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R.A.F. NARRATIVE

(First Draft)

THE CAMPAIGN IN GREECE

1940 - 1941

Air Historical Branch (1  
Air Ministry

# CHRONOLOGY

	MILITARY EVENTS IN GREECE	EVENTS IN OTHER THEATRES
<u>1940</u>		
August		Italian capture of British Somaliland.
Sept. 13		Italian advance to Sidi Barrani.
Oct. 28	Italian ultimatum to Greece.	
Nov. 3	Italian advance against Metsovo	
Nov. 9	Greek counter-attack	
14-23	R.A.F. Squadrons fly from Western Desert to Greece	
15	Greece free of Italians	Keitel-Badoglio talks at Innsbruck.
22	Greek capture of Koritza	
Nov. 22-	Greek offensive into Albania	
Dec. 8		
Nov. 30	Greek capture of Pogradetz	
Dec. 6	Greek capture of Santi Quaranta (Sarande).	
8	Greek capture of Argyrokaastro	
1941	Greeks on Himare-Tepelene-Kelcyre-Corovode-Pogradetz line.	
Dec. 8-	Greek offensive against Valona-	
Jan. 2	Berat-Elbasan.	
Dec. 9		Opening of British offensive in the Western Desert.
Oct. 28	Italian ultimatum to Greece.	
<u>1941</u>		
Jan. 3-4	Unsuccessful Italian counter-offensive.	
14-23	R.A.F. Squadrons fly from Western Desert to Greece	
10	Greek capture of Kelcyre (Klissoura).	
15		Keitel-Badoglio talks at Innsbruck.
20		Hitler-Mussolini meeting at Berchtesgaden
22	Greek capture of Koritza	
Jan. 23-	Ineffective Italian counter-attack. Greeks closing in on Tepelene.	
Feb. 12		
Jan. 30	Greek capture of Pogradetz	
Jan. 29	Death of General Metaxas	
Feb. 6	Greek capture of Santi Quaranta	
Feb. 5	Greek capture of Dorza	
6	Greek capture of Argyrokaastro	Capture of Benghazi
	Greeks on Himare-Tepelene-Kelcyre-Corovode-Pogradetz line.	
	Greek offensive against Valona-Berat-Elbasan.	

DATE	MILITARY EVENTS IN GREECE	EVENTS IN OTHER THEATRES
Feb. 19		Opening of attack on Abyssinia and Somaliland.
14		Capture of Kismayu.
17		Turco-Bulgarian agreement.
22	Decision to send land forces and air reinforcements to Greece.	
Mar. 9	Italian counter-offensive on Tepelene-Corovode line repulsed.	
16		Capture of Berbera
25		Yugoslavia signs the Tripartite Pact.
29		Capture of Dire Dawa. Yugoslav coup d'etat.
31		Capture of Asmara.
Apr. 2		German advance in Western Desert.
5		Capture of Addis Ababa. Yugoslav-Russian Non-Aggression Treaty.
6	German declaration of war on Greece and Yugoslavia.	
8	German capture of Salonika	Capture of Massawa
13		German advance to Bardia-Sollum line.
17		Capitulation of Yugoslav army.
22	Capitulation of Greek Epirus army.	
23	King George and Greek Government leave for Crete.	
27	German capture of Athens.	
May 2		Iraqi revolt.
8		Russia withdraws recognition of Yugoslavia.
17		Duke of Aosta surrenders in Italian East Africa.
20		German attack on Crete.
May 31- June 1		Final evacuation of Crete
June 2		British Troops re-enter Bagdad.

DATE	MILITARY EVENTS IN GREECE	EVENTS IN OTHER THEATRES
June 3		Russia withdraws recognition of Greece.
18		Turco-German Treaty of Friendship.
22		German attack on Russia.

## THE CAMPAIGN IN GREECE 1940-1941

### CHRONOLOGY

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## THE CAMPAIGN IN GREECE

### SECTION I

#### THE DESPATCH OF THE R.A.F. TO GREECE

##### Allied Hopes in the Balkans.

C.O.S.(40) 442  
11.6.40.

At the time of the Battle of France the Chiefs of Staff Committee formed the opinion that it would be a British interest that the Balkans should become a theatre of war. "Now that Italy has entered the war against us" they reported "there is little doubt that any military relief, however small, which we could obtain from a diversion in the Balkans would be to our immediate advantage ... From the economic point of view, the advantages of spreading the war to the Balkans are, on a short-term view, very considerable". As it was at that time their opinion that for economic reasons "Germany will be in danger of collapsing in 1941", these short-term calculations were adjudged to be of great importance.

It was the opinion of the Committee that from similar reasonings the Germans were anxious to prevent the spread of war to the Balkans. Italian interests were, however, quite different. Italy had her own ambitions in the Balkans, and for reasons of prestige it was highly important for her to win a victory where she imagined that she could, to set against German victories. Therefore, on October 28th 1940 Italy presented to Greece an ultimatum, which the Greek President of the Council, General Metaxas, accepted as a declaration of war.

On April 30th 1941 the last of the British troops were evacuated from the Greek mainland. The Greek campaign was, therefore, a campaign of almost exactly six months. The campaign falls naturally into two

/unequal parts -

unequal parts - the first five of the six months, during which Greece was at war only with Italy, and Yugoslavia was still neutral - the last three weeks, following on the German declaration of war on Yugoslavia and Greece on April 6th. The German intervention in the Balkans forced on British authorities a military policy quite different from that of the earlier months.

As long as Greece was at war with Italy the Greek Government had no wish at all to see the British Army on the mainland of Greece. The great Greek concern was to avoid any action that might be considered provocative to Germany, with the hope that, in spite of Italy's belligerency, Germany might still remain neutral towards her. The party in power was opposed to the Venizelist Party (the pro-allied party of the last war).

While rhetoric for foreign consumption was sometimes allowed to indulge in some conventional eulogies on democracy, the home propaganda consistently stressed the truth that the country owed its strength to its dictatorial Government which ruthlessly suppressed the intolerable party divisions of Greek parliamentarianism. The Greek leaders before the war had had no natural hostility towards Germany, and the regime was generally considered as pro-German. General Metaxas had received his military training in Germany, passing out top from the German Staff College. The King, though he had lived in England in his exile, was yet the son of King Constantine and a German mother. With the coming of the Anglo-German war, General Metaxas had taken a firm and dignified line towards pro-German intrigues, and at the time of the fall of France had made it clear that, unlike Rumania, Greece would never renounce the British guarantee which she

/had accepted



had accepted in easier days.

"The German Legation at Athens had let it be known unofficially that the Greek Government could easily obtain grace and favour by renouncing the British guarantee and accepting two pro-German politicians in the Council of Ministers. The President of the Council made it clear that he, categorically, refused to do either."

Sir Michael  
Palairret to  
F.O.No.713.  
21.8.40.

Metaxas' Sympathies.

Even in the worst days of British fortune, General Metaxas, a shrewd judge, always thought that Germany would be defeated in the end, but he had no illusion that if Greece became involved in war with Germany that end would only come after a long German occupation of Greece and the greatest devastation and suffering. The King shared his courage and patriotism, though other members of the Royal Family were less decided<sup>(1)</sup>.

Contempt of Italy.

On the other hand, towards Italy there was a contempt that was more deep-seated than hostility. Even those who were not so optimistic as to expect to avoid war with Germany altogether, rightly saw that it was vital for Greek prestige to postpone that war as long as possible - to postpone it until the Greeks had shown that they were at least a match for the Italians and

/had proved

- (1) "The Crown Princess told the Naval Attache a few days ago that she hoped England and Germany would soon make a just peace as if either side were beaten she visualised the vanquished rising again in twenty years. I do not think this represents the King's views but I imagine the Crown Prince would agree. He and his wife probably visualise a Germany purged of Nazi-ism with whom we could come to terms. The Crown Princess even suggested a division of the French Empire between England and Germany. At the end, she said she spoke only for herself, but it was evident that she was repeating the views held by others, saying "We think" sometimes and "I think" other times."

Sir Michael  
Palairret to  
F.O.No.667  
15.8.40

had proved themselves the first nation of continental Europe to throw back the attack of a totalitarian aggressor. Therefore the only service which the Greeks would accept from the British Army in these early months was the occupation of Crete - essential if a naval base was to be established at Suda Bay as was required if the British were to exercise effective control of the Aegean.

There was not the same reluctance to allow the R.A.F. to land upon the Greek mainland. The Greek Air Force was very small <sup>(2)</sup>. Such as it was, well though it fought, it was soon almost entirely destroyed. Unfortunately their operational training and higher firection were woefully weak with the result that although the pilots put up several gallant shows they were not really used intelligently. Had the Greeks had no help from the R.A.F. the Italians must have had unchallenged command of the air and the success of the Greek resistance to the Italian attack would have been far more doubtful.

/Appeal for

(2) Estimates of the strength of the Greek Air Force were:

(a) By the Air Staff on November 3rd.

Fighters 24 PZIs. (an obsolete type similar to the Gladiator)  
5 Bloch 151

Anti- 1 Regt. and 12 A.A. Btys. for the whole Athens and Piraeus area  
Aircraft 1 Regt. and 1 Bty. in the Larissa area and for the aerodromes of  
Tatoi and Eleusis.

(b) At the outbreak of the Greco-Italian war.

B.A.F.G. Bombers 1 Sqdn. of 8 Blenheims Fighters 3 Sqdns. PZIs.) 6-8 a/o  
Form 540 1 Sqdn. of 11 Battles 1 Sqdn. Blochs) each  
App.A Nov. '40. 1 Sqdn. of 7 Potez 63 14 Henschel 126  
S.7080 (c) On Nov. 16th General Metaxas said that the Greeks had 6 fighters  
64A left.

DO/AML/15 (d) On Nov. 24th Air Chief Marshal Longmore informed C.A.S.:  
Part I 51a "Their Air Force now includes about 60 a/c of various types half  
and 52a. fighters and half bombers ....."

On Dec. 4th: "Greek Air Force at present numbers about 50 aircraft  
..... to which we have now added 12 Gladiators Is."

(e) On Dec. 13th Sir Michael Palairret informed the Foreign Office that  
there were only 14 bombers and 18 fighters ready for action.

Appeal for R.A.F. Assistance.

Sir Michael Palairret  
to F.O. No.891.

DO/AML/15 Encl.2A  
30.10.40.

C.O.S.(40)897  
3.11.40.

The Greeks therefore sent an urgent appeal for a contingent of the R.A.F. to be sent to their assistance. Sir Michael Palairret, our Minister in Athens, was impatient. On September 24, before the Italian attack, he telegraphed "we have up to date neither been able to supply arms nor promise military or air support. As I reported many months ago, the Greeks do not desire a well-sounding epitaph with a promise of resurrection at an eventual peace settlement but want means to be able to defend themselves." On October 30, he telegraphed "Tangible support should be given at once. Three days of war have passed and so far there is no visible sign of British aircraft, troops or ships .... Although Greek morale is still excellent comment is already loud about absence of our aircraft ..... A.O.C.-in-Chief ... October 28 .... himself (referred,) suggestion of bombing Taranto and Brindisi from Eleusis and asking whether Greeks would welcome this ..... After consultation with Greeks we replied they would of course warmly welcome it. It will be disastrous (if we?) now back out of proposals made by ourselves to Greeks ..... If this is done aircraft should fly low over Athens on journey to or from Eleusis (?) so as to be seen by one seventh population of Greece who live there." In face of the Greek appeal the hands of the authorities were also, to some extent, forced by indiscreet boasting at home. The Military Attache in Athens reported to the War Office on October 31st "Public morale has been almost too high. Credence has been given to wildest rumours which were, unfortunately, repeated by B.B.C. All are convinced that we are sending

/aircraft and

aircraft and arms, and from aspect of morale, swing of public opinion when Italian weight is felt and if we are found to have done nothing, will be violent. Germans are already exploiting this in anticipation. B.B.C. has recently laid (so) much emphasis on our increasing air superiority that it can be said authoritatively that presence of air units in Greece and the operations against Italians in Albania are absolutely essential if morale of civilian population is to be kept up."

Air Chief Marshal Longmore's Difficulty.

Air Chief Marshal Longmore, Air Officer Commanding in the Middle East, had always argued, while Greece was still neutral, that no aircraft could be spared from the Middle Eastern operations. He was far from complacent about the situation in the Middle East, even if there were no commitments. "At present moment" he signalled on October 7 "I am not at all confident that sufficient air support can be given to Army in event of serious Italian offensive possibly backed by Germans from Libya." The Secretary of State for War (Mr. Eden) was, it seems, still unconvinced even after Greece's entry into the war. "We cannot from Middle East resources send sufficient air or land reinforcements to have any decisive influence upon course of fighting in Greece," he reported ".... To send such forces from here (i.e. Middle East) or to direct reinforcements now on their way or approved would imperil our whole position in the Middle East and jeopardise plans for offensive operations now being laid in more than one theatre ... Bad strategy to allow ourselves to be diverted from our task ..... The best way in which we can help Greece is by striking at Italy and we can do that more effectively from areas where our strength has been developed over a long period and where our plans are /laid."

DO/AML/9  
Enc.41A

DO/AML/15 Enc.6A  
1.11.40.

DO/AML/15 Enc. 11A  
3.11.40.

laid." "All three C's.-in-C. consider that from the strategical point of view the security of Egypt is a more urgent commitment and must take precedence of commitments to prevent Greece from being overrun; it is also essential if we are to retain the support of Turkey."

The First R.A.F. Reinforcement.

DO/AML/15 Enc. 10A  
2.11.40.

DO/AML/9 Enc. 72A

Air Chief Marshal Longmore expressed agreement with the Secretary for War's signal but signalled the Chief of Air Staff on November 4th "If War Cabinet decide that political consideration override recommendations and views therein (i.e. in the Secretary of State's telegram to the War Office) contained and order increased air assistance from Middle East, I would propose to send No. 84 Blenheim I Squadron. Am already arranging for Wellingtons from No. 70 Squadron to undertake night operations against Adriatic ports using Greek aerodromes for refuelling. Arrangements in hand for this. Chief danger of adding to Greek commitments at expense of Egypt is miscalculation of date by which any such dissipation of forces can be made good by promised reinforcements. Earnestly hope I shall not be called upon to provide any further fighters from here." In view of the language that had been used by Sir Michael Palairret and others he came to agree that some measure of assistance to Greece was inevitable. "On the invasion of Greece by the Italians from Albania on October 28th" he wrote "it was found that we could no longer withhold some measure of air support to the Greeks, and were committed to send at least a token force." "It had become absolutely essential to send token force to Greece even at the expense of my forces here" he

Despatch Part 1  
Sec. 23.

DO/AML/2 Enc. 4A  
31.10.40.

/told C.A.S.

told C.A.S. at the time. He therefore sent a Blenheim I (No.30) Squadron - not No.84 as originally suggested - and received the warmest congratulations of the Prime Minister

DO/AML/2 Enc.34A for doing so. "I hope to reinforce you as soon as possible" 1.11.40.

the Prime Minister promised. "I am grieved that the imperative demands of the Greek situation and its vital importance to the Middle East should have disturbed your arrangements at this exceptionally critical time" he telegraphed to him in apology on November 13.

DO/AML/9  
Enc.95A.

The Maintenance Problem.

DO/AML/2 Enc.37A  
2.11.40.

"I have not the least idea of how I shall maintain this squadron at Athens, if the Greeks last more than ten days," Air Chief Marshal Longmore confided to Sir Charles Portal. There was "naturally consternation, particularly with the Ambassador" at the consequent weakening of the defences of Egypt. But, so far from being the end, he had every reason to fear that this was but the beginning of the demands on him. The Military Attache at Athens was indeed rebuked for having in any way countenanced the suggestion that a military force would follow the air force. The Chiefs of Staff telegraphed to the British Military Mission at Athens on November 9, "You are entirely wrong in supposing that wind is blowing in direction of possible despatch of British military forces to Greek mainland, and you are expressly forbidden by any word or suggestion of yours to imply such a course is contemplated. To arouse false hopes would be disastrous." But they also made it obvious that in the air they would not be content with a "token" force. "It has been decided," ran their telegram of November 4, "to give Greece the greatest possible material and moral support at the earliest possible moment. Impossible for anything from the United Kingdom to arrive in time. Consequently, only

A.M. file  
S.7080 Enc.45A

A.M. File S.7041  
Enc.6A

/course is

course is to draw upon the resources in Egypt and to replace them from United Kingdom as soon as possible ..

... It is fully appreciated that this plan will leave Egypt thin for a period. Every endeavour is being made to make this period as short as possible." Air

DO/AML/9 Enc.104B  
10.10.40.

Chief Marshal Longmore was alarmed. He by no means agreed to the policy of permanently "milking" the Middle East to maintain the forces in Greece. He recommended a separate establishment for Greece with its own reinforcements.

"Barbarity"

DO/AML/2 Enc.34A  
1.11.40.

During November 1940 a force of 4 squadrons, 3 of Blenheims, (2 medium bomber, Nos.84 and 211, and one mixed medium bomber and two-seater fighter, No.30) - 1 of Gladiator single-seater fighters (No.80) - were despatched to Greece. Nos.31 and 33 Air Stores Parks also arrived during November and December and were established at Daphni. No.112 Gladiator Squadron followed on December 2 but the aircraft were handed over to the Royal Hellenic Air Force. The British force was known as Barbarity. On November 6th 1940 Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac arrived in Athens to take command of it.

SECTION II

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1940

The months of November and December were occupied with the Italian advance on Metsovo, with the Greek counter-attack to that advance, which freed Greece of Italian troops by November 15, with the Greek advance into Albania which by December 8 had brought them to the line Himare-Tepelene-Kelcyre-Corovode-Pogradetz and then, for the rest of the year, by a further Greek attempt to advance again from that line and capture Valona, Berat and Elbasan. They did not succeed in reaching these three objectives.

The Bombing Controversy.

The first problem to be settled was that of the method of assisting the Greeks. The Greek Air Force had in the first few days of the war been used in close support of the land forces in battle line against the Italians, and it was the Greek proposal that the R.A.F. force should be used in the same way. But Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac argued that the force would render much better service to the Greeks if, instead of attacking the Italians and their equipment on the battlefield, it attacked them at the disembarkation ports and along the lines of communication. The Air Staff agreed. "Our experience in France" they signalled "proved direct support land forces best provided by attacking lines of communication where congestion likely to be greatest and not necessarily in battle area." The situation was not made any easier by the fact that in this argument the British Military Attache, General Blount, took the Greek side. The issue was indeed in many ways rather an issue between the soldiers and the airmen than between the Greeks /and the

S.7080 Enc.35A  
6.11.40.

W/C.Willetts S.A.S.O.  
to A.V.M.D'Albiac to  
S.A.S.O. M.E. -  
Appendix A 3.11.40.  
B.A.F.G. Form 540.



and the British. The Greek contention in its particular application was similar to that advanced as a generalisation by General Wavell in his controversy with Air Chief Marshal Longmore. While it was true that we had bombed behind the lines in the Battle of France, this policy had of course by no means been universally approved by the soldiers, and there was the inconvenient certainty that, whether post hoc was propter hoc or not, the Battle of France was manifestly not a victory.

The soldiers argued that the Germans, in France as they were to do again afterwards in Greece, during a period of attack concentrated their bombing on the battle front. And it seemed at that date an almost intolerable paradox to argue that the Germans did not understand the proper use of air power. To-day the conclusion can be more readily accepted. In war, as is ever, every medium has its proper functions and it is an error to seek to make one weapon do the work of another. An aeroplane has not the exactitude of a gun. It has the advantages over gun of range and mobility. To use an aeroplane as a gun is to use it for that for which it is less well fitted and to lose its use for that for which it is better fitted. If a heavier bombardment in the battle-line is needed, then what are needed are more guns rather than more aeroplanes<sup>(3)</sup>.

But to lay this down as a general rule does not of course mean that at some particular crisis it may not be wise to use aeroplanes on the battle-line. As a general rule, it would be foolish to man trenches with people who had been specially trained as radio operators. At a particular crisis of a break-through it might be the only way to save the day. So, allowance had to be made for

/Greek

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(3) For a general discussion of this principle of air warfare, see *Air Power and Armies* by J.C. Slessor, Oxford University Press.

Greek temperament - for the possibility that for reasons of morale it might at a particular moment be more important to show the Greeks that they had air support than to use that support in the most scientific way possible.

Greek Demand for Battle-line Support.

Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac promised that, should there be a crisis through an Italian break-through, he would divert his bombers to the battle front. With that promise the Greeks agreed that the general policy should be one of attack on the ports and lines of communication. Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac "took the opportunity of making definite arrangements whereby operations of the Greek Air Force are virtually under my direction". Throughout November this policy was pursued both by the Blenheim day bombers, who carried out 235 sorties, 56 of which were abortive owing to unfavourable weather<sup>(4)</sup> and also by Wellingtons of No.70 Squadron, sent over from Egypt for night bombing in periods of moonlight. We at that time relied on the Greek Air Force for all photographic reconnaissance.

DO/AML/15 Enc. 24A  
7.11.40.

DO/AML/15 Enc.24A  
7.11.40.

By the Middle of November the first Italian advance had been stopped. On the 11th of that month Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac was able to report "Have tonight discussed military situation with Greek

/Commander

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(4) It was represented by Air Vice Marshal Drummond to Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac from H.Q.M.E. "You have been instructing Blenheim pilots to turn back if there is insufficient cloud cover over the target ... The A.O.C.-in-C. ... thinks this turning effect on the D/AOC/morale of pilots. He would therefore like you to authorise the pilots 2. to drop their bombs on some alternative target even though it may be Enc.7A of no particular value."

29.11.40.

D/AOC/Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac agreed.

JA

Opsum 155  
11.10.40.

Commander in Chief and position is satisfactory. Line reasonably stable and in certain sectors Italians are retreating. If position continues satisfactory it will enable me to extend my operations further afield. Eight or nine aircraft were weather-bound (?) but increase 3 (?) 30 Squadron made offensive reconnaissance Sarampi - Konispol which provided Royal Air Force valuable confirmation Italian inactivity. Employed one Wellington to drop food supplies on Greek force isolated by breakdown in supply system. This request of Greek General Staff was agreed to as I considered at this stage a breakdown in morale on part of front might have unfortunate repercussions on whole line. Operation successfully carried out by No.70 Squadron as above (?). Position now satisfactory. All aircraft and crews returned."

Criticisms of R.A.F. Bombing Policy.

It must be confessed that the situation appeared more wholly satisfactory to Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac than to the Greeks. It was not with a very good grace that they had accepted his policy. There was, as Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac put it, "what amounted to a conspiracy to bring unfair pressure to bear on you (Air Chief Marshal Longmore) and British Government". He accused "Reuter's correspondent" and an "unofficial but influential Greek syndicate." They would have preferred that the R.A.F. be used to bomb the battle front and thought that in leaving that task to the Greeks they had left them the harder task. Thus Air Commodore George, the Chief Air Attache in the Balkans, had to report on November 17th - "His Majesty informed me this evening that plans for a big Greek offensive against Korcha (Koritza) are now ready, but before putting them into operation it will be necessary

/to have

DO/AML/2 Enc.94A  
21.11.40.

A.M.file S.7041  
Encl. 17A

to have air assistance just south-east before attack takes place and especially against Italian wedge now facing Greek right flank. He had asked for R.A.F. assistance and was told that only three aircraft were available. The King was very disappointed. I have explained (after consultation with D'Albiac) difficulties owing to small number of aircraft here and importance of using what we have against other targets. His Majesty explained Greek aircraft are doing five to six raids a day while ours are only doing one. His Air Force are harassing the enemy at all points in this sector, and some extra support would help to complete task. Yesterday Greek Air Force destroyed 10 aircraft in air and 16 on ground; their own losses were 5. Today they have destroyed 5 Italians and their own losses were 4. With these losses and no spares, His Majesty fears his Air Force will soon be inoperative and that we shall then have to take over all air operations. He is most anxious that his Air Force should be kept going, that spares for his unserviceable aircraft be provided at once and, later, aircraft. D'Albiac was informed before leaving Cairo that R.A.F. would have 3 Blenheim Squadrons and 2 Fighter Squadrons (Gladiators) established in Greece by November 15th. The actual position night of November 15th was that  $1\frac{1}{2}$  Blenheim Squadrons had arrived. This included a composite bomber-fighter unit. 6 Wellingtons, based in Egypt, operating from Tatoi must be included in this total. All above operate from Eleusis and Tatoi. His Majesty stated that in North Greece have only 6 fighters available. We must, he said, provide some fighter support for Larissa area at once, as enemy fighters and bombers operate over that area continuously.

The King's

The King's View.

Later in evening I was again called to speak to His Majesty. He took me to his conference room where President of Council and Commander-in-Chief (General Papagos) were present. President of Council read reports which had just come in stating that German Air Force would commence operations against Greece on Monday next. He had also received information that Badoglio and Keitel are conferring at Innsbruck. He pleaded for immediate fighter support ... with only 6 Greek fighters available in North situation was serious." It was, of course, the British view that the faulty tactics of the Greeks were themselves responsible for their disproportionate casualties. "Tendency to employ Greek aircraft in close support forward troops has resulted in disproportionate casualties." The truth was that the Italian aircraft in Albania were mainly fighters and they had fighters in such numbers - 150-200 - as to enable them to keep standing patrols at all important points. On November 15 our Flenheims delivered a day attack with an escort of 6 Greek P.B.L's but escort did not keep off the enemy fighters and Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac refused to repeat the experiment. So long as there were no fighter airfields near the front from which R.A.F. fighters could operate, we were, clearly compelled to confine ourselves to night bombing. He joined with the King and President of the Council in appealing for more fighters - if possible Hurricanes rather than Gladiators - on loan, if they could not be spared for longer.

The Greek Offensive.

By the end of the month the Greeks were in their turn pursuing the enemy back on to Albanian territory. Koritza, the largest town of Southern Albanian, fell on

/November 22

A.M. file S.7041  
Encl.17A

A.M. file S7077  
Enc.45B 25.11.40.

DO/AML/15 Enc.14A  
17.11.40.

November 22. The Italian bombing operations against the Piraeus, Larissa and Salonika of the early days of the month, which had caused the Italians considerable casualties both from A.A. and fighters, had now ceased. A standing Blenheim fighter patrol had been established stationed at Eleusis over the Athens area, and the Italians showed a great lack of initiative in the air and made no attempt to bomb the single railway line from Athens to the North nor the munition factory at Eleusis. Had they concentrated their effort in the first days of the war on preventing Greek mobilisation, it is hard to see how the Greeks would have ever been able to put an effective army on to the Albanian frontier to oppose them. But instead they largely petered it away on pointless attacks on undefended villages.

A problem less happily settled was that of airfields. Greece is a very hilly country, and flat areas suitable for airfields are few and far between. The battle-front was several days by road from Athens and unconnected by rail. There were no all-weather airfields in the whole country. The largest area of flat land is round Salonika where there were some dry-weather airfields, but the Greeks would not even allow Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac to look at these, thinking that their very inspection by the R.A.F. would be considered by the Germans as provocative. Prince Paul of Yugoslavia also played, with or without design, the German game, saying that Yugoslavia would resist a German attack but would not fight if Greece provoked Germany by allowing British troops to land on Salonika.

The only other flat area in Northern Greece of any size is that of the Larissa Plain. Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac did station a Gladiator Fighter Squadron (No.80) there, but the airfields there were only suitable for dry weather and, with the November rains, the aircraft were grounded for ten days. The suggestion was made that they should be fitted

A.M. file S.7077. with iron grids as had been done in France, but this was  
Encs. 9A, B & C.  
31.10.40. 6.11.40. impracticable. Also this area was not suitable, in any  
7.11.40. event, owing to the prevalence of low cloud and mist which made flying impossible for an average of fifteen days per month. The quarters themselves at Larissa, according to

Medical History: a Medical Officer, "were dirty and bug-infested."  
Greece p.13.

#### The Problem of Landing Grounds.

In spite of Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac's forebodings it proved that there were suitable landing grounds for fighters near the battle-field at Janina and at Paramythia which had at first been strangely overlooked. Without them it would not have been possible for the Gladiators to operate, but the bombers had to be stationed right back in Attika at Menidi or Eleusis<sup>(5)</sup>. The airfields there were better drained than similar airfields further North and were only unserviceable for a few days after rain, but these

/airfields

(5) "On arrival at Eleusis I was somewhat dismayed to find a rather rough aerodrome with no runways, a large number of imposing but Cdr. Willets unfinished buildings, a cluster of Bloch fighters grouped mostly to S.A.S.O. round four very large and conspicuous hangars, and beyond that, M.E. nothing. No accommodation for the troops, no sanitation, no B.A.F.G. lights and no rations."

Form 540.

App.A.

Nov.1940.

