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MEMORANDUM ON THE MALTA SITUATION

10th May 1942

Issued by the Italian Air Staff

TRANSLATED BY:-

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MEMORANDUM

On the Malta situation - 10th May 1942

The plan for the air offensive against Malta, which was formulated by the O.B.S. (German High Command, Southern Area) during the first days of February, 1942, provided for the neutralization of the Island from a defensive and offensive point of view.

The O.B.S. hoped to arrive at this result by making full use of the entire Luftflotte 2 reinforced by a part of the Fliegerkorps X. The pressure was to be gradually increased. In order to make the most of the German aircraft, the participation of the I.A.F. was to be only in duties of secondary importance (torpedo operations - convoy escorts - sea reconnaissance).

As a question of principle and prestige, the Chief of the General Staff argued that the I.A.F. should have a continuous and important part to play. Provisions were to be made for the following units to operate at full working efficiency:

50th Group - Cant Z 1007 bis - 14 aircraft  
55th Group - Br. 20 - 12 aircraft  
The 2nd Fighter Group was also to be sent.

It was pointed out at different times by General Fougier (Chief of Air Staff) to Field Marshal Kesselring and by General Scaroni to General Loerzer that the pressure of the I.A.F. against Malta, which would have been of little importance at the beginning, would have increased gradually with the reduction in the defensive efficiency of Malta, i.e. when the number of escorting fighters had been diminished and A.A. fire had become less effective.

It was impossible for a larger number of Italian aircraft to take part as all the airfields in Sicily were occupied by the Germans, with the exception of Palermo, Castelvetrano, Sciacca and Chinisia (which was unserviceable because of ground conditions).

At a conference held in Catania by Field Marshal Kesselring on the 12 March, 1942, the three main phases were fixed as follows:

1st phase - neutralisation of A.A. defences.  
2nd phase - mass attacks against airfields and aircraft.  
3rd phase - attacks against naval forces, dockyards and installations at La Valetta until completely destroyed.

Provision was made for changing the order of these operations as and when the situation demanded.

Besides the fighters, there were about 300 serviceable German bombers to be used in three daily sorties of 100 aircraft each. (Appendix A gives the strength of Luftflotte 2 in Sicily, from the 1st January until the 10th May)\*

The principal aims of the operations were as follows:-

- a) - neutralisation of A.A. defences by forcing the batteries to intensify their fire in order to exhaust their ammunition and to tire their personnel.
- b) - elimination of enemy aircraft by concentrating first on the fighters and then on the bombers.
- c) - close collaboration between the Luftflotte 2 and the Sicilian Air Force.
- d) - dislocation, at all costs, of the supply routes to Malta.

\* Editor's note:- As the figures quoted in the Italian document were inaccurate, the correct ones, extracted from the German Air Ministry files, have been substituted.

It was reported that Field Marshal Kesselring and General Fougier arrived at complete agreement concerning Italian aircraft, which were to be used during the second period, that is, when Malta had been appreciably weakened. General Scaroni announced that the Sicilian Air Force, although at a low pitch of efficiency, was ready to co-operate with the G.A.F. from the very first operation, as the units were now available, with the exception of the 2nd Group (equipped with Re 2001 aircraft) which would presumably arrive soon.

The intensified offensive against Malta began on the 20th March and continued with increasing intensity until the 28th April. From then on, operations had to be limited to continuous nuisance raids, aimed at keeping the Island's efficiency at a low level.

There were two main factors which hampered the desired participation of the Italian units. The first, was the particularly adverse meteorological conditions during the season. The second, was the late transfer of the 2nd Group, which was due to unforeseen technical difficulties. In spite of this, all our units were present, especially after the arrival on the 12th April, of the 10th Group (Mc. 202) which replaced the missing 2nd Group (Re. 2001).

