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AIR OPERATIONS IN GREECE, 1940-1941

The following report was submitted to the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East, on August 15th, 1941, by Air Vice-Marshal J. H. D'Albiac, D.S.O., commanding the Royal Air Force in Greece.

dividing it into three periods of two months into which arrangement the campaign conveniently divides itself from the strategical point of view.

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1940.

REPORT ON THE OPERATIONS CARRIED OUT BY THE ROYAL AIR FORCE IN GREECE: NOVEMBER, 1940, TO APRIL, 1941.

Declaration of War:

*Appendix "A"—*Memorandum on Air Policy in Greece.*

3. At 3 o'clock in the morning of 28th October, 1940, the Italian Minister in Athens handed to the Prime Minister of Greece a note from his Government complaining in strong terms of alleged Greek assistance to the Allies and demanding for the Italians the right to occupy certain strategic bases in Greece. General Metaxas regarded this note as an ultimatum which he promptly refused and a few hours later, Greece was at war with Italy.

*Appendix "B"—*Lessons of the Campaign.*

Unlike the Italians, the Greek forces were little prepared for war. Their regular Army units were at their peace time stations throughout the country and general mobilisation had not been ordered. On being attacked, the Greek units holding the frontier posts on the mountainous borders of Albania, although fighting with the greatest gallantry, were overwhelmed in some cases by sheer weight of numbers and compelled to give ground. This was particularly the case in regions where conditions were suitable for the employment of Italian mechanised forces. The progress of the Italian army was, however, slow for although Italy had concentrated large forces on the Greek frontier, the firm attitude adopted by the Greek government came as somewhat of a surprise as it had been thought that all Italian demands would be met without resort to arms. It was confirmed also from the reports of prisoners taken in the first few days that the opening of hostilities was quite unexpected by the Italian soldiers themselves, who had been led to expect a diplomatic victory and a peaceful advance into Greek territory.

Sir,
I have the honour to forward the following report on the operations carried out by the Royal Air Force under my command in Greece from November, 1940, to April, 1941.

Introduction:

2. In framing this report, my object is to describe the various problems with which we were confronted from time to time and how we attempted to solve them; our reasons for adopting certain definite lines of policy; the difficulties with which we were faced; our successes and failures; and finally to draw attention to some of the lessons we learnt in a campaign which, although perhaps not entirely successful in its highest conception, contributed materially to the prosecution of the war as a whole and formed a chapter in history of which the Royal Air Force may well be proud. I do not propose to compile a day to day record of all the activities of the Command. Apart from the immensity of such a task, an account of this description would not serve any useful purpose and would only tend to obscure those particular points which I wish to emphasise. Nevertheless in order to obtain some form of continuity, it is necessary to deal with the campaign in chronological sequence. I propose, therefore,

* Not reproduced.

The Greek Problem.

4. It was clear that the problem confronting the Greeks was largely one of time. Could her frontier units hold the Italian forces sufficiently long to enable her armies to be mobilised and concentrated? As is well known, Greece is badly served by communications. Roads and railways on the mainland are few in number and the former are in most cases bad. A number of her reservists had to come from the Greek islands and it was estimated that it would take at least three weeks for the Greek mobilisation to be completed and for sufficient forces to be concentrated in the battle area before she could really consider herself reasonably safe. In the meantime, the Italian air force could, if handled properly, play havoc with their mobilisation and concentration arrangements. This, for some unaccountable reason, the Italians failed completely to do and wasted their comparatively strong air force in abortive attacks on undefended islands and hospitals in Salonika.

The Greek Air Force.

5. The Greek Air Force, although small and outnumbered by the Italian, fought most gallantly during this initial stage. Their pilots, many of whom had attended courses in England at the C.F.S. and elsewhere, were keen and what they lacked in modern war technique they made up for in personal bravery. Their aircraft, like those of most small independent nations not possessing an aircraft industry of their own, consisted of a number of different foreign types, French and Polish predominating, with a limited range of spares.

6. Operationally, the Greek Air Force was controlled by the General Staff and was used almost entirely in direct support of their army. They were quite unable to obtain any degree of air superiority and in consequence they suffered severe casualties. In addition, owing to the difficulty of obtaining spares, an abnormally high proportion of unserviceability soon existed and in a comparatively short time, their effort was reduced to negligible proportions.

Decision to send an R.A.F. Contingent.

7. In response to an urgent appeal for help, the British Government decided to send a contingent of the Royal Air Force to Greece from the Middle East. The force decided upon was to consist of two medium bomber squadrons, one mixed medium bomber and two-seater fighter squadron—all armed with Blenheim aircraft, and two single-seater fighter squadrons armed with Gladiator aircraft. On my arrival in Athens on 6th November, 1940, the advance elements of this force had already arrived and were ready for action.

Air Policy.

8. That evening I attended a conference with the Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief to discuss the war situation generally. Every pressure was brought to bear on me to employ my force in the same manner as the Greek Air Force, in close support of the land forces. I appreciated, however, that the best help I could give to the Greek armies was to concentrate my small bomber force on the enemy's disembarkation ports in Albania and the important centres in his lines of communication. I argued that such a plan would do far more to delay his advance than if I attacked his forward elements. If, however, the situation deteriorated consider-

ably, and a break through occurred, I would of course devote the whole of my force to the immediate task of stemming the enemy's advance. I finally obtained agreement on this policy and attacks were directed forthwith on the enemy's back areas. These attacks were maintained at maximum intensity with the few day bomber aircraft at my disposal and the detachments of Wellington aircraft sent over from Egypt to operate during the periods of moonlight. By the end of November, the Italian advance had been stemmed and the Greek forces who had by then completed their concentration were able to take the offensive. The Greek General Staff were most appreciative of the prompt and valuable help we had been able to provide for their gallant soldiers who, with ferocious intensity, had disputed every foot of the Greek soil, and they expressed the view that it was largely due to our assistance that the situation had now become satisfactory.

Selection of Aerodromes.

9. One of the main difficulties I experienced in establishing my force and one which was a constant handicap throughout the whole campaign, was the extreme scarcity of aerodromes suitable for the employment of modern aircraft. There were no all weather aerodromes, and on the mainland of Greece there are few areas in which aerodromes of any size can be made. In the Salonika area, the country is flat and a number of dry weather aerodromes already exists. For political reasons, however, I was not even allowed to reconnoitre these grounds, let alone use them. In the Larissa plain, there were many sites possible but by November, the rains had already commenced and, although I did station a fighter squadron in that area on its arrival, it was soon flooded out and aircraft were grounded for a period of ten days before they could be moved. There are few other sites in Greece except an occasional flat stretch on the coast and a certain number of level areas in the valleys, but the heavy rainfall and the prevalence of low clouds and mist make the latter quite unsuitable for operational purposes during the winter months, at any rate for modern bombers. I was forced, therefore, to concentrate my bomber force on the two aerodromes in the vicinity of Athens, and station my fighter squadrons on whatever grounds I could find near the front line, where they had to operate under conditions of the greatest discomfort and difficulty.