Medical History: The report of a medical Officer on "a larger, ugly two-storied building ..... apart from a few forms and trestle tables, completely unfurnished" at Menidi makes it seem even less attractive than Eleusis.  
Greece p.12.

airfields had, of course, the enormous disadvantage that they were at least 250 miles in direct line from the battle front. Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac obtained from the Greek President of the Council a promise that he would build two new all-weather airfields - one at Araxos on the Southern shore of the Gulf of Corinth and one at Agrinion, the terminus of the small railway line that runs up from Missolonghi on its Northern shore. The British medical authorities complained that the selection of new sites had been made without consultation with them and that Araxos, in particular, was a highly unhealthy spot in the middle of a swamp and with a spleen rate of 90 per cent among the native inhabitants, but in any event it did not greatly matter as the promised airfields were never built.

The British Government are often criticised for not sending a larger force to Greece. From the very first Air Chief Marshal Longmore made one of his reasons for reluctance to commit a large force to Greece that in Greek airfields the aircraft would be "unprovided with protecting pens, adequate A.A. ground defence and other precautions of such nature". In his despatch he argues from the poverty of airfields that, even had a larger force been available it would not have been possible to accommodate it. Air Chief Marshal Longmore expressed to the Prime Minister on November 15, "my anxiety not to send Greeks too many squadrons where weather conditions and new aerodrome in few weeks time may restrict their operations considerably, whereas in Western Desert would still permit their active employment in support of British Army." In Greece, as in Turkey, it was

/Air Chief Marshal

DO/AML/15 Enc. 11A  
3.11.40.

DO/AML/9 Enc. 100A



Air Chief Marshal Longmore's constant anxiety that our all too scanty air forces should not be "locked up". There was a certain amount of misunderstanding on this point, not only between British and Greek but also between the British Service and British Diplomatic authorities. The R.A.F. authorities objected to Sir Michael Palairret, the Minister in Athens, appealing directly to London for reinforcements when, as they argued, he was ignorant whether there was accommodation for such reinforcements should they be forthcoming. On the 15th November Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac reported to Air Chief Marshal Longmore - "Have discussed contents of your signal A.474 dated 11.11. with British Minister, to whom I explained quite clearly that continued appeals additional air support from him to Home authorities without my comments could only result in misunderstandings and cause embarrassment to all concerned. He has agreed refer all such cases to me before despatch in future and to record in telegram my reaction, which will be in accordance with your general policy. I pointed out the extent to which Greece was being assisted, both direct and indirect, through Middle East and fallacy of assuming that only those units stationed in Greece were helping her so far. I have made it quite clear that even if extra squadrons were available I would not recommend to you their despatch until sufficient suitable all-weather aerodromes, strategically situated, were available. I hope that this latter statement will act as an additional incentive to accelerate work on Araxos and Agrinion which is proceeding." It may, on the other hand, be contended that had a larger force been available from the first the Salonika airfields would have been put at their disposal. The Greek argument was that a small force would provoke the Germans without being strong enough to defend the Greeks.

/Had there

A.M. file S.7041  
Enc.15A

Had there been a prospect of a larger force their policy might have been different.

Repair and Salvage.

It was also soon discovered that the Hellenic aircraft factory could not undertake R.S.U. work because it was "not adjacent to an aerodrome. Roads, so narrow, winding and obstructed that no aircraft go there except from Hassani aerodrome. Would have to be split up in small pieces." Therefore, it was essential to send an R.S.U. to Greece. No.53 was sent and stationed at Hassani.

Further Reinforcements.

The units of the R.A.F. force arrived at various dates throughout November and December, and the force was completed by the end of the year. There was always a possibility that it would have to be decreased again owing to the demands of the proposed East and North African campaigns. It was thought of paramount importance to keep a sufficient air force for the projected conquest of East Africa. "It may conceivably be necessary, if things go wrong, to call back some Gladiators from Greece", wrote Air Chief Marshal Longmore on November 29. Shortly before the opening of the British December offensive in the Western Desert, Air Chief Marshal Longmore was then calling in all available aircraft from Aden and the Soudan and dangerously denuding the defences of Alexandria and the Canal. The Chiefs of Staff gave a reluctant conditional consent, but said "It is most important at this juncture to avoid disheartening the Greeks". They agreed that the personnel of 112 Squadron might be withdrawn but not that of 30 Squadron. Hospitals, works, rationing, etc., were now operated

/by Army

A.M. file S.7077  
Enc.54A 7.12.40.

DO/AML/2 Part III  
Enc. 8A.

DO/AML/2 Part III  
Enc. 37A.  
25.12.40.

by Army officers, and relations both between the R.A.F. and the Army Officers, and the R.A.F. and the Greek authorities, were excellent.

The R.A.F. in Aerion.

The small R.A.F. force went into operation from its first arrival. During these closing months of the year the Greeks were driving the Italians back from Greece on to Albanian soil, and the R.A.F. contributed to the success of that offensive by bombing the Albanian airfields at Sarande (6) Bay, and the Italian Adriatic ports of Bari and Brindisi, dropping 45 tons of high explosives and incendiaries.

Opsum No.154  
11.11.40.

Tirana was at first left immune (except for one attack on the airfield by a single Wellington on November 19) as "of small military value as a target and possibly undesirable politically." There was some Albanian guerrilla opposition to the Italians but the Albanians were equally hostile to the Greeks and to the Italians, and it was thought unwise to give them evidence that both sides could be unpleasant in war by bombing their capital. Later, however, the Italians established a fighter base at Tirana which, was therefore, bombed on February 12. In all the R.A.F. carried out 235 sorties in these months, 76 of which were abortive owing to weather. "The operations", Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac claimed, "have undoubtedly given Greeks higher chance of success by preventing arrival of reinforcements."

Opsum 158  
15.11.40.

Wellingtons of 37 and 70 Squadrons from Egypt also attacked Italian Adriatic ports at night during the same period, and on November 7th attacked Valona by day, intending to make use of cloud cover. Unfortunately, the sky cleared over the target and, as a result 2 Wellingtons /were shot

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(6) Often known as Santi Quaranta and by the Italians rechristened Port Edda after Mussolini's daughter.

were shot down against one enemy plane destroyed and two damaged. Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac complained of the inadequacy of the bomb supply for the Wellingtons. They were compelled to use Greek bombs which were not good "bomb loads" for them. Wellingtons from 148 Squadron in Malta also dropped 40 tons of H.E. on Italian Adriatic ports. The R.A.F. fighters, in spite of their numerical inferiority established from the first a moral superiority over the enemy. The Gladiators of 80 Squadron, operating from Larissa or Trikkala in support of the bombers, claimed to have brought down in the closing months of this year 42 enemy aircraft confirmed and 12 unconfirmed. The total enemy loss claimed up till the end of the year was 40 confirmed and 33 unconfirmed.

SECTION III

THE REINFORCEMENT PROBLEM

The Weather Problem.

With the coming of the new year difficulties increased for two reasons. First, the weather took a turn very much for the worse, with heavy snow and much low cloud. This made it no longer possible for the bombers to fly across the mountains from Attika to the Battle front. They had now to fly out along the Gulf of Corinth and then up over the sea. This both greatly increased the distance that they had to travel and also prevented any possibility of taking the enemy by surprise. Our aircraft were unable to operate in close support of the Greeks in their advance on Kelcyre on January 8, and it was not before the middle of February that weather allowed other than sporadic operations.

"Flying conditions in Greece," Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac had written in December, 1939, were more difficult than anywhere else in Europe. "The weather changed with great rapidity, making accurate forecast impossible, and the nature of the country seldom made landing possible when pilots were unable to regain their bases. Ice formation was another difficulty. Instruments froze, and masks acquired a covering of ice which made it difficult for the pilots to maintain sufficient altitude to clear the mountains. The temperature at this time of the year was never more than 28° fahrenheit, sometimes as low as minus 50° fahrenheit .... Most of the early losses resulted from inexperience in operating over mountainous country when low clouds trapped the runway. Pilots accustomed to navigation in the  
/desert

desert naturally found it difficult to modify their

Medical History: technique so as to thread a course by winding valleys.

Greece:

Page 26, 27.

Many of those who failed to accustom themselves to the new technique flew blindly through the clouds into the mountain sides." Second, the enemy had by now brought up substantial fighter reinforcements to defend his ports. The targets worth bombing in Albania were very definitely limited in number, which made the defenders' task comparatively easy. The King of Greece complained to our Air Attache at the beginning of January, "At no stage has the flow of men and munitions at Durazzo and Valona been hampered to any extent in spite of isolated fleet action at Valona and the work of the Royal Air Force here. Indeed the strength of the Italian forces in Albania is now double that at the beginning of the war."

Sir Michael  
Palairat to F.O.  
No.26 5.1.41.

Group Captain Willetts in a report of January 30 explained that we had attacked Valona 27 times and Durazzo 8 times. "Valona is a bad bombardment target owing to the high degree of natural dispersion on shore and the large area of sheltered water which permits considerable dispersion in the harbour." Nevertheless prisoners of war from within 20 miles of Valona had reported that "they were lucky to be given food once in three to five days." Our attacks had therefore clearly not been without effect. Durazzo was throughout our No.1 priority target. The difficulty was to reach it so long as our bombers had to operate from Southern Greece. "The enemy", writes Group Captain Willetts, "is fighting from prepared aerodromes with hard runways only a few miles behind his front and alongside his important targets. We are fighting from soft aerodromes 300 miles from our targets with the frightful barrier of the Pindus Mountains between us and our objectives."

BAFG/101/Ops.  
2A

The Need for Reinforcements.

Air Chief Marshal Longmore informed Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac that after the losses which the Blenheims had suffered in the Bardia battle the R.A.F. could no longer afford such a rate of loss as the Blenheims were then suffering in Albania but if the R.A.F. was to avoid heavy bomber casualties it was necessary to make full use of cloud cover and also to provide fighter cover. With the fighters based in the Larissa plain, the bombers in Attika and the bombers approaching the enemy from the side opposite to that of the fighter airfields, this problem of escort was by no means easy.

Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac therefore saw that the R.A.F. could only help the Greeks in Albania to a decisive success if the force could be substantially strengthened. When better weather came more airfields would be serviceable even if the new airfields were not ready. Although the new all-weather airfields promised at Arazos and Agrinion had not been built and existing accommodation in Greece was only sufficient for 8 squadrons in bad weather, it was possible, if we used grass runways, as with the coming of spring we hoped to do, to accommodate a larger number during the spring and summer.

B.A.F.G./202/Plans  
Enc. 1A. 6.1.41.

The Situation in Africa.

In Africa the Italians were being driven back in disintegration beyond Benghazi which fell on February 6, and although, in the event, the Germans took advantage of the diversion of our navy's attention to the shipping of an army over from Egypt to Greece in order themselves to rush over their army from Sicily to Tripoli, it was not then /foreseen that

foreseen that they would intervene in Africa nor that there would be any danger of an enemy counter-offensive in the immediate future. On the contrary, the military authorities definitely advised that there were no signs of the coming of German troops and little chance of such a counter-offensive. "At the time when the decision as to the maximum force which could be despatched to Greece had to be made, there seemed no serious risk to our position anywhere in North Africa ..... Though unconfirmed reports had been received from time to time of the preparation of German troops for despatch to Libya and of their progress via Italy and Sicily, no definite information to justify our expecting the presence of German troops in Africa had been received up to the middle of February ..... On the whole the balance of our information was against any such troops having been sent or being on their way to Libya." But the decision was only accepted with some reluctance by Air Chief Marshal Longmore who thought it "a most dangerous proposal." The Chiefs of Staff had decided that "assistance to Greece must take priority over all operations in the Middle East once Tobruk is taken" which it was on January 21.

General Wavell  
Despatch 2,  
Section 4.

DO/AML/15 Enc.7A  
10.1.41.

C.O.S. Signals  
46.

It was therefore decided that it would be possible to spare for Greece a force of 14 squadrons<sup>(7)</sup> and since it was not possible to accept them all immediately, owing to the small airfield accommodation, so long as the weather remained bad, it was agreed that the squadrons should arrive at various dates between January 15 and April 15. Further A.A. defences were also needed, as

/when 80

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(7) There was some dispute whether we definitely promised the Greeks 14 squadrons. Air Commodore Medhurst, after an examination of the documents, advised that we did not.



B.A.F.G./202/Plans.  
Enc.8A 15.1.41.

when 80 Squadron moved from Larissa to Jannina on January 13, they had taken their A.A. troops with them, leaving Larissa quite undefended. No.11 Bomber Squadron reached Greece on January 24, No.112 Fighter on February 10<sup>(8)</sup> and No.33 Fighter on February 19. By the end of March No.113 Bomber (Blenheims) had also been despatched and No.208 Army Co-operation (Hurricanes and Lysanders) were re-equipped ready for despatch.

The Salonika Airfields.

A further request was made to the Greek Government for the Salonika airfields. The Germans were already infiltrating into Rumania and at first the Greeks seemed inclined to agree. "The A.O.C. yesterday secured the reluctant consent of the President of the Council to the establishment of a Bomber Squadron at Salonika. The President of the Council sent for me" (Sir Michael Palairret) "however, this morning to ask that the Squadron should not be sent there until His Majesty's Government had considered whether they were prepared to face the risk of an immediate German attack.

as a result of the action which the Germans might interpret as a threat to the Rumanian oil wells. If they were, he will agree; but it would be very harmful both to British and Greek interests if our action led to German intervention on a large scale or German attack through Bulgaria ..... He had received all kinds of unofficial intimations that it was this that would provoke German action against Greece, but admitted that it might well be that it would not suit Germany to attack till the spring, but there was a

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/distinct risk

(8) No.112 had at first been equipped with Gladiator Is, but these were found not suitable for use over mountainous country. They were, therefore, re-equipped with Gladiator IIs.  
BAFG/  
202/Plans  
Enc.10A.  
15.1.41.

distinct risk, and until His Majesty's Government had considered that risk he could not authorise the establishment of the squadron at Salonika .... On the other hand, he asked, entirely on his own initiative, that we should send an officer to reconnoitre Lemnos ... A.O.C. is now arranging for detailed reconnaissance by a special party from the Middle East now in Greece for both Lemnos and Mitylene, the President of the Council having also agreed to the inclusion of the latter island. The President of the Council is of the opinion that we should do nothing to provoke Germany until we have dealt with Italy and can be surer of Turkey and Yugoslavia than we are now. His idea is that we should then strike at the oil wells in Rumania, which will induce a German offensive upon Yugoslavia who will then certainly resist. To establish an air base at Salonika now evidently seems to him an unwise risk."

Sir Michael  
Palairret to  
F.O.No.1457  
31.12.40.

Greek Fear of Offending the Germans.

It was somewhat illogical of the Greeks to refuse facilities in Salonika and to permit reconnaissance at Lemnos and Mitylene, as the whole purpose of the preparation of these latter airfields was that they might be used as bases for attacks on Rumanian oil fields, while it could at least be argued that "owing to delays caused by rainy weather in preparing the aerodromes in North-West Peloponesus Salonika had become the most suitable point from which to make daylight attacks on Northern Albanian ports."

Sir Michael  
Palairret to F.O.  
C.O.S. 1.1.41.

"They (the Greek Government)" wrote the Foreign Office "appear to have forgotten the point raised by the King of the Hellenes in his letter of the 17 November to the King, that we had failed so far to send air units to the "northern Salonika" area, but stated in the same letter that if we could establish ourselves in Greece with a strong air fighting force we might not only deal the Italians

/crippling blows

crippling blows but might even deter the Germans from moving against Greece during winter for fear of losing Rumanian oil. You might be able to make use of these points if a suitable opportunity arises .... Furthermore, the route from northern Greece to Tirana and Durazzo is not only by far the best air route to these important objectives since it avoids the worst of the hills, but is also the shortest route ..... While it is, of course, difficult to gauge the degree of provocation which would be required to bring the Germans into action against Greece we consider that the Germans do not want to bring matters to a head this winter ..... and failure on the part of Greece to take any defensive measures will not spare her from the German attack when the time comes .... The Greek Government may be assured that we will not use aerodromes in Greece to attack territories which the Germans may have occupied without their permission ..

F.O. to Sir Michael  
Palairat No.1212  
29.12.40.

... We would agree to our officers doing their reconnaissance in plain clothes .... the measure of assistance which His Majesty's Government can give Greece in the event of German attack would largely depend on how far aerodromes in Greece have been prepared beforehand."

British Acquiescence in Salonika Decision.

The reason why the British authorities at that time acquiesced in exclusion from Salonika without much protest is shown in a letter from Air Vice Marshal Drummond, S.A.S.O., H.Q., M.E., to Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac of January 23, 1941, - "Just a note to put you into the picture with regard to the latest developments as you may have been somewhat depressed at our signal to inform that the departure

of No.33 Squadron is delayed. The Chiefs of Staff have decided to put no pressure on the Greeks to allow us to put forces in the Salonika area now and have instead told us to go ahead with the capture of Benghazi. After that, or as soon as the necessary shipping is available, the reduction of the Dodecanese is the next step. In the meantime we are to build up and hold the strategic reserves here in order to go to the assistance of Turkey and Greece within the next few months. Our air policy is dictated by the appearance of the German Air Force in considerable strength at various parts of the Mediterranean. We have already had German bombers over Palestine, the Canal, and Alexandria and, of course, there is a very severe blitz being conducted by the Germans against Malta ..... The strain on our fighter resources, plus the German threat to Egypt, Alexandria, and the Canal, has forced us to modify our fighter policy, and the A.O.C.-in-C., therefore, feels he must retain No.33 Squadron here for the present for the defence of the Delta, which otherwise is without any fighter defence. As soon as the situation in the Sudan clarifies further (the operations are in progress at present) we hope that stability will be reached and then we shall be able to withdraw the fighter squadron from that place, also a bomber squadron which we can re-arm here." The projected operation against the Dodecanese, which was of course never undertaken, was known as Mandible.

#### The German Threat.

With our air supplies as scanty as they were, the Greek obstinacy about methods of assistance was, as can be seen, by no means universally considered on the British side as an unmixed evil. It was thought that less assistance to Greece would mean a secure position in Libya. Air Chief Marshal Longmore even suggested that

/all the

A.M. file S.7498  
Enc. 34V. 10.1.41.

BFG/AOC/6 Enc.2A  
5.2.41.

BAFG/202/Plans.  
Enc. 15A 17.1.41.

DO/AML/15 Enc.22A  
10.1.41.

all the German Balkan threats were bluff in order to induce us to denude Libya. It was not foreseen that we might be expelled from both Libya and Greece. Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac, on the other hand, was much perturbed at the phrase in Air Vice Marshal Drummond's letter about a strategical reserve force. He read into this phrase a threat that the R.A.F. in Greece would not receive in full the 14 squadrons - that they expected - as, indeed, they never did - and feared the effect on Greek morale of a failure to fulfil expectations. His fears proved justified. There were, in truth, certain elements of Greek opinion which again, in their turn, welcomed a British failure as giving Greece a good excuse for her failure to resist the Germans. The Greeks promised to use, and therefore, re-equip, the Salonika airfields themselves, but so determined were they not to provoke the Germans that they turned a blind eye to the use of German aircraft to transport Italian troops from Foggia to Albania and reported as "unidentified" a reconnaissance aircraft which flew over Athens on January 20 and which British artillerymen certainly identified as a Heinkel 111. General Metaxas' standpoint was that war between Greece and Germany was indeed eventually inevitable, but that the time to provoke it had not yet come. "I knew", Sir Micheal Palairret reports himself as saying to the General, "that if Germany attacked Greece she would resist, but, supposing Germany did not attack, would Greece declare war against her? When he said "Yes", I asked him whether public opinion in Greece would not consider, once Italy was defeated and Greece's immediate war aims achieved, war against Germany was

/an unnecessary

an unnecessary risk. He said with a smile "You can leave that responsibility to me. I have a certain authority over my compatriots and I have a dossier against Germany which I have not yet published". He said that it was the duty of Greece to stand by England against Germany as England had stood by Greece against Italy, and in any case there could be no peace for any country until Germany was defeated. He was perfectly prepared to provoke Germany when the right moment came but that was not yet."

Sir Michael  
Palairret to  
F.O.No.1457  
31.12.40.

As a result of the refusal of the Salonika airfields the Italians were able to attack Salonika on February 9, meeting of course with little opposition, and heavily damaging the Byzantine Church of St. Sophia and a cavalry barracks.

The Question of Military Aid.

It was suggested that troops might be sent to Greece, but on learning that all that General Wavell could offer was "engineers, field-guns, 23 medium guns, about 40 anti-aircraft guns, 24 anti-tank guns, 65 medium and light tanks and no infantry," this offer was rejected. General Metaxas had spoken of the possibility of sending a "hurried expedition" to Salonika when, and if, the invasion actually broke. The Chiefs of Staff replied - "You should make it clear that if we do not send now the motorcyclist forces suggested in our Telegram 46 of January 10 to wait until the Germans advance, these forces could not arrive in time to be effective .... out of the question to send .... hurried forces .... in sufficient numbers to act offensively as well as defensively. Clarify in the event of a German advance it might be necessary to send our forces to Turkey instead of Greece."

Sir Michael  
Palairret to  
F.O.No.83  
18.1.41.

BAFG/202/Plans  
Enc. 14A  
16.1.41.

The supply of the Greek Air Force.

By the New Year the small Greek Air Force had virtually ceased to exist, and it was suggested that in

/addition to

addition to R.A.F. reinforcements the British and American Governments should also supply some modern fighters to the Greek Government for the use of the Greek Air Force. Our policy towards supplying the Greek Air Force had been summed up in a memorandum two months before by Air Commodore Medhurst, then Director of Plans. Since it was not considered wise to sacrifice other interests in order to keep the Greek Air Force in being, our policy was thus: —

- "(1) No modern complete aircraft are to be provided from British sources to the Greek Government.
- (2) Consequent upon the re-equipment of units in the Middle East by modern aircraft, obsolescent aircraft thrown up by the re-equipment policy can be made available to the Greeks on the authority of the A.O.C.-in-C., Middle East.
- (3) Demands for spares for aircraft which they already hold are to be provided as fully as possible by Air Ministry, in collaboration with A.O.C.-in-C. Middle East.
- (4) Other aircraft spares and equipment are also to be provided, if possible, from British stocks."

A.M. file S.7080  
Enc. 54A 14.11.40.

DO/AML/2 Part III,  
Enc. 46B 1.1.41.

"It is really mere eye-wash, therefore," wrote Air Commodore Payne to the A.O.C.-in-C. "turning over Blenheim Is to Greece and expecting them to get away with it. In deciding what types of squadrons Greeks should have, probably better to concentrate on giving preponderance of fighters, preferably those which can carry small bombs. High degree of training necessary for night bombing or day bombing in formation is additional argument."

/American Officers

American Officers of Assistance.

The British Government was not enthusiastic about American offers of assistance to Greece, fearing that the more that was given to the Greeks the less there would be to give to us. Also what was the good of giving the Greeks aircraft if they had no spares? The Greek Air Force, like the air forces of most small non-industrial Powers, suffered from being a scratch collection of different sorts of aircraft, collected here, there and everywhere. As a result, spares were not forthcoming, when required. "Owing to the number of different types of aircraft and an extreme lack of spares, the Greek Air Force rapidly became non-effective.

I must leave it to you to explain to the Greeks that aircraft without spares, tools and equipment are useless,"

wrote C.A.S. to Air Chief Marshal Longmore on March 15.

"In offering 30 fighters for Greece which according to the Greek Legation, they have done" telegraphed the Foreign Office "the United States Government are offering aircraft which had previously been allocated to His Majesty's Government. Seven or eight weeks would be required to transport these aircraft to Greece, and as they are an untried type<sup>(9)</sup> they might not prove suitable when they did arrive. Moreover, since the direct reinforcing route to the Middle East is already fully occupied the delivery of an additional and separate supply of fighters to the Greeks over this route can only be at the expense of an equivalent reduction in vital British reinforcements to the Middle East, so that there would be no net gain to the allied air resources in the Mediterranean theatre ... If ..... the

/United States

DO/AML/2 (9) Tomahawks had been suggested. The Tomahawk had not to that date been in operation. Ammunition for their .5" guns would not have been available till mid-March. Some time elapsed after the arrival of the Tomahawks before it was possible to use them.

Enc.104A  
15.2.41.  
C.A.S. to  
Mr. Eden  
12.2.41.

DO/AML/15  
Enc.63A 13.12.40.

AOC-in-C./2  
Enc.28A



United States Government are willing to supply to Greece fully equipped aircraft from their own sources and make their own arrangements to ship them from Basra, we should welcome such action, and we are asking the United States Government whether they would be willing to do this. His Majesty's Government have shown the importance attached to air support for the Greek Army by authorising the despatch of 12 Gladiators to the Greek Air Force, in addition to the R.A.F. squadrons. It is our intention to continue such reinforcements from our own resources in the Middle East."

The Question of Tomahawks.

This view was later a little modified. At first it was suggested that we should take the Tomahawks and hand over to the Greeks 30 Mohawks. Then the Americans, without the knowledge of the A.O.C., tried to give the Greeks Defiants from the British allocation. Finally it was agreed that the Greeks should have 18 Hurricanes as the next priority after the equipment of 80 and 112 Squadrons. "In lieu of 18 Tomahawks originally proposed and which are untried and ammunition and spares complicated, they will get 18 Hurricanes after completion re-equipment of Nos. 80 and 112 Squadrons. General intention is .... to aim at one type fighter in Greece, both for R.A.F. and Greeks. Blenheim Is are being turned over to Greeks as replaced in British Squadrons by Blenheim IVs. Gladiators also being turned over at steady rate as replaced in fighter squadrons both from Egypt and Greece. The 45 American Grumman fighters, 30 new and 15 old type, offered to them direct from U.S.A. have been accepted by Greeks and I have agreed to fly them across Takoradi route to Egypt if necessary.

/Have

DO/AML/15 Enc. 75B  
19.12.40.

AOC.9 Enc.35A  
1.3.41.

Have recommended Greeks to confine their air force to three fighter squadrons, two bomber squadrons and two army co-operation squadrons, and this they have provisionally accepted. They have, in addition, one coastal reconnaissance squadron under naval control. If available, propose to offer them Blenheim Is for this unit, releasing the Ansons for training."

AOC/9. Enc.18B.

There was a lot of confusion about what was promised between the Greeks and the Americans, but this, we insisted, was at least our understanding of the situation. Meanwhile Air Vice Marshal Slessor had reported "Secretary Knox sent for me this morning" (February 16). "The President has just decided to send Greece 45 Grumman fighters in course next few weeks. Secretary wanted to know my view of Greek capacity to use them and whether we could help in transportation, erection, maintenance. I said Greeks had little experience in flying modern aircraft and would probably experience difficulty in keeping these serviceable, but I think important we should give all assistance we can especially in view possibility that in certain contingencies aircraft may come in useful for our Mediterranean carriers." Greek Anti-Aircraft Defences.

The Greeks still, of course, had anti-aircraft batteries but their activities, though vigorous, were somewhat

The chronological erratically directed. Both the reminiscences of pilots and records and report of No.11 Squadron Operational Summaries give many examples of R.A.F. planes for Feb. 25. being indiscriminately fired on by the Greeks. "Accurate Opsum 262, fire encountered Corfu, heavy calibre, presumed friendly. 26.2.41. Enemy nil."

British Missions: Diplomatic Relations.

There had been a British Military Mission in Athens under General Heywood ever since the beginning of the Greek War. Wing Commander Lord Forbes was the air  
/representative

representative on it. The War Office had also in December sent out "unheralded" a somewhat undefined Reconnaissance Unit under Major Reid. "Major Reid means well, and to use his own words, is convinced 'he can be of some use to somebody'", reported Middle East to Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac in introducing him. "I don't think he can be of any use to you." It was now agreed that with the new aircraft should come an independent Air Mission to help the Greeks in their reorganisation and that this Mission should also supervise the construction of new airfields in Greece; these officers were even allowed to visit and inspect the Salonika airfields, a concession hitherto refused. The Greeks were generous in their offers of free services for the accommodation of the R.A.F. reinforcements, but the British Treasury, suspecting that all Greek expenditure would, in the last instance, probably come out of the pockets of the British taxpayer, were perhaps a little less gracious in accepting these offers than diplomatic tact made desirable. The British Foreign Office in December and again in January had been afraid that Greece might accept German mediation in order to make a separate peace with Italy, but there is no reason to think that the Greeks ever contemplated this. It is probably a misreading of their mentality, nor is it likely that Mussolini could have accepted the humiliation of compromise peace with the Greeks on Albanian soil. The Foreign Office suggested a Treaty between Britain and Greece binding the parties not to make a separate peace, but commented that even such a Treaty "cannot be counted upon to prevail in the face of an overwhelming defeat (C.f. case of France last June)." Herein they under-rated the Greeks.

D/AOC/2 Enc.16A.

BAFG/202/Plans.  
Enc. 9A. 15.1.41.

F.O. To Sir Michael  
Palairot No.1167  
21.12.40. and No.136  
18.1.41.

The Attack on Valona.

