with an armed reconnaissance of the island by two Hurricanes from Vis. As there were few Germans left on the island, the operation expired. On 24 September, the Partisans reported the island clear.

Here was another case of a well-timed and successful German evacuation by sea, wherein tactical advantage was taken of gaps in the Allied organization and the lack of sufficient air and naval forces.

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(1) B.A.F./Air O.R.B. and appendices: Signals in Inter-service Secretariat file ISS/6107a (A.H.B.II J.20/5/12/125).

(2) Of No.281 Wing.

(3) Of No.254 Wing.

(4) Of No.283 Wing.

(5) Of No.281 Wing.

(6) The German evacuation took place after 0300 hours, when M.G.B's ended their patrol of the Hvar channel and handed over to the R.A.F.

The Combined Operation against Brao (12 - 18 Sept. 44) (1)

The date of the landing on Brao was put forward from 20 to 12 September as soon as it was learned that the German evacuation had begun. The main enemy forces were concentrated at Sumartin at the eastern end of the island with others at Supetar and Wmsowica. One brigade of Partisans with British troops<sup>(2)</sup> and fighters and fighter bombers of Balkan Air Force in support, were detailed to attack the strongly held enemy positions there. Supetar was believed to be the main evacuation port. This was the second item in Operation "Flounced II" { The air forces allotted were 8 rocket Hurricanes and 8 Spitfire bombers from Vis and 12 Venturas and 9 Baltimores from the mainland for D Day only.<sup>(3)</sup>

The initial Partisan attacks after the launching on the 12th at Lucica Cove<sup>(4)</sup> were delayed, as no contact with the enemy was effected. There was, therefore, no close air support possible. In any case, the bad weather hampered all Balkan air operations and several missions had to be abandoned because cloud prevented location of targets. This bad weather hindered air operations on the 13th. No close support was reported. Heavy seas held up the German boats evacuating from Supetar. Allied reinforcements were landed and although no fighting was reported, the Germans were contained in Sumartin and Supetar. The situation was still vague on the 14th. The only news that came to hand spoke of street fighting in Sumartin and Supetar, with no major engagement of land or air forces. A few Hurricanes and Spitfires from Vis bombed Sumartin and believed they sank four barges, but the results of these and later attacks were not apparent until the final survey. Artillery engaged the enemy in the Sumartin area, but because the Partisans failed to carry the British plan into operation, the stalemate on the ground continued. The garrison of Supetar escaped relatively scotfree during the night 13/14 September. Heavy guns from Split played sporadically on the Allied positions.

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- (1) B.A.F. O.R.B. Appendices: A History of the B.A.F. (A.H.B. II J.1/130) ISS Files 6107A and B (A.H.B. II J.20/5/12/125 and 126).
  - (2) 111 Army Field Regiment and 43 Commando. The total Allied forces involved totalled to about 1,500 Partisans and 420 British by 14 September.
  - (3) This allotment was considered inadequate by the Partisans. In the event, the occasion for the full use of the forces allotted was ruled out by the poor ground organization of the Partisans.
  - (4) At the western end of the north coast.

/During

During the 15th, the German perimeter shrank to the Sumartin area. A few Spitfires from No.281 Wing at Canne and on Vis, aided by a few Hurricanes, bombed positions there,<sup>(1)</sup> but there was still no close fighting. The evacuating troops did not escape the notice of our M.G.Bs, who claimed to have sunk three infantry landing craft and blown up one armed vessel<sup>(2)</sup> carrying ammunition during the night 15/16 September in the Hvar channel.

Operations warmed up on the 16th when Partisans, supported by British artillery, attacked Sumartin. Venturas of No.25 Squadron made four attacks on the garrison. That night the fall of Sumartin after bloody fighting was reported, and a new phase opened, with British <sup>gunners</sup> troops ready to engage shipping in the channel and targets on the mainland.

Before Brac was clear on the 18th, possession had been taken by a mixed force of British and Partisans of Solta Island.

Polforce Operations from Peljesac against the German  
Evacuation of Korzula (15 - 16 Sept. 44)

It was planned to do everything possible to hinder the German evacuation from the island of Korzula, which was reported to be in progress from the area of the port of Korzula across by water to the port of Orebic on the mainland and by road north across the tongue of the Peljesac peninsula to Trpanj. In execution of this plan, a British force known as Polforce landed early in the morning of 15 September at Desna Luka on the Peljesac peninsula and took up positions commanding the terminal points of Orebic and Trpanj. Fire was exchanged between the opposing batteries on either side of the strait and an enemy column was shelled on the road. In difficult circumstances, the Force was unable to prevent the main evacuation, but certainly made it more difficult and harried the Germans from their staging points. There was little that Balkan Air Force could do in such a constricted and haphazard local ground effort. All the aircraft available were fully stretched on other Balkan operations and it was treated as a small commando enterprise.<sup>(3)</sup> This expedition was all that remained possible of the full scale plan for Operation "Workbasket", which had had as object the seizure of Korzula on 16 September. The Germans evacuated Korzula according to plan. They were not evicted.

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- (1) All Hurricane and Spitfire sorties from No.281 Wing O.R.B. appendix B, September 1944.
  - (2) Not yet confirmed from German sources.
  - (3) No mention can be found of any air support in the operations summaries either of M.A.A.F., B.A.F. or No.281 Wing.

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German strategy (October to December 1944)

German evacuation of Albania and Southern Dalmatia (October and November 1944)

The Russian thrust towards Belgrade in early October forced the Germans to redispense their troops in the Dalmatian area. On 7 October, the C.-in-C. South-East decided to abandon the main defence line along the eastern Adriatic coast and occupy new positions along the line Senj - Knin - Livno - Mostar - Gacko. With the resulting loss of harbours for S-boats and Small Battle Units, all hopes of offensive operations against Allied harbours and shipping south of Ancona were abandoned. Supply traffic by the sea route stopped: the southern Balkan escape route was narrowed down and much valuable equipment abandoned. <sup>(1)</sup>

The new German plan was to occupy and defend four of the islands in the Gulf of Quarnero, namely Krk, Cherso, Lussino and Rab so as to protect the sea routes Fiume - Pola and Trieste - Fiume. Naval personnel not wanted for the Army, including trained ship and gun crews, were to be evacuated, in all, about 7,000 men from North Dalmatia and about 3,000 from South Dalmatia. <sup>(2)</sup>

The stages of evacuation may be broadly traced through the following chronological list and by reference to Figure 13. They did not follow one another in a strict South to North order.

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(1) Admiral Adriatic war diary (F.D.S./Admiralty).

(2) Ibid.

October

9	Sarande captured by Allies
11	Saseno evacuated
12	Corfu surrendered
15	Valona evacuated
19	Ston captured by Partisans
20	Dubrovnik evacuated
25	Split evacuated
26	Split entered by Allies
28	Floydforce landed at Port Gruz (Dubrovnik)
30	Kotor evacuated by land
31	Zara evacuated.

November

7	Sibenik evacuated
13	Tirana (Albania) captured
15	<i>Durazzo</i> Duraze evacuated
	Evacuation of Albania practically at an end
	Coastal area south of Fiume clear of Germans
23	Bar evacuated.

German Occupation of the Islands in the Gulf of Quarnero (1)

Reports from air reconnaissance units and other Intelligence sources of the activities in and around German occupation of a group of islands in the Northern Adriatic revealed little at first of the pattern of their new maritime defence system. The Germans, having abandoned the South Dalmatian Islands and the main ports as far as Zara and Sibenik, proceeded to complete their construction of a new defence nexus which would tie up with the vital sea communications at the head of the Adriatic, protect their supply runs to Fiume, the transport of coal, bauxite and other strategic materials and the movements of their naval units and special weapons.

In September, Fiume was strengthened by the arrival of three MAS boats. Surplus craft from the South came North and stayed there. They began dismantling Siebel ferries, too slow and easy targets for fighter-bombers and very difficult to camouflage. Mines were laid at many points off the Italian and Yugoslav coasts and, with torpedo boats as escorts, at the head of the Adriatic. Apprehensions of an Allied landing in the Istria area, coupled with the need to make a stand in the pivotal area Fiume-Trieste against the Russians' advance, gave impetus to the already energetic movement of supply and naval shipping. On the 16th, Zara's quays were piled with military supplies for shipment and transports and escorts lay in the harbour. On the 17th and 18th, Venturas and Baltimores of No. 254 Wing carried out an attack on the harbour. Great damage was revealed on

/photographs

(1) B.A.F. weekly summaries in O.R.B. Appendices.

photographs among small ships, (1) stores and warehouses. The harbour was covered in oil and smoke hung over the town. German efforts to use Nin were neutralised by continuous small air attacks.

On the 22nd, the motor vessel Mercurio (2) was photographed about to depart from Parenzo. Beaufighters of Coastal Air Force, No. 323 Wing, attacked her and the damage inflicted appears to have put her out of service.

October passed without any clear indications of German intentions in the Northern Adriatic.

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(1) It was claimed that a tanker was hit, but no record of total loss can be traced in German records.

(2) 1,979 G.R.T.

(3) Navi Perdute. Italian Historical Office (A.H.B.6 copy).

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Signs in November and December of German Intentions

In mid-November, the Germans mounted what appeared to be a punitive expedition against the Partisans on Pag Island. In spite of bad weather, occasional air reports of activity in the Pag-Lussino area were received. Deserters reported the active and increasing use of Lussino as an advanced human torpedo base. This was confirmed on the 29th by small arms fire directed from Cigale Cove on our Coastal Forces. German coastal defence guns were ferried across to Rab Island. The defence of these northern islands was growing in importance as the Allies occupied one port after another on the East coast of Italy and the pressure by the Partisan armies (supported by Balkan Air Force) and by the Russian armies fighting round Budapest, <sup>increased.</sup> Unfortunately, frequent bad weather prevented the essential continuity of air reports and the complete picture had to be built up with the aid of other Intelligence material: some of this, it must be recorded, was provided by the Long Range Desert Group and Special Boat Service.

SECRET

Enemy Situation in the Northern Adriatic at the End of 1944

At the end of 1944, the general enemy situation in the Northern Adriatic was that he held the coastlines of Istria, the Gulf of Fiume, and Croatia down to Lukovo, together with the islands of Lussino, Cherso, Krk, Rab and Pag. His method of defence in general terms was to garrison important towns, harbours and anchorages, ignoring the intervening strips of coastline except by patrolling. The system was aided by the rugged nature of the Istrian and Croatian coastline, rendering the landing of large forces impracticable except at a harbour, and by the general hostile attitude to the Allies of the natives of Istria, Cherso and Lussino. The islands were to some extent linked by minefields and coastal defences and the bulk of the enemy naval resources were concentrated within these limited waters. Enemy positions were being reinforced. The Allies were thus presented with a well defended area with a few loopholes, which, except by air, would initially limit any offensive action to the outer fringe.

The Germans had operational bases at Pola and Fiume, an advanced base at Lussino, refitting and shipbuilding bases at Trieste, Monfalcone and Venice and training establishments at Venice, Sesto, Calende (on Lake Maggiore), Valdagno (N.E. of Verona), and Varignano (near La Spezia). In addition, every cove on the coastline and among the islands could be used for dispersal or staging and other islands than Lussino be used at choice as advanced bases. The lifting capacity of his landing craft was estimated at 5,000 men simultaneously and it was clear that, if he wished, he could rapidly establish new bases or strengthen his present ones. All this presented a threat to Allied shipping using the Northern Adriatic and to the projected Allied air base at Zara. While the Allies about to take over Zara enjoyed undoubted superiority, they had considerably less than complete freedom of movement throughout the whole area.

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(1) J.P.S. H.Q. B.A.F. appreciation BJPS (45)3 dated 26 Jan.45 (A.H.B. File II J.20/5/5/56 Encl. 5.)

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Organization and successes of air ship-striking forces

Reorganization of Coastal Air Force

During July, Coastal Air Force Headquarters, with Allied Forces Headquarters moved from Algiers to the Royal Palace, Caserta. On 13 July, operational control of M.A.C.A.F. forces <sup>was</sup> taken over in the combined Navy and R.A.F. War Room. On 31 July, the staff of the C.-in-C. Mediterranean moved into the Combined Operations Room at Caserta and assumed operational control. (1)

The advance of Allied land forces into Southern France and North Italy materially reduced the air threat to North Africa, Corsica, Sardinia and West Italy: air defences in these areas were accordingly modified. Radar cover on the North African coast was reduced and only Algiers was left with fighter defence. No. 337 Wing was transferred from Oran to Balkan Air Force. No. 332 Wing from Taher was reduced to number only basis and No. 340 Wing from Bone was ordered to the South of France. Sardinia and Corsica were reorganised. 63rd U.S. Fighter Wing and a second Fighter sector in Southern France were established. Fighter defence of the North African coast was handed over to the French Coastal Air Force. The squadron strength at the end of August stood at 31 as against 40 at the end of June. (2)

It was recognized in September that North Africa had virtually ceased to be a theatre of war. The general clear-up of U-boats in the Mediterranean by improved joint air and naval methods, the end of the air threat to shipping and the continued lull in enemy activity against M.A.C.A.F. defended ports and cities permitted still further reductions in operational units. Several ceased to operate and others were transferred. (3)

On 3 Sept. 44, the A.O.C., M.A.C.A.F. informed the R.A.F. Group and U.S.A.A.F. Wing Commanders of future plans. The reorganization of M.A.C.A.F. was to \_\_\_\_\_

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- (1) M.A.C.A.F. Air Staff O.R.B. July 44.
  - (2) M.A.C.A.F. Air Staff O.R.B. August 44.
  - (3) M.A.C.A.F. Admins. O.R.B. September 44.

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develop in two stages:- (1) the withdrawal of XII Fighter Command U.S.A.A.F. and (2) the elimination of M.A.C.A.F. as such. On 14 September, XII Fighter Command ceased its attachment to M.A.C.A.F. (1) At the end of September, there were only 22 squadrons in M.A.C.A.F., at the end of October only 18. Of these, 11 were R.A.F., 2 U.S.A.A.F. and 5 French. (2) With No. 337 Wing ('X' Force) established in Greece, the boundaries between Air H.Q. Greece and M.A.C.A.F. were defined.

On 1 Nov. 44, H.Q. M.A.C.A.F. was re-formed to enable it to carry out its existing responsibilities and, in addition, to assume, progressively, responsibility for the functions which would eventually devolve upon Air Headquarters Italy. Coastal Air Force continued to acquire steadily from other Commands and Groups the control of further units. Only two operational units (3) were lost over this period.

This brief survey will assist in explaining the long life of M.A.C.A.F. over a period when, on the face of things, its operational commitments had considerably shrunk. It still had important offensive tasks ahead both in the Tyrrhenian and, to a lesser degree, in the Adriatic. Its fighter bombers were joining increasingly in the land battle in Italy and Jugoslavia: and naval units and forces still needed its protection, in the forms of escort, minespotting and port defence.

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- (1) M.A.C.A.F. Air Staff O.R.B. September 44.
  - (2) Refer to Figure 23 for a graph of the squadron strength of M.A.C.A.F. from end January 1944 to end April 1945.
  - (3) No. 451 Squadron to U.K. and No. 27 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron to South Africa.

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The Dissolution of a famous R.A.F. Group

In the process of simplification, No. 242, the fighting R.A.F. Group with a splendid record of two years of campaigning, was dissolved. It had been formed on 24 Aug. 42, to take part in the North African campaign as an advanced operational Headquarters, controlling two Fighter Wings and one light Bomber Wing in close support of the First Army. Its records in North Africa and in the Heel of Italy has been followed in these pages. In August, <sup>(1)</sup> it had dwindled to No. 286 Wing with a Spitfire squadron at Grottaglie and No. 323 Wing with a Spitfire squadron, and a night Beaufighter squadron, and a Wellington reconnaissance squadron, all three at Foggia. In addition, it controlled the Italian Seaplane Wing with four groups totalling to some 50 Italian reconnaissance aircraft, all except 6 in the Heel of Italy.

Coastal Air Force decided that a Group Headquarters was no longer justified and that it would henceforward exercise control through a new unit, known as No. 4 General Reconnaissance Operations Room at Taranto. On 14 Sept. 44, No. 242 Group closed down. <sup>(2)</sup>

Reduction of No. 286 Wing and Preparations for a move to the Balkans (December 1944)

With the successful occupation of Greece and South-Western Yugoslavia accomplished, the enemy air threat to Brindisi and Bari diminished notably and it became accordingly possible to release No. 286 Wing from its duties in the Taranto Fighter Sector, which was closed on 2 Dec. 44. <sup>(3)</sup>

The Wing left a staff to supervise the newly-formed No. 624 Minespotting Squadron of Walrus aircraft. It handed over its Air Sea Rescue responsibilities. <sup>(4)</sup> Prospects of continued fighting in the Balkans and hopes of establishing an air base at Zara (in Yugoslavia) pointed to the need of a Fighter Sector to provide port air defence. No. 286 Wing was to be therefore re-established as a Master Base Defence Unit and prepare signals staff and mobile signals equipment for a move at short notice to the Balkans.

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- (1) Refer to order of battle and locations at Appendix 49.
  - (2) No. 242 Group H.Q. O.R.B. Sept. 44: No. 242 Group organization memorandum No. 73 dated 6 Sept. 43 at Appendix D.18 of No. 242 Group O.R.B.
  - (3) M.A.C.A.F. O.R.B. Dec. 44.
  - (4) To No. 302 A.S.R.C.U.

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(1)

Independent air anti-shipping operations (September to December 1944)

The major part of the Allied air forces was engaged in support of Italian and Balkan land campaigns or in attacks on German evacuation of Albania, Greece and the Dalmatian islands and coastline. What the few remaining available aircraft of the Balkan and Coastal Air Forces were able to achieve was, therefore not likely to be decisive; they did their best, but when the effort is analysed and results assessed, one cannot claim more for it than a process of useful attrition. Targets were too small and scattered and the effort too low and desultory to merit a detailed account. It was now, increasingly, a war of small ships, small harbours and small formations. Passing tribute must be paid to the units of the Long Range Desert Group and Special Boat Service, who, at great personal risk, furnished inside information on air targets. A general view of air successes against enemy Adriatic shipping from 1 September to 31 December will now be attempted. It will give some idea of the attrition inflicted on enemy supply and naval tonnage by small formations.

Ship strike forces of Coastal and Balkan Air Forces in late 1944

Two appendices - Nos. 48 and 49 - to this volume present the order of battle and locations of the Balkan Air Force and No. 242 Group of the Coastal Air Force during this period. A third - No. 50 - gives monthly details of the wing effort of Balkan Air Force from September to December 1944. The squadrons of Balkan Air Force concerned with Adriatic anti-shipping <sup>operations</sup> have been identified as usually Beaufighters, Baltimores and Venturas, with occasional efforts by Spitfires and Hurricanes.

The squadrons of No. 242 Group (Coastal Air Force) and, later, of its former two wings engaged in anti-shipping operations were the Wellingtons of No. 221 Squadron and, occasionally Beaufighters of No. 272 Squadron, with occasional co-operation from Spitfires.

Enemy shipping losses in September

The total traceable losses identified with air attacks in the whole of the Adriatic for September were, firstly, 4 steamships totalling to

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(1) Monthly enemy shipping losses from the nominal list of 'Enemy Shipping Losses' compiled and held in A.E.B. Identifications of aircraft from M.A.A.F. B.A.F. and M.C.A.F. O.R.B's.

55,357 gross registered tons. These high figures included the S.S. Rex and S.S. Mercurio and <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ never afterwards approached. The rest of the losses comprised 2 Siebel ferries, 2 landing craft, 2 small tankers, 1 small patrol boat, 1 small tug, 2 fishing vessels, 4 barges or lighters and 1 small minesweeper.

The only traceable losses to the Navy appear to be one landing craft and one patrol boat: but one Siebel ferry and one auxiliary fishing vessel were sunk by mines, usually laid by ships.

To unknown causes were ascribed the loss of one coaster, one tug, one barge and one auxiliary fishing vessel. It is an open question as to whether or not air or surface craft contributed to these losses.

Losses to other causes such as marine misadventure were, with one exception, very low, only one naval ferry barge and three sailing vessels being lost. A remarkable feat was accomplished in the sabotaging of the motor vessel <sup>Ausonia</sup> ~~Anisonia~~, which was under construction in Monfalcone. This 9,000 ton vessel was found sunk when the Allies entered the port at the end of the war. The Germans were thus <sup>denied</sup> ~~derived~~ a valuable reinforcement to their hard-pressed supply forces. Enemy scuttlings were too small to mention.

The Sinking of S.S. Rex <sup>SECRET</sup> (8 Sept. 44)

For some time past, the 51,062 ton Italian liner Rex, at one time holder of the Atlantic Blue Riband, had lain in Trieste harbour, heavily protected by anti-aircraft artillery. Her days, like those of all the big tonnage ships, were numbered. The risks of destruction by air attack were now prohibitive; and, one by one, they were scuttled. It was reported that her engines had been disabled and scuttling charges laid and that she was intended to lie as a blockship a few miles from Trieste, so further hindering any incursion by naval forces into the closely guarded key port.

On 4 September, a photographic reconnaissance pilot sighted <sup>S.S.</sup> ~~S.S.~~ Rex at Trieste in tow by tugs, with a destroyer escorting her out. On the evening of the 6th, she was again sighted, this time in Capodistria Bay, 6 miles to the South of Trieste. It was decided to put her out of action, if possible before she could be sunk as a blockship. No. 272 Beaufighter Squadron, experts in this type of operation, were about to finish shipstriking in the Tyrrhenian Sea and transfer from Borgo (Corsica) to Falconara for Adriatic operations. The squadron arrived at Falconara on the 7th.

At 1025 hours on 8 September, eight of their Beaufighters, escorted by eight Mustangs, were airborne. As the formation approached the Rex, by then lying close inshore, an F-boat opened up intensive fire, but was speedily put out of action by the escort. (2) There was very heavy anti-aircraft fire from Trieste harbour, but none from <sup>S.S.</sup> ~~S.S.~~ Rex. The Beaufighters pressed home their attack and claimed with their 25 pound rocket projectiles to have scored 59 hits on the ship, of which 55 were reported as below the water line. <sup>S.S.</sup> ~~S.S.~~ Rex began to burn. The Coastal Air Force Beaufighters turned for base, where they landed undamaged. No. 272 Squadron was credited with the destruction of S.S. Rex. Although the ship had been mortally hit, it needed the added efforts of eight Beaufighters of the Balkan Air Force's No. 283 Wing to administer the coup de grace with 64 rocket projectiles. They left her on fire from bows to stern, with a 90° list to port. Photographs showed her resting on her side approximately one-third above water close inshore along the South shore of the bay. The Italian Historical Office on its official record Navi Perdute records that later the Yugoslavs raised and demolished her.

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- (1) C.A.F. B.A.F. No. 239 and No. 272 Squadrons O.R.B's and appendices.  
 (2) Its loss cannot be confirmed from captured records.

Enemy Shipping Losses in October

Enemy losses attributable to air attack were comparable with those of September, comprising 1 landing craft, 2 naval ferry barges, 2 small patrol boats, 2 tugs, 5 barges or lighters and 6 sailing or auxiliary sailing vessels; and one especial success in the form of an E-boat - S.158 - destroyed by No. 13 Squadron Baltimores at Sibenik on the 25th.

October witnessed an upsurge of activity by Allied Coastal Forces directed by Flag Officer Taranto. As a result of several brilliant engagements, they finished the month with a tally of one torpedo boat,<sup>(1)</sup> two corvettes,<sup>(2)</sup> seven naval ferry barges, one small transport and one auxiliary sailing vessel.

Only one small coaster was sunk by mine and only one small tug by unknown causes. Other causes were responsible for the loss of one naval ferry barge, one auxiliary sailing vessel and one small naval craft. Enemy scuttlings were negligible. They evacuated all their active craft from the abandoned ports and havens.

Tactical Air Force Support for the Partisans (November 1944)

Early in November 1944, Tactical Air Force undertook, for the first time in nearly a year, the task of supporting Marshal Tito in Yugoslavia. For this purpose, three R.A.F. light bomber wings and four squadrons of fighter-bombers, all belonging to Desert Air Force, were given Balkan targets as their first priority, the priorities of the targets themselves being established by Balkan Air Force.

Most of the effort was directed against <sup>land</sup> based targets, but on four successive days, commencing with the 3rd, Kittyhawks<sup>and</sup> Mustangs of No. 239 Wing and Baltimores of No. 253 Wing Desert Air Force carried out a series of attacks on shipping in Fiume harbour. They claimed hits on three sizeable ships and the destruction of a corvette and a Siebel ferry, together with direct hits on piers and buildings. German records confirm the loss of the torpedo boat T.A. 21 <sup>(3)</sup> and the elusive veteran the minelayer Ramb III <sup>(4)</sup> once known as the Kiebitz and now re-christened Pelikan. This was an especially fortunate effort, in view of the intensive

/minelaying

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- (1) T.A.20 (ex-Italian Audace, 628 tons).
  - (2) U.J.208 (ex-Italian Spingarda, 565 tons) and U.J.202 (ex-Italian Melpomene, 565 tons)
  - (3) Ex-Italian Insidioso of 500 tons
  - (4) 530 tons.

minelaying effort at the head of the Adriatic and elsewhere and the enemy's shortage of first line warships.<sup>(1)</sup>

Enemy Shipping Losses in November

The advent of assistance from Desert Air Force and the constriction of the shipping target area worked in favour of the Allied air effort. Air reconnaissance had by now built up a detailed picture of the enemy system, so that it was possible to maintain a more or less running commentary on the situation, broken by bad weather spells. The results of air strikes, apart from the two major successes recorded in the preceding paragraph were, if not spectacular, reasonably satisfactory in the absence of heavy raids on major ports. They included two landing craft, one naval ferry barge, one salvage vessel, one escort vessel, five coasters and two lighters.

Naval successes in this month of worsening weather and in face of heavy enemy minelaying, <sup>were</sup> confined to the sinking of three coasters. Only two vessels were sunk by mines - a naval ferry barge and a tank lighter. Only four small enemy craft were recorded as sunk from unknown causes.

Enemy Shipping Losses in December

With the onset of winter and poor flying weather, the pressure of outside demands on air strength and the increase in enemy night seaborne traffic, little was achieved in December by the air formations. All that can be traced in the way of total losses inflicted amounts to no more than one naval ferry barge, one motor boat, one tug, three barges and three sailing vessels. There were no amphibious operations and no evacuations to disturb the quiet routine of coast-crawling by which the enemy fed his stations and troops.

The Navy had no luck whatever with enemy shipping. Only two sailing vessels were sunk by mines. A tug was found sunk in Ravenna; the cause was never known. The naval ferry barge MFP.956 was lost in a collision with KT.6, (the only war freighter still operating in the Adriatic) N.W. of Pirano in the Gulf of Trieste on 15 December: one lighter was sabotaged and a small coaster lost in a storm off San Benedetto.

/ Reasons .....

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(1) The indications are that the ships were destroyed by the joint effort of Mustangs, Kittyhawks and Baltimores, over the four days. It is impossible to attribute the entire credit to any particular formation.

Reasons for the Survival of the German Seaborne Supply and Naval Organization in late 1944

Close study of the Italian<sup>(1)</sup>, Balkan and Northwest European campaigns cannot fail to impress on the reader the hardening of the German resistance on all land fronts during the autumn and winter of 1944/1945. In spite of local withdrawal, it was characteristic of the German system ~~in what was now perhaps its finest hour~~ that the organization held as a whole: and it may be remarked that it was consistent with its character that it collapsed as a whole. Its maritime fronts had shrunk everywhere, yet they still functioned as minor but vital auxiliaries of the land campaigns. As land communications wilted under the increasing tempo of air attacks, the sea and inland waterway transport routes assumed unprecedented importance.

The Allied air and naval forces, who felt they were about to regain the initiative in late September, came up against the hostile weather, seasoned German crews who took every conceivable advantage of the configuration of the land and seabed and targets increasingly difficult to find, on account of their small size and the lengthening hours of darkness.

A few quotations from the records as one of the worst winters in living memory set in prematurely will give some idea of the grimness of the campaign in the Adriatic. The first week in October saw very bad weather and almost nothing was accomplished. The fourth week ending on 29 October was also very bad. Balkan Air Force summed up a situation which was often to recur. Air operations, they recorded, were considerable hampered and many of them were unsuccessful. Many shipping attacks were attempted, but results were negligible. Two destroyers were sighted in the Arsa Channel but weather prevented an attack and attempts to bomb shipping off Zara and Sibenik also failed. The weather prevented almost all photographic cover of the Adriatic harbours.

November was even worse than October. On the night of the 1st, an extremely heavy storm cut all communications between Florence and Rome and between Siena and Grosseto. At Grosseto airfield ~~(used by No. 242 Group)~~ there was considerable damage due to flooding. Special weather forecasting units were formed. The Armies were often bogged down and confined to patrolling activities.

/December

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*Refer*  
(1) Report to the A.H.B. Narrative on the Italian Campaign Vol. II - Chapters, 2, 4 and 5.

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December weather, it was recorded, hampered all air operations considerably, although there were occasional bright intervals. Under such conditions, it will be readily understood that continuity, so vital to an air force in achieving durable results, was seldom possible. Again, for policy reasons, there was no diversion of strategic heavy bombers on to Adriatic ports. This would have been the only material relief possible and the only method of overcoming the Germans' ability to maintain and improve their shipping position by continuous repair and construction.

SECRET

THE AIR BASE AND THE BRIDGEHEAD AT ZADAR (1)

The need for an air base and a bridgehead across the Adriatic.

One of the ultimate aims of trans-Adriatic operations was the establishment of an air base and a bridgehead across the Adriatic so as to interfere as much as possible with the Germans' withdrawal from the Balkans. Initial planning on this project was discontinued in July 1944 owing to lack of resources and the competing claims of Allied Armies in Italy.

Once the German withdrawal from the southern Balkans was well advanced, it was to be expected that they would be highly concentrated in northern Yugoslavia. Difficult as a landing on that coast would be, plans under development at A.F.H.Q. forced the revival of the idea of a bridgehead. On 31 Oct. 44, the A.O.C., B.A.F. (and Land Forces Adriatic) explained the large-scale pincer movement against the enemy now contemplated. Its right arm was to be provided by a force of up to six divisions landed at a Dalmatian port and moved rapidly through Dalmatia to attack Fiume and Trieste in the rear coincident with an attack by A.A.I. on Kesselring's defense line in northern Italy. D Day for this operation was to be in early February. The Commanders in Bari were instructed to consider how best they could assist the operation by establishing an air base and a bridgehead on the Dalmatian coast from which attacks could be launched against the enemy retreating through Yugoslavia.

The former Italian port of Zara, called by the Yugoslavs Zadar, was rightly chosen as the best locality for such a base. Near it was the airfield of Zemunik and the satellite airstrip of Prkos, both of which could be readily made serviceable. On Zadar, therefore, most of the hopes and plans of B.A.F. and L.F.A. for the next few months were centred.

Planning

Planning began during November 1944 in Bari. It was proposed to establish No. 281 Wing in the Zadar area with a small Command Post and various ancillary R.A.F. units. The land forces were to comprise most of Land Forces Adriatic, most of whose troops were trained for the tasks ahead. It was recommended, firstly, to establish in the Zadar area an advanced landing ground, then an air base; secondly, in co-operation with Partisan forces, to harass the German

/withdrawal

Section

(1) This chapter is mainly derived from A History of the Balkan Air Force (June 1944 - May 1945) by H.Q. B.A.F. 14.7.45 (A.H.B.II 51/130)

44

withdrawal. On 21 Nov. 44, the S.A.C.M.T.O. issued his directive.

7 Marshal Tito had no objection to the establishment of an air base at Zadar, but he was supported by national prejudice in objecting to the presence of a large land force and its 'tail'. The Yugoslavs approved warmly of our support in the air, as well they might, for without the Balkan Air Force, the Germans would have already crushed them. Occupation by land forces was, to their narrow conceptions, synonymous with occupation and the imposition on them of another alien autocracy. In view of the fact that Britain had no political ambitions in the Balkans, this was ludicrous; but it was real, and the bargaining was long and painful.

The operation was given the code name of 'Fairplay'.

Field Marshal Alexander (1) appointed Lieut. J.L.I. Hawkesworth to be responsible for the direction of L.P.A. operations, (2) while the A.O.C. A.V.M. Elliot remained the co-ordinator of trans-Adriatic operations in general. In a series of conferences, the weight of the land forces to be landed was scaled down to a point acceptable to Tito and an agreement drawn up for signature. The idea of an air base was readily approved by Tito, but talks on an army and a naval base dragged on.

Signature of the British - Yugoslav Agreement on Zadar (6 Jan. 45).

On 6 Jan. 45 in Belgrade, an agreement was signed by Marshal Tito and Brigadier Maclean. Together with a naval agreement signed at that time, it provided for the commencement of work on the airfield at Zemunik and its satellite at Pribes as soon as possible, the introduction of about 3,700 Air Force officers and men, about 3,000 Army officers and men, and the use of Zadar port by Allied light naval craft.

It was expected that the Air Forces would consist of 6 fighter or fighter-bomber squadrons (including the 2 Yugoslav squadrons), 1 defence fighter squadron and 1 night fighter squadron, with radar units <sup>and</sup> U.S.A.A.F. aircraft servicing personnel. Army personnel would attend to maintenance and airfield construction and anti-aircraft defence of the port.

The modified plan - Operation 'Accomplish'

In view of a major potential threat to the projected air base by some three and one-half German divisions, the full plan was suspended as from

(1) Appointed SACMED in early December 1944, vice Sir H. Martland Wilson.  
(2) His H.Q. was titled B.A.F. (Army Coordination).

15 Jan. 45. Instead, it was agreed that a small party of some 800 personnel should be landed. It was to consist of a small refuelling and re-arming party, with a protecting force of one L.A.A., and one field squadron of the R.A.F. Regiment was to be established quickly on Fiores.

This undertaking - known as Operation 'Accomplish' - was <sup>launched</sup> launched on 3 Feb. 45. By 7 February, it was completed and the airfield was nearly ready. Revised plan to send forces to Zadar - Operation 'Bingham'

It was clear by 21 Feb. 45 that the potential enemy threat was receding. Fresh plans for the despatch of a force appreciably smaller than once contemplated and for a more modest programme of airfield construction, were rapidly evolved. The plan for these arrangements was to be called Operation 'Bingham'. Meanwhile the work of the Refuelling and Rearming Party continued uninterrupted.

It was important to launch Operation 'Bingham' without delay, so as to provide maximum air support for the approaching offensive by the Yugoslavs' <sup>Fourth</sup> 4th Army in Northern Dalmatia. It was proposed to send in No. 281 Wing, No. 1328 Wing R.A.F. Regiment, various R.A.F. ancillary units, an Army L.A.A. battery and various Army Maintenance and signals units.

Combined Operations Zadar (C.O.Z.A.)

In the middle of February 1945, units of Land Forces Adriatic, including one squadron of the Long Range Desert Group <sup>(1)</sup> and one squadron of the Special Boat Service <sup>(2)</sup> were sent to Zadar. A headquarters for raiding operations, involving land and naval forces, was created under the title of Combined Operations Zadar. The original large-scale offensive known to the planners as Operation 'Fairfax' was no longer feasible, since 15th Army Group had recently lost several divisions to the Western Front and had no troops to spare for diversions. In its place, it was decided that units of the Yugoslav Fourth Army was to launch a heavy offensive in Dalmatia. R.A.F. was to supply air support, Allied naval craft would co-operate and we were to send the maximum quantity of supplies to the J.A.N.L. Arrangements were made at once to give teeth to the plans for air support. The R.A.F. attached an Air Adviser to the Yugoslav C.-in-C's H.Q. and R.A.F. Liaison Officers to Marshal Tito's H.Q. and to each of the Partisan Corps concerned.

/The

(1) Abbreviation L.R.D.G.

(2) Abbreviation S.B.S.

The offensive opened on 20 Mar. 45 and was an unexpected success. Within little more than a month, Yugoslav troops were in the outskirts of Fiume, threatening Venezia Giulia and beginning to overrun Istria. The air support provided by Balkan Air Force played an important part, but its record goes beyond the scope of this history.<sup>(1)</sup>

Operation 'Bingham' (2 - 4 Apr. 45)

The operation opened on 2 April and by 4 April it was reported by B.A.F. that everything had gone very well. The new representative of the A.O.C. acted as co-ordinator of the Combined Headquarters. Air, Naval and Army support was given without stint, but owing to irredentist claims to conquered territory by the Yugoslavs, all British forces were withdrawn from Zadar on 19 May 45, eleven days after the end of the war and seven weeks after their arrival in Zadar.

H.Q. B.A.F. was disbanded on 15 July 45.

It should be mentioned that the R.P. Hurricanes based at Fries cooperated actively in attacking enemy coastwise shipping, against which they scored valuable successes.

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(1) Full details may be found in the O.R.B. and Appendices of the B.A.F. and of No. 281 Wing, and an epitome of operations will be found in A History of the B.A.F. (A.H.B.II.J1/130).

The end of the German hold in the Northern Adriatic (March - May 1945)

The end came suddenly. On 20 Mar.44, the Yugoslav Fourth Army began its drive in the Croatian area. Within one month, aided by the Royal Navy and Balkan Air Force, the Yugoslav forces had cleared the islands of Rab (12 Apl.45)<sup>(1)</sup> Lussino<sup>(2)</sup> Cherso and Rik; and they reached Susak on 20 Apl.45. The larger enemy vessels had already left Piume; on the night of 20/21 April, a flotilla of the remaining small craft sailed South through the Faresina Channel, put in at Pola, and soon after dispersed to Trieste and Monfalcone.

Although the Germans' days were numbered, they continued to sail coasters and smaller craft across the head of the Adriatic between Trieste and Venice. Although they had lost their large minelayers, F-boats still laid mines at high pressure to the very end.

On 1 May 45, some 25 enemy vessels, when dummy attacks were made by R.A.F. Hurricanes as they sailed out of the Gulf of Trieste, hoisted the white flag and were escorted into Allied ports. By 5 May, some 23 enemy ships, including one submarine and seven E-boats had surrendered at Ancona: the few surviving enemy vessels, both naval and merchant, were scuttled.

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(1) Pag and Karlobag were captured on 6 Apl. 45.

(2) Operation 'Antagonise'.

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BALKAN AIR FORCE ANTI-SHIPING OPERATION  
(JANUARY - MAY 1945)

Introduction

The whole strategic military background, the target systems, the forces engaged and the picture of the enemy's sea communications have been now given in sufficient depth for study. It only remains to give a brief outline of the Allied air effort in the last months of the war.

Only the broad outlines are given here, for anything more would be repetitive and suggest more importance than the waning stages of the Balkan war merited.

To some, the individual methods of our air attacks and their inroads on the involved German system of supply by small craft may be of perennial interest. The sources for such research are named in the footnote. (1)

Air operations (January - April 1945) (2)

The weather in the first half of January 1945 was so bad that flying was only possible on four days. R.F. Beaufighters carried out several strikes against gun positions on Lussin Piccolo, one of which recorded 123 hits in the target area. With improving weather in the second half of the month, Baltimores and Marauders bombed Lussin Piccolo and Rab, the E-boat base at Vergarice and shipping in Pola harbour. On the 31st, R.A.F. aircraft sank S.S. <sup>Mediceo</sup> ~~Mediceo~~ (5,083 G.R.T.) at the mouth of the Tagliamento River. Rocket Beaufighters with Mustang escort destroyed explosive motor boats at Cigale Cove. Rocket Hurricanes from Vis strafed shipping, guns at Lussin and other docks at <sup>Tablanac</sup> ~~Jablanac~~. Among the small shipping sunk by air attack it is confirmed that there were one <sup>Tablanac</sup> ~~Jablanac~~ Sibel ferry at ~~Jablanac~~. (3)

/Clearer

(1) Balkan Air Force O.R.B. and appendices: History of the Balkan Air Force (A.H.B.II.J.1/130). For monthly statistics on enemy shipping losses refer to Vol. VIII of the R.A.F. Narrative entitled the R.A.F. in Maritime War - Statistics; and for the fate of individual ships and craft refer to the A.H.B. volume 6 on Enemy Shipping Losses in the Mediterranean, June 1940 - May 1945 Nominal List.

(2) Full accounts in the A.H.B. Vol.II on The Italian Campaign.

(3) There had already been an important success on the night 3/4 Jan.45 to the credit of Nos. 458 and 272 R.A.F. Squadrons, when they sank S.S. Fromethous (2,380 G.R.T.), a converted tanker in Trieste.

Clearer skies in February's first fortnight brought R.A.F. aircraft out in a new record strength. Among a variety of operations may be mentioned shipping sweeps over the Podgoraki Channel, attacks by Beaufighters, Marauders and Mustangs <sup>Senj</sup> on ~~Brijuni~~ and Gospić. On 24 Feb. 45, during a week of concentration on shipping targets, the minelayer Blackback (4,200 tons displacement) was burnt out by R.A.F. Beaufighters in Fiume. (1)

The participation of the heavy U.S. and R.A.F. bombers of M.A.S.A.F. in February must be quoted as a success. It opened on 15 February with light attacks on Pola and Fiume. By the end of the month they greatly reduced the value to the enemy of these two ports. (2)

The anti-shipping offensive continued intermittently through March 1945. Sustained efforts by Hurricanes, Spitfires and Mustangs against shipping at the important <sup>Arso</sup> ~~Arso~~ coal wharf resulted in the sinking of two patrol boats, a gun carrier and a tug (although more was claimed). Later in the month, our fighters <sup>sank</sup> ~~sank~~ not less than 11 lighters off the Po Delta. German island defences and coastal batteries were shot up. American day and R.A.F. night bombers continued their attacks on ports and installations at Trieste, Pola, Fiume and Monfalcone. Four ex-Italian submarines and a German corvette were among confirmed sinkings.

Brief reference must be made here to the successful attack on Venetian docks (Operation 'Bowler') on 21 Mar. 45. (3) S.S. Otto Leonhardt (3,682 G.R.T.) was sunk by aircraft of D.A.F. No. 239 Wing, as well as the German torpedo boat T.A.42, two lighters and a coastal tanker (LIA I). This was, coupled with the crippling of the other ports, a mortal blow to German coastwise shipping. Aircraft of M.A.C.A.F. operating from Vis Island, strafed small shipping and attacked guns on Lussino.

April saw the final subjugation of the Germans in Northern Dalmatia and Italy. Balkan and Coastal Air Forces played a useful part in striking at enemy shipping in the waters of the northern islands. On 19 April, <sup>Rrk</sup> ~~Arso~~ Island was captured, followed by Lussino and Cherso. Good weather conditions prevailed for most of April. The main air effort was in support of Fourth Yugoslav Army

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(1) She had been already sunk on 5/11/44 by D.A.F. and raised.

(2) Refer to Enemy shipping losses in the Mediterranean (A.H.B. for details of enemy losses.)

(3) Figure 26. Refer to R.A.F. Narrative 'The Italian Campaign' Vol. II for details.

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in Croatia, against shipping in the Northern Adriatic and defences on the last German-held islands and the coastline of Istria, squadrons of M.A.S.A.F., M.A.T.A.F. and M.A.C.A.F. operated in this task. Fiume and Pola suffered their last poundings. Hurricanes and Spitfires swept the islands and coasts, destroying lighters off the mouth of the Po and a few odd craft at Senj and Umago. There was very little left to hit, no merchant shipping and only a few (1) ferry boats and fishing vessels. The end had come in the Adriatic.

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(1) Figure 27.

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CHAPTER 4

AIR OPERATIONS IN THE GREEK INSURRECTION  
(DECEMBER 1944 - JANUARY 1945) AND IN THE  
AEGEAN (JANUARY - MAY 1945)

'We have a form of government, not fetched by invitation from the laws of our neighbouring states, which, because in the administration, it hath respect, not to a few, but to the multitude, is called a Democracy. .... And we live not only free in the administration of the state, but also one with another, void of jealousy .... not offended at any man for following his own humour. .... And when this power of the City shall seem great to you, consider then that the same was purchased by valiant men, and by men that knew their duty, and by men that were sensible of dishonour when they were in fight... ... For having every one given his body to the Common-wealth, they receive in place thereof an undecaying commendation, and a most remarkable sepulchre, not wherein they are buried so much, as wherein their glory is laid up upon all occasions, both of speech and action, to be remembered for ever. For to famous men, all the earth is a sepulchre, and their virtues shall be testified, not only by the inscription in stone at home, but by an unwritten record of the mind, which more than any monument, will remain with everyone for ever.'

Pericles' Funeral Oration at the  
Ceramicum in Athens.

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AIR OPERATIONS IN THE GREEK INSURRECTION

(DECEMBER 1944 - JANUARY 1945)

The Military Background

The military situation in late November 1944

As the Germans passed beyond the frontiers of Greece, the restoration of law and order and the relief of the civilian population gained momentum. An agreement was signed on 26 September at Caserta, <sup>(1)</sup> placing General Scobie in command of all armed forces in Greece. The guerilla leaders promised to punish any attempt by their units to take the law into their hands, rivalries were declared buried and a national union of all forces planned. In Athens, no action was to be taken save under General Scobie's orders.

When British troops arrived in Athens, columns of E.L.A.S., the left-wing irregular forces, were already there. They were still in Athens by mid-November, having accumulated dumps of military stores. Their forces in Athens and Piraeus had been built up to about 2,400 men and there were some 2,000 others in the hills north and west of the city. The existing Greek regular army consisted of the Sacred Squadron, a Mountain Brigade, with other units trained in Middle East Forces. The Prime Minister of the coalition Government ordered the irregular forces E.L.A.S. and E.D.E.S. (the centre party group) to hand over their arms on 10 Dec. 44.

During November, it became apparent that E.A.M., the left-wing political coalition, would not agree to the unconditional disarmament of E.L.A.S. The tragic preoccupation of the Greeks with politics and divided loyalties of the E.A.M. (under the thumb of K.K.E. the Communist party) were now to poison relations throughout the whole of Greek society and between many Greeks and the British forces who had brought about their liberation.

The division of irregular forces into two opposing political groups had always prevented their full military use. E.L.A.S., the numerically more powerful group, prepared plans for the capture of Athens before the re-establishment of the Greek National Army, the overthrow of the authority of the exiled Greek government (now restored) and the

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(1) At Appendix 51.

/ establishment .

establishment of the Communist-dominated coalition E.A.M. in its place by force of arms. On 12 October, with the last Germans out of Athens, the chance came. By 15 October, with the arrival of British troops, it had passed. E.A.M. then tried for several weeks to undermine and destroy the Greek Government by political pressure and threats. When these failed, E.L.A.S. put into action its previously prepared plan for an armed coup d'etat. The first shots were fired in the streets of Athens on 3 Dec. 44 and on 5 December, Lt. Gen. Scobie ordered the small British garrison to take the offensive to restore law and order within the city area.

British Ground Forces in Athens.

Under General Scobie's command, the senior British Commander in Athens (1) controlled his own widely scattered 23rd Armoured Brigade and part of the 2nd Independent Parachute Brigade. His area extended into Attica and most of the Peloponnese, other than the north-west region round Patras. The 3rd Greek Mountain Brigade was confined to barracks in Athens. Scobie hoped to handle the situation through the local police and gendarmerie with a stiffening of Allied security forces, but found it necessary to ask before long for a total force of eight infantry brigades and one armoured car regiment. Eventually his forces were built up to one infantry division and five brigades.

The British Land Forces in Greece had never been intended for an army of occupation, and at the end of November they amounted to little more than one and a half infantry divisions, with a reduced scale of artillery and almost no armoured troops. They had not been disposed tactically, but as communications were opened up, were dispersed throughout its length and breadth to maintain law and order and assist in the distribution of supplies.

At the beginning of December, Scobie grouped the British forces under operational command of H.Q. 23rd Armoured Brigade, which included just one squadron of tanks and one of armoured cars. Included in the force was the 2902nd Field Squadron of the Royal Air Force Regiment, with seven armoured cars.

The Army forces available on 5 Dec. 44 were known as 'Arkforce' (1) with headquarters at Athens. This organisation held until 16 December, when the

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(1) Maj. Gen. R.H.B. Arkwright, D.S.O.

Military Command Athens (1) with headquarters at Phaleron was created. As from 18 December, the tanks of 23rd Armoured Brigade began to arrive and two days later, the K.D.G's (2) landed. Units of the Greek National Guard were formed throughout the period of hostilities. Recruiting began slowly but increased rapidly once E.L.A.S. began to lose ground.

British Air Forces and Bases (3)

It will be recalled that the Air Forces began their progress into Greece by seizing Araxos airfield (near Patras) and staging forward from it to Tatoi (Menidi), Kalamaki (formerly Hassani) and Sedes near Salonika; <sup>and Eleusis</sup> Megara enjoyed only a fleeting significance. During the insurrection, Tatoi and Araxos were evacuated for security reasons and Hassani became a key base on which the success of the whole of Allied military operations depended.

Air Headquarters Greece was at Kifissia, a small town some 20 miles north of Athens, with an advanced unit in Athens. Air Commodore W. Tuttle was the A.O.C. R.A.F. Greece.

The brief with which No. 337 Wing with its controlling staff in Air H.Q. Greece had entered that country had been (as had the Army's) - purely pacific. Tactically, if it had to face an enemy its early organization lacked both strength and significance. Most of its officers and men took it as a matter of course that the Greeks were friendly Allies. In the early days of the liberation there was a contagious elation in the air and many military personnel had formed personal friendships or sentimental attachments.

The primary role of the R.A.F. in Greece had been laid down by Balkan Air Force as the air defence of Athens, assistance to the Army in the field of law and order, the disarming of any German forces, attacks on hostile shipping in the Aegean and any German seaborne evacuations. In the event, Luftwaffe reactions were negligible, the Army had needed no tactical air support and no disarming was called for except at Patras.

Events

- (1) Abbreviation M.C.A. O.C. Lt. Gen. J.L.I. Hawkesworth, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.
- (2) Armoured cars.
- (3) All details on air forces, bases and operations from Air H.Q. Greece and No. 337 Wing O.R.B's and appendices: Report by A.O.C. R.A.F. Greece on capture of rear A.H.Q. Greece by E.L.A.S. forces, in A.H.Q. Greece O.R.B. appendix D.1.Feb.45.

Events developed on wholly unforeseen lines. Ground lines of communication were completely disrupted and extensive minesweeping was needed before sea communications could be opened. Hence, air transport assumed the highest importance. The Greek Government could only exert its influence outside Attica by the air transport of its emissaries and by the dissemination of leaflets conveying official decrees and news. The Germans were out of aircraft range. The R.A.F. devoted its effort to aiding the Army's and the Greek Government's internal communications and to assisting the Royal Hellenic Air Force, (whose squadrons had just arrived) to re-establish itself in Greece. The only operational commitment left in mid-November was an occasional harassing raid on the enemy fortress in Crete.

On 5 Dec. 44, Air H.Q. Greece was located at Kifissia, with an Advanced H.Q. (1) in Athens. The operational Air Forces available were:-

a. ATHENS Area

(i)	No. 94 Squadron	Spitfire Vc
(ii)	No. 108 Squadron	Beaufighter VI
(iii)	No. 224 Squadron	Wellington XIII
(iv)	No. 13 (Hellenic) Squadron	Baltimore V
(v)	No. 335 (Hellenic) Squadron	Spitfire Vc
(vi)	No. 336 (Hellenic) Squadron	Spitfire Vc
(vii)	A.H.Q. Greece Communication Flight, various types including Austers used for A.O.P.	

b. SALONIKA

No. 337 Wing Advanced (Wg. Cdr. J.F. Newman, D.S.O., D.F.C.)  
with under command:-

(i)	No. 32 Squadron	Spitfire Vc
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R.A.F. Regiment available on 5 Dec. 44

Throughout the whole period of the liberation of Greece, and in particular during the troubles, the R.A.F. Regiment co-operated closely and to great effect with the R.A.F. and the Army and their record cannot be isolated from the stream of events without impairing the idea of the unity of the whole British effort.

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(1) See Figures 18 and 19 for all Greek locations.

When the situation deteriorated, (to be precise on 5 Dec.44) No. 1321 Wing<sup>(1)</sup> lay at Kifissia. Under command there were elements of three Field Squadrons<sup>(2)</sup> and three Light Anti-Aircraft Squadrons<sup>(3)</sup> distributed in the Piraeus, Pirgos, Kifissia, and the airfields at Hassani/Kalamaki, Araxos and Salonika/Sedes.

Build-up of R.A.F. and Regiment after 5 Dec. 44

Throughout the operations, the three Hellenic Air Force Squadrons took little or no active part and only flew unarmed reconnaissances after the Truce became effective. During the course of operations, the following British reinforcements arrived and were placed under command of No. 337 Wing.

a. 8.12.44

No. 73 Squadron Spitfire IX<sup>(4)</sup>, operational on 10 Dec.45.

b. 14.12.44

No. 40 S.A.A.F. Spitfire V. 4 aircraft only commenced operating 15 Dec.45.

c. 16.12.44

No. 39 Squadron Beaufighter X (R.P.) commenced operating the same day.

Substantial R.A.F. Regiment reinforcements arrived after the outbreak of the rebellion. They comprised a Paratroop Company of the R.A.F. Levies which arrived<sup>(4)</sup> on 7 December by air, a Rifle Flight<sup>(5)</sup> which arrived on 8 December at Araxos, with two Armoured Flights<sup>(6)</sup> which arrived by sea at Piraeus on 13 and 19 December respectively. All these units came from Italy.

/ E.L.A.S.

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- (1) Wg. Cdr. J. Simpson Officer-in-Command,
  - (2) Nos. 2902, 2908 and 2924.
  - (3) Nos. 2914, 2923 and 2926.
  - (4) No. 2.
  - (5) Of No. 2771 Field Squadron.
  - (6) Of Nos. 2771 and 2788 Squadrons.

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E.L.A.S. Forces

The E.A.M. Navy, (known as E.L.A.N.) possessed a number of caiques which they used for gun running and piratical operations and in terrorising the owners and masters of caiques engaged in legitimate trading. In mid-November 1944, it was estimated that E.L.A.S. had 2,400 men in Athens and Piraeus and another 2,000 in the hills north and west of the city.

1 E.L.A.S. Army Corps was stationed at Athens, and 2 E.L.A.S. Division had its headquarters at Eleusis, 3 E.L.A.S. Division was in the Peloponnese and 13 E.L.A.S. Division at Lemna. After concentration of these forces, the total E.L.A.S. forces engaged in Attica between 10 Dec. 44 and 3 Jan. 45 were put at some 21,000 men.

