

REPORT BY AIR COMMODORE J.W.B. GRIGSON
ON
R.A.F. ACTIVITIES IN THE PELOPONESSOS
22nd APRIL, 1941 TO 29th APRIL, 1941.

1. On the evening of 21st April, 1941 the Air Officer Commanding, B.A.F., Greece detailed me to proceed to ARGOS to take charge of R.A.F. in PELOPONESSOS, including the fighter rearguard and evacuation of such personnel as could not be evacuated from the ATHENS area.
2. I arrived at ARGOS by air on 22nd April, 1941 at 0830 and found a nucleus staff under Flight Lieutenant N.S. JENKS already established in a well concealed camp near the main landing ground which latter had been in use by the Elementary Flying School of the R.H.A.F.. Flight Lieutenant JENKS' party had a W/T set operating at their camp.
3. The main landing ground at ARGOS was completely lacking in any form of cover in which to conceal the fighter aircraft, nor were there any shelter trenches for their personnel. I therefore decided that they must be operated from the smaller landing ground three miles North where there was a telephone and where the Greek F.T.S. aircraft were concealed in an extensive olive grove. There were also ample trenches and other accommodation for the personnel. My operational headquarters and a W/T set were established here. Experience at LARISSA, ELEUSIS and MENIDI had shown clearly that some form of concealment was essential as an antidote to the German low flying machine gun attack in addition to anti-aircraft defences.
4. The anti-aircraft defences available on 22nd April were two Greek Bofors and two Greek Hotchkiss machine guns at the northern L.G. and one Greek Hotchkiss at the southern main L.G.
5. A site in extensive olive groves South of the main L.G. was selected as the bivouac area for R.A.F. personnel sent down from ATHENS for evacuation. Two schools in ARGOS were got from the Greek Air Force for the same purpose.
6. All available Hurricanes arrived at ARGOS from ATHENS area in the afternoon of 22nd April, 1941 and were parked in the North L.G. olive grove. No ground personnel had arrived. Greek airman (of whom some 60 of the Elementary F.T.S. were still present) were used for this and for re-fuelling. These aircraft were fired on by the Greek Bofors when circling to land and one was put out of action.
7. During the evening and night of 22nd/23rd April the R.A.F. personnel for evacuation began to arrive by road.
8. On the morning of 23rd April a fighter offensive patrol was despatched over the ARGOS-~~MEGARA~~-LAVRION area to cover the movement of troops to collecting areas and arrival of ships. Reconnaissances (Hurricanes) were also sent to Northern EUBOEA and to the road ARTA-MISOLOGAI; very little movement seen.
9. From a communication received from H.Q., B.A.F. Greece (S.180 Ops. 22/4/41) it appeared to be the intention to attempt to operate evacuation land-planes from ARGOS and flying-boats from NAUPLIA in daylight. I considered this quite impracticable in the face of the enemy air activity which was rapidly intensifying, and signalled urging that evacuation aircraft should arrive between sunset and dark and leave before dawn.

10. Additional British anti-aircraft (two heavy and some Bofors) under Major Pulford began to arrive on 23rd April. The heavies were placed between the two landing grounds and two of the Bofors at the South landing ground, the remainder going to the North landing ground.
11. During the morning of 23rd April enemy aircraft bombed two merchant vessels off NAUPLIA, which were being cleared ready for evacuation use. They had arrived during the night 22nd/23rd April and one contained mules for the Greek Army and the other high explosive. The mule ship was sunk and the explosive ship, whose cargo was being dumped into the sea off NAUPLIA point, was set on fire. She eventually blew up at about 1900 hours, causing extensive damage to windows in NAUPLIA.
12. Consequently a W/T signal was despatched on behalf of Sea Transport Officer to Army Force Headquarters saying that he did not consider evacuation by day in merchant ships feasible and suggesting destroyers arriving and leaving in darkness.
13. During the morning of 23rd April five re-inforcing Hurricanes arrived from CRETE. While on the main L.G. one of them was destroyed by an enemy bombing attack, having failed to get off with the other four to attempt to repel the attack. The other four landed at the North L.G. where unfortunately, one ran into a nullah and was so damaged as to be out of action.
14. On the afternoon of 23rd April the offensive patrol and reconnaissances of the morning (see para. 8.) were to be repeated. One reconnaissance aircraft and six of the patrol had taken off when a very large force of enemy fighters (30-40 Me.110) 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 hrs. and lasted till 1640. Some M.T. on the road near the North L.G. were also attacked and set on fire. Thirteen Hurricanes on the ground and one in the air were destroyed as well as a number of Greek aircraft on the South L.G. and in the olive tree aircraft park.
15. The reconnaissance again reported no great activity on the ARTA-MISOLONGAI road.
16. Pilot Officer B. ASHMOLE, R.A.F.V.R., (a Greek linguist and with a wide knowledge of Greece) proposed that he should go by car to KALAMATA to reconnoitre the possibility of evacuating personnel in local craft. Owing to the increased numbers of R.A.F. personnel who had been sent to the ARGOS area and to the ship sinkings which had occurred, I agreed to this proposal because it seemed unlikely that all the R.A.F. and Army personnel then present could be evacuated from NAUPLIA.
17. Between sunset and dark on 23rd April one Sunderland and three Lockheed Lodestars arrived. Parties for evacuation were detailed for them in accordance with an order of priority which had been indicated by H.Q., B.A.F. Greece. They left before daylight on 24th April.