The Greeks had by now little doubt that they would, in the end, be attacked by the Germans, but their hope was that they would be able to bring the Italian campaign to an end before the German attack. Valona was the Italian base for their forces both in northern and southern Albania, and the Greek object in the first months of the year was to capture that port. In order to assist them in this task the Greeks asked for the abandonment of the R.A.F.'s policy of bombing ports and lines of communication, and for the use of the bomber force in support of the attack. To this Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac agreed, if a little against his better judgment. A part of the bomber force and a fighter wing was formed into a new wing and moved up from their distant airfields to the rear of the battlefront. The policy of co-operation was carried out, met with success, and won great gratitude from the Greeks, though there were some who then complained of the relative immunity of Valona and Durazzo. Though they could not assist in the attack on Kelcyre on January 8, on the 10th Blenheims attacked troops on the Kelcyre-Berat road. They also attacked Berat, Elbasan and Dukaj. Operation Instruction No.1 to No.80 Squadron of January 28 laid down the new policy. "The role of No.80 Squadron with effect from today", it said, "is to be the protection of advanced elements of the Greek Army from Italian air attack. You are to act as the A.O.C's. representative and are to maintain the closest touch with the C.-in-C. Greek Forces with a view to ascertaining his needs and obtaining the necessary information to carry out your role. You are to meet these needs in so far as the strength and condition of your squadron permits you, but you are not to hazard it unduly. To this end low flying attacks are not to be undertaken without prior

/authority from

BFG/115/Ops.  
Enc.1A.

authority from this Headquarters. You are not to operate detachments so small in number that a risk of serious casualties from enemy air action is likely to result. For your guidance, the normal number of aircraft on offensive patrol or reconnaissance should be 15 and is not to be less than 12 unless special circumstances apply and warrant this reduction."

Battle-line Bombing.

Thus also in Operation Instruction No.3 of February 7 to No.211 Squadron. "You are proceeding with 6 Blenheims to Paramythia 9 February and should be established for operations against the enemy by dawn 10 February. On arrival Paramythia you are to immediately establish communication with the Greek General Staff with whom you are to co-operate so as to give close support to the Greek Army in their operations. Your efforts are to give every assistance in concord with General Staff wishes provided this does not ever in any way disagree with your own judgment regarding the good sense of the projected operation. Moreover, you are authorised to act independently against strategical targets of your own selection if these fit in with the general policy."

BFG/115/Ops.  
Enc.4A.

The Death of Metaxas: M. Corizis.

On January 29 General Metaxas died. An interesting sidelight on the Greek attitude towards R.A.F. help is shown by the following extract from a letter to Air Chief Marshal Longmore from Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac, written on February 1, the day after the Air Vice Marshal had had his first interview with M. Corizis, the new President of the Council, who succeeded Metaxas.

/ "Although

"Although the King welcomed Grigson (the head of the new Air Mission to the Greek Government) quite sincerely and pointed out some of the more obvious difficulties he would have to contend with, I thought the President's reception was a trifle lukewarm in spite of the fact that I made it quite clear that all we were out to do was to help. Afterwards, I introduced him to the Air Minister who appeared still more unenthusiastic. I am convinced this state of affairs would not have been allowed had Metaxas still been at the helm.

In the evening the President sent for me again and we had a long talk on air matters. I then discerned that he was woefully weak on air knowledge. He started in by complaining bitterly that the Greek troops were being attacked continually by low-flying Italian aircraft, and would I press for immediate reinforcement of aircraft to be supplied either to my force or to the Greeks? He reiterated the extreme importance to Greece and to ourselves of an early and successful campaign in Albania and seemed to imply that we were holding this up by not sending more aircraft. He also inquired as to the whereabouts of the American aircraft that had been promised and had not yet materialised. I had to point out all the difficulties we were up against and how impossible it was at the present time to maintain any degree of air superiority over that part in face of the limitations imposed on us by nature and climate. I emphasised the fact that, until more aerodromes were prepared, few more aircraft could be operated and I stressed the urgency of the work proceeding. I described what we had already done in spite of extreme operational difficulties and also what we hoped to do in future. I also took advantage of the occasion to rub in the value of the Mission. I

/tried to

I tried to convince him that all my efforts were directed to helping them in their struggle and both I and my staff were constantly working out how best we could serve them with the limited force we could operate. He was most complimentary on this but still seemed to have the idea that there was an inexhaustible supply of aircraft in the Middle East simply waiting to be released. As regards the American aircraft, I could not help him much but I told him of the unavoidable delays in shipping, etc., matters which were out of our hands. I came away from our meeting rather exhausted, with my first impressions of the P. of C. confirmed except that I had possibly rather overrated his intelligence."

BFG/AOC/4 Enc. 2a.

With better weather between February 11th and 18th, 108 sorties were made by Blenheims in support of the Greeks who were attacking Tepelene. 50 sorties were made on February 13th/14th. "General Papagos expressed Greek Armies' great appreciation for R.A.F. strong support February 13th which enabled Greek Armies to reach objective."

Opsum No.151 16.2.41.

The Hurricane Reinforcement.

Particular enthusiasm was aroused by six Hurricanes which arrived as reinforcements during February, having been brought out to Takoradi on H.M.S. Furious and flown thence. Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac had asked for Hurricanes in November but Air Chief Marshal Longmore had replied - "I cannot spare Hurricanes ....

Opsum No.161 18.11.40. Our experience to date has clearly demonstrated that Gladiator is superior to Hurricane for dealing with Italian fighters and are able to operate from aerodromes where Hurricanes cannot. Gladiator is there-

/fore superior

fore superior as front line fighter<sup>(10)</sup>. But this was not the general operational experience. "Pilots take poor view of holding Me.110's with Gladiators - odds rather in lap of the gods. If any Gladiator left, next appearance no doubt in British Museum" runs an entry in 112's Squadron Log. Air Chief Marshal Longmore warned Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac from his own experience to be prepared for Italian air attacks after the military retreat, but the older Gladiators could not alone contend with the more modern aircraft which the Italians had now sent to Albania. The Hurricanes on their first sortie on February 10, however, claimed four enemy aircraft, and on February 28, in conjunction with a formation of Gladiators, claimed 27 without any loss to themselves. This victory aroused such enthusiasm among the Greeks that the O.C. commanding West Wing (Wing Commander Coote) was able to report that "Civilians and soldiers passing us in the streets made the Sign of the Cross saying 'Long life to you. Thank the the Almighty who sent you to us'." Between February 20 and March 3 the West Wing had the remarkable record of 62 claims confirmed and 13 unconfirmed, against a loss of 3 with one pilot safe. Between February 19 and March 4 90 Blenheim sorties were made against Italian troop concentrations. In the week week ending March 3, 33 Italian fighters were claimed as destroyed and 8 probably destroyed, against a loss to us of one Gladiator destroyed with the pilot safe, and two other fighters damaged.

/Italian Counter-

Corres- (10) Air Chief Marshal Freeman on February 16, recalling this, wrote  
pondence to Air Marshal Tedder - "It is funny to think that Longmore not long  
between ago was saying he did not want Hurricanes as the Gladiators were far  
A.O.C.- more efficient." But it is only fair to remember that the Gladiator  
in-C. had proved itself a very effective opponent of the CR.42, against  
and which it had an advantage of speed and also that, until it had been  
V.C.A.S. tried out in Libya, the Hurricane was still something of an unknown  
2A. quantity. The Gladiator had also the great advantage for Epirus that  
it required only small landing-space.

S.124/1/Ops.  
Enc. 7.3.41.



Italian Counter-Attack.

Yet the bad weather came down again and prevented the Greeks from getting to Valona, and an Italian counter-attack in March on the line Tepelene-Corovode, though held, marked the limit of the Greek advance. Italian air activity during that attack was "phenomenal, suspect presence of Mussolini". It was subsequently discovered that he had been in Albania but would not officially reveal his presence until he had seen whether the attack was successful. In support of the Greek resistance to that offensive our Blenheims, between March 9th and 14th, flew 43 sorties against objectives in the Buzi-Gilave area, the Hurricanes flew 15 and Gladiators 122. But the activity, to be frank, did not arouse enthusiasm.

S.124/1/Ops. Enc.34A  
11.3.41.

S.124/1/Ops. Enc.33A

S.124/1/Ops. Enc.37A  
14.3.41.

"Squadrons likely become bored continually Tepelene area", West Wing signalled to the A.O.C. on March 10. West Wing reported to the A.O.C. "Italians using much improved tactics patrolling 25,000 feet. Previous battles advantage in height ours. Consider present fighting force no longer sufficient to attempt such shock tactics over front. Intend trying diversion Valona-Berat unless additional fighters attached." Altogether, we claimed 44 enemy aircraft destroyed or probably destroyed, against a loss of 2 Gladiators and 1 Hurricane, the pilots of which were safe. During the same period, Wellingtons made 4 sorties Blenheims 30 against shipping at Valona. Wellingtons also twice attacked Brindisi, and fighter Blenheims machine-gunned aircraft at the aerodrome at Lecce in Southern Italy. Up to the end of March our fighters claimed 93 enemy aircraft destroyed and 26 probably destroyed, against a fighter

/loss of 4

loss of 4 Hurricanes and 4 Gladiators, 6 of the pilots of which escaped.

Strategic Bombing.

After the 14th, British authorities under instructions from London determined to return to the tactics of bombing Italian airfields and ports. "Scale of enemy air opposition in Albania suggests whole effort of Italian air concentrated there. German undertaking all other Axis commitments. In circumstances, intend heavy attack on all Albanian aerodromes. Am sending up to 8 Wellingtons and 5 Blenheim fighters March 15th for night attacks. They will bring their orders. You are to take on Berat by day escorted by fighters, and suggest you use any information we are able to supply to catch enemy aircraft on ground after their return from an operation. During this phase of direct action against enemy air force you are to restrict close support over Greek front by both bombers and fighters to absolute minimum and you are to explain to Greek Staff that, in their own interests, it is essential until enemy air activity is reduced to normal proportions", signalled Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac. "The primary targets for even Blenheims in Greece should be Valona and Durazzo, whenever these can be reached", ruled the Chiefs of Staff. It was by no means easy to win Greek consent to this reversion to the old tactics. O.C. West Wing report of March 17th records - "Unfortunately officers of the Army Headquarters at Jannina have contrary views. They contrast these constant and of longer duration enemy raids with our two outings per day and numerous are the S.O.S's which reach this Headquarters for not only more fighter patrols but also for more frequent bombings of targets such as gun positions and front line enemy troop positions. In vain have we very diplomatically pointed out that the bombing

Op. Instr. No. 14  
to West Wing,  
14.3.41.

BAFG/101/Ops.  
Enc. 15A, 27.2.41.

of such targets is of no advantage, stating as example results of enemy air action. In vain have we tried to explain to them the proper employment of an air force and the disparity between our strength and that of the enemy. At the end we gained our point, but the same discussion started all over again on the morrow. Nevertheless, jokingly, we again pressed our point of view and always parted at the Greek Headquarters in a most friendly and cordial atmosphere. Members of the Wing Headquarters after the war will be really very well trained for diplomatic missions." Someone has written in pencil in the margin of the Despatch - "So will we".

S.124/1/Ops.  
Enc. 17.3.41.

German Concentration in the Balkans.

By the beginning of March the Italian forces in Albania had been built up to 29 divisions. The Germans had by then completed their occupation of Rumania. The German occupation of Rumania had a triple effect. Not only did it create a new strategical situation in the Balkans, not only did it put into German hands a new source of oil supply, but it also cut off from the other Balkan countries - Yugoslavia<sup>(11)</sup>, Turkey, and, to a lesser extent, Greece - the main source of such meagre oil supplies as they possessed. It rendered their forces immobile. Anglo-Yugoslav relations, in particular, fell into an impasse. The Yugoslavs argued that they could not do anything unless they had some oil. The British argued that they could not spare any oil until they had some guarantee that the Yugoslavs would do something.

/The Germans

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(11) The aviation petrol which the Yugoslavs did not actually import from Rumania in pre-war days they bought in the form of special crude oil which was made up for them in Rumania. They were, therefore, entirely dependent on Rumanian supplies.

The Germans were now infiltrating into Bulgaria.

Before the Italian attack on Greece the Bulgarian Government had been loud in its protestations that nothing would induce it to take a mean advantage of such an opportunity should it be presented to them. "The Bulgarian Minister stated in conversation at the Foreign Office on 21st

F.O. to Sir  
Michael Palairret  
No.536 23.8.40.

instant that he was sure that Bulgaria would in no circumstances profit by an attack by Italy on Greece in order to satisfy her claim to an outlet on the Aegean." But it would have been too much to have expected her to display such abnegation in the face of the actual temptation, and the Germans with their promises had, on the whole, been welcomed in Bulgaria. A German aircraft had force-landed at Kavalla on March 2nd and the crew had been captured.

Other aircraft of unknown nationality had flown on re-

Opsum 268 4.3.41. connaissance over Thrace on that day and again on March 7th,  
Opsum 272 9.3.41. flying from Kara Boulak. On March 8th these aircraft flew  
Opsum 274 11.3.41. as far as Mount Olympus. Thenceforward such activity was  
Opsums 281, 282 continuous until the German declaration of war, and by the  
18.3.41. middle of the month extended as far south as Athens and the Piraeus.

#### Our Counter-Reconnaissance.

The fact that the Greeks would not allow us to use the Salonika airfields and that we respected Bulgarian neutrality even after the German occupation of that country, prevented us from any effective counter-reconnaissance.

Yet we were not, in fact, absolutely obedient to Greek wishes. On April 2nd H.Q., R.A.F., Middle East signal-

BFG/AOC/6 Enc.13A led H.Q., B.F., Greece "Consider desirable carry out some air photography important points Greco-Bulgarian frontier. Presumably Greece unwilling allow us do this but have now got available long-range photographic Hurricane. My suggestion is that without asking Greece's

/consent I

consent I should despatch aircraft to Larissa for temporary attachment 33 Squadron where try and carry out high altitude photographs Blitza or other points you consider desirable."

BFG/AOC/6 Enc.16A

Group Captain Willetts, S.A.S.O., B.F., Greece replied on April 3rd - "Would welcome photographic Hurricane which can do most urgent and important work as you suggest. Have done considerable amount of photography Macedonia and Thrace but feel need of crossing frontier. Agree this could be done surreptitiously without necessarily informing Greeks". On April 6th the Germans invaded.

Attitude before German Menace.

Before the German menace there was not the national unity that there was in face of the Italians; O.C. West Wing reported cases of sabotage from Western Greece and that "quite a number of people suffering from Germonophobia are spreading defeatist views. These views are not stated openly but in a rather suggestive manner." The Port Commander at Sarande, a former Naval Attache in Berlin, and a Cavalry Staff Major were sent back to Athens for such activities. The Chiefs in command of the Central and Southern sectors of the front were placed on the retired list for suggesting that German demands should be considered before rejection. On the other hand, allegedly pro-German officials were appointed to important positions in Northern Greece - General Rangabe to be Military Governor at Salonika and M. Kodzias to be Governor of Thrace. The King pleaded that these officials had asked for an opportunity to prove that they were not pro-German. It seemed an odd moment and odd positions for such an experiment. After M. Corizis's

S.124/1/Ops. Enc.55A  
24.3.41.

/suicide even

suicide M. Kodzias was even President of the Council for twenty four hours.

The Greek Government, recognising that there was no escape in any event, was now willing to receive a British Expeditionary Force. The military plans were, however, in great confusion. In the middle of January General Wavell had visited Greece to offer the help of a British Expeditionary Force, but the offer was then still declined. But, on January 29th General Metaxas died and his successor (M. Corizis) sent, on February 8th, a request to know what British forces would be available against a German attack on Greece. On February 22nd a meeting took place at Tatou Palace between Mr. Eden, General Wavell, General Dill, Air Chief Marshal Longmore and the Greek authorities.

Mr. Eden's Report.

Mr. Eden had reported the previous day to the Prime Minister - "Gravest anxiety is not in respect of army but of air. There is no doubt that need to fight a German Air Force instead of Italian is creating a new problem for Longmore. My own impression is that all his squadrons here are not quite up to standard of their counterpart at home. Having been very hardly worked in chasing Italians these last months some of them are tired and the supply of modern aircraft still leaves much to be desired. Many good (troop)ers are still mounted on wretched horses. We should all have liked to approach Greece tomorrow with a suggestion that we should join with them in holding a line to defend Salonica but both Longmore and Cunningham are convinced that our present resources will not allow us to do this. As regards general prospects of a Greek campaign it is of course a gamble to send forces to the mainland of Europe to fight Germans at this time. No

/one can give

Mr. Eden to Prime  
Minister, 21.2.41.

one can give a guarantee of success .... We are not without hope that it might succeed to the extent of halting the Germans before they overrun all Greece."

"We are agreed we should do everything in our power to bring the fullest measure of help to Greeks at earliest possible moment. If the help we can offer is accepted by the Greeks we believe there is a fair chance of halting a German advance and preventing Greece from being overrun. Limitations however of our resources especially in the air will not allow of help being given to Turkey at the same time if Greece is to be supported on an effective scale. Longmore has kept the Chief of Air Staff informed of dispositions of his forces. Attacks by German aircraft on Benghazi and his other (? gp omitted) in East Africa leave him with much smaller margin of modern aircraft suitable to meet Germans than we had estimated .... Squadrons now supporting Greeks have been increased to seven. In addition one bomber squadron this month to be followed by two bomber squadrons and one army co-operation squadron (Hurricane and Lysanders) which will be made available by the end of March. He also hopes to form two fighter squadrons during March but this must depend on supply of equipment and ammunition for Tomahawks of which date of arrival here is unknown. Moreover Tomahawks as yet untried in warfare. Three Wellington squadrons would also be available for long distance night bombing as required from aerodromes suitable for their occupation. These dispositions leave no margin whatever for any air help to Turkey from resources at present available or in sight in the Middle East. Moreover present limited air forces available make it doubtful whether we can hold

/a line covering

a line covering Salonica which General Wavell is prepared to contemplate. Commander-in-Chief of Mediterranean considers that we can supply the necessary protection at sea to enable Salonica to be used as base but emphasises that to do this he will need air protection which we fear would prove an insuperable difficulty .... General Wavell has the following forces available for Greece in immediate and the near future. Firstly one armoured brigade and a New Zealand division (now raised to three infantry brigades) ready to sail, to be followed by Polish brigade, an Australian division, a second armoured brigade, an Australian division, a second armoured brigade (if required) and a second Australian division in that order ....

My own conclusion which C.I.G.S. and Commanders-in-Chief share is that in the immediate future assistance to the Greeks who are fighting and are threatened must have first call on resources."

Mr. Eden to  
Prime Minister  
21.2.41.

The Meeting of the Commanders-in-Chief.

At that meeting General Wavell asked General Papagos (the Greek Commander-in-Chief) what were the Greek strategical plans against invasion. General Papagos answered that with large forces involved against the Italians in Albania and with Yugoslav support still uncertain the Greeks would not be strong enough to hold their Macedonian territory. Their plan was to withdraw and attempt to stand on the Aliakmon line in front of Mount Olympus. The British representatives accepted this plan and Mr. Eden and Sir John Dill left Greece for Turkey.

The Athens Conference.

At the beginning of March the British representatives returned from Turkey to Athens. Arriving there, they found to their dismay that General Papagos had now changed his plan. Instead of withdrawing from Macedonia he was

/now proposing



now proposing to hold it and demanded that the British troops land at Salonika in order to assist in its defence. General Wavell and the British authorities objected. Mr. Churchill, when the change was reported to him, in view of the new plan, the worsening of Greek morale and the fact that the Suez Canal was at that moment temporarily closed, even spoke of "liberating the Greeks from feeling bound to reject German ultimatum ..

P.M. to Mr. Eden  
5.3.41.

... We do not see any reasons for expecting success."

This was to Sir M. Palairat 'unthinkable'. "We shall be pilloried by the Greeks and the world in general as going back on our word. There is no question of

F.O. No.327 6.3.41.

liberating Greeks from feeling bound to reject ultimatum.

They have decided to fight Germany alone if necessary."

"Chief of Imperial General Staff and I in consultation with three Commanders-in-Chief ..... are unanimously agreed that, despite the heavy commitments and grave risks which are undoubtedly involved, especially in view of our limited naval and air resources, the right decision was taken" "Palairat's telegrams .... show

F.O. No.455 6.3.41.

the position from the Greek angle", wrote Mr. Eden to the Prime Minister. A not very satisfactory compromise plan was therefore adopted. Three Greek divisions were to remain in Macedonia and attempt to hold there. Three more divisions and seven independent battalions were to concentrate on the Aliakmon line, which they were to hold until the arrival of the British contingent which was to be disembarked at the Piraeus and Volos. The seven independent battalions were to come from Western

Sir M. Palairat to  
Foreign Office,  
5.3.41.

Thrace, whose defence, it was hoped, would be taken over by the Turks, but on the 12th March the Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs told Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugesson that the Turkish answers about going into  
/Thrace

Foreign Office  
No. 520

Thrace "would be negative".

The Landing of British Troops.

The landing of British troops during March proceeded with little air interference, Germany not yet being at war with Greece. The Germans thought it more important that their diplomats should observe what was landed. The German Minister, Prince Ehrbach-Schonburg, a master of perfect English, strolled through the streets of Athens and took every opportunity of conversing pleasantly with British troops, and on one occasion even got himself invited to an Officers' Mess. The French Minister was suspected of seconding his efforts.

The new plan was agreed upon at a conference that went on from March 2nd to 5th. At the session of March 4th, Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac suggested that we should anticipate the German concentrations by a Wellington attack on Sofia on March 9th, "Greek authorities has asked us to refrain from bombing operations on Rumania and Bulgaria from Greek bases until a state of war existed between Germany and Greece. We are inclined to think that to take initiative in bombing German lines of communication from Danube to Greco-Bulgo frontier might be advantageous to us during period of concentrations, even though Germans retaliated on our ports of disembarkation as soon as they were in a position to do so. It seems likely that Germans have not initiated bombing, either because they are not ready, or else because they think they would lose more than they would gain by the exchange. Initiative by us is therefore likely to upset their calculations and plans. We could not, of course, initiate bombing without the willing consent of Greeks, nor could we ask for this unless we were satisfied that weather and strength of our bombing force available would enable effective

/attacks to be

COS. Signals 66

attacks to be maintained," but the Greeks would not hear of that. On March 27th, the situation was changed by a coup d'etat in Yugoslavia which put into power there a Government which would certainly declare war if the Germans attempted to march through Yugoslav territory. This aroused in the volatile Greeks a mood of what proved to be most excessive optimism, and in a conference held the next day between the Secretary of State and the Greek Leaders, General Papagos talked with confidence of a joint Greco-Turkish-Yugoslav thrust to uphold a line from the Black Sea to the Adriatic, and of Yugoslav assistance to help the Greeks in liquidation of the Albanian war.

AOC/BAFG/1 Enc.7A

The Florina Conference.

At a conference at Florina on April 3rd between General Papagos and General Sir Maitland Wilson, the British Commander, General Jankovitch, newly appointed Yugoslav Director of Military Operations and Intelligence, showed that the Yugoslavs were quite unprepared and that there was no prospect of their immediate resistance being in the least effective. We took the line that we could not "base unit in Yugoslavia unless military situation was secure" - which, of course, it was not. The most that we were able to contemplate was "to operate from an advanced landing ground in Jugoslavia on account of the political value." Even that, of course, did not prove possible. The talks were, as Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac reported, "from purely air point of view, rather fruitless .... Yugoslav delegates pressed for maximum air assistance everywhere but were not in a

BFG/AOC/4 Enc.54A

/position to

position to discuss details (12)."

Cape Matapan.

On March 28th, all the bombers in Greece had co-operated with the Navy in the battle of Cape Matapan, and the Blenheims, acting on Sunderland reconnaissance reports, had made five attacks, comprising 24 sorties, on enemy warships, claiming direct hits on 2 cruisers and 1 destroyer.

Air Forces At the Time of the German Invasion.

Everything had now to be subordinated to preparations for the coming of the Expeditionary Force. Work on new airfields etc. had to be suspended, but as the weather was now dry this did not very much matter. Although reinforcements were not arriving as rapidly as had been promised, although all the squadrons were much below strength owing to casualties and the re-equipment of the fighter squadron of Hurricanes was delayed, yet the coming of the Expeditionary Force clearly threw a new task on to the shoulders of the small R.A.F. In addition to supporting the Greeks in Albania, it now had to be ready both to cover the British troops at their ports of disembarkation and also to support them in position. It had also to assist the heavy night bombers in Egypt in the control of enemy activity against British shipping in the Aegean and minelaying in the Suez Canal from the Dodecanese. The Dodecanese had already been attacked in March both from Egypt and from Greece.

There were in Greece at the end of March -

3 medium bomber squadrons (2 Blenheim Is and 1 Blenheim IV) with another Blenheim IV squadron expected. (It, in fact, arrived in time to take part in the campaign).

/3 fighter

- (12) It is a curious commentary on the state of Yugoslav information that when Sir John Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, paid a secret visit to Belgrade on March 31st, the secret was so well kept that the Yugoslavs, even after the conference in which they explained to him the whole of their military plans, had no idea to whom they had been talking, imagining him to have been a Commander representing G.O.C. British Forces in Greece."

3 fighter squadrons and 2 half-squadrons  
(1½ Gladiators, 1½ Hurricanes and 1 Blenheim).

1 Army Co-operation Squadron and a Communications Unit Lysander Squadron were also expected. The Lysanders, in fact, arrived.

This made a total of some 80 serviceable aircraft, or 200 including reserves, to oppose 800 German aircraft on the Eastern front, 160 Italian aircraft in Albania and 150 aircraft based in Italy to operate over Greece and Albania. Of these enemy aircraft over 40 per cent were fighters, under 40 per cent bombers and dive-bombers and the remainder reconnaissance aircraft. About half of our aircraft were bombers<sup>(13)</sup>.

Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac proposed that one bomber (Blenheim No.211) and one fighter (Gladiator, No.112) squadron be allocated to the Albanian front to form what was called the Western Wing with Headquarters at Janina.

The priority of defence for other targets he rated as follows:-

- (1) Port of Pireaus and Athens base area.
- (2) Port of Volos and base area.
- (3) Larissa base area.
- (4) Lines of communication to Macedonian and Albanian fronts.
- (5) Preveza.
- (6) Janina.

To defend the Pireaus, one fighter squadron (No.80 Gladiator, re-armed with Hurricanes) was to be stationed at Eleusis. There were also in the Athens area

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(13) <sup>/detachments of</sup>  
Air Chief Marshal Longmore, Despatch 2, Section 44.  
Memorandum of the Employment of the R.A.F. Units in Greece.  
gives somewhat different figures. "At the beginning of their campaign the Germans had about a thousand planes of various types. About a third were fighters, nearly a fifth dive-bombers. Against this we had about 150 acroplanes of various types ..... The German main Air Force was supplemented by German and Italian Air Forces operating from Sicily and the Dodecanese."

AOC/9  
Enc.88A.

detachments of Nos. 37 and 38 Wellington bomber squadrons, and No. 89 (Blenheim) bomber squadron was also stationed at Menidi.

To defend Volos and Larissa one fighter squadron (No. 33 Hurricanes) was to be stationed at Larissa. There was to be no specific allotment to defend the lines of communication to Macedonia.

Preveza was to be covered by an occasional long-distance fighter patrol from either Eleusis or Araxos. All these units were to be under the direct command of H.Q., R.A.F., Greece. Janina was to be defended by the fighter squadron allocated to the Albanian front.

This left two bomber squadrons (Nos. 11 and 113 Blenheims) and no fighter squadron for allocation to the Macedonian, or as it was soon to become the Aliakmon front, with the hope of a reinforcement of one bomber and one fighter squadron. This was to be called the Eastern Wing.

A serious earthquake on March 1st had severely damaged the airfields at Kazaklar and Trikkala, and work in hand at Nea Aghialos was not yet completed. The weather was improving and the ground drying at the time of the German invasion, but after the recent rains landing grounds which would have been serviceable a week later were not serviceable yet. This left only two airfields in that area immediately available for Blenheims or Hurricanes, Larissa itself and Almyros on the Gulf of Pagasai to the southwest of Volos. Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac proposed that the two Blenheim Bomber Squadrons be stationed at Almyros and the two Hurricane Fighter Squadrons (if and when the second squadron arrived) be stationed at Larissa. If an Army Co-operation Squadron arrived and if reconnaissance should show the airfield to be usable, it was proposed that it should be stationed further north  
/at Kasani.

at Kasani<sup>(14)</sup>. At Larissa the cover was well dispersed, with hangars at the opposite end of the aerodrome.

There was a satellite seven miles to the west where the Hurricane Squadron was based as proposed, but it was found that the Greek Air Force was already in occupation of Almyros and, therefore, there was only room for one bomber squadron there. The other had temporarily to be accommodated at Larissa and then moved to Niamata, an unhealthy spot owing to a malarial lake but the only other aerodrome available. It was an additional disadvantage at Niamata that there was no room for dispersion of aircraft.

