

In addition, detachments of Wellingtons of Nos. 37 and 70 (B) Squadrons based in Egypt operated during moon periods from aerodromes in Greece.

The continued arrival of Italian reinforcements in Albania presaged an offensive, to counter which the Greeks would require the maximum air support that could be made available. Thus No. 112 (F) Squadron (Gladiators) was withdrawn from the Western Desert early in January, and No. 11 (B) Squadron (Blenheims) and No. 33 (F) Squadron (Hurricanes) were also withdrawn after the capture of Bardia and despatched to Greece, as follows:—

No. 11 (B) Squadron—24th January.

No. 112 (F) Squadron—10th February.

No. 33 (F) Squadron—19th February.

A situation calling for further reinforcements for Greece was created by the threatened German invasion through the Balkans. Accordingly, by the 31st March, No. 113 (B) Squadron (Blenheims) had also been despatched from Egypt to Greece and No. 208 (A.C.) Squadron (Hurricanes and Lysanders) was re-equipping and preparing to move at an early date.

31. Although the Greek Air Force operated with success in the early days of the war its activities were much reduced latterly by the inability of the Greeks to make good their aircraft casualties. Thus, practically the whole of the air effort in this theatre devolved upon the R.A.F. which was consequently called upon to attack strategical objectives, to operate in direct support of the Greek Army, necessary in order to maintain their high morale, and to provide the fighter defence of the Athens area. To meet these requirements Squadrons were employed in the following roles:—

Wellingtons operating by night attacked ports in Albania and to a less extent in S. Italy to interrupt the flow of enemy supplies and reinforcements to Albania.

The primary role of the Blenheims was to provide direct support for the Greek Army by attacking:—

(a) enemy lines of communication and important centres behind the forward area to prevent the distribution of supplies and reinforcements, and

(b) enemy positions in the forward area.

Blenheims also attacked ports in Albania by night and day and provided strategical reconnaissance of ports in Southern Italy and Albania.

Hurricanes and Gladiators were employed in escorting Blenheims during many of their daylight bombing attacks, in maintaining offensive patrols and in protecting the Greek troops against enemy air action.

Blenheim fighters continued to provide the air defence of the Port and Air Bases in the Athens area.

In addition to the commitments already referred to, Wellingtons and Blenheims operating from Greece were called upon to attack enemy aerodromes in the Dodecanese from which enemy aircraft were carrying out mine-laying operations in the Suez Canal, as well as air attacks on our convoys proceeding to Greece.

32. For the first two months of the year extremely unfavourable weather conditions persisted, preventing our aircraft from operating with any degree of intensity. Although both sides were similarly handicapped, it was more

to our disadvantage in that, *inter alia*, it prevented our own aircraft from attacking ports in Albania and Southern Italy with sufficient intensity to do more than embarrass their use by the enemy. Thus, despite the damage inflicted and the nuisance value of our attacks, the Italians still continued to land reinforcements and supplies in Albania.

The bad weather prevailing at the time of the Greeks' capture of Kelcyre on the 8th January prevented our aircraft from operating in close support of their troops during their advance; in fact, until the middle of February operations were of necessity of a sporadic nature, the weather and state of aerodromes on occasions preventing our aircraft from operating for several days at a time. Subsequently, on the 10th January, as the Greeks continued to make slow progress towards Tepelene, Blenheims attacked enemy troops retiring from Kelcyre towards Berat. Otherwise support to the Greek forces at this time was confined to Blenheim attacks on the bases at Berat, West of the Central Sector and Elbasan, beyond the Northern Sector.

Towards the end of January the fighting round Tepelene increased in intensity as reinforcements reached the Italians, enabling them to stiffen their resistance against the Greek thrusts. During this period and up to the middle of February periodical attacks continued against Elbasan in the North, and Berat, Boulsar and Dukaj in the Tepelene area where military buildings and troop concentrations were bombed.

33. By the middle of February there were indications that the threatened Italian counter offensive would not be long delayed. With the Greeks retaining the initiative the ground operations had developed into a series of attacks by the Greeks followed by fierce Italian counter attacks, this activity being concentrated in the Tepelene area. A brief spell of improved weather conditions at this time enabled our aircraft to operate with greater freedom, 108 sorties being made between 11th and 18th February in support of the Greek forces which were making a strong effort at that time to capture Tepelene. In these operations, stores, M.T. convoys and enemy troop and gun positions in the Tepelene area were persistently and effectively attacked by bomber and fighter Blenheims.

Air activity reached a peak on 13th-14th February when, following a series of ineffective Italian counter-attacks, the Greeks launched a new offensive against enemy positions around Tepelene. Our aircraft made 50 sorties in direct and close support of the Greek troops as they advanced and captured important positions in the mountains to the North and South of Tepelene.

Following this short favourable spell, weather conditions again deteriorated after the middle of February, but although this curtailed operations to some extent our aircraft continued to provide support for the Greek Army which maintained its pressure on the enemy. Between 19th February and 4th March approximately 90 Blenheim sorties were made against enemy troop concentrations, gun emplacements and M.T. convoys in the Southern and Central Sectors in an endeavour to wear down the enemy resistance.