From time to time during the fighting, reports were received of light anti-aircraft and small arms fire experienced by our aircrews. When E.L.A.S. eventually handed in their arms in accordance with their treaty, several 20 mm. pieces were received from the Athens/Piraeus area, confirming both ground and aircrews' reports of the use of these weapons.

The above figures, the good enemy organization and the ferocity of the later fighting will together strengthen the conviction that there was no question of crushing a harmless, ill-armed, democratic rabble, but of holding the defences against a competently led, well-armed insurgent army, with few inhibitions as to fair play in war, and then carrying out a difficult series of combined operations against fanatical resistance to break the will of the unscrupulous guerrillas and retain Greece within the free world.

The unauthorised Russian Flight to E.L.A.S.  
G.H.Q. (25/26 July 44) (1)

On 23 July 44, a request was made to the A.O.C. Balkan Air Force by the Russian Air Group <sup>(2)</sup> for permission to carry out a training flight from Bari to a point just inland from the coast of Greece opposite Corfu. Permission was given and it was specifically indicated that no dropping or landing operations were to be undertaken. The flight was postponed until the night of 25/26 July, when the permission was flagrantly abused. Orders for the flight were passed from the acting head of the Soviet Mission to Tito, <sup>(3)</sup> to the Colonel Commanding the Russian Air Group. <sup>(4)</sup> The cargo included a Russian colonel and an unconfirmed number of the officers including both members of the Soviet Mission to Tito and Tito men. These were dropped in Greece at a landing ground used by the Allies <sup>(5)</sup> without the prior knowledge of the British in Cairo or the Allied Mission in Greece. British air liaison officers in Greece confirmed later that the Russian group had arrived at E.L.A.S. General Headquarters.

This breach of faith was taken up on the highest level as yet another of a series of unfortunate incidents with the Russians wherein they had broken their agreements as to the operations of their aircraft in the Mediterranean theatre. The impression that their object was to <sup>take</sup> the advantage of the position they had gained to further their own political objectives without co-ordination or collaboration with the Allies was strengthened and their attempts to cover up such activities by dissimulation or a bland show of ignorance did nothing to restore confidence in them.

The connection between this operation and the competent pattern of the Communist military effort during the insurrection does not need emphasising. The mission remained near E.L.A.S. Headquarters and was seen in W/T contact with Moscow and Tito's Headquarters. Relations between the Western Allies and E.A.M. (the political direction of the E.L.A.S. military forces) continued to deteriorate.

- / Air
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- (1) C.-in-C. R.A.F. MEDME File J.C.S.5110 Pt.III (INV.1/90/197(c). A.H.B.)
  - (2) H.Q. Bari.
  - (3) Col. Melnikof at Vis.
  - (4) Col. Sokolov.
  - (5) Known as Featherbed, at 30°20'N. 21°30'E. (PHEA WEAT).

Air Forces available for Transport of Reinforcements

There was no air transport organisation based in Greece, either under command of Air H.Q. Greece or the Balkan Air Force. Balkan Air Force (1) controlled five squadrons of Special Duties aircraft, all fully occupied in the Balkans and Northern Italy and one U.S. Troop Carrier squadron. None of these were available during the insurrection. Balkan Air Force was using a detachment of Dakotas belonging to No. 267 R.A.F. Squadron, temporarily based at Bari for Special Duties and could call in emergency on the rest of the squadron, (2) bringing the squadron strength up to 24 aircraft. It also controlled temporarily detachments of Nos. 216, 44 (S.A.A.F.) and 28 (S.A.A.F.) Squadrons, each comprising 2 Dakotas and 3 Ansons. The bulk of the purely Transport forces were allotted to Middle East Command. They were subordinate jointly to H.Q. (R.A.F.) and (R.A.F.) Transport Command (U.K.). Some were based on the Cairo area and some at Maison Blanche (Algeria).

With the battle in Italy raging and the needs of the theatre and world communications always pressing, it still to be seen that the bits and pieces of Dakota squadrons were not strong enough to meet a sudden call for a major effort in time to be decisive, handy as they were to Athens. The winter weather was unfavourable and only Hassani airfield was serviceable. What other forces could be called on?

It was, not for the first time, that H.A.A.F. was to call in its medium and heavy bombers to aid the Army and Air Force and, as Greece was a British commitment, No. 205 R.A.F. Group was called in ~~for aid~~. This group could muster about one hundred aircraft for a special task from a paper strength of some one hundred and fifty. It consisted of four wings and one squadron, (4) all based on satellites of Foggia. About one-half of the aircraft were Wellingtons and the other half Liberators and a few Halifaxes.

The general situation ~~existing~~ and the weight and disposition of the air and ground forces available have now been reviewed. The air forces are seen to be carrying out multiple tasks from an H.Q. at Kifissia and an airfield at Hassani, with various units, as well as the R.A.F. Regiment, installed in Athens. It was against a background of mounting tension, and superficial calm and general unpreparedness that the Communists decided to strike.

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- (1) H.Q. Bari.
  - (2) Under command of No. 216 R.A.F. Group, advanced H.Q. Caserta.
  - (3) Nos. 231, 236, 240 and 2 (S.A.A.F.)
  - (4) No. 614 R.A.F.

THE OUTBREAK OF HOSTILITIES (1)

(2-8 Dec. 44)

Breakdown of Negotiations (2 Dec. 44)

On 2 Dec. 44, the protracted negotiations between the Government and the left-wing ministers broke down. An Order in Council disbanding all irregular forces and leaving the existing regular army intact was prepared, but the six E.A.M. members of the Cabinet, i.e. two from the EKE (2) and four from the other parties in the left-wing coalition, refused to sign and resigned.

Outbreak of Hostilities (3-4 Dec. 44)

These moves were the signal to the E.L.A.S. forces to put into effect their plans to seize Athens and Piraeus and eject the Greek Government by armed force. On the night 2/3 December, H.Q. 1 Corps E.L.A.S. (3) moved out of the city to a secret destination: on the same night, armed columns left Thebes and Eleusis and began to march on the capital. At 0900 hours on 3 December, local E.L.A.S. groups began to enforce a general strike throughout Athens and Piraeus; and by nightfall all public services had ceased to function.

On the morning of 3 December, E.A.M. demonstrators who had assembled contrary to orders in Constitutional Square ~~†~~ clashed with police, exchanging shots and throwing a large number of hand grenades. Eleven people were reported killed and sixty-four wounded. General Scobie held his hand, leaving the maintenance of order to the Gendarmerie and Athens City Police. (4) ~~†~~ E.L.A.S. troops disobeyed the order confining them to barracks and large groups of them infiltrated that night into the city outskirts. One group of 870 were intercepted by British parachute troops.

Show of Air Strength (3 Dec. 44)

While two Wellingtons dropped leaflets urging reconciliation, ten Beaufighters and eight Spitfires flew in formation over Athens, where there were large processions and concentrations of people in the main streets and squares. Again in the afternoon, the show of strength was repeated, this time by eight Beaufighters and six Spitfires. Similar demonstration flights were carried out by Spitfires in the Salamina and Dramareas. Nine Wellingtons transported supplies and a

/Beaufighter

- (1) General sources for this part are:- Operations of British Troops in the Insurrection in Greece - Brit.Hist.Soc. Central Med. (A.H.B.IX20/4/1): A.H.Q. Greece, B.A.F. No. 337 Wing O.R.D. and appendices.  
 (2) Communist Party.  
 (3) The H.Q. controlling the E.L.A.S. force in Athens.  
 (4) Working under command of the senior British Commander in Athens.

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Beaufighter kept a night watch on Crete. In all, 40 sorties were flown in the  
(1)  
24 hours.

R.A.F. precautionary measures

As far back as 14 Nov. 44, the service commanders in Greece, aware of the approaching project for a coup d'état, initiated a number of precautionary measures for the retention of vital points. These were carried out unobtrusively. It cannot be said that elementary steps to protect Allied interests were not undertaken. It was decided that an attack on Air H.Q. at Kifissia was unlikely, but that if sustained, an attack in force could not be overcome unless a relief column arrived in reasonable time. Prestige considerations outweighed any idea of abandoning Kifissia. The A.O.C. agreed to set up a small Tactical Air H.Q. in Athens at the first sign of trouble, to advise the Army Commander, with R/T and radio communications with Kifissia and Hassani. When informed on the 1st of the deterioration of the situation, radio watches between Air H.Q. at Kifissia and the Tactical Air H.Q. in Athens were opened.

At Kifissia<sup>a</sup> an R.A.F. Regiment officer was the local Defence Commander: a defence plan was prepared based on the establishment of a perimeter around the two  
(2)  
main buildings, into which all personnel were to retire in the event of trouble. The Regiment's light anti-aircraft guns were to be used in a ground role. Arms and ammunition were brought up to scale and range practice instituted. Tatoi airfield could not be defended and would be closed, only a flight of the R.A.F. Regiment remaining at Kifissia. A small landing strip for Ansters was laid at Kifissia and 14 days reserve of rations for all R.A.F. units in Greece ordered.

It had been known at Hassani as early as 2 December that large numbers of Army personnel with ammunition and equipment were to be flown in from Italy. Arrangements were going ahead there for the marshalling and refuelling of aircraft. Regiment armoured cars were prepared for action and Bofors' guns reloaded. Night guards on aircraft and billets were increased.

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(1)	<u>Squadron</u>	<u>Sorties</u>
	No. 108	18
	No. 94	20
	No. 335	2

(2) H.Q. and Officers' Mess hotels.

/ Orders

Orders were given that one-third of the unit strength must remain in billets each night, with transport available to <sup>convey</sup> these men to dispersal areas in the event of trouble. A system of anti-sabotage visual signals was devised. Officers and other ranks were "put into the picture" of the course of events which had led to the disturbing transformation of the situation.

When the Air C.-in-C. learned that Kifissia Police Station was surrounded by E.L.A.S. troops, his anxiety for the safety of his H.Q. was sharpened. He sent the Local Defence Commander to report on the local E.L.A.S. attitude. The E.L.A.S. colonel was full of unctious and assured him of his friendly intentions towards the R.A.F. Some local policemen were given sanctuary and sent to Athens. So far, so good. The sun went down on an evening of uneasy calm.

/ The

The Situation Versana (4 Dec. 44)

The bird's-eye view of British aircrafts patrolling on the 4th revealed dangerous developments. Spitfires reconnoitred Salonika and Drama, observing no significant changes. But others patrolling the Athens area saw plenty of action. Op. Capt. Pedley, flying along the roads Athens - Eleusis - Thevie - Avlen observed about 1,000 armed men marching towards Piraeus and the docks: permission to attack was refused. The docks had been paralysed by the strike and there was sporadic firing in Athens. Several parties of about 10 men in each were seen at Daphni (near Eleusis) marching south of the village. In the afternoon, Pedley saw meetings proceeding, large parties of armed men and firing from a town building. The temple of Zeus was being besieged; an aircraft orbiting low over a building south of it was engaged by rifle and machine gun fire. A pre-dusk Bomfighter had a similar experience: it was fired on from a hill at Ay Yorgine. After dark, a Wellington reconnoitred the roads north of Athens, using flares for illumination, but no large concentrations of armed men were seen.

The general situation was one of crisis, with sporadic firing. The police, E.L.A.S. and the liberal partisans (known as X-ists) were all involved. Tanks patrolled the streets, but fired on nobody. Before dawn, however, E.L.A.S. forces had attacked several Police and Gendarmerie stations in Athens and Piraeus and had actually overrun the Police H.Q. and two other stations in Piraeus. It still seemed apparent, however, that the E.L.A.S. forces were under orders to avoid any armed clash with British troops. The only incident up to the morning of the 4th in which British troops had been fired on had been the wounding of three naval ratings in the Greek Naval Cadets College in the Piraeus, the seat of British Naval Headquarters. Nevertheless it was clear, too, that E.L.A.S. intended to establish a hold over the greater part of Athens as rapidly as possible, <sup>and</sup> to eliminate the Civil Police and Gendarmerie. By maintaining the appearance of friendly intentions vis-à-vis the British, they hoped to induce the British authorities to stand aside while they carried out their plan.

While temporising with E.L.A.S. in the fading hope of persuading them to see reason, General Scobie issued an ultimatum, calling for a cessation of attacks on the Gendarmerie, withdrawal from all police barracks and retirement to a demarcation line beyond the Athens - Piraeus confines by 2400 hours on

/ 6 December.

1/TK

6 December. Any offensive action after 1600 hours on 4 December would be considered as hostile and dealt with accordingly. The Army called several times for tactical reconnaissance to locate E.L.A.S. troops marching towards the city, but the A.O.C. gave strict orders that aircraft were not to take offensive action. The first Air Movement of troops (4-5 Dec. 44) As the situation deteriorated, the intended despatch of reinforcements to Greece became a matter of grave concern to the Supreme Commander, representing as it did a serious drain on resources needed in Italy. At this time, 2nd Independent Parachute Brigade was preparing to return to Italy. It was decided to send 139th Infantry Brigade (than resting) to replace it. On 4 and 5 December, therefore, forces of some 50 Dakota flew in two battalions of replacements to Hassan airfield and another battalion sailed for Salonika. A brigade of 4th Indian Division was due to arrive in Greece in the second week of December for transfer to the Aegean and Cyclades Islands. It was agreed that Seebie should retain the Parachute Brigade and all the other units existing in Greece. Although the reinforcements strengthened the British position as a whole, the various units were scattered with no regard for tactical consideration, although the bulk of the installations were within three distinct areas of the installations areas, viz: the centre of Athens, the Piraeus port area and Phaleron. The British and Greek position was by no means strong. Hassan was the only practicable airfield for all purposes and Air H.Q. was isolated at Kifissia. An enemy entrenched in houses, caves and temples, would present a very difficult and unusual target system to the air forces, one calling for a special attention to precision.

The First Air Movement of Troops (4-5 Dec. 44)

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The Storm breaks (5 Dec.44)

On the afternoon of 4 December, E.L.A.S. troops opened fire, for the first time on British troops who were guarding the Singros prison. At the end of the day, many Police and Gendarmerie stations were short of ammunition and it was decided that British troops must go to their aid. They were to take firm action, but only open fire as a last resort. But they never had a chance of exercising such tact, for, by dawn on 5 December, it was apparent that General Scobie's ultimatum to the insurgents would be disregarded, that the latter had no intention of leaving the city confines and that attacks on police stations would continue. Scobie had no alternative but to order British troops into action to drive E.L.A.S. out of Athens and restore law and order. At 1145 hours on 5 Dec.44, he ordered Brigadier Arkwright to take full offensive action against all E.L.A.S. troops remaining within the demarcation line <sup>(1)</sup> and he ordered the G.O.C. 4th Indian Division to maintain control at Salonika and Patras.

The Air Officer Commanding was at III Corps H.Q. during the forenoon and was asked by Scobie to order the R.A.F. to attack any armed columns moving on the roads into Athens. <sup>(2)</sup> Tuttle proceeded to order the evacuation of Tatoi airfield and the strengthening of Kifissia's defences. He established an advanced Air and War Room H.Q. at III Corps H.Q. in Athens. Permission was given to fire a warning burst followed by attack. The two Hellenic Air Force squadrons were growing restive and would neither join in operations against other Greeks nor disarm. Steps to neutralise them were considered.

Aircraft on sorties were now in direct V.H.F. contact with the Army. ~~Whereas~~ In the forenoon, aircraft on tactical reconnaissance merely made notes; towards the end of the day five Spitfires dealt with crowds of armed people near Eleusis and Livadhia. Warning shots were first fired above their heads and into the hills. The crowds dispersed. A truck was destroyed after E.L.A.S. troops had left it, but stray bullets killed two and wounded four. This was still not open warfare.

In Athens city, the situation worsened rapidly. Processions were abandoned and shooting continued all day in earnest. The R.A.F. Assistant Provost Marshal

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- (1) Eleusis-Aspro Pirgos Liessia-Kifissia-Marathon Dam-Pallini-Koropi-Prasaronisi.
  - (2) R.A.F. details from Air H.Q. Greece and No. 337 Wing G.R.B's.

- (1) Central Athens, Northern Athens, South Athens and Fourthly Piraeus (the great port) and Phaleron the small seaside town at the end of the long road from Athens, south of Piraeus and I mile from Hesperia airstrip.
- (2) Formerly a Luftwaffe H.Q.

Tatoz was being evacuated, but Hesperia airstrip was the hub of the whole dumps lay. The race course at the end of the Athens-Phaleron road, where the principal supply Phaleron was the 2902nd Field Squadron of the R.A.F. Regiment, established round both as a base and with its roads leading to Athens. The only British force at part at Piraeus represented a vital base some which had to be held at all costs. Tatoz and Hesperia airstrip, the important military dumps at Phaleron and the north of constitution square.

The advanced Air H.Q. were all now in the Metathron/Tanion building (2) 100 yards to be engaged without regard for the other occupants. Artillery, III Corps and ferrying with operations. On the other hand, buildings housing R.A.F. forces were opened and unarmored hostile crowds were not to be fired on unless they were in the R.A.F. troops were to be asked once to lay down their arms before fire was sectors (1) were ordered for dawn on 6 December. The only restriction was that for miles out of the city. Full-scale attacks on R.A.F. within each of the four The sector covering Hesperia airstrip was Piraeus and Phaleron (on the water side) a The Athens area was split into four sectors, each controlled by a brigade. (1)

The British Plan (5/6 Dec 44)

determined attack on R.A.F. would lead to their early collapse. they themselves were attacked. The British were wrong in supposing that a strong correctly believed that the insurgents would not open fire on the British until was held on the night of 5/6 December in an atmosphere of quiet confidence. They armoured core. The whole British force was now named 'Artillery'. A conference components was the squadron of the R.A.F. Regiment in Phaleron with the few light Armoured Brigade to attack the insurgents the next day. Included in the armoured looked up under guard. On the evening of 5 December, orders were given to the safer office. All patrols were withdrawn from the streets and the motor transport R.A.F. troops came in to apologize. The A.P.M. moved to what appeared to be a lieutenant slipped out for information and orders, the office was damaged and his office as a strongpoint and the cross-fire was intense. While a flight rounds of ammunition apiece. A posse of R.A.F. were using a doorway just opposite their units. He now found his unit closely invested, with only a .35 gun and 10 had used his small force to shepherd R.A.F. and R.N. personnel out of the city to

campaign. Relief and reinforcements ~~in force~~ could only come through it and it must be held. If the airfield were immobilised, the Naval H.Q., the light anti-aircraft unit <sup>and</sup> the slender garrisons everywhere overrun, the installations and dumps destroyed and the forces in Athens cut off from the outside world, a tragic <sup>defeat</sup> ~~defeat~~ with untold consequences was certain to ensue. It was, therefore, very wisely decided to take advantage of the reluctance of E.L.A.S. to fire the first shots, to rush the bases and establish a firm foothold in the critical areas ~~and air bases~~. Two battalions rose early and piled into lorries. At dawn they drove out through the E.L.A.S. lines towards Phaleron.

#### Air Support Organisation in the early Stages (1)

Kifissia was isolated, 10 miles N.E. of Athens, and Hassani lay about 8 miles S. of it. There had never been an Air Support Signals Unit in Greece: communications for air support would have to be by line. A combined Army-Air operations staff was improvised and worked in III Group H.Q. and Air H.Q. Greece's joint quarters. It consisted of R.A.F. Operations staff officers, Intelligence officers and controllers, the G.2 (Air) of III Corps and an Air Liaison Officer from Air H.Q. at Kifissia.

The communications in the first phase consisted of:-

- (1) Telephone lines through E.L.A.S. - controlled exchanges from this combined control to Air H.Q. at Kifissia and to No. 337 Wing at Hassani.
- (11) Teleprinters to Air H.Q. and Wing through the same exchanges.
- (111) A Very High Frequency set on the roof of III Corps building which could communicate with Hassani airfield and with aircraft when airborne.

Even this far from satisfactory Air Support Control organisation could not be fully implemented, as the road to Kifissia was cut and the Air H.Q. overrun (as will be related later). Air support was run for some three weeks with only the G.2(Air), the A.L.O. and his clerk who were pulled in from Kifissia just in time, the R.A.F. S.A.S.O., one Intelligence officer and operators for the V.H.F. set. It amounted, in fact, to a makeshift Air Support Control.

/The

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(1) H.A.A.F. Report on Air Support in Greece 26.4.45 (A.H.B. IX J.1/256/12).

The forces to be controlled by this small unit were even less than appeared on paper. Of the two Spitfire squadrons only No. 94 was available. <sup>(1)</sup> One night fighter Beaufighter squadron (No. 108) and one general reconnaissance Wellington squadron (No. 221) with a communication flight completed the muster. None of these squadrons had any experience of army co-operation other than harassing Germans in their retreat from Greece, but they soon grasped the requirements of the Army and the long range tactical reconnaissances by Beaufighters and Spitfires were before long producing accurate, valuable information. Recapitulating the tasks which lay before the air forces in the unique situation presented, they were to be tactical and artillery reconnaissance, close support against such targets as headquarters, strongpoints, gun and mortar positions, continuous armed reconnaissances over troop columns, flare and supply dropping.

Sorties on the 4th and 5th had been on a low level. Including a few shoots <sup>(2)</sup> on Crete, they totalled to 17 on the 4th <sup>(3)</sup> and 34 on the 5th. So far, no bomb line could be laid down, but a perimeter line, an equivalent in one sense, between Khalkis and Corinth, was established so as to confine the fighting to the province of Attica.

The Ground Fighting (6 - 8 Dec. 44)

In order that the record of operations may be explicit, a brief résumé of the ground operations in the first three days of open fighting must first be made.

The 139th Infantry Brigade broke through the E.L.A.S. line early on the 6th, reached a point close to the tip of the Piraeus peninsula and, with the help of the R.A.F. Regiment, secured the Phalerum area. They crossed the River Ilissos and, by the evening of 7 December, had reached the fringe of the built-up area of Piraeus: here they were held up by mines and E.L.A.S. troops. They held precariously a narrow strip of coastline and beat off an attempt at infiltration on the night 8/9 December. On the 7th and 8th, they fought a ding-dong battle for Piraeus during which two battalions were separated and no decision was reached. However, ships were now unloading in the safe Phalerum area and Hassani airfield was firmly held by No. 337 Wing, covered by Army units.

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- (1) No. 32 was at Salonika/Sedes, dedicated to support of the ground forces in the area.
  - (2) No. 54 Sqn. - 8 sorties; No. 108 Sqn. - 2; No. 13 - 3; No. 335 - 2; Gp. Capt. 2.
  - (3) No. 94 Sqn. - 17; No. 108 Sqn. 6; No. 221 - 1; No. 335 - 6; No. 283 - 1.

In the city, the British had managed by the end of 8 December in clearing and holding a compact area, the perimeter of which extended for some 3,000 yards from east to west and from 1,000 to 2,000 yards from north to south. All sectors contained dominating features: only to the west and northwest was the perimeter really closely invested. Many E.L.A.S. troops wore civilian clothes and their infiltrations were so persistent that it was becoming clear that the garrison would soon be so completely on the defensive that there would be none available to take the offensive.

No. 337 Wing's Aircraft in Action (6-7 Dec. 44) (1)

An increasingly clear picture of events was built up by air reconnaissance on 6, 7 and 8 December and Army calls for close tactical support grew in number daily. On the 6th, early Spitfires reported a quiet situation in the Eleusis-Tatoi area, armed groups at Genihi and Keropi and in the Acropolis area (secured by the British) flasher and tracer fire and a battle in progress. A bomb line was now supplied by the Army. Military targets for aircraft were defined as:-

- (1) All armed E.L.A.S.
- (ii) All vehicles containing <sup>them</sup> ~~items~~. If the occupants could not be clearly distinguished, aircraft were to dive on the vehicle, disperse the occupants, destroy the vehicle and the occupants if armed.
- (iii) Trains, the engines of which were to be machine-gunned.
- (iv) Any opposition to our troops.
- (v) Obvious convoys of horse-drawn traffic or mule trains.

Beaufighters joined in the tactical reconnaissance throughout the areas Corinth-Tripolis-Megara-Athens. Spitfires observed frequent crowds and dispersed armed groups at Megara. One Spitfire in the New Ionia area reported about 500 <sup>people</sup> carrying Greek and Russian flags moving towards Tatoi. At 1610 hours, four Spitfires (No. 94 Squadron) were airborne to attack armed guerrillas hiding in woods in the Alcos-Singrou area, scoring hits all over the woods, while the Army attacked with mortars and was enabled to secure the area. A further four Spitfires attacked Archittos hill feature where E.L.A.S. were reported digging in. Although no insurgents could be seen from the air, the Army reported later that many of them had been liquidated.

/Beaufighters

(1) No. 337 Wing O.R.B.

Beaufighters (No. 108) flew 14 sorties, Spitfires (No. 94) also flew 14 sorties up to the close of the day period; No. 13 Greek Squadron, although refusing to attack their fellow countrymen, sent six Baltimores to bomb a German ammunition dump at Vares (Crete). Wellingtons carried on dropping leaflets and carried supplies to Sedes airfield at Salonika. Spitfires from this latter base flew five reconnaissance sorties on the 6th and six on the 7th.

Early on the 7th, two Wellingtons dropped flares along the Megara - Eleusis road, but to no effect. Nor did a first light Beaufighter see anything to report. The first constructive work was done by two Spitfires, which escorted a road convoy from Air H.Q. at Kifissia safely through to Athens, not without ugly incidents. Other Spitfires dispersed an E.L.A.S. force on the Lamia-Levadhia road without firing on them. Four Beaufighters assisted our troops fighting for Arditos Hill (next to the Stadium) causing an explosion. Spitfires (all of No. 94 Squadron) were busy through the morning and flew over Tourkovounia Hill (<sup>Athens</sup> ~~Piraeus area~~) and Lefos Strofli Hill. No firing took place as our own troops were on the eastern boundary of the hill and E.L.A.S. were hidden. They wanted to intervene in the street fighting round barricades, but permission was not granted, the fighting being at too close quarters. Two more shot up buildings and slit trenches in the Piraeus area, 250 and 500 <sup>pound</sup> bombs were dropped on guerillas and a blockhouse. They were fired at from roof tops and a hill near Piraeus. Four Beaufighters made a great effort to aid in the fighting in open ground east of Athens, but the fighting was too liquid as they approached and the support was called off. Three others had more luck at Lefos Kastelli soon after 1428 hours, when they shot up men running on open ground and blew the roof off a building with a tower causing a big explosion and fire (probably ammunition.) Machine gun fire was reported from the railway station, 88 mm. fire from Piraeus docks and some .303 mm. fire from houses. One aircraft was hit and left for base and a British cruiser opened fire. A good deal of reconnaissance was flown during the day. So the pattern continued - it was, operationally, a very busy and exacting day for all concerned.

/ Safety .....

Safety Precautions at Hassani Airfield (1)

It was clear to the A.O.C. No. 337 Wing by 7 December that in the event of an attack developing against Hassani, little help could be expected from the Army, themselves fully stretched in the Athens-Piraeus area. Twelve Bofors guns were sited round the perimeter; road blocks were constructed on the two main roads passing to the North and South of the airfield and manned by the R.A.F. Regiment. By day, all civilians were <sup>searched</sup> ~~checked~~ for arms; and by night, only military traffic was allowed to pass. A Bren gun was placed at each block, itself within the field of fire of a Bofors gun. All airmen were confined to billets; arms and ammunition were issued to all personnel and Mills grenades to selected men in each defence flight. The aerodrome was divided into defended localities and, in addition to the normal aircraft guard, one-third of each unit's strength hereafter slept on the aerodrome each night, so as to be available in a 'backers-up' role in case of trouble. Two armoured cars were kept on continuous patrol and the few remaining stood in reserve. A Battle H.Q. was constructed in the Operations Block with telephone communications to all gun sites and radio telephone contact with the armoured cars. The tail gunners of the two Wellingtons slept in the Operations Room. Their aircraft were so sited that their tail armament could be employed from the ground to cover two approach lines. One Wellington crew stood by for flare-dropping over the aerodrome in case of E.L.A.S. infiltration attempts. By now, the fighting was quite near the North side of the aerodrome perimeter. Throughout the day and night, rifle, machine gun and heavy artillery fire could be heard.

Sorties rose a little. No. 94's Spitfires flew 26 sorties and No. 103's Beaufighters 16.

/ Air

(1) No. 337 Wing O.R.B.

Air Support Operations (8 Dec. 44)

On the 8th, the ground situation in Athens and Piraeus was hardening to a stalemate and air operations reflected this. Until the weather closed in towards the day's end, the same Spitfire and Beaufighter squadrons reconnoitred and supported the ground forces. The road to Kifissia was scanned for road blocks, a convoy escorted from it to Athens, various searches made for E.L.A.S. formations were made without contributing much. Beaufighters and naval batteries attacked the hill Lefos Kastelli (Piraeus). Later, groups of men and convoys were cannoned and dispersed and flak became increasingly troublesome. The total sorties for the day were only 9 Beaufighters and 11 Spitfires. British troops in outlying country districts seemed to move with their transport without interference, but inside the sealed city it was very different. Fighting round the Stadium was intense and Spitfires joined with Army mortars in straffing positions on the hills west of it. Flares were dropped and photographs taken by Wellingtons. The Assistant Provost Marshal gives the inside story. E.L.A.S. was fighting with a variety of weapons including sticks of dynamite. They had let loose 200 criminals from the gaol. There was a strongpoint just opposite the garage and, when relieved, the seven N.C.O.'s guarding the motor transport were rather shaky. Snipers had used the roof and the garage was not at all secure. The guard was withdrawn under fire. The Paratroop Battalion still felt insufficiently strong to venture into the invested area. They could invade the streets with armoured vehicles, but would be under fire from strong E.L.A.S. forces, all operating from concrete housetops.

*/ Preparations*

PREPARATIONS TO RESUME THE OFFENSIVE  
(8 - 17 Dec. 44)

Air Force Reinforcements

All the efforts of the Army, Navy and Air Force were not sufficient to solve the deadlock or even save the situation. New forces were called for; to aid No. 337 Wing to become a balance/force, elements of three fresh squadrons were flown in. On 8 December, No. 73 Spitfire Squadron flew in from Italy and began operations on the 10th. During the second week, a flight of No. 40 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron's tactical reconnaissance Spitfires with experienced crews flew in and began operating on the 15th. After a few days' delay, six rocket projectile Beaufighters of No. 39 Squadron flew in on the 16th and four of them were in action the same day, so initiating a radical transformation of the pattern of close air support.

The desperate Need for Build-up in Greece

These reinforcements were merely one facet of the physical measures taken at the time, (and just in time) to relieve a situation now to be seen clearly as ~~unsatisfactory and potentially~~ highly dangerous. It is now opportune to fill in more closely the military background. The root cause of the crisis on 8 Dec. 44 in Athens lay in the fact that the siting of the bases, lines of communication, and supply and maintenance installations in and around the city had in the first place been conditioned by the desire to cause minimum inconvenience to the civil population; for the most part the buildings and premises previously in German use, now occupied, were admirably suited to our purposes in every way except from the standpoint of defence. This had led to a dangerous situation, since the three main occupied centres were separated from each other, as well as from a number of outside subsidiary guard points and installations. The principal port of entry at Piraeus was cut off. <sup>Phaleron</sup> Phaleron beaches and Hassani airfield were the sole possible points of discharge for stores and troops for Army and Air Force: and the isolated detachments, dumps and workshops were liable to be overrun at short notice.

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(1) Main German H.Q. in Hotel Grande Bretagne: German Naval H.Q. Aegean Naval Command (in Psamatzoglou Arcade): Ortskommandatur and Gestapo in Hotel Athinon: Luftgaukommando, geographical and other services, and stores, in Metekhikon Tamien Straton building: Seetransportstelle.

The two armoured squadrons had been worked to near-exhaustion. Although up to six brigades were by then built-up, the means of deploying them was absent. Two more brigades were essential, declared Arkforce, to clear the Athens and Piraeus area. They could only come from Salonika, Patras or Italy. Scobie called on A.F.H.Q. on 8 December for reinforcements - more troops, tanks and armoured cars. (1) General Wilson responded the very next day by ordering plenty of all three. He did not stay in the command long enough to follow through the crisis, for General Sir Harold Alexander replaced him as Supreme Commander.

Stalemate in Athens (9 - 11 Dec. 44)

While the reinforcements were being awaited in the following three days, the situation in Athens remained tense. Many forceful attacks by the insurgents were defeated with heavy loss, but the enemy was still calling in reserves and was well armed and determined; and there was little significant change in the general stalemate. British and Greek regular morale remained high, but the over-all temper of the fighting remained guerilla and the tactical disadvantage for the British still remained: in fact, the Military Academy (1 mile outside the perimeter) and the Singros prison were evacuated. This latter evacuation had unfortunate repercussions at Hassani air base.

(2)

Prisoners handicapped Air Operations at Hassani

The Army's lack of vision in dumping about 1,000 political prisoners from Singros prison in a cage on the aerodrome perimeter aroused great indignation in No. 337 Wing. The cage erected consisted of no more than a row of barbed wire with no lights to keep this token barrier under night observation. For the security of the Wing's personnel and other numerous charges who arrived in the following weeks, the Army guards were lent one floodlight and an Italian searchlight. Repeated representations were made to the Army that the cage should be properly wired in, but nothing was ever done until after the troubles.

As a result of this neglect, the prisoners made repeated attempts to break out. On nearly every night, the peace of the base was shattered by prolonged bursts of machine gun fire as the R.A.F. Assyrian Levies attempted either to kill those escaping or persuade the others to stay where they were. One Bofors gun was trained

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(1) 4th Brit. Inf. Div. and an armoured car regiment, the King's Dragoon Guards, and 35 Sherman tanks to follow.

(2) No. 337 Wing O.R.B.

on the centre of the cage, for the thought of a major break-out was a continuous source of anxiety. R.A.F. guards on the aerodrome were nightly arresting escapees attempting to make their way to Athens.

(1)

Commanders visit beleaguered Greece

While the A.O.C. Greece travelled widely, organizing his slender forces, the need for outside aid grew hourly more urgent. That intervention at a high level was essential became evident in several ways. One of them was a signal from Middle East to the effect that the situation was not serious enough to warrant an air lift for ammunition. This was unrealistic nonsense. A conference held on 9 December to discuss air transport to Greece decided more ammunition was needed and a million rounds of .303 ball was signalled for. A great deal more would be needed, and quickly.

The visit of Field Marshal Alexander, the newly appointed S.A.C.M.E.D. on 11 December led to new positive decisions. He selected <sup>Phalerum</sup> Phaleron - Hassani as the base area for Athens and ordered operations to secure it and to reopen the road to Athens. While Arkforce stood firm in Athens, <sup>Phalerum</sup> Phaleron was to be expanded: then <sup>Piraeus</sup> Piraeus was to be cleared, the docks opened to shipping and linked with Athens and <sup>Phalerum</sup> Phaleron. The leading brigade of 4th British Infantry Division was to be flown at once to Hassani and the second brigade to move to Athens by sea. More tanks and ammunition were to come by various carriers and the air lift at Hassani was to provide 20 tons of ammunition <sup>daily</sup> until further stocks were landed by sea. The Army Headquarters was notably strengthened. His quick recognition of the Hassani air base - <sup>Phalerum</sup> Phaleron complex as the crux of the tactical situation was typical of this wise commander.

At 1100 hours on the 13th, Air Marshal Slessor (Deputy C.-in-C. Mediterranean Allied Air Forces) arrived and quickly ploughed through the red tape. He dealt firmly with the Middle East's false assessment of the situation, listened to the Army's statement of needs by airlift and promised them and the R.A.F. everything they needed. The 13th was the second day of the big air lift. We must now retrace out steps and deal with the air force's transport effort, which undoubtedly saved the situation.

/ Stern

(1) Air H.Q. Greece O.R.B.

Stern Conditions in Athens

During the period 12 - 17 December, thanks to the air lift, the build-up at Phalerum went rapidly ahead. Operations to clear the peninsula were begun as a first step towards the task of recapturing and opening the docks. In the centre of Athens, meanwhile, the enemy intensified his efforts, opening with an attack in strength on the perimeter on the night 12/13 December which met with initial success. Conditions in the city continued to deteriorate. The main supplies of water and electricity had been cut and the winter was a hard one. Soup kitchens for the hungry civilians could not be set up in fire-torn areas of the city. There is little doubt that the food shortage, which the British were striving to remedy, helped to turn normal, decent public opinion against the insurgents, who were sometimes driven in at pistol point by their officers, while others were reported to be either in a state of alcoholic exaltation or suffering from a hang-over. Nevertheless, E.L.A.S. forces now outnumbered the British garrison and nearly cut off our ammunition supply. Athens was under siege.

Air Support Operations (9 - 17 Dec. 44) <sup>(1)</sup>

Apart from the air lift, described in the next section, <sup>2</sup>steadily expanding close support effort was put in by the growing forces of No. 337 Wing during the period of preparation and consolidation 9 - 17 Dec. 44.

(1)

	108 Sqn	94 Sqn	221 Sqn	73 Sqn	680 Sqn F/R	40 (SA) Sqn	39 (R.P.) Sqn
Dec. 9	7	20	7	-	-	-	-
Dec. 10	13	21	7	11	-	-	-
Dec. 11	9	10	3	15	-	-	-
Dec. 12	6	4	4	8	-	-	-
Dec. 13	11	11	6	8	-	-	-
Dec. 14	12	2	6	10	1	-	-
Dec. 15	9	12	8	10	-	4	-
Dec. 16	11	8	3	4	-	6	2
Dec. 17	7	4	5	11	-	6	10

/ The

The footnote shows sortie totals for the period and the entry of the Spitfires of Nos. 73 and 40 (S.A.A.F.) Squadrons, as well as the opening efforts of the rocket projectile Beaufighters of No. 39 Squadron. Wellingtons of No. 221 Squadron operated every day, putting out a total for the period of 49 sorties. A few sorties were made by the Warwicks of No. 283 Squadron on minespotting and air/sea rescue. A closer look must now be taken at the intimate day-to-day nature of the very specialised form of support on short call as well as of planned support. It would take too long to detail all the tactical operations, which were largely repetitive. It must be realised that they followed closely a very fluid ground situation in which the British barely succeeded in consolidating their position, ~~on the ground~~. No major change was brought about. The fighting was still defensive. (1)

On 9 December, Spitfires flew 20 sorties, reporting on E.L.A.S. movements and firing on troops and transport <sup>making</sup> for Athens. Beaufighters flew 7 sorties against a variety of targets outside and in Athens, some of them carefully pinpointed houses and ammunition dumps. Great care was essential, as the Army was still in separated groups. Convoys were watched and escorted, oil canisters blown up and entrenching troops sprayed with bullets in their trenches. The 10th saw similar activity <sup>in</sup> <sup>Sorties by</sup> 21 Spitfires of No. 94 Squadron and 11 by the newly-arrived No. 73 Squadron. In addition to reconnaissance and reporting on the increasing blockages on the road to Air H.Q. at Kifissia, they strafed gun positions, strongpoints and vehicles. Thirteen Beaufighters spent a busy day attacking more difficult targets harbouring stores and troops and six Wellingtons joined in with 71 x 250 pound bombs on military installations and troops in the perimeter. Heavy rains and lowering cloud again hindered night operations such as flare-dropping, badly needed by units marooned in the streets of Athens. Just before dusk on the 11th, a section of Spitfires strafed the N.E. corner of <sup>(2)</sup> ~~Likavittos Hill~~ in support of our troops. Return fire was experienced, but

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- (1) A large-scale town plan of Athens is essential to a minute study of the ground and air fighting. The plan recommended in the 1 : 10,000 1st edition of 1944, ref. G.S.G.S.4457 with grid provisional. It includes a valuable key with key numbers and the corresponding grid square.
  - (2) Overlooking the Acropolis. Often spelt Lycabettus.

/ silenced

silenced before the sortie ended, when our troops were seen to be moving forward. Street battles were going on in Athens and Piraeus and could be clearly seen where the weather allowed a few flares to be dropped. Small formations of Spitfires and Beaufighters picked out likely targets but although some lorries were burnt out and guns silenced, the day was not remarkable. Many reports confirmed a worsening of the general situation, with E.L.A.S. digging in on commanding sites and cutting roads leading to the city. Spitfires flew 25 sorties and Beaufighters 9. The campaign was still guerilla in nature, with no large target areas calling for heavy air attack and no suitable aircraft available even if they had existed. Full use could not yet be made of the air support units, for the Army units were often engaged in hand-to-hand fighting: it was ~~rightly~~ assessed too dangerous for fighters to fire or bomb in the hotly contested areas. There were as yet no aircraft armed with rockets, the ideal weapon for pin-point attacks: but their advent was now only a matter of days.

The 12th began with the usual armed reconnaissance, now carried out by Spitfires of the mature No. 73 Squadron. These fired on houses, lorries and trenches with good and visible results. A useful but comparatively quiet day ended on a low total of 12 Spitfire, 6 Beaufighter and 4 Wellington sorties. That night, E.L.A.S. launched a major attack on the Infantry Barracks and were only ejected after a bitter struggle. They ~~only~~ just failed to secure the commanding Kouponia - Ambelokipoi sector in the city. Their failure led to their losing heart; and the next three days, although grim, saw no more attacks on the perimeter. This afforded a timely breathing space, in which Scobie disposed the troops flown in to Hassani.

The air support from 13 to 17 December followed a similar pattern in changeable weather. There was little change in the average number of aircraft sorties, which were flown every day, until the 15th, when No. 40 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron began operating its tactical reconnaissance Spitfires. The two days following - the 16th and 17th - saw additional and significant aid as the rocket projectile Beaufighters of No. 39 Squadron joined in. The last day of the period - the 17th - saw serious effort by 21 Spitfires, 17 Beaufighters (10 of them employing rockets) and 5 Wellingtons. <sup>Sorties</sup> The pattern of E.L.A.S. activity was observed and hindered all

/ over

over the country surrounding Athens. There was great activity in the open as the enemy moved in reinforcements and tried to strengthen his dispositions.

Hassani

By the 14th, Hassani airfield, at the height of its activity, was virtually surrounded by enemy forces, with the exception of the coast road; but even this road was under fire and the only suitable vehicle in which to make the journey to Athens was an armoured car or a tank. An attack on the airfield was expected nightly and the airmen had an extremely arduous time on extra guard and picket duties. In Athens, the III Corps building, where the air support control unit was working, was still being mortared and hit and the offending batteries could not be found by patrolling aircraft.

Day after day, the pattern remained the same and equally difficult to solve. E.L.A.S. troops used their guerilla experience to great advantage. Guns and positions were well camouflaged and strongpoints hard to detect. They even fought from inside hospitals and churches. All the usual targets were attacked, ~~both by~~ ~~cannon fire and bomb.~~ Some attacks were in direct response to Army calls, others part of armed reconnaissance.

Araxos Airfield

In the West of Greece, one Beaufighter landed at Araxos airfield while another orbited the base ready to attack anyone attempting to interfere with the aerodrome. A mixed bag of R.A.F. Wellingtons, Liberators and Mustangs were bogged down on the field. E.L.A.S. troops had visited Araxos and departed to seek reinforcements. On the night 15/16 December, as a precaution, about 180 R.A.F. personnel had moved out into Patras town after destroying the bulk of the petrol. Villagers were busy helping themselves to the remaining oil and petrol. As a result of this reconnaissance, two more Beaufighters were despatched to Araxos in the afternoon of the 16th and a demolition party destroyed the ammunition and the dumps. Guns in the bogged aircraft were removed and destroyed.

Reorganization, Plans and Prospects (17 Dec. 44)

Athens was still under siege and the enemy's noose around Air Headquarters at Kifissia was drawing tighter. H.Q. X Corps set up a new H.Q. in a safer location at the Carlton Hotel at Phaleron. Its title was changed from H.Q. X Corps to H.Q.

/ Military

(1)  
 Military Command Athens. A strong operational staff was built up from III Corps and from Italy. III Corps retained the responsibility for calling forward air support through the apparatus on the roof of the Metekhnikon Tamion building in Athens. All offensive units were blocked under H.C.A. Seobie ordered the clearance of insurgents from the whole of the Athens - Piraeus area without delay. This proved to be impossible at the time. The enemy was strong on the ground although he had no air force.

There were severe restrictions imposed on the use of air and naval support in the built-up areas. Those were inevitable, but they meant that normal close support bombing and the use of naval forces to lay barrages were <sup>denied</sup> ~~denied~~. Rocket attacks from the air and naval bombardment could only be employed against specific objectives such as gun areas and troop concentrations and only machine gun firing aircraft could be employed with comparative freedom from restriction. (2)

It was decided to adopt a policy of limited offensives to recover the lost ground step by step, then, if this succeeded, to ask A.F.H.Q. for an additional one and one-half infantry divisions. Thanks to the air lift, additional forces could reinforce the secure areas and hold them. The base areas at Phaleron and Piraeus and the roads linking them with Athens were to be cleared first, then the rest of the city area. The rocket firing Beaufighters of No. 39 Squadron were to play an unexpected part in these operations and their operations will be related at a later stage. It is now opportune to turn back on the subject of the air lift which had made these optimistic though limited plans possible.

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(1) H.C.A.

(2) H.Q. Land Forces and Military Liaison (Greece) Directive No. 2 17.12.44. (A.H.B. IIJ.20/4/1 Appendix A.16).

THE AIR LIFT (1)  
(12-14 DEC. 44 TO 14 JAN. 45)

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Preparations at short notice

Although the air had been thick with talk of reinforcements for days past, it was not until the 10th of December that the initial warning order from H.A.A.F. to E.A.F. that two battalions of 4th Division were to be transported by air to Greece was clarified. Now, information was given as to aircraft to be employed and details of the lift, that is, a broad idea of the troops, ammunition, supplies and equipment for transport. This was only 36 hours prior to the emplaning time. A meeting was at once called to coordinate the move.

Balkan Air Force was the air coordinating authority. No. 205 R.A.F. Group and No. 267 Squadron were the carriers. MOVIE was the Army coordinating authority and 3 District (Eastern Detachment) was the Army supply organisation.<sup>(2)</sup> Having determined such points as number and type of aircraft load, date, time and airfield for emplaning, stowage system, movement, schedules, documentation, accommodation for aircrews and aircraft maintenance, details were worked out in conference. A great deal of competent, high speed work was put in before operations began, as the striking results were to prove: all units both end of the lift were briefed. Hassani worked non-stop against the hazards already described and in a limited space daily shrinking as new squadrons flew into the battle area. No. 107 Staging Post had only recently arrived at Hassani from Tatoi and was without its full complement of personnel, equipment and motor transport. Nevertheless, the parking instructions were meticulously drawn up and, if the aircrews played the game, there should be great flexibility of manoeuvre, even when the air and the base were crowded with aircraft. Warm tributes were paid to the Army, who co-operated handsomely with their personnel and transport and made the quick deliveries possible.

Loading and Turn round

Owing to individual difference in the aircraft employed, the operations were further complicated. The off-loading of the Dakotas was simpler and quicker than

/either

(1) Reports by Balkan Air Force and A.H.Q. Greece 5/3/45 in File BAF/3032/7/1/ORG (A.H.B. II J.20/5/1/14(B). These give a first-class analysis of operations and lessons learned).

(2) The 4th Division representative, delayed enroute, was not present.

delete  
underlining

either Liberators or Wellingtons. Some Liberators, with bomb-bays were full of stores, had to have the load passed by hand down to the rear waist hatches: this made unloading very slow. Estimated off-loading time for a Dakota was only 5 minutes, for a Liberator or Wellington 30 minutes and for a Liberator using its rear-hatch 45 minutes. To ensure quick turn round, aircraft carried enough fuel for the round trip. There was not enough fuel at Hassani to refuel them all. Some of the technical preparations have now been explained. No. 205 Group and No. 267 Squadron, based in Italy, were the carriers. The best possible plans had been made at very short notice.

(1)

Major Lifts on 12 and 13 December 1944

The programme opened on a note of urgency and, on 12 December, 983 troops, 45 tons of ammunition and 20 tons of stores were lifted by 30 aircraft from No. 267 Squadron and 50 from No. 205 Group. On the 13th, 1,136 troops, 50 tons of ammunition and 30 tons of stores were lifted by a record total of 106 aircraft. On the 14th, weather was too bad for transport operations, but the situation was saved. There was still a need for more of everything, but this could be met at a diminishing tempo.

(2)

The Military Situation (12 - 17 December)

During the period 13 - 16 December, the build-up at Phalerum went rapidly ahead. Operations were begun to clear the peninsula as a first step towards recapturing and opening the docks. In the centre of Athens, meanwhile, the enemy intensified his efforts, opening with an attack in strength on the perimeter on the night 12/13 Dec. 44 which met with initial success. Conditions in the city deteriorated. The main supplies of electricity and water had been cut and the winter weather was bad. Soup kitchens for the hungry Greeks could not be set up in fire-torn areas of the city: no doubt the food shortage helped to turn normal,

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- (1) Details of daily lifts from 12 Dec. 44 to 14 Jan. 45 are given in Appendix 53.
  - (2) 25 from No. 267 Sqn. and 81 from No. 205 Group. 8 of these aircraft returned to base before completion for various reasons.

/ decent

decent opinion against the insurgents, who were sometimes driven in at pistol point by these officers, <sup>their</sup> ~~while others were reported to be~~ <sup>sometimes</sup> in a state of alcoholic exaltation.

Air Lift Operations (15-31 Dec. 44)

From 15 to 31 December, a strong air effort was put on and the contribution by No. 205 Group and No. 267 Wing radically changed the critical stage of shortage into one of strength and optimism. During these 7 days, another 171 successful sorties were flown by Dakotas and 116 by bombers. Between them they transported 385 troops, 658 tons of ammunition and 116 tons of stores.

Of the ten remaining days of the year, no less than seven were blank ones, on account of the hostile weather. In the other three, 72 Dakota sorties were responsible for <sup>landings</sup> ~~landing~~ 108 troops, 75 tons of ammunition and 80 tons of stores. Six aircraft returned with their loads to base, but, as on previous occasions, <sup>that</sup> ~~their loads~~ were reloaded later and the total figures reached (given at Appendix 53) may be accepted as a very close approximation to the actual deliveries. The period here referred to covered the phase of limited Allied offensives.

Air Lift Operations (1-14 Jan. 45)

The special air lift continued until the end of the crisis. The weather was bad and precluded flying on no less than 9 days between 1 and 14 January. On <sup>lift</sup> ~~each day~~, a few troops and stores were carried in. Total sorties for the five operational days were 30 Dakotas. No. 205 Group's last effort had been on 21 December. The total lift for these five days was 107 troops, 3 tons of ammunition and 45 tons of stores. On 15 Jan. 45, the normal Air Transport Service (MATS) was reinstated. The campaign had ended. The period of 1-14 January saw the final stages of the Allied offensive and the pursuit of the enemy which led to the signing of the truce and the end of hostilities on 15 Jan. 45.

The Air Lift Achievement

In terms of figures, the results of the lift were considerable. It had been proved that in emergency and at short notice, H.A.A.F. was flexible enough to switch a mixed assembly of Dakotas and heavy and medium bombers from one sorely-pressed zone of the theatre to another in even greater need. The total load

/carried

carried on the 17 days of operations was:- 2,719 troops, 831 tons of ammunition and 291 tons of supplies. The number of aircraft actually airborne from base was 339 from No. 267 Squadron and 277 from No. 205 Group. The tempo of deliveries was realistically controlled and a gradual over-all improvement in the situation may be discerned from the time the new formations and the additional equipment and supplies could be suitably disposed and employed.

The lift was far from being a paper exercise. <sup>Added</sup> <sub>16</sub> what has already been related on the physical handicaps the following on-the-spot picture will emphasize the excellence of the performance of No. 337 Wing.

— The Staging Post, with only one-third of its normal strength, found on arrival that their entire accommodation (and this in winter) consisted of one hut with half a roof. With the general strike, all work on the airfield had stopped on 3 December. The Post worked on construction, roofing and so forth and laid out the building to fit 'hot' conditions of war.

There was only one all weather tar-mac surfaced runway, 5,252 feet in length and 150 feet wide in use. It was 156° - 336° into the prevailing wind at that period of the year. A second all weather runway was under repair and unserviceable. A strip parallel to the runway was kept clear for crash landings. There were no taxi-tracks. The main aerodrome surface was of gravel and, except where bomb craters had been inadequately filled and went soft in wet weather, the ground was sound for taxi-ing.

During the best part of the period under review, some 150 aircraft of ten squadrons (or squadron detachments), as well as a few communication aircraft and aircraft under repair and in the replacement pool, were all based on Hassani. To this must be added the almost daily 'shower' of transport aircraft circling in groups overhead, waiting to be called down. Of particular value was the heavy delivery of PIAT and 75 mm high explosive, small arms ammunition and 60 and 25 pound rockets for the use of the Bombers. Being in the front line, the airfield had to be cleared before dusk every day. In the first critical stages unloading took place in about two hours round mid-day. Over 700 tons of ammunition was delivered in the first ten days. The record must now turn to the ~~air support~~ <sup>tragic events at</sup> ~~for the Army standing firm in Athens and fighting for Piraeus~~ Kifissia and the long ordeal of the garrison of Air Headquarters.

SECRET

THE CAPTURE OF AIR H.Q. GREECE AT KIFISSIA  
19 DEC.44

800

The Situation on 17 Dec.44

The calculated Risk (1)

It had been decided at an early date, for reasons of policy, prestige and good communications, that Air H.Q. Greece, with a few ancillary formations, should remain in the old German Air Force H.Q. at Kifissia, a suburb 5 miles to the north-east of Athens. On 9 December, it was decided, although E.L.A.S. resistance was stiffening, not to move Air H.Q. For one good reason, air operations vital to the Army would allow of no break in signals organization. The Army believed that should an attack be made on Air H.Q., a relief column could reach the H.Q. in time. It was admitted that without relief, a sustained and heavy attack could not be withstood by the combatant forces with the means available to them.

On Sunday 10 December, the road between Athens and Kifissia was successfully <sup>blocked</sup> ~~disrupted~~ by E.L.A.S. in several places. The Army could not guarantee the forces essential to clear the roads and evacuate the personnel at Kifissia, but a relief operation was quite reasonable hope, especially as, on 12 and 13, the Air Forces flew in substantial reinforcements of troops and arms.

There were no signs of an immediate gathering for the attack as late as 17 December, although rumours of one had been current for days past. But the E.L.A.S. <sup>command</sup> ~~command~~ had not been idle. About 1000 troops were assembled. (2) Some of the Greek civilian employees working for Air H.Q. were E.L.A.S. agents and provided accurate plans of the R.A.F. installations. Notwithstanding, morale inside A.H.Q. was good and the defences well organised; and the records reflect no feelings of isolation or panic. Personnel moved freely inside the perimeter, still on friendly terms with the local population.

