

Ships carried the following totals of men, stores and equipment.

By Surface Ships.

4,990 men.
950 tons of stores.
32 vehicles plus trailers.
27 guns.

By Submarines.

17 men.
325 tons of stores.
1 vehicle.
12 guns.

250. The limited lifts which the Royal Navy could accept were supplementary to a caique service to Leros and Samos, both direct from the Levant and Cyprus, and from Castelrosso. Many difficulties arose, however; the chief of these was to find crews willing to go beyond Castelrosso. This was partially overcome by the finding of some crews by the Royal Navy and of others by the Army.

251. Arrangements were also made for dropping by air; this method was used mainly to meet urgent demands for ordnance stores and in the latter stages of the operation for various natures of ammunition, as there was no other reliable and fast method of meeting such demands. Initially, one aircraft was used each night, but ultimately as many as eighteen were used. During the period, 5th October to 19th November, 334,000 lbs. and 200 personnel were dropped by 216 Group, Royal Air Force. A greater effort was attempted but thwarted by adverse weather.

252. The evacuation of casualties from the Aegean was carried out by destroyer, caique, and transport aircraft. From the end of October, the evacuation of casualties from Leros to the Middle East by sea or air was most difficult; accordingly arrangements were made with the Turkish Government whereby they agreed to accept up to forty seriously wounded men in hospital at Bodrum without internment. Cases requiring operation were to be sent to the Izmir French Hospital. Less seriously wounded men were evacuated by caique to Bodrum, whence they were sent on to Castelrosso.

253. Maintenance by all these methods, none of which was reliable, was necessarily somewhat erratic and very difficult to regulate. The maintenance of our forces could never be regarded as assured, but, in spite of this, the combination of the various methods employed proved successful in that, when the operations were finished, G.O.C. Aegean reported that there was no lack of any vital commodity during the final stages of the operations, which were never influenced by a shortage of ammunition or supplies.

254. In fact, throughout the Aegean operations, it had been accepted that our garrisons could be maintained in supplies and ammunition, but that the cost of such maintenance would be high and the difficulties, especially in shipping heavy equipment, serious and at times prohibitive. On the other hand, our presence there was certainly of great value in causing diversion to the Aegean of German material which was badly needed elsewhere. The enemy was forced to concentrate 350 aircraft in Greece, Crete and Rhodes (of which about 125 were reinforcements) and his aircraft

casualties by 23rd October amounted to over a hundred destroyed, over fifty probably destroyed, and a large number damaged. He had also lost eight motor vessels totalling about 16,000 tons, seven lighters and seven escorts; these vessels, although only a small proportion of those available, were virtually irreplaceable from outside the Mediterranean.* Furthermore, as long as we held Leros the German position on Rhodes remained under threat, and in many ways the enemy's difficulties were at least as great as our own. The crux of the situation was that Leros could not be effectively built-up and the enemy's sea movement intercepted owing to the fact that our air bases were too distant to allow adequate cover to be given to the Royal Navy. If our position could be maintained long enough to effect the build-up on Leros and to take advantage of the German difficulties, the moral and political effect on the whole of South-East Europe would be so great that I decided to retain Leros as long as possible with the limited forces available, whilst making every effort to secure adequate air reinforcements. If these could be procured, not only would Leros be secured but the enemy's supplies by sea to the whole of the Dodecanese would be seriously threatened.

255. When the actual German attack came against the garrisons in the Aegean our failure to maintain our positions was due (as had been anticipated) to the impracticability of providing adequate air cover before and during the battles. For this the underlying cause was that the Aegean operations had never been allowed to encroach on the prior demands of the Italian campaign. Major formations, aircraft and shipping alike, could not be diverted from Italy; for Italy, Middle East's available resources had been concentrated, and although an improvised operation in the Aegean was undertaken (on orders from London) in the hope of seizing the opportunity offered by the Italian capitulation, the risks, from the start, were great.

Middle East Base and Training

256. In fact, the Aegean operations were mounted by Middle East at a time when its role had largely been reduced from an operational command, with troops at its disposal, to that of a base and transit centre and, above all, a training centre for warfare in Europe.

257. As part of its function as a base and training centre, Middle East Command was given an important role in training and equipping allied contingents to take their place in field formations or to release British troops for operational roles. This duty involved a constant regard for the acute political problems which disturb all "refugee" governments, in addition to the difficulties of training the formations, equipping them on British war establishments, and instructing them in British methods,

* Later information showed that the following losses, were, in fact, inflicted on the enemy:—

1. Merchant vessels sunk or destroyed in harbour ...	9
(Approx. 18,000 tons)	
2. F/Lighters and landing ...	14
3. Torpedo-boats, escort vessels and similar craft including small minelayer ...	13
4. Floating Dock ...	1
5. Armed caiques ...	5
6. Number of Germans put into sea ...	4,000