

in the country was some eighty aircraft, to which were opposed, according to all reports, approximately 800 German aircraft on the Eastern front (Bulgaria and Roumania) and 160 Italian aircraft based in Albania plus 150 based in Italy but operating over Albania and Greece, mainly from advanced landing grounds in Albania.

Disposition of Squadrons in Eastern Wing.

31. The first problem with which I was faced in forming the Eastern Wing was that of disposing the air forces I could make available. My intention was to provide each squadron with a base aerodrome, and at least one and if possible two satellite landing grounds.

The location of the fighter squadron was influenced by its role. This was threefold:

(a) to protect the base area, which included the army L. of C., the port of Volos and our aerodromes in the Larissa plain.

(b) to provide fighter escort to our bombers, and

(c) to deal with enemy fighter aircraft in the battle area.

Larissa aerodrome was the most suitable from the geographical and communications point of view, and was one of the few aerodromes which was serviceable for all but a comparatively short period during the winter. Accordingly, the fighter squadron was based there with a satellite on a piece of suitable ground 7 miles to the west. At Larissa the camp was well dispersed at the opposite end of the aerodrome to the hangars, which would be likely to attract bombing attack. Aircraft pens of sandbags capable of taking Hurricanes, though open at the top, were constructed in dispersed positions.

32. As regards the two bomber squadrons, it was my original intention to station them at Almyros, where I hoped they would be sufficiently far back to be immune from escorted bomber raids and low flying fighter attack. Unfortunately, the Greek Air Force were already in occupation of this ground and I did not consider it safe for reasons of congestion to station more than one squadron there. The other squadron had to be sited temporarily at Larissa, pending the discovery of a more suitable ground. This was found eventually at Niamata, which in spite of a nearby marsh and consequent malarial infection, and in spite of the poor strategical position it occupied in the event of the withdrawal of an army to the Olympus line, was the only other which possessed a satisfactory surface and was suitable for night flying in the whole area north of Attica.

Thus the Blenheim squadrons were located at Almyros and Niamata. At each aerodrome every endeavour was made to gain the maximum dispersion of aircraft and encampments. Except at Larissa, the limits of the squadron camps lay at least a kilometre from the aerodrome. Aircraft were widely dispersed off the aerodrome at Almyros, but at Niamata this was hindered by a dyke and drainage ditch which protected the aerodrome from the marsh and lake beyond.

33. The one army co-operation squadron which arrived as the German attack developed I stationed at Kazaklar, where it was suitably sited for meeting the army needs. Unfortunately, however, this squadron rarely had more than

one Hurricane serviceable at a time and, since the remainder of its aircraft were Lysanders, which it was quite impossible to use in the face of enemy air opposition, the squadron did very little useful work.

34. It should be realised that the German invasion of Greece started at a time when very few landing grounds were fit for use on account of rain. They were just beginning to dry, and had the attack been delayed for even a week, we would at least have had several more satellite landing grounds at our disposal. As it was, the change in the weather favoured the Germans.

Position of Eastern Wing H.Q.

35. Considerations influencing the location of the Eastern Wing Headquarters were:

(a) ability of the wing commander to make quick personal contact with force commander.

(b) reliability of communications.

(c) ease of access to operational squadrons under wing control.

(d) reasonable propinquity to aerodrome.

The overriding consideration in locating Wing Headquarters supporting the army on this front was that it should be close enough to Force H.Q. to allow the wing commander and the force commander to be within easy personal touch. It was considered undesirable, however, to locate the H.Q. beside Force H.Q., since the combined encampment would be of excessive proportions, difficult to conceal from the air, marked by deeply worn tracks, congested with vehicles and unwieldy to move.

The fully established wing headquarters failed to arrive in Greece by the outbreak of the campaign and, therefore, after consultation with the force commander, I decided to locate the skeleton wing headquarters beside Force H.Q. at Elason. The wing commander lived in the force commander's mess and so the closest liaison was formed.

Control of Squadrons.

36. At the end of March, the Army Signals detachment attached to wing headquarters was asked to link up all the aerodromes which were eventually used with direct lines to wing headquarters at Elason. This task was far beyond the scope and resources of the Army Signals detachment, with the inevitable result that land line communications were extremely poor. The factors leading to this state of affairs were as follows. The shortage of Royal Signals personnel resulting from the rapid R.A.F. build-up in Eastern Greece, had stretched to the limit the resources of the Signals Company despatched to Greece in July, 1940. Furthermore, priority for such equipment as was available was given to the forces in Libya, and the situation in Greece was acute, particularly as regards landline cable and wire. Technical limitations were a further cause. The trunk landline system was limited to overhead alignments which were frequently out of action as a result of hostile air activity, and reliable maintenance was beyond the resources of the Greek Postal and Telegraph administration. Accordingly the Army was faced with providing the R.A.F. with field cable systems which automatically precluded long distance speech facilities. Thus, although the wing had a direct line to Larissa,