10. The main disadvantage of the aerodromes near Athens was that they were a long way from the front and it meant long hours of flying to and from the targets. They were, however, better drained and were only out of action for a few days after heavy rain. Furthermore, being near the sea, they were not so liable to get completely covered in by low clouds. Criticism has been made that the initial force which was sent to Greece was inadequate and many more squadrons should have been provided. I should like to point out, however, that even if these squadrons had been available, which they were not at the time, the lack of suitable aerodrome accommodation would, in my opinion, have prevented us from accepting them. During my first week in Greece, I made a tour of all possible sites and on my return pressed the Prime Minister to undertake immediately the construction of all weather runways at Araxos and Agrinion. I pointed out

to him the operational disadvantages of the existing situation and that, unless suitable runways were provided near the front, the support that we could give to the Greek nation during the winter months would be severely limited. He agreed fully with my recommendations and arranged for the construction of runways to proceed immediately. After consulting with the head of the department concerned, he informed me that the runways would be completed by the end of January, 1941. (NOTE.—Unfortunately, owing to weather conditions and shortages of material, this forecast proved over optimistic, and neither of these was ready for use when I left the country at the end of April.)

Arrival of the Force:

11. Units of the force continued to arrive throughout the months of November and December and by the end of the year the concentration was complete and the whole command functioning smoothly. When the composition of the force was being considered in the Middle East, it was decided that all the ancillary services such as hospital, works, rationing, etc., should be provided by the Army, with appropriate Army officers on my Headquarters staff to deal with them. This arrangement was particularly successful. Although, even in our respective services, few of us had served together before, officers of this combined staff soon settled down and worked with the greatest enthusiasm and co-operation. This happy atmosphere which existed at the top had, I consider, a beneficial effect on the relationship between the operational units and the actual services themselves who at all times provided our requirements in spite of countless difficulties occasioned by weather and terrain. Similarly, the liaison that existed between the British forces in Greece and the Greeks was at all times close and cordial. Every evening I attended a conference with the Commander-in-Chief and the Greek General Staff to discuss the day's land and air operations and to plan the programme of work for my force and for the Greek air force for the following day. These nightly meetings which were attended frequently by His Majesty the King and General Metaxas, when matters of higher policy were freely discussed, were carried on throughout the whole of my stay in Greece and were invaluable from a co-operation point of view.

Progress of Operations:

12. As regards the actual operations themselves, the Greeks had by now taken the offensive on land and, although handicapped by severe weather conditions and shortage of equipment, had managed to drive all the Italian forces off Greek territory and in some sectors had even advanced into Albania. In the air, our continued bombing offensive against the ports of Valona and Durazzo and the focal points on the enemy's rearward system was having a serious effect on his supply organisation. In addition, during moonlight periods, our bomber effort was being extended to targets on the mainland of Italy by means of Wellington aircraft detached from Egypt for the purpose, and considerable damage was being inflicted on ports on both sides of the Adriatic. Similarly, our fighter aircraft were establishing a definite atmosphere of moral if not of numerical superiority in this theatre.

JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 1941.

Operational Difficulties.

13. The new year opened with a deterioration in the weather conditions. Heavy falls of snow and much low cloud made flying conditions difficult and dangerous. A further handicap now appeared in the form of severe icing conditions which were experienced by our aircraft over the mountainous country between their bases and the targets in Albania. To avoid this serious state of affairs, we were forced to route our bomber aircraft by way of the coast. Over the sea, the flying conditions were considerably better, but this longer route limited the operational radius of action of our aircraft and militated against effecting surprise. Furthermore, enemy aircraft opposition was now becoming increasingly stronger, and large numbers of modern enemy fighters were being encountered constantly over the targets. These reinforcements were undoubtedly being brought over in an effort to reduce the scale of our attacks on the enemy's rearward communication system, which were obviously causing him growing embarrassment. Whilst it was comforting to think that our bomber offensive was presumably having the desired effect, this addition to the enemy's fighter strength increased considerably our operational difficulties. It was now necessary to make full use of cloud cover and to adopt a system of fighter escorts for our day bomber raids if heavy casualties were to be avoided. Our lack of modern fighter aircraft and the difficulties encountered in arranging for bombers and their escorts to meet, owing to the distance between our bomber and fighter aerodromes, badly connected by communications, with weather conditions constantly changing, all tended to reduce the operational effort of my bomber force and it became increasingly obvious that, until the fine weather came and more aerodromes were made available, there would be little opportunity for any decisive action on our part.

14. I would here like to pay a tribute to the magnificent spirit in which the pilots and air crews carried out their work during an exceedingly difficult period of operations. Based as they were in the Athens area, every raid carried out by the bomber squadrons involved a preliminary flight of at least 200 miles to the theatre of operations in weather conditions which were at times quite indescribable. Throughout the journey, the pilots and air crews were fully aware that they would meet strong fighter opposition over the targets, and would have to engage the enemy before they were able to deliver their attacks. The number of lucrative targets in Albania was strictly limited and the Italians had by this time been able to concentrate a high scale of anti-aircraft artillery to defend them, and it was seldom that our aircraft came through unscathed. Having carried out their task, the long and arduous journey home had to be completed. Direction finding aids existed but the very nature of the country made their results unreliable and much had to be left to the skill, judgment and determination of the individual pilots. In spite of all these difficulties, however, squadrons cheerfully accepted all the tasks I gave them and maintained a scale of effort far beyond that which is normally expected from Service squadrons working under

more favourable conditions. This same spirit prevailed in the fighter squadrons which were operating from forward aerodromes in conditions of extreme discomfort. Although outnumbered and armed with aircraft inferior in performance to those of the enemy, the pilots never hesitated to give battle whenever the enemy appeared.

Reinforcement Plan.

15. Early in the new year, I visited Cairo in order to discuss the question of reinforcement which was then under revision. Operations in the Western Desert were being brought to a successful conclusion and it was hoped that, by the time the weather conditions had improved in Greece so as to allow occupation of more aerodromes, it would be possible to spare additional squadrons from the Middle East Command. The reinforcement plan envisaged a total force in Greece of fourteen squadrons and I intimated that I would be prepared to start accepting the additional squadrons by 15th January. It was hoped that the whole programme would be complete by 15th April. In planning the reinforcement programme, I again endeavoured to get permission to use the aerodromes in the Salonika area, some of which had remained generally serviceable throughout the winter and could be occupied forthwith. The Germans, however, had commenced their infiltration into Roumania, and the Greek Government were particularly anxious to avoid giving them any idea that we had any hostile intentions in Macedonia which could be directed only against German interests.

