

Mr. Eden (Foreign Secretary), General Sir John Dill (C.I.G.S.), General Sir Archibald Wavell (C.-in-C. M.E.), Captain Dick, R.N. (representing C.-in-C. Mediterranean) and myself, the decision was taken to despatch British Troops at the earliest opportunity to form on the Aliakmon line to the West of Salonika.

It followed, of course, that an increased air commitment would be involved both in support of the British Army on this new front and also for air protection of the ships transporting men to Greece. Nevertheless, since the Greeks had decided to oppose a German invasion of Macedonia there was clearly no alternative to giving them the maximum assistance possible. Moreover, though German air and land forces had arrived in Tripoli these might well have been to prevent our further advance, and there was no reason on that particular date to suspect the imminent preparation of a counter-offensive in Libya. It is true, however, that such a threat developed almost immediately after the Greek commitment had been accepted.

40. The landing of British Troops in the Athens area during March proceeded with little or no interference from the air; German infiltration into Bulgaria continued but their air activity was limited to occasional reconnaissances over Macedonia. By the 1st April it was evident that the German invasion of Greece through the Balkans was imminent. Consequently, with the prospect of fighting the war on two fronts, two air formations were created, viz. Eastern Wing and Western Wing. H.Q. Eastern Wing was at Tsaritsani, in close touch with G.H.Q. British Forces and controlled Nos. 11 and 113 (B) Squadrons (Blenheims), No. 33 (F) Squadron (Hurricanes) and No. 208 (A.C.) Squadron (Hurricanes and Lysanders). The role of this force was to provide direct support for the British and Greek Armies against the prospective German attack from the North. H.Q. Western Wing was at Yannina and controlled No. 112 (F) Squadron (Gladiators) and No. 211 (B) Squadron (Blenheims), the role of this formation being to support the Greeks on the Albanian Front. The remainder of the squadrons in Greece, viz. No. 30 (F/B) Squadron (Blenheim Fighters), No. 80 (F) Squadron (Hurricanes and Gladiators) and No. 84 (B) Squadron (Blenheims), together with detachments of Nos. 37 and 38 (B) Squadrons (Wellingtons), were at aerodromes in the Athens area directly under the control of H.Q., B.A.F., Greece. No. 815 Squadron Fleet Air Arm was based on Paramythia and No. 805 Squadron Fleet Air Arm on Maleme (Crete).

41. Germany declared war on Greece and Yugo-Slavia on the 5th April, 1941, and launched her attack at dawn the following day, crossing the Greek frontier into Macedonia by four routes, with the main thrust along the Struma Valley. Simultaneously they advanced Westwards into Yugo-Slavia along the Strumica Valley in the South, from Dragoman to Nis in the North, and by other intermediate routes. The Greeks resisted strongly at Rupel, temporarily checking the German advance through the Struma Valley, but despite this opposition the Germans succeeded in penetrating Thrace and Macedonia and occupied Salonika on the 8th April.

Throughout the German advance the primary task of our Squadrons was to attack his A.F.V's., M.T. columns, troops and lines of communication on the Macedonian and Yugo-Slavian Frontiers. Practically the whole of our air effort was directed to this end, Wellingtons making night attacks, Blenheims operating both by night and day, with fighters constantly in support maintaining offensive patrols, making low flying machine-gun attacks on the enemy, and escorting our bombers by day. The first encounter with the German air force on this front took place on 6th April. A patrol of 12 of No. 33 Squadron Hurricanes engaged 30 Me.109's and shot down 5 of them without loss to themselves. During the night of 6th/7th April, 6 Wellingtons of No. 37 Squadron successfully bombed the railway station and marshalling yards at Sofia. From 7th to 9th April, as the Germans advanced in strength, Blenheims of Nos. 11, 84 and 113 Squadrons made heavy and effective attacks on large columns of their M.T., A.F.V's. and troops near Petrich in Bulgaria, on the Strumica-Lake Doiran Road in Yugo-Slavia and at Axiopolis and Polykastron in Macedonia.

42. By this time the German armoured forces, supported by dive-bombers, advancing Westwards from Bitolj, had overwhelmed the Yugo-Slav Army and had succeeded in joining up with the Italians in Albania. They then advanced Southward from Bitolj to Florina, threatening to isolate the Greeks in Albania from our own forces further East. The Greeks were thus compelled to withdraw from the Northern front of Albania, while our Armoured Brigade and an Australian Infantry Brigade were moved Westwards to close the Florina Gap, where they were joined by a Greek cavalry division from the Koritza area. On 10th April, as the enemy continued his Westward thrust into Yugo-Slavia, Blenheims attacked enemy M.T. columns and A.F.V's. on the Prilep-Bitolj road inflicting heavy damage on them. During the night of 11th/12th April, Wellingtons followed up this effort with further attacks on the enemy at Prilep and Kilkis.

Meanwhile, our forces holding the Florina Gap had been hotly attacked by the Germans on 9th April and compelled, after a strong resistance, to withdraw on 11th April. By the evening of 12th April, our front had been formed roughly on a line extending from the coast near Mount Olympus, along the Aliakmon River to Servia, thence N.W. towards the Albanian lakes. Continued bombing and machine-gun attacks by Blenheims and Hurricanes contributed to the delay of the enemy's advance during the critical periods in which our troops were falling back on new positions. These operations were inevitably accompanied by considerable losses and in one raid on the 13th April, for example, a complete formation of 6 Blenheims of No. 211 Squadron was destroyed by Me.109's. Wellingtons continued to attack more distant objectives. On the night of 13th/14th April a force of 10 Wellingtons from Nos. 37 and 38 Squadrons made a further effective attack on the railway goods yard at Sofia, destroying a large number of trucks containing explosives. At the same time other Wellingtons bombed and machine-gunned M.T. convoys at Yannitsa and Gorna Djumaya. In operations on the following night Wellingtons destroyed the bridge over the Vardar River at Veles and Blenheims dropped bombs on