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18. In consequence of the obvious impossibility of protecting the surviving Hurricanes while on the ground, and of the fact that they were so utterly out-numbered by the enemy as to be non-effective in Greece, I decided that they would be of more value based upon CRETE and employed to protect evacuation vessels during the daylight 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 24th April and signalled S.A.F.O. CRETE, HQ, BAF, GREECE, HQ, RAF, ME and HQ, BTG accordingly. Unfortunately, owing to damage to the W/T set sustained in the enemy attack of the afternoon, only part of the signal was transmitted. A second signal was made through Army W/T channel (NAUPLIA) on 24th April.
19. During the night of 23rd/24th April the Sea Transport Officer expected to be able to evacuate a number of troops and suggested that I should send down 500. This was done but no evacuation was possible.
20. Early in the morning of 24th April, Group Captain LEE arrived from ATHENS to assist in administrative matters. At the same time a favourable report was received by telephone from Pilot Officer ASHMOLE regarding evacuation possibilities from KALAMATA. I therefore decided that Group Captain LEE and the 1,700 (approx) officers and men still at ARGOS should go by train and road to KALAMATA for evacuation thence, either direct to CRETE or to the island of KRYTHIA, as a safer preliminary than remaining on the mainland. They left before noon after destroying their technical vehicles. The Army Movement Control, NAUPLIA, and later Brigadier LEE, then commanding PELOPONISSOS, were duly informed.
21. Wireless communication from the Southern L.G. Camp was re-established during the day, but unfortunately the cypher officers who had been detached for duty (Pilot Officers EDGELL and COLEMAN) went off with the KALAMATA party with their cypher books. An attempt was made by telephone to get them back from KALAMATA but it was subsequently found that their cypher books had been destroyed and consequently Group Captain LEE did not send them back. A transposition cypher was therefore inaugurated instead.
22. During the day, 24th April, enemy aircraft were continuously active and made several attacks on both the North and South landing grounds and on M.T. on the road. Group Captain LEE's party were, however, successful in getting away unscathed. It is noteworthy that the 2,000 odd personnel who were concealed with their M.T. in the olive groves remained undetected. This was undoubtedly due to the care which was observed by all ranks to remain hidden from enemy aircraft.
23. Between sunset and dark of 24th April two Sunderlands landed at NAUPLIA and were loaded during the night with R.A.F. personnel, including four R.A.F. injured, and also with Major-General Sir Ivor McKay (Commander 6th Australian Division) and one member of his staff, who had been sent from Army Force H.Q. for air evacuation. These aircraft left at about 0230 L.T. on 25th April. The four R.A.F. injured came from a Dressing Station which had been improvised in a Church at NAUPLIA by Flight Lieutenant GRIFFEN. It contained both R.A.F. and Army patients and the way in which it was being run reflects great credit on Flight Lieutenant GRIFFEN.