The Greek Air Force.

16. As I have stated already in this report, the Greek Air Force had suffered severe casualties in the early stages of the war and by the end of the year, it was reduced to a mere token force of a few serviceable operational aircraft. Promises of the provision of modern fighter aircraft had been received from the U.S.A., and the British Government had agreed also to supply aircraft as and when they became available. Whilst admiring the esprit de corps and enthusiasm of the officers and airmen of the Greek air force, I considered that operationally they had a lot to learn before they would get full value out of really modern aircraft. Similarly, from the maintenance point of view, a considerable amount of re-organisation was necessary before they would be able to maintain a reasonable degree of serviceability. As these American and British aircraft would be provided presumably at the expense of the R.A.F. reinforcement or expansion programme, I was determined to do all I could to ensure that full use was made of them. I had previously discussed the whole problem with H.M. the King of Greece and the Prime Minister and had made the suggestion to them that a British Mission of qualified R.A.F. officers and airmen should be appointed to help them in the reconstruction of their flying service. They welcomed the suggestion and in due course a mission was provided, and the work of re-organising the Greek air force on modern lines was commenced. In addition to their primary role, the Mission undertook also to reconnoitre and supervise the work on all the new aerodromes which it was desired to use in spring, and much valuable work they did in this respect.

Offer of British Expeditionary Force.

17. Early in January, conferences were held to discuss the possibility of sending a British expeditionary force to Greece, but the Greek General Staff, on learning the limited size of the force that could be made available at the time, decided that its presence would only tend to provoke Germany, whilst it was not strong enough to be able to provide any very material support.

Battle for Valona.

18. The Greek General Staff now realised that, if as seemed probable the Germans intended to make a move through the Balkans, they might be faced in the spring with a campaign on two fronts. They therefore considered it essential that every effort should be made to bring the Italian campaign to an end before such an eventuality arose, or at any rate to shorten their front in Albania as much as possible so as to have troops available to strengthen their front in Macedonia. They appreciated that an advance to a line north of Valona would certainly accomplish the latter and might conceivably, in view of the low morale of the Italians at that time, achieve the former. Consequently, early in February, the Greek armies in Albania started a fierce offensive in the direction of Valona. The preliminary attacks were successful and a certain amount of progress was made. Bad weather, however, intervened and, although the Greek soldiers fought with their customary heroic disregard of danger, the Italians were able to bring up reinforcements and the advance was held up just north of Tepelene.

Change of Air Policy.

19. This battle for Valona is interesting from the air point of view inasmuch as a change of policy was forced upon us. Hitherto, my bombing offensive had been directed almost entirely upon lines of communication, ports and aerodromes to the rear, and with the limited means at my disposal was, I think, instrumental in reducing the flow of reinforcements and supplies to the Italian armies in the field. When discussing this new operation both with His Majesty the King and the Commander-in-Chief, they stressed the vital importance of a success, particularly as the morale of the nation had recently been badly shaken by the death of their Prime Minister, General Metaxas. They pointed out that the Greek soldiers on the front had experienced a severe winter and, although full of fight, were not too well off for munitions and supplies. Consequently, it was essential that they should have the utmost encouragement and support that could be provided. This could best be given by my bomber force being used in close support of the Greek attack. I produced all the stock arguments against this form of co-operation, and stressed the fact that by bombing enemy communications leading to the battlefield a greater degree of help would be given to their troops fighting the actual battle. However, they reminded me that the morale of some of the Greek soldiers had been shaken severely by enemy bombing attacks, and that the success of the whole operation might depend on the stimulus afforded by seeing the Italians treated in the same way. I therefore acceded to their requests.

Reorganisation of Command.

20. It was obvious that, if successful close support was to be provided, a certain reorganization of my forces was necessary. It was quite out of the question to attempt to keep in touch with a fluctuating battle in Albania from a headquarters in Athens, and if immediate and constant support was to be given, my aircraft must operate nearer the front. Accordingly, I formed a wing headquarters in the area of operations, and moved part of my bomber force to a landing ground which was found to be sufficiently dry close to the front. For the first few days, until road communication could be established, this landing ground was provisioned by air. I delegated the command and operation of all the bomber aircraft engaged in this operation, and a fighter squadron, to the commander of the wing, who was in constant touch with the Greek commander conducting the land operations. From a purely local and spectacular point of view, this form of co-operation was an instant and complete success. The morale of the Greek soldiers was raised considerably and I received fulsome praise and appreciation of the work carried out by the pilots. I was even approached by one divisional commander who implored me to order my pilots not to fly so low over the Italians for fear they would be shot down. Our efforts were made much of in official communiques, and I think that, during this particular period, the prestige of the R.A.F. was higher in the minds of the Greek nation than at any other period during our stay. I felt the whole time, however, that this high regard was based on false premises for, although we were invigorating our friends, we were misemploying our aircraft. Later events proved this to be the case. If the weather had been kinder, the Greeks might have succeeded in attaining their objective, but heavy falls of snow and rain held up their progress, and early in March, the Italians who had been able to assemble reinforcements, staged a heavy counter attack which, although held by the Greek forces, destroyed all hopes of capturing Valona.

Actually, even if we had employed our bomber force solely on ports of disembarkation in Albania, I doubt very much whether we could have interfered to any great extent with the flow of Italian reinforcements. Our available bomber force was small, the weather was bad, and it was clear that, after their recent defeat in Cyrenaica, the Italians were determined to avoid another reverse which might have had disastrous results on the nation as a whole. Freed from the necessity of supporting their North African front, they had the troops available, and under the conditions prevailing at the time it would have been difficult to prevent their arrival in Albania.

Arrival of Hurricane Aircraft.

21. During the latter part of this period, an event of considerable importance concerning our fighter strength occurred. The first six Hurricane aircraft appeared in Greece. Up till now, the pilots in our two fighter squadrons had been doing grand work with their Gladiators, but with the gradual appearance of faster and better types of Italian aircraft, they were finding themselves at a disadvantage, and their re-equipment with a more modern type was most welcome. The first appearance of these

well known fighter aircraft over Athens was greeted with the greatest enthusiasm by the local population and it was not long before they justified fully their reputation of being first class fighting aircraft. On their first sortie over the lines on 20th February, they shot down four enemy aircraft, and on 28th February, in company with a formation of Gladiators, destroyed 27 enemy aircraft without a single loss to themselves. This fight, which was the biggest ever fought in the air in Albania, was staged over the Greek lines in full view of both armies. All the enemy aircraft destroyed were confirmed from the ground and caused the greatest jubilation.

