

and food are plentiful and adequate for the population of 20,000 and for any garrison which we were likely to put in. The only port is the town of Cos, on the north-east coast, opposite the Turkish mainland; facilities here were very poor, with little depth of water and only one berth alongside the quay for a small vessel. A main road runs the length of the island, connecting Cos town with Antimachia airfield, some eighteen miles away, at the broadest part of the island.

198. The small force of fighters which could be operated and maintained on Cos was not sufficient, in view of the strongly reinforced German Air Force, to ward off for long the determined attacks on the landing ground which began on the 18th September. This was the more so since an adequate early warning system could not be established and the ground anti-aircraft consisted of twenty-four Bofors guns only, a few poorly manned and out-of-date Italian anti-aircraft guns and the small arms weapons of the British troops. Air Transport by day had therefore to be cancelled and all future reinforcement took place by night.

199. The need for British anti-aircraft defences at Antimachia, and for the defence of other landing strips which were being developed on Cos, soon became acute in the face of the increasing number of German air attacks. Bofors guns were sent forward in destroyers, L.C.Ts. and even in submarines, while stocks of aviation fuel and ammunition were despatched in every kind of craft. The ever-growing intensity of German air attack was, however, still preventing the shipping of heavy equipment such as heavy anti-aircraft guns, heavy Air Force equipment for warning systems, and motor transport, all of which were urgently required.

200. Although heavy equipment was lacking, by the end of September the garrisons of Cos, Leros and Samos, had been built up to approximately the strength of one battalion with ancillary troops on each island; on Cos twenty-four Bofors guns were in action and detachments of the Royal Air Force Regiment had arrived and partly taken over the defence of the airfield and landing strips in the island.

201. From air reconnaissance carried out on 1st and 2nd October, it was known that a considerable enemy convoy was at sea; on the 2nd it was sailing east in Naxos area, and the garrison commander on Cos assumed it was a reinforcement for Rhodes. The enemy's air superiority made it impossible for the Royal Navy to intercept the convoy by day, and a sweep carried out by destroyers on the night of 2nd October failed to locate it. At first light on the following day R.A.F. Beaufighters attacked the convoy, but without success. The garrison was therefore only conducting its ordinary routine precautions when, at 0500 hours on 3rd October, the enemy assault on Cos began. The seaborne invading forces, consisting of troops from the Greek mainland and from Crete, landed from merchant vessels, landing-craft and caiques, covered by aircraft and three destroyers, while a strong force of parachute troops, flown from the Greek mainland, was dropped on Antimachia airfield, which our aircraft were unable to use since it had been badly cratered in the air-raids which

preceded the attack. By 4th October all organised resistance on our part had been brought to an end.

202. The enemy's success on Cos was due chiefly to the rapid build-up of his air force in Greece and the Aegean (achieved at the expense of his Italian strength and in spite of the bombing of bases by available R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. aircraft), and the heavy and unceasing effort he was able to maintain in the air which disorganised the defences. Our small garrison was concentrated mainly in the area of Cos town, whilst at Antimachia, some eighteen miles away, there was one company and a detachment of the Royal Air Force Regiment with some light anti-aircraft guns. The main enemy landing, on the north coast, took place virtually without opposition; striking inland, he quickly cut the road Cos-Antimachia and forced our garrison to fight two independent actions with no weapons other than small arms and a few light mortars, which were no match for the heavy mortars and infantry guns which the invaders had brought with them. In spite of a gallant resistance, the garrison, which consisted mainly of the 1st Battalion, the Durham Light Infantry, was overwhelmed and the greater part was made prisoner.

203. The loss of Cos deprived us of our only airfield from which single-engined fighters could operate over the Aegean. As a result, no adequate daylight cover could be given to our shipping, which now became exposed to attack by a greatly strengthened German Air Force based in Greece and Crete, which had been rapidly expanded until it was at least equal to that in Italy; sea transport was henceforth confined to darkness. The disposition of our forces in the Aegean was readjusted on 5th October, when the small garrison which we had established in Calino, the neighbouring island to Cos, was withdrawn; but patrols were maintained there and on Gairos, Kythnos, Stampalia and Simi.

204. As a result of their success, the Germans were enabled rapidly to consolidate their position in the Cyclades, and with the exception of Andros, where some resistance was offered, all the islands garrisoned by Italians fell into German hands. The enemy did not use any great number of troops for these operations, rather he seemed to be gathering his strength for an assault against the islands still occupied by British garrisons, particularly Leros.

205. Constant naval and air patrols were maintained to meet this threat, and on 7th October, the Royal Navy struck a heavy blow at enemy shipping by intercepting a large enemy convoy off Stampalia and destroying four ammunition ships, six landing craft and some armed trawlers. The Royal Air Force, too, and the U.S.A.A.F. were very active and, in addition to carrying out anti-shipping reconnaissance, made repeated attacks upon the Greek mainland, Crete and Rhodes, and other strategical points occupied by the enemy, including Cos (which had now become an objective).

206. The enemy assault on Leros, which had been expected soon after the fall of Cos, hung fire and in the meantime we were able to strengthen our garrison there. It is probable that the first setback to the enemy's invasion plan was the destruction of the convoy off