#### Aircraft Roles.

As the force was so scanty Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac insisted strongly on the necessity for conservation of our resources, and laid down the following general guidance on the functions of the aircraft:-

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| (a) Strategical reconnaissance. | Blenheim IV's operating singly by day at maximum height. |
| (b) Close reconnaissance.       | Army Co-operation aircraft.                              |
| (c) Strategical bombing.        | Wellingtons and Blenheims at night.                      |
| (d) Close bombing.              | Blenheims by day escorted by fighters.                   |
| (e) Fighter policy.             | Offensive patrols, escorts, defence of vital areas.      |

In addition to the R.A.F. forces six Swordfish of the Fleet Air Arm reached Greece on March 11th and were stationed at Paramythia, whence they attacked both

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(14) With the Greeks at once falling back on the Aliakmon line it was, in fact, stationed at Kazaklar, but, as it hardly ever had more than one Hurricane available and as it was not possible to use its Lysanders in face of German opposition, it was not able to accomplish very much. Reconnaissance tasks had to be carried out by fighters.

Valona and Durazzo and sank several ships, scoring five direct and two probable torpedo hits on shipping.

Headquarters Locations: Communication Difficulties.

It had been proposed to establish an R.A.F. Wing Headquarters on the Eastern front within a reasonable distance of the general Force H.Q. but not in the same place. But, when the full establishment of the Wing Headquarters had not arrived by the beginning of the campaign, it was thought best to establish the Wing Headquarters in the Force Commander's mess. The first of these joint Headquarters was established at Ellasson, about 25 miles northwest of Larissa. As a result, there was throughout the campaign the most close and cordial co-operation between the Wing Commander and the Force Commander and his B.G.S.

There was from the first great difficulty about telephone communications between Ellasson and the squadrons. It was not found possible to provide direct lines between H.Q. and the aerodromes. There was a direct line to Larissa but there was found to be the greatest difficulty in using it. The Force line was used wherever possible, and, in order to give orders to Niamata or Almyros, they had to be telephoned in code to Larissa and then telephoned on. Communications between Larissa and Almyros were particularly bad owing to the fact that the Air Defence Centre used the same line for reporting enemy aircraft. Priority calls took as much as five to six hours, and eventually it was necessary to use the squadron at Almyros only for such direct support targets as could be arranged some hours beforehand. The Greeks had an Observer System for spotting enemy aircraft and this system worked quite well during the early days of the campaign, messages being sent through to a fighter operations room established at Larissa, but, when the

/troops withdrew,



troops withdrew, the observers withdrew with them  
and the system of course collapsed.

THE GERMAN ATTACK

BFG/AOC/4 Enc.50A  
2.4.41.

On April 2nd the Greek Government had agreed that should there be a German attack on Yugoslavia, the R.A.F. might operate from Greek aerodromes against any target. Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac always had a certain hankering for an attack on the Rumanian oil wells and the authorities seem to have agreed on the desirability of such raids but had postponed them till the moon period of April. My opinion earliest date for sustained raids would be April moon period, by which time advance British Force disembarked and reasonably

AOC/9 Enc. 32A

established. March moon period will coincide disembarkation British troops and would probably result in a German air attack", signalled the Chief of the Air Staff on February 28, but by the April moon the R.A.F. in Greece were to be otherwise engaged and there were to be obstacles more potent than those of Greek reluctance to the use of the Salonika airfields.

The Opening of the Attack.

As has been said, the German attack began on April 6th<sup>(15)</sup>. Air reports showed an attack on the Rupel Pass and Mt. Beles and mechanical transport on the road for Petrich. Fighters were sent to attack the enemy at the Rupel Pass. 12 Hurricanes of No.33 Squadron met 20<sup>(16)</sup> Me.109s and shot down 5 without loss. As a result of this, the Squadron Commander agreed for the future to allow his Hurricanes to

/operate in

(15) That is to say, the military attack proper. The first German attack on Greek territory, as opposed to reconnaissance flights, was an attack by Ju.88s and Messerschmitts on Corfu on April 4th.

(16) So Combat Reports and Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac's Despatch, Section 39. Longmore, Part II, Section 91, says '30'.

operate in formations of six instead of in twelve's. That night (6th/7th) Sofia, Gorna Djumaya, Simitli and Petrich were bombed by Wellingtons and Blenheims from Athens and the Larissa Plain, with good results. The next day (the 7th) no reconnaissance was possible because of the weather. The most important of the enemy's roads at that moment was the Strumitsa road, as all transport had to pass along it both for Salonika, for the attack on the Aliakhmon line, and for the attack on Yugoslavia. Therefore, in spite of the bad weather, Blenheims of Nos. 11, 84 and 113 Squadrons got through and bombed transport on this road on both the 7th and the 8th. They also bombed Petrich in Bulgaria and Axiopolis and Polykastron in Macedonia. On the 7th the Hurricanes destroyed a Dornier. The Greeks, cut off in the Rupel Pass, sent back an appeal for air support, but it was not thought possible with such limited resources to dissipate forces in the assistance of a cause that was already lost. Salonika fell on April 8th.

The Yugoslav Collapse.

By the 9th, it was evident that the Germans were pouring through Strumitsa, not only against Salonika but, in even greater numbers, against the Monastir Gap. The Greek G.H.Q. on April 6th issued an appeal for a strong Yugoslav counter-attack to take place on the flank of the German attack, if possible towards the Strumitsa valley in order to relieve our forces fighting south of Beles in the Struma Valley. But no such attack was forthcoming. The Yugoslavs were ill-prepared for war, even in comparison with other countries. On April 7th they issued an absurd panic appeal for 'air assistance to the extent of at least 800 aircraft'. In November, Prince Paul had told our Minister in Belgrade, that they only possessed

AOC/BAFG/1  
Enc. 10A

Operations Record Book  
with other countries. On April 7th they issued an absurd panic appeal for 'air assistance to the extent of at least 800 aircraft'. In November, Prince Paul had told our Minister in Belgrade, that they only possessed

/aviation spirit

A.M. File S.6759  
Enc. 2A.

AOC/BAF/1 Enc. 9A  
30.3.41.

aviation spirit for a fortnight's warfare<sup>(17)</sup>. The British and Greek military authorities had made a great mistake in encouraging them to detach four Divisions that they could ill spare for an entirely useless invasion of Albania and, as a result, they had nothing effective left with which to meet the Germans in their own country. The Yugoslav forces were stretched out in a long marching line along the roads - 150 miles of infantry-men and horses and ox-drawn vehicles. The Germans had only to swoop down, dive-bomb and machine-gun the virtually defenceless troops and the Army was at an end. They sent through our Minister in Belgrade on April 9 an appeal to Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac that the Germans were now emerging from Karanik Gorge and that there was a great opportunity to bomb them.

Opsum 304 10.4.41.

"They had not yet emerged (?) from the Gorge and there is at least chance to bomb them before they do so.

Yugoslavs most urgently pressing something to be attempted as situation most critical." 6 Blenheims of No.84 Squadron took off on the attempt, but had to turn back owing to complete absence of visibility.

Ibid.

Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac could only reply - "I realise fully the urgent need for bombing support for Yugoslavia and am doing all in my power to meet it. Have already made attempt to get my bombers through but low clouds, rain, and mist over area concerned for last 72 hours have made it quite impossible."

/The next day

AM.file  
S.6759  
Enc.21A

- (17) It is true that on March 11th the Yugoslav Air Staff told our Air Attache in Belgrade that "The Air Force has plenty of petrol for a (very early) war and did not deny the figure of 20,000 tons suggested to him by me. The real figure is therefore likely to be greater." But there is little reason to think that this was true although, obviously, it was never possible to check the proper figure as whatever they possessed was so rapidly captured by the Germans.

The next day (April 10th) he reported - "German advance westwards from Skoplje towards Florina continues rapidly and this morning recco reports enemy troops near Vevë ten miles east of Florina. Weather continues bad but is improving. Made several attempts to get bombers through yesterday but with no luck. Night operations also impossible. Have every hope of getting some attack in today."

Opsum 304  
10.4.41.

The Splitting of the Greek Forces.

The Germans were therefore meeting with virtually no resistance from the Yugoslavs, and it was clear that they would soon be able to come down south from Monastir through Florina and Kasani against the Aliakhmon position and entirely cut off the troops both in Albania and in Macedonia. There was no alternative but to withdraw completely to the Aliakhmon. Such a withdrawal brought Niamata close to the battle area. It was necessary to withdraw the ground party there and to use it only as an advance landing ground. In order to cause delay, Blenheims bombed enemy transport columns and concentrations on the road between Prilep and Monastir on the 10th, "causing great confusion and casualties", and in the Amyntaion area. On the night of 11th/12th Wellingtons attacked enemy positions at Prilep and Kilkis. Meanwhile, communications between the A.O.C. at Athens and the Wing and Force Commanders at Ellasson had almost broken down, and therefore an officer had to be sent forward to take command in the battle area.

Opsum 306  
12.4.41.

The Withdrawal to Thermopylae.

It became rapidly clear that even the Aliakhmon line could not be held and there must be a general withdrawal on Thermopylae. Therefore, all R.A.F. units in the Thessallian Plain had to be evacuated. Up to the 13th the weather had been bad and the Germans had hardly operated. Then the weather had improved, and became perfect for

/attack.

AOC/BAFG/1 Enc.11A  
14.4.41.

attack. The Germans brought forward their fighters to the Prilep and Monastir areas. The Yugoslavs by then officially described their situation as "desperate" and their Government as "leaving their country". Heavy air attacks were being made on our troops. Our Hurricanes replied with an attack on enemy transport at Ptolemais and many enemy aircraft were shot down. The enemy determined to take his revenge on our aircraft. On April 13th a complete formation of 6 Blenheims of 211 Squadron which was attempting to attack enemy transport on the road from Birol to Prilep was destroyed by Me.109s. On the 15th, short-range fighters shot up Niorata airfield and destroyed every aircraft of the Blenheim Squadron located there. At about the same time, Me.109s appeared over Larissa without warning and destroyed two Hurricanes while they were taking off. The third succeeded in taking off and destroyed an Me.109. On the night of 13th/14th 10 Wellingtons of 37 and 38 Squadrons attacked the railway goods yards at Sofia, and others bombed and machine-gunned M.T. convoys at Yannitsa and Gorna Djumaya. On the 14th/15th they broke the bridge over the Vardar<sup>(18)</sup> at Velos and Blenheims bombed enemy columns on the road from Ptolemais to Kozani. This last attack was repeated on the 15th/16th and during the following day.

The "Times" of April 19th published a message from an Australian correspondent, written on April 17th - "For two days I have been bombed, machine-gunned and shot at by all and sundry. German Stukas have blown

/two cars

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(18) The river which is called Vardar in Yugoslavia is the Axios in Greece.

two cars from under me and strafed a third .... all day and all night there have been waves of armies in the sky. 18 Messerschmitts strafed us on the road last evening. Bullets ripped the trucks and one was destroyed but nobody was hurt and nothing lost except the truck. Before that the convoy I was in was attacked seven times in two hours, but not once was the convoy disorganised or broken up. The Germans are using a fantastic amount of aircraft, more than ever I saw in Norway under similar conditions of terrain. Goering must have a third of his air force operating here and it is bombing every nook and cranny, hamlet, town and village in its path." The machine-gunning from the low-flying aircraft was more devastating than the bombing. "The last day or two I have talked to a number of the fellows back from Greece on the subject of low strafing, and I think the most striking thing is the effectiveness of machine-gun and cannon fire from low-flying aircraft, especially when compared with bombing", reported Air Marshal Tedder. The dive-bombers, a military report said, "did little damage against our retiring columns in Greece, although undisturbed by fighter attack". Air Marshal Tedder agreed. "The dive-bombers made craters alongside the roads and interrupted traffic owing to movement stopping whilst the attack was on but the number of vehicles hit was negligible." "If the Hun liked to go on with such an expensive and harmless amusement he was welcome to do it."

The Cause of Defeat.

With the breakdown of the Greek Observer system we were at a hopeless disadvantage, and even though bombing in a mountainous country such as Greece was not the same thing as bombing in a flat country such as Holland, yet withdrawal was the only alternative to annihilation. We had neither the technique nor the material to hold with-

/out air support

A.O.C.-in-C. to  
V.C.A.S. 14A.

A.O.C.-in-C. to  
V.C.A.S. 24A,  
18.5.41.

out air support as the Germans were able to do at a later date in Italy.

The reason the Aliakhmon line had to be abandoned even before it was attacked was that the Albanian front to the east of it had collapsed. Sound strategy demanded from the first a Greek withdrawal from Albania as soon as Germany declared war. The only hope of protecting Greece was to shorten the line and to establish contact with the British in their Aliakhmon position. General Papagos admitted the sound strategy of this but pleaded that it was politically impossible. The Greek calculation now was that they would, in any event, be immediately overwhelmed, but, looking to the future, they were most anxious to be able to say that they had been victorious against the Italians and were only defeated by the Germans. Therefore, they were determined not to abandon the territory conquered from the Italians until the Germans troops appeared there in the line against them. The highest British hope before the outbreak of the Greco-Italian war had been that "Italy must, if possible, be prevented from achieving a bloodless victory over Greece. If she is resolved to obtain control of Greece she ought to have to fight for it and not obtain it by bluff and empty threats." Of this British expectation the Greeks were doubtless well aware. It was their pride to have proved it false, and they were little comforted by a public message by the British Prime Minister reminding them how "the overwhelming numbers of the adversary availed nothing against the men of Thermopylae<sup>(19)</sup>, Marathon and Salamis."

/The Epirus

F.O. to Sir M.  
Palairat No. 544  
24.8.40.

F.O. to Sir M.  
Palairat No. 559.  
25.8.40.

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(19) The Greeks, doubtless recalled that "overwhelming numbers" in fact completely annihilated 'the men of Themopylae'.



The Epirus Surrender.

From April 6th onwards the Germans had been pouring through Yugoslavia in order to join hands with the Italians in Northern Albania and in order to establish themselves around Lake Ochrida on the Greek-Yugoslav-Albanian frontier. The Yugoslav southern Army capitulated on April 17, and the Germans were able to establish themselves on this frontier without any great difficulty. With no railways and only the most primitive of roads it was then too late for the Greek Army in Albania to withdraw from Epirus, cross the Pindus mountains, and join the British forces and the rest of the Greek Army. Although even then the Italians did not venture to attack, yet the Greek Commander at Yanina capitulated with all his Army to the Germans on April 21st. One of the conditions of the surrender was that the Italians should not be allowed to enter Greece, but the Germans, of course, broke this condition. The Germans were able simultaneously to seize the Greek Aegean Islands with sea-borne troops, whom the Turks allowed to pass unmolested from the Bulgarian Black Sea ports through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. Already on April 14th, General Papagos had, for the first time, suggested that the British forces should evacuate Greece altogether to save the country from further devastation. On April 15th Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac reported that he had "serviceable only 18 Blenheims, 16 Hurricanes and 12 Gladiators, apart from No.37 Squadron Wellingtons". "Even if army establish themselves on rear

line I see no possibility of providing them with adequate air support", he reported, "in view of scarcity of aerodromes behind the line. I consider the time has now come to implement plan for immediate evacuation at any rate of the Air Force in Greece." On April 17th the King told Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac that the internal situation was

/deteriorating.

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DO/AML/15 Enc.97A

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Enc.80A

Foreign Office  
No.358. 11.3.41.

deteriorating. "The capacity of King and Government to maintain the country and army at war against both Italy and Germany will largely depend on our capacity to meet German air attacks on troops and civilian population", Sir M. Palairret had prophesied. He was doubtless right but with such a force against 1,000 aircraft, what could one do? On April 19 the President of the Council, M. Corizis, shot himself.

The Withdrawal of the Western Wing.

Opsum 310 16.4.41.

A.O.C.-in-C. Daily  
Meetings with Staff  
Officers.(20.4.41.)

The immediate practical step was to retrieve the R.A.F. Western Wing with the Epirus Army, which consisted of one Blenheim and one Gladiator Squadron. This was accomplished in spite of the complication that the remains of the Yugoslave Air Force, "a miscellaneous number .... total complement 44", had then reached Paramythia airfield. Their planes had at once been rendered unserviceable by ground attack by some G.50s, and their personnel was now insisting upon fuel and food. Eventually 4 Yugoslav S.79s, 2 Do.17s and 3 Civil Lockheed Electras found their way to Heliopolis, and 10 seaplanes to Alexandria.

With the collapse of the Western Wing, Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac decided to abolish the Eastern Wing also and to take over control of all operations himself from Athens. An R.A.F. officer was left at Force Headquarters to act as liaison officer between Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac and the Army Commander and, later, when the command of the withdrawal was handed over to the Anzac Corps, between him and that Corps. The R.A.F. force continued to provide the Army with what reconnaissance and fighter protection it could.

/The Bombing

The Bombing Effort Against the Germans.

The bombing effort had already passed through three phases. During the first two days (April 6th and 7th) previously arranged targets in the Struma Valley<sup>(20)</sup>, from Sofia southwards had been attacked. During the second phase, targets in the Strumitsa Valley had been attacked with the hope of delaying the German advance against Salonika and southern Yugoslavia. During the third phase, the attacks were on transport on the roads leading from Skoplje, Veles and Prilep to the Monastir Gap, whence the attack on the British forces was to be launched. Stories told by German prisoners bear witness to the nuisance value of these attacks and, in particular, that of the night of the 14th/15th when our Wellingtons caused great confusion by breaking the bridge across the Vardar at Veles. Yet it cannot be pretended that, in general, they were able even to delay the German advance. During the fourth and final phase, our bombers were to be used to hold up the Germans while our troops were re-embarked. Between the 15th and the 22nd Blenheims attacked the airfields at Sedes, Katerina, Kozani and Larissa, also road bridges at Kozani, Grevena and Kalabaka.

German Air Attack.

The Army Co-operation squadron withdrew from Kazaklar to Pharsala and then to Amphiklia behind the Thermopylae line. A Greek Gladiator Squadron was also stationed here. The Germans who, at the beginning of the campaign had operated from the Bulgarian Plains of Plovdiv and Sofia, began using the Thesalian airfields within a few hours after their capture, supplying them by troop-carrying aircraft which brought up staff, fuel and

/ammunition.

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(20) The Struma Valley is known as the Strymon in Greece.

ammunition. The Greek Squadron was attacked on the ground and destroyed by German fighters from Larissa. Our Hurricanes had a lucky escape, and Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac then thought it wise to withdraw them to the Athens area. At the same time, he now reserved the Blenheims for night operations. But the Germans turned the whole weight of their attack on to the Athens area and there was no alternative but to evacuate and save what crews and material survived. The first task was to ferry all but the immediately operating personnel over to Crete.

Owing to the lack of intermediary airfields our fighters were now placed in a hopeless dilemma. If they were stationed on an airfield near to the battle front they at once became liable to destruction on the ground by the Germans. For instance, on April 19th, 100 dive-bombers and fighters attacked the Athens area. Our Hurricanes intercepted them and claimed 22 confirmed and 8 unconfirmed, but we lost 5 which we could ill afford. On the 19th and 20th Hurricanes of 33 and 80 Squadrons claimed 29 German aircraft and another 15 probables. Blenheims of 30 Squadron probably destroyed 2 Italian bombers, but our losses were 7 Hurricanes destroyed and 2 damaged. If, on the other hand, they were far back they were ineffective for protection of the Army. Our fighters were only able to perform their task by continually taking the air in aircraft riddled with bullets and in a condition that would normally have been considered quite unserviceable.

The Evacuation.

If we were to avoid the moon it was necessary either to evacuate before April 28th or else wait another month, which would have meant our annihilation. It

/was therefore

was therefore decided to begin the evacuation of the troops on the night of April 24th/25th. It was not possible to use the Piraeus owing to the strength of German air attacks. The troops were to embark at Nauplion, and the remaining Hurricanes had been sent to Argos to cover their embarkation. Air Commodore Grigson arrived at Argos on April 21st to take charge of the fighter rear-guard in the Argos area. He found that "the main landing ground was completely lacking in any form of cover" and therefore decided to put the Hurricanes at a small landing ground three miles to the north where there was the cover of the olive grove. This landing ground was defended by 2 Greek Bofors and 2 Greek Hotchkiss machine-guns. The Hurricanes arrived at the northern landing ground on April 22nd and while searching to land were fired at by the Greek Bofors, one being put out of action. It had up till then been the intention to attempt the evacuation in daylight, but Air Commodore Grigson at once signalled that this would be quite impossible. On the morning of the 23rd the enemy made a light attack on the landing ground, destroying one Hurricane. In the afternoon of that day "a very large force of enemy fighters (30 to 40 Me.109s) appeared and after silencing the Bofors guns (some of the Hotchkiss continued to fire) they subjected the north and south landing grounds and the olive tree aircraft park to the most thorough low flying attack I have ever seen. The attack began at approximately 1600 hours and lasted till 1640 .... 13 Hurricanes on the ground and 1 in the air were destroyed, as well as a number of Greek aircraft on the south landing ground and the olive tree aircraft park .... In consequence of the obvious impossibility of protecting the surviving Hurricanes while on the ground and of the fact that they were so utterly outnumbered by

/the enemy

Air Commodore Grigson the enemy as to be ineffective in Greece, I decided report on R.A.F. tactics in the that they would be of more value based upon Crete, and Peloponesus, April 22-29. employed to protect evacuation vessels during the day-light portion of their voyages when nearing Crete. I therefore ordered the six serviceable Hurricanes, plus one flyable, but not fit for operations, to leave for Crete at daylight on the 24th April." There was then no alternative but to evacuate the remainder immediately to Crete. The Operational Summary for April 23rd records laconically - "H.Q., B.F., Greece moving w.e.f. 1500 hours G.M.T." In the attempt to cut our troops off from the Peloponesus the Germans dropped parachutists on the Corinth Canal on April 26th, but fortunately for us their landing there came too late.

During the evacuation 14 Blenheim fighters of No. 30 Squadron on patrol covered the disembarkation on the beaches of Crete and flying-boats both of the R.A.F. and the B.O.A.C. ferried airmen and soldiers across. One Sunderland carried 84 people on one trip. Both the King of Greece and the King of Yugoslavia were evacuated on Sunderlands. The last Sunderland left Scaramanga in April 29th, having on board General Blamey and Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac. Bombays and Lodestars also helped in the evacuation. The total number evacuated by air from Greece to Crete was over 600 and from Crete to Egypt 870. Two Sunderlands were lost in the evacuation.

RAF.M.E. H.Q. file  
S. 58163/34.

It was obviously not possible to give our ships the air support that we would have wished. The Admiralty report on 'Operation Demon', as the evacuation was called, records - "Because of the

presence in Greece of strong enemy air forces and the rapidly diminishing fighter support, it was necessary to carry out the evacuation at night and withdraw all ships to the southward during the day - it will be noticed that nearly all losses from aircraft were sustained in the region of the parallel of  $37^{\circ}$  north which was approximately the range of the enemy dive-bombers. It was my policy to insist on all ships leaving the places of embarkation in time to be south of  $37^{\circ}$  north by daylight .... Throughout there was no fighter support for ships at sea north of  $37^{\circ}$  N. The R.A.F. in Crete did what they could for convoys south of this latitude, but protection was slender by reason of the small number of aircraft available."

The Wellingtons of Nos. 37 and 38 Squadrons flew to Egypt on April 17th and 18th, personnel and equipment following by sea. The remaining aircraft, of Nos. 11, 84<sup>(21)</sup>, 113 and 211 (Bombers) and 208 (Army Co-operation), amounting to 24 Blenheims and 4 Lysanders, flew to Egypt on April 22nd and 23rd, the Blenheims having previously made several ferry trips to Crete evacuating aircrews.

"All available Blenheim aircraft are to be stripped of non-essential equipment and are to be filled with the maximum number of aircrews and flown to Heraklion aerodrome.

Immediately on arrival aircraft are to be refuelled and are to return to Menidi where further loads of personnel are to be taken to Heraklion. When all crews have been moved, maintenance personnel are to be taken. Minimum amount of kit is to be carried. Personal luggage and baggage will be sent by ship first opportunity. Only kit to be taken should be tool kits and proportion of

/these should

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(21) Of the officer pilots of No. 84 Squadron who went to Greece in November 1940 only three survived.

these should be taken when maintenance personnel employed. Aircraft are to do as many trips as possible.

The whole operation is to be treated with the utmost secrecy and no junior officers, N.C.Os. or airmen are to be informed until the last possible moment before "leaving", ran Operation Instruction No.32 to O.Cs. 11,

84 and 211 Squadrons of April 17. The six Hurricanes from Nos.33 and 80 Squadrons which had survived the Argos attack, and 14 Gladiators of Nos.18 and 11 Squadrons flew to Crete on April 23rd.

Air Marshal Tedder's Summary.

Air Marshal Tedder in a letter to Air Chief Marshal Freeman, V.C.A.S., written on April 25th, A.O.C.-in-C., and V.C.A.S. 10A. summed up the lessons of the campaign - "By the time you get this you will probably know more about the Greek business than we do here at present. It is quite clear that we shall get no equipment whatever out of the country and will be lucky if we get out all our personnel. Yesterday the remains of the Blenheims, some 20 very much secondhand Blenheim Is and Blenheim IVs, reached here after having done some hard work ferrying between Greece and Crete. Yesterday we believe there were 5 Hurricanes left in Greece. I doubt whether there are any now. The main trouble was that, when we were forced to withdraw from the Vale of Tempe aerodromes, there were only two aerodromes near Athens and any effective dispersal was literally impossible. The result was that when the Hun determined to beat them up he could not help but succeed. I have spoken to some of those who watched it and they were struck with the tremendous effort which proved to be necessary to get effective results.. Despite the congestion, low-flying machine-gun attacks by some two

/dozen 109s



dozen 109s would only knock out two or three aircraft.

However, he was in the position to, and did, repeat the process again and again with large numbers, and all concerned did very well to get as many aircraft away as they did.

He repeated the process at Argos where the relics of

Hurricanes were trying to carry on. Once again the whole

thing was a question of sheer numbers. The unpleasant

part of the whole business is the literal impossibility of

giving any effective cover to the evacuation. Argos has

been put out of action and there is nothing else. The

best we can do is to operate Blenheim fighters from Crete.

I am afraid you will know before you get this how ineffec-

tive this has proved. The soldiers in Greece have, I

know, been having a pretty beastly time since we were

pushed out of the contest. The thing was quite unavoi-

dable. I do not see what could have been done to make

things better but I am afraid there will be some bitter

feeling against us on the part of the soldiers."

But fortunately he was able to write again on May

1st - "The evacuation appears to have been amazingly

successful in the circumstances. Apart from battle

casualties I think we have got practically every single

man and officer back to Crete or here (the majority to

Egypt). There are some fantastic stories of bravery

and initiative, many of which I expect will never be

heard of. We are trying to collect the main ones.

As far as we can tell, the Sunderlands brought out over

700 people. They came out with loads of 60 and upwards.

I believe 85 is the highest figure. One Sunderland

took off in the dark in rough sea towards mountainous

coast. I was unduly pessimistic about the Blenheim

fighters. There is no doubt that they did invaluable

service in covering convoys. On various occasions

/their appearance

their appearance was sufficient to encourage the Hun to drop his stuff quickly and get away. It is unfortunate that the Navy shot down two of our people, although fortunately without loss of personnel .... The last day or two I have talked to a number of the fellows back from Greece on the subject of low strafing, and I think the most striking thing is the effectiveness of machine-gun and cannon fire from low flying aircraft, especially when compared with bombing."(22)

A.O.C.-in-C, and  
V.C.A.S. 14A.

Summary of Claims and Casualties.

The final evacuation of troops was on April 30th . Throughout the evacuation of the troops Blenheims, Hurricanes and Gladiators provided protection against enemy attacks and Sunderlands provided reconnaissance against Italian naval raids.

During the Greek and Albanian fighting the R.A.F. claimed 231 enemy aircraft confirmed and 94 unconfirmed. The total enemy aircraft claimed as lost amounted to 259 confirmed and 99 unconfirmed. We dropped 500 tons of bombs. Our total aircraft lost amounted to 209, of which 72 were lost in combat and 82 destroyed or abandoned on evacuation. Almost all the remainder were destroyed in low flying attacks while they were

/were on

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(22) Perhaps the best first-hand account of this last fantastic phase in Greece can be culled from No.112 Squadron's log. See Appendix A.

were on the ground. We lost 148 killed and missing and 15 prisoners. Of these 150 were aircrew<sup>(23)</sup>.

(23) Air Chief Marshal Longmore Despatch 2 Sect. 47. Slightly varying figures are given by different authorities. Air Vice-Marshal D'Albiac Despatch, Section 50 gives 232 enemy aircraft confirmed as destroyed and 112 unconfirmed. Owing to the destruction of records it was never possible to check up the aircraft lost by squadrons.

