

SECRET

R.A.F. NARRATIVE

(FIRST DRAFT)

OPERATIONS IN THE DODECANESE ISLANDS

SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER 1943

AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH (1)
AIR MINISTRY

NARRATOR'S PREFACE

The operations in the Dodecanese dealt with in this narrative include the attempt to occupy Cos and Leros and the subsequent evacuation of these islands by British forces. From the air point of view, the lesson to be derived from these operations is one that had been demonstrated time and time again in the course of the war in the Mediterranean. An undisputable pre-requisite of all war winning operations was the establishment of air superiority, if only temporarily. Despite the Allied preponderance in aircraft in the Mediterranean area, the Luftwaffe were able to establish local air supremacy long enough to allow the ground and sea forces to invade and capture the islands. Operating at much greater distances from their bases, the air forces in the Middle East could not effectively challenge the enemy's dominance. Engrossed as the main Allied air forces were in the Italian campaign they could afford little aid to these operations in the Aegean. The attempt to occupy these islands was, at the best, a brave endeavour which failed because the cardinal principle of warfare enunciated in the Second World War was neglected.

In the Aegean, the names of places can be given in at least four different versions, namely Modern Greek, Italian, Turkish and anglicised versions of Ancient Greek. The principle adopted in naming these islands has been that of the most common. Where any difficulty might occur, two versions of the place name is given.

SECRET

CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER 1 Background to the Operations.....	1
CHAPTER 2 The Occupation and Fall of Cos.....	9
CHAPTER 3 Conflicting Policies.....	27
CHAPTER 4 The Capitulation of Leros.....	35

APPENDICES

1. G.A.F., South Eastern Command, Orders of Battle,
31 August, 20 October and 10 November 1943.
2. Middle East Command, Orders of Battle,
28 September and 26 October 1943.

MAP

German Operations in the Invasion of Leros

The Dodecanese Islands

The Eastern Mediterranean

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND TO THE OPERATIONS

J.P.109 Jan. 1943
A.H.B./IIJ1/94/64

In November 1942 the tide of battle had turned in favour of the Allied Forces in the Middle East. In Egypt the Axis forces had begun to retreat westwards after the battle of El Alamein, and the Allied Forces under General Eisenhower had made a series of successful landings in French North Africa and Morocco. On the 18th of that month the Commanders-in-Chief(1) in the Middle East ordered that plans were to be prepared for the capture of Crete and the Dodecanese Islands. A subsequent examination of the problem however showed that the defences of Crete were so strong that it would not be possible, in 1943, to provide the number of landing craft necessary for a direct assault unless Crete was selected as the primary objective in the whole Mediterranean.

Ops. in the
Aegean
A.H.B./IIJ1/94/64

C.C./176
12 Jan. 1943

A week later the Commanders-in-Chief examined the possibility of opening the Aegean as far as Smyrna and took note that plans were being prepared for the capture of Rhodes. As a result of this meeting, the Commanders-in-Chief informed the Chiefs of Staff on 12 January 1943 that they had been considering how best they could assist the Russians by turning the Middle East area into a liability for Germany in the year 1943. They considered that the greatest contribution that could be made in this theatre would be for Turkey to come into the war. Such an event seemed unlikely and they had therefore been examining the possibility of action in the Aegean.

Given certain conditions it was considered that there was a good chance of being able to capture Rhodes and the Dodecanese even without the use of Turkish airfields, provided major operations in the Eastern Mediterranean were taking place at the same time. Unless the German Air Force was pre-occupied elsewhere, operations in the Aegean were not feasible.

C.C./178
13 Jan. 1943

C.O.S.(S)(2)
Symbol and
Telescope 14.

The Commanders-in-Chief could not of course guarantee that even if a major operation took place in the Central Mediterranean that they would be justified in embarking on the proposed operation, for the Germans might reinforce Rhodes, or the Dodecanese, or some other change might take place; but it was thought the prospects were reasonable and sufficient to justify their asking for these resources in advance. It was pointed out that unless the equipment was already available they would not be able to profit from a favourable opportunity which might arise. The additional resources they considered they required were two auxiliary aircraft carriers, eighty-eight landing craft of various types and ten aircraft squadrons. This proposal was referred to the Prime Minister who was then attending the Casablanca conference, he minuted to General Ismay 'what do the Chiefs of Staff Committee think about this? I rather like it. I will discuss it with General Alexander.'

(1) Admiral Sir H. H. Harwood, General Sir H. Alexander and Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder.

SECRET

2

C.O.S. (M.E.) 351
21 Jan. 1943

Central J.P.S.
Paper No. 4.
Feb. 1943.
A.H.B./IIJ/184/
14A

The Chiefs of Staff replied on 21 January that the whole question of Allied strategy for 1943 was still under consideration and turned largely on the resources available. While the desirability of the operations which had been proposed was admitted no answer could be furnished until at least three weeks had elapsed. The Prime Minister, however, at a meeting held on 27 January charged the Commanders-in-Chief with the task of planning and preparing for the capture of the Dodecanese employing 'ingenuity and resource' to the full.