MARCH-APRIL, 1941.

Decision to send a British expeditionary force.

22. The opening of this final phase of the campaign in Greece was notable for the decision taken at long last to send a British expeditionary force to the country. The Germans had by now completed their subjugation of Roumania and were repeating their customary penetration tactics this time into Bulgaria. The usual stories of the arrival of tourists and reports of preparations being carried out on aerodromes and lines of communication had been coming in for some time, and it was all too clear that it was only a matter of time before the German armies would be ensconced on the Greek northern frontier. The attitude of the Yugoslavs, on whom the defence of the northern Greek territory depended so much, was strictly non-committal and unsatisfactory. The Greeks, realising fully the seriousness of the situation, were in no doubts that, if they allowed British fighting troops to enter their country, war with Germany was ultimately unavoidable. To their lasting credit, however, they preferred to accept such a situation rather than have to submit when the time came to a tame capitulation in face of overwhelming force. In consequence of this decision, a British force was rapidly assembled in Egypt and the first troops started to arrive in Greece on the 7th of March.

23. I do not propose to give a description of the dispositions or activities of this force, which presumably are included in detail in the G.O.C.'s report, except in so far as they affect the air operations in my command. The general role of this force was to support the Greek armies against a German threat from the north, and much discussion took place as to where this help could best be given. It was eventually decided that, owing to the shortage of time available before it was considered that Germany's preparations would be completed, and to the doubtful attitude of Yugo-Slavia, it would be unwise to move up to the Greek-Bulgarian frontier. Arrangements were therefore made for a defensive line to be prepared and occupied in suitable country west of Salonika, covering the Larissa plain.

Preparations for the Arrival of the B.E.F.

24. As time was all important now, everything had to be subordinated to get this defensive position prepared and the force assembled. Engineering works on aerodromes which were not of immediate importance had to be stopped so that camps could be constructed, roads repaired, and all the preparations necessary to receive the force could be made. Similarly, in view of the necessity to avoid congestion at the docks, we were forced to

use all our available transport to move the incoming munitions, stores, etc. On the arrival of G.H.Q., the army services which had hitherto been under my command, together with the appropriate army staff officers, were transferred to Army control. These commitments and re-arrangements meant a certain amount of disorganisation in my command. The weather, however, was now improving and the landing grounds in the plains and valleys drying up. Therefore, no very great delays in our arrangements occurred.

Reorganisation of R.A.F.

25. The arrival of the British expeditionary force and the establishment of a new front meant a further reorganisation of my force and a readjustment of my slender resources. Although very few reinforcements had arrived as yet, and my pilots and air crews were beginning to feel the strain of heavy and continuous operations throughout the winter months, an additional burden was now thrust upon us. I still had to provide air support for the Greeks who were being ferociously attacked in Albania by the Italians, spurred on by the presence of Mussolini himself. I had to provide air escorts for incoming convoys, also some form of air defence for the ports of disembarkation of British troops which were becoming alarmingly congested. I had to deliver occasional attacks on the Dodecanese Islands to reduce the scale of enemy attacks on convoys which were becoming embarrassingly frequent, and finally, I had to allocate a portion of my force to support the position in process of occupation by British troops. I attach as Appendix "A" * to this report a memorandum which I issued on 18th March, pointing out the very parlous condition we were in at that time and describing how I proposed to attempt an almost impossible task. Apart from the fact that all my squadrons were much below strength in serviceable aircraft, due to the heavy casualties we had suffered and the unavoidable inability to keep us supplied with replacements, the re-equipping of my fighter squadrons with Hurricanes was not proceeding as rapidly as I had hoped. Furthermore, the arrival of reinforcing squadrons was not keeping pace with the programme decided upon and those that did arrive were much below establishment in aircraft and equipment. In spite of these difficulties and disappointments, however, I still hoped that time would be on our side and that, when the German attack developed, we would be in a reasonable state of preparedness to meet it.

The Battle of Cape Matapan.

26. On the 28th of March, a refreshing interlude to our troubles on land was afforded by the naval engagement off Cape Matapan. All our bombing squadrons took part and the Mediterranean fleet was able to bring the enemy to battle and inflict on them a smashing defeat.

The Fleet Air Arm.

27. At this juncture it is appropriate to mention the good work carried out by the Fleet Air Arm operating from western Greece. Six Swordfish aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm arrived in Greece on 11th March, and proceeded to Paramythia from where they operated against Valona and Durazzo harbours. Their task was beset by various difficulties. The high coun-

try surrounding Valona made a night approach awkward and hazardous, while it was almost impossible to get into the bay undetected. At Durazzo, the water was shallow and the approaches were thereby limited. Pilots reported the presence of night fighters over Valona. However, in spite of all this, several ships were sunk and many more hit and damaged during the period the Fleet Air Arm were with us.

Germany declares War on Yugo-Slavia and Greece.

28. In the meantime, events were moving rapidly in the Balkans. While the Regent of Yugo-Slavia was signing away the freedom of his country, a coup d'état was staged and we had a new ally. Large German forces had crossed the Danube and were moving into Bulgaria. Time was clearly running short. In spite of every effort, we were only able to arrange one so called "staff conference" with the Yugo-Slavs which did little beyond providing an opportunity for mutual criticism as to our state of unpreparedness for war, before the Germans declared war against both Greece and Yugo-Slavia on 6th April, and commenced invading both countries.

THE GERMAN INVASION.

29. I propose to deal with the air campaign against the German air force in somewhat greater detail than the operations hitherto carried out in Albania. I do this because I believe there are valuable lessons to be learnt which, owing to the great disparity between the British and German air forces in this campaign, are shown up in high relief. In addition, our air force gave support to a British army which may, perhaps, consider that the major cause which forced it to withdraw from its positions and eventually evacuate Greece altogether, lay in the lack of this very air support. I was fully aware that the air forces at my disposal could not give the support which the army desired and which we would like to have given. Although I stressed the fact, the full consequences were perhaps not clearly recognised by the army. I feel, however, that if various aspects of our air inferiority are discussed, a more complete comprehension of the issues which are at stake may be gained, and that we may thereby pave the way to a better mutual understanding between the Services, a state of affairs which is essential for the efficient conduct of modern war.

Organisation of R.A.F. Component.

