

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.

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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