AOC/ Squadron Leader Levell's report on wastage of aircraft gives the  
BAFG/ following figures:-

1/1									
7.5.41.	Bombers	-	Total number of Blenheims supplied to Greece,						129
			Squadrons 30, 211, 84 and 11. ... ..						38
			Returned to Egypt ... ..						91
			Lost ... ..						61
			Battle casualties ... ..						30
			Abandoned ... ..						91
	Fighters	-	Total number of Gladiators or Hurricanes						126
			supplied to Greece, Squadrons 80, 112, 33, 208.						19
			Returned to Egypt ... ..						107
			Lost ... ..						54
			Battle casualties ... ..						53
			Abandoned ... ..						107
	Lysanders	-	Total number supplied to Greece						10
			Returned to Egypt ... ..						4
			Lost ... ..						6
			Battle casualties ... ..						2
			Abandoned ... ..						4
									6

The figures, given in Appendix G, taken from the Weekly Intelligence Summaries, again vary somewhat.

SECTION V

COMMENTARY: LESSONS OF THE CAMPAIGN

The Merits of Intervention in Greece.

Many critics have, of course, suggested in their wisdom after the event that the whole Greek expedition was a mistake. It must be emphasised that at the time when it was decided to send a military expedition to Greece, it was not foreseen that the Germans would take over control in North Africa from their Italian allies. It was not foreseen, that is to say, that the detachment of forces to Greece would endanger our African position. In fact, as the quotation in Section III shows, General Wavell's advice was definitely to the contrary. But, even had it been foreseen, it is difficult to see how we could have avoided intervention in Greece even had we wished. We had given a guarantee to Greece. The Greeks appealed to us in the name of that guarantee for air support. Low as was our prestige on the Continent of Europe at that time, it would have sunk to nothing had we rejected the Greek request altogether. We could never have hoped to obtain any continental ally again. It was far better to be defeated than to decline the fight. Nor of course must it be thought that, because we lost Greece and later Crete, our intervention there was merely quixotic. Our highest hope at that time was to derange the enemy's time-table. The German attack on Russia did not take place till midsummer. The enemy was not able to attack Cyprus or Turkey. He was not able to intervene effectively in Syria or Iraq. For all this the upset of his time-table and his losses in Greece and Crete were doubtless

/largely

largely responsible. The effect on American opinion of a brave refusal to count the cost was without doubt considerable. A fatal blow was dealt to Italian prestige.

Besides it must be remembered that our intervention was in two stages. The R.A.F. intervened when Greece was at war only with Italy. That was a war that was by no means hopeless - that might conceivably have ended in complete success, that did, as it was, thanks to British support, give to the world the first example of a successful resistance to totalitarian aggression. It can hardly be seriously suggested that, after we had intervened to support the Greeks against the Italians, we should then have withdrawn when the Greeks were threatened by the Germans.

What did the Authorities Expect?

But what is very much less clear is what the British authorities expected to happen when the Germans attacked. The German forces were, and were known to be, overwhelmingly superior. "When the British army entered Greece, it was intended that the Air Force should be rapidly built up to a strength of at least 300 aircraft. That this was never done was due firstly to the inadequate total air resources at the disposal of the A.O.C.-in-C. and secondly to the German advance into Cyrenaica which compelled the retention in Egypt of squadrons earmarked and ready for Greece", states the Memorandum on the Employment of the R.A.F. Units in Greece. But even though a German invasion of Africa had not been foreseen was there ever any serious reason to think that the A.O.C.-in-C's resources would not be inadequate, and, in any event, would 300 aircraft have been enough to turn the scale? As one reads the story, it is difficult to see how anyone expected anything but a complete and rapid German victory,

/and the

and the Report of the Inter-Services Committee on Greece assumed that this was expected from the first and that the expedition was always looked upon as a political gesture, 'with small chances of its success as a military operation'. But, when we turn to the military reports, there is small evidence that it was so understood by the military authorities. Air Marshal Tedder, it is true, wrote to Air Chief Marshal Freeman, V.C.A.S. , on March 23, "One does feel rather that if our Balkan blitz is really going to materialise (until the last few days I have always been rather sceptical) our striking force is going to be rather meagre to say the least of it." But, as we have seen, there was frequent talk by Greek authorities of the holding of a permanent line and by Air Vice Marshal D'Albino of a base on the Continental targets could be bombed.

A.O.C.-in-C. and  
V.C.A.S.

General Wavell writes in his despatch "It was not really such a forlorn hope from the military point of view as it may seem from its results." Mr. Eden expressed a moderate optimism. General Smuts said "If our position on Aliakhmon line does not break in next few weeks, we have reasonable chance to build up a stable front in Greece and immediate danger will pass." It is a little difficult to understand what they can mean - what they think might have gone differently. The Prime Minister seems to have been in a similar difficulty. "We do not see any reasons for expecting success except of course we attach great weight to opinions of Dill and Wavell", he had written. Could we have held the enemy even if we had had the 300 fighters for which we hoped? It is argued that the Germans avoided fighter-combats wherever they could, but it is always unsafe to draw from the fact that a superior force does not do a thing when

General Smuts to  
Prime Minister.  
7.3.41.

Prime Minister to  
Mr. Eden, 3.3.41.

it can win without doing it, the lesson that therefore it would not have been able to do it, had it been necessary. There is no great reason to think that the Germans would not have engaged, had it been necessary.

Insufficiency of Anti-Aircraft Defences.

Granted our hopeless air inferiority not only in numbers but also, so far as we were dependent on Gladiators, in speed, the Inter-Services Committee set up after the campaign to investigate its lessons cannot find anything very serious to criticise in the conduct of air operations.

A.O.C./9 Enc.88A We were hopelessly handicapped not only by our inferiority in aircraft but also by our insufficiency in A.A. guns. Criticisms were at the time, of course, made by soldiers, what Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac in a letter called 'the usual bleat from the Army', but these were natural human reactions rather than the product of reason<sup>(24)</sup>. The only suggestion of the Inter-Services Committee was that these misunderstandings might have been reduced had

/General Wilson's

- (24) General Smith forwarded to Air Marshal Tedder three letters from Army officers in criticism of the R.A.F.'s poor dispersal. 'Aircraft were lost in the Larissa area through lack of proper dispersion' writes Brigadier Galloway 'despite the fact that General Wilson personally warned the R.A.F. of what was likely to happen. Dispersion means using different landing grounds on different occasions as well as separating flights and actual machines. We do not practise this enough. Aircraft were lost at Argos through putting them in olive groves where they were only half hidden.' Brigadier Salisbury-Jones also wrote of 'the disastrous casualties to aircraft that had occurred in Greece, particularly at Argos.' Brigadier Charington said, 'Reference our conversation re the waste of good machines from failure either to disperse or take cover to the utmost extreme possible. I myself saw our aeroplanes practically wing tip to wing tip round the aerodrome at Menidi, when arriving there one day from Larissa, where also our machines were for several days making nothing like enough use of the available space. There was a barbed wire fence around Menidi, put there when it was only used for small numbers of aircraft. It would have been very easy to make gaps in the wire, when there would have been excellent cover just outside it.'

Readers of the foregoing narrative will agree that these were largely counsels of perfection. There was no alternative space available either in Thessaly or at Argos. Concerning Menidi, Air Chief Marshal Longmore has commented in the margin "No - open field across a public road - but army would not supply guards."

General Wilson's and Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac's Headquarters not been so far apart from one another. Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac is probably justified in his suggestion that the army might have reduced their own casualties had they been more careful to make their movements at night. The campaign did perhaps teach some lessons on the type of commander that was required if an expedition was to be led to victory. Up till then it had often been argued that personality and magnetism were indeed required in the squadron commander but that the A.O.C.'s work was done at his desk and that what was needed there was a competent organiser and able staff officer. The Greek Campaign showed that, important as organisation was, yet both an air force and an army, particularly if they were likely to be faced with hard times, needed for success the inspiration of personality in their commanders.

#### German Bombing Errors.

As it was, the wonder is that so many of all services escaped. This was, says the Inter-Services Committee, due to two German errors. They did not concentrate on breaking and keeping broken the single railway and single road through the Isthmus of Corinth along which every every evacuee had to pass. They did not try to bomb at night.

#### Preliminary Over-confidence.

There seem to have been throughout the campaign both among the Greeks and among the British curious oscillations between over-confidence and over-pessimism - at one time talk about Greece being used as a base not only for the bombing of Rumania but even for the invasion of Germany and the whole Continent, at others prognostications of evacuation even before an attack

/by Italians



by Italians alone. At the end of March - March 21 - the British Military Mission in Athens in its confidential telegrams was still speaking of "the necessity not only of showing that combined Anglo-Greek forces can hold Germans but also of keeping up Greek material power and spirits, which may conceivably be affected if part of Greece becomes overrun by enemy." They spoke of a new Greek army corps of 50,000 men to be ready at the end of June. Yet at the very opening of the campaign on November 8 the British Government sent to the United Kingdom High Commissioners in the Dominions an admirably balanced prophecy of what might be considered likely to happen. They reported, "It is possible that Italians have made premature and uncor-ordinated move against Greece to better their position vis-a-vis the senior partner in the Axis. It would appear, however, more likely that the move is part of a prearranged Axis plan with the object of diverting our land and air forces from the Libyan front, dispersing our naval forces in areas where they may be subjected to heavy scale of air attack, and gaining of air and naval bases in Greece. Combined plans may have been arranged under which initial Italian attack would be deliberately half-hearted to induce us to send military assistance to Greece, whereupon Germany would invade that country through Bulgaria. Turkey has declared she will support Greece in event of Bulgarian attack but would be unlikely to take similar action if Germany attacked Greece, through either Yugoslavia or Bulgaria ... Although an Axis occupation of Greece would not in itself seriously increase the scale of attack on Egypt, it would render our support of Turkey more difficult by weakening our control of sea communications in the Aegean. But, although it is desirable from many points of view to give Greece all

/possible

A.M. file S.7080  
Enc.149A.

possible support, the measure of such support must not jeopardise the security of our vital interests in Egypt and must also be balanced against our future possible commitments in support of Turkey and in Syria. Present morale of Greek troops is high, though it might deteriorate if population is subject to heavy air attacks ..... It may be hoped that Greeks will be able to impose considerable delay on Italian advance. Communications between Albania and Italy depend on ports of Durazzo and Valona, and, if these could be seriously damaged, results would be important. Greek Air Force is however very small, and main threat is heavy scale of air attack against larger towns and against troops and transport on narrow hill roads. Situation would be completely altered by German intervention, and it is unlikely that Greeks could hold out for long against heavy scale of air attack and advance of armoured and motorised formations through Bulgaria and possibly Yugoslavia. In such conditions no assistance which we are at present in position to make available would materially delay German advance through Greece ..... The possibility of a German advance through the Balkans and Syria towards the Middle East emphasises the importance of building up a Middle East reserve with which to support Turkey and protect the communications through Syria. If, however, the Greeks succeed in holding the Italian advance and the Germans do not intervene in Greece this year, it would be to our advantage to give all possible support to Greece without committing vital forces. We might then be able to consolidate our foothold in Greece at a later period after adequate reinforcements had arrived in the Middle East .....

/We have

We have sufficient forces available to reduce the scale of Italian air attack by attacking Italian air forces in Albania. The fighters which have been made available in Greece should cover our own operating bases. We should however demonstrate whenever possible over Athens in order to sustain public morale."

Italian Fear of R.A.F. Intervention.

If we are to give any credence to the alleged account of the meeting of the Fascist Grand Council, on October 15th 1940, printed in Tempo of July 13th 1944, the intervention of the R.A.F. was the one thing which General Jacomini, then Military Governor of Albania, feared. This account is however very suspect and reads as if it had been concocted in post-Fascist Italy by enemies of Marshal Badoglio in order to make it appear that the Marshal was as bad as the Fascist Leaders.

It is of course possible that the King of Greece was right in thinking that slightly stronger support from the R.A.F., had it been available, might have tipped the scale in the November offensive and enabled the Greeks to capture Valona and drive the Italians into the sea. To the "Ifs" of history, there is never any certain answer. But, it is improbable and if victory had come thus, it would only have come because the Italian morale was bad and their heart was not in the war. It is more probable that success against the Italians would only have led to an earlier German intervention. In any event it is certain that German morale was not then such that a slightly stronger resistance or the infliction of slightly heavier casualties would have been sufficient to stem the German attack.

/Yet, apart

Yet, apart from its part in the large strategical plan of the whole war, the campaign had also its tactical lessons to teach - lessons which are perhaps for the most part fully appreciated today but which were by no means so generally appreciated then.

Importance of Secure Bases.

The first lesson was that of the primary importance for any successful air operations of secure bases. Whatever tasks the air forces may be given of defending military or naval positions or attacking enemy positions, it is useless to devote their strength to those tasks until they have performed their first task of securing their bases. One way of securing your bases is through offensive action against the enemy airfields so as to drive him back from the area in which he could offensively operate. This is clearly only possible to an air force that has command of the air through superior numbers or enterprise, as the Allies had in France in 1944, where they could attack both enemy airfields and also other targets at the same time. Such tactics were in no way possible for the R.A.F. in Greece in 1941. As had been said, there was some criticism of the lack of dispersal of aircraft on airfields. Whether this criticism be just or not, yet dispersion is in itself no substitute for defence. Indeed it is not even a method of defence if airfield protection is so weak that the attacker can deliver his attack at leisure. There is no great difficulty in destroying an isolated aircraft if you can attack it with impunity as many times as you want. To the contrary. If the aircraft are spread out over a wider area, then the A.A. and fighter defences must also be thinly spread out. What are required are concentrated and definite areas of defence, adequately protected by fighters and /A.A. against

A.A. against dive-bomber or fighter attack and of course protected also by an efficient observer system. These areas, if the defence be adequate, can be near the battle-line, and the close support bomber squadrons can operate from within them. In Greece we had no secure bases. If the fighters went out to escort bombers, they had to leave the airfields unprotected. The communications system, devised by the Army signals detachment, was never in proper working order owing to lack of wire. The Greek observer system, efficient enough to begin with, broke down when the advancing Germans captured the observer posts. Without some bases both our bombers and fighters were condemned to what was little better than a game of hide-and-seek until the Germans inevitably caught them.

The Army and Anti-Aircraft Defences.

The main air defence must be in the air - the fighter. Yet adequate A.A. defences are also necessary, and in Greece these defences were entirely inadequate. The deficiency there was even greater than in other matters, and the reason for this deficiency was that airfield defence was at that time entirely a responsibility of the Army. It was a responsibility, but at the same time a by-task, of the Army, and it was almost inevitable that, at a time when they were suffering from so many deficiencies, the soldiers' first interest should be in the remedy of the deficiencies in what they considered their proper jobs. The Australians, in particular, as General Sir Maitland Wilson admits in his despatch, objected to what they called contemptuously a "behind the lines" job. The Greek campaign proved once again, as had even before that been already proved, the need for an R.A.F. Regiment, whose peculiar task would be the defence of airfields. General Sir Maitland Wilson in his Despatch, twists that argument the other way  
/round and,

round and, admitting the need for close co-ordination between ground and air forces, argues for an Army Air Force, parallel to the Fleet Air Arm and subordinate to the Army Commanders. This raises a large general issue, in which there are arguments on both sides and on which it would be impertinent to pronounce a verdict. As everyone knows, in many countries the air forces are subordinate to the army and it may be argued that what is important is unified control rather than the title of the controller. But at least it may be urged that a condition of a successful Army Air Force is the widespread knowledge among army officers of the principles of air warfare. Experience in Greece showed that that knowledge was not at that time at any rate widespread enough. General Sir Maitland Wilson's own testimony to the indifference of the army to airfield defence is proof. General Sir Maitland Wilson says that the Air Force's larger machine-guns should have been handed over to the army for airfield defence. It would have been no remedy if the army was not willing to detach the men to man them.

#### The German Tactics.

At the beginning of the campaign the German aeroplanes were based in the Plovdiv and Sofia plains of Bulgaria. As our fighters had not been allowed by the Greeks to use the Salonika airfields, we had nothing further north than the Thessalian plain and our air bases were therefore for the moment well out of German fighter range. But equally the Greek and Yugoslav troops and our bombers who attacked German positions in Macedonia were out of the range of the protection of our fighters. The Germans, overwhelmingly superior on land, were able to defeat the Greek and

/Yugoslav

Yugoslav armies in Macedonia almost without using aeroplanes at all. But once they had got the Salonika area, then they were able to use the Salonika airfields to render the Thessalian airfields untenable, the Thessalian airfields in their turn to prevent the use of Amphiklia for the holding of the Thermopylae line and the Attica airfields to attack Argos and prevent any possibility of a stand in the Peloponese. We were being driven steadily down the sides of an inverted triangle whose apex was at Argos. As a result, while we were trying to defend a position, there was still a large variety of targets between which the Germans could choose for their attack, but, when the Germans, having conquered all else, concentrated their forces for an attack on our fighters, they found our fighters huddled together into one single place at Argos and ready meat for the slaughter.

#### Line and Zone Defence.

The Greek campaign gave yet another demonstration that with the air a new dimension had been added to warfare. Like the French in 1940, we again attempted to meet the Germans with the old conception of line-defence. It was an anachronism. Both the Aliakhmon and the Thermopylae lines were already lost before they were even reached. Though even to this day the newspapers still talk about holding lines, yet it was in fact clear in Greece, as it has been clear throughout all this war, that, with parachutists and air-borne landings, the only possible defence is not line-defence but zone-defence. Obviously the most important zones are the zones within the reach of the enemy's short-range fighter. Outside that range landings are only possible by unescorted bombers or by parachutists, and, as the parachutists, could in the nature of things only have the

/support of

support of long-range fighters, which are always inferior to short-range fighters, such landings could hardly succeed in permanently establishing themselves except in the complete collapse of the defence. But within the short-range fighter range it is obviously essential for the defender to hold strongly all strategic points and to have an efficient system of communication, so that troops can be immediately rushed to any point threatened. Merely to hold a line is to invite the enemy to land behind it and to cut it off from its base. It follows indeed, as the Inter-Services Committee argue, from this addition of the new dimension to warfare that the Air Headquarters and the Military Headquarters should be close to one another. But that by no means says that it would have been right for the Air Headquarters at Athens to have moved up to the Force Headquarters at Ellasson. It would have been much more sensible for the mountain in defiance of precedent to have gone to Mahomet. The Old Staff College precept taught that Headquarters should be as far forward as possible so as to be near the battle. But with the new possibilities of air-landing such a Headquarters is vulnerable - liable to destruction or capture or at the least a cutting of its communications with its troops at a critical moment. On the other hand with communication by wireless and the aeroplane there is no longer the same need for the Headquarters to be physically close to the battle. It is rather important that it should be behind not only the battle-line but also the battle-zone. Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac at Athens saw more of the battle in Athens than General Sir Maitland Wilson at Ellasson.

/German



German Maintenance Organisation.

Obviously a condition of the Germans' success was not only a mere superiority in numbers of aircraft but also the possession of a most elaborate and efficient air maintenance organisation, flown in some hundreds of transport aircraft and thus independent of road or rail. This enabled the Germans to use new airfields almost as soon as they captured them. Without such an organisation and without the incidental good-fortune of dry weather such a rapid success would not have been possible.

The Germans suffered heavy casualties - absolutely a great deal heavier than ours - yet, when one side starts with a great preponderance, it can lose more heavily than its opponent and yet increase its proportionate strength. If A with 1,000 aircraft loses 100, while B with 100 loses only 50, the proportion of A to B which, was to begin with, 10 to 1, is at the end 18 to 1, and, as a result of casualties in such a ratio, by the end of the campaign we were only able to give to the Army inadequate and quite sporadic fighter protection.

Military Deficiencies.

It can fairly be said that the Greek campaign revealed that the military authorities still had a very inadequate appreciation of the new principles which the air had introduced into warfare. Not only did they underestimate the importance of adequate air defence, they also had a share of the responsibility for their own heavy casualties by the failure to understand that to move by day and with transport congested against an enemy with overwhelming air superiority was to invite destruction. Against an air force with an adequate fighter defence day-bombing was, as Air Vice-Marshal D'Albiac argued, except in exceptional climatic conditions, simply a

/suicidal waste

suicidal waste of effort. The single-bomb fighter/bomber, as used by the Germans in England and to be used afterwards in Crete, had so small a load as only to be effective against targets more suitable for ground-staffing and the modern heavily armoured day-bomber was then still unknown, but, where fighter and A.A. defences were absent, day-bombing of course was enormously preferable for the attacker to night-bombing, and the defender had no hope of survival unless he recognised this, expected it and took what precautions he could against it.

It is not either unfair or ungenerous to say that the Greek campaign showed that the soldiers had at the very least as many lessons to learn about air warfare as the airmen. Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac in his Despatch argues that the heavy army casualties during the retreat and evacuation were partly the consequence of the army's failure to apply the new lessons of air warfare. There are the points already mentioned. They moved along the roads by day and in concentration instead of by night and dispersed. As has been said, Force Headquarters was placed right up behind the battle-line in accordance with the principles of the old text-books, not behind the battle-zone, as the new air warfare demanded. But, beyond that, it must be said that the task of the small R.A.F. force, hard in any event, was made far harder by the constant demand of the army that if morale was to be preserved, the whole of its small effort must be constantly and immediately devoted to the defence of the troops. When morale is broken, imaginary fears become as potent as real ones. General Sir Maitland Wilson has recorded an instance of Australian troops in Greece

/scattering at

scattering at the approach of an eagle. Experience in Tunis, in Italy, in Normandy and elsewhere had indeed amply proved the importance of air superiority and has proved that, ultimately and other things being equal, victory goes to the side which possesses it. But it has also been proved that troops, which have not got support from the air, can endure for a considerable time. It has certainly shown that it need not be accepted as an axiom that, if your enemy had command of the air, then your morale must collapse immediately. Italy in particular has shown that in hilly country positions can be held for some considerable time against an enemy with air superiority. That, the forces on the two sides being what they were, defeat in Greece was eventually inevitable, is almost certainly true. The question is whether it was inevitable that it should have been so rapid.

Difficulties of Airfield Construction in Greece <sup>(25)</sup>.

In Greece the R.A.F. found itself confronted with problems with which neither its experience in Libya nor anywhere else had made it familiar. The construction of airfields in the flat African desert was not a task of very great difficulty. In mountainous Greece it was one of the greatest difficulty, and, whereas in Egypt we had had a long time to prepare ourselves and plan against a conflict the possibility of which had long been foreseen, in Greece the Greeks, in their anxiety not to provoke the Axis, had deliberately refrained from any large-scale preparation of airfields. Such as there were, were of small dimensions, of grass surface and poorly drained. A little rain easily made them unserviceable. The only airfield that remained at all reliable throughout the winter was

Menidi.

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(25) These pages are throughout greatly indebted to The Greek Campaign, by Group Captain Gordon Finlayson (unpublished).

Menidi, where owing to a steep gradient and gravel soil, water drained off fairly quickly. This therefore became our main bomber base. The Gladiators were based at Larissa, but the airfield there, though it looked promising, was of a very uneven and corrugated surface. This was responsible for much damage to tail wheels and stern frames in dry weather. By the end of our period of occupation two steamrollers had been acquired, whose task it was to roll down the surface after rain and thus to prevent the formation of ruts, but they were not available until the end of March.

A detachment was sent from Larissa to a landing-ground between Trikkala and Kalabaka, whence it was possible to operate with ease over the Koritsa and Lake Ochrida area, but this was hopelessly swampy. After the capture of Koritsa the Greeks developed a small landing-ground there but this was too near the fighting line. There were two landing-grounds at Yanina, which were again frequently unserviceable, but theirs was the best of all the positions for the Albanian fighting, and, fighters from them when they were usable, could escort our bombers over the Italian lines.

Our greatest need was for an airfield in Western Greece for our Blenheims. Menidi was a two-hours' flight from Valona, and the Blenheim Is flying time was only  $4\frac{1}{2}$  hours. This meant that Valona was only just in range of a Menidi-based Blenheim. Besides owing to the variations of weather the Gulf of Corinth was often impassable when there was ideal bombing-weather in Western Greece. Not only is winter in Northern Greece a terrible time, but the  
/mountain mass

mountain mass in the centre of it is a weather divider. When the weather on the one side is good it is usually bad on the other side and ~~vice versa~~. It is rarely good on both sides. The only possible western site was Araxos in the north-west corner of the Peloponese. Work was started on its preparation but never completed.

At the end of January Paramythia was discovered. The Greeks had had full plans for its development for a long time but had agreed not to use them for fear of offending the Italians and had then forgotten all about them. The only way of approaching the Albanian ports from Menidi, at any rate with such navigational aids as were then available, was to fly out along the Gulf of Corinth and then up the west coast of Greece over the Ionian Islands. Even such a journey in the intense cold, wet and cloud of a Greek winter was from from pleasant, the more so as it was only possible to take an hour and a half's supply of oxygen. Our aircrews, without leather flying suits, Irvine jackets, electrically heated clothing, silk linings or indeed sufficient gloves, socks or sweaters, suffered intensely from the cold.

#### The Communication System.

The following was the communication system:-

- (1) Information had to be sent back from the battle-front to Army H.Q. at Yanina about the tactical situation.
- (2) From Army H.Q. it had to be transmitted to R.A.F. H.Q. at Athens.
- (3) From R.A.F. H.Q. orders were sent to the bombers at Menidi or the fighters at Larissa and Yanina.
- (4) The unit commanders had then to co-ordinate their plans.

/At every

At every stage in the chain there were difficulties. In the first place it took three or four days for detailed tactical information from the battle-front to reach H.Q. at Yanina. Again the landline communication between Yanina and Athens was very unreliable and subject to as much as twelve hours' delay. Communications over the short distance from Athens to Menidi were satisfactory, but communications between Athens and the fighter fields were very bad and subject often to a twelve hours' delay. W/T was of course available for the R.A.F. links in the chain, but cyphering was inadequate and mountains and electrical storms often made reception difficult, or even impossible. The result was that arranged rendezvous between bombers and fighters were seldom kept. It meant in practice that attacks had to be confined to pre-arranged targets and that short notice, immediate, emergency support was impossible. In fact the programme was arranged at daily conferences between the King, General Metaxas, General Papagos and Air Vice-Marshal D'Albiac, when the Greeks would ask for what they wanted and Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac would say whether it was possible or not.

#### The Observer System.

There was a far reaching Observer system throughout the country and the air raid warning system was good. There were posts in all the western islands and throughout the battle area, which were linked up, sometimes by landline and sometimes by W/T with their main posts in their area, themselves in their turn connected with the Air Defence Centre in Athens. The system was helped by the fact that Athens and the greater part of the population of Greece are on the east of the mountains, whereas the enemy had to come in from /the west.

the west. But at the end of February a disturbing flaw in the system was discovered. There was a post on a small island ten miles to the north-west of Corfu known as Phanos. This island was linked by W/T with the main post at Paramythia. Whenever any aircraft approached a post, a preliminary warning signal was sent out, and consequently Phanos used to send out its signal whenever our bombers flew up on the way to Valona. There is no doubt that the Italians at Valona picked up these signals, and that it was they which were responsible for the fact that the enemy was almost always forewarned of our coming. The days when heavy fog blanketed our engines and when the bombers happened to fly at a little further distance from Phanos were almost the only days when the enemy was caught unprepared.

#### Italian Incompetence.

When all due credit has been given, there can be no question that the success of the R.A.F. in Greece was to some extent due to the extraordinary strategic incompetence of the Italians. Just as, had they bombed the lines of communication, they might have prevented Greek mobilisation at all, so, had they bombed our bombing airfields, they could certainly have compelled the withdrawal of our fighters from the battle-line to the protection of the bombers. The Italians attempted to follow the German example in Poland by using their aircraft almost entirely in support of their battle-line troops, but the Germans only followed these tactics after they had first destroyed their enemy's air force. This the Italians omitted to do.

With the coming of the German attack a new situation was created. Outnumbered as they had been by the Italians, the British were overwhelmingly outnumbered by

/the Germans -

the Germans - by an enemy who had both the capacity and the ruthlessness to take a full advantage of his superiority of numbers. A new Wing was formed to meet the German attack, but so inadequate was its equipment that there was no W/T available for the Wing Headquarters. Headquarters had to use the W/T of one of the squadrons. For this reason a central position had to be selected, and, since it was also necessary that the Wing Headquarters were established at Larissa, lodging itself on 33 Squadron. This was in itself a happy arrangement and enabled the Wing Commander to supervise the operations room. But the whole system and organisation of course collapsed with the German invasion.



EXTRACT FROM OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK OF NO. 112 SQUADRON

APRIL 17th - 24th

(Patras. April 17th)

F/O Barclay and P/O Fletcher arranged for the troops to sleep in a school three miles from the docks, and interviewed the military governor of Patras to get transport for the kits. He refused as he stated that the R.A.F. at Araxos had refused him transport despite forty lorries on hand. We learned that the reason was that they were packed up for evacuation as well - but they could not tell the Greeks that! We spent five hours in the station master's office to find out where the train was. Eventually at 2300 hours we received advice that the train would leave at 0500 hours. Kits were left on the quayside except for blankets.