30. At the time when Germany commenced the invasion, my force was organised as follows:

A Western Wing—consisting of one bomber and one fighter squadron (Gladiator) supporting the Greeks in Albania.

An Eastern Wing—consisting of two bomber and one Hurricane fighter squadrons supporting the Anglo-Greek forces facing the German advance. The squadrons of this wing occupied landing grounds on the Larissa plain which, although still soft after the winter rains, was now drying rapidly.

In the Athens area, I had one bomber squadron and one fighter squadron in process of re-arming with Hurricanes. Expressed in terms of aircraft, my total serviceable strength

* Not reproduced.

in the country was some eighty aircraft, to which were opposed, according to all reports, approximately 800 German aircraft on the Eastern front (Bulgaria and Roumania) and 160 Italian aircraft based in Albania plus 150 based in Italy but operating over Albania and Greece, mainly from advanced landing grounds in Albania.

Disposition of Squadrons in Eastern Wing.

31. The first problem with which I was faced in forming the Eastern Wing was that of disposing the air forces I could make available. My intention was to provide each squadron with a base aerodrome, and at least one and if possible two satellite landing grounds.

The location of the fighter squadron was influenced by its role. This was threefold:

(a) to protect the base area, which included the army L. of C., the port of Volos and our aerodromes in the Larissa plain.

(b) to provide fighter escort to our bombers, and

(c) to deal with enemy fighter aircraft in the battle area.

Larissa aerodrome was the most suitable from the geographical and communications point of view, and was one of the few aerodromes which was serviceable for all but a comparatively short period during the winter. Accordingly, the fighter squadron was based there with a satellite on a piece of suitable ground 7 miles to the west. At Larissa the camp was well dispersed at the opposite end of the aerodrome to the hangars, which would be likely to attract bombing attack. Aircraft pens of sandbags capable of taking Hurricanes, though open at the top, were constructed in dispersed positions.

32. As regards the two bomber squadrons, it was my original intention to station them at Almyros, where I hoped they would be sufficiently far back to be immune from escorted bomber raids and low flying fighter attack. Unfortunately, the Greek Air Force were already in occupation of this ground and I did not consider it safe for reasons of congestion to station more than one squadron there. The other squadron had to be sited temporarily at Larissa, pending the discovery of a more suitable ground. This was found eventually at Niamata, which in spite of a nearby marsh and consequent malarial infection, and in spite of the poor strategical position it occupied in the event of the withdrawal of an army to the Olympus line, was the only other which possessed a satisfactory surface and was suitable for night flying in the whole area north of Attica.

Thus the Blenheim squadrons were located at Almyros and Niamata. At each aerodrome every endeavour was made to gain the maximum dispersion of aircraft and encampments. Except at Larissa, the limits of the squadron camps lay at least a kilometre from the aerodrome. Aircraft were widely dispersed off the aerodrome at Almyros, but at Niamata this was hindered by a dyke and drainage ditch which protected the aerodrome from the marsh and lake beyond.

33. The one army co-operation squadron which arrived as the German attack developed I stationed at Kazaklar, where it was suitably sited for meeting the army needs. Unfortunately, however, this squadron rarely had more than

one Hurricane serviceable at a time and, since the remainder of its aircraft were Lysanders, which it was quite impossible to use in the face of enemy air opposition, the squadron did very little useful work.

34. It should be realised that the German invasion of Greece started at a time when very few landing grounds were fit for use on account of rain. They were just beginning to dry, and had the attack been delayed for even a week, we would at least have had several more satellite landing grounds at our disposal. As it was, the change in the weather favoured the Germans.

Position of Eastern Wing H.Q.

35. Considerations influencing the location of the Eastern Wing Headquarters were:

(a) ability of the wing commander to make quick personal contact with force commander.

(b) reliability of communications.

(c) ease of access to operational squadrons under wing control.

(d) reasonable propinquity to aerodrome.

The overriding consideration in locating Wing Headquarters supporting the army on this front was that it should be close enough to Force H.Q. to allow the wing commander and the force commander to be within easy personal touch. It was considered undesirable, however, to locate the H.Q. beside Force H.Q., since the combined encampment would be of excessive proportions, difficult to conceal from the air, marked by deeply worn tracks, congested with vehicles and unwieldy to move.

The fully established wing headquarters failed to arrive in Greece by the outbreak of the campaign and, therefore, after consultation with the force commander, I decided to locate the skeleton wing headquarters beside Force H.Q. at Elason. The wing commander lived in the force commander's mess and so the closest liaison was formed.

Control of Squadrons.

36. At the end of March, the Army Signals detachment attached to wing headquarters was asked to link up all the aerodromes which were eventually used with direct lines to wing headquarters at Elason. This task was far beyond the scope and resources of the Army Signals detachment, with the inevitable result that land line communications were extremely poor. The factors leading to this state of affairs were as follows. The shortage of Royal Signals personnel resulting from the rapid R.A.F. build-up in Eastern Greece, had stretched to the limit the resources of the Signals Company despatched to Greece in July, 1940. Furthermore, priority for such equipment as was available was given to the forces in Libya, and the situation in Greece was acute, particularly as regards landline cable and wire. Technical limitations were a further cause. The trunk landline system was limited to overhead alignments which were frequently out of action as a result of hostile air activity, and reliable maintenance was beyond the resources of the Greek Postal and Telegraph administration. Accordingly the Army was faced with providing the R.A.F. with field cable systems which automatically precluded long distance speech facilities. Thus, although the wing had a direct line to Larissa,

25 miles of it consisted of field telephone wire, and the utmost difficulty was experienced in using this line. The force line or Fullerphone to the main exchange was used whenever possible. Similarly, communication to Almyros was not possible from Elason. It was therefore decided to establish a system of relaying operation orders in code by telephone from the wing commander at Elason to Larissa, where they were further transmitted as appropriate either direct to the fighter squadron at Larissa or by telephone to the bomber squadrons at Niamata or Almyros. For this purpose, an officer was permanently standing by at Larissa to relay operation orders.

Communication from Larissa to Niamata only twelve miles away was reliable, but to Almyros it was most unsatisfactory, largely due to the fact that the Air Defence Centre used the Almyros line for reporting enemy aircraft. As the campaign proceeded, so the demands both of the wing and of the Air Defence Centre augmented until finally it took as much as five to six hours to pass a priority telephone message from Larissa to Almyros. Thus it was decided to use the squadron at Niamata for any fleeting targets which presented themselves, while the squadron at Almyros carried out direct support operations, the need for which could be foreseen some hours previously.

Organisation of Fighter Defence.