Air H.Q. Installations at Kifissia (3)

The main R.A.F. building was the Cecil Hotel, formerly Luftwaffe H.Q. In it the staff worked; Battle H.Q. functioned in a section on the south side of the building. The Pentelikon Hotel, a short distance to the south (once the German A.O.C.'s Mess) was now the Officers' Mess, with accommodation for 70 officers.

/The

- (1) Report by the A.O.C., R.A.F. Greece (A.H.Q. Greece O.R.B. Appendix Feb.45 D.1)  
(2) Drawn from the 1st Regiment based in the Corinth area, the 7th Regiment based at Khalkis and the 5th Regiment based in Athens and previously stationed at Kifissia.  
(3) Refer to Figure 24, for all positions.

SECRET

The Palace Hotel housed the airmen. There was a big motor transport park under guard. The staff of the Combined Services Direct Interrogation Centre were in the south-west zone of the enclave in the Hotel Aparghi and the R.A.F. Regiment staff in an adjacent block.

In theory, when the assault opened on the 18th, there were 59 officers, 69 senior H.C.O's and 594 other ranks available to hold the position. In practice only a limited number were to form the core of resistance, for the guns and ammunition were limited, ~~in number and weight.~~

Strength and Defences of Air H.Q. (18 Dec. 44) (1)

The total strength of officers, <sup>and airmen</sup> ~~senior H.C.O's and other ranks~~ at Kifissia was composed of Air H.Q. Greece (287), No. 337 Wing (15) No. 1321 Wing, R.A.F. Regiment (10), No. 2923 Squadron R.A.F. Regiment (194) No. 107 Staging Post (114) the Royal Corps of Signals (87), C.S.D.I.C. (79) and a few miscellaneous units (32). There were approximately 188 items of motor transport, 477 items of small arms and some 32 cannon and guns of various calibre, none of them over 40 millimetres and most of them less. A substantial amount of signals equipment, tentage, food and other supplies existed to cover needs for a short stand.

Just a few yards north of A.H.Q. in the Hotel Cecil ran a natural defence in the form of <sup>the</sup> a winding <sup>R. Kifissia.</sup> river. A barbed wire fence covered approach from north and west. Inside it, on the north side, were three 20 mm. Hispano Guns. At different strategic points on the perimeter of the entire defence zone, eleven 40 mm. Bofors guns were sited and manned. Most of these must first be eliminated before Battle H.Q. could be directly assaulted. Two road blocks had been constructed at the western entrances to the area, each manned by a detachment.

The closest available estimate of the armament available is 70 revolvers, 157 Sten carbines, 25 rifles, 8 Brens 0.303, 24 Thompson sub-machine guns, 8 Hispano cannons and 12 Bofors guns.

(1) Refer to Appendix 34 for the analysis of personnel and to Figure 24 for details of defences.

(1)

The Attack (18/19 Dec. 44)

Timing

After their attack of 15 December on the Infantry Barracks had been bloodily beaten off, E.L.A.S. forces in Athens licked their wounds for three days and planned retaliation. They kept up vicious sniping on the British forces, knowing well that they held them closely invested. They were too conscious of what was at stake to stay sulking and inactive for long and, on 18 December, they broke the lull with startling suddenness and disturbing success. While one force raided the British guard at Averov Prison, another quietly assembled; and reinforced from the countryside, the latter launched a full-scale attack on Air H.Q. at Kifissia. Averov prison was isolated and its evacuation had been left too late. The attack on it opened early on the 18th and its defences were cornered until relieved and evacuated to the centre of the city. Two hundred of the three hundred political prisoners were either killed, wounded or left in E.L.A.S. hands. As so often before, this 'two-handed punch' had unpleasant consequences for the recipients and restored the ~~single~~ morale of the insurgents just when it was hoped to launch a series of limited offensives against them.

Pressure on the Perimeter (18 Dec. 44)

At about 0130 hours on 18 December, E.L.A.S. opened an attack in force on Air H.Q. An early attack on No. 3 Bofors guns was held, but road block A was attacked and set alight and a sentry killed there. The enemy infiltrated through the outside perimeter. At 0300 hours, they were exerting pressure on the Hotel Aparghi. At 0330 hours, No. 2 Bofors gun was hit and the position evacuated. At 0430 hours, an attack on the rear of Air H.Q. was held. At 0530 hours, things began to worsen. No. 3 Bofors gun was hit. Its crew destroyed the ammunition and were withdrawn. At the same time, the C.S.D.I.C. building was attacked and E.L.A.S. infiltrated past road block B as far

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- (1) Details of the attack and defence are collated from the records and reports contained in the O.R.B's and appendices of Air H.Q. Greece and No. 337 Wing (the latter for December 1944 only, as succeeding O.R.B's were never returned to Air Ministry).

/ as

as the rear of the A.H.Q. building which contained Battle H.Q. At 0545 hours, infiltration through the neutralized positions of No. 2 and 3 Bofors guns brought the insurgents up to the H.Q. of No. 2923 R.A.F. Regiment Squadron. At 0730 hours, No. 1 Bofors gun position was lost, but the gun was destroyed by R.A.F. aircraft. At 1130 hours, No. 10 Bofors gun and its crew were captured.

In spite of these serious setbacks, the defenders fought back with automatic and rifle fire from the windows of the Cecil and Pantelikon hotels and the remaining Bofors were kept very busy. The main strongholds were still intact at lunch time and the perimeter, though pierced, was unchanged.

During the afternoon, the pressure was maintained. At 1330 hours, the Officers' Mess (Pantelikon) was under severe pressure from the area of the Regiment's Squadron H.Q. At 1530 hours, No. 11 Bofors gun was destroyed and at 1730 hours, Nos. 7, 8 and 9 guns (on the eastern flank) were under attack.

#### Organization inside the Perimeter

At 1800 hours, the Hotel Aparghi was becoming untenable and the Interrogation unit was withdrawn. One half went to strengthen the Officers' Mess and the other half to the Hotel Olympus, next to the Cecil. At 2030 hours, No. 4 Bofors gun was destroyed and its detachment withdrawn.

During the day, <sup>the</sup> following moves had been made to strengthen the British position. Early in the morning, airmen, in battle flights under officers, were dispersed at vantage points outside the Officers' Mess. Fire fighters, nursing orderlies and a stretcher party assembled on the first floor of that building. Two senior officers kept a telephone watch, so as to be in close contact with the Defence Commander at the Hotel Cecil and with H.Q. III Corps in Athens. The motor transport park was guarded. Snipers were numerous everywhere, hiding in houses. Early failures of communication <sup>were</sup> repaired and ammunition was rationed. One airman was killed by a sniper. Battle H.Q. ordered the destruction of all documents and tentative plans for evacuation were outlined. Under continuous fire, officers crossed in an armoured car to the Cecil and began the destruction of documents.

At about 1700 hours, a message was received from the Air Officer Commanding asking for every effort to be made to hold out and intimating that an armoured relief column was about to set out. This message was very cheering and determination freshened. A lunch of kinks, tea, biscuits and cheese were served.

/After

After 1700 hours, the evacuation of the C.S.D.I.C. party was covered by an armed party in a pillbox. In the failing light, final dispositions were made; the gunners were issued with 30 rounds per man, and hand grenades were made ready. It grew colder and very quiet.

Calls to Surrender (18 Dec.44)

During the 18th, three calls to surrender were rejected by the Defence Commander. At about 1900 hours, a woman rushed in to the ground floor with a message that E.L.A.S. had all the guns and that unless the garrison surrendered, they would all be killed. She had brought a white flag and called for a decision. She was sent back with a firm 'No' for an answer. Squadron Leader Wicks told her to tell her 'Army' that "They had started it" and we were going to finish it.

Air Support and Supply Drops (18 Dec.44)

Air support was provided from Kassani from an early hour. So long as the visibility was good, it was effective, although when the case is considered in retrospect it seems very regrettable that the air forces in Greece were too weak to do much more.

At 0230 hours on the 18th, the situation was still good, although it was night, and the enemy was being held on all sides. Wellingtons had dropped supplies on the 17th. Now, during the night 17/18, they dropped flares to light up enemy troops infiltrating <sup>into</sup> the inner perimeter. Three of them dropped flares from 0215 to 0730 hours, returning scatheless to base, meeting, like the succeeding missions, only scattered fire.

At first light, a Beaufighter carried out a reconnaissance of Kifissia. Later, Cpt. Podley did the same in a Spitfire. Air H.Q. reported that 75 mm. gunfire ceased on the arrival of daylight and aircraft. Fire from various houses appeared to be directed on Air H.Q. by an E.L.A.S. post 600 yards north of the landing strip. Another Spitfire (No. 73 Squadron), patrolling at the same time as Podley, reported hidden guns firing from the north-west. Road blocks were surveyed, movement in the area reported and transport was fired on. Spitfires continued to watch in relays and a few strikes on gun targets were made.

A Beaufighter attacked mortar and gun positions. Later, another Beaufighter led two rocket Beaufighters (No. 39 Squadron) to fire on a gun position near A.H.Q.

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One aircraft overshot with rocket projectiles by 10 yards and hit some buildings which collapsed. The other aircraft scored direct hits on the target and strafed it with its cannon. As a result, buildings in the target disintegrated. A gun <sup>and a</sup> near three R.A.F. Bofors gun was fired on. The patrolling Beaufighter (No. 108 Squadron) was then joined by two Spitfires and led them to a still burning target, a truck just behind the gun pit. Both aircraft claimed hits. Two more Spitfires came in to strafe targets 50 yards south of Air H.Q., directed by the same Beaufighter. In poor visibility, no mortar positions could be identified; this was regrettable, for the damage inflicted by the weight of mortar fire was increasingly grave. One other Beaufighter, firing on positions at Kifissia, heard that a companion despatched to join him had crashed and that he was to destroy the aircraft. The crashed captain transmitted from the ground and, on the advice of the Army, notes were dropped to the crew telling them to make for the nearest hospital. Repeated attempts to destroy the crashed Beaufighter failed for various mechanical reasons.

At 1630 hours, a Halifax <sup>(1)</sup> (escorted by four Spitfires), dropped guns and ammunition for the beleaguered men at Kifissia. Unfortunately, the supplies dropped on the landing strip and in the gully beside it. Lying 100 yards south of Air H.Q. it was on enemy ground and impossible to reach. The Spitfires were briefed to destroy the ammunition but had exhausted their heavy shell and found the remnant of their .303 ammunition ineffective <sup>for</sup> ~~for~~ the purpose. As the afternoon passed, a small formation <sup>of</sup> rocket firing Beaufighters was followed by three small formations of Spitfires. They reported good results to their attacks on houses harbouring men and ammunition. Now the light began to fade.

Weather conditions worsened fast. By 2100 hours, visibility was too poor for a Beaufighter patrol to pinpoint Air H.Q. The cloud base over Hassani was 3,000 feet and only 2,500 feet at Kifissia. The Beaufighter crew passed messages from the Air Officer Commanding to Air H.Q. by radio telephone before he was forced back to base. Before the weather closed in, Spitfires gave the ammunition containers some good volleys of fire.

Continuous support during the day by a series of small formations certainly achieved tangible results, harassed the enemy, ~~put~~ into his stocks and transports and kept his head down. But the weight of effort was too light to swing in the in the favour of the R.A.F. the scales so heavily weighted down by the enemy's

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(1) No. 148 Squadron, recently arrived from Italy.

great preponderance in fire power and his superior tactical ground position.

Early Night Conditions in the Hotel Cecil (18/19 Dec.44)

At 1730 hours, all telephone lines from Hassani to Air H.Q. went out. Although they passed through an exchange in M.L.A.S. hands, they had served their purpose. As in all tight battle emergencies, the messages in clear had encouraged rapid action. It was surprising that they had lasted so long. The only means of communication left was the radio telephone pack set link and radio, which grew weaker as the batteries ran down. In the surrounding countryside the enemy closed in, too confident of themselves to bother to device their truck lights.

At 0030 hours, an attack opened with mortar, shell and machine gun fire on the Officers' Mess and the motor transport harbour. Two vehicles were set on fire and the section holding the harbour was forced to retire, together with the R.A.F. Regiment, to the Officers' Mess building. Nos. 7, 8 and 9 Bofors gun positions had repelled a heavy attack from the East and at 0130 hours, communication to them was restored. The enemy moved into the old C.S.D.I.C. building, thus covering all movement between Air H.Q. and the Officers' Mess.

At 0230 hours, mortar and shell fire continued to play and all communications to Battle H.Q. were destroyed by mortar fire. Small sections of the enemy attempted assaults from the rear of Air H.Q. With all communications cut, central control ended and the defended localities fought their own individual battles. At 0330 hours, all available reserves in the Air H.Q. building were sent out to reinforce the Japanese cannon posts outside and to occupy the surrounding slit trenches. Armoured fighting vehicles covered the entrance gates. It was growing difficult to collect the wounded.

*/Fatal*

Fatal Delay of 'Hunterforce', the armoured Relief Column

At 0730 hours on 18 December, the A.O.C. Greece asked the Army Commander to send a relief column immediately to Kifissia and it was agreed to. A ground operation had just been launched, (and was progressing favourably), to clear the Athens - Phaleron road and open up safe communication for 'soft skinned' vehicles between Athens and Piraeus as an essential prelude to throwing E.L.A.S. out of Attica. The Army commanders reluctantly decided they were unable to organise a column of sufficient strength (and strength was essential) without disengaging troops from the operation now under way and so <sup>jeopardising</sup> ~~jeopardising~~ the military plan. The earliest at which a column could leave was 1600 hours on the 18th and then only armoured cars would be available. Against well-organised and stiffening E.L.A.S. resistance over prepared ground the chances were dubious.

The direct road from Athens to Kifissia was considered impassable even for an armoured column, as it ran through suburbs and a village all strongly held by E.L.A.S. forces, well suited for ambush and reported by aircraft as out in several places. A cross-country route was proposed and reconnoitred from the air by both the column commander and the G.O.C. X Corps, who agreed that it was impassable for an armoured column by night. A mixed force of tanks, armoured cars <sup>(1)</sup> and scout cars was formed at Messani airfield under the title 'Hunterforce' <sup>(2)</sup> with the assistance of the Fighter Controller. The force proceeded to the small town of Glifadha and left at 0600 hours on 19 December.

After taking a long detour E.N.E. to Keropi and northwards to Palaia, they reached Kifissia at about 1000 hours, to find the Air H.Q. a shambles and only a handful of survivors. Of the defenders, 585 had been taken prisoner and marched off into the hills: the ammunition and motor transport had been carried off and the buildings ransacked and in ruins. There was nothing they could do but wait while survivors and wounded were loaded into vehicles and begin the journey back to Glifadha before darkness intervened.

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(1) Including 5 R.A.F. vehicles.

(2) O.C. was Maj. J.P.G. Wise, 40th Royal Tank Regiment.

The return journey was made in the face of great difficulties. Mines and gaps blown in the road caused long delays. The column was fired on as the road was filled, but the enemy was held at bay and the column reached Cliffratha shortly after night fall on the 19th. (1)

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(1) A full account of the operation is contained in the 46th Royal Tank's war diary for Dec. 44 (Cabinet Historical Archives). Refer also to A.H.Q. Greece G.R.S. appendix B.1 for February 1945 and the British Historical Section Central Mediterranean volume (A.H.B.II J.20/4/2, pp.36-37).

The Final Assault and Surrender (19 Dec. 44)

At midnight on 18 December, the defenders were based in two areas, based in and around Air H.Q. buildings <sup>(1)</sup> (the Cecil and Olympus Hotels) and the Officers' Mess (the Hotel Pentelikon). It was still possible to pass from one to the other, though this was a hazardous business. What happened soon after is clear from the excellent record left by one of the officers in the Officers' Mess - Sqn.Ldr. Wicks.

Just after midnight, whistles were heard outside the Pentelikon and 'the heavens opened'. Mortars started up and the 75 mm. guns seemed to be finding their correct range. The firing grew progressively denser, bullets whistled through windows and partitions, showers of glass and plaster were flying everywhere. As they stepped up their attack, the enemy seemed to be tackling the hotel floor by floor, starting at the top. After 04.00 hours, it sounded as if 'hell had been let loose'. The bugles outside drew nearer and nearer. A barricade of blankets and mattresses was built halfway up the stairs and the defenders began to withdraw to the first floor and continue the fight from there. The Greek sergeant called for Tommy guns, hand grenades were passed down to him under a shower of machine gun fire from all directions. Insurgents appeared then on the ground floor, along the corridors, pouring in from all sides. Outside, close fighting continued and stretcher bearers hurried out and back with the wounded. The telephone was tried, but found to have gone dead.

Enemy troops planted sticks of dynamite under the walls and a great explosion rocked the building. The leader of the defenders <sup>(2)</sup> urged on our troops until the insurgents broke through to the main doorway vestibule and the hall leading to the kitchen. At 0620 hours, they called <sup>on the</sup> defenders to surrender: but the fight was continued until it was clear that there was no hope of victory. Fifty or sixty men had already been taken prisoner and the insurgents might well have used them as a shield in the advance. Three senior officers held a brief conference and decided to end the bloodshed and destruction, for they were outfought by sheer weight of gunpower and retreat was cut off. They surrendered to the E.L.A.S. Commander and gave the 'Cease Fire' order.

/Meanwhile

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(1) Local Defence Commander - Wg.Cdr. J. Simpson (O.C. No. 1321 Wing, R.A.F. Regiment); O.C. No. 2923 (LAA) Squadron, R.A.F. Regiment - Sqn.Ldr. W.H. Chapman.  
 (2) Pte.Lt. Pothard.

Meanwhile, things were going badly for the men in the Cecil Hotel where the Battle H.Q. was located. Having occupied the Penteliken, the enemy threw his full weight against the H.Q. building. At 0545 hours, Battle H.Q. received a direct hit. At 0600 hours, the west side of Air H.Q. was dynamited. The flames from a stricken truck set fire to the building. At 0645 hours, the enemy entered the Cecil Hotel and shortly afterwards the 'Cease Fire' order was given.

One spirited Flying Officer (1) had moved his Bofors gun 300 yards up the hill during the night. From this point of vantage he watched two separate bodies of insurgents creep up on the old gun position. He and his men were vastly diverted to observe them clash in the darkness and fight out a spirited engagement. After the surrender of Air H.Q., he continued to hold his position until surrounded by E.I.A.S. troops from the hills above him. He surrendered at 1000 hours on the 19th about the same time as the relief column broke in.

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(1) F/O R. Collier.

The long March of the Allied Prisoners (19 Dec.44 - 20 Jan.45)

Casualty List (19 Dec.44) (1)

When the count was taken, it was found that 11 airmen had been killed and 5 officers and 41 airmen wounded, giving totals of 11 killed (2) and 46 wounded. Of the wounded just over one-half (24) evaded capture as well as 71 others.

The total number taken prisoner on 19 Dec.44 at Kifissia was put at 985, (3) of which number 22 were wounded. Analysis shows that 47 officers and 538 airmen were captured, packed into lorries and later put on the road to the hills and the North.

Route of the long March

The extremely diffuse and broken evidence available is insufficient for exact delineation of the enemy's plan for their disposal; but by <sup>en</sup> piecing together the testimony of aircraft crews, the route of the long march followed roughly the following courses:- Afidhuon Station - Avlon - by road or train to Thess - Iivadhia - Kifisskhorl - Amfiklia. Here a digression must be made to mention the curious but definite location of some prisoners as far east as Atalandi near the Gulf of Volos and on the road linking it with the main road north. (4) From Amfiklia the main route led to Lamia, site of a transit camp for sick prisoners. There the main body of captives was lost sight of for a week. The probable answer is that they were entrained at Lamia for Kardhitsu, (about 32 miles roughly S.W. from Larissa) and driven to the main prison camp at Lasarina, some 11 miles N.W. of it. ~~It appears probable, too, that a few prisoners were taken to Larissa at about the same period.~~ The whole arduous journey in the snow covered hilly country lasted four weeks.

When the Armistice was signed the prisoners were exchanged, taken to Volos and shipped to Piraeus for home leave.

/Brief Chronology

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- (1) Refer to Appendix 54 for complete analysis.
  - (2) Of these, 2 were of the Royal Corps of Signals and the rest R.A.F. and R.A.F. Regiment.
  - (3) Of these, 77 were of the Royal Corps of Signals and 508 R.A.F. and R.A.F. Regiment.
  - (4) A party may have been put on the train at Afidhuon.

Brief Chronology

From 19 to 31 Dec.44, the prisoners were conducted by various routes and in groups to the Livadhia area. The movements of the majority were roughly followed by Spitfires and Wellingtons: when weather allowed, limited supplies were dropped. A few prisoners escaped, mostly Greek personnel.

From 1 to 9 January, their progress was intermittently watched by aircraft as they converged on the Lania area. On 6 January, British forces had broken through the E.L.A.S. cordon and were in Eleusis. By the 10th, these troops had pursued the enemy as far as Amfikhia, but all trace of the main party was lost until the 16th, when they had already reached Laccarina camp. <sup>(1)</sup> A fair quantity of essentials had been dropped by then, but not nearly enough to keep them in good health. The 15th was Armistice Day. On the 20th, a relief party sailed for Volos and proceeded to Laccarina where the captives were rehabilitated, re-kitted and documented. On 26 Jan.44 they sailed from Volos for Piraeus, their long calvary ended.

The almost daily shadowing and frequent supply dropping tied up a number of aircraft sorely needed for support of the Army and related tasks in a period of grave crisis. The outcome certainly justified the effort and the recovery of so many able-bodied men must be weighed against the adverse effects of diminished air power on the situation in Athens, Piraeus and Petras.

First Moves - (19 Dec.44)

The defenders of the Air H.Q. and the Officers' Mess were taken prisoners and marched to Kificcia village. When the Air Officer Commanding flew over the area later he sighted about 100 men on the road to Tatoi. Air H.Q. was <sup>ruined</sup> ~~ruined~~ and all documents of value destroyed. The record presented here has been compiled from the evidence of the only two available reports by captured officers and the records of the air units engaged in reconnaissance and supply dropping and sundry scraps of information from intelligence sources.

The ordinary airmen were separated from their officers. One group of about 23 officers and the 57 senior N.C.O's was marched, heavily escorted, to a house  
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(1) A.H.Q. Greece, No. 337 Wing, Nos. 94, 108 and 221 Squadrons O.R.B's and appendices.

near Elali. There they were searched and relieved of papers. No desire was shown by E.L.A.S. to take money or personal belongings; but when they were bedded down, some E.L.A.S. troops, who had escaped from the camp at Hassani airfield, came in at intervals and stole overcoats, surplus clothing, rings, watches and even personal letters. They said these were reprisals on the British for handing them over to right-wing Greeks who had stripped them of everything.

The March to Lavadhia (19 - 31 Dec. 44) (1)

No precise itinerary of the whole of the group of prisoners can be presented, but the following broad record of movements confirmed by aircraft and other reports indicates the general direction.

On 20 December, movement was towards Thebes, through Boyati, Afidhuen and Avlon. On the 21st and 22nd prisoners were located at Avlon, Monedi and Lesia. Between 23 and 27 December they were passing through Panayia, Thebes, Vayda, and Hassia in the general direction of Lavadhia. From the 28th to the 31st they were located near <sup>Krasnamatais</sup> ~~Krasna Metala~~, <sup>Thebes</sup> ~~Thives~~, Kifisokhori and Vrastanutars. The van of the party was seen at Amfiklia and Lavadhia on the last day of the year. To this point, the journey had been roundabout, largely because of the mountains and to some extent because E.L.A.S. hoped to shake off the R.A.F. reconnaissance aircraft.

The march thence forward in January ran roughly north-west to Lania and from there probably by train to the main camp at Lazarina (near Kharditsa) where other prisoners were held. (2) At fairly close intervals throughout the arduous journey, the prisoners were comforted by the sight of Spitfires reconnoitring and Wellingtons (and a few Spitfires) dropping supply canisters to them. The intensity and success of this effort by very <sup>small</sup> ~~small~~ formations may be judged from the following record of events.

/Air Watch .....

- (1) Refer to Figure 24 for a diagram of the prisoners' march.  
(2) But one party was traced as far east as Atalandi, probably rejoining the main march through Kalopedhien, after following the coast road to Atalandi.

Air Watch and Supply Drops on the road to Livadhia (19 - 31 Dec. 44)

On almost every day that weather permitted, small missions of Wellingtons and Spitfires were despatched to locate the prisoners, and usually, when they were found, supplies were dropped. In the 12 days from 20 to 31 December, five Wellingtons of No. 221 Squadron made a total of five successful drops to the marchers and two photographic reconnaissance sorties; seven other dropping missions were abortive because of bad weather. There is no doubt that more supply drops would have been executed but for the forced diversion of the squadron to the relief of the Allied Army garrison of the Pallini Wireless Station 10 miles out of Athens on the road to Marathon, who were cut off from the main forces and in a critical position. They were supplied on four separate days in seven drops by single Wellingtons.

After an early attempt had run into prohibitive weather, the first supplies were dropped to an R.A.F. party seen at Avlon just before dusk on the 20th. All containers fell within 100 yards of the adjacent building. It was not until Christmas Day that the next aircraft, in spite of bad weather, managed to drop to some prisoners at Vayda on the road to Livadhia. The effort on the 26th was abortive. The 27th was devoted to the isolated Army troops at Pallini. On the 28th roads, railways and villages in the area, Scala Oropou - Avlon - Livadhia were thoroughly searched by two Wellington crews, but, failing to find the prisoners, they returned to base. Late in the afternoon, a third Wellington made a drop at Scala Oropou. The 29th was devoted to the Pallini troops. The 30th was spent catching up on the arrears of leaflet dropping, resting and late flare dropping N.E. of Hassani aerodrome, where an attack was expected.

The last day of the year was the most successful in several ways. Definite locations were plotted, a much greater volume of supplies was dropped and the prisoners themselves materially supported operations. During the morning, a Wellington found some prisoners at Krasnamatais (near Livadhia) who had constructed a stone 'T' in a conspicuous position. Two containers, one containing medical supplies, were dropped on to the thick snow at about 1100 hours.

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Earlier, six Spitfires of No. 94 Squadron had left Kassani on a similar mission. They found and supplied four separate groups, who, like other groups identified, had all found suitable dropping zones and constructed ground signs asking for certain commodities. The Spitfires' crews first dropped supplies at Livadhia and Larissa (which the R.A.F. prisoners had not reached), ~~but where other Allied prisoners were unaccounted for~~. At Khifisokori, some 90 prisoners were seen and two containers dropped and recovered. At Amfiklia, a further 100 or so were seen and more supplies dropped and recovered with much cheering and waving. All day, reconnaissance over the roads was maintained. Round about noon, three more Spitfires dropped supplies at Amfiklia. At Khifisokori, 20 more prisoners were seen making ground signs asking for 'PACS'. Lastly, just before last light, further supplies were dropped by Spitfires at Amfiklia and Khifisokori. All of them were recovered and the men waved frantically. So after having lost and recovered traces of our men among the snow-clad, hilly roads so many times, the main body had been found and partially supplied and were in better heart. They were not to know, but in and round Athens the tide <sup>had</sup> ~~was~~ turned. But still in rough weather, insufficiently clad and short of all essentials they were prodded on by forced marches towards Lamia.

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The Road to Lazarina (1 - 20 Jan. 45) (1)

The new year marked the turn of Allied fortunes. With the defeat of E.L.A.S. in Athens and Piraeus impending, more aircraft were diverted to reconnaissance, shadowing and supply dropping. From the 6th, when the British reached Eleusis, the march became a game of hide and seek. The general route of the main groups was by way of Livadhia, Khifisokori, Atikitsa to Lamia where they were probably entrained for Kharditsa and the main prisoner-of-war camp at Lazarina. One group followed an easterly route to Alalandi and appears to have rejoined the main column via Kalopodhion between 4 and 7 January.

On the 5th, the British Army was in Daphne and Peristeri, on the 6th in Eleusis, on the 8th, in Thebes, on the 9th in Livadhia and Khalkis and on the 10th in Amfiklia.

/Air Watch .....

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Air Watch and Supply Drops on the Road to Lania (1 - 15 Jan.45)

Between 1 and 5 Jan.45, the shadowing operations were fairly successful. Wellingtons made 4 drops and Spitfires 3 drops, at Livadhia, Khifleskari, Amfiklie and at Kalopedhien (near Atalandi). <sup>Aircraft</sup> Beauforts reconnoitred the area on the first four days of the month. Efforts on the 6th were slight and abortive but a drop was made on the 7th by Wellingtons at Atalandi (sometimes east of the main route) and 8 miles south of Livadhia. Prisoners were seen on the 8th, but the two drops planned were abortive. On the 9th, one drop out of two planned succeeded at Athitea. These drops included such items as blankets, food and clothing. The situation was increasingly confused, as the days passed by the presence of groups of civilians fleeing northwards who did not acknowledge messages. Occasional fog and rain were a serious hindrance and aircraft were sometimes fired on. Nevertheless, the signs were that some of the canisters were recovered, although between 9 and 16 January, it seems clear that the movements of all but a few of the prisoners was hidden from our aircraft. The snow and the lay of the country aided the efforts of E.L.A.S. in dispersing and concealing prisoners and the bad weather rendered a running air watch impossible.

From 10 to 14 January, three drops were made by Wellingtons between Athitea and Larissa. Shadowing operations were carried out on at least four days by Spitfires and Beaufighters of No. 108 Squadron, but the truth is that for a week the main body of prisoners was lost. At about the 9th, most of the groups seemed to have swerved from the route to Larissa in a westerly direction (probably by train from Lania) towards the main camp at Lazarina, but some prisoners (perhaps Army troops) were seen on Larissa airfield on the 16th. There a green signal was received, 40 to 50 people were seen to pick up the canisters and an American officer on the airfield indicated that no further supplies were required and the men formed the word 'NO' with stones. On 15 January, the Armistice came into force.

The Message from Lazarina (16 Jan.45)

After contact with the main body of prisoners had been lost for a week, (1) a report was received on 16 Jan.45 by Air H.Q. Greece (now established in Athens) from an American officer at Lazarina to the effect that 961 prisoners-of-war were there and were in very bad shape. The local E.L.A.S. authorities

/agreed

(1) Sighting reports had been only partial and confusing.

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agreed that he should take care of them. Immediate action was taken by Air H.Q. Greece who signalled to H.Q. Balkan Air Force for a major air drop of clothing, food and medical supplies. Reconnaissance was being made for a dropping zone. ~~The drops ought to be made the very next day, but Greece could not meet the needs. Italy would have to fulfil them.~~

Air Shadowing and Supply Dropping by No. 337 Wing (16 - 23 Jan.45) (1)

As from the day the main body was located at Lasarina, aircraft continued dropping supplies. In spite of rough weather which forbade some of the missions, three drops were made on the 16th, eight on the 20th, one on the 21st and three on the 23rd, making a total of 15 drops; most of these were at Lasarina, but those on the 16th are recorded as made at Larissa, where the Wing seemed convinced that R.A.F. prisoners were visible.

On four (or perhaps five) days in this period, Spitfires reconnoitred the area and they and Beaufighters reported on the movements of the relieved prisoners all the way from Lasarina via Rendina to Volos, where they embarked on 26 January.

Major Supply Drops by Balkan Air Force (18 - 19 Jan.45) (2)

On 16 Jan.45, Air H.Q. Greece asked H.Q. Balkan Air Force for a drop from Italy on the 17th, as they themselves could not cope with the requirements. Medical supplies and a doctor should be included. As there were no signs of developments in negotiations for the exchange of prisoners, supply might well be essential for some time to come. Each ration drop would have to consist of 60 containers. Greece might find the containers, but lacked the bulk supplies. In any case, the *Key* Wellington squadron - No. 221 - was due for withdrawal from Greece.

On 18 January, Air H.Q. Greece reported that most of their 26 sorties were reconnaissance for the prisoners. R.A.A.F. appeared to be obeying the terms of the truce. The prisoners were in the worst possible condition and would <sup>need</sup> ~~need~~ blankets.

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- (1) No. 221 Squadron and Balkan Air Force O.R.B's.  
(2) B.A.F. File BAF/4506/29/E. (A.H.B. III.20/5/9/1).

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blankets, uniforms, overcoats, towels, soap, underwear, insecticide, washing material and food. Yet the morale was stated to be splendid. Tuttle informed Sinclair that his shortages were due to the non-arrival of supplies from Middle East H.Q.

The military branch of Special Operations supplied most of the articles required. On Thursday and Friday 18 and 19 Jan. 45, Halifaxes of No. 148 Squadron dropped 60 containers of food rations for 960 men for three days, a large assignment of clothing and 15 containers of medical supplies and comforts, including soap, concentrated food tablets and medical items on a comprehensive scale. There was, oddly enough, no insecticide available, an <sup>almost</sup> item as important as food at the time.

/conditions

Conditions of Captivity at Lamia (1)

Along the course of the R.A.F.'s Anabasis, (2) Lamia was the halfway house. Most of the prisoners passed through the transit camp there on the way to Larissa. The records left by the two R.A.F. officers are only of limited value to the historian, for they were both returned to Eleusis on the outskirts of Athens early on, for personal and political reasons. Fortunately there exists a letter written on 3 Jan. 45 from the Senior British Officer of the P/W Transit Camp at Lamia to the A.O.C. Greece: and it will be of profit and interest to examine the contents of this report in the wider context of outside events.

The situation on 3 January at Lamia was fluid. Some of the Kifissia prisoners had passed on and others were expected. This evidence of camp conditions is important, for it renders more meaningful the efforts of airmen to shelter them and the great value of the canisters dropped on to the snow-clad ground. The evidence on conditions will be examined first, then the evidence on movements.

The morale of the airmen, stated Wright, was low, mainly on account of the cold and damp and the filthy conditions under which they were housed. At Lamia they were sleeping on bare concrete. <sup>Perhaps</sup> Barely one-half of them had greatcoats or blankets. In bitter winter conditions, the only way of obtaining heat was by breaking down partitions and burning the wood in the middle of the floor with the smoke escaping through broken windows. Plans for straw to sleep on and fuel to burn went unheeded. The latrines were choked up and nauseating. The daily ration per man was half a loaf, half a pint of unsweetened coffee and a tin of soup made of dried peas, beans and potatoes. Seriously wounded men arriving at Lamia were admitted to hospital: others had their wounds dressed. Supplies were very short and there were <sup>no</sup> ~~no~~ <sup>anesthetics</sup> ~~anesthetics~~.

The British officers there did their utmost to alleviate the shortage of food by making local purchases with the funds they shared. (3) Commander Wright had thus

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(1) Letter from Cdr. H. Wright R.N. from Lamia to A.O.C. Greece 3.1.45 (A.H.C. Greece O.R.B. Appendix D.2, February 1945).

(2) Title of Xenophon's book on the march up country of the Greeks into Persia in the 5th century B.C.

(3) No complaints on the officers' behalf were recorded. They were separated from the men and well billeted in the town, eating in the E.L.A.S. Officers' Mess.

been able to ensure the airmen one good meal a day of meat and vegetables at a cost of one shilling per head. The local population sold without demand and there appeared to be no risk of looting in the Lania area such as had occurred near Kifissia.

Prospect for the foreseeable future were reasonably fair. There was no Red Cross functioning at Lania, but there were two officers and some <sup>men</sup> of the American Section of Military Liaison. Although under house arrest and in a delicate position, they helped liberally by supplying some dehydrated meat, potatoes, tea, a little clothing and an advance of £250 for local purchase.

The E.L.A.S. authorities made a gesture, which seems a little dubious now in the light of their practice of systematic deception. They showed Genfr. Wright a letter dated 25 Dec. 44 from E.L.A.S. H.Q. to Lania Divisional H.Q. stating that approval had been given for a ship to land a consignment of supplies at the adjacent port of Styliis and for road transport to deliver them. He and another officer were being held at Lania to accept delivery. At the moment of <sup>his</sup> writing, the most urgent requirements were:-

- 1,500 blankets
- 500 greatcoats
- 1,000 pairs of socks
- 200 pairs of boots (size 8 and 9 and a few 10's)
- Tea, sugar, and powdered milk
- 1,000 sets underwear.

He made suggestions as to dropping zones and despatched money in the keeping of certain officers on the basis of information furnished by E.L.A.S., which proved to be untrue.

One party of 330, including an officer from Kifissia, had already passed through on the road to the area, (it was said), West of Lania, <sup>This officer wrote</sup> asking the Red Cross to drop medical supplies. About 150, <sup>note,</sup> (he understood), mainly R.A.F., with definitely three officers from Kifissia, were in the Larissa area. Both of these parties, (he was told), were to be moved on to the part of Volos, where they were to join up with a third party of 230 men and officers (including 2 captured at Kifissia) which had already left in trucks. On 1 January (and this appears to be the only reliable information), it was known that a Kifissia officer with 80 men were at Kifissiohori, a similar party at Mellos and a further 100 men at Amfiklia.

/This

This report was carried by a U.S. Red Cross officer to Air H.Q. at Athens, which he reached on 8 January. The false information given by E.L.A.S. resulted in Cdr. Wright's indication of the forward route of the prisoners proving misleading and his own disposition of funds among the officers partially fruitless. On the 16th, the prisoners were accurately reported at Lazarini, a considerable distance to the North-West of Lamia. Acting on Wright's letter, the Larissa and Veles areas were combed by reconnaissance aircraft for several days, but in vain. So successful was the deception by E.L.A.S. that for a week after the letter reached Athens, all track of the prisoners was lost. The circumstantial evidence points to rapid entrainment of each group, as it passed through Lamia, from just beyond it direct to Kharditsa and Lazarina.

The Loss of Air H.Q. and the Long March in Retrospect

There is no room now, any more than there was at the time, for recrimination or moralising over the unfortunate history of Air H.Q. Kifissia. If the simple facts are summarised, there is an undeniable air of fatality about the whole story. Nobody was to blame; it was simply another exposition of the play of chance in military affairs and its sometimes disastrous implications for the least favoured.

Air Headquarters at Kifissia was merely a pawn in the disposition for peaceful purposes of the occupying British forces. Tactical military considerations never entered into its initial siting at Kifissia, although certain practical ones did. No more political guidance on the menace of Communism was given to the Air Forces in Greece than to anyone else. When the intentions of E.L.A.S. became clear, this defection in the ranks of an ally came to most as a complete surprise, of which E.L.A.S. swiftly seized nearly all the advantages. There was still time in the first week in December 1944 to transfer Air H.Q. back to Athens, but there were overwhelming reasons against this course. The Athens forces were under siege, tightly compressed into separate, overcrowded sectors, served by heavily overloaded communications liable to be cut from one hour to another.

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There was not even standing room for an Air Headquarters in Athens. Apart from this, the psychological importance of maintaining British prestige in the emergency was sensibly allowed for. <sup>It</sup> not only was it vital to give the impression of our ability to go <sup>quickly</sup> over to the offensive without delay, but the Air Force had to show that it could not only hold its own ground in Greece, but could proceed with its programme of reconstituting the Hellenic Air Force; in other words, to create a fictitious impression of strength and durability while neither in fact existed.

What fortified the British Army and Air Force Commanders in their decisions was the assumption that the insurgents would succumb to the first co-ordinated British offensive. This understandable, but unjustified, optimism rendered it feasible to believe that Kifissia could be relieved; as December matured and the British found themselves still on the defensive, this optimism was replaced by a sober pessimism. When the road to Kifissia was cut on 10 December it was already late. The fighting heightened in intensity and the armour essential to a relief of Air H.Q. was too hotly involved in the land battle to operate in time and by night. The relief column arrived at Kifissia at least 10 hours too late.

The garrison of Air Headquarters Greece put up a gallant defence, but were overwhelmed by superior weight of armament and did not enjoy the volume of air support essential to silence the enemy batteries. At a time of dangerous setbacks in the Athens and Piraeus fighting, this air support was not available. Something had to be sacrificed and it was Kifissia. The prisoners were treated, (apart from the initial looting incidents), with the formality and indifference associated with ideological banditry. There seem to have been no cases of deliberate cruelty to be compared with atrocities committed against brother Greeks, <sup>(1)</sup> although E.L.A.S. showed that they could ignore military etiquette if it suited them. <sup>(2)</sup> The

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(1) For an account of these atrocities, see H.Q. L.F. & H.L.(G) Report of offences against troops and civilians by E.A.H./E.L.A.S. (Cabinet Historical Archives).

(2) On 12 Dec. 44 the Medical Officer of 4th Parachute Battalion was intentionally shot by insurgents while wearing a Red Cross armband and attending to wounded in an ambulance. After killing the M.O., the insurgents machine-gunned the ambulance (Operations of British Troops in the Insurrection by Brit. Hist. Soc. Central Med. (A.H.B. II J.20/4/1 p.47)

hardships of the prisoners are clearly established, but their captors, themselves soon to be fugitives, can have had only slightly better resources themselves.

The effect of the diversion of air effort to the shadowing and supply of the prisoners ~~on the military situation~~ was serious, but not fatal. The progressive arrival of air reinforcements (including the successful rocket-firing Beaufighters) and the very large increment of troops flown in from Italy were decisive in assisting to turn the tide in the favour of the determined British commanders and their forces. But for these factors, the outcome might have been far more disadvantageous to our fortunes.

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The Phase of limited Offensives (17 - 28 Dec. 44)

(1)

Army Reorganization and Plans

The decision to set up the H.Q. of the new Military Command Athens in Phalerum was a wise one, for in Athens itself the defense was not yet consolidated. From Phalerum, it was simpler to control the three main sectors, viz. Athens, Piraeus and the Athens-<sup>Phalerum</sup>Phalerum road. X Corps disappeared to make way for Military Command Athens, an operational H.Q. sharing with H.Q. III Corps the functions of command and administration. G(Air) staff remained in Athens. The two integrated staffs worked satisfactorily at Phalerum, but the air control organization could not be transferred there. No air support unit of the ordinary type was available. The only machinery in existence was the mock-up unit and their roof apparatus in the City. Hence the calling forward of air support was vested in H.Q. III Corps.

On 19 Dec. 44, it was decided to launch a series of limited offensives designed to secure the base areas at Phalerum and Piraeus and the roads linking them with Athens, then to turn to the task of clearing the rest of Athens city. The forces were disposed in three groups. The first was 4th Division, whose task was to open and hold the Phalerum-Athens road up to the southern edge of the central Athens perimeter and to hold the Kalamaki (Hassani) and Phalerum area: the second was 'Arkforce', whose task was to hold and make good the actual perimeter and relieve isolated posts: the third was 'Blockforce', whose task was to continue to clear the Piraeus area up to the railway line and beyond, so as to open the road for soft vehicles from Piraeus to Phalerum, to hold the front and create a reserve. Most of these tasks were already in hand on 18 December.

Ground Operations (18 - 27 Dec. 44)

The clearance of the Athens-Phalerum road began on 18 December. Almost its entire stretch, which was nearly 3 miles long from the Racecourse in the South to Makryianni suburb in the North, lay in territory dominated by the insurgents. The three-pronged attack made steady progress. Arditos Hill was

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(1) Operations of British Troops in the Insurrection in Greece. Brit. Hist. Sec. C. Med. Chap. III (A.H.B.IIJ.20/4/1).

stormed the first day. The R.A.F. Parachute Levies played a useful part on the 19th in clearing the southern part of Gargarets along the River Ilissos. By the end of 20 December, the Phaleron-Athens road was open. 'Granforce' was formed in the Phaleron sector.

On 18 December, the insurgents raided the Averof prison and Air H.Q. at Kifissia, both with success. Between 20 and 22 December, it was decided to discourage any further boldness on the part of E.L.A.S. by strengthening and wiring the city perimeter. On the 21st, the feeding of the civilians recommenced inside the wire. By the 22nd, the situation in the south and south-west sectors of Athens was improving and Arkforce recovering some of its power.

The recapture of the greater part of Piraeus port was achieved after very bitter fighting which lasted from 22 to 27 December; and <sup>it</sup> is of especial interest in that it provided the setting for some effective work by the rocket projectile Beaufighters. The insurgents took the initiative on the night 20/21 Dec. 44 with a mortar attack on the oil storage installations at Limin Foron Bay, setting 100 tons of fuel ablaze. The British fought back and, by the time their own assault went in, ~~it~~ found the enemy tired and weakened. On the night 21/22nd, the Indian Brigade made a surprise landing on the quays south of Dhrapatsona and prepared to fan out east and west from there, to clear the rest of the promontory and attack the north side of the priority objective - the Inner Harbour. Fierce opposition was crushed with the help of the rocket-firing Beaufighter squadron No. 39. There were three counter-attacks during the night of 22/23 December and a stalemate ensued until the night of 23/24 December, when, again with aid by aircraft, a night attack was pressed home and part of the north side of the harbour secured. From then on, progress was bloody, but steady and, beaten down by a furious hammering from Beaufighters and mortars, the enemy relinquished his hold on Piraeus. On 27 Dec. 44, the first cargo ships were unloaded in Leondos harbour. There were now only a handful of E.L.A.S. troops lurking in the outskirts of the port.

Between 23 and 27 Dec. 44, the forces in Athens consolidated their position and began to feel their way forward towards Piraeus and to seize control of key western areas of the city of Athens. By the end of the 27th, the paratroops had cleared the Iroon, Metaxouryian and Keramikos suburbs, so driving the

/ insurgents

insurgents from their nearest positions to the centre of Athens and establishing a secure hold on the Piraeus road between Omonias Square and Rouf barracks for convoys to the depot area.

Air Forces available on 18 Dec. 44

Before outlining the air effort in the most critical and decisive phase of the fighting, a reminder of the structure of this small, multiple-function air force will provide the material for assessment of how much a restricted force can achieve in a time of crisis in unconventional fighting against a background of disappearing targets, split-second calls for air support and a ban on normal air bombing.

When the Army launched its three limited offensives, the Air Force was at full strength. The Greek squadrons (Nos. 13, 335 and 336) were excluded from offensive operations, but there were available two R.A.F. Spitfire squadrons (Nos. 94 and 73) for short range reconnaissance and close support, one Spitfire S.A.A.F. squadron (No. 40) for long range tactical reconnaissance and one detachment (No. 680) for photographic reconnaissance, one day/night fighter R.A.F. Beaufighter squadron (No. 108), one day/night R.A.F. Wellington squadron for bombing, flare and supply dropping, and a detachment of one R.A.F. rocket projectile Beaufighter squadron (No. 39). In addition, there were a few Spitfires at <sup>32</sup> Seides/Salomika (No. 32 Squadron), a few air/sea rescue Warwicks (No. 283 Squadron) <sup>which</sup> ~~was~~ could spot for mines, and the A.H.Q. Greece Communication Flight, with various <sup>which</sup> ~~who~~ types including Austers, <sup>which</sup> ~~who~~ took an active part in operations against the insurgents. In all, by European standards, a mere handful of aircraft, but they performed a multiplicity of tasks in difficult, unpredictable weather.

Diffuse Target Pattern and multiple Functions of No. 337 Wing

An attempt will now be made to relate the air effort between 18 and 27 Dec. 44, while omitting the record (already covered) of the support of the besieged Air H.Q. Kifissia and the shadowing and supply of the Allied prisoners-of-war on their long march up country. It <sup>has</sup> ~~has~~ already been stated that that unfortunate episode dangerously depleted the air effort in support of the Army during the most critical phase, but it will be seen that the all-out operations of the balance of No. 337 Wing's forces played a considerable role in the turning of the tide of battle to the advantage of the British.

It would be a good thing if these air operations could be neatly tied down into the separate compartments of the three main zones of the ground fighting already defined as existing on 18 Dec. 44, but this is, in the nature of things, impossible. The reasons are that no planning for support on short call was possible. Targets and times in the guerilla fighting were unpredictable and if no machine-gunning was called for, the Spitfires of Nos. 73 and 94 Squadrons were employed on wide reconnaissance, gun ranging for the Navy, cover for relief columns, the defence of Hassani airfield, pathfinding for rocket Beaufighters and area patrolling.

The ground fighting ~~as a whole~~ was confined to Attica in general and the Piraeus - Phaleron - Athens complex in particular. The responsibilities of the R.A.F. extended to the greater part of Greece. This is easy to understand if the enemy forces are visualised as a series of mushroom units springing up hourly through the country areas of the Peloponnese, Attica, the Corinth Canal area and as far as Thrace. From these remote areas E.L.A.S. in the Athens area received their reinforcements, arms and supplies for the central battle. All over these areas they were browbeating the inhabitants and setting up military installations and political headquarters with the object of a complete take-over. There were no thin red lines in this campaign. The enemy system may most readily be compared with one of those threatening fronts, known to aircrews, that suddenly fills all the parts of a landscape simultaneously. Not only was this pattern diffuse, but it was mobile within its confines and as most of the E.L.A.S. troops were wearing civilian clothes and mingled with the population, often moved in small groups of transport or single trucks, took cover in houses and churches, the air gunners were usually presented with a very teasing problem of identity. It is because it is so difficult to find a parallel to the nature of the fighting in the Greek insurrection that the air operations must always retain a special lesson for the future.

There are several angles from which to approach the air operations, but the daily record with its infinite detail is rejected as entirely confusing. Instead, the record will deal with the various categories of aircraft, without mentioning every sortie, giving special attention to episodes of note, with a special assessment of the rocket Beaufighter effort. It must be assumed that unless specifically mentioned, all the missions were very small ones.

(1)

The Menace to Hassani Airfield

With Air Headquarters in ruins and its garrison in captivity, the weight of command fell heavily on No. 337 Wing Headquarters and the station staff of Hassani airfield. With shortening breaks of good flying weather, the squadrons furiously busy, with air transports landing daily, a prisoner of war camp on the perimeter, well-armed E.L.A.S. units in the vicinity and the prospect of a succession of V.I.P. visits in the near future, Hassani's cup was full of problems. To cap the situation, (2) the protection afforded so far by the Army was being reduced, so that 4th Division could 'gather up its tail' and concentrate on the offensive against the key port of Piraeus. Hassani lay the whole of this critical period under the threat of extinction and, before outlining the achievement of its squadrons, it is as well to follow events in the life of the hub of all air activity.

During the first half of the night 18/19 December, the fighter controller assisted in marshalling armoured cars and tanks on the airfield in readiness for the first light sortie to Kifissia, which arrived too late after much delay. All was quiet until 0920 hours on 21 December, when shells started falling near Hassani aerodrome; several dropped near the flashing beacon and one near the homer. While the Beaufighter already airborne on gun reconnaissance was being directed to search for local gun positions, a strike force composed of six Spitfire bombers (No. 73 Squadron), four rocket Beaufighters (No. 39 Squadron) and two Wellingtons (No. 221 Squadron) with 500 pound bombs was brought to stand-by. Aircraft were dispersed 100 yards apart. Two armoured cars and a Dingo scout car of the Guards went out to reconnoitre roads East of the aerodrome. The shelling by 4 inch calibre guns continued erratically for a good hour. Two Spitfires looked for guns in the vicinity, but found neither guns nor movement. A Beaufighter had little luck, either. The O.C. of the Group reconnoitring the general area Hassani - Athens saw the normal picture of intermittent movement of trucks and civilians, but nothing suggesting an imminent attack. Other aircraft scanned the local country, saw trenches and a pile of ammunition boxes and a sunken pillbox, but

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(1) No. 337 Wing O.R.B. December 1944.

(2) They were still left with 1 battalion of the Northumberland Fusiliers on the airfield itself, with additional tanks and infantry in the immediate vicinity, as well as one Field Squadron of the R.A.F. Regiment.

still no signs of life. At last light, a few men were seen and gun flames at Glifadha, (not far from Hassani), but that was all. The night was spent in a state of readiness ~~for attack~~, but there were no untoward incidents.

Nothing of immediate interest developed during the 22nd and a strong cross wind prohibited all flying from 1550 hours that day until the following morning. The 23rd passed uneventfully on the field, but a very comprehensive flare-dropping programme was arranged for the night 23/24. Again, the high cross wind blew all night and no flying was possible. All this time, Spitfires and Beaufighters had been very active against central and <sup>peripheral</sup> ~~peripheral~~ targets in the Athens - Piraeus area and there can be no doubt that their continuous offensive was making it difficult for E.L.A.S. to concentrate for an assault on Hassani. Again, on the night 24/25, the deteriorating weather rendered the airfield non-operational.

Christmas Day was passed at high pressure owing largely to the arrival of the Prime Minister and Mr. Eden during the afternoon. They left Hassani at 1725 hours en route for the cruiser H.M.S. Ajax lying off Piraeus.

At noon on 26 December, the R.A.F. Regiment reported that mortar shells from over the mountain ridge were falling on hills immediately East of the aerodrome. A Beaufighter sent up to investigate failed to find the mortar batteries. All through the 26th, Athens was constantly patrolled on account of the presence of Churchill, Eden and Alexander, attending an all-party conference.

At 2318 hours on the 26th, machine guns from the hills to the East was directed on the aerodrome, with special attention to <sup>the</sup> ~~an~~ R.A.F. Regiment gun post. The attack lasted for 50 minutes, but caused no damage. A Wellington illuminated the whole area with flares and a Beaufighter made a vain search for the enemy gun positions. One Regiment officer was killed and one airman wounded. The illumination was continued round Hassani until dawn on the 27th. The rest of the year was free of any attacks on the aerodrome, for E.L.A.S., energetically harried by all forces, was beginning to lose its grip on the situation and the end was in sight.

/Statistics

Statistics of Air Effort (18 - 27 Dec. 44)

A full list of daily operational sorties by squadron is given in the footnote below. <sup>(1)</sup> The almost daily detachment of Spitfires, Wellingtons and Beaufighters from the 18th onwards in support of Air H.Q. at Kifissia and our prisoners-of-war, as well as for the defence of Hassani airfield (both already described), must of course be allowed for. Clearly, the balance left over for support of the ground fighting, reconnaissance of enemy supply routes and gun positions and patrols over the distant Allied bases at Patras and Salonika was not considerable. Yet the figures given below can prove deceptive. Many aircrews (including the Officer Commanding No. 337 Group), flew several sorties on some days and displayed unusual versatility. A very interesting example of a multiple-function air force is presented.