We entrained at dawn on the 18th on a "special" to run through to Athens in six hours. We stopped for half-hour intervals every 45 minutes to let nine refugee trains out of Athens area to pass. We had never seen coaches so packed; at least a hundred riding on the roof of every coach on all trains. The train only once stopped for an Air Raid Alarm, but nothing developed. The Greeks by now knew that the end was in sight but they were still friendly. We waited two hours for transport at Athens, and eventually reached Hassani Aerodrome at sunset. For some obscure reason we stayed here until the evening of the 22nd, although everyone was glad of the rest.

Eleusis, Menidi and Piraeus were bombed and strafed, but there was no attack on Hassani. By late 22nd the last of road party straggled in, many having walked a good section of the journey and been picked up by the evacuating army etc.

We received final orders from H.Q.B.A.F. Greece to burn all papers etc. Later, orders were received for aircraft to leave at once for Crete and for the rest of the personnel to leave for Argos at nightfall on what proved to be the beginning of the rush for the coast, which discipline alone prevented turning into a rout. In pitch darkness we moved off, after throwing all equipment etc. into the sea, and we passed Eleusis village without incident. Here our convoy met the Army stream, and any further attempt to keep touch was futile, every driver immediately realising that we were all going the same way. At a deadly snail's pace this vast cavalcade crept on. Nerves were frayed and any suggestion of a light brought forth a chorus of "Put that bloody light out" from front and rear. As it was imperative to use lights now and then to navigate the cliff road the invective was almost continuous. As it was the road was strewn with overturned vehicles. One estimate was 300 overturned on the Corinth-Argos section alone. Indirectly, therefore, the snail's pace was possibly a blessing in disguise. Just before Corinth the cavalry and pack mules got mixed up in the general melee. In passing we must pay a tribute to the magnificent way the soldiers coaxed and handled these animals; a loose horse was a rare sight and generally followed the trucks blindly. On our arrival at Argos, endless units were in groups for miles down the road, but gradually the R.A.F. were sorted out and moved over to the aerodrome. By now (23rd) 11,000 Army and Air Force had reached Argos, only to learn that two of the ships to take us off had been dive bombed and were burning - one loaded with high-explosive. This blow up with a terrific crash, but passed almost unnoticed

/ in a bombing

in a bombing raid. About mid-day 20-25 Do.17's and 215's started coming over at high altitudes. The technique seemed to be singly or in pairs to draw our fighters at 5 to 10 minute intervals until all were off in different directions. Taking advantage of this situation, the next move, 20 to 25 Ju.88's with Me.109 escort, dive-bombed A/A batteries and the aerodrome from low-level. This went on for some time, and as Hurricanes landed after this show they were re-fuelled and flown away as fast as possible. This operation was successful, but a Lysander was shot down by a Me.109 as it took off. About two hours before sunset, 20-25 Me. 110's arrived and literally did aerobatics over the 'drome, setting fire to three remaining aircraft, ammunition etc. The Ack-ack ceased to function and the aircraft flew at ground level looking for trouble. While this was going on, nearly 1,000 airmen were crouching in an olive grove adjacent to the drome. Time after time the enemy dived over the olive grove, but for some reason did not fire and returned to strafe the 'drome viciously. Had they chosen to strafe us the result would have been disastrous. It must be presumed that they were too engrossed with the aerodrome as we learned later that they returned the next day and shot up this olive grove from end to end. At nightfall we again moved through Argos and dispersed on the hillsides three miles beyond, this time minus blankets and kit, and it being too cold to sleep, finished continuous 48 hours without sleep.

Dawn (24th) - and still no word of a ship, but a little later, first 3 Me.109's took a look round. The roads were jammed with Army vehicles still arriving. Some Senior Officer then very sensibly ordered immediate dispersal of all vehicles and personnel. Had this not been done casualties would have been heavy, as the usual dive-bombing started shortly afterwards. Later in the day, Me.110's flew far and wide at 3,000 feet seeking objectives. Flying overhead, they fired short bursts, either testing their guns or in an endeavour to get someone to run and reveal our position. The Squadron had two narrow escapes when sticks of bombs dropped right across our lines without hitting the 200 yards of our dispersal, but fell in a unit on our right. A check up revealed that F/L Wagner and a party of airmen were missing, while our party comprised 200 odd of all ranks. It was later learned that F/L Wagner and his party had been diverted during the night to another evacuation point. His arrival at Gythoon and subsequent adventures by sea until his arrival at Crete by H.M.S. Auckland on 29.4.41. were described in a report to Group Captain Lee M.C., of H.Q. M.E. Towards sunset we were all told to be ready to march to Naphlion (Nauplion). Relief showed on all our faces and no one asked the distance. The six miles were covered in excellent time and we arrived at water's edge in good order without incident. As the harbour was too shallow for large ships to put alongside, invasion barges were brought in by the Navy and everyone looked on in silent admiration of real efficiency. The last on board arrived about midnight making 70 sleepless hours in all, and all lay down anywhere anyhow to a sleep of sheer exhaustion, oblivious of any dangers the sea might hold and with full confidence, as ever, in the Navy.

APPENDIX B.

BRITISH AIR FORCE ORDER OF BATTLE IN GREECE

AERODROME	NOVEMBER 1940	JANUARY, 1941	MARCH, 1941	APRIL, 1941 FORCE EXPECTED TO BE IN GREECE
MENIDI (TATOI)	84 (B) Blenheims 211 (B) Blenheims  70 (B) Wellingtons <sup>(2)</sup> 87 (B) Wellingtons <sup>(2)</sup>	84 (B) Blenheims 211 (B) Blenheims	84 (B) Blenheims 1 Flt. 113 (B) Blenheim IVs Detachments of 37 (B) Wellingtons 38 (B) Wellingtons	45 (B) Blenheim IVs 113 (B) Blenheim IVs <sup>(8)</sup>
ELEUSIS	30 (B) Blenheims <sup>(3)</sup> 112 (F) Gladiators <sup>(4)</sup>	30 (F) Blenheims	30 (F) Blenheims 80 (F) Gladiators & Hurricanes <sup>(5)</sup>	30 (F) Blenheims 80 (F) Gladiators & Hurricanes
YANNINA	80 (F) Gladiators		112 (F) Gladiators <sup>(6)</sup>	112 (F) Gladiators
PARAMYTHIA			211 (B) Blenheims	211 (B) Blenheims.
AGRINION <sup>(1)</sup> ARAXOS				84 (B) Blenheims
LARISSA		80 (F) Gladiators	33 (F) Hurricanes <sup>(5)</sup>	- (F) Hurricanes 33 (F) Hurricanes
ALMYROS and NIAMATA			11 (B) Blenheim IVs <sup>(7)</sup>	11 (B) Blenheim IVs 55 (B) Blenheim IVs
KASANI				208 (AC) Hurricanes <sup>(8)</sup>

(1) These airfields never became operational

(2) Based in Egypt. Operated in Greece during moonlight periods.

(3) Subsequently became Fighter

(4) Arrived December 2. Handed over aircraft to R.H.A.F. pilots Dec. 6 and returned to North Africa.

(5) Hurricanes arrived February 19

(6) Returned to Greece February 2

(7) Arrived January 24.

(8) 113 & 208 alone actually arrived.

208 was in fact stationed at Kazaklar.

LOCATION AND STRENGTH OF ITALIAN AIR FORCE IN THE BALKANS. 7.12.40.

	Regiment	Wing	Squadron	Strength & type of a/c	Location	Authority
FIGHTER		160	363 393 394	CR 42 & 32 ? CR 42 ? CR 32 ? CR 32	Unknown Valona Valona Tirana	- Captured documents. 12/4 Confirmed.
		150	364 365 383 (?)	CR 42 & 32 } ? }	- Durazzo	H.Q.M.E. 4/12 Believed
	52		? ?	G. 50 G. 50	Argyrokaastro Durazzo and Valona Dist	Observed by our aircraft 22/11 & 24/11
			?	Macchi 200	Durazzo	Seen by our a/c 24/11. Confirmed
			?	CR 42	Lecce	P.O.W. 8/11/40.
RECCO		?	25 120	RO.37 RO.37 RO.37	At Koritza until the fall Bari?	Captured documents.
			42	10 RO.37	Durazzo(?)	Durazzo Believed.
BOMBER	38 'B'	39	51 69	H.Q. 135.81 - -	Durazzo Valona - -	H.Q.M.E. 30/11 (Believed) W.15/11/40 & photographed. (Confirmed)
		40	202 203	15S.81	Tirana	H.Q.M.E. (Believed)
		55	? ?	15S.79 -	Unknown -	21/10/40. (Believed)
		?	? ?	15S.79	Unknown -	21/10/40. (Believed)
	AUTONOMOUS SQDN. (probably staff)			1S.81 2S.79	- Tirana	- 12/9/40. (Believed)
			611 Trans Sqdn.	5 BA 44 1 unknown	Tirana	P.O.W. 12/9/40
		50	210 211	Cant Z 1007 12 " 61's 12 " "	Brindisi " "	P.O.W. 8/11/40 (Confirmed)
	35	86		30 Cant 2506	Unknown	27/10/40. (Believed)
		95	190 191 230 231	- - - -	- - - -	- - - -
SEA						

\* May have been based in Italy.

LOCATION AND STRENGTH OF ITALIAN AIR FORCE IN THE BALKANS. 5.1.41.

	Regi- ment	Wing	Squad- ron	Strength & type of a/c	Location	Authority
FIGHTER	53	150	363 364 365	?CR 42 ?CR 42 ?CR 42	Valona ? Durazzo	H.Q.M.E. 4/12/40 & 25/12/40. (Believed)
	?	160	383 393 394	?CR 32 & 42 ?CR 32 & 42 ?CR 32 & 42	Durazzo Valona Tirana	H.Q.M.E. 25/12/40. (Confirmed)
	?	?	?	Macchi 200	Durazzo	Seen by our a/c. 29/11/40. (Confirmed)
	52	24	360 361 362	13 G 50 13 G 50 13 G 50	Durazzo & Valona areas	(Confirmed). Seen by our a/c, 22 & 24/11/40. H.Q.M.E. 9/12/40 & 25/12/40.
	6	2	150  152	?CR 42  ?CR 42	Devoli (Berat) "	H.Q.M.E. 18/12/40 & 25/12/40. (Believed)
RECCE	?	72	25 120 42 116	?RO 37 ?RO 37 10 RO 37 ? RO 37	Tirana " Durazzo ?	H.Q.M.E. 4/12/40, 9/12/40 1/1/41. (Probable compos- ition of 72 Wing. Total strength:- 30 pilots: 20 observers).
BOMBER	38	39	51  69 202 203	11 S 81  12 S 81	Valona  Tirana	P.O.W. 15/11/40 & Photo. (Confirmed) H.Q.M.E. 24 & 25/12/40 H.Q.M.E. 24 & 25/12/40. (Believed)
	?	?	?	1 S 81 2 S 79	Tirana	Used as staff squadron
	46	?	?	? S 79 ? S 79	Believed to be Lecce	H.Q.M.E. 9 & 20/12/40. (Total a/c in both wings 30).
		?	?	? S 79 ? S 79		
	37	54	218 219	S 79 S 79	Lecce	Believed (Reliable Greek source)
		55	220 221	S 79 S 79		
SEA	?	?	?	Breda 65 S 79	Valona	Photograph 14/12/40 Captured Koritza North
	35	86	190 191	? Z 506 "	-	Total a/c in Z wings 30 No Cant. Z 506 yet obser- ved moored on Albanian waters
		95	230 231	" "		
	16	50	210 211	12 Cant Z 1007 "	Brindisi	Prisoner of war 8/11/40.

## LOCATION AND STRENGTH OF ITALIAN AIR FORCE IN THE BALKANS. 30.3.41.

	Regi- ment	Wing	Squad- ron	Strength and type of a/c	Location	Authority
	53	154	?	24 Macchi 200	Albania	H.Q.M.E. 18/3/41
	?	160	383 393 394	24 CR 42	Durazzo Valona Tirana	Confirmed H.Q.M.E. 19/3/41.
	52	22	? 360	24 G-50	Albania Durazzo	H.Q.M.E. 19/3/41.
	?	24	361 362	24 G-50	Valona	
	AUTONOMOUS		369	12 Macchi 200	Tirana	P.O.W. 16/3/41
NOTE: 150 Fighter Wing (CR 42) to be withdrawn from Albania Ceampino to be re-equipped with Macchi 200 (HQME 2/4/41).						
DIVE BOMBERS	?	?	238	10 JU.87	Scutari or Tirana	Italian aircrews. H.Q.M.E. 19/3/41.
RECCO	?	72	120 42	18 RO.37	Valona	H.Q.M.E. 4-9/12/41 & 1-19/3/41.
	?	70	?	18 RO.37/CAN13	?	H.Q.M.E. 26/2/41
	19	5	?	18 RO.37/CAN3	?	
BOMBER	38	39	51 69	6 S.81 6 S.79	Foggia "	
		40	202 203	6 S.81 6 S.79	"	H.Q.M.E. 1/4/41.
	46	104	252 253	6 S.79 6 S.79	"	
	12	41 42	204 206	6 CANT Z/1007 6 ?	Italy "	
	16	50	210 211	6 CANT Z/1007 6 "	"	
	?	?	?	1 S.81	"	
	?	?	?	2 S.82		
	46	?	254	6 S.79		
	?	?	?	6 S.79		These presumed operating from Italy.
	?	?	?	6 Breda 65		H.Q.M.E. 1/4/41.
	?	?	?	1 u/r		
	?	?	?	10 CA 135		
	37	54	218 219	6 S.79 6 S.79	Lecce	
		55	220 221	6 S.79 6 S.79		
			276 277	6 BR 20 6 BR 20		
	74	?	320 321 322 323	6 CANT Z/1007 6 " 6 " 6 "	Grottaglie	
	18	?	?	6 S/79 or BR20	A viano	
	35	86	190 191	? CANT Z.506 ?	Brindisi	
		95	230 231	? " ? "		
	?	?	611	5 BA 44		

GERMAN AIR FORCE ORDER OF BATTLE IN THE BALKANS 5th APRIL, 1941.

1. SUMMARY BY TYPES

Long Range Bombers	39
Dive Bombers	156
Recco	36
Fighters (Twin engined)	70
Fighters (Single engined)	297
Army Co-op	120
Total	718
Transport	300
Wetter Staffeln	6
Sea Rescue	6
Grand Total	1030

2. ORDER OF BATTLE

Higher Command Fliegerkorps VIII O.C. General  
JESCHONNEK Under Luftflotte IV H.Q. VIENNA.

<u>Class</u>	<u>Formation &amp; Component Units</u>	<u>Type of aircraft</u>	<u>Establishment</u>	<u>Believed Location</u>
Bombers	Lehr I Gruppe I	JU.88	39	KRUMOVO (Bul)
<u>Dive Bombers</u>	Stuka K.G.2 Gruppe I	JU.87	39	KRAINITZA (Bul)
	Gruppe III	JU.87	39	"
	Stuka K.G.3 Gruppe I	JU.87	39	"
<u>Single Engined Fighters</u>	J.G.27 Gruppe II	ME.109	39	BELITZA (Bul)
	Gruppe III	ME.109	39	"
	J.G.28 Gruppe I	ME.109	39	BUCHAREST (Pipera)
<u>Twin Engin- ed Fighters</u>	Z.G.26 Gruppe II	ME.110	39	SOFIA
<u>Long Range Recco</u>	2(F) 11	DO. 17	12	BUCHAREST (Giulesti)
	2(F) 221	DO. 17	12	BUCHAREST (Baneasa)
	7 Lehr II	ME.110	12	SOFIA

/Army Co-operation

<u>Class</u>	<u>Formation &amp; Component Units</u>	<u>Type of aircraft</u>	<u>Establishment</u>	<u>Believed Location</u>
<u>Army Co-operation</u>	2 (H) 10 3 (H) 13 4 (H) 13 5 (H) 13 1 (H) 14 PZ 3 (H) 21 PZ 4 (H) 22 1 (H) 23 PZ 2 (H) 31 PZ 4 (H) 32 PZ  Certain elements of the above Army Co-op Units are in Bulgaria	Hs.126 " " " " " " " " "	12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12	CRAIOVA BUCHAREST Unknown CARACAL CRAIOVA CONSTANTA ALEXANDRIA ALEXANDRIA CONSTANTA PLOESTI (SEVERIN) (STRESNICAL)
<u>Sea Rescue Wetter Staffel</u>	76	FW. 58 ME.111	6 6	BULGARIA RUMANIA
	4 Gruppen 1 Gruppe	JU. 52 Total ) JU. 52 300 in ) JU. 52 all in ) Bulgaria & Rumania but no other locations known.		PLOESTI (N) GRAF IGNATIEVO KRUMOVO PLOVDIV
<u>Recent Arrivals</u>		Me. 110 Me. 109 Me. 109 Me. 109 Me. 109 } or } Me. 110 } Ju. 88 Ju. 87	31  100 39 12  39  - 39 or more	TURNUL SEVERIN (Rumania) DETA (Rumania) SOFIA ARAD (Rumania)  ARAD or BALOMIR (Rumania) VRBA (Bulgaria) -



GERMAN AIR FORCE ORDER OF BATTLE IN THE BALKANS 20 th APRIL, 1941.

<u>Class</u>	<u>Formations</u>	<u>Aircraft</u>	<u>Estab- lishment</u>	<u>Believed Location</u>
<u>Bombers</u>	I/LEHR 1	JU 88	39	KRUMOVO
	II/LEHR 1	JU 88	39	URBA
	Part of KG 51			SALONIKA
	Part of KG 55			SALONIKA
	III/KG 3	DO 17	39	KRUMOVO & KRAINITSA
<u>Dive- Bombers</u>	1/St.KG 1	JU 87	39	PRILEP area
	1/St.KG 2	"	39	BELITZA
	III/St.KG 2	"	39	KRAINITZA
	I/St. KG 3	"	39	LARISSA
Stabstaff	I/St.KG 77	"	13	ARAD or ZEMUN
6 and 9	III/St.KG 77	"	26	PTOLEMAIS
8	III/St.KG 77	"	13	KORINOS
<u>Single- engined fighters</u>	Part of JG 26	ME 109		PTOLEMAIS
	Part of JG 27	ME 109		KORINOS
	II/JG 27	ME 109	39	KOZANE
	III/JG 27	ME 109	39	NIAMATA
	I/JG 28	ME 109	39	BUCHAREST (Pipera)
	II/JG 54	ME 109	39	ZEMUN
	III/JG 54	ME 109	39	SEMUN
	II/Lehr 2	ME 109 or 110	39	LARISSA
	Part of JG 77	ME 109		LARISSA
	II/JG 77	ME 109	39	VALANDOVO
	III/JG 77	ME 109		-
		ME 109	22	DETA
		ME 109	39	SOFIA
		ME 109	39	ARAD

<u>Class</u>	<u>Formations</u>	<u>Aircraft</u>	<u>Estab- lishment</u>	<u>Believed Location</u>
<u>Twin-engined Fighters</u>	I/ZG 26 II/ZG 26	ME 110 ME 110	39	Parts of these at SALONIKA & LARISSA
Long Range	2/F 11 2/F 221 7 Lehr	Do 17 Do 17 Me 110 Me 110	12 12 12 31	One of these at Salonika Sofia Jumal Severin
Army Co-operation	2(H) 10 3(H) 10 4(H) 13 5(H) 13 1(H) 14 Pz 3(H) 21 Pz 4(H) 22 1(H) 23 Pz 2(H) 31 Pz  4(H) 32 Pz	He 126 " " " " " " " " "	12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12 12  12	Larissa Bucharest Bucharest Caracal Larissa Constantza Larissa Servia Alonakia (near Kozane) Polesti (Stresnical)
<u>Sea Recco</u>	FW 58		6	Bulgaria
<u>Wetter Staffel 76</u>		He 111	6	Roumania
<u>Transport 4 Gruppen</u>		Ju 52 " "		Graf Ignatiers Krumovo Floudiv
<p>N.B. - The Weekly Intelligence Summary concludes with the following sentence:-</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Total 300 in Bulgaria, Rumania and (?) Greece.</p> <p>It is not clear of what 300 was the total. There were clearly many more than 300 aircraft in the three countries at this date.</p>				

BOMBING RECORD. B.A.F. GREECE

November - December, 1940

Date	No. of a/c	Sqdn.	Type of a/c	Target	Losses
<u>November</u>					
13th	3	84	Blenheims	Valona Port	
"	3	30	Blenheims	Argyrokaastro	
"					
14th	3	30	Blenheims	M.T. Columns North of Koritza	2
"	3	84	Blenheims	Elbasan - Koritza Road	
15th	3	84	Blenheims	Italian position 3 N.E. Koritza	1
15th/16th	4	70	Wellingtons	Oil tank farm, Brindisi	
17th	2	30	Blenheims	Elbasan	
17th/18th	6	70	Wellingtons	Valona - Durazzo	1
19th/20th	3	70	Wellingtons	Durazzo - Tirana aerodrome	
20th	3	30	Blenheims	Tepelene	
22nd	3	84	Blenheims	Pogradetz	
"	3	30	Blenheims	Argyrokaastro	
23rd	3	84	Blenheims	Elbasan	
24th	9	211	Blenheims	Durazzo	
"	3	84	Blenheims	Tepelene	
25th	1	84	Blenheim	Valona	
26th	6	84	Blenheims	Valona	
"	1	84	Blenheim	Tepelene	
28th	3	211	Blenheims	Sarande	
"	8	84	Blenheims	Durazzo	1
29th	3	84	Blenheims	Tepelene	
<u>December</u>					
1st	3	30	Blenheims	Sarande	1 (Crew safe)
"	3	84	Blenheims	Sarande Bridge	
2nd	8	211	Blenheims	Valona	
3rd	3	30	Blenheims	Sarande ships	
4th	2	30	Blenheims	Sarande ships	
"	9	211	Blenheims	Tepelene	
"	8	84	Blenheims	Kelcyre	
6th	7	84	Blenheims	Valona Docks	2 (Both crews safe)
7th	8	211	Blenheims	Valona shipping	4 (1 crew safe)
"	2	211	Blenheims	Valona shipping	

December, 1940 - January, 1941.

<u>Date</u>	<u>No. of a/c</u>	<u>Sqdn.</u>	<u>Type of a/c</u>	<u>Target</u>	<u>Losses</u>
<u>December</u>					
9th	3	211	Blenheims	Valona docks	
10th	5	84	Blenheims	Valona docks	
14th	4	84	Blenheims	Valona aerodrome	
"	8	211	Blenheims	Valona Barracks	
15th	3	70	Wellingtons	Durazzo Port	
17th	3	211	Blenheims	Valona - Sarande Road	
18th	3	30	Blenheims	Valona Docks	1
19th/20th	4	70	Wellingtons	Brindisi	
19th	6	84	Blenheims	Valona	
"	3	84	Blenheims	Krionero	
20th	9	211	Blenheims	Berati	
22nd	9	84	Blenheims	Kucova	2
24th	7	211	Blenheims	Valona Aerodrome	
26th	8	211	Blenheims	Krionero	
28th	3	211	Blenheims	Valona Aerodrome	
29th	3	30	Blenheims	Valona Jetty	1
"	3	211	Blenheims	Valona Harbour. Buildings	
31st	9	211	Blenheims	Valona Stores & Ammunition	
<u>January</u>					
2nd	8	64	Blenheims	Elbasan town & village	
4th	8	211	Blenheims	Elbasan	
6th	9	211	Blenheims	Valona	2
7th	8	84	Blenheims	Elbasan	
10th	8	84	Blenheims	Troops on Kelepe-Berat Road	
13th	6	84	Blenheims	Berat	
19th	6	84	Blenheims	Berat	
19th/20th	4	70	Wellingtons	Valona	
"	1	70	Wellingtons	Brindisi	
20th	5	211	Blenheims	Valona	
21st	5	54	Blenheims	Elbasan	
22nd	6	211	Blenheims	Berat	
25th	3	30	Blenheims	Boulsar, near Elbasan	
27th	6	211	Blenheims	Elbasan	

January, 1941 - February, 1941

<u>Date</u>	<u>No. of a/c</u>	<u>Sqdn.</u>	<u>Type of a/c</u>	<u>Target</u>	<u>Losses</u>
31st	6	84	Blenheims	Dukaj, near Tepelene	
<u>February</u>					
1st	5	211	Blenheims	Valona	
6th	2	211	Blenheims	M.T. & Dumps near Tepelene	1
10th	5	211	Blenheims	Dukaj, near Tepelene	
11th	5	211	Blenheims	Salaria, N.W. Tepelene	1
"	1	211	Blenheim	Dukaj	
"	6	211	Blenheims	Salaria and Dukaj	
12th	9	11	Blenheims	Elbasan - Dukaj area	
"	9	84	Blenheims	Elbasan	
"	3	30	Blenheims	Elbasan	
"	3	211	Blenheims	Elbasan	
12th/13th	4	37	Wellingtons	Durazzo & Tirana Aerodromes	
13th	8	84	Blenheims	Busi - Gilave	
"	3	30	Blenheims	Busi - Gilave	
"	6	211	Blenheims	Tepelene Area	
"	3	84	Blenheims	Tepelene Area	
"	3	30	Blenheims	Tepelene Area	
"	6	211	Blenheims	Busi Area	
"	6	11	Blenheims	Berat	2
14th	8	84	Blenheims	Busi Area	
"	4	30	Blenheims	Busi Area	
"	6	211	Blenheims	Busi Area	
"	3	30	Blenheims	Busi Area	
15th	6	211	Blenheims	Busi & Laitiza	
"	3	30	Blenheims		
15th/16th	4	37	Wellingtons	Brindisi Aerodrome	1
16th	6	211	Blenheims	Gilave - Busi	
17th	6	211	Blenheims	Besist. Danzi, & Canesisti	
"	6	211	Blenheims	Besist, Camisisti, & Cautsisti	
18th	3	30	Blenheims	Tepelene Area	
"	6	211	Blenheims	Tepelene Area	
"	3	30	Blenheims	Tepelene Area	
20th	8	84	Blenheims	Tepelene	
"	3	30	Blenheims	Tepelene	
"	6	211	Blenheims	Berat	
"	3	30	Blenheims	Berat	
"	7	84	Blenheims	Berat	
22nd	5	211	Blenheims	Bouzi	
23rd	6	211	Blenheims	Dukaj	
24th	6	211	Blenheims	Tepelene Area	
"	2	11	Blenheims	Tepelene Area	

February - March, 1941

<u>Date</u>	<u>No. of a/c</u>	<u>Sqn.</u>	<u>Type of a/c</u>	<u>Target</u>	<u>Losses</u>
<u>February</u>					
25th	6	211	Blenheims	Tepelene - Kelcyre Road	
"	3	11	Blenheims	Tepelene - Kelcyre Road	
26th	6	211	Blenheims	Luzati	
"	3	11	Blenheims	Luzati	
"	6	211	Blenheims	Fieri	
"	4	11	Blenheims	Fieri	
27th	6	211	Blenheims	Valona Aerodrome	
"	3	11	Blenheims	Valona Aerodrome	
28th	6	211	Blenheims	Kodra & Dragoti	
	3	30	Blenheims	Kodra & Dragoti	
<u>March</u>					
1st	6	211	Blenheims	Paraboar, 5 miles N. Buzi	
"	3	30	Blenheims	Paraboar	
	6	211	Blenheims	Berat	
	3	30	Blenheims	Berat	
	6	211	Blenheims	Valona	
	3	30	Blenheims	Valona	
2nd	6	211	Blenheims	Berat Aerodrome	
"	3	30	Blenheims	Berat Aerodrome	
3rd	1	211	Blenheim	M.T.E. of Tepelene	
4th	9	211	Blenheims	Naval Units off Himare	
	5	84	Blenheims	Naval Units off Himare	
6th	3	211	Blenheims	Gun positions, Tepelene-Luzati	
7th	9	211	Blenheims	Besist	
	9	211	Blenheims	Dragoti	
8th	9	211	Blenheims	Gilave - Busi	
	9	211	Blenheims	Tepelene	
8th/9th	4	37	Wellingtons	Durazzo Harbour	
9th	9	211	Blenheims	Dukaj & Luzatz	
"	9	211	Blenheims	Busi, Gilave & Tepelene	
10th	9	211	Blenheims	Busi - Gilave Road	
	5	84	Blenheims	Kattavia Aerodrome	
	6	37	Wellingtons	Calato Aerodrome	
11th	8	211	Blenheims	Busi - Gilave Road	
12th	8	211	Blenheims	Busi - Gilave Road	
12th/13th	6	37	Wellingtons	Maritza, Kattavia	
	7	84	Blenheims	Calatz, Scarpanto	
13th	5	815	Swordfish	Valona Harbour	1
	3	211	Blenheims	Valona Aerodrome	