The Central Joint Planning Staff in Cairo, realising that there was no hope of the required reinforcements being provided specifically for the Aegean operation until late in the year, were faced with the problem of what plans and preparations should be made. The degree and scope of operations in the Aegean would be governed largely by the demands of the forthcoming invasion of Sicily. The primary task would be to stage some diversion in the Aegean as a help to the proposed invasion, but the final plan for that operation had not then been issued.⁽¹⁾ If the invasion of Sicily were successful, a favourable opportunity might arise for the seizure of islands in the Aegean, or even to effect a landing in Greece. They examined the problem carefully and concluded that future operations in the Eastern Mediterranean might take the form of a diversion to the Sicilian invasion; or, secondly, large scale operations against Crete and/or Rhodes, as an alternative to Sicily, or as a counter to an unsuccessful invasion of Sicily; or, thirdly, the capture or occupation of Rhodes and other islands in the Dodecanese, or a landing in Greece as the result of a successful invasion; or, lastly, the opening of the Aegean with Turkish co-operation for which plans would depend on the result of conversations with the Turks which were going to be held shortly. It would be necessary to appoint a special commander and staff to plan any operations in the Aegean in detail. In the meantime subversive and irregular activities, designed to lower the morale and reduce the resistance of the Italian garrisons were to be started in that area.

M.E. Forces
Troopers
telegrams
52100
12 Feb. 1943

On 12 February, General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson who had taken over the command of the Middle East Forces from General Alexander, received the following directive from the Prime Minister.

'On taking up the Middle East Command the following will be your main tasks in order of priority.

- (a) You will maintain the Eighth Army and support its operations to the utmost until Tunisia is fully cleared of the enemy.
- (b) In conformity with the requirements of General Eisenhower, you will take all measures necessary for the mounting of that part of operation Husky which is launched from the area under your command.
- (c) You will make preparations for supporting Turkey in such manner as may be necessary to give effect to the policy of His Majesty's Government as communicated to you from time to time by the Chief of Staff

(1) It was not finalised until June 1943.

SECRET

3

- (d) You will prepare for amphibious operations in the Eastern Mediterranean.'

As a result of this directive the Commanders-in-Chief(1) informed the Chiefs of Staff on 22 February that they intended to prepare detailed plans for operations in the Eastern Mediterranean as a diversion or an alternative to operation 'Husky' (the code name for invasion of Sicily). They regarded it as essential that preparations should be made to meet any possible changes in the existing plans or in the general Mediterranean situation. They added a general outline to their proposals and suggested that Lt. General Desmond F. Anderson(2) should be appointed to prepare the plans and assume responsibility for any operation in the Eastern Mediterranean which might be decided upon.

O.Z.587/26

The Prime Minister who had seen this proposal addressed his comment to the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East. 'I am looking to you personally in this matter there is no question of having anyone else in this except you you are the man to prepare the plans and be ready to assume responsibility for any operation in the Eastern Mediterranean that may be decided upon, and the one man who should take a grip of it without delay. I should have thought you would be very keen on it.'

O.Z.550
24 Feb. 1943

C.C./197
27 Feb. 1943

Both the Chief of Staff and the Chief of the Air Staff objected to the appointment of General Anderson as a 'special commander'. If the intention was that he should be a Task Force Commander for any operation to be undertaken, they considered his appointment premature. If it was intended that General Anderson should co-ordinate planning, who were to be his Naval and Air colleagues? The Commanders-in-Chief explained that what they had in mind was that special commanders from all three Services should be appointed at once to work out detailed plans for possible operations in the Aegean and to be Commanders designate of the forces which might be allotted to those operations. They proposed General Anderson for the Army side, the Air Officer Commanding Egypt for the Air side,(3) and 'on the Naval side the Commander-in-Chief, Levant has in mind to ask the Admiralty for a Naval Commander.' Their object in making this proposal was to bring all their preparations to the highest possible state of readiness so that if operations in the Aegean were required, possibly at very short notice, there would be the minimum delay. If the appointment of these commanders were left until the situation developed and they then had to get into the very complicated Aegean picture and work on a plan, which was not of their making, the result would be delay and possible failure. They thought it essential therefore to take steps at once to avoid such contingencies and asked the Chiefs of Staff to agree to their suggestions. The Chiefs of Staff gave their approval on 4 March and directives were issued for the three principal(4) Aegean planners on 19 March.

O.Z.638
4 March 1943

-
- (1) Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham became C.-in-C., Mediterranean on 20 February 1943. Vice Admiral Sir H. H. Harwood became C.-in-C., Levant and was relieved on 27 March by Admiral Sir Ralph Leatham.
(2) Commander of III Corps.
(3) Air Vice-Marshal R. E. Saul.
(4) The Naval representative was Rear Admiral G. J. A. Miles.

