

Hurricanes to 6. These and 14 Gladiators of Nos. 80 and 112 Squadrons were flown to Crete on 23rd April to defend Suda Bay against enemy air attack and to take part with No. 30 Squadron in providing cover for sea convoys engaged in the evacuation. Sunderlands started to evacuate R.A.F. personnel on 19th April, when they flew a 30 Squadron party to Crete. The previous day they had also carried King Peter of Yugoslavia and other important political personages to Egypt, having taken them off from Kotor (Yugoslavia) on 17th April. Sunderlands continued the evacuation of essential personnel in stages from Greece to Crete, thence to Egypt. The King of Greece and members of the Greek Royal Family were included among other important passengers flown to Crete in Sunderlands on 22nd and 23rd April.

46. On 23rd April the Sunderlands were reinforced by two B.O.A.C. Flying Boats which operated between Crete and Egypt and rendered valuable service. These efforts were further augmented on the same day by Bombays of No. 216 Squadron which took two parties from Eleusis to Bagush, and the following day by Lodestars of No. 267 Squadron which carried three parties from Argos to Bagush. Enemy air attacks rendered Eleusis and Menidi aerodromes unusable after 23rd April, and Argos was similarly out of action from 24th April. The Bombays and Lodestars thereafter continued to carry personnel from Crete to Egypt. The last Sunderland loads to leave Scaramanga were taken off on 24th April and included Lieutenant-General Sir T. Blamey, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., and Air Vice-Marshal J. H. D'Albiac, D.S.O., and their respective staffs.

On 24th April 1,700 R.A.F. personnel were at Argos awaiting evacuation by sea but by the next day the majority of these had moved to Kalamata and Gytheon, three Sunderland loads being taken off from the former, and one from the latter and flown to Crete. Subsequently all personnel remaining there were evacuated by sea, many of them crossing in small boats to Kythera whence they were later taken off in destroyers. Further Sunderland evacuations from Greece, were made from Nauplia (Morea), transporting Prince Paul of Greece, the Greek Prime Minister and other important passengers including General Sir Maitland Wilson and Generals Mackay and Rankin.

Meanwhile flying boats of Nos. 228 and 230 Squadrons and landplanes continued the evacuation from Crete to Egypt, the last flight being made by a Sunderland on 2nd May. The total number of personnel evacuated by air from Greece to Crete was over 600, and from Crete and Greece to Egypt 870. Two Sunderlands were lost in these operations, one of which crashed while alighting by night at Kalamata, and the other was destroyed by enemy air action at Scaramanga.

47. The main evacuation from Greece of British and Imperial Forces was effected between 24th and 30th April in convoys of H.M. Ships and other vessels. All available aircraft operated in support to protect the convoys against the heavy enemy air attacks to which they were constantly subjected, and which were causing heavy losses. The forces available in Crete were 14 fighter Blenheims of

No. 30 Squadron, 9 fighter Blenheims of No. 203 Squadron (recently sent to Crete from Egypt to take part in this operation) and the remaining 6 Hurricanes and 14 Gladiators of Nos. 33, 80 and 112 Squadrons. At this stage, however, only 6 of the 14 Gladiators were serviceable.

Blenheims usually operating in patrols of six aircraft provided such cover for convoys as was possible in the vicinity of the mainland of Greece, while Hurricanes and Gladiators provided patrols over convoys approaching Crete and during their disembarkation at Suda Bay. At the same time, Sunderlands provided Ionian and Mediterranean reconnaissances to guard against possible raids on our convoys by units of the Italian Navy.

During the six months' campaign in Greece our Squadrons contended throughout with numerically superior enemy air forces, emerging in the end with much credit although sadly depleted in strength. Our total aircraft losses amounted to 209, of which 82 had to be destroyed and abandoned by our own forces during the withdrawal and subsequent evacuation. Many of the latter had been damaged during enemy attacks on our aerodromes and in normal circumstances might have been repaired. Our total losses of aircraft, missing and in combat with the enemy were 72.

As a comparison, the losses inflicted on the enemy totalled 259 aircraft destroyed and 99 probably destroyed, with several others damaged. Of these, 231 were destroyed and 94 probably destroyed in combat with our aircraft.

Our personnel losses in Greece amounted to 148 killed and missing and 15 taken prisoner. Of the total, 130 were aircrews. Such losses cannot be considered unduly heavy, bearing in mind the difficulties of the campaign and the hazards of the subsequent evacuation.

48. I cannot speak too highly of the work of Air Vice-Marshal J. H. D'Albiac, D.S.O., who commanded the British Air Force in Greece during the whole six months' campaign. His initiative, his personality and tact in dealings with the Greek High Command, enabled him, right up to the end, to obtain the maximum results in support of the Greeks from the small force at his disposal.

Of those under his Command, the most outstanding for their valuable services were:—

Group Captain A. H. Willets, Senior Air Staff Officer during the whole period.

Wing Commander P. B. Coote, who commanded the Western Wing (The Albanian Front) and himself took part in many of the fighter patrols and bombing raids of his Squadrons, from the last of which he is missing.

Wing Commander J. R. Gordon-Finlayson, D.S.O., D.F.C., commanding No. 211 Squadron, and later the Eastern Wing. A fine leader and an inspiration to his Squadron, with which he had completed over one hundred raids.

Squadron Leader E. G. Jones, D.F.C., commanding No. 80 (F) Squadron; his leadership maintained the high morale and efficiency of this Squadron whose six months' record in Greece, mostly in Gladiators, was quite remarkable.