(1) Operational sorties by No. 337 Wing (18 - 27 Dec. 44 inclusive).  
(omitting A/S/R)

Dec. 1944	S P I T F I R E S				BEAUFIGHTERS		WELLS	AUSTERS etc. COMN. FLIGHTS	TOTAL
	680 P/R	73	94	40(S.A.) T/R	D/N 108	R.P. 39	221		
18	-	12	12	4	9	8	7	-	52
19	-	14	27	1	8	6	9	5	70
20	-	8	13	2	8	6	8	3	48
21	-	8	25	4	8	6	12	4	67
22	-	20	7	1	6	5	5	1	4045
23	-	-	17	2	10	11	2	-	42
24	-	11	2	2	6	9	1	-	31
25	-	-	14	4	5	8	2	-	3333
26	1	14	8	2	7	3	9	-	4544
27	-	-	7	2	9	2	9	-	29
	1	87	132	24	76	64	64	13	461

/Tactical

Tactical Reconnaissance by Beaufighters and Spitfires (18 - 27 Dec. 44) (1)

Long range tactical reconnaissance was carried out at least once a day covering the approaches to Athens and Piraeus areas from North and from the Peloponnese. The Army did not look on these flights as especially productive of intelligence as to enemy intentions. E.L.A.S. was short of transport and moved mostly on foot in small bands and at night. It was difficult to differentiate between E.L.A.S. and civilians. Notwithstanding, the Beaufighters (No. 108 Squadron) and Spitfires (Nos. 73, 94 and 40 S.A.A.F. Squadrons) built up a clearer pattern of the supply routes, harassed groups caught in the open, shot up dumps and transport and kept the enemy's head down. In addition to the areas mentioned, they paid a visit to the threatened area of Patras. A goodly number of what the Air Force called gun reconnaissances were flown, especially in the areas of close fighting in Piraeus port and Athens town. Very close co-operation with the artillery in shoots and registrations through rather roundabout communications was only rarely carried out and usually by trained pilots of No. 40 Squadron. More would have been attempted but for the fact that there were no Very High Frequency sets available to place with the guns.

Standing reconnaissance from dawn to dusk by Beaufighters and Spitfires proved invaluable. It was possible to obtain information on any part of the battle area within 2 to 5 minutes. The system employed was that G(Air)MCA or the Counter Battery Officer could ask Air Support Control in Athens on their direct lines for any information on movement or gun positions; then, Air Support Control through their Very High Frequency to the aircraft could obtain the answer within a few minutes. In this manner, the continuous reports by civilians of hostile guns or movement could be confirmed immediately.

Unfortunately most of these <sup>last-named</sup> reports were either too late or incorrect. The Army (2) thought that these reconnaissances, by maintaining a continuous watch for enemy guns and mortars, were certainly responsible for keeping their activity to a minimum. The endurance of the Beaufighters rendered a welcome economy in the use of aircraft feasible.

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(1) No. 337 Wing O.R.B. : Army report on air support in Greece - HQMAAF/S.354/AIR. 26.4.45 (A.H.B.IIJ.1/256/12).

(2) H.Q. Land Forces and Military Liaison, Greece.

(1)  
Close Support (18 - 27 Dec. 44)

*L.C.* In order to cause as little damage as possible to civilian life and property, bombs were not used in built-up areas. Only three bombing attacks took place. One of them was on a troop concentration in the open, one to cut the railway line ELEUSIS - Athens, and the third on a large explosives dump.

The day Beaufighter and Spitfire attacks with cannon and machine gun fire may first be considered, before a closer glance at the successes of the rocket-firing Beaufighter. Generally speaking, the first two aircraft types dealt with the same targets as the rocket-firing aircraft, viz. E.L.A.S. headquarters and strongpoints, gun and mortar positions and opportunity targets, such as vehicles and enemy concentrations, but tougher buildings were reserved for rockets.

Most air support was concentrated in the city and Piraeus, following the gradual consolidation by our forces of their gains, and on the roads between Phaleron, Piraeus and Athens which were slowly released from the grip of the insurgents. The fighting in Athens was still marked by extreme bitterness. On the 24th, for example, three Spitfires made no less than thirty attacks on a building in the Lykabettus area of Athens before they could dislodge the insurgents. In spite of the watch on the Kifissia captives moving northwards, Spitfires registered four cannon attacks on the 23rd and eight on the 25th. A new task from the 21st for Spitfires was gun ranging for H.M.S. Ajax, who was shelling rebel positions at Piraeus.

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(1) No. 337 Wing O.R.B.

/Operations

Operations by Rocket Beaufighters in Athens - Piraeus Area(16 Dec. 44 - 3 Jan. 45)<sup>(1)</sup>No. 39 Squadron sends a Detachment from Italy(2)

On 16 Dec. 44, six rocket projectile Beaufighters, a detachment of the parent No. 39 Squadron, flew from Biforno airfield in Italy to Hassani, with orders to provide close support for the Army fighting in Athens and Piraeus. They were armed with 60 lb and 25 lb rocket projectiles and 20 mm cannon. In all their offensive operations except one, either both rockets and cannon were used in conjunction or cannon only. Their sojourn in Greece, which ended on 18 Jan. 45, was a memorable one. All air and ground records testify to the high degree of success achieved by their precision attacks on strongpoints and the generous effect of them on the morale of the British troops fighting in the crowded quarters of Athens city and Piraeus port.

The achievement of the detachment, although falling short of perfection, was out of all proportion to its size. From 16 to 21 December, the effort was confined to Athens, where strenuous efforts were being made to wire the perimeter and loosen the enemy's grip on key points in the built-up areas. This effort in Athens continued intermittently thereafter until 3 Jan. 45. From 22 December onwards, attacks were carried out from time to time in Piraeus to aid the advance of the troops landed in the dock area. These, also, continued until 3 January, by which time victory was in sight and rocket attacks were no longer required. Thereafter, hindered by bad weather, they performed a variety of useful tasks until the fighting petered out. Then the crews could at last view the Acropolis and other fair antiquities of Athens in peace and quietness and need no longer look askance at women, likely to be carrying hand grenades and revolvers beneath their clothes.

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(1) No. 39 Squadron and No. 337 Wing O.R.Bs: H.Q. M.A.A.F. Bombing Survey Report 13.2.45 (A.H.B. IIJ1/138).

(2) Abbreviation R.P.

/ Close

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(1)  
Close support in Athens (16 - 28 Dec. 44)

(2)  
On the evening the detachment arrived at Hassani, two Beaufighters attacked the rebel-held Athens radio station with eight 60 lb rockets each. One salvo struck about 30 yards from the aiming point and the other salvo about 120 yards off it: but damage caused to the pipe from the feeder station stopped the broadcasting.

On the 17th, the whole squadron was airborne. Six aircraft, armed with 60 lb rockets, attacked the K.K.E. (Communist Party) H.Q., scoring many hits and reporting damage and fires. The Bombing Survey did not report on the damage. The effects of air attacks tend to be erased as time proceeds, for various well-known reasons, and the lapse of three weeks of close, ding-dong fighting often renders accurate assessment impossible. Two more aircraft, carrying projectiles, scored hits with rockets and cannon on food and ammunition dumps, causing fires and explosions, none confirmable later. The last mission on the 17th was an attack on a two-storey building with solid stone walls, reported as an E.L.A.S. H.Q. It was confirmed by the survey that they caused extensive damage with fragmentation on the inside from four strikes. Forty occupants were killed and forty wounded.

18 December saw the British offensive against Ardhittes hill in Athens, which was successfully stormed and left vacant for the night, an operation in which the R.A.F. Regiment's Assyrian Parachute Levies earned praise from the Army. The same day saw a two-handed punch by E.L.A.S. the fall of Air H.Q. at Kifissia and the evacuation of Averof prison. The 19th and 20th saw a partial restoration of the Allied position in the city and the reopening of the road to Phalerum.

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- (1) Statistics from No. 39 Squadron O.R.B. and the M.A.A.F. Operations Research Section Report No. N.31 (A.H.B.IIJ1/138): confirmed results from the last-named document: Army testimony from the British Historical Section, Central Mediterranean record mentioned frequently above (A.H.B.IIJ20/4/1). Consult Appendix 55 to this volume for full known details of all R.P. attacks.
- (2) Not Pallini and not one of the 3 official Athens stations previously used (see Town Plan and Key).

/ On

On the 18th, a mission of two aircraft ~~was~~ silenced a gun at Kifissia and set its shelters on fire, the remaining missions were devoted to close support in the city. A heavy gun on the outskirts was partially damaged and silenced and the roof and part of the walls of the adjacent farm buildings destroyed by 60 lb rockets in an attack by two aircraft. Four aircraft joined in a ground artillery attack near the Stadium <sup>and</sup> with 32 projectiles and cannon fire, scored many hits on a complex of occupied buildings 300 x 360 yards in extent. The survey unit could not sort out the relative contribution of air and artillery to the damage. Six aircraft continued the close support on the 19th by firing 48 rocket projectiles into a block of buildings sheltering enemy concentrations. On their return to base, the crews were addressed by the Air Officer Commanding, Greece, who told them he had already received Army reports on the 'considerable devastation' they had caused. Crews reported 20 mm. anti-aircraft fire from E.L.A.S. batteries.

There <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ two missions on the 20th. The first, of four aircraft, almost certainly eliminated anti-aircraft positions in Galatsi suburb. The second, of two aircraft, also used 60 lb projectiles, with cannon, against an E.L.A.S. headquarters in the same suburb, reporting the wrecking of one building with four direct hits and severe damage to the other. The survey team are silent on this effort.

On the 21st, five crews left to attack Singros prison, in the afternoon. This was a group of heavy stone building, in use as a natural strongpoint. They reported accurate precision hits with their forty 60 lb projectiles, but the survey team in January found all exact evidence eliminated by the confusion of damage caused by artillery as well as rockets. The second mission, by a single aircraft, was directed to destroy <sup>a part</sup> ~~the Interrogation Room~~ of the abandoned C.S.D.I.O. building at Kifissia. The rockets were fired as instructed, but the fading light conditions rendered a detailed assessment of damage impossible. ~~and the result remains unknown.~~

The attack of the 22nd on a two-storey dwelling-house, used as an E.L.A.S. headquarters, failed. Hassani's stocks of 60 lb rocket projectiles built up by the air lift were running down and the crews left armed with 25 pounders. Trouble developed early. The projectiles began to burn for what were described as <sup>unpredictable</sup> ~~impracticable~~ periods before leaving the rocket rails. Only one rocket appears to have been fired. Aware of the danger, the crews returned to base.

On the 23rd, four crews began the morning early with a series of cannon attacks on two E.L.A.S.-held buildings in North Athens. Both blocks were repeatedly raked with cannon fire as a softening-up process to facilitate a ground attack. Almost immediately after de-briefing, the same four crews were given another target. <sup>(1)</sup> This was a reported ammunition dump concealed in three single-storey buildings, with load-bearing solid stone walls, in North Athens. They claimed many hits, which were confirmed by the survey team later: but the only effects of the 25 lb rockets were holes in the walls. As the crews turned for home, they looked in vain for 'fireworks' from exploding ammunition, and concluded the dump was empty. In the afternoon, three aircraft added their weight to an Army offensive by firing their rockets into a single-storey hotel being used as a strongpoint, reporting all rockets on target. The precise result was never sorted out from the general debris in the area.

The 24th was a day of constructive support. In the afternoon, two Beaufighters attacked a petrol store in a building in the northern suburbs of Athens with rockets, saw it catch fire, lose its roof and then almost completely disintegrate. They then made three cannon dives on another building which was also, they reported, totally demolished. Two other aircraft attacked a billet with cannon. The survey team reported the top storey of the first house destroyed and one room on the ground floor severely damaged. The best effort of the day was a rocket attack by three aircraft on an E.L.A.S. H.Q. in the city. The claim was of 24 (100%) direct hits. The Army reported damage and confusion. <sup>(2)</sup>

The survey teams reports appear to have mixed the sortie details of several missions on this and the following days, but they do testify to the extensive damage caused by a total of six aircraft with their 60 lb rockets to buildings. Some 25 lb rockets, they wrote, had caused damage to a tobacco store and machinery, <sup>and had</sup> ~~and 25 lb strikes had~~ caused fires.

On Christmas Day, two of the four missions joined in the fight for the Piraeus dock area. The third strike force, (four Beaufighters), discharged fourteen 60 lb and sixteen 25 lb R.P's. and carried out many cannon strikes against an E.L.A.S. resistance area in north central Athens. They reported

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(1) No. 15 in Appendix 55.  
 (2) Refer to Appendix 55.

partial demolition of the area and the remainder very badly damaged and on fire. Accurate, light anti-aircraft fire from a neighbouring area was replied to by one gunner without positive result. The Army, from the next block but one to the target, telephoned through a report describing the attack as "the most accurate we have ever seen."

It was not until the 27th, that the next urgent Army target was called for. This was an ammunition dump in a poorly constructed building in North Athens. Two Beaufighters launched eight rockets each into it, but in the absence of explosions, it was thought the dump was empty. Another small attack was carried out on the 28th on two buildings (believed to be in Athens) defended by E.L.A.S. troops. Both were reported damaged. About 20 men rushed out and were machine-gunned from an aircraft with definite effect.

#### Close Support in Athens (29 Dec. 44 - 3 Jan. 45)

Although the general period covered by this section is 17 - 28 December, it is considered more conclusive to give a complete running tableau of the detachment's rocket attacks until the last mission on 3 Jan. 45. There will then be more point in an over-all assessment of the results of the operations in Greece.

All the 11 sorties on 29 December were in response to Army calls for the destruction of E.L.A.S. installations in Athens. The position in Piraeus was progressing very comfortably, the whole detachment was available and three replacement aircraft had just been flown in from Biferno.

At mid-day, four Beaufighters were airborne, but hurriedly reported finding their target marked with red crosses. Re-briefing took place over the Very High Frequency and they went on to attack a large stores building, (mud-bound, with solid stone walls) in Northern Athens. They emptied about 22 rocket projectiles into the target and raked it with cannon fire, reporting damage and fires. The survey team noted <sup>minor</sup> ~~some~~ damage in the area but could not say exactly what the aircrews achieved. There was still a lot of fighting and bombardment to come, ~~on the 29th~~. In the afternoon of the 29th, three aircraft attacked a monastery and adjacent buildings in Athens harbouring

/guns

guns and troops. They reported the destruction of the guns and accurate fire on the troops surrounding them: There was evidently, at any rate, a temporary hold-up in the local enemy operations, although by the time the survey team covered the ground, little trace of damage was apparent. But they recorded 50% hits on target. At 1620 hours, four aircraft were despatched to attack a factory where an E.L.A.S. conference was known to be in session. There were two modern and one solid stone buildings in the target area. Both 60 lb and 25 lb rockets were used in the attack. The buildings were hit by 56% of the projectiles. One of them was partially destroyed, burst into flames and continued burning all night. The damage by 60 lb rockets to both buildings and the silk-spinning machinery they housed was certified later as fairly extensive, and some damage to machinery had resulted by impact of 25 pounders. Most important of all, as was confirmed ~~by news~~ on 1 January, most of the E.L.A.S. conference members were killed.

After a day of non-operational weather on the 30th and a mission en /n Piraeus on the last day of the year, four aircraft attacked, on 1 January, the Eighth State School <sup>(1)</sup> in the northern Athens suburb of Kato Patissia, a three-storey building with stone walls, an ideal strongpoint for the insurgents. Hits were scored with 25 lb rockets and cannon, but no claims were made apart from these hits: only minor damage was confirmed later. It was one of those numerous cases where the true effect in terms of loss of life and material and the lowering of morale cannot be calculated, but must be woven into the texture of the combined operations then proceeding.

The last operation in Athens was most probably the attack on 3 Jan. 45 by four Beaufighters on a building reported as an E.L.A.S. headquarters. Apart from the report of hits on the target, no evidence on the operation has survived. By this time, the enemy's grip on Athens had been noticeably weakened and the attack in northern Athens, designed to initiate the final clearance of the city, was making decided progress. At the end of <sup>4</sup> January, the very heavy losses inflicted on the insurgents on that day and the 3rd had broken the back of their

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(1) Previously occupied by the Germans.

resistance. On the night of 4/5 Jan. 45, they withdrew from Athens and Piraeus into the hills.

(1)

The Port of Piraeus

The Piraeus consisted of Leontos, Megas and Kephos harbours, the whole being enclosed between the peninsula on the western side of Phaleron bay and the mainland to the northward. When H.M.S. Ajax approached and was abreast of Aegina, the Piraeus peninsula resembled an island with white and reddish cliffs. Closer in, the signal station and a windmill could be seen on the summit (Lefes Castella) in the south-eastern part of the peninsula, and to the north-eastward, the Acropolis and the buildings round Athens stood out clearly on a fine day. The whole dock system combined to form an important base, with up-to-date facilities for handling merchandise and providing fuel and repairs for a great volume of shipping. The town of Piraeus lay eastward and north-eastward of the harbours. It was the centre of Greek commerce in the days of peace and, being the terminus of three railways, the natural distributing centre for the whole of Greece. The peninsula, nearly 2 miles long, had been won from E.L.A.S. by the 18th and the Army was now confronted with the formidable task of clearing the rest of the docks and the built-up areas of the town. The situation of the civil population was grave, medical supplies and feedstocks were low. German bombing in the first Grecian campaign had created waste areas of wreckage.

To reopen the port and docks in Piraeus, the first essential was to secure the closely built-up area north of the inner harbour (2) and the area round it, dotted with factories and industrial buildings. The flank landing was intended to reduce the bloody

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- (1) Mediterranean Pilot Vol. IV.  
(2) Limin Alon.

/nature

nature of the fighting ahead to a minimum. Air restrictions as to bombing and so forth in the densely populated town are already known. Aid by precision rocket-firing might do much to eliminate strongpoints. It was very close work, sometimes very near the front line troops.

(1)

Close Support in Piraeus (22 - 26 Dec. 44)

The first use of rockets in Piraeus occurred on 22 December, when three Beaufighters, armed with the more reliable 60 lb rocket projectiles, met with a high measure of success in an afternoon attack on two school buildings being used for artillery storage, both with stone walls and reinforced concrete floors. They reported one building completely wrecked and the other severely damaged. The survey team confirmed expensive damage by 7 out of the 24 rockets fired.

The next call for close support was on the 24th, when two aircraft scored many direct hits on an E.L.A.S. strongpoint on which they made four rocket and five cannon attacks, leaving it considerably 'shaken' and on fire. On the 25th, two precision attacks were carried out. Two aircraft attacked an E.L.A.S. headquarters, (two modern, concrete-framed, two-storeyed buildings) with 25-pounders, causing considerable damage which could not be specifically identified in the later confusion in the area. Soon after lunch, the O.C. Detachment (2) with two aircraft, singled out a petrol dump in the battle area. The two crews claimed 14 out of 16 hits on target with rockets and, with the added effects of cannon fire, general havoc.

On the 26th, three aircraft returned to the E.L.A.S. H.Q., visited the previous day in Piraeus. The leading aircrew reported five or six rocket hits. Two other aircraft raked the target with cannon, the whole attack producing serious damage and a small fire. The H.Q. was mopped up as the Army advanced with many more local ruins. By now, the port and town were dominated by the British.

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- (1) Refer to Appendix 55 for analysis of operations.  
 (2) F/Lt. Pitman.

/Close

Close Support in Piraeus (31 Dec. 44 - 3 Jan. 45)

E.L.A.S. troops continued to cling <sup>desperately</sup> ~~desperately~~ to strongpoints in the suburbs, although they should have known it was of no avail. On 31 December, the Beaufighters were called in to reduce a group of five or six buildings, from which the insurgents were launching a counter-attack north of the Anastasis cemetery. In the forenoon, four aircraft made attacks on the buildings <sup>(1)</sup> with 25 lb rockets and made numerous cannon runs. Although their reports were not effusive, the attacks, according to the Army historians, made it possible to renew the advance, capture Eryenia hill and open the road to St. George's Bay generating station. All the essential unloading harbours and the main installations were now in British hands.

On 3 Jan. 45, bitter fighting was still proceeding as the final advances to crush the rebellion were initiated. It was on this day that the Beaufighter Detachment made its final gesture. A mission of four aircraft claimed direct hits on gun positions in North Piraeus <sup>(2)</sup> firing on <sup>our</sup> ~~the~~ troops as they closed in on the dominating heights of Tourkovounia in the north-western suburbs of Athens.

The British Historical Section testified later to the great contribution of the Beaufighters during the last week of December in 'the tremendous hammering' of the enemy administered by the combined attacks by mortars and airborne rocket projectiles. The combined ground/air team that visited some of the locations attacked attempted to treat the results statistically. Quite naturally this was only possible, in the devastated areas, in a few cases, but it will be instructive if their findings are now briefly examined.

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(1) Target 26 in Appendix 55.

(2) Target 28 in Appendix 55.

Claims and verified Results of Rocket Attacks

It would be of superlative value if we could subject the results of rocket attacks on all 29 targets to close statistical analysis. Unfortunately and perhaps understandably, <sup>owing to</sup> the pace of operations and the ad hoc nature and intensity of the in-fighting that marked the whole insurrection in the Athens area, details of aircraft armament are missing and damage to the target ~~was~~ progressively ~~reduced~~ <sup>erased</sup> by the wear and tear of battle. There are, however, reports based on personal inspection which can be set against the weight of effort and the aircrews' claims. Although the samples available are insufficient to produce exact calculations, the series of comments which follow and the figures quoted do serve a useful purpose and go to strengthen the general view taken at the time by the ground and air participants that the task was well executed, the weapons nicely adapted to the ends in view and the results fruitful.

Pilot's claims are available with full details of rocket loads in 16 of the 32 attacks made. Of these, in eight attacks using 60 lb high explosive

(1) M.A.A.F. bombing survey report (A.H.B. ILJ1/138)  
S.C.O.R.U. Det., R.A.F., M.E. }

(2) Strike percentages confirmed by Bomb Survey Unit

Target No.	Area	No. of R.P.		% age Strikes	Target Area	
		Fired	Strikes		Plan	Elevation
1	Athens	16	0	0	144	120
4	Athens	16	11	69	5,700	4,300
14	Piraeus	24	7	29	14,600	5,800
15	Athens	48	14	29	6,750	3,240
19	Athens	48	36	75	75,600	11,000
24	Athens	24	12	50	3,500	1,800
25	Athens	32	18	56	47,000	-
27	Athens	32	17	53	17,500	14,800
TOTAL		240	115	48%		

(H.E.)

(H.E.) heads. 188 R.P. were fired and 158 hits claimed (84%). In eight attacks using 25 lb A.P. heads, 192 R.P. were fired, and 152 hits claimed (79%). Thus, of these 380 shots, 310 were claimed hits (81%).

The eight targets analysed by the survey team and given in the footnote show an average of 48% hits, but if the failure of the mission on target No. 1 is excluded, a more favourable percentage of 51 is arrived at. By the end of 1944, the discouragement of fantastic claims had led to a sober, conservative attitude on the part of aircrews. Long examination of the records of the Italian campaign confirm this. Hence the probability that the true average of hits was substantially higher. But a hit did not necessarily imply destruction of the target. Apart from flukes, it needed several runs and liberal cannon strikes to effect much damage to some of the heavy stone buildings attacked. Much depended on the nature of the targets, thickness of walls, point of impact, ancillary effects of fragmentation and the behaviour of fuses and rocket motors. All such questions, although they are the natural subjects for more technical treatises than this, contributed to the general effect. Some of the complementary and after effects of fragmentation and the erratic behaviour of the flying motors achieved the desired result, which was usually to cause casualties and fires and to render the operation of the gun battery or tactical headquarters ineffective. Individually, some of the rockets were faulty. All the snags had not yet been discovered. Yet enough has been related in these pages to confirm the excellence of the general performance of No. 39 Squadron Detachment (already experienced in comparable operations in Yugoslavia against powerfully defended German positions) in aid of the British forces under siege in Greece.

/ The

The Final Week (28 Dec. 44 - 5 Jan. 45)

The Insurgents on the Defensive

On 25 December, when the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Army Commander-in-Chief visited Athens to resolve the political situation, the British programme of limited offensive had already produced important results. The base at Phaleron was firmly linked with Athens and Piraeus, a large part of south-west Athens had been recovered and the recapture of the Piraeus was in sight. There was evidence that insurgent troops, particularly elements of the two 'country' formations, <sup>(1)</sup> roughly 20,000 of the 35,000 insurgent troops estimated to be in the Athens area, were moving back from the centre of the city. It was clear that E.L.A.S. must quickly decide either to stand and fight in Athens in the hope of forcing a decision, or to withdraw and concentrate round the city while negotiating for terms under the threat of launching a fresh offensive. It was believed that the latter course would be followed; and, although the enemy was still capable of fighting with fanaticism, events proved this belief well founded.

Reports of withdrawal to the outskirts continued to arrive over the 26th and 27th of December. Certain areas in the centre of the city were probed and found weakly held. Some units reappeared in the mountains outside the city and the brunt of the fighting fell on the enemy's Athens Corps. The Army Commander saw that the enemy's hold on Athens was weakening and decided on 27 Dec. 44 to increase the tempo and scope of the offensive forthwith and to clear the whole of the south-east of Athens.

Clearance of South-East Athens (28 - 30 Dec. 44)

The attack began on the night 27/28 December with a strike eastwards from the Athens - Phaleron road toward Katsipodhi and was followed through until, at the end of the 28th, this district and its neighbour Drogouti had been almost cleared. The 29th saw intensive <sup>fighting</sup> across the City through Kinosarvas into Kaisariani, which the enemy had sworn to make a 'little Stalingrad'. They were dislodged, driven into the open ground to the eastward and decimated by our tanks. The heavy casualties suffered here by the E.L.A.S. forces were unacceptable to them and they began to pull back into the hills. On 30 December, only disorganized resistance

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(1) 2nd and 3rd E.L.A.S. Divisions.

was met. By the end of 31 December, the various British and loyal Greek forces had joined hands and south-east Athens was clear of insurgents. There was still plenty of strenuous fighting ahead.

Further Advances in Piraeus and Improvement in Outlook (28-31 Dec. 44)

While the attack on south-east Athens was in progress, 'Blockforce' in Piraeus exploited from the line gained on 27 December to secure St. George's Bay generating station and the environs. On the 30th, a grip on Anastasis cemetery was secured and a cordon drawn from it to Limin Paron Bay. On the 31st, the advance was delayed by a counter-attack forming up north of the cemetery and it was at this point that the rocket projectile Beaufighters attacked to such good effect that the advance was resumed. The road from Evyenia Hill to St. George's Bay was opened and the cordon moved forward.

There was still no indication that the enemy was approaching breaking point; and the movement of his troops out of Athens had not been noticeably accelerated. But the situation had much improved in our favour. Instead of having three separate perimeters to defend, with tenuous communications between them, the Greco-British forces were now established on a continuous front facing North, from Goudhi Barracks in the East to St. George's Bay in the West, all of it firmly linked with the base area at Phaleron.

Air Operations in the Battle Area (28 - 31 Dec. 44)

During the last few vital days of the year, the air forces acted as the eyes of the Army. Their pattern of reconnaissance covered movements on the roads, enemy gun batteries and developments round enemy headquarters at Peristeri and in the country districts. Normal bombing was excluded, but R.A.F. fighters harried motor transport and concentrations of enemy troops. All in all, the scale of effort was not formidable. With other commitments such as supply to the prisoners from Kifissia on the march, the defense of Hassani air base, escort of rocket Beaufighter missions and cover to Army convoys there was not much left over; but that balance was spread so as to influence the general tactical situation, provide information and keep the insurgents' heads down.

A few illustrations from the period 28 - 31 December will give a general idea of the pattern of air co-operation. On the 28th, a Wellington dropped flares over Piraeus in the small hours. Three Beaufighters flew gun reconnaissances, a

fourth reconnoitred as far northwards as Larissa and Trikkala, reporting on road traffic; and two others swept the country south-east of Athens. Peristeri H.Q. came under observation. One of the South African Spitfires and six from No. 73 Squadron reconnoitred for enemy guns in Athens and Piraeus. Two other Spitfires indicated targets for No. 39 Squadron's Beaufighters in Athens, marking the targets with bursts of cannon fire.

On the 29th, No. 94 Spitfire Squadron took over from No. 73. Six of them marked targets in Athens for Beaufighter missions, four escorted Army columns and two reconnoitred Pallini wireless station. Others carried out a general survey, raked buildings, transport and troops with cannon. The tactical Spitfires of No. 40 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron put up four gun reconnaissances, a strafing attack and a flight over Peristeri.<sup>(1)</sup> This same area, a nodal point, both as headquarters and supply centre close to the two main escape routes, was photographed. Wellingtons dropped flares over south-east Athens and three Beaufighters made a comprehensive reconnaissance of Athens and parts of Attica. The weather on the 30th was so bad that only a few patrols over Hassani airfield were possible.

On the 31st, Spitfires had an active day as the ground fighting increased in tempo and the insurgents were being forced into the open. A total of sixteen Spitfire sorties (most of them in Piraeus), were recorded, including cannon strikes on houses harbouring E.L.A.S. rearguards as they made their last desperate stand in the dock area. While Beaufighters salvaged rockets into buildings and shot up transport, the Navy and the Army shelled positions. Spitfires reconnoitred for guns and joined in the firing. Spitfire co-operation in the rescue of the garrison at Pallini radio station must now be related.

/ Air

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(1) H.W. Athens.

Air Participation in Relief of Pallini Radio Station - (21-31 Dec.44) (1)

At the outbreak of hostilities in early December, Pallini Wireless Station (about 10 miles east of Athens on the road to Marathon) and the Marathon Dam (about 20 miles by road N.E. of Athens) were each garrisoned by small forces under command of 'Arkforce'. (2) Pallini was important as being the only commercial broadcasting station in British hands. As the situation deteriorated, it was decided to reinforce Pallini at the expense of Marathon, to increase the chances of holding this instrument in the propaganda war of nerves.

On 21 Dec.44, two Spitfires (3) reconnoitring for E.L.A.S. forces in the Athens area reported that our troops at the wireless station near Pallini "seemed quite all right" and reported about 200 prisoners from Kifissia on the march in the vicinity. On the 24th, a Wellington dropped food supplies to the troops at Pallini and Marathon. About 25 troops were seen at Pallini to pick up the three containers dropped. There was doubt about the safe receipt of the container dropped at Marathon.

On 26 December, two of the South African Spitfires carried out an exhaustive survey of the Marathon-Athens road and the coastal sector from Pallini to Marathon, reporting various blocks, slit trenches and weapon pits. There was a roundabout passage which might, with luck, be negotiated by men and trucks. On the 27th, a Wellington carried supplies for Pallini, but was turned back by rough weather. Later in the day, two other Wellingtons were successful. The first aircraft dropped six containers of food and ammunition, three rolls of blankets and two bundles of sandbags. All these dropped in the defended area and were retrieved by our troops. The aircraft was hit (but not seriously) by rifle fire. A crowd of some hundred people were seen outside a church and some others in a slit trench in the neighbourhood. The second aircraft dropped five containers of food and twelve rolls of barbed wire, all retrieved.

On 28 December, the Marathon garrison withdrew on foot and marched across the hills to Pallini, which they would probably never have reached on the open road. Pallini now had more mouths to feed and still greater incentive to build up a strong defence. In the late afternoon, two Wellingtons dropped more supplies and on the 29th there was a repeat drop by two more Wellingtons.

/At

- (1) No. 337 Wing C.R.B.
- (2) 50th Royal Tank.
- (3) Of No. 40 S.A.A.F. Squadron.

SECRET

At about this time, the enemy cut the Pallini-Athens underground cable and the station, now useless for broadcasting, lost its importance. The 30th was stormy and no flying was possible. That night (30/31st) the enemy attacked Pallini in strength. The garrison fought back vigorously and at dawn on 31 December the enemy had been repulsed; but as there was little purpose in retaining a force there in such an isolated position, the decision was taken to evacuate.

Early on 31 December, a Beaufighter dropped a message to the troops at Pallini, who replied by ground signs that they still needed food and ammunition. They did not have long to wait for help. At 1400 hours, a relief column of troops and tanks, escorted by Spitfires, left Athens for Pallini. The advance was hotly contested. There were many well-made road blocks on the way, most of them covered by fire; and the last 2 miles of road were potholed and mined, so that troops often had to dismount and walk. The weight of fire put down by the relief column's tanks and other artillery, added to the effect of low Spitfire cannon attacks on the insurgent parties encountered, were decisive. Aircrews reported leaving big fires in enemy-occupied buildings. The enemy was overwhelmed and in most places broke cover and ran, losing many dead. The road blocks were removed, and the column reached Pallini only 2 hours after leaving Athens. The garrison, which had beaten off all attacks, was loaded into scout cars and the return journey was made without event as darkness fell.

SECRET

Re-formation

(1)

Re-formation of Air Headquarters, Greece.

Before proceeding to the record of the final phases, a step back to the capture of Kifissia will provide a basis for outlining the career of Air Headquarters thereafter.

Air H.Q. at Kifissia was over-run early on 19 Dec. 44, demolished and ransacked and most of the staff marched off into captivity. On 20 December, the A.O.C. decided to set up a new H.Q. to the then existing establishment as close to III Corps as possible. On the 22nd, arrangements were made to accommodate Air H.Q. in Athens, combining Rear and Advanced Headquarters. The Splendide Hotel became the Officers' Mess. It was not until the 26th that local obstructions were overcome and the staff moved into the III Corps building. Christmas was a time of austerity, but the other ranks enjoyed all the available turkey and pudding, except what was sent to the R.A.F. patients at the 97th General Hospital (surrounded by E.L.A.S. elements) in Red Cross vehicles. The centre of the stage was occupied by the V.I.P.s for several days. About a ton of well-laid dynamite was discovered just in time on the 26th in a sewer under the Grande Bretagne Hotel, which was occupied by staff.

Conferences with the insurgents ~~WEL~~ appeared to have little hope of succeeding. The E.A.M. members brought through the lines were posing excessive demands. On 28 December, the A.O.C.'s daily conferences recommenced and things were taking shape. Plans for the evacuation of Patras and Salonika were outlined. Anxiety for the fate of the prisoners from Kifissia was acute, little definite information being brought back by reconnaissance aircraft until the 30th. On the 31st, supplies were dropped to some of them at Livadhia. The location of the prisoners and delivery to them of supplies and their ultimate rescue and rehabilitation was one of the main preoccupations of January. By the middle of that month, the new H.Q. was functioning smoothly.

/The

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(1) A.H.Q. Greece O.R.B.

The Final Offensive (1 - 5 Jan. 45)

The rest is a success story and can be quickly told. The enemy's power of resistance, although it presented a hard surface, had no depth and it only now needed the simultaneous pressure by the regrouped British and Greek National forces to break it and disperse the whole structure of the enemy's dispositions. The topography of the battle area has been progressively made clear and the character and weight of the air effort given in some detail. It will, therefore, dispense with needless repetition, if this next and decisive phase is treated in general terms. The air effort, though small, was of no slight value, although the greater part of the credit for the defeat of the insurgents must go to the mixed Army formations who, in the face of fanatical resistance, <sup>executed</sup> ~~executed~~ a series of masterly tactical manoeuvres. The main enemy concentrations within the city confines had been driven into the northern suburbs, where they were in two main groups, round Kipseli <sup>(1)</sup> and in the north-western suburbs where the two main escape routes, the roads to Daphni and Peristeri, leave the city. This Peristeri, headquarters and supply centre, was a special target.

On 1 Jan. 45, the Army was regrouped, with British forces in the van to encourage speedier surrenders by E.L.A.S. forces schooled to expect maltreatment at the hands of their own compatriots. On 2 January, the attack was opened and made progress in ~~Neapolis~~ <sup>Neapolis</sup>, where the insurgents fought from a hospital. Heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy. A group known as 'Crackforce' was left to guard Phaleron and Hassani. By the end of 5 January, the plan had been carried through. The remaining strongholds in Neon Phaleron and the Reuf Barracks area were cleared and Averof prison stormed. On the left flank, a brigade advanced to the line of the Athens - Peristeri road and cut it.

Our troops began to move into more open country. The Kolokynthos and Yoryious bridges were captured intact. On the 4th, the E.L.A.S. headquarters at Peristeri was raided and quantities of ammunition and explosives brought back in recaptured lorries. Bloody fighting ensued in the centre of the city front and before they were driven out of Vathi and Metaxouryon, the rebels, using every <sup>(2)</sup> means of defence, had lost some 750 killed, wounded and prisoners. By the

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(1) Lykabettus Hill.

(2) Including tear gas.

end of the 4th, the very heavy losses suffered by the insurgents had broken the back of their resistance. On the night 4/5 Jan. 45, they withdrew from Athens and Piraeus into the hills north and west of the city and at dawn on 5 January, British troops advanced into the whole of northern Athens and the northern tip of Piraeus without opposition. Armoured patrols, many of them escorted by Spitfires, fanned out along the main roads out of the city area, hampered by road blocks and demolitions, and failed in the course of the day to regain contact with the enemy at any point.

/ Air

Air Support (1 - 5 Jan. 45) <sup>(1)</sup>

The pattern of air operations followed that of the ground operations; first, a few days of energetic patrolling and cannon strikes, then, as the crust of the enemy's defence broke, attacks on troops and motor transport in the open and ranging over the enemy's rear areas. The same team of Beaufighters, Spitfires and Wellingtons functioned to the end, with one or two of the last named continuing their non-stop psychological warfare by leaflet dropping. <sup>(2)</sup> Omitting reconnaissance and supply dropping for the Kifissia captives and rocket attacks by Beaufighters (both of which have been already dealt with), the picture remains on 1 January very much as before. Four Beaufighters scanned the country in the Eleusis-Larissa-Corinth area and damaged some lorries. Two of the miniature Auster aircraft reconnoitred successfully for Army formations. Eleven Spitfires reconnoitred the escape routes from Athens to Peristeri. Photographs were taken of the Port Rafti-Lavrica area on the south coast, where small enemy craft were seen to be busy. More would have been done but for the bad weather and the supply of the prisoners on the roads to northward.

On the 2nd, Beaufighters reconnoitred the country west from Eleusis to the Corinth Canal, which would eventually have to be stabilised. Two Spitfires took photographs and a few others covered the country from Athens to Parapoli, looking for guns and occasionally firing on motor transport. Vehicles moving round the rebel H.Q. at <sup>Peristeri</sup> Peristeron were damaged. This was a busy day for No. 39 Squadron: their rocket attacks in Athens and Piraeus at this time were very timely and enhanced Army morale.

Patras was receiving the attention of aircraft in this period on account of the anxiety felt for the garrison there and the air personnel at Araxos air base. Four Beaufighters shared the reconnaissance there along the

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- (1) Daily sortie totals, including supply of our Pa/W, R.F. Beaufighter operations, leaflet dropping and attacks on Crete 1 Jan. 40, 2 Jan. 36, 3 Jan. 49, 4 Jan. 39, 5 Jan. 55, 6 Jan. 0.  
(Source B.A.F. O.R.B. Appendices Jan. 45. Nos. E.5 and 63).
- (2) Known as 'nickelling'.

/Eleusis

Eleusis route across North Peloponnese. Spitfires had a busy day. Five patrolled Athens and Piraeus and raked buildings in the town with cannon, while eighteen others escorted Army columns, claiming the destruction of twelve motor vehicles and damage to about the same number: they also fired on ammunition dumps.

On the 3rd, 4th and 5th, the fighting rapidly lost its enclosed, concentrated character and the air squadrons at last found that fluid tactical situation they were accustomed to, with targets and visible results more to their liking. In those three days, a total of 90 Spitfiresorties were flown on tactical and gun reconnaissance, cannon attacks and escort tasks, and five Spitfires took photographs. 16 Beaufighter and 2 Wellington sorties were flown on long range reconnaissance and 5 Austers operated, mostly on artillery spotting (as in Italy). The successes of aircraft against enemy motor transport is one measure of their success. Claims (probably conservative), were of a total of 118 <sup>destroyed</sup> vehicles and 39 damaged. (1) These losses were crippling, but the main E.L.A.S. forces, shattered as they were, had gained a lead on our forward formations at the end of 5 Jan. 45.

#### Naval Operations during the Insurrection

##### The Navy at Piraeus (2)

The record of close fighting in the Athens-Piraeus area may have partially obscured the fact that the E.L.A.S. uprising was a general one covering large areas of Greece and the Aegean. Naval forces that went into Athens with Operation 'Manna' on 15 Oct. 44 had set up their base at Piraeus. (2)

- (1) 3 Jan. - 29 destroyed 14 damaged.  
4 Jan. - 12 destroyed 12 damaged.  
5 Jan. - 77 destroyed 13 damaged.

Total 118 destroyed 39 damaged.

- (2) Preliminary narrative - 'The War at Sea' Vol. V and VI  
(Admiralty Historical Section) : Roskill.  
'The War at Sea' Vol. III Part II.

/Quoting

Quoting from Capt. Roskill's third volume of 'The War At Sea',

'At the head of that lovely stretch of blue water where the Acropolis looks down at the rocky hills and steep valleys of Attica - the cradle of so much that we treasure in western civilisation - lay a great fleet of grey, <sup>rust</sup> ~~mist~~-scarred British and Greek warships. Some of the former, including the flagship Orion and her sister-ship the Ajax, had been present when, three and a half years earlier, we <sup>rescued</sup> ~~had recovered~~ all that we could from the wreck of the armies hastily sent to try and save something of Greek liberty. Many of the older men serving in the ships now lying in comparative safety off Piraeus had known the Grecian harbours intimately in days of peace...'

Combined Naval Headquarters was at the Greek Royal Naval College in Piraeus under command of the Senior British Naval Officer, Greece.

#### Crisis in Piraeus (4 Dec. 44 - 4 Jan. 45)

On the morning of 4 Dec. 44, E.L.A.S. forces attacked the Combined Naval H.Q. and were repulsed by armoured cars and parachute troopers. Despite the general strike and the cutting-off of all power and light, the unloading of ships had continued. Forewarned, the S.N.O. ordered all merchant vessels and British and Greek warships to move to Salamis Bay and the <sup>warships</sup> ~~latter~~ to stand by for bombardment. On 6 December, Navy House was again attacked repeatedly and again E.L.A.S. troops were cleared out, by tanks, infantry and Royal Marines. The Piraeus wireless station went off the air and the road to Athens was blocked.

Attacks on naval establishments continued on and off until the end of the month, but (as related above), the situation improved steadily in the last ten days of the year, as the peninsula and dock area were cleared by troops and rocket Beaufighters. Towards the end of December, heavy retaliation was meted out by H.M.S. Ajax in shelling programmes. Aircraft spotted for the cruiser's batteries.

#### Trouble in the Ports and Islands

Throughout December, there was trouble in several other Greek ports and the islands and a large part of the naval forces in the Eastern Mediterranean were occupied in attempts to restore order. Warships were sent to Kavala, Kalamata, Volos, Syra (Oyclades), Mitylene and Missolonghi and their presence

/ensured

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ensured the temporary security of our forces there. But the commitment of establishing strong garrisons everywhere could not be met and it was decided on 16 December, while the outcome of the fighting was still in the balance, to arrange a general withdrawal. The Commander of III Corps ordered his troops out of Kavala, Voles, Kalamata, Preveza, Leykas, the north shore of the Gulf of Corinth and the Ionian Islands. Evacuation by the Navy proceeded smoothly. Troopships intended for Mitylene were diverted to Khios, only a cruiser remaining to cover the naval port party and military personnel. In the western Epirus, the situation was threatening. The loyal Greek forces under General Zervas were forced back by E.L.A.S. on to Preveza and, on 30 Dec. 44, the Royal Navy evacuated this town, carrying with them 6,540 troops, some 3,200 refugees and nearly 1,000 prisoners-of-war (mostly Italians), besides stores, mules and vehicles. On the same day, E.L.A.S. forces landed on Levkas Island, near Corfu, and threatened Zervas's smaller group of 500 men. About one-half of these were evacuated. On 31 December, Royal Marine Commandos were withdrawn from Corfu.

In early January, an E.L.A.S. invasion of Corfu was feared, but the favourable turn in the fortunes of battle removed the threat. On the 5th, warships arrived and stabilised the situation. Naval patrols were established and plans for the island defense made. This was doubly necessary, as some 500 of the Zervas troops had deserted <sup>to</sup> E.L.A.S. The story of events at Patras, in which the air force was involved, will be dealt with separately. While there were no large scale operations in Greek and Aegean waters during January 1945, H.M. ships were fully occupied controlling sea traffic, supporting the British and Greek Government forces and, after the 15th, in seeing that the terms of the truce were carried out. Cadques and other small enemy craft were either captured or sunk. Spetsai Island (Gulf of Nauplia) was captured, and a watch maintained on the German forces still remaining in the Dodecanese Islands.

The record of tactical manoeuvres and evacuations carried out by the Royal and Royal Hellenic Navies is <sup>depressing reading</sup> ~~not a heroic one~~; but the nature of the campaign must be clearly recognised. With the E.L.A.S. forces usually unrecognizable among the civilian population, no major offensive operations could be launched for fear of bringing death and destruction to our friends.

The diplomatic manner in which the Navy carried out its trying task is highly commendable. As has been seen, it eventually enjoyed a happier situation, with its good name enhanced.

Situation at Herakleion (Crete)

One of the rare pieces of good news came from Crete. A destroyer which arrived there on 4 Dec. 44 <sup>British</sup> found a reconnaissance party in control of the slightly damaged port. By the 7th, a searched channel had been established and the harbour cleared of mines. The local E.L.A.S. gave no trouble at first and the distribution of relief stores created a favourable impression. In spite of various attempts by E.L.A.S. to stir up dissent, the year closed on a more tranquil note. The Germans, however, were still active in a few of the islands. Strict precautions were taken and a watch kept on craft likely to be carrying torpedoes. One of these was seen at Canoa (Crete) in January.

/Return

857

Return of Liberty to Greece (January - February 1945)

(1)

Restoration of Order at Patras and Araxes

(2)

The situation facing the British and loyal Greek forces at Patras and Araxes airfield (3) deteriorated rapidly after the middle of December. The ground and air force troops who had gone in with Operation 'Towanbucket' (4) in the van of the occupation now found the ground drying up around them and hostile forces emerging from a previously friendly entourage. Troops in the field were pulled in to strengthen the Army brigade in Patras. No. 2914 Squadron of the R.A.F. Regiment transferred on the 13th from Pirgos to Patras.

It was decided to evacuate Araxes air base, which, isolated as it was, could not be held against a strong attack. On the night 15/16 December, about 180 R.A.F. personnel moved out of Araxes for Patras. They set fire to some of the petrol before leaving and two Beaufighters blew up the dumps and ammunition on the 16th. The insurgents and civilians looted all equipment left over and obstructed the runways with mutilated aircraft. It was in this period that the staff on Tatoi (Menidi) airfield was evacuated to Kifissia. Megara airfield had never been operational and, with Eleusis airfield, was in enemy territory. The Allied hold on Salonika/Sedeo air base was insecure and now Araxes had been given up. The ring tightened round Kifissia. Only Hassani remained and the whole campaign depended on its security.

For a time it seemed that we must lose Patras, the most important port in Morea. On 28 Dec. 44, A.H.Q. Greece planned to evacuate the R.A.F. units out of it and, on the 29th, detachments of two R.A.F. Regiment units were embarked for transfer to Italy. Things only began to improve when, on 4 January, H.M.S. Ajax arrived from Piraeus. On the 5th and 6th, Beaufighters from Hassani carried out demonstration flights. It was decided to leave the R.A.F. and a squadron of the R.A.F. Regiment there. On 9 Jan. 45, a local truce was arranged with the rebels (5) at Araxes and aircraft landed to pick up Army wounded on the 10th. Army reinforcements landed at Patras with a squadron of tanks; and in Athens plans were drawn up for converting Araxes to a transport port of call when the situation improved.

(1) R.A.F. and A.H.Q. Greece O.R.B's and appendices.

(2) 38° 15'N., 21° 43'E.

(3) 38° 09'N., 21° 24'E.

(4) 23 - 26 Sept. 44. See Figures 18 and 19.

(5) Some amusement was caused by the inclusion in the 'wounded' of a number of men overdue for leave.

Events hastened towards a climax. On 10 January, an ultimatum was sent to E.L.A.S. calling on them to evacuate Patras by the 11th. They moved out during the night. The general truce was signed on the 11th. E.L.A.S. showed their resentment by at once contravening its terms. On 13 January, Gurkha troops were attacked without warning and the Durhams had to fight their way through to capture Araxos airfield. Patras was now quiet. On the 16th, the first R.A.F. staff arrived at Araxos by air. On the 18th, supplies were flown in. More staff followed and the airfield was soon partly operational. H.M.S. Ajax returned to Piraeus. Sporadic fighting in the country between Patras and Araxos died down on the 19th.

(1)

Plans for British Occupation of Salonika and Sedes Airfield

(2)

The plan to occupy Salonika after the German evacuation involved the despatch of British troops to disarm any remaining German forces, maintain order and create the conditions for relief of the population. To establish control in the area, three operations were planned. The first was Operation 'Scrumhalf', in which land forces known as 'Scrumforce' and Naval Force 59 were to establish a base on the island of Skiathos to cover minesweeping operations in the Gulf of Salonika, and to secure and repair Sedes airfield. The second was Operation 'Kelse' in which land forces known as 'Kelforce' were to occupy the Salonika area and airfield engineers with heavy airfield construction equipment were to complete repairs at Sedes airfield. 'Kelforce' was to land over beaches on the south-east coast of the Gulf of Salonika. Part of the force sailed from Italy and part from Piraeus. The third was Operation 'Glissade', the move from Italy of one division to Salonika and two or more follow-up convoys, in which a battalion of parachutists were carried.

R.A.F. Intentions at Salonika

It was planned to operate Fleet Air Arm and R.A.F. aircraft as mine spotters to co-operate with the minesweepers preceding the convoys to Salonika, to operate fighters and fighter-bombers from Sedes in support of the Army and land supply and personnel at Sedes and to establish the R.A.F. on Sedes airfield as soon as possible in order to support the Army and attack German forces attempting to evacuate Greece.

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(1) A.H.Q. Greece Operation Instruction No. 1 Operations 'Kelse' and 'Glissade' (A.H.Q. Greece O.R.B Nov. 44 Appendix C.1).

(2) 40° 06'N., 23° 00'E.

The Air Forces in the Salonika area were under the command of the A.O.C. R.A.F. Greece and the local commander was Wing Commander J.F. Newman, D.S.O., D.F.C. No. 337 Wing was operationally and administratively responsible. Wellingtons (1) and Warwicks (2), both from Hassani, Walruses (3) operating from Skiathos and Swordfish (4) operating from Larissa were to precede minesweepers clearing minefields for the safe passage of convoys in co-ordination with the 15th Cruiser Squadron. In view of the lack of airfields within striking distance of Salonika available to the Germans, no fighter protection for the convoys in passage to Salonika was provided and other precautions were dispensed with. The R.A.F. was to limit its support for the Army to demonstrations unless more was allowed by A.H.Q. Greece.

Seizure, Repair and Serviceability of Sedes Airfield

Most of the plans worked out satisfactorily. 'Scrumforce' went into Salonika on 1 Nov. 44 and at once set to work on a North to South strip at Sedes, which was eight and a half miles S.S.E. of Salonika. (5) All of the Salonika area was low lying; and with a high proportion of it being reclaimed marshland, unserviceability of all airfield surfaces except actual runways was to be expected in wet weather, of which there was certain to be plenty in winter.

On 5 Nov. 44, the air party arrived in Wellingtons. Local Greeks worked enthusiastically. On the 7th, ten aircraft cannoned German units retreating in the area north of the town. Various moves in the following days saw the whole air staff established by the 16th, although in buildings still lacking doors and windows. Sundry weather and railway reconnaissances were flown between the 11th and 20th. On three of these days a few Spitfires of the occupying squadron - No. 32 R.A.F.-bombed German troops and positions in Yugoslavia. The weather 'went sour' on the 20th and stayed so until 30 November, during which period there was no operational flying from Sedes.

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- (1) Of No. 221 Squadron.
  - (2) Of No. 283 Squadron.
  - (3) Of No. 294 Squadron.
  - (4) Of No. 727 F.A.A. Squadron.
  - (5) Although unsatisfactory, Sedes was the best available potential field for Spitfires. Megalo Mikra field and the two small landing grounds at Karantina and Mikra were ruled out.

(1)

Situation at the Outbreak of Hostilities

When the first blows were struck in early December, the R.A.F. was represented by No. 337 Wing Advanced H.Q., No. 32 Squadron of Spitfire VC's and No. 2924 Field Squadron of the R.A.F. Regiment. With various ancillary units the total personnel at Sides was now 593 men with 110 vehicles and the squadron aircraft at their disposal. It was already clear that No. 32 Squadron's main task would be that of a garrison squadron, maintaining law and order; and, as time passed, they looked apprehensively towards Mount Olympus and the South, where Athens lay nearly 200 miles away.

The local E.L.A.S. army appeared to be in complete control of Salonika. The inhabitants, while expressing approval of the presence of British and Dominion troops, exhibited none of the enthusiasm shown by the Athenians. They were overawed by E.L.A.S., who regarded association with us as a sign of Fascist views and acted accordingly. Both sides avoided open disputes. The majority of armed men claiming to be E.L.A.S. troops looked like youths had had missed the last four years of their schooling. Clad in nondescript attire, slovenly, usually unshaven, without work or training, they slouched their way through the streets, ostentatiously armed and up to no good. Trading conditions were shaky and the whole area was suffering from the ruinous effects of the inflation created by the Germans and the lack of efficient administration. Isolated as Salonika was, it was of considerable strategic importance to the Allies and had to be held. The air units faced an uncongenial month ahead, with air transport their only link with the outside world and with the snowy season fast approaching. There were some ugly incidents between Greeks in Salonika and the behaviour of some of the E.L.A.S. guerillas had so disgusted some British parachutists, at first inclined to sympathy with Communist ideology, that they had reversed their political attitude.

(2)

(3)

Operations by No. 32 Squadron in December 1944

The squadron operated every day from 2 - 9 December inclusive. They began on the 2nd with demonstrations by seven aircraft over Salonika to impress the

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- (1) No. 32 Squadron O.R.B.
  - (2) Signal from Gen. Scobie to Prime Minister 10 Dec. 44.  
(A.H.B. ID.7/329 Pt. 3).
  - (3) No. 32 Squadron and A.H.Q. Greece O.R.B's.

civil population and these appeared to be well received by large audiences. Twenty-nine Dakotas landed with reinforcements. From now henceforward, the squadron co-operated with the Army. On the following days, Spitfires flew up to 12 daily sorties on reconnaissance of the Drama-Kavalla foothill areas and the Kavalla-Alexandroupolis-Rozani area. They also flew a few demonstration flights (referred to as 'mailed finger flights') over the city and searched in such areas as Edessa and Veria for signs of partisan activity.