SECRET

4

O.Z.1219
in file Ops.
in the Aegean
Policy
A.H.B./IIJ1/184/
14(A)

Number 2 Planning Staff which formed in Cairo was mainly composed of officers of III Corps Headquarters. The senior member of the Royal Air Force contingent being Group Captain H. G. Wheeler. Planning was complicated by the conflicting ambitions of the Greeks and the Turks for the ultimate possession of the Dodecanese. After considering all the possibilities, it was decided that the actual operations should be executed by British forces only, and that the future of the Dodecanese should not be discussed with either of the interested parties.

The operations in Tunisia were the most important commitment of the Middle East Forces at that time and when the possible withdrawal of some British troops from North Africa to the Middle East for Aegean operations was raised, General Eisenhower replied that the ability of North Africa to furnish British troops after the completion of the Tunisian campaign depended upon the decisions of the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the course of operations in the Mediterranean, following the planned invasion of Sicily. He declared, therefore, that the movements of troops from North Africa to the Middle East should follow and not precede, these decisions.

Despatch
General Wilson

Nevertheless, although the prospect of obtaining troops from North Africa was uncertain, a detailed plan for a full scale attack on Rhodes and Scarpanto (Carpathos), and the subsequent occupation of other islands was produced by 2 May.⁽¹⁾ The principal feature of the plan was the landing of forces two hundred and fifty miles from their nearest air bases in Cyprus, and still further from Cyrenaica, and the crux of the operation was the provision of the necessary air cover and adequate air reinforcements.

Number 2 Planning Staff was re-designated Force 292 in June 1943, when it seemed likely that active operations in the Aegean were to be undertaken and a Force Headquarters would be required to conduct operations in the field. But the uncertainty of Turkey's attitude, the complication of the political situation in the Balkans, and the needs of Sicily and Italy made detailed planning difficult. At times plans had to be made in the absence of a Naval Planning Section, and consequently were never fully completed, but on four occasions a force was assembled and partially prepared to undertake the capture of Rhodes.

C.O.S.(M.E.)400
3 Aug. 1943

Policy for Aegean Operations

On 3 August, the British Chiefs of Staff sent a course of action for the Middle East forces. If the Italians in Crete and Aegean area resisted the Germans and deadlock ensued, the Middle East policy should be to help the Italians wherever possible. To this end they were to make what preparations they could to take advantage of any available opportunity that occurred. Where possible they were to enlist the support of the local population. The resources of the Middle East Command were limited, but the Commanders-in-Chief were authorised to approach the Allied Commander-in-Chief for help in landing craft and ships. Apart from that, the Chiefs of Staff could give no further assistance but hoped that the Middle East would improvise to the utmost. Two days later

(1) Operation Accolade.

A.O.C.161
5 Aug. 43

the A.O.C.-in-C., Middle East, sent a personal telegram to the A.O.C.-in-C., Mediterranean Air Command in which he said that, at a recent Commanders-in-Chief Meeting, it had been agreed that they should be ready to take immediate advantage of any favourable development in the Balkans and the Aegean which might arise should an Axis withdrawal take place or the Italians or Germans start fighting each other, as they might well do in Rhodes where Italians greatly outnumbered the Germans. They had decided that the only way to be ready in time for such an eventuality was to hold a force immediately available. The primary object of this force would be to carry out a quick 'Accolade' operation against Rhodes, but it would also be available to go anywhere that seemed desirable. The Chiefs of Staff had approved their proposal and they had authorized the retention in the Middle East of ships to enable certain forces to be assault loaded forthwith.

C.C./271
5 Aug.

The A.O.C.-in-C. Middle East had been requested to be prepared to carry out a quick 'Accolade' in the near future should the opportunity arise. In such circumstances it was almost certain that some air threat from Greece and Crete would still exist, air protection of the convoy would therefore be essential. He would do his utmost to provide all the air forces required from his own resources, but he would require a little assistance from M.A.C. General Eisenhower had been informed of the Middle East requirements. On the air side four Lightning squadrons and sufficient transport aircraft to lift one parachute battalion group had been requested. The A.O.C.-in-C., Middle East did not know how he could carry out the operation without this amount of air assistance since apart from Beaufighters which were insufficient in number and not entirely suitable for the purpose, he had no fighters with sufficient range to operate from Cyprus in the vicinity of Rhodes and had only sufficient transport aircraft for foreseen commitments quite apart from parachute operations.

The force would be loaded and ready to sail at any time after 18 August so that the Lightning squadrons should be in Cyprus by 15 August, while the parachute battalion with their transport aircraft should be in position by 14 August. As the A.O.C.-in-C., Middle East could not foresee when the operation was likely to be ordered it was not possible to say how long the Lightning squadrons would have to remain in Cyprus but once the operation was launched it should be possible to return them within four or five days.

If and when the operation was ordered it would be essential to neutralise such German Air Forces as were in Greece, Crete and the Aegean at the time. This could only be done by the Ninth Bomber Command and his two Royal Air Force heavy bomber squadrons which would have to be released from all other commitments for this purpose during the period of the operation. He did not, however, propose to divert them unless or until the operation was definitely ordered to take place.

