

was made on the Fleet Base at Alexandria, and it was not until later that attacks increased in intensity.

A Balloon Barrage was established at Alexandria under the very able control of Squadron Leader G. M. Trundle, who commanded No. 971 Squadron.

71. Mention must be made of the work of No. 267 Communication Squadron, ably commanded by Wing Commander S. F. Wynne-Eyton, D.S.O., and of No. 216 Bomber Transport Squadron. Their respective functions involved long and frequent flights to all parts of Middle East Command, stretching from Libya to Kenya and from Greece to Takoradi. Frequent use was also made of the services of the British Overseas Airways Corporation on their regular air routes. Their efficiency and reliability was of great assistance in meeting the very heavy demands for air transport.

Health and Morale.

72. The general health of the Command as a whole remained good during the period under review. This was especially noticeable during the advance in Libya and during the operations in Greece where climatic conditions were extremely hard. The morale of all ranks, especially flying crews, remained high throughout.

As recorded in my previous Despatch, credit is due to Air Commodore A. E. Panter, the Principal Medical Officer, and to his Deputy, Group Captain F. J. Murphy. Squadron Leader, The Rev. F. D. Morley, continued his active interest in the welfare of the airmen.

Administration.

73. The work of endeavouring to maintain the Squadrons throughout the Command with replacement aircraft, spare engines and equipment of all kinds, proved most difficult in the absence of regular supplies from home. Re-equipment with new aircraft of those Squadrons using obsolescent types was in most cases seriously delayed. In spite of these handicaps, everything possible was done by the Air Officer in charge of Administration, Air Vice-Marshal A. C. Maund, C.B.E., D.S.O., within the means at his disposal.

Air Commodore F. L. Fay, M.C., the Chief Engineer, continued most successfully to press on with the construction of the new aerodromes and landing grounds.

The ever-increasing financial problems were most ably handled by the Command Accountant, Group Captain T. H. Evans, O.B.E., and in connection with which Mr. C. W. Evans, my Financial Adviser, was of considerable assistance.

74. No praise can be too high for the work of the ground personnel, Officers and men alike, who, in their various capacities, maintained the aircraft, usually under the most trying conditions; whether in the winter snow or slush on the Greek-Albanian Front, or the sand and heat of Aden, Egypt and the Sudan, their devotion to duty, cheerfulness and faithful service remained the same. All maintenance units, repair and salvage organisations, worked to their utmost capacity to keep the Squadrons supplied.

Air Staff.

75. Air Marshal A. W. Tedder, C.B., whose arrival on the 9th December, 1940, I recorded in my previous Despatch, gave me most valuable support at all times as Deputy Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief.

Amongst others who continued to function most efficiently under extremely high pressure conditions were Air Vice-Marshal R. M. Drummond, D.S.O., O.B.E., M.C., the Senior Air Staff Officer; Air Commodore H. E. P. Wigglesworth, D.S.C., Plans; Group Captain N. S. Paynter, Senior Intelligence Officer; Wing Commander C. Bray, Senior R.A.F. Press Officer; Wing Commander T. A. B. Parselle, Air Communications; Squadron Leader Sir Arthur Curtis, K.C.V.O., C.M.G., M.C., my personal Staff Officer. Great credit is also due to Group Captain W. E. G. Mann, D.F.C., the Senior Signals Officer, and all his Staff, for the efficient signal organisation which met each new increase with complete efficiency.

76. In reviewing the part played by the R.A.F. in the Middle East during the period of my Command (May, 1940-May, 1941), the following is a summary of some interesting and prominent features worthy of being placed on record:—

(a) The unexpected survival of Malta as an operational air base. It started without fighters: after one year of war it had 50. It has continued to function as a link on the air reinforcing route to Egypt and as a base for bomber and reconnaissance Squadrons.

(b) The security of the Red Sea shipping route and its comparative immunity from Italian bombers or submarines; a tribute to the Aden and Port Sudan Squadrons and no compliment to the Regia Aeronautica.

(c) The part which the occupation of territory plays on the Mediterranean Littoral, as elsewhere, in adding to or reducing the potential scale of air attack on ships at sea and on our Naval, Army and Air Bases. Instance the Dodecanese (later of course, Greece and Crete), and particularly the North African Coast.

(d) In this respect, the advantage to the enemy of regaining Cyrenaica and the coastal strip of the territory between Tobruk and Sollum. In contrast, our difficulty in providing fighter defence to isolated Tobruk, and the disadvantage to our bombers and reconnaissance aircraft of the increased distance to enemy bases.

(e) The speed of advance by motorised or armoured forces after breaking resistance in breadth, and the importance of mobility of those R.A.F. Squadrons with short range aircraft which must operate at once from rapidly established forward landing grounds if they are to keep pace with, and continue, effective support of the advanced ground forces. Instance the advance into Cyrenaica, December to February, and also General Cunningham's rapid drive into Abyssinia through Italian Somaliland.

(f) The losses in grounded aircraft sustained during a rapid withdrawal through aerodromes being overrun; also the difficulty experienced by Squadrons in offering effective air resistance whilst the ground personnel are constantly on the move to the rear.