On the 4th, guards has been positioned and a duty watch begun on the airfield. From the 10th to the 23rd the airfield was completely unserviceable for Spitfires, although the small Fairchild aircraft was able to take off and collect useful information. The weather grew dull and cloudy.

On 15 December, the situation was tense. Balkan Air Force grew apprehensive, for although Sedes airfield was stoutly guarded, it could hardly be held against a heavy attack. (1) The Navy despatched the cruiser H.M.S. Aurora to Salonika to impress the insurgents, but by the 24th, the situation had worsened. The town was reported held by E.A.M. The waterfront was not completely under British control, only a defended area at the East Mole and certain interior positions. Navy House was close to the E.A.M. H.Q. and would be completely untenable in the event of serious hostilities. The uneasy equilibrium was maintained by tactful displays of music and football matches with the local Greeks by service teams.

Between 24 and 31 December, the field was only operational for four days, on each of which one or two Spitfires flew reconnaissances for the Army. Light snow fell on the 22nd and, as the days passed, it lay on the mountains, creeping lower every day. The Athens mail flights were very erratic. In the town both sides watched one another. E.L.A.S. troops spied on the airfield from a nearby village, but still made no move.

At the end of the year, the Commanding Officer recorded emphatic views on the unsuitable nature of the airfield for permanent, significant support for the Army. In that region, grass runways were useless for all-the-year-round operations, especially by Spitfires. Permanent runways were absolutely necessary. In Athens, a plan was afoot to clear Attica of E.L.A.S. and then leave the National Greek forces to carry on. The idea of evacuating Salonika was considered but postponed. (2) The R.A.F. held on at Sedes.

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(1) B.A.F. O.R.B.

(2) A.H.Q. Greece O.R.B.

(1)

Operations by No. 32 Squadron in January 1945

Snow fell for the first three days of the year. Then the thaw set in. Austers and Fairehills, usually with some difficulty, operated from the short concrete runway completed with local labour, but no Spitfires were airborne for the first three weeks of the month. (2) With their Athens front crumbling, E.L.A.S. wisely decided to leave Sedes alone. Had it been otherwise, no material aid could have been given by the squadron.

(3)

The truce was signed on 11 January, but no one trusted the insurgents even in their hour of defeat. On the 13th, trouble was expected and both battle flights stood by at Sedes. The tension was unabated until it was noticed on the 18th by reconnoitring Austers that many E.L.A.S. troops had already left. On 20 Jan. 45, a truce area of 20 miles radius from Salonika was in force and pilots were briefed to fly at not less than 3,000 feet outside this area as a precautionary measure against small arms fire. Rain, bad weather and the thaw prevailed all the rest of the month. On the 27th, the time limit expired and the Salonika area was clear of E.L.A.S. forces. Greek Naval Officers in Charge were appointed to Salonika, Patras, Velos, Corfu, Herakleion (Crete) and to Mitylene Island, where there had been trouble with local E.L.A.S. elements.

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(1) No. 32 Squadron O.R.B.

(2) Except 2 sorties on the 1st.

(3) The Cease Fire was operative as from 0001 hours on 15 Jan. 45.

(1)

The Pursuit of the Insurgents (5 - 15 Jan. 45)

Having reviewed the restoration of the situation at Patras, Araxos, Salonika and Sedes air base, and having followed the fortunes in captivity of the Kifissia garrison and the air drops to supply them, it only remains to pick up the narrative at the point where the E.L.A.S. front in Athens and Piraeus finally broke, the insurgents were retreating to the hills and the campaign entered its final phase.

Leaving a few detachments in the city, the main body of the E.L.A.S. forces was falling back on 5 Jan. 45 on Eleusis, where the routes to the interior began. In the next few days, as British patrols and columns with aircraft in the van fanned out from Athens in pursuit along the Sacred Way, the insurgents were unable to organize a fresh line of resistance, though rearguards fought stubborn delaying actions. British aims were to clear Attica, relieve Patras and Salonika, close down Kifissia Air H.Q., disarm the insurgents, re-establish law, order and the machinery of government and re-open key ports for shipping. The main Army drive forward was directed northward through Eleusis and westward through Corinth.

Progress gathered momentum daily. After reaching Daphni on the 5th, Eleusis and Mandra on the 6th and 7th, and Thebes on the 8th, the Army drew up to Livadhia on the Khalkis road on 9 Jan. 45, where the E.L.A.S. leader Zevgos came out to parley. On the 10th, our units were in Amfiklia on the prisoners' road <sup>and</sup> astride the Corinth Canal. By now Patras had been reinforced and the E.L.A.S. army began to finally disintegrate.

(2)

Air Escort for Armoured Columns (5 - 14 Jan. 45)

The outstanding contributions by the R.A.F. in the period of the pursuit up to 14 January, the last day of hostilities, were the escort missions flown ahead of our armoured columns by Spitfires and Beaufighters. These absorbed a high

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- (1) Air H.Q. Greece and B.A.F. O.R.B.'s and appendices: Operations of British Troops in the Insurrection in Greece - Brit. Hist. Sec., Central Mediterranean (II J.20/4/1 p. 51).
  - (2) M.A.A.F. Operational Summaries in O.R.B. appendices and Air H.Q. Greece O.R.B. January 1945.

/ proportion

(1) proportion of the air effort and produced tangible and valuable results. They were organized on the following lines. There were two types of continuous armed reconnaissance over Army columns, one with and the other without Very High Frequency to the columns. In the first type, the aircraft shot up ambushes ahead or identified their targets by observing our tracer fire. Usually the aircraft discovered the ambush before the column was held up. This air cover gave a running commentary to Air Support Centre on the progress of the columns. (2) In the second type, a R.A.F. Controller with a V.H.F. set stationed in a vehicle with the commander of the column near the leading vehicle communicated direct with the aircraft. This proved most satisfactory. On one occasion, for example, opposition within 50 yards of the leading vehicle was successfully attacked. In addition, the column commander was kept informed of all obstacles such as road blocks ahead of him and possible deviations were defined.

5 January, the day the Communist perimeter was broken, was something of a 'free for all'. Patrols of the Guards sped out of Athens to seize the rebel H.Q. at Peristeri and the key village of Daphni at the gateway to the North and West. A total of 49 Spitfire sorties were expended on armed reconnaissance and cannon attacks ahead of columns, <sup>picking</sup> picked out bridges, gun positions and transport. Claims at the close of day were of about 100 vehicles destroyed, some 20 damaged and an ammunition dump exploded. Fifteen Beaufighters ranged over a wide area and executed 'mailed-finger' flight over Patras.

(1) No. 337 Wing Operational Sorties for 5 - 14 Jan. 45 (exclusive of A/S/R, R.H.A.F. and Communication Flight).

Date	Spitfires				Beaus.		Wells	Total Operational Sorties
	73	94	40	680 P/R	108	39	221	
5	27	19	3	1	10	5	3	68
6	8	25	2	1	9	1	4	50
7	15	6	-	1	4	-	2	28
8	-	15	1	1	3	1	2	23
9	29	10	2	1	5	-	11	58
10	-	9	-	2	8	-	6	25
11	13	-	2	-	-	-	-	15
12	6	12	-	4	6	-	5	33
13	14	7	2	1	5	2	1	32
14	5	10	-	-	4	1	3	23
	117	113	12	12	54	10	37	355

(2) This was passed to G.(Air) M.C.A.

On the 6th the pace quickened. Thirty-five Spitfire sorties were flown. Some of these escorted a strong column with tanks, which broke through to reach Eleusis after a sharp fight and leaguered for the night south of Mandra. Part of the column moved off to Kifissia, (the ruined Air H.Q.) and later swung South to Korepi. The escort was joined for the first time by Beaufighters, who flew 10 sorties on this task and other reconnaissance. They, like the Spitfires, found plenty of road transport in their sights and attacked it. The bag by nightfall for the day was put at 43 vehicles destroyed and 19 damaged.

E.L.A.S. had gained a short lead and used it to mine and block the roads, leaving the occasional ambush. No. 337 Wing intensified its cover pattern. On the 7th, two Beaufighters and sixteen Spitfires flew ahead of columns in the Kifissia - Korepi and Eleusis - Thebes areas. Two Beaufighters and five other Spitfires flew reconnaissances over Athens and Kifissia, along the Thebes - Livadhia - Agrinion - Lamia - Amfiklia road (the prisoners route) and from Corinth to Patras. The air attacks of the 5th and 6th had sorely ravaged the enemy's transport. The claims for the 7th were for only 9 vehicles destroyed. Our columns advancing towards Thebes and N.E. of Athens were preceded on the 8th by 13 Spitfires. Claims for the day were for only 8 vehicles destroyed and for the 9th also 8 vehicles destroyed with three damaged and one 75 mm gun destroyed. On that day, 21 Spitfire sorties were flown on escorting columns and patrolling in their area and cannoning road targets. Six other Spitfires flew armed reconnaissances, shooting up insurgents and their trucks. There was no opposition from the air, the only risk being from small arms fire and rare flak.

The evacuation of Araxos airfield and the relief of Patras absorbed a good deal of attention during this period. Leaflet dropping was intensified, the prisoners on the road supplied and a watch kept on caiques near Porto Rafti and Lavrion, of which H.M. Navy was quick to take advantage.

Another important task which took from 6 to 11 January was the despatch and return of a series of columns, (the early ones armoured) to Kifissia. They collected what few pieces of furniture and personal effects had been overlooked by the looters, destroyed all surviving documents and picked up the Air Chaplain and a few wounded men.

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It was on the 9th that the first motions of surrender was made by E.L.A.S. Columns had passed Kani Kaza (now empty of rebels) and raced through Thebes to overtake the tail of the main insurgent column north of that town. They had fired on it with good effect and captured arms and ammunition. Resistance seemed to collapse at this point. On 9 January, as columns were approaching Livadhia, Zevgos, formerly the Communist Minister of Agriculture <sup>(1)</sup> in the Papandreu Government, approached the leading armoured cars and asked to be taken to Gen. Scobie.

The 10th was spent by the R.A.F. in reporting on the general situation north of Athens and evacuating Araxes. <sup>(2)</sup> On the 11th, Army columns were escorted by a few Spitfires in areas Kifissia, Corinth and Skala-Dropeu and other Spitfires and a few Beaufighters secured the country from Corinth to Patras. On the 12th, there were armoured columns still cleaning up in wide areas and they were escorted by three Beaufighters and six Spitfires in the Pelopponese and Corinth areas and as far north as Lamia. The fighting was dying down and only a few escort sorties were flown on the 13th and 14th. The Army had had its turn. There were other tasks now that truce talks were proceeding and the R.A.F. turned to assisting the Navy, bringing the general country position under close inspection, recovering the Kifissia prisoners and reconstituting the Royal Hellenic Air Force in Greece. <sup>(3)</sup>  
Truce, Cease Fire and Agreement.

On 8 Jan. 45, the E.L.A.S. Central Committee gave a memorandum to two group members <sup>(4)</sup> to convey to Gen. Scobie's Headquarters. It authorised four representatives, <sup>(5)</sup> either altogether or two alone, to negotiate and sign an agreement for the cessation of hostilities. <sup>(6)</sup> Zevkos came out at Livadhia and

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- (1) He had resigned on 2 Dec. 44 with the other E.A.M. members.
  - (2) 6 Wellingtons.
  - (3) Most of the facts quoted in this sub-section are drawn from a series of signals between the British Government and its military commanders and ministers in Greece in the period under review. (A.H.B. ID.7/329 Pt. 3).
  - (4) Mr. D. Partsalides and an E.L.A.S. major.
  - (5) Mr. J. Zevgos, Mr. D. Partsalides, Major of E.L.A.S. T. Maeridis and Maj. H.A. Athinolis.
  - (6) Signed by Geo. Siantos (Secretary of the Communist Party) and Generals E. Mantakas and Hadjimihaelis.

/ by

by the 10th the whole party was with Gen. Scobie. A series of rapid exchanges between Athens and London ensued. The leaders of two minor bodies belonging to E.A.M. (the left-wing coalition) deserted to the British Commander at Salonika and dissociated themselves with E.A.M., which was still not entirely Communist in pattern.

The British Government was advised throughout the two days of bitter argument that followed by the Ambassador in Athens <sup>(1)</sup> and the Minister of State, <sup>(2)</sup> Middle East. A firm line was taken. The rebels were defeated and discredited; and full advantage was taken of this fact. On 11 January, a truce was signed which stipulated a cease fire order operative at 0001 hours on 15 January.

The main points of the truce were, firstly, that E.L.A.S. was to retire from Attica, the northern part of the Peloponnese <sup>(3)</sup> and an area within 30 kilometres of Salonika. On 14 January, there was still local fighting in many places, but at 0001 hours on the 15th, our troops and aircrews stood fast everywhere, the E.L.A.S. forces continued to withdraw and open hostilities came to an end. <sup>(4)</sup>

Then began a strenuous period of negotiation with the Communist agents headed by Siantos. This man drove a hard bargain, but was forced to climb down on all the points called for in the interests of stability. All prisoners were to be exchanged. There was no intention of allowing him the means of continuing secret terror in every town and village with his band of clandestine thugs. While the amnesty granted was generous, it allowed for the punishment of certain crimes and acts of inhumanity. E.L.A.S. was to hand in all its arms and disband. The British were to leave in Greece sufficient armed forces for the maintenance of law and order and protect our strategic interests until such time as the Greek National Army, the Royal Hellenic Air Force and the Gendarmerie and Police forces were reconstituted. The final agreement was signed on 12 Feb. 45 at Varkiza.

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(1) Mr. Leeper.

(2) Mr. Macmillan, the present Prime Minister (1961).

(3) The demarcation line was exclusive of Lamia and Volos in the northern mainland area and south of Nauplia and Pirgos.

(4) The British and Greek Governments refused to negotiate with any other party, since it was common knowledge that they and no others were behind the struggle for power.

A great haul of enemy equipment was captured and destroyed in the last phase of the fighting alone, from 3 - 14 January, including 200 machine guns, 6,000 rifles, over 9,000 grenades, 2,500 mines, well over 4,000,000 rounds of small arms ammunition and 1,000 gallons of petrol. Later checks by survey teams revealed large quantities of concealed arms. In the struggle for political power there were no rules of fair play.

The Army's Thanks to the R.A.F.

It will be of interest to quote here the congratulatory message received on (1) or about 24 Jan. 45 by the A.O.C., R.A.F. Greece from Lt. Gen. Scobie, the General Officer, C.-in-C. Its rather formal terms, customary on such occasions, do not conceal its sincerity or the justice of its interpretation of events and, as it was intended for the record, it is given in full. Criticism of the air effort on one score or another loses some of its edge in these generous paragraphs.

'The rebels in Attica have now been completely routed. The success the Army has achieved in these operations is due very largely to the magnificent work of all branches of the R.A.F., work which has perhaps been more vital to the Army than in most other operations our two Services have undertaken together.

When the rebellion broke out III Corps was not only very weak in troops but had hardly any ammunition with which to fight, since it had come to Greece almost on a peace footing. Without the continuous support given from the air, our troops would have had difficulty in holding out until reinforcements arrived. It was air transport which saved a dangerous situation in the first few days by bringing in an Infantry Brigade, ammunition and other much needed stores.

I much regret the heavy losses the R.A.F. have suffered especially in the R.A.F. Regiment and to all those at Kifissia after their fine stand.

Will you convey to all ranks under your command the thanks of myself and my troops. Our thanks are due not only to those who fought in the air but also to the R.A.F. Regiment, to the ground staffs of whom so few had to do so much and to many others. Finally will you thank 216 Group and all others in Italy who helped us for their great work. The R.A.F. have certainly helped the Army on a greater scale in other operations, but the help they have given here has never been bettered.'

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(1) A.H.Q. Greece O.R.B. Jan. 45 Appendix K.4.

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B

LAST OPERATIONS IN THE AEGEAN  
(JANUARY - MAY 1945)

Air Headquarters Greece controls the Aegean Sea

(1)

General situation in Greece and the archipelago

By the middle of January 1945, law and order had been virtually restored throughout Greece. Air operations, it has been seen, had played a vital and decisive part in bringing this about.

After the civil war, air operations from Greece were very considerably reduced, consisting of only a few attacks on anti-aircraft guns, shore batteries and other enemy installations on certain Aegean and Dodecanese islands, added to leaflet dropping, mine spotting and sweeps against small enemy shipping supplying the last German garrisons. These enemy fortresses were not yet worth the diversion of troops from the final planned battles in Italy. Nor were the Germans ready to relinquish these hungry outposts without a show of arms. At the opening of 1945, they maintained their hold on a corner of N.W. Crete, on Rhodes, Kos, Leros, Meles, Piskopi and a few minor islands: and at the end of April they were still holding on, but by the skin of their teeth. Conditions were rough, desertions common, and an attempt was made to assassinate their own C.-in-C. Aegean. There were about 20,000 German and 10,000 allied Italian troops in the Aegean, mostly sealed off from the outside world. They had already lost the whole of their active Aegean merchant fleet, 50 or more vessels. Only a few key personnel were able to leave by an occasional transport, aircraft from Vienna, or move around precariously in a couple of Fieseler Storchs.

The enemy tried to maintain morale by organizing raids on Allied-held islands, and by running Officer Corps Training Units. They promoted the Rhodes garrison to the dizzy height of Panzer Grenadier Brigade. The local comments would have been worth hearing.

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(1) Air H.Q. Greece O.R.B. and appendices.

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(1)

Change of R.A.F. control in the Aegean

When 1945 opened, A.H.Q. Eastern Mediterranean could still call on the services of one R.A.F. Beaufighter, one R.A.A.F. Baltimore, one S.A.A.F. Spitfire and one R.A.F. Air Sea Rescue squadron. The Spitfires did not operate and other squadrons were withdrawn, leaving by early February only the A.S.R. squadron.

In the middle of January, A.H.Q. Greece took over responsibility, with three squadrons of Spitfires, and one each of Baltimores, Beaufighters and Wellingtons, operating from Greek airfields. The Royal Hellenic Air Force were responsible for much of the work and this was a source of great satisfaction to them.

Baltimore attacks on Rhodes

The great days of the anti-shipping campaign were over and lively incidents were few. While A.H.Q. Eastern Mediterranean still functioned in January, their Beaufighters made daily, but vain reconnaissances. Their Baltimores dropped leaflets and bombed Rhodes and Piskopi.

On 16 Jan. 45, 11 Baltimores bombed the German H.Q. and barracks at Coschinisu, Rhodes, reporting bursts in the target area; and again on the 22nd, 2 Baltimores bombed the same target and 7 others bombed Mandracchio harbour shipping without traceable results.

Air/naval operations against Piskopi (Tilos) Island (28-30 Jan. 45)

The responsibility of the Fleet for the Aegean was much wider than the R.A.F.'s and the last four months provided plenty of action, such as dangerous and often fatal minesweeping, raids, bombardments, and patrols.

Piskopi was twice bombarded in January, the second occasion being on the 30th. The island (also known as Tilos) lies half-way between Rhodes and Kos. The Navy wanted air help on the 29th in winking out some German troops hiding in river beds to the west of Livadhia Bay. This was provided by 11 Baltimores of E. Mediterranean A.H.Q. Again on the 30th, Baltimores went in and were thanked by the Navy. Thereafter, Piskopi was left to disintegrate for another month.

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(1) A.H.Q. Greece and A.H.Q. Eastern Mediterranean O.R.B's.

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Operations by A.H.Q. Greece (early January 1945)

As Greece returned to normal, the effort of A.H.Q. Greece swung against the Germans in the Aegean. On 12 January, the first of a long series of bombing attacks on Melos Island was carried out by the R.H.A.F. R.A.F. Beaufighters and R.H.A.F. Spitfires intruded over the Crete area, R.A.F. Beaufighters and R.H.A.F. Baltimores looked for shipping, Baltimores and Wellingtons bombed other targets than Melos, and a special Walrus detachment aided the Navy by mine-spotting.

Air attacks on Melos (January - May 1945)

The small garrison of some 570 men on Melos were a tough, seasoned body of men and they took all the punishment the optimistic British and Greeks meted out to them with hardihood. The raid of 12 Jan. 45 was followed by a long succession of air attacks, the usual targets being gun positions (well-sited), ammunition dumps, trenches, machine gun posts and H.Q. buildings. The weight of the long-sustained attacks on Melos may be assessed from the following sortie totals for the period 12 Jan. - 5 May 45:-

Baltimores	130
Spitfires and Spitbombers approx.	310
R.P. Beaufighters	17
	<hr/>
Total approx.	457 sorties

(1)

Landings by Germans

The German Command believed in keeping their troops from moral decay by finding jobs for them. Raiding neighbouring islands was a favourite pastime, usually resulting in a useful haul of fresh food, cattle and so forth.

In early January, Stampalia was raided; on 21 January Pserimo, on 11 February Nisero (from Piskopi). They were cornered and cleaned up by troops of the Greek Sacred Regiment sent from Syml, covered by H.M. Ships Dunce and Lodbury.

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(1) Naval Historical Branch Preliminary Narrative 'The War at Sea' Vol. VI: Air H.Q. Greece C.R.B. and appendices.

/ Capture

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(1)

Capture of Plakopi (1 Mar. 45) and raids on Khalkis Island

The island of Plakopi, N.W. of Rhodes, had been stoutly holding out since our abortive attack in October 1944 and was proving a thorn in our side. Plans for its liquidation were quickly laid and a joint air/naval attack was launched in late February 1945.

On the night 28 February/1 March a force of about 500 Greek and Indian troops was put ashore to liquidate the garrison. They met stubborn resistance for some hours, but, in the evening of 1 March, the garrison surrendered.

Supporting fire was provided by the destroyer H.M.S. Liddesdale, whose company was at action stations for 22 hours. During the morning, four A.H.Q. Greece Beaufighters joined in with rocket projectiles, cannon and machine gun fire, and were thanked by the Navy.

A German landing on Khalkis Island proved only a temporary foraging raid and it was reported finally evacuated on 11 March, but this was premature. It was raided again on 21/22 March and the German force clashed with two of our M.L.'s, escaping to Leros. A similar landing was effected on 23 March. On this occasion they picked up six prisoners from the Anglo-Greek occupying force.

Allied air attacks on Rhodes, Leros and Melos

Air H.Q. Greece kept up constant pressure on Rhodes and Leros during the last four months of the war. On the night 6/7 March, two Wellingtons dropped 24 x 250 pound bombs on food dumps on Leros. On 17 and 21 March, Beaufighters bombed enemy aircraft on Rhodes/Calate airfield. On 27 Mar. 45, six Baltimores dropped bombs on small shipping in Kos harbour. Results cannot be confirmed. April was a quiet month and the final attack of the period (apart from those on Melos on 4-5 May) was directed against Rhodes, when 8 Greek Baltimores bombed troops and guns.

The final missions against Melos, on 4 and 5 May, were combined efforts by Baltimores, Beaufighters and Spitfires against coastal defence guns. Direct hits by rockets were claimed.

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(1) Naval Historical Branch Preliminary Narrative 'The War at Sea' Vol. VI: Air H.Q. Greece O.R.B and appendices.

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Meanwhile, the long series of hit-and-run raids were drawing to an end. The handful of British Army and R.A.F. Regiment men on Crete had survived five months occupation unmolested by some 10,000 German troops only about 90 miles away in the N.W. corner of the island.

Dodecanese, the Cyclades and Crete surrender (8-10 May 45)

About the end of April, there were signs that the remaining German garrisons in the Dodecanese were preparing to surrender. A launch was standing by in Leros to convey a German mission to Samos. Demolitions were observed in Kos and Leros. Meanwhile, operations against Rhodes and Alisni were continued.

On 7 May, the Flag Officer Levant confirmed that General Wagener, Commandant of the German Garrisons in the Dodecanese, and a fanatical Nazi, had asked for a meeting to arrange surrender. This was fixed for 8 May at Symi Island, where unconditional surrender terms were signed between the Germans and Force 281, operating under command of G.H.Q., Middle East.

On 9 May 45, surrender missions from Force 281 arrived in Kos, Leros and Rhodes. In the Cyclades, the surrender of the German garrison on Milos was effective on 9 May and British forces left to occupy the islands the same day.

The German Command in Crete surrendered on 9 May to troops of Land Forces, Greece, and signed the capitulation on 10 May.

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CHAPTER 5

FINAL OPERATIONS IN THE CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN  
(JANUARY - MAY 1945)

The enemy supply system in the Ligurian Sea

*l.c.*  
The Ligurian Ports

From November 1944 to April 1945, the most important active ports along the Ligurian coast, running from West to East, were Ventimiglia, San Remo, Imperia, Savona, Varrasse, Genoa, Rapallo, Sestri Levante and La Spezia. From these bases, mostly at night, single merchant craft and convoys maintained the supply to the Fourteenth Army of ammunition, rations, hay and straw, moved essential coal and transported industrial equipment and scrap metal for transit to the Reich. Naval escorts were often provided. This traffic persisted all through the last winter of the war. In addition to the merchant shipping, a small but active naval force of mixed units continued to lay mines, attack our surface craft and port defences and furnish convoy escorts. Among these were some interesting one or two-men explosive craft and submarines. Genoa and San Remo (adjacent to the Franco-Italian front) (1) were the most active naval bases. Savona, Imperia, Sestri Levante and La Spezia were the main supply bases. La Spezia had the additional repute of a great, heavily defended hinge on the left flank of the Allied front. (2).

La Spezia (3)

The harbour and defences of La Spezia had frequently been attacked by Allied aircraft in 1944. The damage inflicted was turned to good account by the Germans at the expense, as was normal, of the Italians. An interesting account of the dismantling of La Spezia Arsenal was given by a prisoner-of-war: it was confirmed from other sources that heavy sea and railway traffic, under attack from Allied air formations was devoted to this class of transport.

In April 1944, it was stated, the Italian directors of La Spezia Arsenal were informed that on account of Allied air bombing the German High Command had

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*Alpine*  
(1) Officially referred to as the ~~Alpine~~ Front.

(2) The German System of Supply in the Field of 1943/45 AFHQ-G-2, Feb.1946. (A.H.B./IIJII/58/39).

(3) 15th Army Group Intelligence Summary No. 80 G-2, 6 Feb.1945. (Cabinet Historical Archives).

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decided to remove all machinery and stores from La Spezia to a railway tunnel near Genoa, in which work was to be continued. In the course of the next few weeks, 35 trucks were loaded under supervision of Italian volunteer mechanics and eventually reached Grondola railway tunnel on the Spezia - Parma line, to join six to seven hundred other trucks filled with industrial material. This was all in keeping with a longstanding German policy of the stripping and despatch to Germany of Italian industries, in so far as consistent with the continuance of active production in Italy for the benefit of Germany.

Photographs revealed the progressive sinking of blockships to prevent landings, the entry of Allied offensive craft and the eventual use of the port. On Punta Bianca several powerful coastal batteries were installed south-east of the harbour. The Germans attached great importance to this base, now the most southerly loading port. It would have needed a combined operation to neutralise it. The extreme vulnerability of its main east-and-west railway and road from sea and air ceased to apply between Sestri Levante and La Spezia. There, a large section ran through tunnels: the hope of hitting traffic concentrations was thus reduced to a minimum in that area and marshalling out of the reach of aircraft proceeded in safety.

*l.c.* Axis Merchant and Naval Forces in the Ligurian Sea

The strength of the Axis merchant and naval forces varied from week to week. On the one hand, they suffered loss and damage to all categories by Allied air and naval offensive action. On the other, they were reinforced by building, re-fitting and repair and to some extent by ingenious technical development and new fighting craft. It will suit the purpose of this survey if the position at the end of January 1945 is used.

Merchant shipping had been reduced to one merchant vessel of 1,000 tons, five K.T. ships (of which three were active) 35 supply barges, a dozen or more small-coasters and schooners, and 35 F-lighters (dual-purpose craft with heavy armament, fitted for both cargo and carrying and escort duties).

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As naval forces, the enemy employed one fleet destroyer,<sup>(1)</sup> two modern torpedo boats, four escort corvettes, two minelayers, five motor torpedo boats<sup>(2)</sup> and ten R-boats, used as motor minesweepers or escorts. All were based at Genoa and used in defensive roles. The torpedo boats and minelayers both laid mines; the remainder often escorted convoys. For offensive purposes the enemy had relied, since the landings in Southern France, on a number (unknown at the time) of one-man explosive motor boats, human torpedoes and one-man midget submarines. These, based in San Remo, had been used with a conspicuous lack of success against Allied forces bombarding and minesweeping off the French and Italian Riviera. Some were sometimes photographed by our aircraft. One photograph showed twenty one-man boats in San Remo.<sup>(3)</sup>

*1.c.* Enemy Merchant Shipping Activities in the Ligurian Sea

The principal activity continued, as for some months past, to be evident between Genoa and La Spezia. The capacious K.T. ships sailed only on this run, in one or two convoys nightly in each direction. A typical fast convoy comprised a K.T. ship, with escort. A slow convoy comprised armed F-lighters and supply barges. West of Genoa, Savona was the main port of call for coasters, F-lighters and supply barges. West of Savona <sup>Here</sup> was only occasional activity.

Between 1 January and 1 April 1944, the supplies carried monthly by sea to the Fourteenth Army, along the west coast, were between 8,000 and 12,000 tons, i.e. about 12 to 18 per cent of the total supplies for that army. Statistics for the corresponding period of 1945 show the damaging results of Allied offensive air and sea action. The monthly figure had by then fallen to 1,500 to 2,000 tons of supplies to Army Liguria<sup>(4)</sup> and Fourteenth Army, representing 6 to 8 per cent of the total supplies. Although the figures for the Adriatic had themselves fallen from 4,000 to 6,000 tons to 2,500 to 4,000 tons, the enhanced activity on this eastern sea front did much to compensate the enemy. Nevertheless, the bare 1,500 odd tons a month in the Ligurian went a long way to maintain the Fourteenth Army in some of its essentials and it would have been highly desirable if the Allies could have prevented it passing. But this they failed to do.

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- (1) The ex-Yugoslav 'Dubrovnik', mounting four 5.5" guns.  
(2) Italian Mas. type.  
(3) E.A.A.F. Intelligence study in No. 116 Air Intelligence study in No. 116 Air Intelligence Weekly Summary, 4 Feb. 1945. (A.H.B./XIS/43).  
(4) Formed in the early summer of 1944.

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Apart from this southbound traffic, the following figures of northbound goods for German industry and armament (1) carried monthly show how much was being done, in spite of our great air superiority, to bolster up the economy of the Reich. (2) From Savona to Genoa over 2,000 tons of coke; from La Spezia to Genoa, 500 tons of chrome and nickel-yielding shells, 1,000 tons of scrap and 250 tons of copper ore; from Sestri Levante to Genoa, 1,500 tons of manganese ore, 250 tons of steel ingots and 3,000 tons of fireproof clays. All this, added to the 1,500 tons of bauxite, large quantities of salt, cement, grain, flour etc. passing round the head of the Adriatic still represented an appreciable contribution; the cargo ships also helped the enemy to retain their hold on the civilian population by carrying from Genoa to La Spezia, Sestri Levante and Imperia over 8,000 tons of flour, rice and sugar monthly. (3)

Renewed activity in February

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February began normally. Coastal Air Force's effort remained low, with mine-spotting and reconnaissance almost the only maritime activity. But the latter end of the month brought increased activity. Genoa, La Spezia and Savona were all busy. On 20 February, two fresh active merchant vessels were photographed in Genoa; and it was realised in this period that the Dominante, (4) which usually ran between Genoa and Savona, had made at least one run to La Spezia. In La Spezia a sunken merchant vessel (5) had been refloated and repaired and was ready to sail. It would hardly be seaworthy enough for coastal work in convoy, but might very well serve as blockship for the gap at the western end of the harbour.

/ Sesto Calende

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(1) Wirtschaft and Ruestungsqueter.

(2) M.A.F.A.F. Monthly Intelligence Bulletin. (A.H.B./XIX/1/18). T.A.F. O.R.Bc. German Field Supply Italy 1943-45 C.M.F. Hist.

(3) Figure 22 shows the lay-out of responsibility of the Axis sea supply organisation.

(4) 1,000 tons.

(5) M.712 of 480 tons.

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Sesto Calende assembly plant was chosen for attack on two consecutive days in an effort to stop the output of small offensive naval craft. On 24 February, 18 Mitchells of Tactical Air Force dropped 137 bombs in a good concentration, mostly on the west buildings. The next day, a similar force attacked also visually, but reported no confidence in their bombing. Photographs showed an overall result by no means unsatisfactory. Seventy-five per cent of the buildings in one area and fifteen per cent in another had been either destroyed or damaged. Coastal Air Force, in the same period, made small attacks on a headquarters and the harbour at San Remo and on Imperia. The San Remo attack may have done a little to enhance the effects of the naval bombardments, which had led to a notable decrease in the output of midget assault craft. There were two of these naval attacks in February, <sup>(1) one</sup> ~~one~~ on the 6th and another on the 22nd. On 12 February, two French Thunderbolts <sup>(2)</sup> on tactical reconnaissance made machine gun attacks on the Royal and Imperial hotels. The following day, a force of 24 Thunderbolts of the same unit dropped 48 bombs on the Royal and Imperial hotels. The following day a force of 24 Thunderbolts of the same unit dropped 48 bombs on the Royal, straddling the target. Although not stated, it may be safely assumed that these hotels were Axis headquarters.

Allied anti-shipping operations

Aerial minesweeping

One of the tasks of Coastal Air Force was the spotting, plotting and reporting of mines laid by these Axis surface craft. The extent of the threat may be gauged from the report on naval operations at Appendix 30. The Navies appreciated this contribution by the Air Forces as a necessary ingredient in their progressive taking-over, opening-up and maintaining of Italian ports, on which in turn the supply of much air force equipment and stores depended.

Before the Allied minesweeping forces began operations, aerial reconnaissance was carried out and results passed to the Senior Officer Minesweepers. The best types of aircraft for the task were considered by the Navy to be the Walrus and Catalina of Coastal Air Force, or the small Piper Cub also used for artillery spotting. They flew normally at 400 feet at a speed of 70 knots. The ideal weather was a smooth, glassy sea, a blue sky and clear atmosphere. The

/best

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best time was between 1100 and 1400 hours, when the glare on the sea surface was at a minimum.<sup>(1)</sup> Smoke floats were dropped where mines were sighted.<sup>(2)</sup> The records show such operations by Coastal Air Force aircraft proceeding steadily throughout the winter. They performed a task impossible by any other means, for their speed and flexibility enabled them to cover a greater area and to give earlier warning, providing security and greater freedom of action to our surface forces.<sup>(3)</sup>

Allied Naval Forces

Although the detail of naval operations does not come within the scope of this narrative, some idea of their general nature is essential at intervals for the appreciation of how air operations fell into the over-all pattern. The terrain was peculiar in that there were two seas flanking the peninsula; to the east a partisan campaign drawing off an increasing volume of men and equipment and to the west a minor front on the Franco-Italian border. Tactical and Coastal Air Forces were both concerned with the sea flank and co-operated with the Navies.

The naval forces at the time General Alexander became Supreme Commander in December 1944 included four British cruisers,<sup>(4)</sup> one American, five <sup>French</sup> French, and four Italian cruisers, six destroyer flotillas of the Royal Navy, twelve American, nine French, seven Greek and seven Italian destroyers. A Flank Force was formed to operate in the Gulf of Genoa and the Ligurian Sea. In the Adriatic the organisation was one of smaller coastal craft, some of which later merged with heavier ships to assume duties from Yugoslav bases.<sup>(5)</sup>

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(1) Runs were best made at right angles to the sun's bearing, since nothing 'up sun' could be sighted.

(2) Position, direction and length of lay were ascertained.

(3) Notes on opening up of captured ports in the Mediterranean. Admiralty M.02556/45 by Rear Adml. Morse.

(4) Of the 15th Cruiser Squadron, R.N.

(5) Admiralty Historical Section (Appendix 30).

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*l.c.* Naval Operations in the Ligurian Sea and the Gulf of Genoa

*7* **Ibid.** In January, Flank Force ships bombarded enemy territory near San Remo and Porto Maurizio. Axis supply traffic was hampered by bombardment of barges at Pietra Ligure. In the course of numerous minor engagements, several explosives<sup>6</sup> motor boats and F-lighters carrying ammunition and troops were sunk. In February, San Remo and Ospedaletti were bombarded, an armed supply vessel torpedoed <sup>(1)</sup> and two small merchant ships sunk. <sup>(2)</sup> Porto Maurizio, San Remo and Bordighera were shelled. American motor torpedo boats sank two F-lighters, but others were less fortunate on the night of 13/14 March, when radar-controlled fire from Savona forced their withdrawal. There was a successful engagement in the Gulf of Genoa with enemy destroyers on a minelaying expedition. The Supreme Commander attributed a large part of the credit for the sinking of two torpedo boats <sup>(3)</sup> to the constant and accurate information supplied by plots taken by the R.A.F. radar station on Cap Corse and the R.N. radar station at Leghorn. The operation probably saved one of the Leghorn-Marseilles convoys from destruction: it was turned back just in time. Continuous minesweeping was carried out through the winter and until the end of operations. <sup>(4)</sup>

*l.c.* Spasmodic January Air Attacks on Ligurian Ports

*7* **Ibid.** It was hardly worth despatching aircraft to attack shipping in January. Spitfire reconnaissance never reported anything by day, for the simple reason that most vessels sailed at night. Yet this expensive day reconnaissance, once initiated, had to be continued as a deterrent. If it had ceased, the enemy would certainly have increased his daytime sailings. The only attacks likely to repay the effort were<sup>6</sup> harbours and shipping in them. Bad weather and other more urgent commitments only allowed XIII Tactical Air Command to carry out strikes on five days. Coastal Air Force recorded small offensive actions on nine days.

XIII Tactical Air Command's most spectacular effort in a modest month was made <sup>in early</sup> on January. It was a bad day for flying, but there was a break in the weather round Genoa, a phenomenon by no means unfamiliar. In the course of

/ armed

(1) Off Mesco Point.

(2) Outside Savona.

(3) TA. 24 and TA. 29

(4) For a fuller record of naval operations in the Mediterranean from January to the end of the campaign refer to Appendix 30.

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sweeps, Thunderbolts turned from primary, cloud-covered targets to Imperia harbour and Genoa docks. A 5,000 ton merchant vessel was seen to be damaged at Imperia. At Genoa one large and three small petrol tanks were destroyed. Two attacks were made on the aircraft carrier Aquila. The first missed it altogether. The second scored two direct hits and four near misses, damaging and leaving it burning. There was no question of it being used again as a carrier, but it was a good potential blockship or supply ship. On 10, 25 and 26 January, Thunderbolts on area sweeps included calls at San Remo and Savona, Genoa and Savona and Genoa irritating as these minor operations were to the enemy, his practised repair organization undoubtedly made light of the damage. More would have been attempted if it had been possible, for the full picture of the extent of enemy sea activity was becoming apparent. Weather, other commitments and the very wide selection of tactical targets made it difficult to bring any major individual task to a conclusion.

Coastal Air Force aircraft, on the nine days they worked in the area, maintained the steady attrition of enemy equipment, kept him on the alert and absorbed his manpower. Reference to operations in support of the Franco-Italian front by British, American and French aircraft based in the South of France will be omitted, as the concern here is with the supply of the main front. On the night of 1/2 January, three South African Air Force Venturas <sup>(1)</sup> were despatched on reconnaissance of the Gulf ports. One was forced back by adverse weather, another observed three vessels leaving Genoa and five barges leaving La Spezia. The third ran into violent action with a convoy of four barges and three F-boats off Sestri Levante. Twenty bombs were dropped across the convoy and showers of sparks followed the bursts. Thick flak came up from the escorts and prevented the Ventura getting close enough to check results. The aircraft came in again and dropped another 20 bombs, straddling the F-boats, who although believed hit, proceeded later on their course. The Venturas dropped to 1500 feet to machine-gun the convoy, through intense flak fire, but was still unable to check the extent of the damage. Again on the next night, a formation of five Venturas <sup>(2)</sup> /demonstrated

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(1) Of No.17 Squadron.

(2) Also of No.17 S.A.A.F. Squadron - B-34s.

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demonstrated the formidable difficulties of night attack on mobile and well-defended targets at sea without the aid of modern precision instruments. (1)

Reconnoitring between La Spezia and Genoa, five Venturas picked up three F-boats off Istri Levante, under way. The first aircraft hit one ship. The second was about to bomb when the flash and smoke from the hit ship persuaded delay. Soon after, he dropped five bombs, but missed. The vessels continued on their course. So also did five barges off Santa Margherita, bombed by the third aircraft in the face of flak dense enough to prevent observation of results. The fourth aircraft dropped 40 small bombs on the town. The fifth dropped the same weight on Rapallo harbour, but returned without definite claim.

*l.c.*

Coastal Air Force on Southern French Bases

These incidents at San Remo are reminders not only that there was a minor front in the area, but that Coastal Air Force units were at the time well established in Southern France. They supported the Alpine front tactically, and with sea reconnaissance and anti-  
shipping strikes. Their operations must be seen not only in this light, but as part of the Allied air security pattern for the Ligurian Sea and Gulf of Genoa. San Remo served the enemy in a dual role operationally, as the seat of headquarters and as a busy constructional naval base.

~~M.A.A.F./S.1643/~~  
~~Org. 3 31 Jan.~~  
~~1945. H.Q.~~  
~~M.A.A.F., O.R.B.~~  
~~App. 6/Org. 12 Feb.~~

No. 340 R.A.F. Wing at Aix-en-Provence controlled five squadrons, with an initial establishment of 84 aircraft. Typically enough, the night-operating Beaufighter squadron, (1) based at Le Vallon, was American and the other four were French. Two of these latter, (2) also based at Le Vallon, were fighter units flying Airacobras. The third (3) based at St. Madrier, and the fourth (4)

/based

(1) No. 417.

(2) II/6 (Vendee Squadron) and II/6 (Roussillon Squadron) of No. 3 Escadre de Chasse in the French Air Force chain of command.

(3) No. 2 S flying Latécoeres.

(4) No. 4 flying Walruses.

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based at Ouers, were employed on air/sea rescue work. No. 22 (S.A.A.F.) general reconnaissance squadron was on loan to Gibraltar and in view of the periodic submarine attacks on Allied ships in the approaches to the Straits, was fully employed. (1)

A Coastal Air Force commitment of importance was the surveillance of Allied convoys approaching the ports captured in Operation <sup>Dra gonn</sup> ~~'Dragon'~~ in August 1944. By this time, a high rate of discharging of war cargoes for the N.W. European front was being maintained. Marseilles, for example, cleared in February alone 450,109 tons of dry stores, 29,701 tons of fuel and 14,753 vehicles. (2)

Coastal Air Force support operations (April 1945) (3)

At the beginning of April, a large part of H.Q. staff of Mediterranean Coastal Air Force was busy planning reduction, but the operational staff was working at full pressure. A limited offensive was opened on the Alpine front to assist Operation 'Grapeshot' and the two French squadrons gave close support to the French troops engaged, putting out a high number of bombing and machine-gunning sorties. When the main offensive opened from 9 April onwards, these two squadrons were also called on to cover a comprehensive tactical reconnaissance effort west of a line Milan/Alessandria/Genoa.

No. 237 Squadron (operated by No. 338 Wing) also combined bombing missions, from the middle of the month onwards, with tactical reconnaissance for Tactical Air Forces east of the French squadron's area to a line Brescia/Parma. One flight was briefly detached to Falconera to work with No. 1435 Squadron and Beaufighters of No. 272 Squadron in attacks on two successive days on enemy radar installations on the <sup>Istrian</sup> ~~In~~strian Peninsula and the northeast coast of Italy. These anti-radar attacks, although primarily designed to suggest to the enemy that amphibious landings were impending, were more successful from a destruction point of view than many previous much larger efforts against such difficult targets.

/ Coastal ...

(1) On 17 February the American Liberty ship Michael J. Stone and the British tanker Regent Lion were torpedoed 10 miles N.W. of Tangier.

(2) Total discharge in South of France ports February 1945:-

Port	Dry	Wet	Personnel	Vehicles
Marseilles	450,109 tons	20,701 tons bulk. POL	49,866	14,753
Toulon	11,913 tons	50,543 barrels	3,672	7
Port Bouc	64,491 tons	718,000 barrels	-	-

(3) M.A.C.A.F. Air Staff O.R.Bs.

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Coastal Air Force maritime and Night Operations in April

Coastal activities were more strenuous than they had been for some time, particularly in the Northern Adriatic, where the enemy, as has been recorded, was using midget submarines for landing agents and, possibly, with a view to anti-shipping attacks. On several occasions, Wellingtons and Beaufighters were homed to suspected positions. Although only one midget submarine was known to have been sunk, the agents in a second had to be put off in their dinghy prematurely and were captured on reaching land. Other submarines were so harassed that whenever they approached our coasts and shipping lanes their plans were frustrated. Blind bombing control was particularly successful.

In the Gulf of Genoa, towards the end of the month, there were several desperate sorties by enemy E-boats. No. 38 Squadron Detachment dropped flares in darkness and helped to break up their attacks by bombing. The coastal traffic ran on until the last hour; it was now made increasingly vital by the breakdown in road and rail communications.

It was thought advisable to close the gap of the Lufthansa night flights carrying high ranking officials out of Italy in search of havens, but nothing was intercepted by the standing patrols and it was concluded that the aircraft were routed over land. Minespotting began late in the month on an increasing scale as the Navy prepared to move up to captured ports.

The last anti-shipping attack by Coastal Air Force was made during the night of 30 April/1 May, when Wellingtons <sup>(1)</sup> bombed a convoy of E-boats and six landing craft at Parenze. Offensive operations ended on 1 May, but the Air Force continued to assist the Navy in tidying up the Mediterranean.

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Statistics of the Air Forces' contribution to enemy shipping losses  
(June 1940-May 1945)

Introduction

While constant efforts were made during the war to keep abreast of the status of enemy shipping losses due to sundry causes, it was not until the post-war period that it was possible to engage on really close analysis. Information on shipping losses is, as professional analysts of the subject will confirm, often difficult to come by until the results of on-the-spot survey and enquiry are known. Even when all methods of research have been exhausted, there remains a residue of imponderables and insolubles which have to be accepted.

Nevertheless, it has been proved possible by the Air Historical Branch, by the application of sustained research among extensive material and with the co-operation of Lloyds Shipping Editor, the Naval Historical Branch and the Italian Admiralty and Air Force Historical Offices to complete the best obtainable analysis of ships dates, tonnages and causes day by day over the whole period of the war. Totals have been extracted, the contribution of the British and U.S. Air Forces and the Fleet Air Arm clearly defined and offset against losses to H.M. ships, by mines and other causes. These lists and tables are not yet available to the public and only to authorised Service personnel.

The details of enemy shipping losses in the Mediterranean contained in a nominal list compiled by the Air Historical Branch and the various summaries embodied in Vol. VIII Statistics of the R.A.F. Narrative, "The R.A.F. in Maritime War". This latter volume covers all theatres of war *except the Far East.*

Study of either or both of these works should convince the most sceptical of the all-important role of the Air Forces in the campaign against enemy merchant and naval shipping. The successes achieved played a progressive, and, in the end, decisive <sup>part in</sup> ~~result of~~ bringing the sea communications of the Axis to a standstill.

Enemy merchant shipping sinkings (10 June 40 - 2 May 45) (1)

The *grand* totals of merchant shipping sunk by <sup>the Allies</sup> ~~all~~ causes is calculated as not less than 1,441 (24) ships of 2,673,141 G.R.T. Of this total:-

/ 44.12 .....

---

(1) Numbers of ships in brackets denote ships of unknown, usually very low, tonnages.

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44.12	per cent	was sunk	by the	Navies		
46.17	"	"	"	"	"	Air
6.53	"	"	"	"	"	Mine
3.11	"	"	"	"	"	Air/Navy shared
0.07	"	"	"	"	"	Air/Mine shared

To these figures must be added 1,641 (73) ships of 1,474,382 G.R.T. Of this total, the causes were:-

Sabotage	13 ships	16,447 G.R.T.
Captured or surrendered	218(16) "	300,513 G.R.T.
Scuttled	554(24) "	735,804 G.R.T.
Enemy (Axis) aircraft	27 "	91,343 G.R.T.
Other causes	173(1) "	86,619 G.R.T.
Causes unknown	646(32) "	243,656 G.R.T.

The grand total of enemy merchant shipping sunk by all causes is approximately 3072 plus ships of a total G.R.T. of 4,147,523 plus.

Enemy merchant shipping losses attributed to Allied Air Forces

It has been of permanent historical interest to analyse the total tonnage sunk by aircraft into separate totals by the R.A.F. (including Commonwealth Air Forces) the U.S.A.A.F. (now the U.S.A.F.) and the Fleet Air Arm. The F.A.A. totals are relatively easy to assess, but in view of the integrated Anglo-American formations (in particular a M.A.C.A.F.) there are many cases where the credit was shared and an additional portion where the credit must be recorded as shared. The totals reflect, although they do not specify, the weight of day U.S.A.A.F. heavy bomber attacks on ports and the night R.A.F. medium bomber attacks.

The analysis of grand totals of sinking reads as follows:-

R.A.F.	273(2) ships	440,040 G.R.T.
R.A.F./F.A.A. shared	7 "	44,614 G.R.T.
R.A.F./U.S.A.A.F. shared	72(2) "	64,017 G.R.T.
F.A.A.	38 "	190,935 G.R.T.
U.S.A.A.F.	377(3) "	534,591 G.R.T.

The total sunk by Allied aircraft alone was, therefore, 769(7) ships of 1,234,197 G.R.T. The tonnage expressed as percentages read:

R.A.F.	40.05
F.A.A.	14.04
U.S.A.A.F.	45.91
	<hr/>
	100.00
	<hr/>

Another 19 ships of 84,970 G.R.T. were shared by the Air Forces with the Navy and mines:-

/R.A.F./ .....

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S E C R E T

R.A.F./Navy shared	8 ships	35,323	41.57%
F.A.A./Navy "	9 ships	43,231	50.88%
U.S.A.A.F./Navy "	1 ship	4,638	5.46%
F.A.A./Mine "	1 ship	1,778	2.09
			<u>100.00</u>

Of the above 788(7)ships there were sunk :-

At sea	226(1)ships	652,766 G.R.T.	49.48%
In port	562(6)ships	666,401 G.R.T.	50.52%
Total:	788(7)ships	1,319,167 G.R.T.	100.00%

Enemy warship sinkings (10 June 40 - 2 May 45)

The grand total of enemy warships <sup>(1)</sup> lost in the Mediterranean during the War by all causes was 1390(427)ships of 1,044,722 tons displacement. The actual status of a vessel i.e. its definition as a merchant<sup>or</sup> naval vessel was often extremely difficult to define and often shifted as vessels were commandeered or released. Although sometime rough and ready ratios between gross registered tonnage and the displacement tonnage used for naval vessels are used, they are not considered here as mathematically acceptable. The naval lists and tables have been computed quite independently of the merchant shipping and cannot be blocked in with them.

Of the ground total of 863(322)ships of 457,818 tons displacement accounted for by Allied action, <sup>there</sup> these figures:-

35.66%	- Navy
8.66%	- Mine
5.00%	- Air/Navy shared
50.68%	- Allied Air.

Of the balance of 527(105)ships of 586,904 tons displacement lost, the various causes accounted for:-

Sabotage	11(13)ships	55,795 tons.
Captured or surrendered	126(4)ships	328,427 tons.
Scuttled	174(15)ships	119,790 tons.
Air(Axis)	13	38,360 tons.
Cause unknown	96(10)	18,089 tons.
Other causes	107(63)	26,443 tons.

Enemy warship losses attributed to Allied Air Forces

Of the 457,818 displacement tons of warships sunk by Allied direct action, the following analyses show the relative percentages credited to each major air arm:

<u>Sunk</u>				
R.A.F. (1)	206(160)ships	42,316 tons	21.03%	
R.A.F./U.S.A.A.F. shared	44(17) ships	15,719 tons		
F.A.A.	12(2) ships	30,514 tons	16.80%	
U.S.A.A.F. (2)	295(71)ships	143,455 tons	62.17	/Shared

(1) Including formations associated or under operational control.

(2) Including a few French Air Force units under command in the later phases.

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Shared

R.A.F./Navy shared	3 ships	2,038 tons
F.A.A./Navy shared	3 ships	20,795 tons
U.S.A.A.F./Navy	1 ship	60 tons

Of the above 564(250)ships there were sunk:-

At sea	176(75)ships	52,797 tons	20.71%
In port	388(175)ships	202,100 tons	79.29%
Total:	564(250)ships	254,897 tons	100.00%

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APPENDIX 36

GERMAN NAVAL SHIPBUILDING PROGRAMME IN THE  
SECOND HALF OF 1944

On 25 July 44 O.K.M. reported to O.K.W. (letter B. No.1./Sk1/44g Kdos to OKW/WF Stab in captured German document PG/33051A at the Foreign Documents Section, Admiralty) that there were in course of construction in the Istrian area the following naval units:-

15 German U-boats	Type XXVIII, the 2-man submersible known as 'Hecht'. 1 in August, 2 in September, 2 in November, 8 in December 1944: the rest in 1945.
4 Italian submarines	2 transport and 2 coastal.
15 midget (CB) U-boats	In Milen, of which 3 were almost ready for operations in Pola.
7 TA-boats	2 ready in June, 2 July - August 44.
3 Italian corvettes	1 Aug., 1 Sept. and 1 Nov. 44.
16 Italian R-boats	4 June, 2 July-Dec. 44.
<i>armed trawlers</i>	
37 coasters (R.F.K's)	1 Sept., 2 Oct., 3 Nov., 5 Dec. 44: the rest Jan. to Aug. 45.
65 naval ferry barges (M.F.P's)	15 July-Oct., 9 Nov. and 7 Dec. 44. 8 minelaying M.F.P's were to be included in this schedule.
17 artillery barges (M.A.L's)	
22 Siebel ferries	

This volume of construction must be borne in mind, for it is against such figures that the effort by the Allied Air Forces and Navies must be measured. Their success depended on their ability to hinder and overtake it, although it was linked with other factors such as territorial advances in Italy and elsewhere.

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NO. 242 GROUP

ORGANIZATION AND LOCATIONS  
(OCTOBER 1943 TO JUNE 1944)

1. ORGANIZATION

(a) 25 OCT. 43

NO. 242 GROUP

No. 286 Wing

Italian Seaplane Wing

No. 284 Sqn.  
A/S/R.  
(Walrus)

416th Sqn.  
(U.S.A.A.F.)  
(Beaus.Night)

No. 14 Sqn.(Det.)  
(Marauders)

No. 608 Sqn.(Det.)  
(Hudsons)

No. 126 Sqn.  
(Spits)

No. 249 Sqn.  
(Spits)

No. 1435 Sqn.  
(Spits)

No. 39 Sqn.  
(Beaus)

No. 255 Sqn.  
(Beaus/  
Night).