U.S.F.O.R.
No. 4327
6 Aug.

The next day (6th) the British Chiefs of Staff explained to General Eisenhower that their directive to the Commanders-in-Chief Middle East of 3 August was not intended to overrule the policy that the requirements of his operation should take priority over those of the Eastern Mediterranean and that he should release only those resources which he could spare after meeting his own requirements.

SECRET

6

As a result of this communication General Eisenhower informed the Middle East that although he could provide the troops asked for, it was impossible for them to arrive by 14 August. Certain ships could be made available, but he could not provide either the Lightning squadrons or the transport aircraft required for the parachute operations. At that time the Lightning squadrons were fully employed in escorting the Strategic Bomber Force for the primary role of knocking Italy out of the war and were specifically required for operation Avalanche.(1) Obviously it would be wrong to divert them from this employment. All transport aircraft were required for his own operations and experience in the Sicilian operation had shown that twenty-one days training for any specific operation was mandatory. The time factor alone would therefore preclude him from placing these transport aircraft at the disposal of the Middle East. The reply of the A.O.C.-in-C. Mediterranean Air Command to the A.O.C.-in-C., Middle East merely referred to General Eisenhower's reply and added 'regret nothing more can be done at present.'

AFHQ
No. 8608
7 Aug. 43.

A.O.C. 162

General Eisenhower in reply to the British Chiefs of Staff's telegram of 6 August, said that he had noted their priority ruling, but he viewed with considerable concern the possibility that in practice requirements for this operation would draw upon reserves urgently required for the main business in hand, which was to knock Italy out of the war. The facts were that in the Mediterranean there were many critical items, such as anti-aircraft guns, landing craft and air forces which were barely sufficient for the present operations. Operations such as Accolade could not be staged without drawing to some extent upon these resources. He expressed the opinion that they should concentrate on one thing at a time and that Accolade should be abandoned. With this opinion, he said, both the Naval and Air Commanders-in-Chief in the Mediterranean were in agreement.

AFHQ.
No. 385

Nothing daunted the Commanders-in-Chief Middle East returned to the charge. On 10 August in a telegram to General Eisenhower they appreciated the reasons for which further help could not be given. Operation Accolade in its attenuated form would only take place if conditions in the objective gave a reasonable prospect of success with the forces available. The effect of General Eisenhower's decision was that the objective must be softer before an operation could be launched. The Commanders-in-Chief felt that such conditions in the objective might well be accompanied by a situation in Italy sufficiently favourable to permit the release of the four Lightning Squadrons which had been requested. It was hoped that this would be borne in mind as the situation developed. They for their part were continuing to plan, prepare, and load the equipment of the first two Brigade Groups as they felt that at some time an opportunity might occur and that it might be of short duration. They had postponed the target date of readiness to three days notice from 19 August as the situation made it unlikely that earlier sailing would be necessary.

C.C./273
10 Aug. 43

The British Chiefs of Staff were also reluctant to abandon the proposed operation. On 18 August they informed both General Eisenhower and the Middle East that it was never

U.S.F.O.R.
No. 4513
18 Aug. 1943

(1) Landing in Italy at Salerno.

intended that their directive of 3 August would in any way encroach upon the resources required for operations in the Central Mediterranean. They however, considered that advantage should be taken, within the resources that could be made available, of an opportunity to occupy either Crete or the islands of the Dodecanese in the event of a German withdrawal. They thought it was too early to discount entirely the possibility of a favourable opportunity occurring. They agreed that the limited size of the force available would preclude any operation in the face of serious German opposition. They therefore confirmed their instructions of 3 August provided there was no detracting from the main effort in the Central Mediterranean. It was realized that a force could not be kept ready indefinitely and asked the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East to report as to how long they could do so and at the same time meet the demands which were being made upon them by the Allied Force Headquarters and those which could be foreseen in the immediate future.

C.-in-Cs. to
C.O.S.
C.C./283
23 Aug. 1943

Despatch
General Wilson

C.O.S. M.E.
417 & 418
3 Sept.
O.Z. 2652 and
2653

C.C./43
6 Sept. 1943

C.C./291

O.Z.2722
9 Sept. 1943

(8516)11

By this time the Sicilian Campaign had been concluded successfully and the Allied Armies in Sicily were about to attempt the invasion of Italy. As the collapse of Italy appeared imminent the Middle East Force stood ready to undertake the capture of Rhodes and was to have sailed on 1 September. Unfortunately on the 26 August the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East ordered their transports to proceed to India, and the force was disembarked and returned to its stations; so that when, on 8 September, the Italian armistice was announced and an opportunity for seizing the island arose, the shipping and the force which had been specially prepared for a quick seizure of Rhodes had been dispersed. Thus the Italian armistice took the Commander-in-Chief Middle East, at a complete disadvantage. Owing to the claims of the other Commands, a carefully planned operation had been jettisoned and no urgent action was contemplated in the immediate future, since he was not kept informed of what was afoot and first learned that Italy was discussing terms only twenty-four hours before the public announcement that the armistice had been concluded. He therefore had neither time, troops nor shipping to prepare to take advantage of the chances which were thus offered.