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March - April, 1941

<u>Date</u>	<u>No. of a/c</u>	<u>Sqn.</u>	<u>Type of a/c</u>	<u>Target</u>	<u>Losses</u>
<u>March</u>					
14th/15th	3	815	Swordfish	Valona Harbour	
15th	7	211	Blenheims	Berat Aerodrome	
	8	211	Blenheims	Valona Aerodrome	
15th/16th	8	?	Wellingtons	Tirana Aerodrome	1
	4	30	Blenheims	Valona Aerodrome	
	3	?	Swordfish	Valona Harbour	
16th/17th	1	815	Swordfish	Valona Harbour	
17th	4	815	Swordfish	Durazzo Harbour	
	4	?	Blenheims	Valona Aerodrome	
17th/18th	7	37	Wellingtons	Durazzo Harbour	
18th	7	211	Blenheims	Busi - Gilave Road.	
19th	5	84	Blenheims	Tepelene & Dukaj	
19th/20th	3	?	Swordfish	Durazzo Harbour	
23rd	7	84	Blenheims	Berat Aerodrome	
	4	211	Blenheims	Busi - Gilave	
	1	84	Blenheim	Busi - Gilave	
24th/26th	2	30	Blenheims	Calato	
	1	30	Blenheim	Scarpanto	
	1	30	Blenheim	Stampelia	
27th	11	84	Blenheims	Calato	
28th	6	30	Blenheims	Lecce	
	11	113	Blenheims	Italian Naval Units W. of Crete	
	8	104	Blenheims	Italian Naval Units W. of Crete	
	4	211	Blenheims	Italian Naval Units W. of Crete	
29th	1	211	Blenheim	Dukati	
	1	211	Blenheim	Berat	
	2	211	Blenheim	Dukai	
30th	5	113	Blenheims	Stampelia	1
	10	84	Blenheims	Elbasan	
	1	211	Blenheim	Tepelene	
	1	211	Blenheim	Dukaj	
	1	211	Blenheim	Dukati	
	1	211	Blenheim	Valona-Himare Road	
<u>April</u>					
2nd	6	211	Blenheims	Tepelene	
3rd	6	211	Blenheims	Berat	
6th	6	211	Blenheims	Berat	
	6	37	Wellingtons	Sofia	
	3	84	Blenheims	Gorna Dzumata	
	8	84	Blenheims	Similiti	
6th/7th	6	37	Wellingtons	Sofia Marshalling Yard	

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April, 1941

<u>Date</u>	<u>No. of a/c</u>	<u>Sqdn.</u>	<u>Type of a/c</u>	<u>Target</u>	<u>Losses</u>
<u>April</u>					
7th	7	113	Wellingtons	Petrich	
	3	11	Blenheims	Petrich - Strumica Road.	
7th/8th	5	11	Blenheims	W. Lake Doiran	
8th	6	84	Blenheims	Strumica - Doiran Road.	
	7	113	Blenheims	Strumica - Doiran Road.	
	6	84	Blenheims	Strumica Area	
9th	6	113	Blenheims	Bridge at Polycastron	
	6	11	Blenheims	Axiopolis	
10th	4	113	Blenheims	Bitolj - Prilep Road.	
	6	84	Blenheims	Topalcane Area	
	1	11	Blenheim	Prilep - Monastir Road.	
	8	84	Blenheims	Bitolj - Prilep Road	
10th/11th	2	37	Wellingtons	Veles	
	1	37	Wellington	Prilep	
	1	37	Wellington	Diavata	
	1	37	Wellington	Kilkis	
11th	3	84	Blenheims	Bitolj Area	1
	1	113	Blenheim	Polykastron	
11th/12th	4	37	Wellingtons	Calato	
12th	2	11	Blenheims	Bitolj - Veles Road.	
	2	211	Blenheims	Convoy near Valona	
13th	7	211	Blenheims	Quhres-Line Road	6
	6	211	Blenheims	Near Lake Presbankso	
	7	113	Blenheims	W. Lake Petrou	
	6	211	Blenheims	Bitolj - Prilep Road.	
	9	113	Blenheims	Ptolemais - Veve Road	
13th/14th	5	37	Wellingtons	Sofia	
	1	37	Wellington	Yannitsa	
	6	38	Wellingtons	Sofia	
	1	38	Wellington	Pernik	
	1	38	Wellington	Dupritsa, Gornadjumaya, Yannitsa	
14th	6	84	Blenheims	M.T. near Ptolemais	
	1	113	Blenheim	Kozani - Ptolemais Road.	
	8	113	Blenheims	Kozani - Ptolemais Road.	
14th/15th	9	38	Wellingtons	Bridge at Veles	
	5	84	Blenheims	Road at Kleisoyra	
	6	815	Swordfish	Shipping, Valona	1
15th	9	37	Wellingtons	Kozani - Ptolemais Road	
15th/16th	6	11	Blenheims	Kozani - Ptolemais	
16th	4	84	Blenheims	Katarini area	
18th	1	211	Blenheim	Bridges S. of Kozani	1
	1	211	Blenheim	Bridge S. of Grevena	
	4	11	Blenheims	Grevena - Kozani Road.	



April, 1941

<u>Date</u>	<u>No. of a/c</u>	<u>Sqdn.</u>	<u>Type of a/c</u>	<u>Target</u>	<u>Losses</u>
<u>April</u>					
18th	1	11	Blenheim	M/T W. of Kozani	
	1	84	Blenheim	M/T S. of Grevena	
	1	84	Blenheim	Bridge S.E. of Malajsim	
	1	84	Blenheim	Bridge N.W. of Kalabaka	
19th/20th	1	211	Blenheim	Kozani Aerodrome	
	6	84	Blenheims	Katarine Aerodrome	
	2	11	Blenheims	Katarine Aerodrome	
	1	211	Blenheim	Railway near Katarine	
	1	211	Blenheim	Railway near Katarine	
	2	211	Blenheims	Katarine Aerodrome	
	2	11	Blenheims	Transport on roads near Katarine	

SUMMARY OF BOMBING TARGETS IN ATTACKS FROM GREECE

I. November - December

	<u>Raids</u>	<u>Aircraft</u>	<u>Losses</u>
<u>Day</u>			
Albanian ports	27	130	12
Battle targets	18	78	5
<u>Night</u>			
Albanian targets	2	9	0
Italian targets	<u>2</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>0</u>
	<u>49</u>	<u>225</u>	<u>17</u>

II. January - March

<u>Day</u>			
Albanian ports	11	62	3
Italian ports	1	6	2
Battle targets	87	469	3
Naval targets	5	27	0
Dodecanese targets	3	16	0
<u>Night</u>			
Albanian targets	10	40	1
Italian targets	2	5	1
Dodecanese targets	<u>5</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>0</u>
	<u>124</u>	<u>632</u>	<u>10</u>

III. April

Albanian targets	5	29	1
Bulgarian targets	9	49	0
Yugoslav targets	17	82	7
Dodecanese targets	1	4	0
Greek targets	<u>17</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>1</u>
	<u>49</u>	<u>248</u>	<u>9</u>

Total for whole campaign 222 1105 36

REPORT ON STATE OF GREEK AIRFIELDS SUBMITTED TO THE AIR STAFF ON 1ST JANUARY, 1941

Name of airfield or landing ground	Type	Present Dimensions (yards)	Facilities lacking	Present operational capacity	Details of latest progress report 31.12.40.	Work contemplated under short term policy, i.e. for completion before April.	Work to be undertaken on completion of short-term work
AGRINION	A.	Suitable for Gladiators	Levelling, draining, extension of runways	1 Fighter Squadron	Provision of 2 runways, 1000 metres long and extension of airfield in hand; work seriously delayed by continuous bad weather	-	Provision of runways
ALMYROS	L.G.	1100 x 430	Extension	1 Fighter or 1 Medium Bomber Squadron	Extension to provide dimensions of 1320 x 1100 yards has been delayed by constant bad weather and need 2 weeks fine weather to complete. Further extensions are proposed. Runway of sand is unnecessary here.	Rendering ground suitable for medium bombers.	-
ARAXOS	A.	1200 x 1200	Runways and Extension	1 Fighter or 1 Medium Bomber Squadron	1 runway 1320 yards long is 5% complete but work has been seriously impeded by continuous bad weather.	Provision of runways and rendering airfield suitable for medium bombers	Extension.
DRAMA	A.	Between 850 x 850 and 1100 x 1100	Drainage and runways	1 Fighter Squadron	-	-	-
ELEUSIS	A.	At least 1500	Runways	3 Fighter Squadrons	Work on 1 runway about 1% complete	Provision of runways and rendering airfield suitable for heavy bombers.	-
GUIOA	L.G.	At least 1100 x 1100	Extension	At least 1 Squadron (any type)	-	Rendering ground suitable for medium bombers	Extension.
KAROITSA	L.G.	At least 1100 x 1100	Extension	1 Medium Bomber Squadron	-	Rendering ground suitable for various medium bomber squadrons	-
KAVALLA	L.G.	At least 1100 x 1100	-	At least 1 Heavy Bomber Squadron	-	-	-
LARISSA	A.	At least 1100 x 1100 - readily extensible to 1500 x 1500	Runways	3 Bomber or Fighter Squadrons	-	-	-

Name of airfield or landing ground	Type	Present Dimensions (yards)	Facilities lacking	Present operational capacity	Details of latest progress report. 31.12.40.	Work contemplated under short term policy, i.e. for completion before April.	Work to be undertaken on completion of short term work.
LEMET	L.G.	At least 850 x 850	Improvement of approaches	1 Fighter Squadron	-	-	-
LIVADACHORI	L.G.	2 strips 1100 x 105	Drainage and runways	1 Fighter or 1 Medium Bomber Squadron. Unsuitable in winter for Heavy Bombers	-	-	-
AIKRA (Salonika)	A.	At least 1100 x 1100	-	At least 1 squadron	-	-	-
SEDES (Salonika)	A.	1500 x 750	Runways	3 Fighter or Bomber Squadrons	-	Rendering ground suitable for various heavy bomber squadrons	-
MEGALIO-MIKRA (Salonika)	L.G.	2500 x 300	General development	None at present. Could ultimately accommodate 2 bomber squadrons	-	-	-
NEA ACHIALOS	L.G.	2 strips, 1100 x 105 & 850 x 105	Runways	1 Squadron	-	-	-
NEA KOUKOAINA	L.G.	One runway 1620 x 105 - another runway dimensions not known but surface unsuitable	Runways	At least 1 medium bomber squadron	The plant required to construct one runway is en route to site by sea. Work not yet started	-	Provision of runways
NEA PELLA	L.G.	At least 1100 x 1100	Runways	1 squadron	-	-	-
PAREMYTHIA	L.G.	1430 x 1320 990 x 1320	Runways	At least 1 fighter or medium bomber squadron. Too soft for heavy bombers	-	-	Provision of runways.
PHARSALA	L.G.	At least 1100 x 1100	Runways	1 squadron	-	-	-
PIENIDI	A.	1500 x 1400 700 x 720	Extension & runways	More than 2 bomber squadrons	-	Rendering airfield suitable for operating various heavy bombers, medium bomber & fighter squadrons	Provision of runways
SITAGRI	L.G.	At least 1100 x 1100	Extension	More than 1 Fighter Squadron	-	Rendering ground suitable for operating medium bombers	-

Name of airfield or landing ground	Type	Present Dimensions (yards)	Facilities lacking	Present operational capacity	Details of latest progress report. 31.12.40.	Work contemplated under short term policy i.e. for completion before April	Work to be undertaken on completion of short term work.
TANAGRA	L.G.	At least 850 x 850	Extension	1 Fighter Squadron	-	Rendering ground suitable for various fighter squadrons	-
TIRNAVOS (KAZAKLAR)	L.G.	1100 x 540	Extension	At least 1 squadron (any type-	-	Rendering ground suitable for medium bombers	Extension
VOEVODA (TRIKKALA)	L.G.	At least 1100 x 1100	Drainage and runways	1 Fighter Squadron	-	-	Provision of runways

B.A.F. GREECE TABLE OF COMPARATIVE LOSSES IN COMBAT  
NOVEMBER 1940 - APRIL 1941

(Taken from Weekly Intelligence Summaries)

DATE	Axis Losses				Our losses	
	Destroyed by British Air Force		Destroyed by Greek Air Force		British	Greek
	Confirmed	Unconfirmed	Confirmed	Unconfirmed		
November 19th-30th	23	16	35	12	6	?
December 1st-7th	10	8	1	-	7	3
December 8th-14th	-	1	-	-	-	-
December 15th-22nd	10	6	7	2	8	-
December 23rd-29th	-	-	-	-	1	-
December 30th-Jan. 5th	3	1	1	1	1	2
Jan. 6th-12th, 1941.	-	1	3	2	2	-
Jan. 13th-19th	-	-	-	-	-	-
January 20th-25th	1	-	5	-	1	-
Jan. 27th-Feb. 2nd	2	-	2	-	-	-
February 3rd-9th	7	-	8	1	2	1
February 10th-16th	10	2	9	3	4	2
February 17th-23rd	10	1	8	3	-	2
Feb. 24th-March 2nd	39	10	2	-	1	11
March 3rd-9th	21	8	1	-	3	-
March 10th-16th	38	11	2	1	4	-
March 17th-23rd	7	4	-	-	4	-
March 23rd-30th	2	20	-	-	2	-
Mar. 30th-April 6th	12	2	2	-	1	-
April 7th-13th	5	3	8	1	11	-
April 14th-20th	34	16	14	2	26	6
Total	<u>234</u>	<u>110</u>	<u>108</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>84</u>	<u>27</u>

PROJECTED ATTACK ON THE DODECANESE

Projected German Occupation of Dodecanese

C.O.S.  
Signals  
N.31.

D.O.Ops.  
Folder:  
Dodecan-  
ese.

At the beginning of the war, when the French were still fighting and when the alliance with the Turks was ~~signed~~, there had been discussions for an attack on the Dodecanese, should Italy come into the war. With the French collapse those plans had all to be postponed. The Turks themselves decided that discretion was the better part of valour. But to certain minds towards the end of 1940 it appeared that it would be a great political convenience to seize the islands, when Turkey was still neutral. "Italy" wrote the Commanders-in-Chief in the Middle East to the Chiefs of Staff on December 16 "might ~~under~~ German pressure offer surrender Dodecanese to Turks as bribe for remaining neutral. Desirable to forestall such eventuality. Finally, eventual political destiny of islands might be ~~more~~ easily settled if they were to fall to British before Turkish intervention." In January, 1941, the question became urgent owing to reports of reconnaissance of the Dodecanese by German He.III's from Sicily. It was thought that the Germans were planning to establish themselves in Rhodes in strength. Wing Commander Grant of A.I.3 submitted a report on possible enemy intentions on January 19. "From the Dodecanese," he wrote "the dive-bombers, which have a radius of action of approximately 200 miles, can harass our shipping and our base at Soudas Bay in Crete. Long-range bombers have a radius of 400-700 miles. They will be able to attack Alexandria and Haifa. The tactics of the German Air Force operating from Sicily appear to be to attack the Fleet at sea when it is within reach, and, when they cannot get at the Fleet itself, to attack its base at Malta. They have also attacked our air bases at Malta, presumably with the intention of destroying our fighter defences and also securing their own base by destroying any air striking force which we have based at Malta. Should a German Air Force contingent go to the Dodecanese it seems likely that they will follow similar tactics. They will try to strike at any naval units which their bomber reconnaissance aircraft find within reach of the Dodecanese. When such targets do not present themselves they will concentrate on making Crete untenable for either our naval or air forces. The whole of Crete is well within range of dive bombers operating from the Dodecanese. The long-range bombers will also be able to attack our naval base at Alexandria and the oil supplies at Haifa. The strategy of the whole move appears to be to bottle up our Fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean by means of a striking force in Sicily and to destroy our naval bases in the Eastern Mediterranean by a striking force from the Dodecanese. The destruction of these bases would make it impossible for the Fleet to remain in the Eastern Mediterranean indefinitely. If the Suez Canal had been blocked by air actions, units of the Fleet would eventually be forced to try to escape from the Eastern Mediterranean by running the gauntlet of the narrow passage between Sicily and Tunis. The Germans presumably would hope to catch them with their air force based in Sicily while they do this".

Ibid

Air Marshal Harris (as he then was) who was the D.C.A.S. was less impressed than others by this threat. He wrote, "We do not like Malta so much although there is only a threat to our absolute sea supremacy thereabouts. Put yourself in Boche shoes therefore and imagine how you would like the Dodecanese lacking any chance of surface supply and reinforcement. The more the Boche stretches himself the better, and there are few better stretches than to the Dodecanese. We could no doubt take them if we had nothing else to do but in my view let us retain the initiative for once and do what we want to do when we want to do it."

/ In spite of

In spite of Air Marshal Harris' objection in the early months of 1941, the next offensive operation projected in the Eastern Mediterranean was the capture of the Italian Dodecanese Islands. The plan was originally conceived as a concomitant of the infiltration of Turkey which the Prime Minister was proposing. There was a political difficulty, as both Greeks and Turks had claims in the Dodecanese. Admiral Tule in the Chiefs of Staff Conference of November, 27, 1940, suggested that the Turks might have Rhodes and the Greeks have the rest, but Mr. Eden reported to the War Cabinet on January 9, 1941, that 'the talks were not going well owing to extravagant demands of Greeks'. When the Turks rejected the plan of infiltration, the operation against the Dodecanese was temporarily postponed, but throughout February, March and April preparations were still being made for it. In February there was a raid by four destroyers and some fighters on the sea-plane base of Castellorizo, an Italian island, not one of the Dodecanese, off the Anatolian coast and eighty miles to the east of Rhodes. The general operation was to be sea-borne. Its code name was Mandible. The R.A.F. force in this operation was known as Z Wing. It was to operate from Heraklion in Crete.

#### Italian Forces in Dodecanese

It was estimated that the Italians had 82 aircraft in the Dodecanese - 49 bombers, 15 fighters, 10 sea-reconnaissance and 8 sea-fighters. The number of German aircraft there was less certainly known, but it was stated that the airfield accommodation was only sufficient for an additional 40 or 50 aircraft. Unless and until the Germans were willing to violate Greek neutrality, they obviously could not fly aircraft to the Dodecanese on any considerable scale.

There were nine airfields on Rhodes (Cordite), (the code names or numbers for places mentioned are the names given in brackets) one on Scarpanto (Armature) and one on Cos (Beneath). The nature of the country made impossible much further airfield development. In the bays of the islands there were a number of natural alighting grounds for sea-planes. The most important regular sea-plane bases were the two on Leros (Allowance). There were also bases on Rhodes and Scarpalia (Consumption). Rhodes was primarily valuable to the enemy as a refuelling base after attacks on Aegean shipping or on objectives in Egypt. In an attack on the Dodecanese it was obvious that the attacking aircraft would have the support of aircraft based in Sicily and Southern Italy.

#### The Projected Attack

The R.A.F. bases were too far distant for fighter operations over the Dodecanese to be possible. Therefore the R.A.F. tactics were to put the Dodecanese airfields out of action by bombing attacks before the sea-borne invasion. Fighter protection could of course be provided by the R.A.F. over Port Said, the port of embarkation in Egypt (897). Fighter protection on the voyage was to be provided by the Fleet Air Arm.

From D-10 to D-1 the R.A.F. operations were to consist of:-

Air Reconnaissance by medium bombers from Greece (927).

Night bombing on the scale of 5 aircraft per night by a Wellington Squadron from El Adem (1162).

Raids by two formations of 4 aircraft each of medium bomber squadrons from Greece on D-3.

A fighter patrol of 3 Hurricanes from Heraklion (1011)

/commencing



commencing from first light of D-1.

Low flying attacks on sea-plane bases at Leros and Scarpalia by Blenheim fighters from Greece.

By D-2 4 Lysanders and 6 Hurricanes from Egypt and 6 Blenheims from Greece, together with Fleet Air Arm aircraft, were to be established in Crete. Light A.A. and machine gun defence was to be intensified at Heraklion by D-2 and a mobile radio unit to be in operation. There was to be a standing patrol by day over Heraklion after the arrival of the aircraft.

During Phases 2 and 3 from D-1 to p.m. D+2, 10 Wellingtons from El Adem were to attack the main airfields in Rhodes by night and two formations of medium bombers to attack them by day. Two formations of three fighters each of the Fleet Air Arm from Heraklion were to conduct an offensive patrol over Scarpanto. 3 Hurricanes were to maintain their standing patrol over Heraklion. There was to be a continuous Tactical Reconnaissance patrol of one aircraft from first light on D+1, until counter-manded by the land forces. Three Blenheim bombers were to be at stand-by on the airfield at Heraklion and three at readiness from first light on D+1. These aircraft were to return to their bases in Greece or Egypt on D+1 or D+2.

The object of this first attack was to be Scarpanto. The assaulting force, which was to attack Scarpanto, was to consist of two Commandos and one Infantry Section with a total personnel of some 1,800 odd men to be transported in two destroyers, two Glen ships and a cruiser. It was proposed that Scarpanto, when it had been seized, should then be used as a base for a further immediate attack on Rhodes. With the capture of Rhodes the smaller Dodecanese Islands would be untenable and would easily fall into our hands.

#### Cancellation of Operation

This operation was cancelled after the German occupation of Greece and the invasion of Egypt from the West, and Z Wing, the R.A.F. force designated to take part in it, was attached to the Cretan defence force.

THE GREEK DEMANDS AND THE MIDDLE EAST AIR SITUATION

As has been shown in the narrative, in face of every demand for reinforcement from Greece, Air Chief Marshal Longmore had necessarily to ask himself what effect compliance with it would have on our position in Egypt and the Western Desert. In order to make his dilemma fully intelligible, it is well to give a short summary of the air forces there during those months.

Position in Africa

The entry of Italy into the war in June, 1940, found us dangerously weak in the air in Egypt. We had in the Western Desert only one fighter, three bomber and one Army Co-operation squadrons. We had one fighter squadron for the defence of Alexandria and the Canal, to which a second fighter squadron was afterwards added. With the Mediterranean cut the route of reinforcement was a long one nor, so long as the Battle of Britain was being fought, was much in the way of reinforcement available. The position might have been desperate had it not been for Italian lack of enterprise.

After three dangerous months the organisation of the Takoradi route gave hopes of a more satisfactory flow of reinforcement in October. It was just at this moment that the demand came to send forces to Greece. The demand had to be complied with. As we have seen, four squadrons were sent. As a result the force in the Western Desert was still very weak in November. We had there at that time two bomber squadrons and two flights of two other squadrons, two fighter squadrons, and two Army Co-operation squadrons and a flight of another squadron. A few Bombays and Wellingtons were also available for night bombing.

To these another fighter and another bomber squadron were added in early December, when the demand came for support of the Army's offensive, which began on December 9. The demand could only be met at all by calling in reinforcing squadrons from Aden and the Sudan and by denuding Alexandria and the Canal of effective air defence. Thus the equivalent of about ten squadrons could be collected. Against this the Italians had about 250 bombers and 250 fighters - a superiority of about four to one - with an easy reinforcement route from their home country.

Proposed Infiltration into Turkey

The first months of the New Year brought, as has been shown, elsewhere in this narrative, the proposal of further air reinforcements to Greece and the proposed plan of infiltration into Turkey. It was suggested that we should send 14 squadrons to Greece and we did send about 10. Had the Turkish Government accepted Mr. Churchill's infiltration proposals, we should have been committed to sending at least 10 squadrons to Turkey. Again it is important to see these proposals against the background of the general situation in the Middle East, as of course the Middle Eastern situation in its turn must be seen against the background of the shortage at home and the still very real dangers of an invasion here.

The month of January was occupied with the British offensive in the Western Desert, successful in spite of our

/numerical

numerical inferiority in the air. Benghazi was captured on February 6, but, specifically because of the Greek demands, we did not advance beyond El Aghcila but took up what we hoped would prove a stabilised position there. Contrary to our expectations, however, the Germans took over from the Italians in Libya, and on April 2, four days before their offensive into Greece, they opened an offensive in the Western Desert, which robbed us of all the Italian territory which we had conquered in North Africa with the exception of Tobruk and gravely threatened our position in Egypt.

On February 10 we opened our offensive in East Africa, which led to the surrender of the Duke of Aosta on May 17 and to the final Italian expulsion from all Italian East Africa, Abyssinia and British Somaliland.

Our evacuation of Greece coincided with the revolt in Iraq on May 2 and our evacuation of Crete with our re-entry into Baghdad on June 2.

Throughout these months Malta and our naval communications in the Mediterranean were under attack from the Germans who had established themselves in Sicily.

#### Our Forces in Middle East at New Year, 1941.

On January 1, 1941, we had in Egypt 8 bomber squadrons, 4 fighter squadrons and two Army Co-operation Squadrons, one bomber-transport squadron and one flying-boat squadron. We had in Palestine one Army Co-operation squadron and a French fighter flight. We had in the Sudan a South African fighter squadron - which incidentally the policy of the South African Government would not allow to be sent out of Africa - three bomber squadrons, a Rhodesian Army Co-operation Squadron and some odd fighter flights. In Kenya the South Africans had three bomber, two fighter and two Army Co-operation Squadrons - again, none of them to be sent out of Africa. There were two bomber squadrons, a fighter squadron and a French bomber flight in Aden, essential if the Red Sea was to be kept open to our shipping. In Malta there were two fighter and one fighter-bomber squadrons. At the same time there were, as we have seen, four squadrons - two fighter and two bomber - in Greece. There was also a detachment of a Sunderland squadron in Crete.

In the middle of February, after the capture of Benghazi, owing to the demands of the Greek campaign, no attempt was made to press on to Tripoli. Instead all forces possible were withdrawn to Egypt and there were left in Cyrenaica only 2 fighter, one bomber and one Army Co-operation squadron. This small force was almost immediately subjected for the first time to attacks by German aircraft. Up till then the Germans had left that part of the world entirely to their Italian allies. As a result one fighter squadron, No. 73, which it had been intended to send to Greece, was retained in Cyrenaica.

During these months - that is to say, from January 1 to March 31 - the losses of aircraft from all causes in the Middle East were 184. The new arrivals via Takoradi or Malta were 166. As during these months we were conducting campaigns against an enemy numerically our superior in the air in East Africa it was impossible to withdraw forces from there. With the Germans growing rapidly in strength both in Tripoli and in the Balkans, the gravity of Air Chief Marshal Longmore's problem can be easily seen. It was upon a background of such a general situation

/that he

that he was called upon to supply reinforcements to Greece in February and March.

A Memorandum of March 6, 1941, sums up the air situation at that date. In Libya the Italian air force could be then be almost neglected. On the other hand the Germans had there about 170 fighters and dive-bombers. An indefinite number of long-range bombers operated from Sicily and Southern Italy against either Cyrenaica or the Suez Canal. German reinforcements were pouring into Tripolitania. The enemy air bases were out of range of our fighters. To meet this threat we had in Cyrenaica 4 Squadrons (one Hurricane, one Army Co-operation and one Blenheim I) and about 16 Wellingtons, who had to operate against the Dodecanese as well as against Tripolitania.

Malta was much the most convenient base for attacks on targets in Tripoli, Sicily or Southern Italy, but it itself was under heavy attack and defended by only one fighter squadron. Unless a second fighter squadron could be spared, it would not be possible any longer to use it as a bomber base.

German aircraft from Rhodes were beginning to operate against Alexandria and to lay mines in the Canal.

It was against this background that we must judge the correspondence of March of that year, the complaints of Air Vice-Marshal D'Albiac, the complaints of Air Chief Marshal Longmore and the complaints of the Prime Minister.

#### German Attacks in April

By April, when the Germans delivered their challenge both in Africa and in the Balkans, the Takoradi route was working more rapidly, the back of Italian resistance had broken in East Africa and aircraft could be spared from there. Reinforcements were beginning to flow in but they were too late to save Cyrenaica or Greece and almost too late to save the Suez Canal. By April 30, if we count by squadrons, the force in Egypt, the Western Desert and Palestine seemed formidable. 36 squadrons and some odd flights were listed as established, among which the squadrons evacuated from Greece are included. But, if we count the number of aircraft on the strength out of all these squadrons, we find that it only comes to 288.

MIDDLE EAST REINFORCEMENT: CORRESPONDENCE  
BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER, AIR CHIEF MARSHAL LONGMORE &  
AIR VICE-MARSHAL D'ALBUAC

BFG/AOC/4  
24A

"I am very distressed about the acute position of aircraft, particularly so as at the present time the Italians have chosen the opportunity for another of their periodical bursts of activity on the Albanian front. At the present moment I have no more than 12 serviceable fighters (Hurricanes and Gladiators) on that front and a similar number sharing the responsibility of the defence of Athens and Volos" - letter from Air Vice-Marshal D'Albiac to Air Chief Marshal Longmore 15.3.41.