No. 286  
Wing  
Satellite  
(Training)

No. 323 Wing

No. 32 Sqn.  
(Spits)

No. 73 Sqn.  
(Spits)

No. 253 Sqn.  
(Spits)

SECRET  
- 1 -

APPENDIX 37

1. ORGANIZATION  
(b) 13 DEC. 43

NO. 242 GROUP

No. 286 Wing

Communications  
Flight

No. 253 Sqn.  
Admin. Control  
only.

No. 608 Sqn.  
(Det.)

No. 284 Sqn.  
A/S/R.  
(Walrus)

No. 323 Wing  
No. 73 Sqn.  
(Spits)

416th Sqn.  
(U.S.A.A.F.)  
Beaus.-Night.

No. 14 Sqn. (Det.)  
(Marauders)

No. 126 Sqn.  
(Spits)

No. 249 Sqn.  
(Beaus/  
Night).

No. 255 Sqn.  
(Beaus/  
Night).

No. 608 Sqn.  
(Det.)  
(Hudsons)

No. 1435 Sqn.  
(Spits)

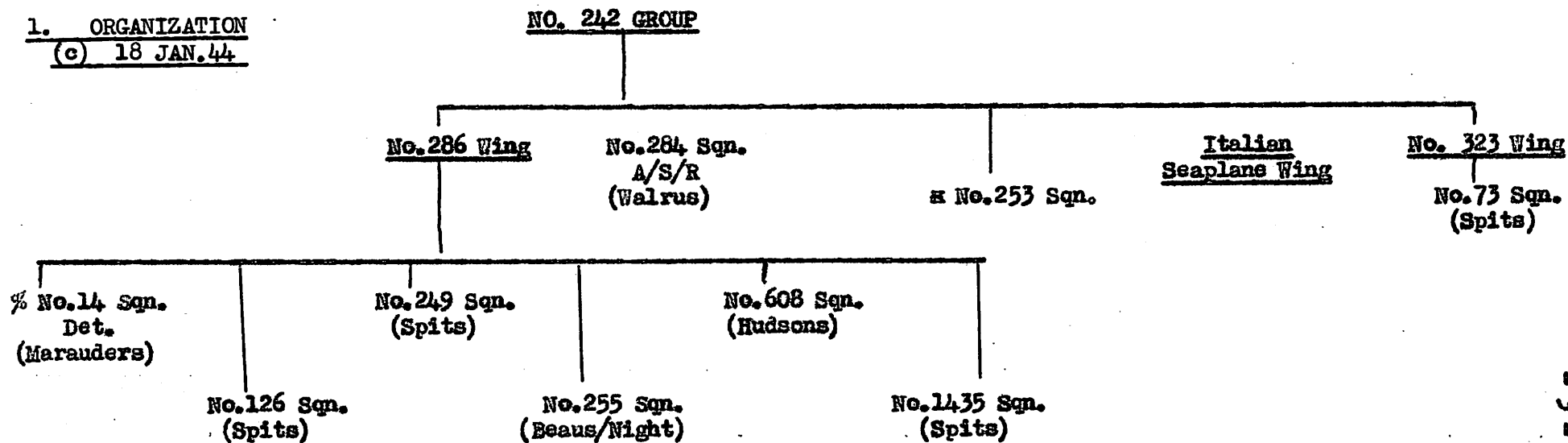
No. 286 Wing  
Satellite  
Training.

Italian Seaplane Wing

S E C R E T  
- 2 -

APPENDIX 35 37

1. ORGANIZATION  
(c) 18 JAN. 44



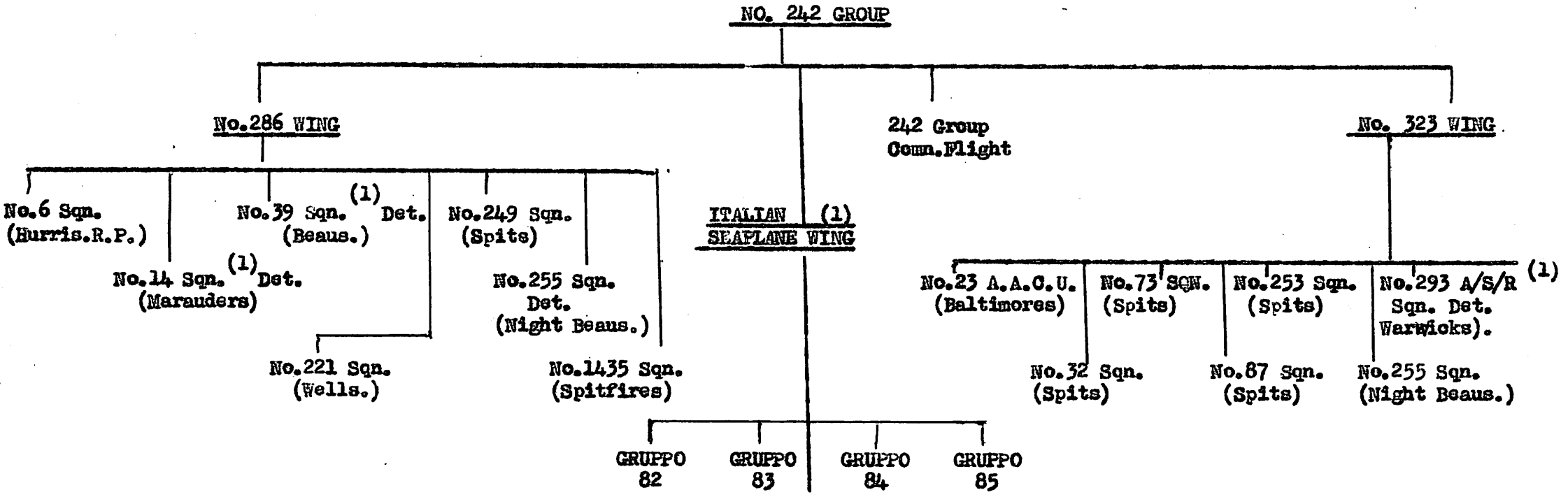
⌘ Administered direct by H.Q. No. 242 Group through Squadron H.Q.

% Operational control only.

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APPENDIX 36 37

1. ORGANIZATION  
(a) 18 JUNE 44



(1) Operational control only.

SECRET  
- 4 -

SECRET

- 5 -

NO. 242 GROUP2. LOCATIONS(a) 25 OCT. 43TARANTO (TOWN)

H.Q. No. 242 Group

BARI

No. 286 Wing Satellite

GROTTAGLIE - AIRFIELD AREA

H.Q. No. 286 Wing

No. 126 Squadron

No. 14 Squadron (Det.)

No. 608 Squadron

416th Squadron (U.S.A.A.F.)

No. 1435 Squadron

No. 39 Squadron

No. 255 Squadron

No. 249 Squadron

2. LOCATIONS(b) 13 DEC. 43TARANTO (TOWN)

H.Q. No. 242 Group

FOGGIA MAIN

H.Q. No. 323 Wing

No. 73 Squadron

GROTTAGLIE VILLAGE

H.Q. No. 286 Wing

BRINDISI

No. 1435 Squadron

2. LOCATIONS(c) 18 JAN. 44TARANTO (TOWN)

H.Q. No. 242 Group

BRINDISI

No. 284 A/S/R Squadron

No. 1435 Squadron

FOGGIA MAIN

H.Q. No. 323 Wing

No. 73 Squadron

GROTTAGLIE AIRFIELD

No. 126 Squadron

No. 608 Squadron

No. 14 Squadron (Det.)

416th Squadron (U.S.A.A.F.)

No. 249 Squadron

No. 255 Squadron

No. 242 Group Communication Flight.

GROTTAGLIE VILLAGE

H.Q. No. 286 Wing.

MONTE CORVINO

H.Q. No. 323 Wing

FOGGIA AREA

No. 284 A/S/R Squadron

GROTTAGLIE (AIRFIELD)

No. 126 Squadron

No. 608 Squadron (1 Flight)

No. 14 Squadron (Det.)

416th Squadron (I.S.A.A.F.)

No. 24 Squadron

No. 255 Squadron

NAPLES (CAPODICHINO)

No. 253 Squadron

MONTE CORVINO

No. 608 Squadron

NAPLES (CAPODICHINO)

No. 253 Squadron

/(a) .....

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SECRET

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2. LOCATIONS(a) 18 JUN. 44BRINDISI

No. 1435 Squadron

FOGGIA MAIN

H.Q. No. 323 Wing

No. 32 Squadron

No. 73 Squadron

No. 87 Squadron

No. 253 Squadron

No. 255 Squadron

No. 293 Squadron (Det.)

No. 23 A.A.C.U.

ISLAND OF VIS

No. 3 Forward Fighter Control Unit

No. 6005 A.M.E.S.

No. 6008 A.M.E.S.

No. 6109 A.M.E.S.

GROTTAGLIE AERODROME

No. 6 Squadron

No. 14 Squadron Det.

No. 39 Squadron Det.

No. 221 Squadron

No. 249 Squadron

No. 255 Squadron Det.

G.R. Operations

GROTTAGLIE VILLAGE

H.Q. No. 286 Wing

SAN VITO DI NORMANI

No. 242 Communications Flight

TARANTO TOWN

H.Q. No. 242 Group

Italian Seaplane Wing

SECRET

MIDDLE EAST AIR COMMAND

ORDERS OF BATTLE OF MEDITERRANEAN OPERATIONAL UNITS AS AT 1 FEB. AND 1 JUNE 44

A. 1 FEB. 44

Unit	Type of Aircraft	I.E. & I.R.	Location	Remarks
<u>A.H.Q. Eastern Mediterranean</u>			Adv. Alexandria	Rear Cairo
<u>No. 209 Fighter Group</u>			Haifa	
No. 127 Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Hurricane IIC	16 I.E. Temp 18 I.E. and 3 I.R.	St. Jean	Det. Beirut To re-arm Spitfire
No. 46 Sqn. (T.E.F.) Det.	Beau.	-	St. Jean	
No. 213 Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Hurri. IIC	16 I.E.	Lakatamia	Air Echelon
No. 232 Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. VB IX	-	Lakatamia	Admin. Levant
<u>No. 212 Fighter Group</u>			Benina	
No. 3 S.A. Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Hurri. IIC	16 I.E.	Savoia	To re-arm Spit.
No. 94 Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Hurri. IIC	16 I.E.	El Adem S.	To re-arm Spit.
No. 41 S.A. Sqn. S.R.F.)	Hurri. IIC	16 I.E.	El Adem	To re-arm Spit.
No. 237 (Rhod.) Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V	16 I.E.	Savoia	Det. Sidi Barrani
No. 335 (H) Sqn. S.R.F.)	Spit. V	16 I.E.	Bersis	Det. Tocra
No. 336 (H) Sqn. (S.R.F.) Det.	Hurri. IIC	-	El Adem	-
No. 96 Sqn. (T.E.F.) Dets.	Beau.	-	Tocra & El Adem	-
<u>No. 219 Fighter Group</u>				
No. 213 Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Hurri. IIC	16 I.E.	Eacu	To re-arm Spit. Air Echelon Lakatamia
No. 7 S.A. Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V	16 I.E.	Gamil	-
No. 46 Sqn. (N.F.) T.E.F.)	Beau.	16 I.E. (Temp. on 24 I.E.)	Eacu	Dets. Abu Suair, St. Jean, Tocra & El Adem
No. 74 Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V & IX	16 I.E.	Eacu	Det. Dekheila
No. 238 Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V & IX	16 I.E.	Gamil	-

Unit	Type of Aircraft	I.E. & I.R.	Location	Remarks
No. 336 (H) Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Hurri. IIC	16 I.E.	Sidi Barrani	To re-arm Spit. Det. El Adem
No. 451 (R.A.A.F.) Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V	16 I.E.	Daba	Dets. Kabrit & Gamil
No. 318 (Pol.) Sqn. (F.R.)	Hurri. IIA & B	18 I.E.	Abu Sueir	-
No. 33 Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V	16 I.E.	Mersa Matruh	-
No. 237 (Rhod.) Sqn. (S.R.F.) Det	Spit. V	-	Sidi Barrani	-
<u>No. 235 (Naval Co-op) Wing</u>				
No. 162 Sqn. (Sigs) 'A' Flight	Well./Blenheim/Mosquito	-	Gambut 3	Det. Matruh West
No. 24 S.A. Sqn. (GR/SR)	Marauder	16 I.E.	Gambut 2	-
			Gambut	Temp. on loan from M.A.A.F.
No. 15 S.A. Sqn (GR/SR)	Balt.	16 I.E.	Matruh W	-
No. 459 (R.A.A.F.) Sqn (GR/SR)	Ventura	16 I.E.	Gambut 3	-
No. 603 Sqn. (T.E.F.)	Beau. X	16 I.E.	Gambut 3	-
No. 47 Sqn. (T.E.F.)	Beau. X	16 I.E.	Gambut 3	-
No. 252 Sqn. (T.E.F.)	Beau. X	16 I.E.	Matruh W.	-
<u>No. 247 (Naval Co-op) Wing</u>				
No. 227 Sqn. (T.E.F.)	Beau.	16 I.E.	Berka 3	
No. 38 Sqn. (TB/ASV)	Well. XIII	16 I.E.	Berka 3	Authorised to operate 20 I.E.
No. 294 Sqn. (A.S.R.) Det.	Well/Walrus	-	Berka 3	-
No. 16 S.A. Sqn. (GR/SR)	Beau.	16 I.E.	Berka 3	-
No. 454 R.A.A.F. Sqn. (GR/SR)	Balt.	16 I.E.	Berka 3	-
No. 17 S.A. Sqn. (GR/SR) Det.	Ventura	-	Berka 3	-
<u>No. 245 (Naval Co-op) Wing</u>				
No. 17 S.A. Sqn. (GR/SR)	Venturas	16 I.E.	St. Jean	Det. Berka 3
No. 1 G.R. Unit	Well.	3 I.E.	St. Jean	-
No. 294 Sqn. (A.S.R.)	Well./Walrus	14 I.E. & 2 I.R.	Ismailia	Det. Derka 3
		Temp. 16 I.E. Well	Amriya S.	
		9 I.E. Walrus		
No. 13 (H) Sqn. (GR/SR)	Balt.	16 I.E.	Amriya Sth.	-
No. 162 Sqn (Sigs) H.Q. & 'B' Flight	Well/Blenheim/Mosquito	10 I.E.	Amriya Sth.	'A' Flight Gambut 2

Unit	Type of Aircraft	I.E. & I.R.	Location	Remarks
<u>No. 240 (Heavy Bomber) Wing</u>				
No. 178 Sqn. (H.B.)	Lib. II & III	16 I.E.	El Adem	Operations by H.Q. R.A.F. M.E.
No. 462 Sqn. (H.B.)	Halifax	16 I.E.	El Adem	
			El Adem	
<u>No. 263 (Light Bomber) Wing</u>				
No. 13 (L.B.) Sqn.	Balt.	16 I.E.	Kabrit	
No. 55 (L.B.) Sqn.	Balt.	16 I.E.	Kabrit	
<u>No. 322 Fighter Wing</u>				
No. 154 Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V & IX	16 I.E.	Aleppo	Admin. A.H.Q. Levant Det. Lakatamia - -
No. 232 Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V & IX	16 I.E.	Mimik	
No. 242 Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V & IX	16 I.E.	Bab el Haoua	
No. 243 Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V & IX	16 I.E.	Afisse	
			Weirab	
<u>No. 334 Special Duties Wing</u>				
No. 148 Sqn. (S.D.)	Halifax/Lib.	14 I.E. and 4 I.R.	Brindisi	Op. H.Q. R.A.F. ME/M.A.A.F. Admin. M.A.A.F.
No. 624 Sqn. (S.D.)	Halifax/Ventura	14 I.E. & 4 I.R.	Brindisi	
<u>ORDER OF BATTLE - LEVANT</u>				
<u>AIR H.Q. LEVANT</u>			Jerusalem	
<u>Note:-</u> A.H.Q. Eastern Mediterranean (through No. 209 Group) are responsible for fighter defence of Levant				
No. 209 Sqn. (F.R.)	Spit. V	18 I.E.	Megido	-
<u>ORDER OF BATTLE - H.Q. R.A.F. MIDDLE EAST</u>				
No. 680 Sqn. (P.R.)	Spit. IV & XI	15 I.E.	Matariya	Dets. Touza & Lakatamia Admin. No. 206 Group To re-arm Mosquitoes 10 I.E.

B. - SQUADRONS IN PROCESS OF TRANSFERRING TO M.A.A.F. ON 1 MAR. 44

Squadron	Type of Aircraft	I.E.	Location	Destination
<u>No. 212 Group</u> No. 7 (S.A.A.F.) Sqn. (S.E.F.)	Spit. V	16 I.E.	Savona	c/o No. 7 S.A.A.F. Wing
<u>No. 219 Group</u> No. 238 Sqn. (S.E.F.)	Spit V & IX	16 I.E.	Mersa Matruh	Ajaccio (Corsica)
No. 451 (R.A.A.F.) Sqn. (S.E.F.)	Spit V & IX	16 I.E.	Gamil	Ajaccio
No. 237 (Rhod.) Sqn. (S.E.F.)	Spit. V	16 I.E.	Elon	Ajaccio
No. 80 Sqn. (S.E.F.) Ground Party	Spit. V	16 I.E.	Kabrit	Joining Air Echelon Madna
No. 274 Sqn. (S.E.F.) Ground Party	Spit. V	16 I.E.	c/o 24 P.T.C.	Joining Air Echelon Madna
No. 6 Sqn. (S.E.F.) Small Ground Party	Hurri. IV	24 I.E.	Grottaglie	c/o 22 P.T.C.
No. 13 Sqn. (L.B.)	Balt.	16 I.E.	Kabrit	Celone
No. 55 Sqn. (L.B.)	Balt.	16 I.E.	Kabrit	Celone
<u>Air H.Q. Levant</u> No. 208 Sqn. (F.R.)	Spit. V	18 I.E.	Megido	Lago
<u>No. 322 Fighter Wing</u> No. 154 Sqn. (S.E.F.)	Spit. IX	16 I.E.	Ramat David )	Ajaccio
No. 232 Sqn. (S.E.F.)	Spit. IX	16 I.E.	Ramat David )	
No. 242 Sqn. (S.E.F.)	Spit. IX	16 I.E.	Ramat David )	
No. 243 Sqn. (S.E.F.)	Spit IX	16 I.E.	Ramat David )	

C. ORDER OF BATTLE - MIDDLE EAST COMMAND, MEDITERRANEAN OPERATIONAL UNITS AS AT 1 JUNE 44

Unit	Type of Aircraft	I.E. & I.R.	Location	Remarks
<u>A.H.Q. EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN</u>			Alexandria	
<u>No. 209 Fighter Group</u>			St. Jean	
No. 46 Sqn. (N.F.) (T.E.F.) Det.	Beau. VI	-	St. Jean	
No. 294 Sqn. (A.S.R.) Dets.	Well XI/Walrus	-	Lakatamia & St. Jean	
No. 41 (S.A.A.F) Sqn. (S.R.F.) Det.	Spit. V & IX		St. Jean & Lakatamia	
No. 459 Sqn. (R.A.A.F.)	Ventura V	16 I.E.	St. Jean	To re-arm Warwicks
<u>No. 212 Fighter Group</u>				
No. 3 (S.A.A.F.) Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V & IX	16 I.E.	Savioia	To transfer M.A.A.F.
No. 46 Sqn. (N.F.) (T.E.F.) Dets.	Beau. VI	-	Tocra & Gambut	
No. 94 Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V & IX	16 I.E.	Bu Amud	
No. 335 (H) Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V	16 I.E.	Bersis	
No. 294 Sqn. (A.S.R.) Dets.	Well XI/Walrus	-	Berka 3 Gambut 3	
No. 352 (Jugoslav) Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Hurri. IIC	16 I.E.	Lete	To re-arm Spit. V
<u>R.A.F. Station Gambut</u>			Gambut 3	Ops. control Navl Co-op units only
No. 24 (S.A.A.F.) Sqn. (GR/SR)	Marauder II	16 I.E.	Gambut 3	Temporary loan from M.A.A.F.
No. 603 Sqn. (L.R.F.)	Beau. X	16 I.E.	Gambut 3	
No. 15 (S.A.A.F.) Sqn. (GR/SR)	Balt. IV & V	16 I.E.	Gambut 3	To re-arm Warwick
No. 38 Sqn. (GR/SR) Det.	Well XIII	-	Gambut 3	
<u>R.A.F. Station Berka</u>			Berka 3	Ops. control Naval Co-op units only
No. 16 (S.A.A.F.) Sqn. (L.R.F.)	Beau. X	16 I.E.	Berka 3	
No. 38 Sqn. (G.R./L.R.)	Well. XIII	16 I.E.	Berka 3	Det. Gambut authorised to operate 20 I.E.
No. 227 Sqn. (L.R.F.)	Beau. VI & XI	16 I.E.	Berka 3	
No. 454 Sqn. (R.A.A.F.) (GR/SR)	Balt. IV & V	16 I.E.	Berka 3	To re-arm Warwick

1 JUNE (contd)

Unit	Type of Aircraft	I.E. & I.R.	Location	Remarks
<u>No. 219 Fighter Group</u>				
No. 213 Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V & IX	16 I.E.	Edeu	Re-arming Mustang
No. 46 Sqn. (N.F.) (T.E.F.)	Beau. VI	Temp. 20 I.E.	Edeu	Dets. Gambut, Tocra & St. Jean
No. 336 (H) Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V	16 I.E.	Mersa Matruh	-
No. 41 (S.A.A.F.) Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V & IX	16 I.E.	Gamil	Dets. St. Jean & Lakatamia. To transfer M.A.A.F.
No. 162 (Sigs) Sqn.	Well/Balt/Mosquito	10 I.E.	Edeu	-
No. 294 Sqn. (A.S.R.)	Well.XI/Walrus	11 I.E. & 2 I.R. temp 16 I.E. Well 9 I.E. Walrus	Edeu	Dets. Berka 3, Gambut 3, Mersa Matruh St. Jean & Lakatamia
No. 2 (R.E.A.F.) Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Hurri. IIC	16 I.E.	Edeu	Admin. R.E.A.F.
No. 252 Sqn. (T.E.F.)	Beau. X	16 I.E.	Mersa Matruh	
<u>ORDER OF BATTLE - A.H.Q. LEVANT</u>				
No. 9 (S.A.A.F.) Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V	16 I.E.	Minnik )	Admin. & Opl. control through H.Q. Calforce - for Levant Force
No. 10 (S.A.A.F.) Sqn. (S.R.F.)	Spit. V	16 I.E.	Minnik )	
<u>No. 2 (S.A.A.F.) Wing (H.B.)</u>				
No. 34 (S.A.A.F.) Sqn. (H.B.)	Liberator	16 I.E.	Rasin-el-Bouz Rasin-el-Bouz	
<u>ORDER OF BATTLE - H.Q., R.A.F., M.E.</u>				
No. 680 Sqn. (P.R.)	Mosquito	10 I.E.	Matariya	Dets. Tocra & Lakatamia
M.E. Comm. Sqn.	Various	54 I.E.	Heliopolis	
No. 31 (S.A.A.F.) Sqn. (H.B.)	Liberator VI	16 I.E.	Gebel Hamzi	Admin. control No. 206 Gp (forming) Forming & training prior to transfer to M.A.A.F.
<u>No. 334 Special Duties Wing</u>				
No. 148 Sqn. (S.D.O.)	Halifax	14 I.E. & 4 I.R.	Brindisi )	Ops. H.Q. R.A.F. M.E./M.A.A.F. Admin. M.A.A.F.
No. 624 Sqn. (S.D.O.)	Halifax/Lysander	14 I.E. & 4 I.R.	Blidah )	

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

S.E.F.	=	Single Engined Fighter
S.R.F.	=	Short Range Fighter
L.R.F.	=	Long Range Fighter
F.R.	=	Fighter Reconnaissance
S.R.	=	Strategical Reconnaissance
GR/SR	=	General Reconnaissance Short Range
TB/ASV	=	Torpedo Bomber Anti Surface Vessels
T.E.F.	=	Twin Engined Fighter
P.R.	=	Photographic Reconnaissance
H.B.	=	Heavy Bomber
L.B.	=	Light Bomber
S.D.	=	Special Duties
H.	=	Royal Hellenic Air Force
R.E.A.F.	=	Royal Egyptian Air Force
S.A.A.F.	=	South African Air Force
R.A.A.F.	=	Royal Australian Air Force
Rhod.	=	Rhodesian Air Force
A.S.R.	=	Air Sea Rescue

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THE GERMAN NAVY IN THE AEGEANORGANIZATION(OCTOBER 1943 AND AUGUST 1944)

At the end of October 1943, the position was broadly as follows. Coastal defence was the responsibility of the four Sea Defence Commands, viz. Salonika (1) Lemnos, (2) Attica (3) and Crete, (4) with each a Coast Defence Flotilla of coasters, converted fishing vessels and auxiliary sailing vessels under command. (5) Boom Defence Group South controlled 2 netlayers and 4 net tenders.

The 15th Landing Flotilla had 16 naval ferry barges for inter-island operations.

The 12th R-Boat Flotilla, with 12 boats, carried out minesweeping, patrol and escort duties.

The 21st Anti-Submarine Flotilla, with some 29 UJ-boats (anti-submarine vessels), one ex-Italian torpedo boat (6) and the 2 minelayers Bulgaria and Drache, was the only truly offensive force.

There were as yet no S-boat or torpedo boat flotillas. The hospital ship Gradisca completed the strength in late October 1943.

By August 1944, the organisation had become quite impressive and a examination of its outline reveals how deeply committed the Germans had allowed themselves to become, the measures taken to counter the steadily mounting threat of Allied aircraft, surface craft and submarines, and the fruits of their energetic shipyard construction and reconditioning of captured Italian vessels.

There were by then six Sea Defence Commandants, viz. Northern Greece, (7) Attica, (8) Crete (9) Western Greece (10) Peloponnese (11) and Dodecanese. (12)

The first two had doubled the strength of their flotillas, and the last three mustered about forty craft between them. There were four Boom Defence Groups instead of one.

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- 
- (1) H.Q. Salonika.
  - (2) H.Q. Lemnos.
  - (3) H.Q. Piraeus.
  - (4) H.Q. Canea.
  - (5) S.D.C. Salonika had some 19 vessels (prefixed GA) Lemnos some 6 (prefixed GL) Attica some 16 (prefixed GA) and Crete some 13 (prefixed GK).
  - (6) TA.1 (ex Panone)
  - (7) H.Q. Salonika.
  - (8) H.Q. Piraeus.
  - (9) H.Q. Canea.
  - (10) H.Q. Patras.
  - (11) H.Q. Kalamata.
  - (12) H.Q. Port Laki.

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The patrol and escort forces of the 12th R-Boat Flotilla had suffered heavily and were down to seven boats. So, also had the U-boats of the 21st Anti-Submarine Flotilla, now down to eight boats.

In contrast, there was now the 9th Torpedo Boat Flotilla with a force of four TA-boats, all ex-Italian torpedo boats or destroyers. The 21st S-Boat Flotilla was active with eleven German S-boats.

The 15th Landing Flotilla had lost most of its naval ferry barges, but was much stronger numerically by the addition of 33 Sicel ferries and 26 infantry landing craft. There were still two minelayers - Zeus and Drache which were often pressed into service as escorts..

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AIR HEADQUARTERS EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN  
MONTHLY ANALYSES OF SORTIES  
FEBRUARY TO JULY 1944

1944	Anti-Submarine Convoy Escort.	Independent Anti-Submarine Patrols.	U-Boat Hunts.	Long Range Fighter Protection.	Fighter Protection.	Offensive Sweeps.	Strikes	Fighter Sweeps.	Shipping Recces.	Photo Recces.	Weather Recces.	Fighter Sorties Against Enemy or Unidentified Aircraft.	Fighter Sorties Against unidentified Aircraft subsequently proved friendly.	Fighter Sorties Against false Alarms.	Intruder Operations.	Minelaying	Air Sea Rescue	Miscellaneous	"Q" Raids	Totals
Feb.	237	81	46	149	1,479	216	167	70	86	4	3	165	65	14	12	7	101			3,002
Mar.	262	157	252	212	1,074	248	62	29	47		8	80	72		112	10	89			2,714
Apr.	201	163	202	153	616	208	164	53	47		9	130	64		43	15	55	52		2,175
May	206	118	6	161	595	225	211	25	136			131	38		93	27	64	36	4	2,076
June	190	94	1	163	467	127	407	50	61			190	64		72	15	75	100		2,076
July	109	35	1	43	259	34	182	221	19			72	54		44	11	65	16		1,165
Totals	1,205	648	508	881	4,490	1,058	1,193	548	396	4	20	768	357	14	376	85	449	204	4	13,208

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ENEMY SHIPPING IN THE AEGEAN  
VESSELS AVAILABLE ON 1 SEPT. 44  
(ALLIED INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE)

<u>WARSHIPS</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>	<u>DETAILS</u>
Destroyers	3	1 active, 1 believed serviceable and 1 believed unserviceable. (N.B. In fact, there was 1 active destroyer and 3 torpedo boats in varying states of serviceability. This force was increased by 5 t.b.'s from the Adriatic on 24 Sept. 44).
U-boats	2	Both on patrol and 1 inactive (N.B. only 1 effective).
S-boats	5	1 active (N.B. untraced).
LS-boats	4	Very small S-boats - 35 to 40 knots - All active.
R-boats	11	17/18 knots. All believed active.
Minelayers	2	<u>Eous</u> and <u>Brachis</u> - could carry circa 600 troops each as transports.
Auxiliary minelayers	3	
Signal ferries	18/20	Chiefly in North Aegean and West Greece. Capable of transporting large numbers of troops.
60 foot Landing Craft	10	10 knots.
I-boats (60 foot armed launches)	24/28	8 knots.
Naval Ferry Barges (F. Lighters)	8	10 knots.
Corvettes	2	<u>Brigitte</u> and <u>Coriolanus</u>
Naval Auxiliaries	2	<u>Marathon</u> and <u>Aura</u> (UJ. 2108) the ex-Italian corvette <u>Aura</u> : (UJ. 2108)
Trawler Escorts	8/10	
Armed Galleys	100	
K.T. Ships	4	3 active, 1 under repairs.

/ACTIVE MERCHANT VESSELS ....

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<u>ACTIVE MERCHANT VESSELS</u>	<u>TONNAGE</u>	<u>REMARKS</u>
S.S. <u>Bourgas</u>	2,940	
S.S. <u>Tsar Ferdinand</u>	1,994	
S.S. <u>Carola</u>	1,348	
S.S. <u>Saloma</u>	751	
S.S. <u>Orion</u>	700	
Coaster <u>Toni</u>	638	
Coaster <u>Silva</u>	488	
Coaster <u>Sybil</u>	350	
Coaster <u>Kalydon</u>	272	
Approx. 4 small Coasters	average 200 G.R.T.	
Small Tanker <u>Ellis</u>	272	
Small Tanker <u>Dresden</u>	120	
River Barge <u>Eugen</u>	381	
River Barge <u>Louisa</u>	381	
21 {Esco Lighters	each 200 G.R.T.	
{Magda barges	each 50 G.R.T.	
18 Concrete barges	300-600 G.R.T.	Majority inactive 1/9/44
Many caiques and other small craft	50-300 G.R.T.	

Source: R.A.F. M.E. Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 220  
 part 5 in Air Staff O.R.B. appendices Sept. 44.  
 Tonnage corrected from Admiral Aspin war diary  
 at P.D.S./Admiralty and by Lloyds' records.

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H.M.S. ULSTER QUEEN

FIGHTER DIRECTION SHIP

OPERATIONS WITH MIDDLE EAST BEAUFIGHTERS IN THE AEGEAN  
(26 Sept. to 4 Oct. 44)

C O N T E N T S

	<u>Page</u>
Report of Proceedings	2 to 6
Movements	7 to 10
Comments by Director of Air Warfare and Flying Training, Admiralty.	10

(Source: Admiralty File M/011972/44)

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H.M.S. ULSTER QUEENREPORTS OF PROCEEDINGS IN THE AEGEAN  
(26 Sept. to 4 Oct. 44)

(Extracts in precis form)

(Ref. Admiralty M/011972/44)

Commanding Officer Ulster Queen to C. in C. Med. 6 Oct. 44

I have the honour to submit the following report on the direction of night fighters ... between 26 Sept. and 4 Oct. 44.

Before the ship arrived in the area, the enemy had begun to evacuate his troops from Crete to the mainland. Since his attempts to do this by sea had been curtailed and then stopped by our naval patrols, he was obliged to resort to air transport and a nightly ferry service of Ju.52s flying at 300 feet or less had been established for this purpose. The object of Ulster Queen's operation was to discourage this traffic and consequently deny the enemy the ability to transfer his troops in Crete, believed to number about 20,000, to the mainland.

Intelligence was supplied to the ship before sailing by A.H.Q.E.M. giving routes and airfields used; in spite of the fact that this was based on P.O.W. reports of 3 months previously, it turned out to be largely accurate, thanks to the consistency of the enemy.

Most of the sorties were flown to or from Herakleion, while a considerable number of aircraft used Maleme ..... and a few Do.24s and Ju.52 floatplanes used Suda Bay.

The number of tracks plotted on the principal routes were as follows:-

Maleme - Athens 41:	Athens - Maleme 28
Herakleion - Athens 81:	Athens - Herakleion 90.

These figures suggest that a few aircraft made the round trip Athens - Herakleion - Maleme - Athens, although they may include some Suda Bay traffic: the latter was definitely identified on the night 1/2 October, when 4 sorties from Suda Bay to Athens were detected. The total number of flights was almost certainly less than 300.

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The routes flown were as follows:-

(a) Athens - Maleme and Maleme - Athens. Almost wholly on a direct course, but occasionally northbound aircraft flew up the east coast of the mainland. The drop in traffic on this route for the last 4 nights was due to the bombardment of the airfield by H.M. Ships Black Prince and Aurora.

(b) Athens - Herakleion and Herakleion - Athens. Most sorties flew a dog-leg course via Milos in both directions, the turning point being somewhere between Milos and a point about 10 miles north of Suda Bay, but usually about 3 miles S.W. of Milos. A fair number of sorties were also flown in both directions via Naxos, presumably turning at the visual beacon there; this route was not used until the night 29/30 September. An occasional trip was made northwards via Pholegandros.

(c) Suda - Athens. Aircraft on this route appeared to be making landfall at Milos before setting course for Athens.

The courses flown on all these routes were very steady, no evasive action being taken until sighting our aircraft.

Routes on which scores were obtained were:-

Maleme - Athens 3: Athens - Maleme 7: Herakleion - Athens 6: Athens - Herakleion 5: Suda - Athens 2: Athens towards Keso Straits 1: making a total of 24.

The aircraft were usually flown off in batches of 5 or 6 at a time; an effort seemed to be made to send off the first batch immediately after sunset, while another favourite time was just prior to first light.

About two-thirds of the flights were made at 300 feet or less, sometimes as low as 50 feet, while the remainder varied from 1000 to 9000 feet, mostly probably at 5000 - 6000 feet. After the first few days, aircraft in any one batch would be sent out at different heights in order to create confusion.

For the first 5 nights, the aircraft employed were almost all Ju.52s at a speed of 110 - 140 m.p.h., but from the night 1/2 October, other and faster types began to appear to the exclusion of the Ju.52s. It seems probable that the latter have been largely transferred, at least temporarily, to the Athens - Salonika Service. Ju.88s, He.111s and Do.24s seemed to be bearing the brunt at that period, flying at speeds of 160 - 240 m.p.h. This must be very uneconomical, because of their smaller passenger load and because their higher speed makes them a much easier prey for a Beaufighter. Their higher mortality rate is reflected in the score for the nights 1/2 and 2/3 October.

/Beaufighters

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BEAUFIGHTERS When the operation was planned, it was anticipated that both Nos. 46 and 108 Squadrons would be available, but No. 108 was at short notice to move elsewhere. This move presumably took place, since no aircraft from 108 were employed for the first 3 nights, during which time No. 46 produced 4 aircraft a night to cover the period from dusk to moonset. On the fourth night, No. 108 Squadron appeared, having apparently been recalled, and from then onwards, 7 or 8 aircraft a night were available. Except for one night, they arrived in the area one at a time for a patrol of 90 minutes North of Crete or 75 minutes North of Milos. On the night 30 Sept./1 Oct., they came in pairs, the first pair arriving at 2325 hours, which was unfortunate in that 40% of the night's traffic was by that time safely on its way: also, control was complicated in that pilots seemed to have been briefed to go to the rendezvous of the previous night some 32 miles to the West, while the Mark VIII beacon chose this as one of its nights off. Hence a considerable waste of time in pinpointing the fighters and homing them to their correct patrol area.

Since 7 or 8 aircraft per night was the maximum available, a signal was sent back to base suggesting that it was preferable to provide continuous cover with one aircraft at a time; and this became the policy for the remainder of the operation.

While in the area to the North of Crete, Beaufighters patrolled near the ship at 500 feet on the side from which it was anticipated the next batch of enemy aircraft would appear and were generally controlled by the G.C.I. while on patrol and plotted on the 277 PPI and Skiatron. The first of these two sets to pick up a bogey and to have a good picture of both fighter and target was detailed to take over the interception.

As a result of slackening trade on the night 1/2 October and of a signal from F.O.L.E.M. giving a prohibited area for German aircraft which corresponded very closely with the area in which we had been working, the R/V was altered to 15 miles N.W. of Milos, closer to the enemy's base, in order to cover any possible re-routing. In this position, side echoes from the many small islands in the neighbourhood made it impossible to see the coast limits accurately on the G.C.I. and it was considered safer to patrol the fighters on the 277 PPI, which gave an excellent picture.

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The flying schedule was very well adhered to, there being no gaps in the advertised cover until the last night, when 75 minutes elapsed between the departure of one aircraft and the arrival of his relief.

In order to get an A.I. contact on a bogey on the deck, it was necessary to put the fighter at the same level or lower, and the strain of patrolling at 300 - 500 feet and doing battle at 100 feet or lower, sometimes in a force 4 wind, must have been considerable, but the cheerfulness of all the pilots on the R/T and the ribaldries of some, were a constant tonic to all in the A.D.R., while the zest with which they went about the job and their almost oriental delight with anything which burned is reflected in the results. PISTOL 50 of No. 46 Squadron, with a score of 5, 3 of which were shot down on one patrol, did particularly well.

There was 1 casualty, Beaufighter GOBY 40 of No. 108 Squadron, last heard of in contact with a northbound bogey doing 160 knots in a position just south of Milos, after which both plots faded.

Dusk cover of 2 day Beaufighters and dawn cover of 1 day Beaufighter was provided on most outings.

The tactical result of the 8 nights operations should not be measured only by the number of aircraft shot down, but by the diminution and final cessation of traffic at night between Crete and Athens. Since it is not thought likely that many sorties will be flown in daylight while the Carrier Force is in the area, a considerable number of Germans should be isolated in the island.

RADAR

(a) The principal conclusions on the work of the G.C.I. on this operation are that:-

- (1) It is a practical proposition on board a normal H.M. Ship.
- (2) It can be maintained and operated by purely Naval personnel. The G.C.I. team of Flight Lieutenant F.W. Thirlaway, R.A.F., Lieutenant B.W. Price, R.N.V.R. and Sub. Lieutenant A.V. Pelly, R.N.V.R. has largely responsible for the successes.

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(b) 277 This set played a major part in this operation and the result obtained completely reversed previous mediocre opinions of it. Land echoes and the roll of the ship were the main drawbacks.

(1) Mark VIII A.I. Beacon - Performance more consistent than usual: on one occasion it homed a Beaufighter from 80 miles at 6,000 feet after a long chase which had taken him right off the map.

(c) 79, 281 and 253. Reasonably satisfactory performances.

Successes The score was 24 (destroyed, probable and damaged).

	<u>277</u>	<u>GCI</u>	<u>79</u>
<u>Contacts</u>	23	22	1
<u>Score</u>	10 $\frac{1}{2}$	12 $\frac{1}{2}$	1

The "Y" service was most disappointing.

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H.M.S. ULSTER QUEENMOVEMENTS

(25 Sept. to 4 Oct. 44)

(Extracts in précis form - Ref. Admiralty M/011972/44)

1944

25 Sept. 1050 Passed Alexandria breakwater; Liddesdale in company.

26 Sept. 1100 Sighted scheduled Beaufighter.

1117 35°19'N., 26°39'E.

1121 Sighted Ju.88. Enemy reversed course, crossed ahead and resumed southerly course to port.

2016 Contact with first Night Fighter. Began F.D. Operations.

2050 Arr. R/V 36°00'N, 24°15'E.

2150 Steady stream of bogies travelling southwards and slightly East of Ulster Queen.

2256 Observed a Ju.52 crash in flames, bound South.

2312 " " - do - " " "

2320 Ulster Queen and Liddesdale opened fire on a Ju.52.

2334 Observed a Ju.52 bound South crash in flames.

2347 " " - do - " " "

27 Sept. 0015 - 0300 Red flares and searchlights at intervals direction Maleme.

0230 Last Night Fighter left for base.

0253 Opened fire on a Ju.52.

0300 Proceeded to St. Nikolo Bay, Kythera.

0820 Anchored there.

RESULTS - 4 Ju.52s shot down by Beaufighters. Ju.52s flying at about 200 feet; when fired on by ships, they rose and altered course.

It was decided to shift R/V to 36°15'N., 24°15'E. It was estimated that 32 Ju.52s were in operation.

1100 A Ju.88 appeared from over Kapsali Bay under A/A fire from guns W. of G. Capeda, passed E. of Ulster Queen, at about 7,000 feet and disappeared to the N. after ample reconnaissance.

1115 Weighed and stood South.

1140 Requested dusk fighter cover. Stopped close N. of G. Capeda.

1800 Proceeded for R/V 36°15'N., 24°15'E. Bicester and Themistocles in company.

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1855 Dusk fighter cover arrived.

2040 First Night Fighter arrived.

2108 Do.26 fired on by Beau. N.R.

2138 Beau. fired on south-bound Ju.52 floatplane, which crash-landed in sea with port engine on fire 15m N. of Crete.

2323 Ulster Queen and Bicester engage a N-bound aircraft. N.R.

2345 Bicester engaged N-bound aircraft. N.R.

28 Sept. 0015 Observed North-bound Ju.52 shot down in flames by Beau.

0230 Last Night Fighter left.

0835 Anchored in St. Nikolo Bay.

RESULTS 1 Ju.52 shot down by Beau. 80 plus tracks plotted. 1 Ju.52 floatplane shot down by Beau. and crash-landed on sea, port engine on fire. Night's work disappointing, in view of large flow of traffic at 200 - 1000 feet. Most hostile aircraft were on passage as soon as darkness fell and at early dawn.

1355 Ju.88 on reconnaissance over Kythera.

1800 Weighed. Bicester and Oakley in company.

1940 First Night Fighter arrived. Began F.D. Operations.

2200 After contact with 2 hostiles, arrived R/V 36°15'N., 24°15'E.

2230 Observed N-bound Ju.52 exploded in air.

20 Sept. 1118 Beau reported shooting down Ju.88 over Milos Island.

0700 Fighter chased bogey as far as Crete.

0835 Anchored St. Nikolo Bay.

RESULTS 1 Ju.52 and 1 Ju.88 destroyed. 2 hostile aircraft engaged ships. Only 37 tracks plotted. Contacts more difficult for pilots to exploit: enemy more wary, as heights varied from 50 to 9,000 feet.

1650 Recce. Ju.88 engaged.

1800 Weighed and R/V at 36°15'N., 24°15'E. Oakley and Themistocles in company.

2000 Began F.D. Operations.

2054 Enemy aircraft observed about 50 feet above surface.

2200 Night fighter shot down 2 south-bound Ju.52s and hit a third.

30 Sept. 0500 Proceeded towards Kythera.

0516 Fighter shot down a S-bound Ju.52.

0540 " hit " " "

0615 Last Night Fighter Left.

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0635 Contacted dawn Fighter cover.

0834 Anchored off St. Nikolo.

RESULTS 3 Ju.52s shot down and 3 damaged by Beaufighters.  
 1 Ju.52 engaged by ship.  
 Only 30 tracks plotted. Most hostiles flying at c.50 ft.

1100 Recce. Ju.88 over anchorage engaged by ships.

1800 Weighed with Themistocles in company, for new R/V in  
 36°00'N., 24°50'E. Sailing postponed until this hour in  
 order to intercept the dusk air traffic Athens - Maleme.

1800 - 2000. Dusk fighter cover.

2045 Several hostile plots.

2315 First Night fighters.

2358 Arrived R/V.

1 Oct. 0030 Ships engaged hostile. Aircraft appeared to be sighting us in  
 the moonlight.

0055 - 0310 Sightings and engagements by ships.

0314 Fighter shot down a Do.24. Dawn cover did not appear.

RESULTS disappointing. Only 1 Do.24 shot down. Radar conditions  
 not ideal and difficulty found in holding target. Later aircraft  
 heights varied up to 7000 feet, those at 2000 and 3000 feet being  
 particularly awkward to record. Over 60 tracks recorded.

1111 Fueled in Kapsali Bay.

1515 Proceeded to R/V in 36°00'N., 24°50'E., Themistocles in company.

1940 Three plots at about 50 feet - 1 probable Ju.52 destroyed.

1950 Dusk fighter shot down N-bound Ju.52 report.

2140 Night Fighter reported shooting down a Ju.88 (southbound).

2228 " " - do - " " He.111 (Northbound ~~He.111~~).

2 Oct. 0005 FoLEM signalled information of re-routing of German aircraft.  
 ^ FoLEM stood to eastward and arrived 18 miles 090° of R/V by 0100.

0435 Fighter reported shooting down a southbound Ju.88.

0555 Observed prob. He.115 crashed in flames.

0620 Fighter reported shooting down a N-bound Do.24.

0630 Last Night Fighter left. No dawn cover.

RESULTS 2 Ju.88s, 1 He.111, 1 He.115, 1 Do.24 shot down,  
 1 Ju.52 damaged, 1 Ju.52 probably destroyed by  
 ship's barrage. 31 tracks plotted.

0700 Kapsali anchorage unsuitable.

1058 Anchored St. Nikolo.

1700 Weighed. New R/V. 37°00'N., 24°00'E. Themistocles in company.

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2100 Beau. chased and lost a Do.24.  
 2215 Arrived R/V. 165° - 58 Miles from Athens.  
 3 Oct. 0020 Beau. reports shooting down a N-bound He.111.  
 0925 St. Nikolo Bay.

RESULTS Only 6 tracks detected. Assumed enemy has drastically cut down his air ferry service. 1 He.111 shot down. 1 Do.24 damaged by Beaus.

1700 Proceeded towards R/V in 37°00'N, 24°00'E. Themistocles in company.

2135 Fighter observed to shoot down a N-bound Ju.52.

4 Oct. 0400 Proceeded towards Kythera.

0906 Anchored in St. Nikolo Bay.

RESULTS 1 Ju.52 destroyed by Beau. Owing to <sup>a</sup>serious defect in the evaporator boiler, it was decided to return to Alexandria this necessity appearing acceptable owing to the scarcity of enemy targets.

1800 Left St. Nikolo for Alexandria, Themistocles in company.

FINAL SUMMARY

<u>Shot down by Fighters</u>	<u>Probables</u>	<u>Damaged by Fighters</u>
10 Ju.52	1 Ju.52 floatplanes	4 Ju.52
3 Ju.88	1 Ju.52	1 Do.24
2 Do.24	<u>2</u>	<u>5</u>
2 He.111		
1 He.115		
<u>18</u> certainties.		

Fired on by Ulster Queen and/or Escorts without apparent results

17 aircraft

Senior F.D.O. Temp. Lt.Com. L.S. Lee R.N.V.R. assisted by 2 R.N.V.R. and 1 R.A.F. Officer (G.C.I.) named above.

(Sgd.) C.O. H.M.S. ULSTER QUEEN.

Minute by Director of Air Warfare and Flying Training 28/12/44

"It is considered that the ship showed considerable imagination in utilising the equipment to such good advantage and that great credit is due not only to the R.A.F. pilots of the Beaufighters, which is a difficult aircraft for night fighting below 500 feet, but also to the Aircraft Direction Team as a whole.

The achievements of this ship are of great satisfaction to D.A.W.T. since they should serve finally to demonstrate not only the value of specialist Fighter Direction ships but also the ability to control night fighter aircraft to good effect even under radar conditions of great difficulty.

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ANALYSIS OF BEAUFIGHTER OPERATIONS

DATE	NUMBER OF NIGHT FIGHTERS		FIRST AIRCRAFT ARRIVED	LAST AIRCRAFT LEFT	GAPS IN COVER	NUMBER OF TRACKS					NUMBER OF CONTACTS	DESTROYED	DAMAGED	<u>REMARKS</u>
	46 Sqn.	108 Sqn.				HERAKLEION-ATHENS	ATHENS-HERAKLEION	MALEME-ATHENS	ATHENS-MALEME	OTHERS				
26/27	4		2030	0230	none	6	10	6	7	-	5	4 Ju.52s		16 enemy craft were destroyed by No.46 Sqn. and 3 by No.108 Sqn.
27/28	4		2035	0250	none	28	30	9	2	12	10	2 Ju.52s		
28/29	4		1950	0205	none	12	11	11	5	10	7	1 Ju.52 1 Ju.88		
29/30	4	3	2005	0620	none	1	8	6	12	-	9	3 Ju.52s	3 Ju.52s	
30/1	4	4	2325	0618	none	22	22	-	1	-	4	1 Do.24		
1/2	5	2	1955	0601	none	8	9	7	-	7	7	2 Ju.88s 1 He.111 1 Do.24 1 He.115	1 Ju.52	
2/3	6	2	1945	0600	none	4	-	1	1	-	3	1 He.111	1 Do.24	
3/4	4	3	1845	0600	0330 - 0445	-	-	1	-	-	1	1 Ju.52		
Totals	35	14	-	-	75 mins.	81	90	41	28	29	46	19	5	

Source: No. 108 Squadron O.R.B. Oct.44 Appx.26

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Source: Admiralty File M/01027/45.  
 This Appendix contains extracts in précis form.

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OPERATION "OUTING" : PHASE I

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS

(Extracts in précis form from Admiralty  
File H/01027/45)

OPERATIONS 9 - 20 SEPT. 44 (FORCE "A")

On 9 September, certain units of the Mediterranean Fleet were placed under command of the Rear Admiral, Escort Carriers as Force 120. They consisted of escort carriers, cruisers and destroyers. On that day he proceeded in H.M.S. Royalist, with a proportion of Force 120 consisting of escort carriers and destroyers and known as Force A with the object of interrupting sea communications in the Aegean. After 12 days operations, during which some units left and others joined the force, the enemy's seaborne communications with Crete had been almost completely cut, a number of his few remaining transport ships had been sunk, his communications ashore in the southern islands had been well harried and one of his three remaining U-boats sent to the bottom. In addition, naval aircraft had covered the operation for occupying Kythira Island and sweeping the Kythira channel into the western Aegean. The bulk of the force then returned to Alexandria for rest and refit, leaving destroyers to maintain a nightly blockade of Cretan ports. These ships operated from Kythira under the orders of F.O. Levant and Eastern Mediterranean.

2. At first the Force remained to the southward of Crete, waiting for a profitable moment to enter the Aegean. This came on 12 September, when intelligence was received from <sup>FOLEM</sup> ~~Folen~~ that shipping movements between Crete and the islands were expected.

Royalist and 3 destroyers passed through the Keso Straits after dark and left at daylight after an area sweep at high speed, their withdrawal being covered by fighters flown off the carriers operating outside. During the sweep, Troubridge and Tuscan encountered a small convoy on the Candia-Santorin run and accounted for the whole of it, viz 1 K.T. ship, the Toni, 3 caiques and 2 escort vessels.

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3. This procedure was repeated on the two following nights. The sweep on 13 September was blank, but on the 14th two K.T. ships were intercepted and sunk by Royalist and Teazer off Suda Bay.

4. On 15 September, the operation having provoked no response from the Luftwaffe, I deemed it prudent to move the carriers into the Aegean. A K.T. ship had been reported by air reconnaissance at Milos and the arrival of Aurora on 16 September to join the Force enabled a bombardment of the harbour, with aircraft spotting, to be carried out. The ship was put out of action and beached and several smaller vessels sunk.

On the same day, aircraft visited Crete and shot up M/T on the roads, a procedure that was continued both on Crete and other islands during the remaining days of the operations.

5. The next day, 17 September, Aurora bombarded the minelayer Drache in Milos harbour without result: Aurora and Terpsichore took up positions off Milos during the night with a view to interception should the enemy try to slip out, but were obliged to keep their distance owing to the presence of minefields and well directed shore battery fire. The Drache escaped, probably avoiding our radar by hugging the coast and passing through the narrow channel to the eastward. On 24 September she was sunk by R.P. Beaufighters.

6. During the next 2 days, the carrier force continued to operate to the northward of Crete, destroyers closely blockading Gandia and Suda by night. Royalist took up a central position at night on the air route between Crete and Athens with a view to directing night Beaufighters on to the stream of German transport aircraft flying northwards. No difficulty was experienced in directing aircraft, but no intercepts resulted. Conditions were not easy, since the enemy flew very low and Beaufighters, which were only available for short periods, flew very fast in comparison with the slow Ju.52's: it was also very dark. Sufficient experience was gained to show that night interception with Royalist's gear was an entirely practicable proposition. The need for night flying naval aircraft was acutely felt, both for interception and twilight cover. During the whole period, Beaufighters

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APPENDIX A3

from N. Africa made a dusk rendezvous with the Force and remained in company over the dangerous period.

7. At dusk on 18 September O.R.P. Garland sighted smoke on the horizon while near Santoria and sighted <sup>a</sup> the submarine Schmorkel. Contact was picked up by destroyers and maintained almost unbroken for 10 hours. The U-boat was attacked, surfaced and her crew abandoned ship.

8. On 19 September, operations were transferred to the Eastern Aegean. A strike of 45 aircraft was flown off to attack 2 depot ships at the pier at Rhodes. One ship was damaged, according to air photographs. A convoy of 8 M/T at Rhodes was destroyed.

9. Just after dark on 20 September, after a day of little action, Revalist was ordered to return to Alexandria and arrived there on the 21st.