The Commanders-in-Chief had held a meeting on 6 September to discuss a paper prepared by the Joint Planning Staff which contained certain suggestions for action which might be taken by the Middle East forces in the event of the Italians accepting surrender terms, and as a result had sent the course of action they proposed to the Chiefs of Staff and the Allied Commander-in-Chief in Italy, General Eisenhower. They intended to send a small detachment of the S.A.S. Regiment plus civil affairs officers to organise the defence of the island of Castel Rosso (off the Turkish coast). Similar parties were to be despatched to other islands held by the Italians; the island of Cos was being given especial consideration. They were sending a special Inter-Service Mission to Rhodes after contact had been established with the Italian Governor to assess what assistance the Middle East could give to the Italian forces in rounding up German garrisons. If the mission reported favourably, 234 Brigade, plus one battalion of tanks and supporting troops, would be mobilised and equipped immediately, with the object of despatch to Rhodes; one and possibly two squadrons of Spitfires would be sent also. These proposals brought the comment from the Prime Minister, 'Good. This is a time to play high. Improvise and dare!'

CHAPTER 2

THE OCCUPATION AND FALL OF COS

Despatch
Gen. Wilson

Report of Naval
Ops in the
Aegean
Appendix 2
'Diary of Events'

Events immediately following the Armistice with the Italians showed that German plans to cope with such an eventuality had been well laid. They immediately took over Crete and Scarpanto. In spite of this the opportunity for seizing Rhodes before the German garrison there, could re-organise and adjust itself to the changed circumstances, still existed. The Commander-in-Chief of the Middle East Forces therefore decided to despatch the 234th Brigade to the island to assist the Italians in overpowering the Germans. At this time the German Air Forces in Greece and the Aegean were not considered sufficiently strong to contribute a major threat to these operations,⁽¹⁾ nor were their land forces on Rhodes of any great consequence; the Italians outnumbered them by six to one.

Ibid

The expedition of the 234th Brigade was to be preceded by a small mission whose task was to make contact with the Italian commander in Rhodes and induce him to take over control of the island. The Missions left Haifa by sea on 8 September (the day on which the Armistice with Italy was announced) and went to the (Italian) island of Castellrosso which capitulated to a small detachment of the Special Boat Squadron on 10 September. On the night of 9/10 September Major Lord Jellicoe and another officer were dropped by parachute on Rhodes and established contact with Admiral Campione, the Italian Governor. Late on the afternoon of 11 September the Commander-in-Chief received the information that the Governor had lost heart, and that he had refused permission for British forces to land on the island.

Ibid

The 234th Infantry Brigade was in the meantime being prepared for operations, but, owing to the limitations of shipping and the time taken to collect it, the brigade could not be ready to sail until 18 September. The urgency was such that this delay was unacceptable. One battalion was ordered to embark in motor launches and Royal Air Force craft for transit to Rhodes, while preparations for the mounting of the rest of the brigade went on as fast as possible. It was, however, imperative that the British force should have a guarantee of unopposed entry into the port of Rhodes and an unopposed occupation of an airfield, either at Maritza, in Rhodes, or on Cos before the expedition could be launched. But before anything could be done the Germans had assumed undisputed control of Rhodes.

This situation made it necessary to revise completely the plans for operations in the Aegean. Hitherto all the plans which had been made, under the code name Accolade,⁽²⁾ had involved the employment of considerable forces, and had as their first objective the capture of Rhodes. Future plans

-
- (1) See Appendix 1 for G.A.F. South Eastern Command Orders of Battle.
- (2) The code name Accolade meant Operations in the Aegean. The code name Handcuff meant operations against Rhodes. In many telegrams it was found that Accolade was often used wrongly to mean operations against Rhodes only. (Aegean Ops. M.O.5. War Office).

had to be made on a smaller scale and, since it was essential to act quickly, they had to be improvised. German resources in the Aegean had been stretched to the limit by their recent take-over in Rhodes and Crete, and it seemed possible that by a rapid move the Middle East forces might obtain control of other Aegean islands, notably Cos, and by so doing neutralise the enemy successes over the Italians, enhance British prestige throughout the Middle East, and act as a diversion for the Operations in Italy.

General Eisenhower had already made it clear that little material support, especially in the air, could be given by North Africa to such an undertaking, and had emphasised that the campaign in Italy must not be prejudiced by any other operation in the Mediterranean. There was, however, a good chance that, even with the limited means at their disposal, the occupation of such islands as Cos, which had an airfield and landing grounds, Leros, where there was an Italian naval base, and Samos could be undertaken, since the garrisons seemed likely to welcome the prospect of a British occupation.