BFG/AOC/4.  
27A

Air Chief Marshal Longmore replied on the following day - "Your squadrons are doing magnificently on Albanian front. Urgent necessity for reinforcing Malta with fighters has temporarily deprived you of those promised. More Hurricanes have just arrived Takoradi and you will get some immediately they come over". The news aroused Air Vice-Marshal D'Albiac to large ambitions, unclouded by the shadow of coming events. He wrote back to Air Chief Marshal Longmore on March 18 - "Is not now the time to press for facilities to enable us to carry out really big operations from Greece? I hear reports of the fine performance of the new heavy bombers at home, Stirlings, Manchesters, etc. Could not the Air Ministry be persuaded to send some to us now?.....Now we have the Army out here, units of which I regard purely as aerodrome guards pushed well forward, we have a comparatively secure base to operate from ..... Now we have got our footing in Europe, I see no reason why we should not take full advantage of it."

BFG/AOC/4.  
33A

Prime Minister to  
Air Chief  
Marshal  
Longmore.  
29/3/41  
X.539.

Air Chief Marshal Longmore in his reply of March 22 poured cold water upon this flame of vision. It was as well that he did so, for two days later he received the following letter from the Prime Minister - "I have been concerned to read your continual complaints of the numbers of aircraft which are sent you", wrote the Prime Minister. "Every conceivable effort has been made under my express directions to reinforce you by every route and method for the last five months. In order to do this, the Navy have been deprived of Argus and Furious and are left without a single a/c carrier except occasionally Ark Royal to cope with the German battle-cruisers in the Atlantic. We are as fully informed as you of what you are getting. A weekly report is submitted to me of all movement via Takoradi. Therefore, when I read a telegram from General Smuts in which he refers to 'Beaverbrook being persuaded to disgorge from his hoard' or when I read the C-in-C. Mediterranean's telegram to First Sea Lord stating that 'Only one Hurricane was received during the month of March' and when I also read your A.442 which seeks to justify this absurd statement, I fear there must be some talk emanating from your Headquarters which is neither accurate nor helpful."

General  
Smuts to  
Prime  
Minister  
6/3/41.

AOC-in-C.  
to VCAS.3A  
11/3/41

Air Chief Marshal Longmore in reply repudiated responsibility for the phrase about Lord Beaverbrook. "Smuts' reference to Beaverbrook was quite unprompted", wrote Air Marshal Tedder in confirmation, but, Air Chief Marshal Longmore pleaded "Commitments have grown and are still growing beyond the resources which can be built up along one single air line of communication from Takoradi". The Prime Minister returned a mollified reply.

DO/AML/15  
72B.

On the very same day that Mr. Churchill sent his rebuke to Air Chief Marshal Longmore, M. Corizis had sent an exaggerated complaint that seemed to bear evidence of breaking nerves. "Please communicate to H.E. Mr. Eden that the Greek military authorities report that not only no aid of the R.A.F. has been sent to Greece but even the few fighters that were in action on the Albanian front have nearly completely disappeared."

TURKISH RELATIONSThe Anglo-French-Turkish Alliance

When the war began Turkey was an ally of Great Britain and France, pledged to go to war should the war spread to the Eastern Mediterranean. Greece had merely accepted the Franco-British guarantee and had made no pretence that she would fight were she not herself attacked. Turkey's claim to such supplies as were available was, therefore, superior to that of Greece; and indeed Rumania which received long-nose Blenheims before they were supplied to our own Middle Eastern forces, was preferred to Greece. The Allied policy in these early months was well summed up by a despatch from the War Office on September, 20th, 1939. "It is very important to ensure that Turkey should intervene on our side because if Italy should join Germany, or if the latter country extends her military operations into the Balkans, the intervention of Greece or Rumania on our side could only add to our immediate commitments...Present policy is that British armed forces should not be committed to any action in Salonika, which is most unsuitable as a base for operations." This policy had been agreed upon by Mr. Chamberlain and M. Daladier at the first meeting of the Supreme War Council. They agreed that everything should be done to keep Italy out of the war "In spite of that there are", reported the Chiefs of Staff in the meeting on September 20th, 1939, "constant indications giving grounds for the belief that the French are contemplating some move in the Balkans not in accordance with that policy... The French appear to be obsessed with Salonika". General Weygand, then French Commander in Syria, was continually toying with plans for a landing on Salonika and an offensive in the Balkan Peninsula. General Gamelin also, in spite of the War Council's ruling, was four months later still intriguing for the Salonika plan.

S.1871  
11A  
20.9.39.

S.1871  
10A  
20.9.39.

COS' (40)  
War Serial  
No.213  
11.1.40.

S.1871  
10A  
20.9.39.

It is true that the Italians were not keeping the Anglo-Italian Agreement in that they were reinforcing Libya and the Dodocanese and not informing us of such reinforcements, as they were under obligation to do under the Agreement. On the other hand, admitted the Chiefs of Staff "it seems almost certain that these (French) projects of forcing Italy into the war in order to provide a soft spot for an Allied offensive, which are constantly being canvassed in France, must have reached the ears of the Italian Government. Moreover, they must be well aware of Weygand's activities...When our Ambassador in Rome takes up the question of the breaking of the Agreement it might be as well to disabuse the minds of the Italians of any idea that we are double-crossing them in the Balkans".

Turkey or Greece?

Up to the Italian attack on Greece, the Air Ministry had been very reluctant to divert to Greece such military resources as it had available for export. The general view being - a mistaken one, as it afterwards proved, - that Turkey was a more reliable friend than Greece. The Turks had, of course it must be recognised, only signed the alliance with us on the assumption that France with her Army in Syria would be also belligerent and, according to the military clauses of the alliance, the defence of Turkey was very largely entrusted to French fighters based at Aleppo. Owing to the French collapse, to the fact that even while they were still in the war the supplies that they sold to the Turks were very largely "dud" and for other reasons, deliveries of raw materials to Turkey were behind schedule. The tactics of the Turks, allied as they were to the Greeks, were to compel the Greeks to state most explicitly their desire to keep out of the war and then to turn the documents over to the British should not be tempted to send their

Mr. Eden  
to Prime  
Minister  
28.2.41.

S.2981  
10

/spare

spare supplies to Greece rather than Turkey. To the Greek requests that if Turkey would not fight as she had promised she should at any rate let Greece have some fighter aircraft they always turned a deaf ear. The Turkish policy worked. The attitude of the Air Ministry in those days may well be summed up by an unsigned minute from an officer in D.D.I.3 written and initialled on January 1st, 1940:-

"Good. A modern aircraft exported to Greece is a modern aircraft down the plug 'ole"

On the other hand in May, 1940, Air Chief Marshal Longmore discovered that the Turks had 19 Hurricanes at a time when Middle East itself had as yet none.

#### Turkish Reluctance to Help Greece

The whole issue was of the very first importance because Greek guns were all of the French type and, therefore, only suitable for French ammunition, which neither the British nor the Americans manufactured. After the fall of France there was, of course, nothing forthcoming from France. The Turks alone in that part of the world had ammunition of this type. It was, therefore, vital, could they be persuaded to do so, that the Turks release some of this to the Greeks, but they could not be persuaded. The only method of pressure upon us that the Greeks had in these early days was to threaten that if no supplies were forthcoming they would follow the example of the Bulgarians, and to some extent the Jugo-Slavs, and buy from the Axis. They had some negotiations for arms apparatus with Germany and when we refused to sell them Gladiators in December, 1939, (we had none to spare, having just sold thirty to Finland), they threatened to sign a contract for the supply of fighters with Italy, but it was obviously not a very potent threat, as the Axis was not likely to supply them with sufficient war material to make them capable of an effective resistance to Italian armies.

The Greeks, after the Italian entry into the war and the torpedoing of the Greek cruiser Helli at the Island of Tenos on the Feast of the Assumption in August, 1940, had little doubt that they would soon have to fight. General Metaxas showed himself to have a better understanding of the probabilities of Turkish policy than British military, political or diplomatic authorities. On August 22nd, 1940, he told Sir Michael Palairot, the Greek Ambassador at Ankara had "received a somewhat evasive answer from the Turkish Government and he understood that a similar reply had been returned to our own... He earnestly hoped that we would not allow the Turkish action to make precedent pretext for evading her obligations". "He (General Metaxas) has based his policies" reported Sir Michael Palairot to the Secretary of State for War, Mr. Eden, on October, 17th, 1940, "on belief in our victory, but he has persistently warned us of strategic danger of concentrating on helping Turkey to the exclusion of Greece in the event of an Axis drive against Greece and Turkey. He is confident that his army can hold up Italian land forces now in Albania and thus preserve our flank if he were provided with some air support and some anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons. There is, however, danger of effect of unopposed air bombardment both on army morale and civilian determination". "I cannot refrain from remarking that Greece's consistent readiness to play her part despite the minimum moral and financial support from H.M. Government contrasts sharply with Turkey's manifest reluctance to fulfil her engagements, even after being comparatively heavily subsidised". Sir

M. Palairot  
to F.O.  
No. 725  
22.8.40.

Chiefs of  
Staff  
Ctee (40)  
No. 846  
22.10.40.

/Michael

Sir Michael Michael Palairret also wrote "And if we cannot prevent Turkey Palairret from refusing to enter the war if Greece is attacked, are we to F.O. ever likely to be in a better position to get her to play her No.1738 part? If Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugesson's arguments are accepted I 23.8.40. cannot help wondering why we were at great pains and expense to obtain Turkey's alliance".

Overestimate of Likelihood of Turkish Intervention

Sir  
Michael  
Palairret  
to F.O.  
No.738  
23.8.40.

The Turks, in spite of their alliance with Greece, did not, of course, declare war when Greece was attacked. So long as the Balkan war was a purely Italo-Greek war the military authorities in this country took the view that Turkish intervention would do more harm than good, but they seemed throughout to have counted to an extent that proved wholly fallacious, on a possibility of Turkish intervention if there should be a German invasion of Greece. In discussing plans for the bombing of Roumanian oilfields it was confidently expected that the Turkish airfield of Eskisehir would be available "If it comes to a question of choosing between Greece and Turkey, I am sure you will agree that in the present circumstances we must give priority to Turkey" wrote Sir Archibald Sinclair to the Prime Minister.

COS Com.  
(40)  
No.743  
14.9.40.

There was, to put it mildly, some excuse for the misunderstanding. The Dominions Office reported on November 10th, 1940, to the High Commissioners in the Dominions "Please inform Prime Minister that Turkish Minister for Foreign Affairs is informing E.M. Ambassador at Ankara that if Germany were to move from Bulgaria it would be a move against Greece and Turkey, and Turkey would go to war." As a result of similar assurances received by the Greek Government from the Turkish Government to the effect that latter will guarantee Bulgarian-Greek frontier, General Metaxas has decided to remove considerable forces from that area. On January 20th, the Turkish Foreign Minister said to the Greek Ambassador, 'with some warmth, "As I have told the British Ambassador and you three times, Turkey would regard a German attack through Bulgaria as a casus belli". He made no suggestion that Turkey's decision would be influenced by the accident of the supply of arms from England.'

Sir  
Michael  
Palairret  
to F.O.  
No.335  
7.3.41.

The Infiltration Plan

The Prime Minister had a plan for infiltrating ten R.A.F. Squadrons and one hundred AA guns into Turkey in a manner similar to that in which the Germans had infiltrated into Bulgaria. He wrote to President Inönü of Turkey on February 1st, 1941.

"The rapidly growing danger to Turkey and to British interests leads me, Mr. President, to address you directly.

I have some information that the Germans are already establishing themselves upon Bulgarian aerodromes. Hutments are being prepared, and advance servicing personnel numbering several thousands have arrived. This has been done with full connivance of the Royal Bulgarian Air Force and undoubtedly of the Bulgarian Government. Very soon, perhaps in a few weeks, the movement into Bulgaria of German troops and air squadrons will begin. The air squadrons will only have to fly from their stations in Rumania to the bases they are preparing in Bulgaria and will immediately be able to come into action. The Germans would then be in a position to summon you to stand aside under threat that they will immediately bombard Istanbul and your great cities and dive-bomb your troops in Thrace. No doubt they would hope

/either



to reach Salonika unopposed or to compel the Greeks to make peace with Italy and yield them air bases in Greece and in the Islands, thus endangering the communications between our armies in Egypt and the Turkish Army. They would deny the use of Smyrna to our Navy, they would completely control the exits from the Dardanelles and thus complete the encirclement of Turkey in Europe on three sides. This would also facilitate their attacks upon Alexandria and Egypt generally. Of course I know, Mr. President, that, confronted with these mortal dangers, Turkey would fight for her life, but why is it necessary to hand over to the enemy the enormous advantage of being able to secure the mastery of the Bulgarian airfields without a word being said or a single effective counter-measure taken? The Germans are in fact preparing to repeat on the frontiers of Turkey exactly the same kind of manoeuvre as they accomplished on the frontiers of France in April and May, 1940. But in this case, instead of having hesitating and terrified neutrals like Denmark, Holland and Belgium, she has in Bulgaria a confederate and former ally, who has beyond all doubt abandoned the will, and never had the power, to resist.

All this, I repeat, may fall upon us in February or in March, and will be open to the Germans even without moving any large masses of troops from the moment when the Bulgarian airfields have been fitted to receive the German air force and are occupied by the advanced aircraft personnel and ground staff. Do we propose to sit still with folded hands and watch the steady preparation of this deadly stroke? It seems to me that we should be held gravely blameworthy by our respective nations if we were to fail in ordinary prudence and foresight. Even now we have waited too long.

I therefore propose to you, Mr. President, that our two countries should repeat in defence of Turkey the same kind of measures which the Germans are taking on the Bulgarian airfields. My Government wish to send to Turkey at the earliest moment when accommodation can be provided at least ten Squadrons of fighter and bomber aircraft apart from the five now in action in Greece, which we intend to maintain to help her in her fight. And further we will fight the air war from Turkish bases with ever-increasing Air Forces of the highest quality. Thus we shall help to give the Turkish Army the additional air support which they need to sustain their famous military qualities. But, more than that, we shall place Turkey in a position, once our squadrons are on the Turkish airfields, to threaten to bombard the Rumanian oilfields if any German advance is made into Bulgaria, or, better still, if the air personnel already in Bulgaria is not speedily withdrawn. We will undertake not to take such action from Turkish airfields except by agreement with you. There is more to come. The attitude of Russia is uncertain and it is our hope it may remain loyal and friendly. Nothing will more restrain Russia from aiding Germany, even indirectly, than the presence of powerful British bombing forces, which could attack the oilfields of Baku. Russia is dependent upon the supply from these oilfields for a very large part of her agriculture and far reaching famine would follow their destruction. We are assured that the whole soil around the oilwells is impregnated with petroleum making it possible to start a conflagration on a scale not hitherto witnessed in the world. Thus Turkey, once defended by air power, would have the means of deterring Germany from overrunning Bulgaria and quelling Greece and of counterbalancing the Russian fear of the German Armies. If this decisive position is to be saved, there is not an hour to lose, and on receipt of your assent His Majesty's Government will immediately give the necessary orders for our advanced personnel, either in uniform or in plain clothes as you prefer, to start at once for Turkey

/Further

Further we are prepared to send you 100 A.A. guns, which are now either in or on their way to Egypt. These would be complete with personnel either in uniform, if you so desire, or in the guise of instructors. All other measures which have been discussed with Marshal Chakmak and also the naval measures will at the right moment be brought into operation. The victories we have gained in Libya will enable us to give a far more direct and immediate measure of aid to Turkey in the event of our two countries becoming allied in war, and we will make common cause with you and use our growing strength to aid your valiant Armies".

DO/AML/  
2.93A

Air Chief Marshal Longmore's Dismay.

DO/AML/2  
87A.  
30/1/41.

Had the Turks agreed to this infiltration, it was the Prime Minister's suggestion that the needs of it should take "priority over operations against East Africa, Abyssinia, Sicily and further assistance to Greece." Air Chief Marshal Longmore, looking to the immediate needs of Africa and Greece and judging that these infiltrated squadrons would at the best be locked up "for a time until Turkey declared her hand", replied to this signal "Quite frankly contents astound me". "There seems to be a mistaken idea," he complained to Air Vice Marshal D'Albiac "that when the situation in Cyrenaica and Eritrea is stabilised there will be nothing left for the Air Force to do in these areas and that therefore they can be sent to Turkey".

DO/AML/2  
64A

DO/AML/15  
26A  
4.2.41.

"Can you confirm", he asked C.A.S. a little desperately "that security of our Army in Cyrenaica, defence of Malta and successful Mandibles are to have prior claims to policy of air infiltration into Turkey and that further air assistance in Greece will now be afforded?" C.A.S. could confirm no such thing.

AOC/9  
8A

31.1.41

It astounded the Turks, too, and they took advantage of it to raise their price. "Turkish long term equipment demands", Air Vice Marshal Elmhirst reported on January 23. "Turks have put forward schedule of air requirements with a view to re-equipping in time Air Force from England or America, with 500 first line aircraft of latest type. Schedule includes besides aircraft, bombs, fuel, training aircraft, anti-aircraft guns for aerodromes, defence lorries, etc. and is all in addition to requirements previously ordered." "I am unofficially informed", reported Air Vice-Marshal Elmhirst again on January 29, "that the main reaction of the Turkish Air Staff to liaison staff conversations recently concluded is one of disappointment that I did not arrive with full plans for the immediate dumping of Air Force supplies for our own use and with plans for the immediate establishment in Turkey of Air Force base depot (officers?) repair workshops and even aircraft factories".

X.4842

X.6662

Air Chief Marshal Longmore suggested that the competing claims of Greeks and Turks might in a measure be reconciled by assigning squadrons to be operated from either Greece or Turkey "according to circumstances". But this was not really a practicable suggestion, as the Greeks were at war with the Italians and very anxious to avoid war with the Germans, whereas the Turks, if they went to war with anybody, would go to war with Germany.

Turkish Rejection of Mr. Churchill's Plan.

F.O.  
No.235

The Turks never showed any signs of accepting Mr. Churchill's suggestion. "Long conversations ensued", reported Sir Hugh Knatchbull Hugesson on February 2, "during which Minister for Foreign Affairs expressed purely personal views. He was reluctant that I should inform you at this stage but I do so as an indication. They are not encouraging. They deal with three points :-

/(a)

- (a) He was inclined to think that fears as to immediate danger from infiltration into Bulgaria were exaggerated.
- (b) He did not think our offer sufficient to cope with German attack.
- (c) To participate in the offer would be a provocation amounting to act of war for which Turkey was not ready.

Minister for Foreign Affairs saw no objection to immediate preparations such as despatch of material supplies, etc., his objection was to despatch of actual aircraft, etc., with personnel.

The Turks were afraid not only of the Germans but also of "the present coldness of the Soviet Union". They feared that provocative action would bring down upon them not only a German but also a Russian attack, and they were unwilling to pay the price which Russia was demanding for changing sides. "Part of price Soviet Government might expect Turkey to pay for any assistance would be concessions at Straits. You will remember discussions on this point last autumn and Turkish determination not to offer such concessions". On that very same day that situation was somewhat eased by M. Vyshinski reading to the Turkish Ambassador in Moscow the following declaration. "I am authorised by the President of the Council of People's Commissars and the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the U.S.S.R. to announce that this revision does not (group omitted) at all with the attitude of the Soviet Government, and should Turkey really be subjected to an attack on the part of any foreign Power and be obliged with arms in her hands to defend inviolability of her territory then Turkey, relying on non-aggression pact existing between her and the U.S.S.R., may count on full understanding and neutrality of Russian Government".

F.O. to  
Moscow.  
No.191.  
9.3.41.

Quoted by  
Sir S.  
Cripps to  
Foreign  
Office  
No.204.  
10.3.41.

Nevertheless, the President's official reply, when it was forthcoming on February 7th was along much the same lines as the Foreign Minister's prognostications. "To allow the presence in Turkey", he wrote, "in anticipation of a German advance threatening Turkish security, of British air and artillery units, would mean the entry of Turkey into the war. Such a step cannot be contemplated...The situation even with regard to material dealt with by special agreements is far from satisfactory two years after the opening of the negotiations. It is therefore eminently desirable that Mr. Churchill's proposals (about supply of material to Turkey, but not about infiltration) should be carried out without delay".

#### Advance in Price of Chrome

M.E. Intell- The next day it was learnt that, while the Turks were still  
igence willing to sell the British chrome as heretofore, they were "de-  
Ctr. manding a stiff advance in the price per ton over that granted for  
No.432. the 1940 production."

8.2.41.  
11J1/14.

BAFG/201/  
Plans 21A  
22.3.41.  
AOC.9  
16B  
15.2.41.

The Turks would have fought against a direct attack but they never had any intention of fighting because of an attack on anybody else. "Before the war with Italy we had promised sixty Spitfires to Turkey. Only two supplied and further supply now impossible", reported the Air Ministry, but there is little reason to think that the Turks would have fought even if they had had the sixty.

#### Mr. Eden Loses Faith in Turkish Intentions.

Even when Greece came to be menaced by a direct German threat,

/our policy

COS  
papers  
56

AOC/9.  
38A.  
4.3.41.

Mr. Eden  
to Prime  
Minister  
28.2.41.

Personal  
453 F.O.  
6.3.41.

FO.490  
8.3.41.

our policy was still strangely obsessed with Turkish possibilities. "The only way of making sure that the Turks do fight" thought the Defence Committee "is to give sufficient support to the Greeks to ensure they fight." Therefore it was decided to agree to the Greek request "that ten squadrons of the R.A.F. which were originally earmarked for Turkey might be drawn upon for Greece". "After a conference in Ankara in March Air Vice Marshal Elnhirst reported on the 36 Tomahawks and the equipment and personnel which Turkey had agreed to accept. "It is" he said "a matter of honour between the Turks and ourselves that we implement our agreement", and "the Turkish Air Force is likely to be fighting on our side before very long". But the Turks by then "stated that the common cause would be better served if Turkey remained out of the war until her deficiencies had been remedied". All that they would promise was that "Turkey undertakes in any event to enter the war at some stage". Mr. Eden no longer had any illusions. He telegraphed to the Prime Minister on March 6th "Greeks are much distressed at realisation that has dawned upon them that if Greece is attacked Turkey may not after all regard this as casus belli in spite of previous undertakings...German propaganda is carrying on nerve war against Greeks by every possible means and in particular by alleging that Greece is being deserted by her friends. Hitler's message to Turkish President and fact that Greek Government have not been informed of what passed are being used to foment these fears...If Turkish Government cannot be prevailed on (to make a public declaration of solidarity with Greece) could they not at least take over the positions in Thrace now to be evacuated by seven Greek Battalions". Two days later, however, he telegraphed to our Minister in Belgrade. "I have confidence in Turkish loyalty. You may use foregoing paragraphs in conversation with Jugo-Slav Government".

What really happened was that the Turks had signed a non-aggression pact with Bulgaria on February 17th and on February 19th the Turkish President received a letter from Hitler thanking him for "his good-will". So far from the Turks relieving the Greek-Thracian garrisons, the Germans were able to withdraw their troops from the Turko-Bulgarian border and throw them on to Greece, and Jugo-Slavia. In May, after having expelled us from Greece, the Germans expelled us from Crete. On June 18th Turkey and Germany signed a Treaty of Friendship and on June 22nd Germany attacked Russia.

Our Air Obligations under Treaty of 1939 with Turkey, and Performance up to 10 February, 1941.

AOC.9  
18B

Number promised in full figure

" delivered in brackets.

(d) = all delivered.

Aircraft

Ansons	25 (6)
Battlos (Standard)	30 (d)
Battles (t/t)	4 (1)
Blenheims I	10 (d) (30 had been supplied before Treaty)
Hurricanes	30 (d)
Magisters	25 (75 in process of delivery)
Spitfires	60 (2)

33 Lysanders supplied with spare engines

Other supplies

Petrol (aviation)	3,000 tons (d)
Oil	300 " (d)
Parachutes	400 " (d)
Flying Clothes	577 sets (d)
Bellman Hangars	15 (d)
Bessoneau Hangars	25 (in process of supply)
Bombs	4,000 tons (d)
Pyrotechnics	73,000 (none delivered)
Aerodrome equipment	estimated at £42,000 (in process of supply)
Portable W/T stations	15 (limited number available)
Railway Petrol Tank Wagons	40 (Nil delivered)
M/T equipment	estimated at £305,000 (very little delivered) and smaller items

Also 1 ambulance supplied

YUGOSLAV RELATIONS

BFG/  
207/8A On March 9th Wing Commander MacDonald, our Air Attache in Belgrade, wrote to Wing Commander Lord Forbes, our Air Attache in Athens - "There are to my knowledge for certain 70 experienced pilots who have every intention of leaving the country by any means and joining the Greeks or us or the Turks (if they are at war) in the event of the Yugoslav Government giving way too much to Germany. Some of these pilots intend flying over in their civil or service aircraft while others (together with an even larger number of ground personnel) intend to escape by land or sea route". He suggested that they be instructed to proceed to Larissa.

BFG/  
207/A In a signal of March 10th he reported "I should explain at present I have been approached by four categories people approving, making plans and asking advice or instructions in order to leave country and join us in event Yugoslavia capitulating favour Germans. None these categories appear aware each other's activities. They are (a) the Air Force as a whole. (Through J.K. and almost certainly with active preference of I.H.) (b) Civil Air line pilots; (c) Individual Air Force Pilots; (d) Civilians such as doctors, engineers etc. Up till now I have only registered particulars and stated I am waiting instructions".

BFG/  
207/11A Wing Commander Forbes replied on March 13th, instructing them to proceed to Almyros. "Since some Yugoslav aircraft German and Italian types, streamers at least 12 feet long should be fastened to tail. Land evacuees should proceed Florina".

BFG/  
207/39A On March 21st Wing Commander MacDonald signalled - "Before proceeding to Athens I had long talk with J.K., two Staff Officers and representatives of I.H. and tentatively discussed (a) possible co-operation with us; (b) bombing objectives; (c) evacuation. At Athens very satisfactory meeting with Air Officer Commanding and representative of Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief. Discussed above question and procedure with individual air force deserters now crossing into Greece. On return to Belgrade again saw J.K. etc. and I think there are good prospects this Air Force playing part in our favour whatever may be political outcome. Am discussing with Staff Officer this afternoon possible use auxiliary landing grounds in Serbia for our bombers in event of hostilities. Essential that no knowledge of these talks gets round and they have to be carried out with great discretion. There are Yugoslavs feeling they are being hurried against their interests solely for our own".

BFG/  
207/30A On March 22nd Air Vice-Marshal D'Albiac signalled Air Chief Marshal Longmore - "Scheme for evacuation fully discussed here with MacDonald and ready to put into operation. You will probably wish to consult Secretary of State before any action taken, and suggest therefore that executive order to commence comes from you".

BFG/  
207/33A On the same day Wing Commander MacDonald telegraphed - "Political situation is not encouraging. Am seeing J.K. in confidence early tomorrow morning and questions may be raised on immediate or early evacuation of Air Force if feeling is sufficiently strong that Serbs have been let down by their Government."

On March 22nd, he also telegraphed - "There are rumours that the tri-partite pact will be signed within a few days. In Air Force this has resulted in a strengthening of decision of pilots to fly out of country rather than come under German control. Slav temperament is such, however, that, after pact is signed (if it is), there may be a reaction of despair causing the gloomy acquiescence

/to new order.

to new order. It may therefore be in our interests to encourage an evacuation as soon as we feel certain that pact will be signed but before objectionable acts (corrupt group). The choosing of right moment would be a very difficult matter, particularly if we do not know details of pact. In principle, however, it would appear easier to err on early side rather (than) on late side as we would then at any rate be certain of having some birds in hand. An maintaining close contact with Minister and other organisations."

BFG/207  
35A

On March 25th, he signalled - "While there is a chance of the country fighting instead of giving in I have not talked of evacuation to pilots. Would B.B.C. be prepared at short notice to announce on wireless in Serbian that all pilots wishing to join our forces should fly at once to any Greek aerodrome?....Alternatively I hope to arrange whole thing in confidence with senior officers who intend themselves to leave the country in certain circumstances."

BFG/207  
/29A

On March, 25th, Air Chief Marshal Longmore signalled - "Have discussed with C.I.G.S. and Secretary of State, and latter has sent following signal to Minister, Belgrade." 'Should pact with Germany be signed and it becomes probable that army will not fight we should wish air force to evacuate. You alone can judge when, if ever, that moment arrives and you have full authority to act as situation demand. If any part of the Serb army should fight on our side we should propose that Yugoslav Air Force should be employed with Royal Air Force in supporting them.' Executive order to commence will therefore come from Minister, Belgrade."

BFG/207  
/45A

On March 26th he signalled - "It is possible that some Yugoslav pilots may fly to Greece own planes during next delay (?) beginning tonight. Please do all you can to prevent them being attacked by Greek or British fighters or A.A. guns. Scheme for organised evacuation will not come into operation we are more established(?) Serbs are not, of course, repudiating their present Government".

BFG/207  
41A

D/AOC/2  
20A, 20B,  
21A, 26A.

With the Yugoslav coup d'etat of March 29 it became, of course, unnecessary to carry out these plans. In December, 1940, there had been a not dissimilar plot for the desertion to us of some Rumanian pilots under a Wing Commander Burduliou. It had come to nothing.

AIRFIELDS  
USED BY THE  
ROYAL AIR FORCE  
IN  
GREECE