37. The Greek observer system consisting of posts with sub-posts radiating from each and linked to air defence centres by telephone, operated with a certain degree of success, and various interceptions of Italian aircraft had been made over the Larissa area.

A fighter operations room was established at Larissa and was run by the squadron stationed there. Depending on alternative duties, aircraft were standing by throughout the hours of daylight. It was, however, inevitable to leave the L. of C. and base area unprotected when the fighters were required for escort duty or protective duties over the forward troops.

The system worked well, although there was little enemy air activity during the first few days of the campaign. When, however, the withdrawal of our troops began, the personnel manning the posts of the observer system had to withdraw and consequently the system broke down.

Liaison with Force H.Q.

38. The wing commander visited the force commander in his office each morning as a routine, and daily discussions were held in the force commander's mess both with him and his B.G.S. The force commander was fully informed of the air situation and made no excessive demands upon our resources. Without exception, the utmost was done to meet the requirements of the army and every request for reconnaissance made by the force commander or the B.G.S. was followed by a faithful endeavour to carry out that task. At the outset, however, weather was a serious hindrance, and in spite of the most frequent and determined attempts, many failures had to be reported.

The choice of targets for the bombers, the ways and means of providing fighter patrols over our forward troops, the question of leaving the base area unprotected whilst fighters escorted bombers or patrolled over the line, ground strafing of M.T., reconnaissance, and

every other aspect of the air situation were discussed, and complete agreement was expressed with the direction and operations of the squadrons supporting the army. Neither the force commander nor the B.G.S. permitted themselves to indicate more than a general plan, in view of the rapidly changing situation, and they always expressed their agreement in the suggested methods of meeting any particular circumstances.

In addition to the personal liaison between the force and wing commanders, an A.L.O. kept in constant touch with the G. Staff, watching and reporting every development in the situation. It is difficult to know how air forces could be operated in closer co-operation with the military forces than was in fact the case during the opening days of the Balkan campaign. Whatever shortcomings there may have been in the support given by the air forces, they certainly cannot be attributed to lack of co-operation or to lack of the most faithful endeavours of our pilots. At every available opportunity, aircraft of this wing were doing their utmost to carry out the multifarious tasks which were required of them.

6th-9th April—The German Advance.

39. On the morning of the 6th April, the German forces were on the march. The bulk of the enemy moved west from the Struma valley, filtering by all available roads into each valley and gorge, inundating every plain with their swiftly moving forces. The first air reports indicated that an attack was being made upon Mt. Beles and the Rupel Pass. Simultaneously, our reconnaissance aircraft reported movement of M.T., on the road west from Petrich.

It was certain that this movement would be covered by fighter patrols, and the fighters were sent off to carry out a sweep over the road and over the Greeks on Mt. Beles and in the Rupel Pass. Twelve Hurricanes met twenty Me.109s. and our fighters shot down five without loss to themselves. This disposed of any anxiety or over-cautiousness which the squadron commander of the fighters had felt about the change over from Italians to Germans. Whereas, at the outset, the squadron commander expressed the view that his aircraft could not operate in formations of less than twelve, he now agreed that formations of six would be able to escort Blenheim formations across the line. This meant that the base area only had to be left completely unprotected when the Hurricanes went off in strength to patrol over our forward troops. In the circumstances, the wing commander considered it a reasonable division of fighter strength.

Meanwhile, reconnaissances of the Struma valley were being carried out. During the course of that night Sofia, Gorna Djumaya, Simitli and Petrich were bombed by Wellington and Blenheim aircraft both from Athens and from the Larissa plain. These raids were most successful, and pilots on their return reported good results. The weather was bad on the following day and no reconnaissance was possible, but it was anticipated that considerable concentrations of enemy M.T. would be found at Strumitsa. Late in the afternoon, in spite of severe weather, some of our aircraft got through and bombed the rich target presented by the heavy congestion of German M.T. confined to the road in this area by marshes and

watercourses and the surrounding mountainous country. The escort of Hurricanes destroyed a Dornier. A large proportion of the German forces moving west against the Yugo-Slav armies had to pass through Strumitsa, as well as all the forces advancing on Salonika and those about to deploy themselves before our positions on the Mt. Olympus region. Consequently, as many heavy attacks as possible were made against targets in this area.

On the following day, the bad weather continued but in spite of it, we were able to get some of our reconnaissance machines through, and again in the evening we bombed enemy M.T. in considerable concentration near Strumitsa.

Since the army co-operation squadron was short of aircraft, and since it was considered expedient to avoid sending unescorted Blenheims on long reconnaissances, the fighter squadron was asked to help out with reconnaissance. This squadron was thereafter frequently asked to provide recon aircraft, and although the pilots had had no reconnaissance training, they carried out the most valuable work throughout this period of great stress.

The wing commander had received an appeal to give bombing support to the Greeks who were cut off in the Salonika area. On consulting the force commander as to the relative danger to the army of the various points which the German advance was threatening, the wing commander decided, in view of the limited opportunities for air operations offered by the weather, and in view of his limited air resources, not to dissipate any effort on a front which was already lost in spite of the gallant action still being fought in the Rupel area by the Greeks. Nevertheless, the powerful bombing attacks against Strumitsa were bound to have a direct effect upon the situation in the area of Kilkis and Salonika, since German columns passing through Strumitsa and south to Lake Doiran were attempting to encircle the Mt. Beles position.

On the following day, the weather was again very bad. From the information available, however, it was now clear that very considerable German forces were passing through Strumitsa, some advancing south by Lake Doiran were already in or around Salonika, whilst the greater part continued west and north west and were threatening the Monastir Gap.

The situation was beginning to unfold, contact was expected shortly on the Olympus line but anxiety was felt on account of the ineffectiveness of the Yugo-Slav resistance and the lack of information as to the situation in the north. Every effort was made by our air force to alleviate the pressure on the Yugo-Slav army in order to give them time to withdraw in front of the highly mobile German forces, and to take up strong positions in the mountains and gorges.

9th-15th April—1st Withdrawal.

40. Communications between Force H.Q. and Wing H.Q. to Athens were now becoming extremely poor, and I was virtually out of touch not only with the wing commander but with the G.O.C., with whom it was essential for me to be in constant communication. Accordingly, I sent an officer of air rank to take over operations in the forward area. The air officer took over at a time when, in view of the intention of the army to withdraw to the

Olympus line, plans were being drawn up to withdraw the ground party of the squadron of Blenheims at Niamata and to use it only as an advanced landing ground.