10. 368 sorties were flown, only 4 accidents recorded and no aircraft or pilots were lost. The high winds in the Aegean at this time of year make for ideal flying conditions, since the sea raised is insufficient to produce any motion on the escort carriers when head to wind. Seafires were on one occasion flown off Attacker while she was oiling Revalist at 6 knots and landed on Emperor, where some important photographs which they had taken were developed and analysed. The Hellcats and Wildcats with their extra range again proved their superiority over British types, though the need for rocket projectiles in the Hellcats was much felt. Had they been so equipped, a great deal more damage might have been done to shipping. Merchant ships of 1,000 tons and less are a very poor target for fighter bombers. Although several aircraft were hit by flak, not one was lost, a result I attribute to the experience gained in Operation "Dragon".

11. Revalist and the destroyer screen were expertly kept topped up with oil from the carriers, but the method was very slow.

Signed Rear Admiral  
Escort Carriers.

OPERATION "OUTING": PHASE I

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- 9 Sept. Force A, comprising Royalist, Rhedive, Pursuer, Searcher, Trotbridge, Tyrian, Termination, Tornament, Teaser, Tumult, Tenacious, Tuscan, H.H.M.S. Navarino and C.R.P. Garland sailed from Alexandria at 0945 G hours.
- 10 Sept. Position 34°20'N., 24°40' E.
- 11 Sept. S.E. of Crete.
- 12/13 Sept. Sweep by Royalist and destroyers.
- 13 Sept. 2 Groups rendezvoused on 35°30'N., 25°35'<sup>E.</sup> and rejoined Force A, fighter cover by aircraft from Pursuer.  
At 1830 G, Rhedive, escorted by Garland, detached to proceed to vicinity of 37°30'N., 26°30'E to rendezvous with Princes David to provide fighter protection during Operation "Aplomb".
- 13/14 Sept. Sweep.
- 14 Sept. R.A.E.G. in Royalist and Teaser entered the Aegean to sweep for enemy shipping and direct night fighters. At 0400 hours, 2 K.T. ships sunk 20 m N.E. of Suda Bay.
- 15 Sept. Searcher and Rhedive provided fighter protection over the Kythera area.  
Force A in 35°02'N., 26°28'E. Sweep
- 16 Sept. Miles bombarded and blockaded. Crete blockaded.  
Aircraft from Attacker, Emerox and Pursuer on reconnaissance of shipping routes and staging points and attacks on shipping at Miles and roads in Crete. 76 sorties.
- 17 Sept. Attacks on Drache and Miles installations.  
1 calque damaged at Santorin harbour.  
Aircraft reconnoitred shipping routes, harbours and roads in Crete. 60 sorties.
- 17/18 Sept. Cretan ports blockaded.

/18 Sept.

- 18 Sept. W/T and radar stations at Milos bombarded  
Air reconnaissance and attacks on M/T in Crete  
15 flying boats, 11 of which believed to be B & V 122s,  
seen in Suda Bay. 16 fighter bombers divebombed them, but  
results unknown.  
At 1730A, in 36°14'N., 24°33'E., G.R.P. Garland sighted a Schmerkol.
- 18/19 Sept. Candia harbour and Heraklion airfield bombarded
- 19 Sept. Air shipping reconnaissance. 9 M/T destroyed at Rhodes  
and 1 Ju.52 damaged by cannon fire on Maritza airfield.  
At 1020 hours a Balbo of 45 fighter bombers (24 Seafires,  
10 Hellcats and 11 Wildcat Vics) sent to attack a K.T. ship at  
Rhodes. 2 ships destroyed, 2 small craft and 1 ex-British M.L.  
damaged. 1 machine gun nest destroyed and the sea mine store blown  
up. No damage to our aircraft.
- ~~19 Sept.~~ At dusk one of the two Beaufighters sent to provide dusk  
protection was fired on and hit by an aircraft from Panagoras.  
The Beau reached base but crash-landed and was wrecked. The  
crew was uninjured.
- 20 Sept. Candia, Suda and Santorin blockaded. Air shipping reconnaissance,  
but no results.
- 21 Sept. At 1400 G hours, Force A arrived Alexandria.

LOSSES AND DAMAGE TO THE ENEMY CLAIMED

1. Destroyed

3 K.T. ships  
1 U-boat  
8 Caïques  
2 escort launches  
3 miscellaneous vessels  
1 Ju.52  
3 unidentified seaplanes  
3 staff cars  
4 petrol bowers  
64 assorted M/T.

2. Damaged

- 1 L.T. ship
- 2 Sicel ferries
- 3 coasters
- 1 trader
- 2 depot ships
- 3 miscellaneous vessels
- 1 Ju. 52
- 10 assorted M/T.

3. Prisoners

- 31 Germans
- 2 Greeks

NIGHT FIGHTER CONTROL

Aircraft were homed to Royalist by radar. Royalist was only fitted with 281 and Skiatron. Bogeys were flying at such low heights that they were never detected at a greater range than 14 miles and usually at a range of 10 miles. Type 277 radar would have been invaluable for night fighter control and for more accurate height finding. Royalist was never controlling a night fighter during peak air traffic.

The ideal equipment suggested was:

Skiatron Type 277 (working with Type 281)

940 or 941 interrogator (for "canary" interrogation).

OPERATION "OUTING": PHASE II

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS (FORCE 120)

(30 SEPT. - 4 OCT. 44)

H.M.S. Revalist proceeded from Alexandria at 1500 hours on 30 Sept. 44 with escort carriers, cruisers and destroyers in company, to continue operations against the enemy in the Aegean. Unfortunately the Kinares channel into the Northern Aegean had not yet been properly swept, consequently the activities of the Force were confined to the southern area, which had already been well harried and from which virtually all enemy shipping was excluded. Activities of H.M.S. Ulster Queen and night Bombers had reduced the flow of air traffic to and from Crete to a mere trickle. There was very little doing.

Reconnaissances were flown off each day morning and evening, small craft were attacked in Portolago, (Leros) an attack which cost 1 Halibut: the wireless station at Levita was shot up by 16 Seafires. Revalist and Troubridge bombarded targets on Milos, and Aurora and Colombo shot up the aerodromes at Galato (Rhodes) and Maleme and Herakleion (Crete).

Destroyers close blockaded Cretean ports nightly, but observed nothing except demolition fires ashore.

On 4 October, Aurora, Hunter and 3 destroyers covered sweeping operations in the Kinares channel and that evening, the remainder of the Force returned to Alexandria for fuel.

OPERATION "OUTING": PHASE II

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

- 30 Sept. Force A sailed. (Revalist, Attacker, Hunter, Emperor, Colombo, Aurora, Troubridge, Tyrian, Teazer and Navarinon.)
- 1 Oct. Small air reconnaissance operations and watch for aircraft using Galato airfield, which was shelled.
- 2 Oct. a.m. extensive air reconnaissance. 8 fighter bombers attacked caiques at Milos.

/2/3 Oct.

- 2/3 Oct. Maleno airfield bombarded, patrols, and blockaded Milos - Santorin, Gandia, West of Rhodes.
- Part of Force withdrew through Sharpeno Strait.
- 3 Oct. 1655 hours 16 aircraft from Attacker and Hunter attacked W/T station on Lavitha Island (already abandoned).
- 1710 hours 16 aircraft from Attacker attacked shipping in Portolago (Port Lali) 13 plus craft hit, 1 Helicat lost.
- 3/4 Oct. Blockade of Gandia and Suda
- 4 Oct. Santorin, and Milos reconnoitred by aircraft and north coast of Crete. At 1515 hours Milos was bombarded with aircraft from 2,000 tons Attacker spotting, a ship aground was fired on and hit. Shore batteries firing were silenced by gunfire.
- 5 Oct. 0700 hours. Amaze, Hunter, Tuscan and Sevastian detached to give air and surface cover to 5th Minesweeping Flotilla sweeping Kinaros Channel.

OPERATION "OUTING" : PHASE III

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY (FORCE 120)

(8 - 12 OCT. 44)

On 8 October, Royalist, with Emperor, Troubridge, Tenzor and Tyrion in company sailed from Alexandria, to attack enemy forces in the Aegean; more particularly to continue the operations begun by Black Prince and carriers of Force A working in the Northern Aegean against the enemy's lines of communication with Salonika.

9 Oct. Passed through Shrapante Strait. Armed air reconnaissance of Santoria, Piskopi, Kos, Leros, Milos, north coast of Crete, Khalkia, Albania.

8 aircraft sank 5 out of 10 caiques at Kos and attacked 6 small ships on slips.

10 Oct. Course changed to a position halfway between Rhodos and Mitylene, where the Force remained for the day, without operating aircraft and keeping U/T silence.

Royalist and Troubridge operated during the night in the Gulf of Salonika.

Tyrion on anti-minelaying patrol in Kinaros Channel.

10/

11 Oct. Night anti-shipping patrol on Skiathos - Cape Cassandra route.

10 aircraft passed near, probably ferrying between Salonika and the south.

11 Oct. Air reconnaissance of Syros and the Euripo Channel: strafed and set K.T. ship on fire S.E. of Khalkia. One aircraft lost to flak.

16 fighter bomber recon'd Volos.

At Khalkia, E.-boats, landing craft and 30 plus mixed small craft attacked with satisfactory results. K.T. ships attacked by the earlier reconnaissance soon burning fiercely. In Volos Bay, several small craft were left smoking and a small convoy in the northern Talanta Strait bombed and two craft left smoking.

8 aircraft attacked closely - packed concentrations of craft at Khalkia (while ships were covering the Khalkia - Talanta Channel - Volos area) and 2 craft left smoking of a small N-bound convoy south of Khalkia.

4 aircraft sent to deal with the Larissa - Salonika railway blow up 3 locomotives, an ammunition train and cut the line.

An unidentified twin-engined aircraft observed at 1740, while Force was between Strati and Psathura Islands. Fighters failed to contact it.

Royalist and Troubridge patrolled Gulf of Salonika: Emperor, escorted by Ternsiohore and Teazer, returned to Alexandria.

As it seemed desirable to cover the northern as well as the southern side of the Gulf of Salonika, and likely that enemy aircraft had sighted and reported the Force, the Commodore Commanding Escort Carriers decided (perhaps incorrectly) to disregard the enemy radar coverage from Cape Cassandra and to extend the previous night's area of operations so as to include possible traffic from Lannos. From our own reconnaissance, chances of worthwhile northbound traffic during the night from Skiathos appeared poor. Patrol withdrawn at midnight.

12 Oct. Force returned to Alexandria (except Emperor).

Remarks. Landing craft attacked in Volos were loaded with troops. Range and hitting power of naval Hellcat aircraft very impressive, as displayed by No. 800 Squadron in Emperor, although that unit was thoroughly tired after 5 months of sustained operations. Both their range and hitting power were superior to Seafires.

Until Zee and Dore Channels were swept, Kinaros Channel provided the only safe approach to the Northern Aegean.

Radar station at Pliniri (Rhodes) successfully attacked Freya destroyed.

13 Oct. Emperor returned to Alexandria 0800 hours.

Enemy shipping destroyed - Claims

5 caiques, 3 E-boats.

(Also 3 locomotives and 20 plus trucks)

(Many other craft known damaged or set on fire)

8 caiques, <sup>2 or 3</sup> 80 small craft, 5 l.c's, 1 Siebel ferry.

1 barge, 1 trawler, 1 flak escort, 1 K.T. ship, 1 auxiliary vessel).

Note.

In the case of Phases III and IV, the usual reports of proceedings have been omitted as largely repetitive of those on previous phases: the chronological summaries give the gist of aircraft carrier operations while preserving the sense of their context in the main force.

OPERATION "OUTING": PHASE IV

CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY

(13 to 30 OCT. 44)

by the Captain of H.M.S. Attacker.

At 1645 G hours on 13 October H.M.S. Royalist (Flag), Attacker, Stalker, Emperor, Troubridge, Tuscan, P.S. Garland left Alexandria.

- 14 Oct. 1400 2 photo recon aircraft to Laros - no shipping seen  
1545 Attacker, with Stalker, Troubridge, Tuscan and Garland under orders, proceeded to flying area for Operation "Manna" while F.O.E.C. in Royalist, etc. proceeded for the Northern Aegean with Emperor.
- 15 Oct. Datum position for flying, some 60 miles south of Athens, reached at dawn. Continuous fighter cover over the Athens area carried out alternately by the two carriers, except for a suspension of flying for about 3 hours on account of heavy thunderstorms. 1 Ju.88 destroyed by a Stalker aircraft. During the night, the Force retired to the southward returning to datum position by dawn.
- 16 Oct. Attacker gave fighter cover over Athens area and returned at 2,000 hours to Alexandria, arriving at 0930 G on 18th. The 3 other ships joined the Royalist to northward.
- 19 Oct. 0830 G hours Attacker sailed again.  
1430 G hours 8 aircraft bombed Kos airfield (apparently deserted).  
Stalker patrolling North Aegean.
- 21 & 22 Oct. Fuelled ships at Rhodes.
- 20 Oct. Supplies landed for naval party on Sharpanto.
- 25 Oct. a.m. Attacker arrived in area South of the Gulf of Salonika, some 40 miles S.E. of Mount Olympus.
- 24 & 25 Oct. Aircraft attacked roads and railway.
- 25 Oct. Attacker, Kimberley and Navarinon arrived Rhodes.  
F.O. Escort Carriers left for Piraeus and C.O. Attacker assumed

/temporarily

temporarily duties of Senior Naval Officer, Northern Aegean.

- 26 Oct. Ships sailed for Castro (Lemnos) and Mitylene to show the flag and demonstration flights of 8 Seafires each were flown over both islands. <sup>Khios</sup> Tirius left ~~Khios~~ to support Force 142 landings on Piskopi.
- 27 Oct. p.m. Piskopi captured.
- 28 Oct. p.m. German troops reported landed on Piskopi and Allied position serious. Available British resources (1 major and 25 men) shipped from Khios to Piskopi.
- 29 Oct. At dawn, Attacker sailed for Piskopi to give air cover and ground support to our troops. Navarinon reported no radio contact with our Piskopi garrison. At 1230 hours, 4 Seafires flew off at 95 miles from Piskopi. They strafed 2 landing craft in Livadia Bay. The destroyer sank 2 other craft. 3 missions strafed the 2 L.C.'s putting them out of action. During the afternoon, Navarinon reported the enemy had captured, and was using, our mortars and machine guns. He had an appreciable superiority in numbers and our own troops were disorganized, having lost their 2 senior officers and all heavier weapons. The reports showed we could not attempt recapture of Piskopi with the forces then at our disposal. The Senior Military Officer in Navarinon had insufficient troops for a landing. She rescued as many of our troops as possible and remained patrolling to prevent further German infiltration.
- 30 Oct. 1500 hours. Attacker arrived in Alexandria, so ending her participation in Aegean operations.

ESCORT CARRIER OPERATIONS IN THE ARCTIC  
(SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 1944)

TOTALS AND ANALYSIS OF AIRCRAFT SORTIES

	PERIOD	REGULAR PATROLS		FIGHTER BOMBER	TUCAN	SPOTTING	TOTALS
		NORMAL & EXHIBITION	OPERATION "MADNA"				
PHASE I	9 to 20 Sept.	212		110	30	16	368
PHASE II	30 Sept. to 4 Oct.	2		34	22	2	60
PHASE III	8 - 13 Oct.	4		40	4		48
PHASE IV	14 - 30 Oct.	26	52	72	13	(1)	163
	Grand Totals	244	52	256	69	18	639
PHASE V	1 - 20 Nov.	No figures available					

Total Casualties - Phases I, II and III:    Lost: Pilot 1, Aircraft 2  
Damaged: By enemy action 10 aircraft  
                   By deck-landing 4 aircraft  
                   accidents.

Above figures subject to confirmation by Admiralty Historical Section.

Source: Admiralty File H/01027/45

GROUP	SECTOR	SECTOR H.Q.	SECTOR LIMITS	NAVAL COMMUNICATIONS <sup>To</sup> SECTOR
M.A.C.A.F. H.Q. Algiers (No. 210 Group from 9/7/44)	Oran	Oran	Cape Tres Forcas 03°00'W. to Dupleix 01°43'E.	COMNOB Oran
	Algiers	Reghaia	Dupleix 01°43'E. to Cape Sigli 04°47'E.	C.-in-C. Mediterranean
	Djidjelli	Taher	Cape Sigli 04°47'E. to Cape Bougaroni 06°28'E.	N.O.I.C. Djidjelli
	Bone	Bone	Cape Bougaroni 06°28'E. to 09°00'E South of 38°00'N.	N.O.I.C. Bone
	Bizerta	Sidi Amour	37°06'E. 09°00'E. to 38°00'N. 09°00'E to 38°40'N. 10°30'E. to West Point of Pantellaria to Ras Dimasso 35°37'N. 11°03'E.	F.O. Tunisia
A.H.Q. Malta	Malta	Malta	Ras Dimasso 35°37'N. 11°03'E. to West Point of Pantellaria to Licata 37°06'N. 13°55'E. coastwise to Cape San Croce 37°16'N 15°15'E. to 37°16'N. 18°47'E. to 36°30'N. 19°30'E. to Cape Misurata 32°24'N. 15°06'E to Ras Dimasso.	V.A. Malta
	Palermo	Palermo	West Point of Pantellaria to 38°40'N. 10°30'E. to 39°40'N. 10°30'E. to 39°40'N. 14°45'E. to Cape Orlando 38°10'N. 14°45'E. to Licata 37°06'N. 14°45'E. to Licata 37°06'N. 13°55'E. to West Point of Pantellaria.	COMNOB Palermo
	Catania	Catania	Cape Orlando 38°10'N. 14°45'E. to 39°40'N. 14°45'E. to 39°40'N. 16°32'E. through Cape Colonne to 37°16'N. 18°47'E. to Cape San Croce 37°16'N. 15°15'E. thence coastwise to Licata 37°06'N. 13°55'E. to Cape Orlando.	S.N.O. Eastern Sicily
No. 242 Group Adriatic	Taranto	Grottaglie	Cape Matapan 36°22'N. 22°28'E. to 36°30'N. 19°30'E. to Cape Colonne 39°02'N. 17°12'E. to 40°34'N. 15°36'E. to 41°17'N. 16°25'E. and thence on a bearing of 040°.	F.O.T.A.L.I.
	Foggia	Foggia	41°12'N. 16°40'E. to 40°23'N. 15°50'E. to 41°52'N. 13°48'E. to 42°23'N. 14°25'E. and thence out to sea.	
62nd U.S. Fighter Wing Naples	Naples	Naples	39°40'N. 16°32'E. to 39°40'N. 11°55'E. to mouth of Tiber 41°45'N. 12°15'E. and thence due North.	F.O.W.I.T
63rd U.S. Fighter Wing Naples	Borgo	Bastia	41°40'N. 12°15'E. to 41°40'N. 09°10'E. to 42°32'N. 08°42'E. thence <sup>over</sup> to sea	S.O.I.S.
	Ajaccio	Ajaccio	On South by 41°20'N. to 41°20'N. 09°10'E. to 41°40'N. 09°10'E. to 42°32'N. 08°42'E. thence out to sea.	N.L.O. Ajaccio Fighter Sector.
	Alghero	Alghero	40°00'N. 04°47'E. to 40°00'N. 10°30'E. to 39°40'N. 10°30'E. to 39°40'N. 11°55'E. to 41°40'N. 12°15'E. to 41°40'N. 09°10'E. to 41°20'N. 09°10'E. thence 270°.	N.O.I.C. Maddalena
	Cagliari	Elmas	38°00'N. 07°30'E. to 38°00'N. 09°00'E. to 38°40'N. 10°30'E. to 40°00'N. 10°30'E. to 40°00'N. 07°30'E. to 38°00'N. 07°30'E.	

GROUP	SECTOR	SECTOR H.Q.	SECTOR LIMITS	NAVAL COMMUNICATION <sup>To</sup> SECTOR
No. 208 209 Haifa	25	Nicosia, Cyprus	Off the coast of Cyprus	Famagusta C.C.O.
	24	Haifa	From the Turkish Border to the Palestine Egyptian Frontier	Haifa C.C.O.
No. 219 Alexandria	12	Port Said	From the Palestine - Egyptian Border to Meridian 31° E,	Port Said C.C.O.
	13	Alexandria	From Meridian 31° E. to Meridian 28° E.	Alexandria C.C.O.
	29	Mersa Matruh	From Meridian 28° E. to Meridian 25° 30' E.	Alexandria C.C.O. Through 219 Group
No. 212 Benghazi	15	Bu Amud (Tobruk)	From Meridian 25° 30' E. to Meridian 23° E.	Alexandria C.C.O. Through <sup>A.H.B. II</sup> <del>Algeria</del> and 212 Group.
	16	Cyrene	From Meridian 23° E. to Meridian 21° E.	Benghazi C.C.O. through 212 Group.
	17	Driana (Benghazi)	From Meridian 21° E. to Meridian 19° E.	Benghazi C.C.O. through 212 <del>211</del> Group.

Source: M.J.A.O. 40 Appendix 1 - Mediterranean Joint Air Orders (A.H.B. II.J.1/75/547)

**COASTAL AIR FORCE PATROLS FOR INTERCEPTION OF GERMAN ANTI-SHIPPING  
STRIKES BASED ON SOUTH OF FRANCE**

(Source: CAF/16/14/AIR 25 Apl. 44.)

**OPERATION INSTRUCTION No. 3**

**INFORMATION**

1. The enemy has had an anti-shipping strike force with attendant aircraft based on the South of France for sometime for attacks on convoys passing through the Mediterranean. This strike force is composed of the following units and aircraft:-

Function	Unit	Aircraft	Strength	Base	Also use
Recece	1/F.33	Ju.88 Ju.188	10	St. Martin	Les Chanoines Montpellier
Strikes	(II/KG.100) (III/KG.100)	Do.217	25	Toulouse/ Francazal	Istres
	(I/KG.26	He.111	10	Salon	La Jasse
	(III/KG.26	Ju.88	30	Montpellier	Les Chanoines
	(II/KG.40	He.177	20	Bordeaux/ Merignac	
Night Fighter) Escort	I/ZG.1	Ju.88 (C-6)	10	Bordeaux/ Merignac	Istres

2. It is probable that the enemy obtains his initial information regarding shipping movements in Spanish Morocco and Southern Spain. In addition, a regular reconnaissance is maintained of all Mediterranean shipping lanes, especially those passing along the North African coast.

3. Experience has shown that the enemy intends to attack Eastbound traffic in preference to Westbound. He has obtained the best results by delivering these attacks at dusk, and it is probable he may persevere with this policy. Such strikes have, however, been costly, with the results that experiments have been attempted at carrying out attacks during the hours of darkness with the assistance of Sea-markers and Flares. This has not greatly reduced his losses and at the same time has resulted in little damage to our shipping. Experiments on these lines will probably continue, but the main threat is still during the dusk period.

4. Normally, there is an indication of an impending attack through increased reconnaissance activity. The majority of the recece aircraft operate at sea level, but some are now also coming over in the vicinity of 30,000 feet. Apart from

/ shadowing

shadowing the convoy, the recon aircraft are thought to signal to base the composition, speed and course of convoy, weather conditions and fighter escort in the area. The route taken by recon aircraft from the South of France varies considerably, but there is reason to believe that on the return journey the majority of the low-level reconnaissance pass in the vicinity of Cape Creus.

5. Rather more information is available regarding the course taken by the subsequent strike formation. Owing to the successful results obtained in the past by patrolling the Balearic gaps with our fighters, this strike is now keeping to the East of Minorca even when the convoy to be attacked is as far West as Oran. Minorca is used as a navigational check, either by visual means or by the employment of A.S.V. In the latter case, the formation must pass within maximum A.S.V. range of the island and, therefore, uses a gap anywhere between the island and a point 60 miles to the East of it.

#### INTENTION

6. To destroy the daylight reconnaissance aircraft, and so deny the enemy this source of information.
7. To inflict a heavy or crippling loss on the main strike formation in daylight with a strong force of our own fighters, thereby either prohibiting further attacks for some time, or forcing the enemy to resort to night attacks, which are much less effective.

#### METHOD

8. Certain patrols have been planned and are shown on the attached map, Appendix (1) 'A'. Details of these patrols are set out below. 'Dolphin' and 'Horizon' are to be flown immediately it is apparent that there is an increase in enemy recon activity or that an increase is thought probable. 'Trapper One' and 'Trapper Two', 'Shuttlecock One, Two and Three' and 'Longarm' to be flown later to intercept the strike.
9. All these patrols will be ordered from the A.C.H.Q. Algiers.

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(1) This appendix is missing from the file OAF/15/AIR held at this date (January 1958) at the Cabinet Historical Archives, ref. AFHQ/282/3. The pattern of patrol described from this point has been incorporated in Figure 20 of this volume.

ANTI-RECCE PATROLS  
'DOLPHIN'

10. No. 328 Wing is to maintain a standing patrol during the hours of daylight until last light of one section of Beaufighters or Mosquitoes off Cape Bagur. The patrol line is from the coast to maximum visibility distance from it.
11. A section is to be detailed daily to stand by to carry out this patrol and is to be at 30 minutes readiness.
12. The patrol is to be flown at minimum altitude.

'HORIZON'

13. One section of Mosquitoes of No. 256 Squadron is to patrol on an East/West line North of the convoy and just beyond visual range of it. From 30 minutes before last light until 15 minutes after last light, the patrol is to be moved to a line North and South 30 miles East of the convoy. When on patrol, the section is to fly as low as possible.
14. If the threatened convoy is in the Algiers sector, the first section is to proceed direct to the patrol line and further Mosquitoes as required are to proceed to Reghaia, to operate under No. 338 Wing to continue the patrol. The first section is to return to Reghaia.
15. Bad weather, other convoy commitments or unserviceability may make it necessary for this patrol to be flown by No. 153 Squadron.
16. Two Mosquitoes are to be maintained daily at 30 minutes readiness to carry out this patrol with 4 other aircraft available to take over.

ANTI-STRIKE PATROLS  
'TRAPPER ONE'

17. At least 12 Beaufighters or Mosquitoes of No. 328 Wing are to patrol East and West on a line East of Minorca. The extremities of the line are 20 miles and 60 miles from Cape Negro. <sup>(1)</sup> The aircraft are to be in position 30 minutes before the enemy formation is expected to pass through the patrol area and are to continue to last light.
18. The time at which this patrol is to be in position will be signalled from A.C.H.Q. Algiers.
19. The aircraft for this patrol and for 'Dolphin' are to be provided if necessary at the expense of any shipping strikes.

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(1) In the approaches to Port Mahon, in the south-east of Minorca. Not to be confused with the Cape Negro on the north-western coast of Minorca or the Cape Negro near Cape de la Nao (Spain).

20. Aircraft for 'Trapper One' are to stand by daily at 30 minutes notice from 1500 hours until 90 minutes before last light, when they may stand down.

'TRAPPER TWO'

21. Six aircraft of 414th Squadron (U.S.A.A.F.) are to patrol on a line East to West from the western extremity of 'Trapper One' to the coast of Minorca.

22. The time on patrol and the states of readiness are the same as for 'Trapper One'.

23. Patrols 'Trapper One' and 'Trapper Two' are to be flown at minimum altitude.

'SHUTTLECOCK ONE, TWO AND THREE'

24. Depending on other commitments, this patrol will be flown by aircraft of No. 256 or No. 153 Squadrons at maximum possible strength, governed by night requirements, which are to take precedence.

25. This patrol is to cover the gaps between Cape San Martin - Iviza, Iviza - Majorca and Majorca - Minorca. The gaps are numbered 1, 2 and 3.

26. The patrol is to commence 30 minutes before the enemy strike is expected to pass and it is to continue until last light.

27. The time at which the patrol is to commence will be signalled from A.C.H.Q. Algiers.

'LONGARM'

28. As an alternative to 'Shuttlecock' patrols, aircraft available in excess of night commitments may be ordered to execute a 'Longarm' patrol. This patrol area is 80 miles from the estimated dusk position of the threatened convoy on the expected line of approach of the hostile aircraft.

29. The aircraft are to patrol at right angles to the anticipated hostile track starting from this track and extending 30 miles towards the East.

30. They are to fly at minimum altitude.

INTRUDER PATROLS

31. On receipt of a 'Trapper' signal by No. 328 Wing, aircraft of No. 23 Squadron are to stand by for Intruder operations over the South of France.

32. If an attack develops against the convoy, a signal is to be sent from A.C.H.Q. Algiers to 63rd U.S. Fighter Wing stating enemy aircraft active, if possible by types and giving estimated time of arrival of these aircraft back at their bases. On receipt of this information, No. 23 Squadron is to undertake Intruder operations over the South of France aerodromes.

/ COMMUNICATIONS

COMMUNICATIONS

33. The measures to be taken as a result of this Operational Instruction are allocated the codeword 'Barricade'.
34. All orders for patrols under this instruction are to be preceded by the codeword 'Barricade' followed by the patrol required and, if known, the codename of the threatened convoy. Where necessary the time on patrol will follow, for example:-
- 'Barricade - Trapper One - Aertex - 1800 hours'
35. All orders are to have EMERGENCY priority and to be repeated with the same priority to Wings and Units which may be called upon to carry out subsequent patrols.
36. In the event of any aircraft on 'Trapper One or 'Trapper Two' sighting the enemy, the pilot is to warn all aircraft engaged on the same patrols.
37. The Commanding General, 63rd U.S. Fighter Wing is to ensure that aircraft of No. 328 Wing and 414th Squadron are operating on the same V.H.F. frequency and is to issue instructions for the co-ordination of action in the event of hostile aircraft being sighted.
38. Wings are to issue detailed operational instructions to their Squadrons to cover whichever is applicable of 'Trapper', 'Shuttlecock', 'Longarm', 'Dolphin' and 'Horizon'. A copy of these instructions is to be forwarded to this Headquarters.
39. Operations 'Hamper', 'Tentacle' and 'Ambush' are cancelled by the above instructions.
40. Receipt of this instruction is to be acknowledged by signal.

Signed A.O.C., M.A.C.A.F.

Ref. GAF/16/14/AIR  
Date 25 Apl. 44.

**SECRET**

APPENDIX 46

# CORRELATION OF GERMAN AND ALLIED TIME SYSTEMS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

In the computation of times and dates relating to operations, various differences between the Allied and German versions will often become apparent. These can only be reconciled by comparison between the time systems ruling at the date in question. The two tables given below give the various systems employed in the Mediterranean over different periods by both sides. Most Allied naval and some air signals bear a letter preceding the time.

ALLIED TIME SYSTEMS

**Z = Greenwich Mean Time (G.M.T.)**

**A = G.M.T. + 1 (or single Summer Time)**

**B = G.M.T. + 2 (or double Summer Time)**

## GERMAN TIME SYSTEMS

From 1 Apr. 40 to 1 Oct. 44      German Summer Time  
= G.M.T. + 2, the same as Allied B time

From 2 Oct. 44 to 2 Apr. 45 Central European Time  
= G.M.T. + 1, the same as Allied A time

**From 2 Apr. 45 to 2 May 45      German Summer Time**

U-boat commanders always used German Summer Time in their logs and other records, unless they specifically stated otherwise.

**Source:** Foreign Documents Section, Admiralty.

**SECRET**

- 1 -

LUFTWAFFE ANTI-SHIPING AND COASTAL FORCES IN SOUTHERN FRANCE  
(JANUARY TO AUGUST 1944)

Introduction

Orders of Battle of reconnaissance, bomber and fighter forces available for strikes on Allied convoys along the North shipping lanes on 10 Jan. 10 May and 31 July 44, as well as of fighter defense and coastal units, are given below.

Reconnaissance of convoys was carried out by 1(F)33 and specially detailed aircraft from the bomber units. As far as can be ascertained, there is no evidence of the Ju.290s of F.A.Gruppe 5 participating in anti-convoy operations in the Mediterranean.

All the bomber units operated in the period and on some occasions the Ju.88 fighters of Z.G.1 provided long range cover. The fighters of J.G.2 and J.G.200 were not involved in anti-convoy operations.

LT = Torpedo equipped aircraft

10 Jan. 1944

ORDERS OF BATTLE

<u>Category</u>	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Serviceable</u>	<u>Base</u>	<u>Role</u>
(i) <u>Reconnaissance</u>				
FA.Gr. 5 (Ju.290)	7	2	Mont de Marsan	— —
1(F)33 (Ju.88)	14	5	St. Martin	Convoy recce.
2/128 (Ar.196)	18	13	Berre	Coastal
<u>Total recon.</u>	<u>39</u>	<u>20</u>		
(ii) <u>Bomber</u>				
I/K.G.26 (He.111 LT)	37	28 )	Montpellier )	Strike
III/K.G.26 (Ju.88 LT)	37	31 )	and Salon )	
II/K.G.40 (He.177)	21	11	Bordeaux )	
<u>Total bomber</u>	<u>95</u>	<u>70</u>		
(iii) <u>Fighter</u>				
Stab III and 7/Z.G.1 (Ju.88)	16	9	Bordeaux	Strike Cover

/10 May 1944

- 2 -

10 May 1944

<u>Category</u>	<u>Strength</u>	<u>Serviceable</u>	<u>Base</u>	<u>Role</u>
(i) <u>Reconnaissance</u>				
FA.Gr.5 (Ju.290)	13	5	Mont de Marsan	—
I(F)33 (Ju.88 and Ju.188)	9	4	St. Martin	Convoy recce.
2/128 (Ar.196)	<u>14</u>	<u>9</u>	Berre	Coastal
<u>Total recce.</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>18</u>		
(ii) <u>Bomber</u>				
III/K.G. (Ju.88 LT)	39	32	Montpellier ) and Valence. )	Strike
I/K.G.77 (Ju.88 LT)	27	22	Orange	
III/K.G.77 (Ju.88 LT)	23	18	Orange	
4 and 6/K.G.76 (Ju.88)	10	8	Istres	
6/K.G.100 (Do.217)	8	7	Lezignan	
7 and 9/K.G.100 (He.177)	<u>18</u>	<u>12</u>	Toulouse	
<u>Total bomber</u>	<u>125</u>	<u>99</u>		
(iii) <u>Fighter</u>				
II/Z.G.1 (Ju.88)	18	10	Cazaux	Strike Cover
I/J.F.2 (FW.190)	<u>43</u>	<u>24</u>	Marignane	Defence
<u>Total fighter</u>	<u>61</u>	<u>34</u>		

31 July 1944

(i) <u>Reconnaissance</u>				
FA Gr.5 (Ju.290)	17	4	Mont de Marsan	—
I(F) (Ju.88, Ju.188, He.410)	7	3	St. Martin	Convoy recce
2/128 (Ar.196)	<u>12</u>	<u>8</u>	Berre	Coastal
<u>Total recce</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>15</u>		

/(ii) Bomber

31 July 1944 (Contd)

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(ii)	<u>Bomber</u>				
	I/K.G.26 (Ju.88 LT)	29	23	Salon	} Strike
	II/K.G.26 (Ju.88 LT)	13	6	Valence and Montelimar	
	8 and 9/K.G.26 88 LT)	14	8	Nimes	
	Stab and III/K.G.100 (Do.217)	25	16	Toulous	
	<u>Total bomber</u>	<u>81</u>	<u>53</u>		
(iii)	<u>Fighter</u>				
	J.Gr. 200 (FW 190 and Me.109)	19	12	Aix and Avignon.	Defence

Source:- German returns at A.H.B.6.

BALKAN AIR FORCE  
ORDER OF BATTLE AND LOCATIONS (1)  
(30 SEPTEMBER 1944)

WING	SQUADRON	ROLE	TYPE	LOCATION	REMARKS
<u>No. 281 R.A.F. Wing</u> <u>Canne, Italy</u>	No. 253 R.A.F.	S.S. Fighter	Spitfire VC	Canne	
	No. 335 R.H.A.F.	S.S. Fighter	Spitfire VB & C	Biferno	Non-opl.
	No. 352 Jugo.	S.S. Fighter	Spitfire V.C.	Canne	
	No. 73 R.A.F.	S.S. Fighter	Spitfire V.C.	Canne	
	No. 6 R.A.F.	Ftr. Recce.	Hurricane IV R.P.	Canne	Det. Vis.
	No. 351 Jugo.	S.S. Fighter	Hurricane II C	Canne	Non-Opl.
	No. 336 R.H.A.F.	S.S. Fighter	Spitfire VB & C	Biferno	Non-Opl.
<u>No. 283 R.A.F. Wing</u> <u>Biferno, Italy</u>	No. 102 I.A.F.	S.S. Fighter	Macchi 202	Leverano	
	No. 155 I.A.F.	S.S. Fighter	Macchi 205	Leverano	
	No. 10 I.A.F.	S.S. Fighter	Airocobra	Leverano	Non-Opl.
	No. 12 I.A.F.	S.S. Fighter	Airocobra	Leverano	
	No. 249 R.A.F.	S.S. Fighter	Spitfire VC, VII & IX, Mustangs	Biferno	
	No. 51 I.A.F.	S.S. Fighter	Spitfire V	Leverano	Non-Opl.
	No. 213 R.A.F.	S.S. Fighter	Mustang III A	Biferno	
	No. 16 S.A.A.F.	M.S. Fighter (C)	Beaufighter X R.P.	Biferno	
	No. 19 S.A.A.F.	M.S. Fighter (C)	Beaufighter V & XI	Biferno	Det. Lecce
	No. 39 S.A.A.F.	M.S. Fighter (C)	Beaufighter X, R.P.	Biferno	
<u>No. 254 R.A.F. Wing</u> <u>Biferno, Italy</u>	No. 13 R.H.A.F.	Light Bomber	Baltimore IV & V	Biferno	
	No. 25 S.A.A.F.	Light Bomber	Ventura (B-34)	Biferno	
<u>Direct B.A.F.</u>	No. 32 R.A.F.	S.S. Fighter	Spitfire VC	Canne	Later for A.H.Q. 'X'
Source :- A.H.B. II/14/27 (D) . (1) Excluding Special Duties and Transport)					

NO. 242 GROUP (COASTAL AIR FORCE) (1)  
ORDERS OF BATTLE AND LOCATIONS  
(1 AUGUST 1944)

WING	SQUADRON	ROLE	TYPE	LOCATION	REMARKS
<u>No. 286 R.A.F.</u> <u>Grottaglie, Italy</u>	No. 1435 R.A.F.	S.S. Fighter	Spitfire VC & IX	Grottaglie	
<u>No. 323 R.A.F.</u> Foggia	No. 73 R.A.F. No. 255 R.A.F.	S.S. Fighter M.S. Fighter (night)	Spitfire VC Beaufighter (N) VI, A.I. MK.VIII	Foggia Foggia	(Dets. Halfar, Catania (and Grottaglie 16 + 4 I.E. A.1 (MK.IV temporarily
	No. 221 R.A.F.	General Reconnaissance	Wellington XIII, A.S.V. MK.II	Foggia	
<u>ITALIAN (IDRO)</u> <u>Seaplane Wing</u> Bari	Group 82 Squadriglia 139	General Reconnaissance	6B	Taranto	Holdings 7 aircraft
	149	General Reconnaissance	CZ.506B	Taranto	Holding 7 aircraft
	Group 83 Squadriglia 141	General Reconnaissance	CZ.501/6: S.87	Brindisi	Holdings 7 aircraft
	147	General Reconnaissance	CZ.501	Brindisi	Holdings 6 aircraft
	Group 84 Squadriglia 140	General Reconnaissance	CZ.506S & B	Elmas	Holding 6 aircraft
	Squadriglia 288	General Reconnaissance	CZ.506S & C	Taranto	Holdings 4 aircraft
	Group 85 Squadriglia 183	General Reconnaissance	CZ.501	Taranto	Holdings 7 aircraft
	287	General Reconnaissance	RS.14	Taranto	Holdings 9 aircraft
	<u>Note on Italian A/C</u>	CZ = Cantzetta S = Savoia RS = Recognizioni			
Source: R.A.F. Med. M.E. Orders of Battle (A.H.B.II/14/27(D)					

SECRET

- 1 -

BALKAN AIR FORCE  
WING EFFORT  
SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER 1944

SEPTEMBER

<u>Category</u>	<u>Wing</u>		<u>Sorties</u>
SEFB	No. 281	Nos. 32, 73, 249, 335, 336, 352 Spitfire	749
SEFB	No. 283	No. 213 Mustang	241
F(Italian A.F.)	FLS	4 Stormo Airocobra, 5 Stormo MA.202) 51 Stormo MA.205	567
SEF (RP)	No. 281	No. 6 Hurricane	194
TEF (RP)	No. 283	Nos. 16, 19 and 39 Beaufighter	277
LB	No. 254	No. 13 Baltimore and No. 25 Ventura	408
		<u>Total</u>	<u>2,436</u>

Losses: 16 Spitfires: 4 Mustangs: 7 Macchis: 3 Hurricanes:  
 7 Beaufighters.

Total - 37OCTOBER

SEFB	No. 281	Nos. 32, 73, 335, 336, 352 Spitfire	662
SEFB	No. 283	Nos. 213 and 249 Mustang	256
(F(Italian AF)	FLS	4 Stormo Airocobra, 5 Stormo MA.202) 51 Stormo MA.205	206
SEF (RP)	No. 281	Nos. 6 and 351 Hurricane	135
TEF (RP)	No. 283	Nos. 16, 19 and 39 Beaufighter	317
LB	No. 254	Nos. 13 Baltimore and 25 Ventura	380
		<u>Total</u>	<u>1956</u>

Losses: 15 Spitfires: 12 Mustangs: 5 Hurricanes: 12 Beaufighters:  
 1 Baltimore.

Total - 45NOVEMBER

SEFB	No. 281	Nos. 73, 253 and 352 Spitfire	447
SEFB	No. 283	Nos. 213 and 249 Mustang	313
SEFB	FLS	No. 20 Spitfire, 10 and 12 Airocobra ) Stormo 102, MA.202, Stormo 155 MA.205)	1,048
SEF (RP)	No. 281	Nos. 6 and 351 Hurricane	193
TEF (RP)	No. 283	Nos. 16, 19 and 39 Beaufighter	257
LB	No. 254	No. 25 Ventura and No. 132 Baltimore	127
		<u>Total</u>	<u>2,385</u>

Losses: 4 Spitfires: 5 Mustangs: 1 Beaufighter: 7 Hurricanes:  
 1 Ventura: 1 Macchi: 6 Airocobras.

Total - 25DECEMBER

SEFB	No. 281	Nos. 73, 253 and 352 Squadrons	237
SEFB	No. 283	Nos. 213 and 249 Mustang	569
SEFB	FLS	No. 20 Spitfire, Nos. 10 and 12 Airocobra) Stormo 102, MA.202 and 205.	389
SEF (RP)	No. 281	Nos. 6 and 351 Hurricane	187
TEF (RP)	No. 283	Nos. 16, 19 and 39 Beaufighter	324
LB	No. 254	Nos. 25 Marauder, 28 Ventura and 132) Baltimore.	385
		<u>Total</u>	<u>2,091</u>

Losses: 4 Spitfires: 8 Mustangs: 4 Airocobras: 2 Beaufighters: 1 Baltimore.

Total - 19

Source: A History of the Balkan Air Force (A.H.B.II J.1/130)

SECRET

SECRET

TEXT OF THE CASERTA AGREEMENT ON GREECE  
(26 Sept. 44)

1. All guerilla forces operating in Greece place themselves under the orders of the Greek Government of National Unity.
2. The Greek Government places these forces under the orders of General Scobie who has been nominated by the Supreme Allied Commander as C.O.C. Forces in Greece.
3. In accordance with the proclamation issued by the Greek Government the Greek Guerilla leaders declare that they will forbid any attempt by any units under their command to take the law into their own hands. Such action will be treated as a crime and will be punished accordingly.
4. As regards Athens no action is to be taken save under the direct orders of General Scobie C.O.C. Forces in Greece.
5. Security Battalions are considered as instruments of the enemy. Unless they surrender according to orders issued by the C.O.C. they will be treated as enemy formations.
6. All Greek Guerilla forces in order to put an end to past rivalries declare that they will form a national union in order to co-ordinate their activities in the best interests of the common struggle.

Source: Operations of British Troops in the Resurrection in Greece. Appendix  
P. by the British Historical Section, Central Mediterranean  
(A.H.B.II J.20/4/1).

SECRET

DECEMBER 1944

A.H.Q. GREECE

APPENDIX

Analysis of Sorties and Hours Flown and  
Tonnage of Bombs Dropped during  
DECEMBER 1944  
By Squadron and Type of Duty

<u>SQUADRON</u>	<u>SORTIES</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>TONNAGE BOMBS</u>
<u>SL. FIGHTER-BOMBER</u>			
No. 32 - Spit.	NIL		
No. 94 - "	365	365.50	5.2
No. 335 - "	10	18.75	.8
No. 336 - "	NIL		
No. 73 - " (DET.)	205	203.00	1.4
	<u>580</u>	<u>587.25</u>	<u>7.4</u>
<u>TF FIGHTER</u>			
No. 39 - Beau. (DET.)	95	61.25	-
No. 108 - "	237	451.25	-
	<u>332</u>	<u>512.50</u>	<u>-</u>
<u>G.R.</u>			
No. 13 - Balt.	21	41.50	14.0
No. 221 - Coll.	130	246.00	26.6
No. 383 - Warwick.	9	30.00	-
	<u>160</u>	<u>317.50</u>	<u>40.6</u>
<u>TOTALS</u>	<u>1092</u>	<u>1417.25</u>	<u>48.00</u>

Study of Operations

ANALYSIS OF SORTIES  
FIGHTER AND LIGHT BOMBER  
AIRCRAFT  
By Type of Mission and Target

<u>Offensive Action</u>	<u>Bombing</u>	<u>Escort</u>	<u>Patrol</u>	<u>Rescue &amp; ASR.</u>	<u>Supply Dropping</u>
127	24	7	123	63	21
-	4	-	-	6	-
139	6	2	14	44	-
<u>266</u>	<u>34</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>137</u>	<u>113</u>	<u>21</u>
<u>Land Install.</u>	<u>Harb'r &amp; Shipping</u>	<u>Intruder</u>	<u>Patrol</u>	<u>Rescue &amp; ASR.</u>	
95	-	-	-	-	-
129	-	6	122	-	-
<u>224</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>122</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
		<u>Mine Sp.</u>	<u>Leaf. &amp; Fl. Dropping</u>		
18	3	-	-	-	-
17	-	-	83	11	19
-	-	2	-	7	-
<u>35</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>83</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>19</u>
<u>259</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>83</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>19</u>

APPENDIX 52

JANUARY 1945

A.H.Q. GREECE

APPENDIX

**Analysis of Sorties and Hours Flown and  
Tonnage of Bombs Dropped during  
JANUARY 1945  
By Squadron and Type of Duty**

<u>SQUADRON</u>	<u>SORTIES</u>	<u>HOURS</u>	<u>TONNAGE BOMBS</u>
No. 32 - Spit.	NIL.		
No. 94 - "	182	308.00	-
No. 335 - "	10	15.00	-
No. 336 - "	8	12.75	-
No. 73 - " (DET.)	157	207.25	-
	<u>357</u>	<u>543.00</u>	<u>-</u>
<u>TE. FIGHTER</u>			
No. 108 - Beem.	116	289.75	-
No. 39 - " (DET.)	29	54.00	-
	<u>145</u>	<u>343.75</u>	<u>-</u>
<u>G.R.</u>			
No. 13 - Balt.	60	99.00	38.4
No. 221 - Vall.	93	212.25	-
No. 283 - Warwick.	8	28.00	-
	<u>161</u>	<u>339.25</u>	<u>38.4</u>
<u>TOTALS</u>	<u>663</u>	<u>1226.00</u>	<u>38.4</u>

**ANALYSIS OF SORTIES  
FIGHTER AND LIGHT BOMBER  
AIRCRAFT  
By Type of Mission and Target**

<u>Offensive Sweep</u>	<u>Bomber Escort</u>	<u>Escort a/c &amp; Sh.</u>	<u>Recco &amp; ASR</u>	<u>Land. Fl. Supply Dropping</u>
96	-	9	62	15
-	-	-	10	-
-	-	-	8	-
106	4	+ 17	30	-
<u>202</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>110</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>Intruder</u>				
78	10	1	26	1
-	18	-	11	-
<u>78</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>Land Instal.</u>				
-	54	-	3	3
-	-	-	9	64
-	-	-	8	-
<u>-</u>	<u>54</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>67</u>
<u>78</u>	<u>82</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>167</u>	<u>105</u>

+ Escort to Armoured Column.

APPENDIX 52

TRANSPORTATION OF TROOPS AND SUPPLIES BY AIR FROM ITALY TO GREECE  
(12 DEC. 44 - 14 JAN. 45)

Date 1944	Troops	Tons of Ammo.	Tons of Stores	No. of Aircraft		Remarks
				267 Sqn.	205 Sqn.	
Dec. 12	-	45	20	30	-	
	983	-	-	-	50	
Dec. 13		50	8	25	-	
	1,136		22		81	8 returned
Dec. 14	-	-	-	-	-	No flying due weather
Dec. 15	-	73	-	-	36	
Dec. 16	50	50	25	37	-	1 returned
	100	30	10	-	19	
Dec. 17	5	50	30	38	-	
Dec. 18	166	33	30	36	-	
	2	47	-	-	16	
Dec. 19	46	74	11	35	-	
Dec. 20	16	63	10	36	-	
	-	120	-	-	39	
Dec. 21	-	118	-	-	36	
Dec. 22-24	-	-	-	-	-	No flying due weather
Dec. 25	81	38	9	23	-	4 returned
Dec. 26	5	20	37	27	-	2 returned
Dec. 27	-	-	-	-	-	No flying due weather
Dec. 28	22	17	34	22	-	
Dec. 29-31	-	-	-	-	-	
<u>1945</u>						
Jan. 1	26	3	12	9	-	
Jan. 2-4	-	-	-	-	-	No flying due weather
Jan. 5	22	-	12	8	-	
Jan. 6-11	-	-	-	-	-	No flying due weather
Jan. 12	45	-	14	10	-	
Jan. 13	8	-	5	2	-	1 returned
Jan. 14	6	-	2	1	-	
Jan. 15	-	-	-	-	-	Normal M.A.T.S. Service reinstated
Totals	2,719	831	291	339	277	

Source: B.A.F. Report on Air Transportation to Greece in File  
BAF/3032/7/1 ORG. Encl. 97a (A.H.B. IIJ.20/5/1/14(B)).

A.H.Q. GREECE, KIFISSIA  
CASUALTY LIST  
DECEMBER 1944

APPENDIX 54

UNIT	TOTAL PERSONNEL AT KIFISSIA ON 19 DEC.44			NUMBER EVADING CAPTURE			KILLED			WOUNDED BUT EVADING CAPTURE			PRISONERS OF WAR					
													UNINJURED			WOUNDED		
	OFF	SNCO	OR	OFF	SNCO	OR	OFF	SNCO	OR	OFF	SNCO	OR	OFF	SNCO	OR	OFF	SNCO	OR
Air H.Q. Greece	30	21	136	6	-	14	-	-	-	-	-	1	22	19	116	2	2	5
No. 337 Wing	-	1	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	-	1	7
No. 1321 Wg. R.A.F. Regt.	2	1	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	-	7	-	-	-
No. 2923 Sqn. R.A.F. Regt.	8	19	167	1	2	19	-	2	4	-	-	6	7	15	135	-	-	-
No. 107 Staging Post	4	7	103	-	-	27	-	-	1	-	-	-	4	7	75	-	-	-
No. 12 A.M.C.U.	1	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	1	-	-
C. Coy. 2 Air Signals ) R. Corps Signals. )	5	5	77	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	7	4	5	68	-	-	-
C.S.D.I.C.	6	8	65	3	2	20	-	-	1	1	1	6	6	4	35	-	1	-
Miscellaneous	3	3	21	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	3	3	19	-	-	-
TOTALS	59	65	594	10	4	81	-	2	9	2	2	20	44	53	466	3	4	15

Note: OFF = officers  
SNCO = senior N.C.O's  
OR = other ranks

Equipment Losses  
188 items of motor transport  
477 items of small arms  
52 guns  
tentage, signals gear and miscellaneous stores.

Source:- A.H.Q. Greece letter AOC/15 dated 20 Feb.45 in A.H.Q. Greece O.R.B. Appendices.

S E C R E T

APPENDIX 54

CLOSE SUPPORT BY ROCKET PROJECTILE BEAUFIGHTERSIN THE ATHENS - PIRAEUS AREA(DECEMBER 1944 - JANUARY 1945)

On 16 Dec. 1944, a detachment of 6 R.F. Beaufighters of No. 39 Squadron flew from the parent base at Biferno (in Italy) to Nassani airfield in Greece. Between 16 Dec. 1944 and 18 Jan. 1945 they flew 130 sorties, the greater part of them in close support of the Army. The records of the period testify to the high degree of success attained by this detachment and the suitability of the combined precision rocket projectile and cannon attacks, mostly in built-up areas and often against solid stone buildings.

On 11 Jan. 1945, a Bombing Survey Unit of mixed Air/Army staff visited the 29 targets attacked by R.P.'s and, where possible, described the targets and results. The analysis, which begins on the following page, sets their findings against squadron claims. There are a few gaps here and there and it is difficult to link the claims and reports on 24 and 25 December. In only 16 of the 32 attacks on the 29 targets are accurate details available of the number of R.P. fired; and with only 8 targets was it possible to give an accurate determination of the number of strikes resulting from R.P. attacks. The analysis of these 8 targets (given as a footnote in the text of this narrative) is of great interest, revealing an average percentage of strikes of 48%, ranging from 0 to 75%. The actual overall percentage was most probably somewhat higher.

The report of the Bombing Survey Unit concluded that the 60 lb. R.P. was an excellent weapon for making the tenability of a gun emplacement or house being used as a strongpoint extremely hazardous, if not impracticable: also that the 25 lb R.P. had caused extremely limited <sup>structural</sup> structural damage but was fortuitously useful against targets with a high fire risk. There were 12% unexploded 60 lb H.E. heads (No. 1 Mark I fuse 865).

