

had used up their ammunition, pursuing enemy aircraft engaged in ground strafing our troops.

On 20th April, approximately 100 dive bombers and fighters attacked the Athens area; my whole force of fighters of fifteen Hurricanes intercepted them, bringing down a total of 22 enemy aircraft confirmed and eight unconfirmed for a loss of five Hurricanes. Small as our losses were, they were crippling to our small force.

Even after having been shot down, our fighter pilots would immediately take the air in aircraft which had been riddled with bullets and by all normal standards were totally unserviceable. The courage of these men never failed nor looked like failing. Each day their fellows died, each day they stepped into their battered aircraft, not without a sensation of fear but quite undismayed. Each man was aware of his great responsibility in the face of great odds.

Final Evacuation of Air Forces.

46. On 22nd April, I sent the remaining Hurricanes to Argos. From here, I intended that they should cover the evacuation of the British Army, but the German air attack became so concentrated, that after a number of Hurricanes had been destroyed on the ground on 23rd April, the remainder were ordered to leave for Crete. In Crete, Blenheim fighter patrols were organised to cover the ships evacuating the troops from the beaches. These escorts were maintained throughout the evacuation without respite, and I consider it was due largely to their efforts that such a large proportion of the total British forces in Greece were evacuated.

47. A reference to the evacuation would not be complete without a tribute being paid to the flying boats, both of the R.A.F. and the B.O.A.C. These boats carried out magnificent work ferrying parties of airmen and soldiers both from the mainland to Crete and from Crete to Egypt. A number of their flights were carried out in conditions of the utmost danger, and, throughout, the pilots and crews displayed the utmost gallantry and devotion to duty. From the point of view of interest, the record number of personnel carried in one single Sunderland on one trip was 84.

CONCLUSION.

48. The lessons and conclusions to be drawn from a campaign of this description are many, and in Appendix "B" to this report, I have included those which I consider are of the chief interest. In bringing out the various points that come to my mind, I find it difficult to avoid criticising various aspects of service organisation and doctrines. I would like to point out, however, that these criticisms are made in an entirely constructive sense and in the hope that profit may be gained by our experience.

49. Where we are in possession of totally inadequate air forces, there will always be requests from every direction for the air support which in ideal circumstances we would comfortably be able to provide, and which indeed we would be only too pleased to give. In Greece, we had the minimum, and in order to produce any results at all, it was essential that all available force was directed in accordance with a carefully conceived plan. As our bombing forces were inadequate to deal decisive and instantaneous blows on the enemy, our policy had to be to sustain our small efforts for

as long as possible at points where the resultant dislocation caused the enemy the utmost embarrassment. This we were able to do in Albania, for the Italian air strategy was extremely weak, and the numerical odds were only some four or five to one against us. When, however, we had to face the full force of the German onslaught in addition, the odds became too great in spite of the superb gallantry of our pilots and crews.

50. In spite of the strategic and tactical disadvantages under which our air forces laboured in Greece, in spite of the great enemy superiority in numbers, and in spite of the weather conditions which there can be no doubt were the worst in which British air forces have had to operate throughout the world, a considerable offensive effort was developed. During the Albanian and German campaigns in Greece, our fighters destroyed 232 enemy aircraft confirmed, and a further 112 unconfirmed. Our bombers operating by day and night dropped 550 tons of bombs on the enemy. There was no indiscriminate or area bombing. Each bomb was carefully aimed in order to obtain the maximum effect to ensure that the efforts required to overcome the disadvantages which beset our air crews were not in vain.

51. The participation of our land forces in the Greek campaign was dictated entirely by political considerations, and we were fully aware of our weaknesses both in the air and on the ground. I have heard criticisms made that, under these conditions, we should never have sent a land force to Greece. I attended all the conferences held in Greece to discuss this matter and I would like to say without any hesitation, and in the light of subsequent events, that in my opinion the decision made was a right one and in accordance with the best traditions of our race. There was always the chance that, in the first place, Germany would respect the neutrality of Yugo-Slavia and that her advancing armies might be delayed sufficiently long to enable our forces to be strengthened and our position made secure. On the other hand, if Yugo-Slavia threw in her lot with us, which eventually she did, it was reasonable to suppose that her soldiers, renowned for their fighting qualities, would prove a tough nut for the Germans to crack and they would be able to protect our left flank. In any case, we would be containing large enemy land forces and air forces at a time when Britain needed a breathing space to perfect her defensive arrangements.

Furthermore, the assistance which we were considering was to be given to a nation which had sacrificed her all in our cause and was herself quite prepared to face complete extinction rather than capitulate. I suggest that it would have been difficult to refuse her this help and our conduct would have been most reprehensible in the eyes of our countrymen and those of important neutrals had we failed to do so.

52. Finally, I would like to express on behalf of each individual under my command, my sincere appreciation of the generous hospitality and friendship which were unfailingly shown to us by Greeks in every walk of life. We will never forget the brave and courteous spirit of these people, whose kindness and sympathy towards us were as great when we finally had

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