During the next few days, until the complete evacuation of the Larissa plain on the 15th, enemy M.T. columns and concentrations on the roads between Prilep and Bitolj and in the Amyntaion Area were bombed successfully by our aircraft. Our army had had little time to prepare strong positions in this area, which they had hoped would be protected for some time by the resistance of the Yugo-Slavs. A heavy burden was therefore thrown upon our air forces which now virtually had to make up for the time lost by the caving-in of the Yugo-Slav forces. No stone was left unturned to delay the enemy and to shield our ground forces. Meanwhile, our army was engaged in fighting a rear-guard action in the areas around Amyntaion and Kleisoura.

No sooner was the withdrawal to the Aliakmon line complete when, on account of the threat to its left flank, it became necessary for the army to make a further withdrawal to the Thermopylae line. Consequently, all R.A.F. units on the Larissa plain had to be withdrawn at once with the utmost speed along roads which were already congested. At the same time, the R.A.F. continued to throw all its power into delaying tactics.

On 14th April, the weather improved and German air activity intensified. The Germans had brought their fighters forward to the Prilep and Monastir areas, where their engineers had prepared the necessary landing strips. The German air force was mainly directed in close support of their army, and heavy dive bombing attacks were made against our troops. Our Hurricanes, escorting our bombers in attacking enemy M.T. on the roads near Ptolemais and disorganising his lines of communication, shot down many enemy aircraft.

41. On 15th April, the main effort of the German Air Force was directed against our air force, which had been delaying their military operations and had taken toll of their aircraft. Large numbers of short range fighters made their appearance over the Larissa plain and ground strafed Niamata. In spite of A.A., every aircraft of the Blenheim squadron located there was destroyed. Owing to the breakdown of the Greek observer system, our fighters were at a hopeless disadvantage. When, on one occasion, Me. 109s appeared over their aerodrome at Larissa without any warning, three Hurricanes were attacked whilst taking off and two were shot down. The third shot down one Me. 109. Although, when our fighters were able to get off, they played havoc with the enemy, the situation was obviously untenable. I was present on the Larissa aerodrome whilst this attack was in progress and I ordered the squadrons to withdraw to the Athens area forthwith.

The Albanian Front.

42. Meanwhile, the wide manoeuvre of the German forces advancing swiftly through the mountain passes north west and west of Skoplje was developing. Their intention was to force contact with the helpless Italian forces near Kukes in northern Albania and to threaten the right flank of the Greek armies in Albania from the Lake Ochrida area. The Greeks, who had

fought so valiantly against the Italians throughout the winter months, were hardly in a position to withstand the extra pressure of the German forces. Withdrawal from Albania in the Koritsa area had been considered expedient by British commanders before the German invasion began. However, the Greeks did not take a sufficiently strategic view of warfare to allow such a withdrawal to be carried out without seriously affecting the morale of the army. This was especially the case when wrested from the despised Italian invaders. To give up their acquisition of their own free will and to see it fall once more into the hands of the Italians was for the Greek fighting soldier in the line an intolerable idea. When in fact, the withdrawal was eventually forced upon them, it was too late for the Greeks, reliant upon mule and bullock-cart transport, to conduct an orderly retreat. Morale and organisation collapsed. The Greek army commander at Yannina capitulated to the Germans.

As the situation in this area deteriorated, it became increasingly obvious that it was necessary to withdraw the R.A.F. Western Wing, consisting of one Blenheim and one Gladiator squadron. This was successfully carried out in spite of difficulties which arose as the result of numbers of Yugo-Slav aircraft and personnel arriving at Paramythia aerodrome and requiring fuel and food right up to the last moment.

15th—24th April. 2nd Withdrawal.

43. At this juncture, I decided to abolish the Eastern Wing and take over control of all operations from Athens. I left an R.A.F. officer at Force H.Q. to act as liaison between the army commander in the field and myself. Later, when Force handed over the direction of the withdrawal to Anzac Corps, this officer was attached there. The army commander desired only reconnaissance and fighter protection which we did all we could to provide.

Throughout the withdrawal, the army co-operation squadron carried out what reconnaissance they could. After they had evacuated Kazaklar, north of Larissa, they operated their few aircraft from Pharsala, which by this time was serviceable. Later they operated from Amphiklia, just behind the Thermopylae line. Here there was a Greek Gladiator squadron which was ground strafed and destroyed as soon as the Germans were able to locate their fighters on the aerodromes on the Larissa plain. The army co-operation squadron's Hurricanes were not on the aerodrome at the time of the ground strafing, and so luckily escaped, but I considered it wiser to bring them back to the Athens area.

In view of the complete numerical superiority enjoyed by the enemy, I decided to operate my Blenheim squadrons by night as much as possible in efforts to delay, as far as lay in our power, the enemy's advance. But after the decision to evacuate had been taken, the whole weight of the German Air Force was turned on the Athens area and there was no alternative but to save what air crews and material remained. These squadrons ferried the remainder of the personnel of their squadrons to Crete and carried out their instructions with discipline and courage in the face of great peril.

Direction of Bombing Effort.

44. As far as the direction of bombing is concerned, the operations against the Germans followed four clearly defined phases:

The first phase, lasting for about two days, was the disclosure of the enemy plan prior to gaining contact with our troops. During this phase, bombing was directed at previously arranged targets in the Struma valley, including Petrich, Simitli, Gorna Djumaya and Sofia.

During the second phase, in which the direction of the German advance was recognised and in which every possible effort was made to alleviate pressure thrown against the Yugo-Slav armies in the west and the Greek armies in the Salonika area, bombing was directed against supply columns and concentrations of enemy M.T. at the bottleneck around Strumitsa, where the German forces divided into two columns.

The third phase, in which a serious threat developed against the British armies in the region of the Monastir gap, was devoted to the bombing of bottlenecks, railway junctions, stations, bridges, defiles and concentrations of enemy M.T. on roads leading towards the Monastir Gap, from Skopje, Veles, Prilep to Bitolj.

The fourth phase was the direction of all our air effort in hindering and delaying the advancing Germans to allow our army to conduct a successful withdrawal. All our resources were thrown into the task of alleviating the pressure on our forces in order to allow them the maximum amount of time to withdraw and to prepare new positions.

Targets were chosen at points where it was calculated that the effect of dislocation would be most widespread amongst advancing German columns, and yet close enough to the rear of the German fighting troops to have the maximum immediate effect upon the progress of their advance.

It is impossible to calculate the degree of success which this policy attained, but German prisoners who fell into our hands told woeful tales of the heavy bombing which they had suffered from the R.A.F. throughout their advance. On the night 14/15th, our Wellingtons created much chaos at Veles and broke the bridge across the Vardar. A glance at the map will at once show the importance of a dislocation in the German L. of C. at this point. It is the hinge upon which one, perhaps the greatest, of the main German drives depended.