Abbreviations used in the following Analysis

Bldg. building	Ammo. ammunition
N.K. not known	Ops. operations
R.P. rocket projectile	

/Statistics

ANALYSIS OF ATTACKS BY ROCKET PROJECTILE BEAUFIGHTERS IN ATHENS AREA  
(16 DEC.44 TO 3 JAN.45)

Date 1944	Target Ref. No.	R.P.		% of Strikes	No. of A/C	Target	Results & Damage	
		Fired No./Type (1b)	Strikes No./Type (1b)				Claims by No. 39 Squadron	Bombing Survey Report
16 Dec.	1	16/60		0	2	Athens radio station: feeder station. Small single storey building	Broadcasts ceased	Salvo of 8 R.P.'s about 30 yds from aiming point. Further 8 about 120 yards from aiming point. Damage to feeder pipe stopped radio.
17 Dec.	2	48/60	N.K.	N.K.	6	K.K.E. H.Q.	Many hits, damage & fires.	N.K. (not known)
	3	16/60	N.K.	N.K.	2	Ammo & food dumps, Athens	8 R.P. hits, fires & explosions.	N.K.
	4	16/60	11/60	69	2	E.L.A.S. H.Q. Athens, load bearing, solid stone walls; 2 storeys & semi- basement.	Hits	Extensive damage in area of strikes with fragmentation on inside from 4 strikes. 40 dead, 40 wounded.
18 Dec.	5	16/60	N.K.	N.K.	2	2 guns at Kifissia	Guns knocked out and shelters on fire	N.K.
	6	16/60	3/60	19	2	1 heavy gun near mud block farm buildings nr. Athens.	Gun silenced	1 R.P. exploded close to gun, minor damage to gun. 2 R.P.'s struck building & destroyed roof & part of walls.
	7	32/60	N.K.	N.K.	4	Bldgs. near Stadium 300 x 360 yards area	All scored hits in target area; consider- able damage & fires.	Not determinable owing to damage by ground ops.
19 Dec.	8	48/60	N.K.	N.K.	6	Block of bldgs, Athens	All in target area	N.K. (but Army reported con- siderable devastation on 19/12)
20 Dec.	9	32/60	N.K.	N.K.	4	A/A posns in bldg in Galatsi, Athens.	Posn almost certainly eliminated	N.K.
	10	16/60	N.K.	N.K.	2	E.L.A.S. H.Q. at Galatsi	1 bldg wrecked by 4 direct hits: the other severely damaged.	N.K.
21 Dec.	11	40/60	N.K.	N.K.	5	Athens gaol, bldgs of heavy stone construction	R.P. hits on all sections - accurate precision firing.	Same remarks as Target 7.
	12	4/60	N.K.	N.K.	1	C.S.D.I.C. bldg at Kifissia	Fading light prevented detailed assessment	N.K.
22 Dec.	13	15/25	1/25	7	2	E.L.A.S. H.Q. 2-storey dwelling house in row Athens	N.B. Shortage of 60 lb R.P.'s. 25lb R.P.'s burned before leaving rocket rails for unpredictable periods. A/C returned to base.	Target probably not identified (but see preceding column).

	14	24/60	7/60	29	3	Gun posn. in school premises consisting of 2 bldgs, 40 ft apart. Single storey, with semi-basement; solid stone load-bearing walls; reinforced concrete (r.c.) floors. (Piraeus)	1 bldg. completely wrecked the other severely damaged.	Extensive damage at points of explosions. 4 strikes caused internal fragmentation damage.
23 Dec.	15	?	14/25	29	4	Ammunition dump: 3 bldgs single storey: load-bearing solid stone walls: pitched tile timber roofs (North Athens).	Many hits but no explosions. Dump thought to be empty.	All hits by 25lb R.P. only effects were holes in walls. 1 U/S 60lb R.P. found in target area.
	16	?	N.K.	N.K.	2	E.L.A.S. strong point (hotel) in Athens: single storey bldgs.	All R.P.'s on target	Confusion due to combination of air & ground attacks.
24 Dec.	17	N.K.	N.K.	N.K.	2	E.L.A.S. strongpoint (Piraeus)	Many direct hits, causing damage & fire in 4 R.P. attacks.	N.K.
	18	8/25 8/60	6/25 5/60	75 63	2	Petrol store (1) in bldg. in N. suburbs of Athens. R.P. & cannon dives on another building (2).	(1) Caught fire and disintegrated (2) totally demolished	Top storey of 1 house destroyed and 1 room on ground floor severely damaged. Second bldg. not mentioned.
	19	discrepancy between report & squadron O.R.B.'s.	in attacks by 6 A/C:- 26/25 10/60	75	3	E.L.A.S. H.Q. in Athens (also E.L.A.S. billet attacked by 2 A/C with cannon only).	24 direct R.P. hits (100%). Army reported damage & confusion	In attacks by 6 A/C:- Extensive damage, particularly as result of 60lb R.P.'s. Damage to tobacco stock and machinery also caused by fire as result of 25lb strikes
25 Dec.	20?	24/25	N.K.	N.K.	2	E.L.A.S. H.Q. in Piraeus 2 modern R.C. framed, 2 storeyed bldgs.	Considerable damage	Confusion of damage as consequence of both air & ground ops.
	21?	16/?	N.K.	N.K.	2	Petrol dump - Piraeus	14 R.P.'s hit target Havoc with R.P & cannon	No reports reconcilable
	19?	14/60 16/25	N.K.	N.K.	4	Resistance <sup>area</sup> in North Central Athens	Part demolished, rest very badly damaged & on fire. Army reported this the most accurate attack they had seen.	No reports reconcilable
26 Dec.	20?	?/25	See No. 20? 25.12.44		1	E.L.A.S. H.Q. - Piraeus (2 other cannon aircraft)	5-6 R.P. hits, straffing serious damage and a small fire.	Confusion of results of air and ground action.
27 Dec.	21	16/25	N.K.	N.K.	2	Ammo dump (factory of inferior construction) nr. Athens.	Disappointing. Despite many hits, lack of explosions suggest target empty.	No vital damage: involved in ground ops.

28 Dec.	22	16/60 + 16/25	N.K.	N.K.	4	bldgs. defended. (two)	Both damaged: occupants driven out and fired on.	N.K.
29 Dec.	23	32/60	N.K.	N.K.	4	Bldg. in N. Athens mud- bound, solid stone.	Damage & fire	Area property not seriously damaged. Impossibility of establishing exact aiming point prevents assessment of results.
	24	24/25	12/25	50	3	Guns in monastery (Athens) & buildings	Guns destroyed, troops fired on.	Apart from holes in walls, damage insignificant
	25	24/60 8/25	10/60 8/25	56	4	Factory where E.L.A.S. conference being held 2 modern and 1 solid stone building.	1 bldg. hit set on fire burned all night, most of conference members killed	Fairly extensive damage to buildings and silk-spinning machinery by 60lb R.P's Damage to machinery by impact of 25lb R.P's.
30 Dec.		No ops	No ops	-	No ops	-	-	-
31 Dec.	26	32/25	N.K.	N.K.	4	5 or 6 buildings Piraeus.	<sup>damage</sup> Some <del>damage</del> by 25lb R.P's extended by cannon fire	N.K. Army advance resumed.

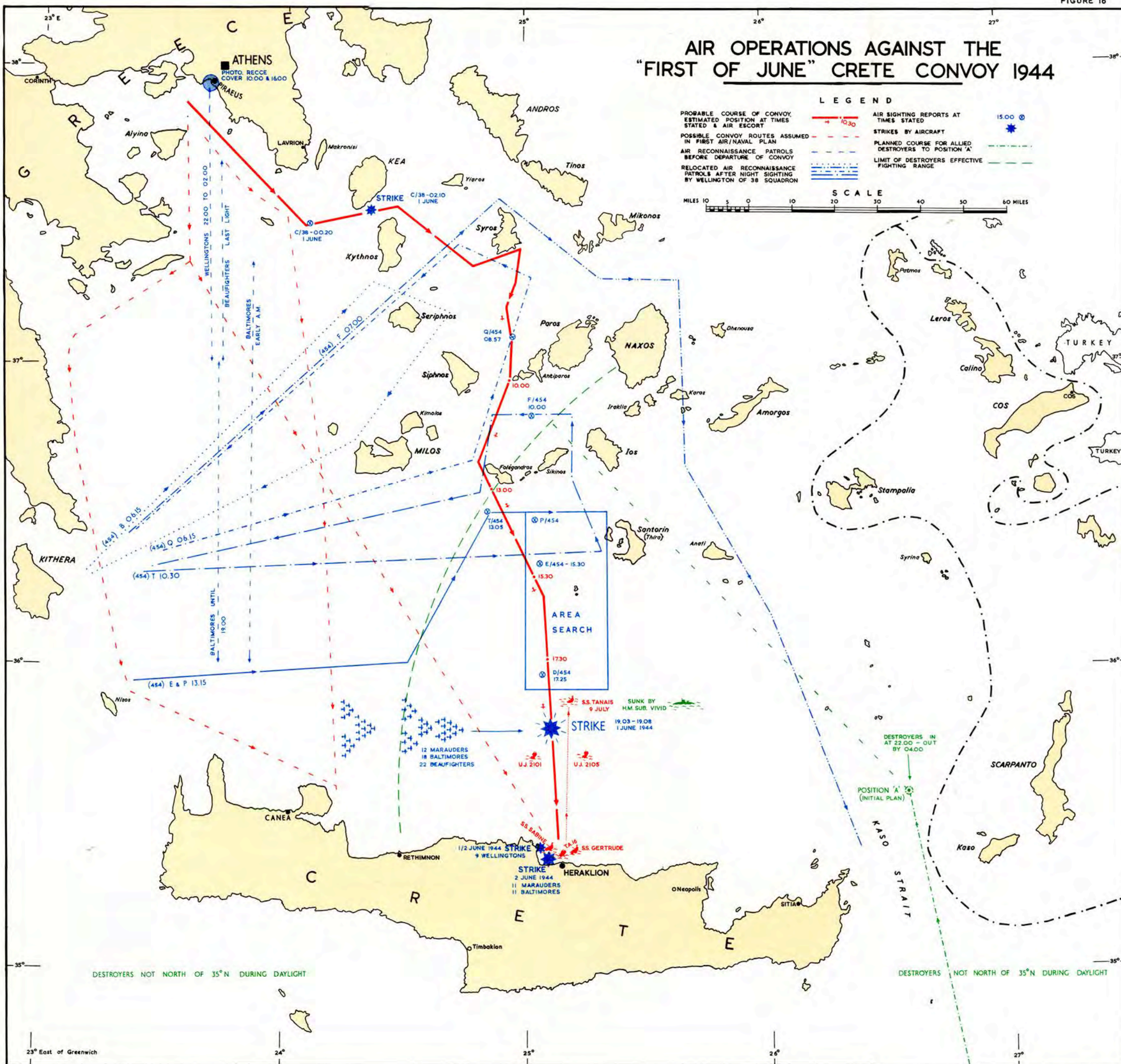
December total of 87  
R.P. sorties.

<u>1945</u> 1 Jan.	27	32/25	17/25	53	4	8th National School (N. Athens) 3 storey and semi-basement. Stone, load-bearing walls.	No claim	Only minor damage as result of perforations by 25lb R.P's.
2 Jan.	-	-	-	-	No ops	No ops	-	-
3 Jan.	28	N.K.	N.K.	N.K.	4	Guns, N. Piraeus	Direct hits	N.K.
	29	N.K.	N.K.	N.K.	4	Reputed H.Q. bldg. (Athens)	Hits	N.K.
January total of <u>12</u> R.P. sorties								
Grand total of R.P. sorties <u>99</u> December - January.								

Note: In every case except one, cannon fire was used in conjunction with the R.P.

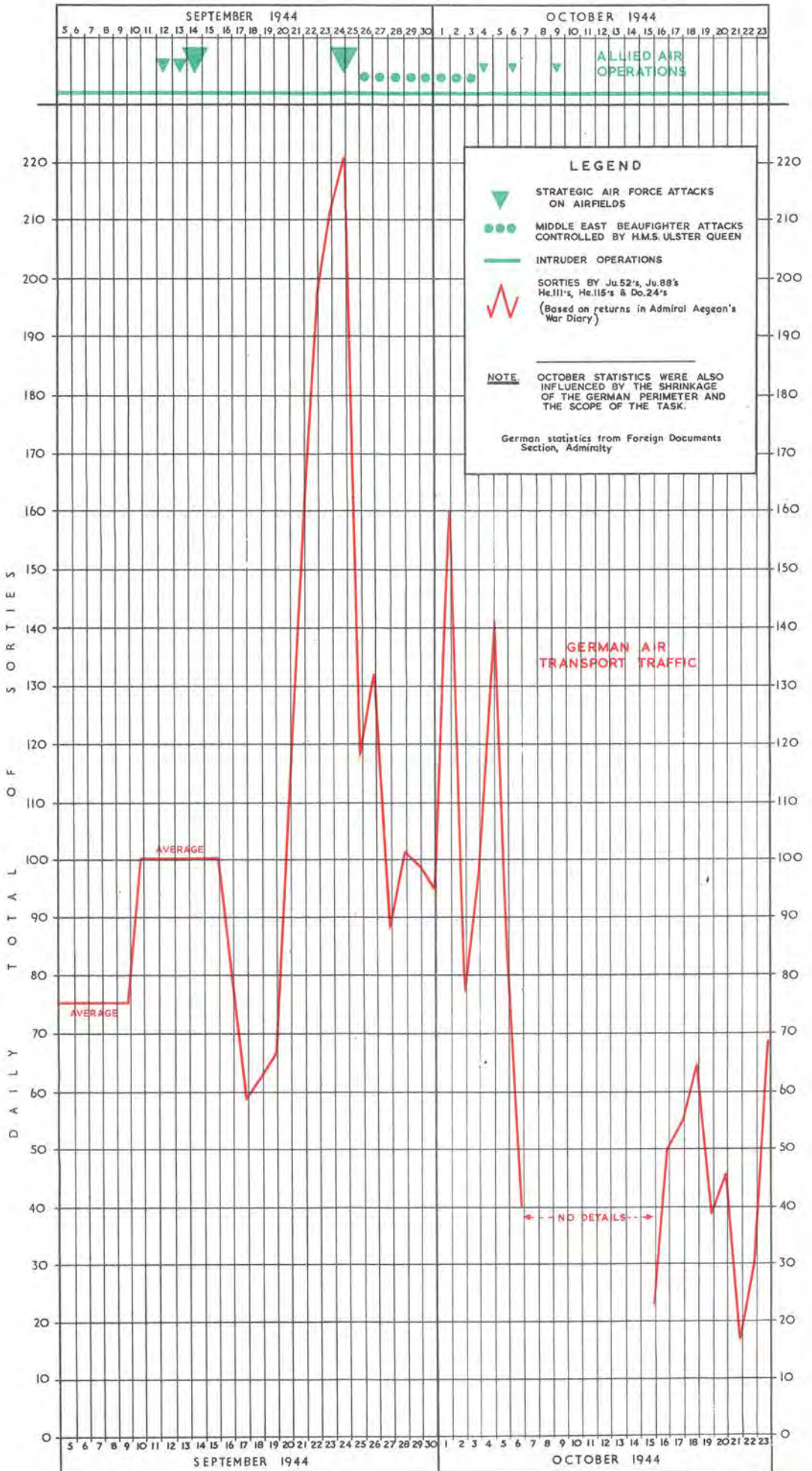
For a detailed report by the Bombing Survey Unit refer to M.A.A.F. Operational Research Section Report No. H.31 of 13.2.45  
(A.R.B. III.1/138).

# AIR OPERATIONS AGAINST THE "FIRST OF JUNE" CRETE CONVOY 1944







# GERMAN EVACUATION AIR TRANSPORT OVER GREECE AND THE AEGEAN

TRAFFIC CORRELATED WITH ALLIED AIR ATTACKS  
5 SEPT-23 OCT 1944



# THE ALLIED ADVANCE TO ATHENS SEPTEMBER — OCTOBER 1944

## LEGEND

AIRBORNE OPERATIONS   
 NAVAL OPERATIONS   
 LAND FORCES   
 AIRFIELDS  TATOI

SCALE  
 MILES 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 0 10 MILES

AIRBORNE LANDINGS  
 AT ARAXOS-23 SEPT.  
 (OPERATION 'TOWANBUCKET')

GULF OF CORINTH

'BUCKETFORCE'  
 (FROM ARAXOS)

AIRBORNE LANDINGS  
 FROM 12 OCT

AIRBORNE LANDINGS  
 FROM 17 OCT

OPERATION 'MANNA'  
 MAIN NAVAL CONVOYS  
 15 OCT.

OPERATION 'DELIVERED'  
 12 OCT.

OPERATION 'EDGEHILL'  
 1 OCT (FROM KYTHERA)

ESCORT CARRIER  
 FORCE 'A'

FOXFORCE  
 13/14 OCT

PIRAEUS  
 16 OCT.

ELEUSIS  
 15 OCT.

TATOI (Menidi)

SKARAMANGA

MEGARA  
 12 OCT

PERISTERI  
 14 OCT.

PHALIRON

KALAMAKI (HASSANI)

FOXFORD

PHIEVES  
 12 OCT.

ANGISTRION

METHANON

ARGOS

NAUPLIA

DAHREPANON

MEGARA

LOUTRAKI

PERAKHORA

SIKIONIA

SIKION

VELLON

NERANTZA

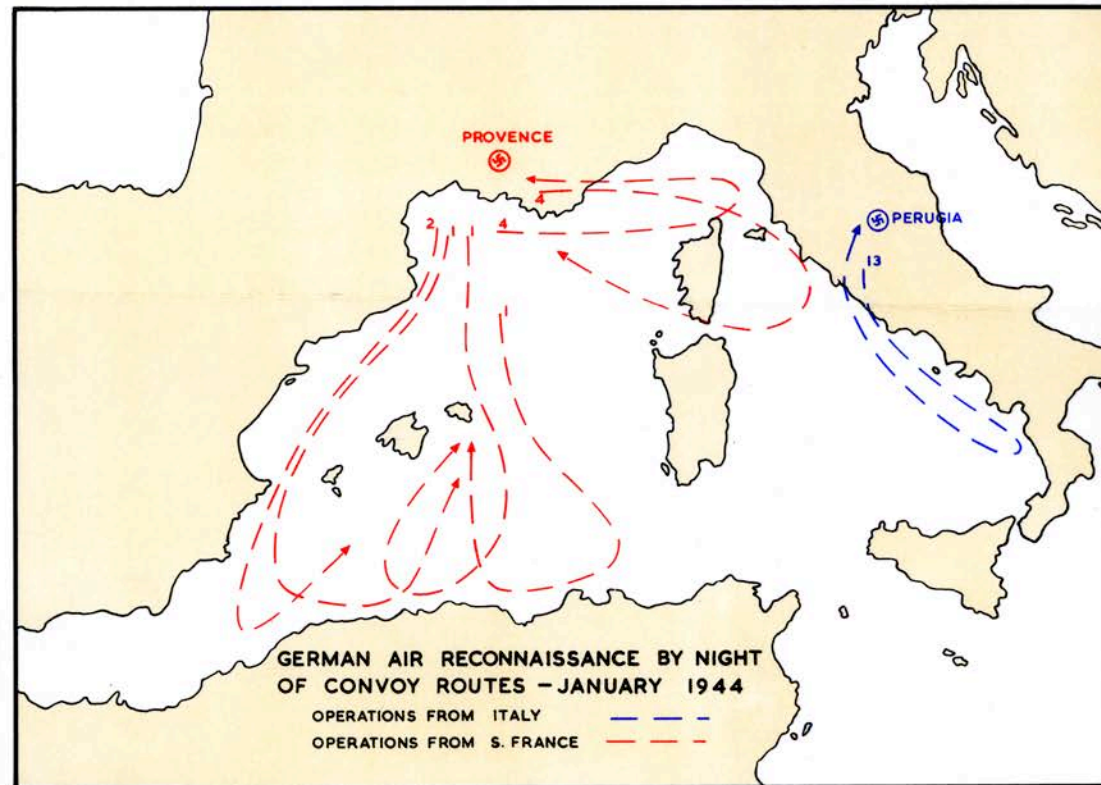
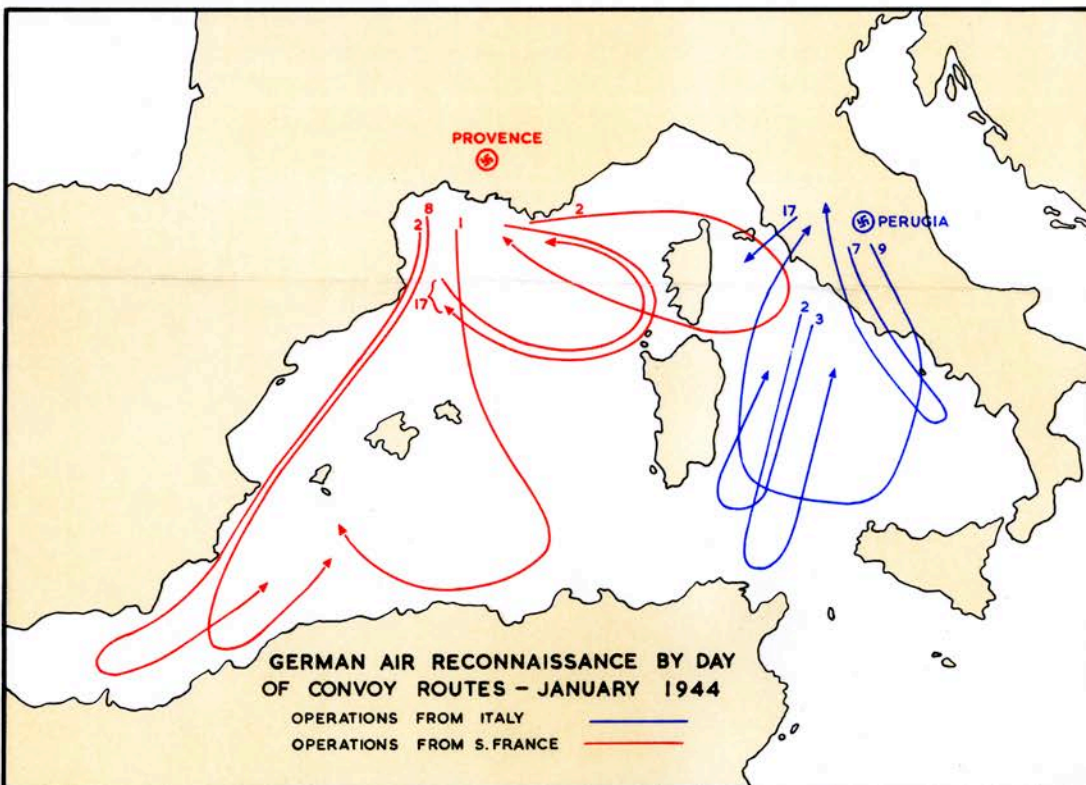
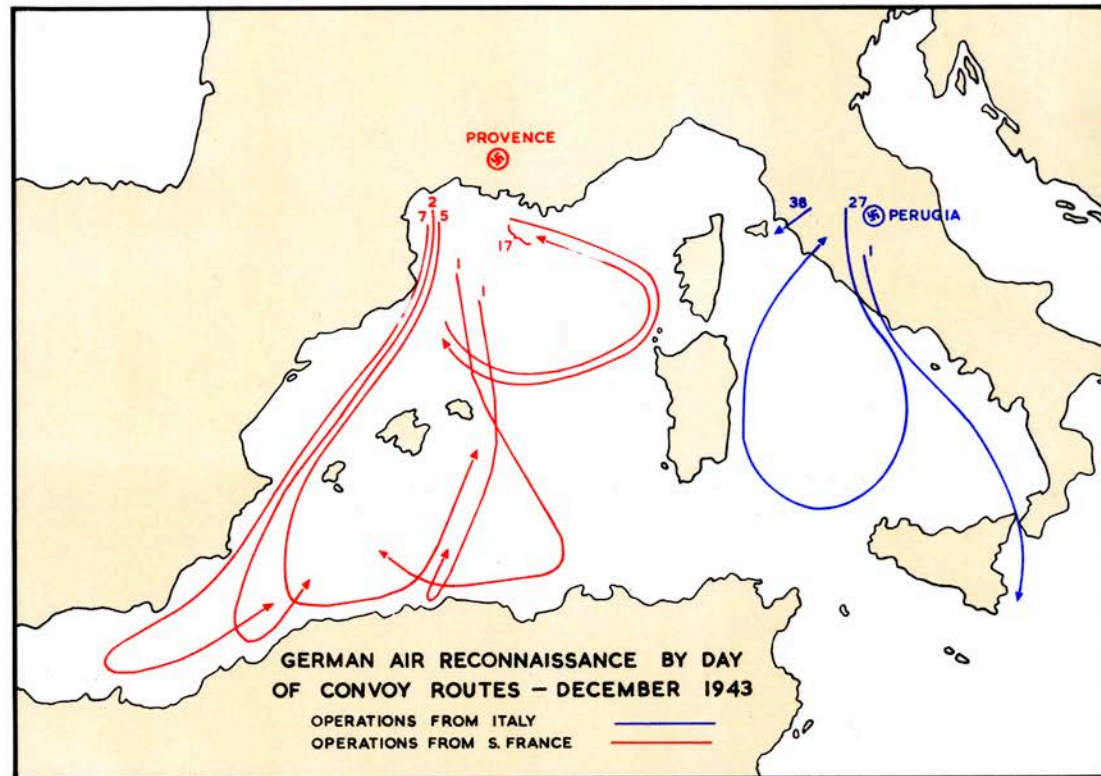
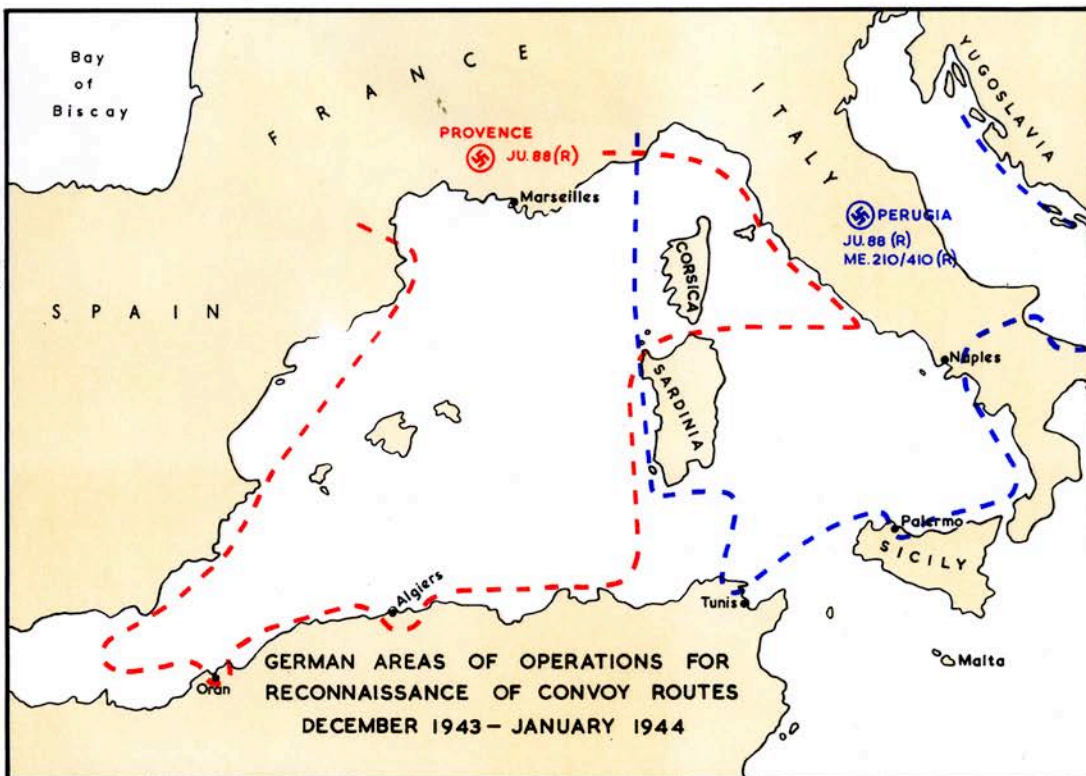
ASSOS

ISTHMA

23° East of Greenwich

# GREECE AND THE AEGEAN





# OPERATION "BARRICADE"

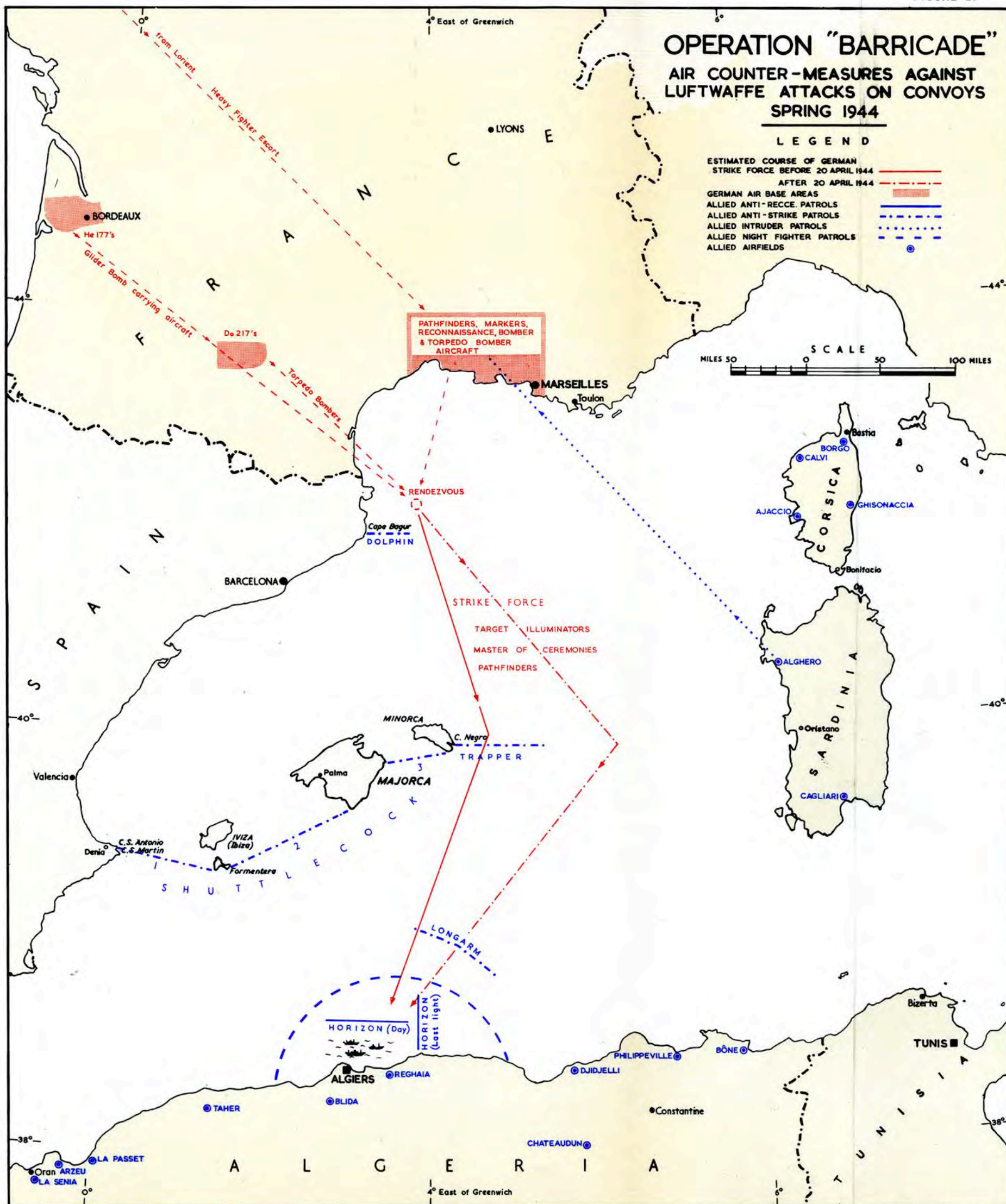
## AIR COUNTER-MEASURES AGAINST LUFTWAFFE ATTACKS ON CONVOYS SPRING 1944

### LEGEND

ESTIMATED COURSE OF GERMAN  
STRIKE FORCE BEFORE 20 APRIL 1944  
AFTER 20 APRIL 1944

GERMAN AIR BASE AREAS  
ALLIED ANTI-RECCE. PATROLS  
ALLIED ANTI-STRIKE PATROLS  
ALLIED INTRUDER PATROLS  
ALLIED NIGHT FIGHTER PATROLS  
ALLIED AIRFIELDS

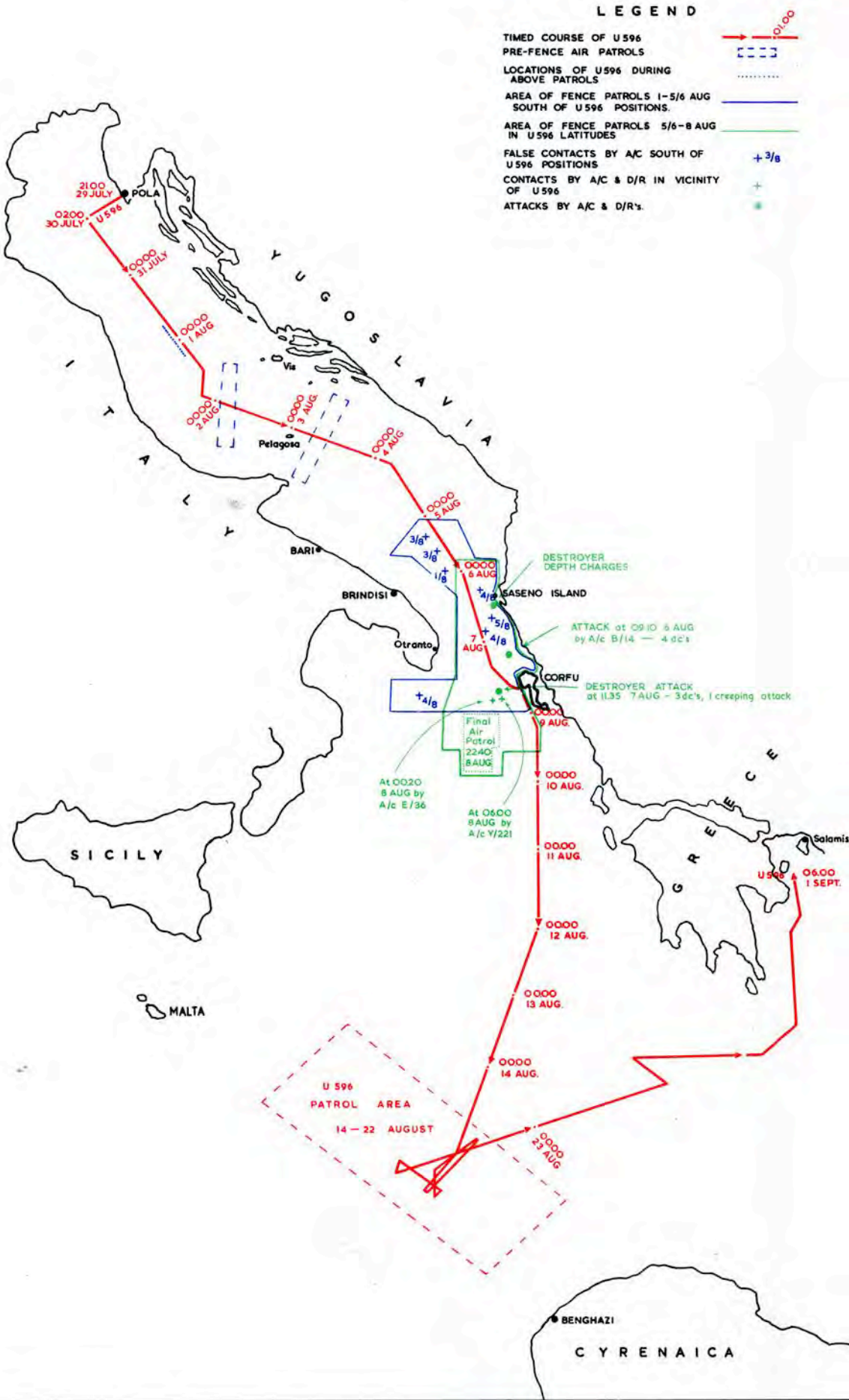
SCALE  
MILES 50 50 100 MILES



# COURSE OF U-596 THROUGH THE OTRANTO FENCE

29 JULY - 8 AUGUST 1944

DIAGRAM SHOWING AIR PATROLS



# MEDITERRANEAN ALLIED COASTAL AIR FORCE

## STRENGTH IN SQUADRONS

### FROM END OF JANUARY 1944 TO END OF APRIL 1945

INCLUDING AIR SEA RESCUE BUT EXCLUDING ITALIAN AIR FORCE

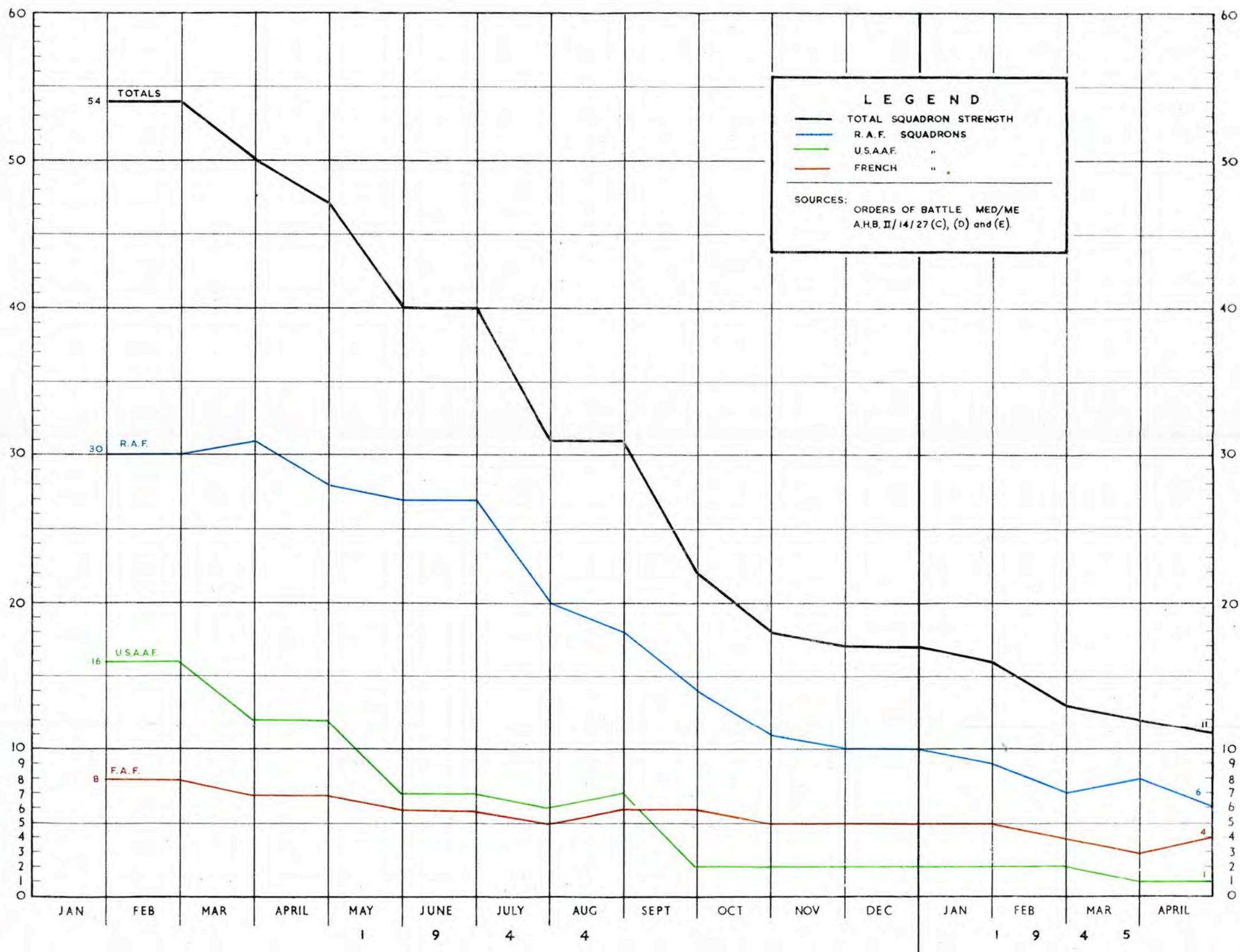
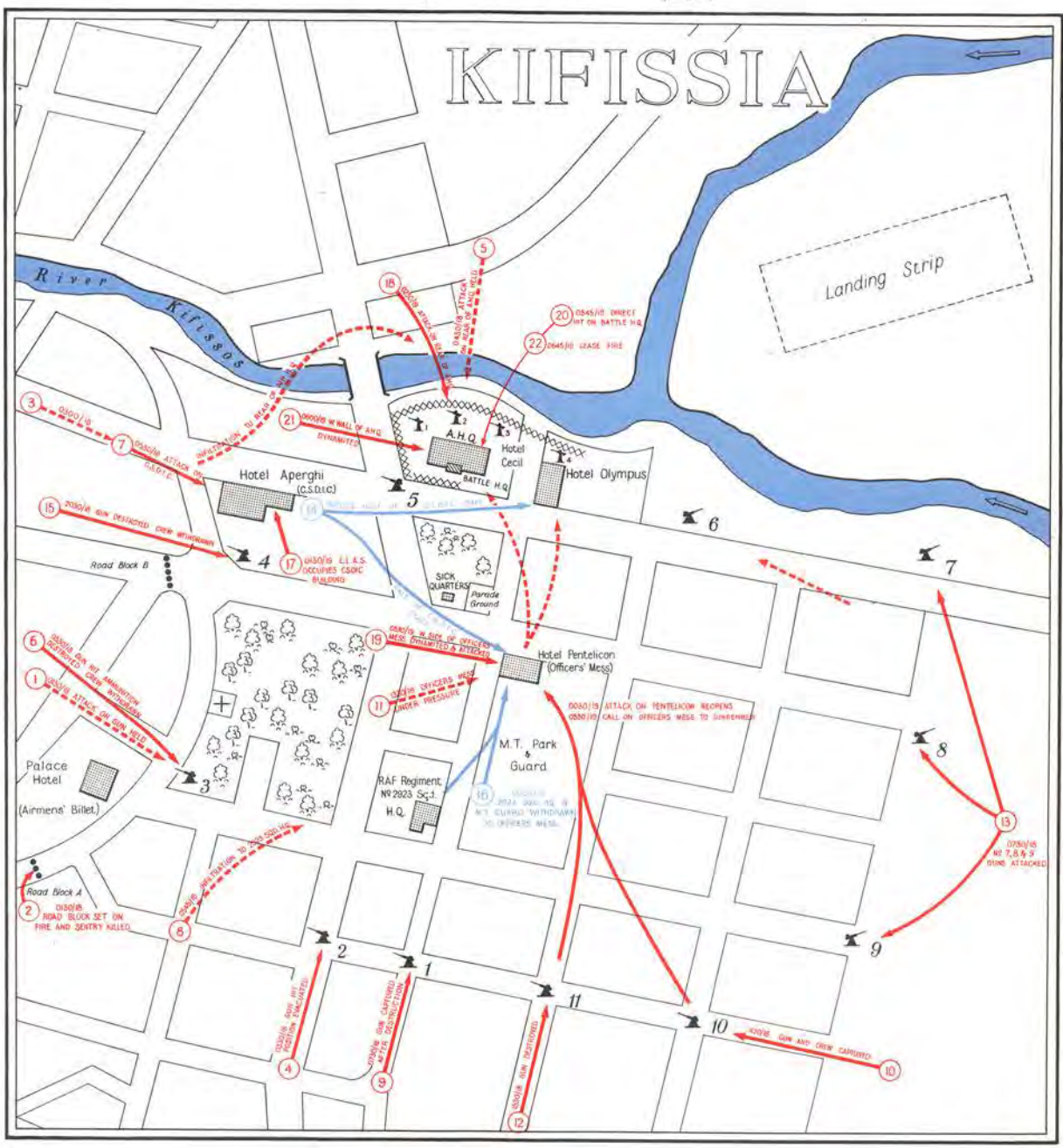


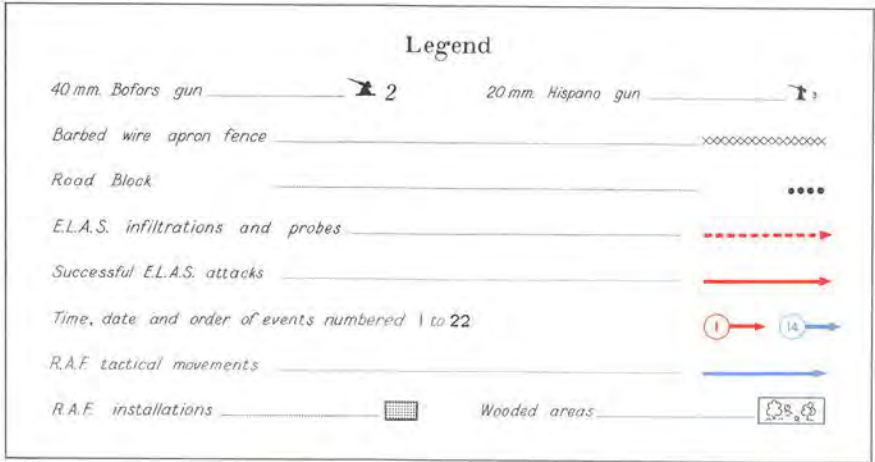
FIGURE 23

# Assault on Air H.Q. Greece

18-19 December 1944



Scale of Yards



# THE LONG MARCH OF THE CAPTURED GARRISON OF AIR H.Q. GREECE

DECEMBER 1944 - JANUARY 1945

Scale of Miles



## LEGEND

- (Confirmed)
- (Probable)
- Return from Lazarina to Piraeus.
- Roads
- Railways
- MEGARA
- Airfields
- E.L.A.S. P.O.F. W. Camps.



# VENICE

## SOUTHWEST HARBOUR

### BOMB DAMAGE ASSESSMENT

21 MARCH 1945

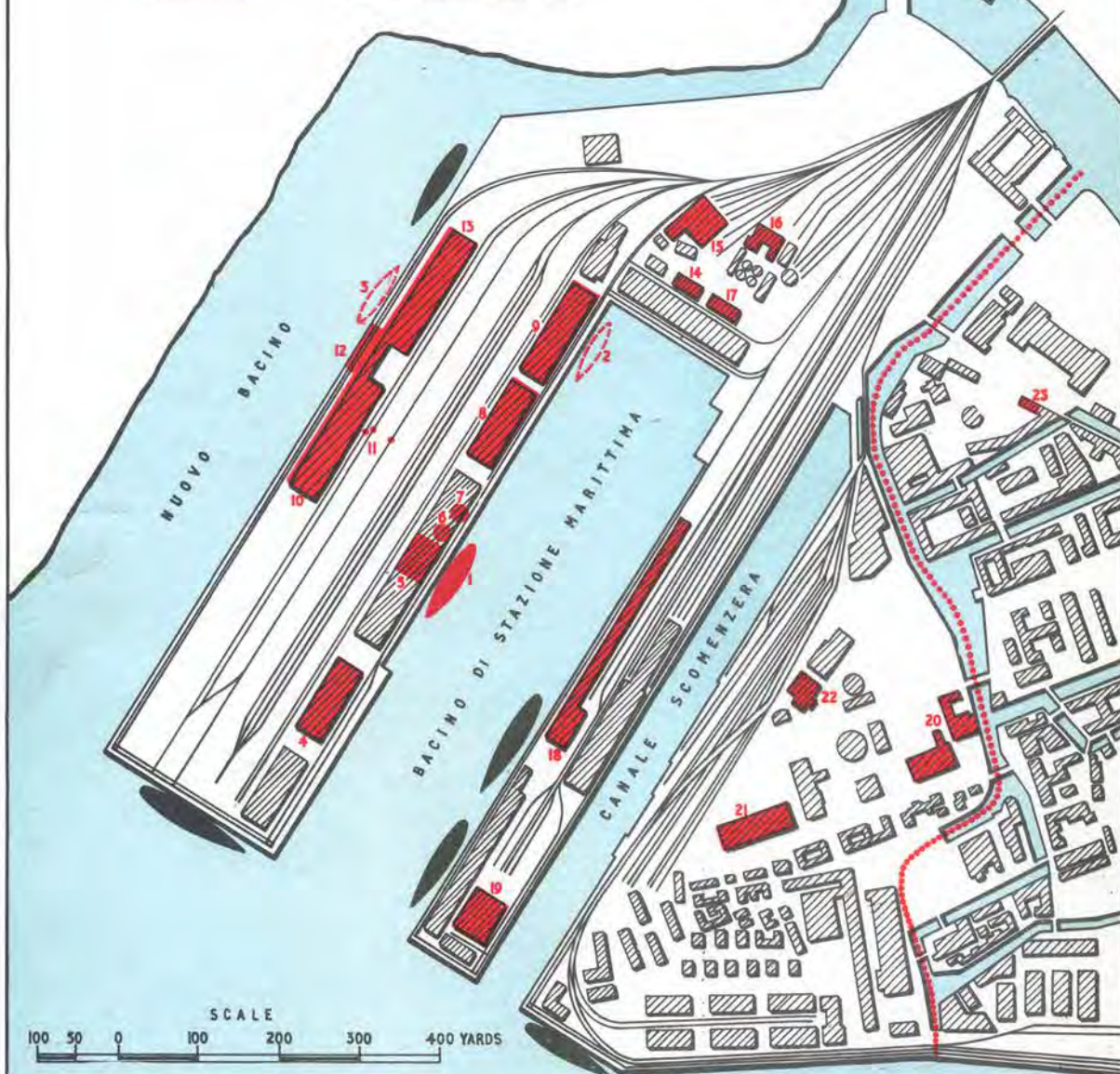
## LEGEND



BOMB STRIKES



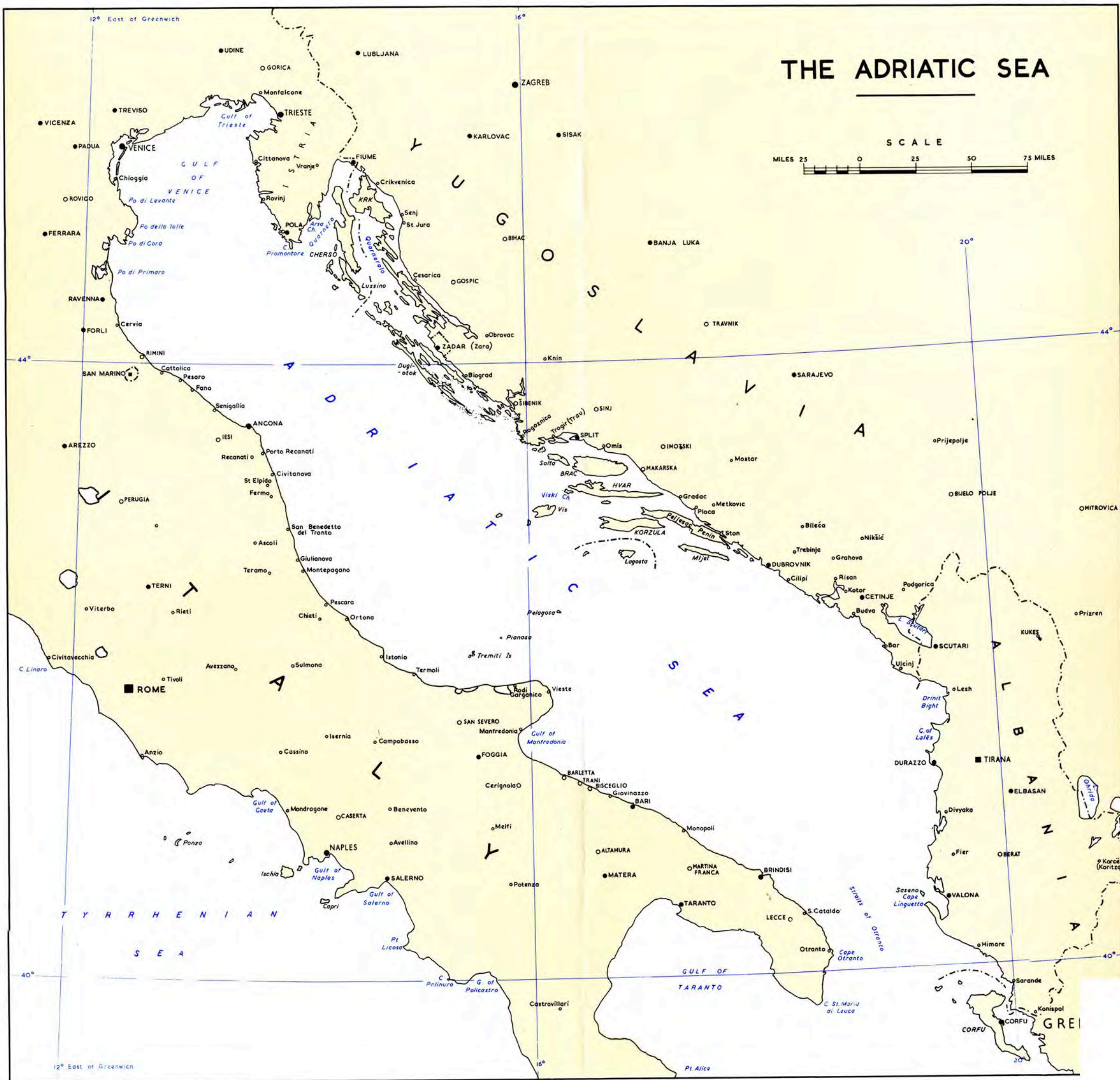
LIMITS OF MAXIMUM TARGET AREA



- 1 340 FOOT M/V OTTO LEONHARDT 3200 TONS SEVERELY DAMAGED AFT
- 2 WAR PARTENOPE TORPEDO BOAT 697 TONS SUNK
- 3 COASTAL TANKER 1000 TONS SUNK
- 4 WAREHOUSE 290x100 FEET HALF DESTROYED
- 5-7 ROOFS OF WAREHOUSES PENETRATED BY BOMBS WHICH CAUSED FIRES AT 6 AND 7
- 8-10 TWO WAREHOUSES 8 & 9 COMPLETELY GUTTED AND ONE 10 SEVERELY DAMAGED
- 11 3 TRACKS CUT AND 20 WAGONS ON SIDINGS DAMAGED
- 12 HOLE 170x100 FEET BLOWN IN QUAY
- 13-14 WAREHOUSE AND 2 BUILDINGS VERY SEVERELY DAMAGED
- 15-17 ROOFS OF 3 SHEDS BADLY DAMAGED
- 18-19 ONE WAREHOUSE 18 COMPLETELY GUTTED; ROOF OF WAREHOUSE 19 PARTIALLY DESTROYED
- 20-22 DAMAGE TO ROOFS OF 3 LARGE BUILDINGS IN GASWORKS
- 23 SMALL BUILDING DESTROYED IN WATERWORKS

SCALE

MILES 25 0 25 50 75 MILES



# THE MEDITERRANEAN