With the limited number of German aircraft based on Greece and Crete at this time, and with British fighters based on Cos the possibility of major seaborne or airborne German operations seemed slight, and with the aid of the Italian garrison of Cos and Leros, who were at that time thought to be reasonably well equipped for ground and air defence, it was considered that the British forces might maintain themselves in these islands, until an attack could be launched on Rhodes from the Middle East. It was therefore decided to despatch small forces to Cos, Leros and Samos, to act as stiffening to the Italians. Cos and Samos were secured by the detachment of the Special Boat Squadron which had occupied Castelrosso, and troop movement began, both by sea and air on 15 September.

Ibid

Preparations had been made by the Headquarters of the Royal Air Force in the Middle East to conform with the constantly changing plans for operation Accolade, and by the end of August a photographic coverage of all the important areas in the Aegean had been made by No. 680 (P.R.) Squadron. As a result of the capture of Rhodes by the Germans the latest plan of operations in the Aegean, Accolade Case 'Z' had had to be modified drastically.(1) The assembly, embarkation, and loading of Royal Air Force Units, equipment, vehicles, and supplies required to be transported to Rhodes had to be postponed. It was intended to form a small build up of essential Royal Air Force personnel equipment and stores at Castelrosso but squadrons were to remain at their advanced landing bases as moves forward into the Aegean could only be undertaken by Special Service troops by sea in launches and caiques or by being dropped from the air.

ADEM Air Staff
Memo No. 2
12 Sept. 1943

By 14 September an Advanced Air Defence Headquarters had been established at Nicosia in Cyprus. The function of this headquarters was to act as a forward co-ordinating authority for offensive air operations in the Aegean and for fighter protection of shipping in the Levant. Air Commodore W. H. Dunn was placed in charge of these operations and was responsible to the Air Defence Commander(2) who was to remain

ADEM Air Staff
Memo. Nos. 2 & 3

(1) See Appendix 2 for R.A.F. forces in M.E.
(2) A.V.M. R.E. Saul.

for the time being in Cairo. Group Captain Riocard of No. 201 (Naval co-operation) Group was attached to the Advanced Headquarters Staff for liaison duties. This group was responsible for providing the appropriate scale of fighter protection of all shipping, outside a forty mile range of Cyprus; between that island and Castelrosso through a temporary Wing Headquarters (No. 237) at Limassol (Cyprus) comprising two Beaufighter Squadrons, Nos. 227 and 252. No. 209 Group comprising Nos. 213 and 274 Squadrons (Hurricane) located at Paphos (Cyprus) were responsible for providing similar protection within forty miles range of Cyprus. Control was to be exercised by No. 25 Sector at Nicosia and arrangements had been made whereby the Naval Authorities and the appropriate Service Authority at Castelrosso were to notify Headquarters No. 209 Group, No. 237 Wing and No. 25 Sector of all movements of shipping.

Ibid

Command of all army and air forces in the Aegean and at Castelrosso was vested in the Commander of Force 292 (Lieutenant General Sir Desmond Anderson). Local command of all army and air forces in Castelrosso was vested in Major Shaw, Royal West Kents, and command of the Naval Forces in the Aegean and at Castelrosso was exercised by the Commander-in-Chief Levant. (1)

The intention was to form a small build-up of personnel, equipment and supplies at Castelrosso and to infiltrate into the Aegean Islands with land and air forces by air and sea to bolster up the Italian Garrisons and Greek partisans against the German Forces of occupation. Cos was to be occupied by British forces in this manner and British Missions (2) were to pave the way for similar operations in Leros and Samos.

Island of Cos

The island of Cos is about thirty miles long and nowhere more than seven miles wide. It is the most fruitful in the Aegean; water and food are plentiful for the local population of about twenty thousand. The only port is the town of Cos, on the north-east coast, opposite the Turkish mainland; facilities here are very poor, with little depth of water and only one berth alongside the quay for a small vessel. A main road runs the length of the island, connecting the town of Cos with Antimachia airfield, some eighteen miles away, at the broadest part of the island.

Cos was the most important of the islands to the expedition since it possessed an airfield from which single-engined fighter aircraft could operate over the Aegean and could cover an attack on Rhodes when the time came for that operation to be resumed. By comparison with the facilities at Rhodes, the airfield at Antimachia was a poor one, and it was not considered possible, even from the start, to hold Cos in strength without Rhodes, for which Cos was to be a preliminary step.

ADEM
Air Staff
Memo. No. 3

Occupation of Cos

The first step was taken on 13 September when a detachment of the Special Boat Squadron proceeded from Castelrosso to Cos

-
- (1) Admiral Sir John Cunningham.
 - (2) Senior R.A.F. member was Group Captain H. G. Wheeler.

SECRET

12

by sea. The next morning at dawn two Beaufighters of No. 46 Squadron landed on Antimachia airfield, deposited a R.A.F. point to point wireless station and flew despatches back from the Officer Commanding the Special Boat Squadron detachment to General Headquarters in Cairo. At dusk on the same day five Spitfires of No. 7 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron with three Dakota aircraft of No. 216 Group carrying maintenance personnel and supplies landed at Antimachia.

No. 216 Group
O.R.B.