The continual bombing of M.T. which presented some of the best targets which our Blenheim pilots, accustomed to such targets as dispersed vehicles in the desert, had ever known, caused much confusion amongst the enemy.

Withdrawal of Fighter Squadrons.

45. The fighters were withdrawn to the Athens area, since no aerodrome north of this was free from ground strafing. The constant lack of intermediary aerodromes made it inevitable that, if our fighters were placed on an aerodrome from which they could give protection to our troops, they were in imminent danger of destruction by ground strafing as soon as they were on the ground. If, on the other hand, they were placed beyond the range of ground strafing, they were unable to protect our troops and the tightly packed columns of M.T. withdrawing along the roads. The utmost efforts were made to give the maximum protection to our continually harassed troops. All our machines were working to maximum capacity. Many of our pilots were working at extreme range, challenging untold odds and at times, after they

had used up their ammunition, pursuing enemy aircraft engaged in ground strafing our troops.

On 20th April, approximately 100 dive bombers and fighters attacked the Athens area; my whole force of fighters of fifteen Hurricanes intercepted them, bringing down a total of 22 enemy aircraft confirmed and eight unconfirmed for a loss of five Hurricanes. Small as our losses were, they were crippling to our small force.

Even after having been shot down, our fighter pilots would immediately take the air in aircraft which had been riddled with bullets and by all normal standards were totally unserviceable. The courage of these men never failed nor looked like failing. Each day their fellows died, each day they stepped into their battered aircraft, not without a sensation of fear but quite undismayed. Each man was aware of his great responsibility in the face of great odds.

Final Evacuation of Air Forces.

46. On 22nd April, I sent the remaining Hurricanes to Argos. From here, I intended that they should cover the evacuation of the British Army, but the German air attack became so concentrated, that after a number of Hurricanes had been destroyed on the ground on 23rd April, the remainder were ordered to leave for Crete. In Crete, Blenheim fighter patrols were organised to cover the ships evacuating the troops from the beaches. These escorts were maintained throughout the evacuation without respite, and I consider it was due largely to their efforts that such a large proportion of the total British forces in Greece were evacuated.

47. A reference to the evacuation would not be complete without a tribute being paid to the flying boats, both of the R.A.F. and the B.O.A.C. These boats carried out magnificent work ferrying parties of airmen and soldiers both from the mainland to Crete and from Crete to Egypt. A number of their flights were carried out in conditions of the utmost danger, and, throughout, the pilots and crews displayed the utmost gallantry and devotion to duty. From the point of view of interest, the record number of personnel carried in one single Sunderland on one trip was 84.

CONCLUSION.

48. The lessons and conclusions to be drawn from a campaign of this description are many, and in Appendix "B"* to this report, I have included those which I consider are of the chief interest. In bringing out the various points that come to my mind, I find it difficult to avoid criticising various aspects of service organisation and doctrines. I would like to point out, however, that these criticisms are made in an entirely constructive sense and in the hope that profit may be gained by our experience.

49. Where we are in possession of totally inadequate air forces, there will always be requests from every direction for the air support which in ideal circumstances we would comfortably be able to provide, and which indeed we would be only too pleased to give. In Greece, we had the minimum, and in order to produce any results at all, it was essential that all available force was directed in accordance with a carefully conceived plan. As our bombing forces were inadequate to deal decisive and instantaneous blows on the enemy, our policy had to be to sustain our small efforts for

as long as possible at points where the resultant dislocation caused the enemy the utmost embarrassment. This we were able to do in Albania, for the Italian air strategy was extremely weak, and the numerical odds were only some four or five to one against us. When, however, we had to face the full force of the German onslaught in addition, the odds became too great in spite of the superb gallantry of our pilots and crews.

50. In spite of the strategic and tactical disadvantages under which our air forces laboured in Greece, in spite of the great enemy superiority in numbers, and in spite of the weather conditions which there can be no doubt were the worst in which British air forces have had to operate throughout the world, a considerable offensive effort was developed. During the Albanian and German campaigns in Greece, our fighters destroyed 232 enemy aircraft confirmed, and a further 112 unconfirmed. Our bombers operating by day and night dropped 550 tons of bombs on the enemy. There was no indiscriminate or area bombing. Each bomb was carefully aimed in order to obtain the maximum effect to ensure that the efforts required to overcome the disadvantages which beset our air crews were not in vain.

51. The participation of our land forces in the Greek campaign was dictated entirely by political considerations, and we were fully aware of our weaknesses both in the air and on the ground. I have heard criticisms made that, under these conditions, we should never have sent a land force to Greece. I attended all the conferences held in Greece to discuss this matter and I would like to say without any hesitation, and in the light of subsequent events, that in my opinion the decision made was a right one and in accordance with the best traditions of our race. There was always the chance that, in the first place, Germany would respect the neutrality of Yugo-Slavia and that her advancing armies might be delayed sufficiently long to enable our forces to be strengthened and our position made secure. On the other hand, if Yugo-Slavia threw in her lot with us, which eventually she did, it was reasonable to suppose that her soldiers, renowned for their fighting qualities, would prove a tough nut for the Germans to crack and they would be able to protect our left flank. In any case, we would be containing large enemy land forces and air forces at a time when Britain needed a breathing space to perfect her defensive arrangements.

Furthermore, the assistance which we were considering was to be given to a nation which had sacrificed her all in our cause and was herself quite prepared to face complete extinction rather than capitulate. I suggest that it would have been difficult to refuse her this help and our conduct would have been most reprehensible in the eyes of our countrymen and those of important neutrals had we failed to do so.

52. Finally, I would like to express on behalf of each individual under my command, my sincere appreciation of the generous hospitality and friendship which were unfailingly shown to us by Greeks in every walk of life. We will never forget the brave and courteous spirit of these people, whose kindness and sympathy towards us were as great when we finally had

* Not reproduced.

to leave Greece to the occupation of the Germans, as when we arrived in November last in the fever and anxiety of the opening days of the war against Italy. It was with a feeling of deep regret but of profound admiration and affection for this heroic people that we left the shores of Greece.

53. Under separate cover, I have forwarded to you the names of officers and airmen who I would particularly like to bring to your notice for their excellent work and devotion to duty during this campaign. I have nothing but praise for all the officers and airmen whom I had the honour to command, whose conduct

was at all times exemplary and who, even during periods of the greatest stress, continued to work with that cool and calm efficiency which we have become accustomed to expect from the members of the Service.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

J. H. d'ALBIAC.

Air Vice-Marshal,

Commanding R.A.F. in Greece.

November, 1940, to April, 1941.

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