Before the intensified offensive had ceased, the O.B.S. made known his intention of transferring part of Luftflotte 2 (2 Groups of Ju. 88's and 2 Groups of Me. 109's) to other operational sectors. As a result, the following units were to replace them:

9th Group	Mc. 202
2nd "	Re. 2001
88th "	Br. 20
4th "	S. 84

With these units, plus the Italian ones already in Sicily, we can count on an average of 30 aircraft per day (including those used in day and night operations), which should be sufficient to keep up the neutralization of the Island, in co-operation with the remaining German units.

In a summary of the situation made by the Command of Luftflotte 2 at the end of the intensified offensive, it was confirmed that:-

- a) - Malta was neutralized as a supporting base for the fleet and as a port of call for shipping.
- b) - all the serviceable ships had been destroyed or put out of action.
- c) - enemy air activity from Malta had been severely restricted.
- d) - the supply routes to Libya were safe.
- e) - the blockade against supplies to the Island had been maintained.
- f) - the most important military installations had been destroyed.

The following gives a summary of the operations carried out:-

Aircraft employed

bombers	5807
fighters	5667
reconnaissance	345

Bombs dropped

6557,231 tons

/Losses

Losses inflicted

aircraft shot down	64
" destroyed on ground	68
" probably shot down	9
" probably destroyed on ground	15

Steamers

sunk	2
probably sunk	2

Although the results were good, they were not up to the expectations of the O.B.S. who issued the following directives for the last stage of operations:-

1. - Close co-operation must be maintained between Luftflotte 2 and the Sicilian Air Force in order to develop the process of disintegration of Malta with the aid of small formations to be employed night and day;
2. - The main objectives were to be those mentioned in the preceding plan which were not completely destroyed (equally important: airfield installations, barracks, A.A. Batteries, stores and technical installations);
3. - The enemy must be forced into combat, in order to use their inferior number of fighters.

OBSERVATIONS AND NOTES

From an examination of the operations carried out and the results obtained during the period from the 20th March (beginning of the intensified offensive) until to-day, observations and notes which will be of great value for future operations, can be drawn up as follows:

- 1) - The intensified offensive against Malta which took place between the 20th March and the 28th April for air and naval supremacy of the Mediterranean, should have been the conclusion of the operations against Malta, the orders for which were issued by the O.B.S. at the beginning of January (Appendix B shows the number of sorties flown by German aircraft between 1st January and 30th April.).
- 2) - During the intensified offensive against Malta, the average number of aircraft used by the Germans was less than half the number planned (145 instead of 300).
- 3) - The duration of the offensive was twice the length of time which had been deemed necessary (taking nearly 6 weeks instead of 3).
- 4) - The three phases, corresponding to the various categories of objectives, were non-existent in practice.
- 5) - From an offensive point of view, the neutralisation of Malta was almost complete. An absence of ships, serviceable submarines and multi-engined aircraft was noticed.  
From a defensive point of view, the neutralisation was limited and temporary, judging from reports by Luftflotte 2 and the Sicilian Air Force concerning A.A. fire and searchlights.
- 6) - Although very efficient, the blockade against Malta during this period was not complete. It was also seen that supplies arrived by air, by submarine and possibly by small ships from the Tunisian coasts (either directly or by night trans-shipment to submarines or to fast vessels).

/ 7) -

- 7) - As the activities of surface ships in Malta gradually diminished, the activities of submarines in Central and Eastern Mediterranean gradually increased.
- 8) - It was impossible to stop air reinforcements, as the take-offs took place from aircraft-carriers. No specific news can be obtained on the transfer of bombers, which were sent directly from Gibraltar and England.
- 9) - As most of the bombers had been sent elsewhere or destroyed during the course of the offensive, the aircraft now on Malta are all fighters.
- 10) - Malta was transformed from an offensive-defensive strategical base into an exclusively defensive one.
- 11) - Contrary to the statements made by the Command of Luftflotte 2 in their orders of the day, the main aims of the operational plan were not realized, or only partly so.
- 12) - According to photo-reconnaissance, the A.A. batteries were as follows:

