

*The Greek Problem.*

4. It was clear that the problem confronting the Greeks was largely one of time. Could her frontier units hold the Italian forces sufficiently long to enable her armies to be mobilised and concentrated? As is well known, Greece is badly served by communications. Roads and railways on the mainland are few in number and the former are in most cases bad. A number of her reservists had to come from the Greek islands and it was estimated that it would take at least three weeks for the Greek mobilisation to be completed and for sufficient forces to be concentrated in the battle area before she could really consider herself reasonably safe. In the meantime, the Italian air force could, if handled properly, play havoc with their mobilisation and concentration arrangements. This, for some unaccountable reason, the Italians failed completely to do and wasted their comparatively strong air force in abortive attacks on undefended islands and hospitals in Salonika.

*The Greek Air Force.*

5. The Greek Air Force, although small and outnumbered by the Italian, fought most gallantly during this initial stage. Their pilots, many of whom had attended courses in England at the C.F.S. and elsewhere, were keen and what they lacked in modern war technique they made up for in personal bravery. Their aircraft, like those of most small independent nations not possessing an aircraft industry of their own, consisted of a number of different foreign types, French and Polish predominating, with a limited range of spares.

6. Operationally, the Greek Air Force was controlled by the General Staff and was used almost entirely in direct support of their army. They were quite unable to obtain any degree of air superiority and in consequence they suffered severe casualties. In addition, owing to the difficulty of obtaining spares, an abnormally high proportion of unserviceability soon existed and in a comparatively short time, their effort was reduced to negligible proportions.

*Decision to send an R.A.F. Contingent.*

7. In response to an urgent appeal for help, the British Government decided to send a contingent of the Royal Air Force to Greece from the Middle East. The force decided upon was to consist of two medium bomber squadrons, one mixed medium bomber and two-seater fighter squadron—all armed with Blenheim aircraft, and two single-seater fighter squadrons armed with Gladiator aircraft. On my arrival in Athens on 6th November, 1940, the advance elements of this force had already arrived and were ready for action.

*Air Policy.*

8. That evening I attended a conference with the Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief to discuss the war situation generally. Every pressure was brought to bear on me to employ my force in the same manner as the Greek Air Force, in close support of the land forces. I appreciated, however, that the best help I could give to the Greek armies was to concentrate my small bomber force on the enemy's disembarkation ports in Albania and the important centres in his lines of communication. I argued that such a plan would do far more to delay his advance than if I attacked his forward elements. If, however, the situation deteriorated consider-

ably, and a break through occurred, I would of course devote the whole of my force to the immediate task of stemming the enemy's advance. I finally obtained agreement on this policy and attacks were directed forthwith on the enemy's back areas. These attacks were maintained at maximum intensity with the few day bomber aircraft at my disposal and the detachments of Wellington aircraft sent over from Egypt to operate during the periods of moonlight. By the end of November, the Italian advance had been stemmed and the Greek forces who had by then completed their concentration were able to take the offensive. The Greek General Staff were most appreciative of the prompt and valuable help we had been able to provide for their gallant soldiers who, with ferocious intensity, had disputed every foot of the Greek soil, and they expressed the view that it was largely due to our assistance that the situation had now become satisfactory.

*Selection of Aerodromes.*

9. One of the main difficulties I experienced in establishing my force and one which was a constant handicap throughout the whole campaign, was the extreme scarcity of aerodromes suitable for the employment of modern aircraft. There were no all weather aerodromes, and on the mainland of Greece there are few areas in which aerodromes of any size can be made. In the Salonika area, the country is flat and a number of dry weather aerodromes already exists. For political reasons, however, I was not even allowed to reconnoitre these grounds, let alone use them. In the Larissa plain, there were many sites possible but by November, the rains had already commenced and, although I did station a fighter squadron in that area on its arrival, it was soon flooded out and aircraft were grounded for a period of ten days before they could be moved. There are few other sites in Greece except an occasional flat stretch on the coast and a certain number of level areas in the valleys, but the heavy rainfall and the prevalence of low clouds and mist make the latter quite unsuitable for operational purposes during the winter months, at any rate for modern bombers. I was forced, therefore, to concentrate my bomber force on the two aerodromes in the vicinity of Athens, and station my fighter squadrons on whatever grounds I could find near the front line, where they had to operate under conditions of the greatest discomfort and difficulty.

10. The main disadvantage of the aerodromes near Athens was that they were a long way from the front and it meant long hours of flying to and from the targets. They were, however, better drained and were only out of action for a few days after heavy rain. Furthermore, being near the sea, they were not so liable to get completely covered in by low clouds. Criticism has been made that the initial force which was sent to Greece was inadequate and many more squadrons should have been provided. I should like to point out, however, that even if these squadrons had been available, which they were not at the time, the lack of suitable aerodrome accommodation would, in my opinion, have prevented us from accepting them. During my first week in Greece, I made a tour of all possible sites and on my return pressed the Prime Minister to undertake immediately the construction of all weather runways at Araxos and Agrinion. I pointed out