The Dakotas of No. 216 Group had originally been assembled together for Operation Accolade at the end of August. It had then been agreed that the Air Commander should be allocated a total of twenty-two, which included eight paratroop aircraft, for his sole use, prior to and during the operation. The disposition of these aircraft on 10 September was eight Dakotas at Ramat David near Haifa standing by for the paratroop operation, three at Nicosia loaded with petrol and ammunition, and standing by to supply the fighter aircraft which were to operate from Maritza (Rhodes), three at readiness at Cairo West, and six at twenty-four hours notice engaged on normal routine flights but subject to recall.

Because of the sudden decision to reinforce Cos, no plan was made for the use of the transport aircraft. The wholesale application of the Accolade plan to the Cos Operation, known as 'Microbe', was hardly feasible. Plans developed as the operation proceeded, but the Air Commander was permitted to retain the use of twenty, and later, twenty-two Dakotas. The aircraft were redistributed on 14 September. The three Dakotas at readiness at Cairo West, together with the six of No. 267 Squadron at twenty-four hours' notice, were ordered to Ramat David and were in position on the morning of the 14th. Of the eight standing by at Ramat David for the original paratroop operations, six were ordered to Nicosia, from whence a drop on Cos was to be undertaken that night. Meanwhile, late in the afternoon, the three aircraft already at Nicosia took off for Antimachia, as already related. Their route followed the Turkish coast for the greater part of the way and the Spitfires of No. 7 (S.A.A.F.) with long range tanks on their way to operate from Cos were on this single occasion able to give protection throughout the whole outward flight. Signals had been pre-arranged between the Italian garrison and the aircraft, but nevertheless they were fired upon by the ground defences upon reaching Cos island, fortunately with no harmful results.

Ibid

No. 216 Group
O.R.B.

That night 'A' Company of the 11th Battalion Parachute Regiment was to be dropped one and a half miles north-west of the town of Cos. The Company consisted of 120 men, their equipment being packed into 36 bomb-rack containers. Six Dakotas took off from Nicosia at 2241 hours on 14 September. The weather was fine and clear and there was a full moon. The route followed was Nicosia-Castellosso-Marmaris-Gulf of Kerme-Cos. The aircraft took off at two minute intervals and flew below three thousand feet in order to be sheltered by the Turkish hills from any enemy radar north of Rhodes. The leading aircraft reached the dropping zone at 0145 hours fired a red light which was duly answered by a green. The ground organisation was good and all the troops were dropped successfully at the right place, only one sustained slight injuries. By 0439 hours the aircraft were back at Nicosia after a flight of just over five and three quarter hours.

Between 15 and 17 September⁽¹⁾ daylight landings in Cos were made by Dakotas operating from Nicosia and from Ramat David, and by a few Hudson aircraft from the latter station which were manned, except for the pilots, by crews from No. 1 Aircraft Delivery Unit. Sixty-five men of the Durham Light Infantry, 31 personnel of No. 2909 Squadron, R.A.F. Regiment and a light A.A. unit with 71 personnel plus Bren and Hispano guns had been flown into the island. The only untoward incident occurred on 17 September when Turkish light A.A. fire slightly damaged two aircraft on their way back to Ramat David.

For the first few days the transport of troops went on without opposition, and in addition to the occupation of Cos, Leros and Samos, the islands of Simi, Stampalia and Icaria were occupied on 18 September. Air transport was used to reinforce Cos by day, troops being landed at Antimachia airfield, while destroyers went direct to Leros, the reinforcements to Samos going thence in small local craft.

The German Reaction

The German problem was primarily to prevent the Allies from securing too large a hold in the Aegean, and in particular to prevent the mounting of an attack upon Rhodes. If Rhodes could be retained they could hope to re-capture the whole of the Aegean and maintain the outer ring of defences of the Greek mainland. To implement this programme they had to deny the British the use of the airfield in Cos, the only airfield other than those on Rhodes. Accordingly in mid-September they opened their air attack and began to assemble the surface craft necessary to assault Cos.

An increase in enemy air activity became apparent on 13 September when two Ju.88 reconnaissance aircraft were

(1) By 17 September the R.A.F. order of battle on the Island of Cos was as follows:-

Senior R.A.F. Officer, Cos and Commanding No. 7 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron	- Major Van Vliet (Group Captain Wheeler had sustained a fractured skull in a car accident on Cos on 15 September)
Signals Officer	- Squadron Leader Bennett
Administrative Officer	- Flight Lieut. Mitchell
Equipment Officer	- Flight Lieut. Beckton
Flight No. 7 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron (8 Spitfires)	- 14 officers and 23 airmen
Detachment No. 2909 Squadron R.A.F. Regiment (9.20-mm Hispano guns)	- 2 officers and 41 airmen
No. 610 A.M.E. Station	- 12 airmen
No. 625 A.M.E. Station	- 12 airmen
R.A.F. W/T Station	- 2 cypher officers and 5 airmen

The R.A.F. garrison of Castelrosso consisted of:-

Senior R.A.F. Officer	- Flight Lieutenant H.F. Forster
Equipment Officer	- Flying Officer D. L. Currie
Flight No. 2924 Squadron	- 1 officer and 36 airmen
R.A.F. Regiment	
No. 601 A.M.E. Station	- 12 airmen
No. 607 A.M.E. Station	- 12 airmen
R.A.F. W/T Station	- 2 cypher officers and 4 airmen
Observer Post No. 13 Wireless Unit	- 5 airmen

ADEM
Air Staff
Memo. No. 3

Luftwaffe
Operational
Losses, South
Eastern Command
9 Sept-29 Sept.