20th March:	29 heavy	-	36 light
10th May:	31 "	-	35 "
- 13) - Enemy Air Force  

On the 20th March	there were	43 aircraft
" " 28th April	" "	58 "
" " 10th May	" are	87 "

apart from those in the cave workshops, which could not be detected by air reconnaissance.
- 14) - Installations and depots in the naval bases were heavily damaged, but it is difficult to say whether this will affect La Valetta as a naval base.
- 15) - Italian aircraft participated in the offensive to a much greater extent than had been foreseen, (the late arrival of the 2nd Group was replaced by another, and then by the whole of the 4th Stormo Mc. 202) as they took part from the very first stages. (see Appendix C).
- 16) - Photographs show that the land defence organization was greatly increased during the offensive (observation posts, installations etc;), especially to the West of the Victoria line and along the coasts.

#### C O N C L U S I O N S

1. The neutralization of Malta is partial and temporary.
2. It is necessary to continue and to increase blockade operations by using strong formations against the Eastern and Western approaches, so as to prevent the Island recovering or re-assuming the offensive, which would be extremely dangerous.
3. In order to maintain and improve the results achieved, it is necessary to proceed with operations against the objectives laid down by the O.B.S. in the operational plan, as it would ensure a certain amount of security to our traffic with Libya.
4. The forces necessary for the operation remain more or less unchanged since two months ago and the situation does not call for a slackening of pressure in order to benefit other sectors.

5. The intensified operation did not produce any results likely to offer new operational possibilities for the Axis forces and may only be considered as a first phase in a larger cycle of operations which are to be continued without pause in order to wear down the defence which was not affected by the operations carried out against it for 40 days in succession.

6. As the main aim of the objective is to achieve permanent air supremacy, it is necessary to deal with the aircraft which are put into operation by the enemy, by engaging them with superior numbers.

Appendix A.

OPERATIONAL STRENGTH OF LUFTFLOTTE 2, JANUARY - MAY, 1942

N.B. The figures given in column (a) give the total strength, those in column (b) the serviceable strength.

	<u>3rd Jan.</u>		<u>31st Jan.</u>		<u>28th Feb.</u>		<u>4th April</u>		<u>10th May</u>	
	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)
Close Recce	14	4	19	3	15	3	14	6	17	7
Long Recce	42	22	42	20	34	18	46	29	49	29
Bombers	302	79	326	129	259	97	233	155	214	127
Dive Bombers	82	47	85	29	85	38	72	42	66	38
S.E. Fighters	151	94	231	98	220	147	212	137	98	69
T.E. Fighters	21	8	26	10	35	15	37	22	47	24
Night Fighters	58	32	50	28	54	24	17	11	29	17
Transport	220	117	120	50	77	44	53	32	95	55
Coastal	49	35	39	23	53	31	49	21	66	38
<b>Totals</b>	<b>939</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>908</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>832</b>	<b>417</b>	<b>733</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>681</b>	<b>404</b>

Appendix B.

NUMBER OF GERMAN SORTIES FLOWN AGAINST MALTA JANUARY - APRIL, 1942

	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	<u>March</u>	<u>April</u>
Bomber sorties	591	568	1425	4591
Fighter sorties	1145	1606	3041	4410
Recce sorties	237	323	461	598
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1973</b>	<b>2497</b>	<b>4927</b>	<b>9599</b>

Appendix C.

SCALE OF ITALIAN AIR OPERATIONS OVER MALTA, 20TH MARCH - 10TH MAY, 1942

<u>TYPE OF AIRCRAFT</u>	<u>Number of sorties</u>	<u>Weight of bombs dropped (Kg.)</u>	<u>Torpedos dropped</u>
Bombers: Sicilian Air Force	210	128825	-
Fighters: " " "	504	-	-
Torpedo- Bombers } Scilian Air Force	12	-	12
	13	-	8
Reconnaissance } Sicilian Air Force	8	-	-
	118	-	-
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>865</b>	<b>128825</b>	<b>20</b>

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