

more favourable conditions. This same spirit prevailed in the fighter squadrons which were operating from forward aerodromes in conditions of extreme discomfort. Although outnumbered and armed with aircraft inferior in performance to those of the enemy, the pilots never hesitated to give battle whenever the enemy appeared.

Reinforcement Plan.

15. Early in the new year, I visited Cairo in order to discuss the question of reinforcement which was then under revision. Operations in the Western Desert were being brought to a successful conclusion and it was hoped that, by the time the weather conditions had improved in Greece so as to allow occupation of more aerodromes, it would be possible to spare additional squadrons from the Middle East Command. The reinforcement plan envisaged a total force in Greece of fourteen squadrons and I intimated that I would be prepared to start accepting the additional squadrons by 15th January. It was hoped that the whole programme would be complete by 15th April. In planning the reinforcement programme, I again endeavoured to get permission to use the aerodromes in the Salonika area, some of which had remained generally serviceable throughout the winter and could be occupied forthwith. The Germans, however, had commenced their infiltration into Roumania, and the Greek Government were particularly anxious to avoid giving them any idea that we had any hostile intentions in Macedonia which could be directed only against German interests.

The Greek Air Force.

16. As I have stated already in this report, the Greek Air Force had suffered severe casualties in the early stages of the war and by the end of the year, it was reduced to a mere token force of a few serviceable operational aircraft. Promises of the provision of modern fighter aircraft had been received from the U.S.A., and the British Government had agreed also to supply aircraft as and when they became available. Whilst admiring the esprit de corps and enthusiasm of the officers and airmen of the Greek air force, I considered that operationally they had a lot to learn before they would get full value out of really modern aircraft. Similarly, from the maintenance point of view, a considerable amount of re-organisation was necessary before they would be able to maintain a reasonable degree of serviceability. As these American and British aircraft would be provided presumably at the expense of the R.A.F. reinforcement or expansion programme, I was determined to do all I could to ensure that full use was made of them. I had previously discussed the whole problem with H.M. the King of Greece and the Prime Minister and had made the suggestion to them that a British Mission of qualified R.A.F. officers and airmen should be appointed to help them in the reconstruction of their flying service. They welcomed the suggestion and in due course a mission was provided, and the work of re-organising the Greek air force on modern lines was commenced. In addition to their primary role, the Mission undertook also to reconnoitre and supervise the work on all the new aerodromes which it was desired to use in spring, and much valuable work they did in this respect.

Offer of British Expeditionary Force.

17. Early in January, conferences were held to discuss the possibility of sending a British expeditionary force to Greece, but the Greek General Staff, on learning the limited size of the force that could be made available at the time, decided that its presence would only tend to provoke Germany, whilst it was not strong enough to be able to provide any very material support.

Battle for Valona.

18. The Greek General Staff now realised that, if as seemed probable the Germans intended to make a move through the Balkans, they might be faced in the spring with a campaign on two fronts. They therefore considered it essential that every effort should be made to bring the Italian campaign to an end before such an eventuality arose, or at any rate to shorten their front in Albania as much as possible so as to have troops available to strengthen their front in Macedonia. They appreciated that an advance to a line north of Valona would certainly accomplish the latter and might conceivably, in view of the low morale of the Italians at that time, achieve the former. Consequently, early in February, the Greek armies in Albania started a fierce offensive in the direction of Valona. The preliminary attacks were successful and a certain amount of progress was made. Bad weather, however, intervened and, although the Greek soldiers fought with their customary heroic disregard of danger, the Italians were able to bring up reinforcements and the advance was held up just north of Tepelene.

Change of Air Policy.

19. This battle for Valona is interesting from the air point of view inasmuch as a change of policy was forced upon us. Hitherto, my bombing offensive had been directed almost entirely upon lines of communication, ports and aerodromes to the rear, and with the limited means at my disposal was, I think, instrumental in reducing the flow of reinforcements and supplies to the Italian armies in the field. When discussing this new operation both with His Majesty the King and the Commander-in-Chief, they stressed the vital importance of a success, particularly as the morale of the nation had recently been badly shaken by the death of their Prime Minister, General Metaxas. They pointed out that the Greek soldiers on the front had experienced a severe winter and, although full of fight, were not too well off for munitions and supplies. Consequently, it was essential that they should have the utmost encouragement and support that could be provided. This could best be given by my bomber force being used in close support of the Greek attack. I produced all the stock arguments against this form of co-operation, and stressed the fact that by bombing enemy communications leading to the battlefield a greater degree of help would be given to their troops fighting the actual battle. However, they reminded me that the morale of some of the Greek soldiers had been shaken severely by enemy bombing attacks, and that the success of the whole operation might depend on the stimulus afforded by seeing the Italians treated in the same way. I therefore acceded to their requests.