

CONCLUSION.

78. These operations were carried out to take advantage of the Italian surrender to obtain a foothold in the Aegean with such forces as were available in the Middle East. We failed because we were unable to establish airfields in the area of operations.

79. The enemy's command of the air enabled him so to limit the operations and impair the efficiency of land, sea and air forces that by picking his time he could deploy his comparatively small forces with decisive results.

80. The naval forces engaged on these operations, cruisers, destroyers, submarines and coastal craft, and the small force of aircraft available to 201 (Naval Co-operation) Group all fought hard and did valiant work under

particularly trying conditions. They achieved considerable success against the enemy and held off the attack on Leros for some time, but not without heavy casualties to our own forces.

81. Had more aircraft been available, especially modern long range fighters, and given more luck, the operations might have been prolonged, but after the loss of Kos, if the enemy was prepared to divert the necessary effort, it is doubtful if Leros could have been held indefinitely without our embarking on a major operation for which no forces were available.

82. It may be, however, that the inroad made in the enemy's shipping resources—which process is still going on—will prove a fatal handicap to him when the time comes for us to embark on an "all in" offensive in the Aegean, with adequate forces.

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