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24. During the night 24th/25th April the 500 R.A.F. personnel who had been sent to NAUPLIA area on 23rd April (see para 19) as well as about 250 R.A.F. personnel who had gone to NAUPLIA on arrival from ATHENS owing to mis-direction by Army guides, were evacuated to CRETE in ships under arrangements by the Army Movement Control. Unfortunately one vessel, the "ULSTER PRINCE", was run aground when being brought into NAUPLIA. She was duly destroyed by an enemy J.U.87 squadron on the morning of 25th April.
25. On the 25th April low enemy air activity continued, periodic attacks being made with bombs and machine guns on the two landing grounds in spite of the fact that the number of Bofors guns had by now increased to about eight.
26. I wasted much time and energy trying to locate the concealed headquarters of the Army Officer Commanding Troops in the PELOPONESSOS (Brigadier LEE) and later Force Headquarters. While doing so I found Army officers similarly engaged. Brigadier LEE stated that the A.A. defence of the North landing ground could not be strengthened and agreed that its use was consequently not a feasible military proposition.
27. On the afternoon of 25th April Force Headquarters was found and there General HAYWOOD (Military Mission) and Admiral TURLE (Naval Attache) asked to be informed if a Sunderland was coming that night to fetch them and some members of the Greek Government whom they had with them. In due course they were told that no Sunderland had come and one was asked for for the following night.
28. A request was also made to Headquarters, R.A.F. Middle East for land aircraft to come in on the evening of 26th April but a reply was received to the effect that this was not possible.
29. On 26th April I reported to the G.O.C. Force Headquarters (General Sir Henry Wilson) and again asked for a strengthening of the light A.A. defence of the ARGOS landing ground against low flying attack as a requisite to bringing back fighters. The G.O.C. said that he had not got the means required and agreed that the landing ground was not therefore useable.
30. I found that arrangements had been made by Group Captain PELLY for a Sunderland to take off General WILSON and his party (including General HAYWARD etc.) from MYLOI on the night of 26th April. I therefore reserved passages for my Headquarters party of 20 in this aircraft.
31. During the day, 26th April, enemy air activity was much intensified against the roads through ARGOS and southward and 2,000 parachutists seized the CORINTH Bridge. Troop carriers also landed at FERYALI landing ground near CORINTH. Special precautions were taken against troop landings on ARGOS South landing ground which was very suitable for the purpose.
32. I attempted to prepare for flight to CRETE a Proctor aircraft which had suffered damage which did not preclude its flying, but I was unable to repair a bullet-punctured tyre. I succeeded in flying it from the North to the South aerodrome getting well shot at by our own A.A. in the process. But, as a result of this experiment, I did not consider the machine could be taken off in the starlight with one flat tyre. I therefore destroyed it.

33. My Headquarters party of 20 moved down to MYLOI on the evening of 26th April to find that all but 16 of the capacity of the Sunderland had been filled. I therefore embarked 16 and with Flight Lieutenant JENKS and two wireless operators (Sergeant KAY and Corporal MESTON) with a W/T set I made South with two cars.
34. During the daylight of 27th April we lay up under trees South of TRIPOLIS and received great hospitality from the local inhabitants. Enemy air activity on the road was continuous.
35. During the night of 27th/28th April we drove to GITHION where we found that the R.A.F. party (part of Group Captain LEE's contingent) which had been there, had gone. We could not telephone to Group Captain LEE at KALAMATA because the telephone lines had been damaged by bombing.
36. We then went on to MONEMVASIA where General FREYBURG (Commanding ANZAC Corps) had his headquarters and whence evacuation of troops was planned to occur.
37. Here W/T communication was established with HQ, R.A.F., M.E.
38. The Army Headquarters believed that a Sunderland was coming on the evening of 28th April and H.Q., R.A.F., M.E. was asked for confirmation in order that arrangements might be made. No reply could be obtained and at 2000 L.T. the W/T was destroyed.
39. The party embarked on HMS "HAVOC" during the night 28th/29th April, reaching CRETE in the morning of 29th April.
40. I wish to bring to notice the following for their good work and devotion to duty during the period covered by this report :-
- Flight Lieutenant N.S. JENKS, R.A.F.V.R.
Squadron Leader E.G. JONES, Officer Commanding, No. 80 Squadron.
Flight Lieutenant W.P. GRIFFIN, Royal Air Force Medical Service.
No. 567623 Sergeant KAY - Wireless & Electrical Mechanic.
No. 517296 Corporal MESTON - Wireless Operator.
No. 590801 Sergeant STRINGER, G. - Clerk G.D.
No. 791153 A.C.2. CASSAR - Driver Petrol.
41. Considerable assistance was received from the Greek Air Force, particularly the local senior officer at ARGOS, Wing Commander ARGONYOPOLIS. This assistance was only made possible by the fact that Flight Lieutenant JENKS spoke fluent Greek and had already established cordial relations with these Greek officers.
42. I was most impressed with the effectiveness of the German dive bombing attacks on ships and similar small targets, and with the deadliness of their low flying attacks on aircraft on the ground. Adequate means to counter the latter must be found. Suggestions are :-
- (i) Concealment so as to render difficult the selection of objectives at which to shoot.

- (ii) Intense machine gun defence, the gunners being shielded so as to give them the maximum fighting chance.
- (iii) Dispersion of landing grounds in depth so that aircraft are on the ground as little as possible while within range of enemy fighters.
- (iv) Fighter cover while re-fuelling is in progress on forward landing grounds.
- (v) Pens with bullet proof head cover and with a traverse wall in front of opening.

Don Grierson

H.Q., R.A.F., Middle East.
3rd May, 1941.

Air Commodore.