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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.

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

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

*Appendix "B"—Lessons of the Campaign.

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,

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.

Declaration of War:

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.

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.

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