ADEM Sit.
Report No. 2

destroyed, one by Spitfires off Alexandria and another by Beaufighters of No. 201 Group off Paphos. That night the German held airfields at Calato and Maritza in Rhodes were attacked by heavy bombers of the Ninth (U.S.) Bomber Command. On the 17th ten enemy vessels escorted by a destroyer were shadowed by Baltimores of No. 201 Group until they were attacked by a strike of eight Beaufighters of No. 237 Wing operating from Limassol. The air escort of three Arado sea-planes was engaged and one was forced down into the sea and the ships damaged. Two Beaufighters were damaged severely by heavy flak, one crashed landed at its base with the navigator killed and the other returned safely on one engine. This convoy which consisted of a tanker and a merchant vessel, thought to be bound for Rhodes with much needed German supplies, was finally sunk north of Stampalia by British destroyers during the night.⁽¹⁾ After this action the naval forces withdrew from the Aegean under cover of a Beaufighter escort. On the same day a Ju.52 was shot down by a Spitfire operating from Cos.

No. 216 Group
O.R.B.

The long awaited discovery by the enemy of the Royal Air Force's occupation of Antimachia led to three attacks upon the landing ground on 18 September, which were not unexpected. The first attack was made at three hundred feet by a single Ju.88, the second by seven Ju.88's escorted by five Me.109's. One airman and one soldier were killed on the ground and two Spitfires were missing. Three Dakotas, which had been unloaded were burnt out on the ground, and a fourth seriously damaged. A fifth Dakota hit the water when flying low to avoid interception, the crew and passengers were later rescued. Two bomb craters were made in the landing ground. The attackers lost heavily, four Ju.88's and one Ju.109 were claimed as destroyed by the fighters and one Ju.88 damaged by A.A. fire was compelled to land in the sea. During the night, standing patrols of one Beaufighter of No. 46 Squadron operating from Nicosia was maintained over Cos through the night but nothing was seen. Two intruder patrols were flown over Crete by single Beaufighters of No. 89 Squadron. One aircraft was hit by 'flak' over Herakleion (Candia) and crashed landed at Bu Amud.

ADEM Sit.
Report No. 3

At 0945 hours the next day the landing ground at Antimachia was again attacked by five Ju.88's and more than ten Me.109's which carried out low level bombing and ground strafing. The landing ground was made unserviceable by butterfly bombs. The raid was engaged by the Spitfires and by British and Italian light A.A. guns. Two airmen were killed on the ground and two seriously injured. One Spitfire was destroyed in the fighting and the pilot was missing. Two Dakotas were burnt out on the ground, and one which had just arrived and was about to land had to return to its base. The enemy lost one Me.109 as well as several aircraft damaged by the fighters and A.A. defences. Stampalia had also been attacked from the air on both 17 and 18 September in pursuance of the enemy's policy to attack centres of population in the islands which had not capitulated to the Germans.

Luftwaffe
Operational
Losses
S.E. Command
19 Sept.

On the same day general reconnaissance patrols sighted no major shipping movements in the Aegean and an offensive sweep

(1) The German escort vessel survived the action although badly damaged and put into Stampalia Harbour where she was disarmed by the Italians (ADEM 4).

ADEM
Sit. Report
No. 4.

by seven Beaufighters of No. 237 Wing round the north coast of Rhodes and Scarpanto also made no sightings. Six Hurricanes of No. 213 Squadron (Paphos) swept the sea on a broad front between Cyprus and Castelrosso, with the object of surprising enemy reconnaissance aircraft, but found nothing. At night two Beaufighters of No. 39 Squadron, operating from Sidi Barrani, intruded into Crete. The first engaged some aircraft parked on Maleme airfield from three hundred feet in the face of A.A. fire. The second aircraft was unable to continue the patrol on account of thick mist.

Luftwaffe
Operational
Losses
S.E. Command
20 Sept.

At dawn on the 20th yet another attack was made on the landing ground at Antimachia by two He.111's dropping butterfly bombs and ground strafing. Two soldiers and one airman were injured and a Spitfire damaged. The attack coincided with the arrival of two Beaufighters of No. 89 Squadron on a ferry flight, one of which destroyed a He.111. The second raider was destroyed by the A.A. defences. A second attack was made later in the morning by three Ju.88's and four Me.109's.

Cos the Key to Invasion of Rhodes

The aim upon which the decision to occupy Cos had been based was the subsequent invasion of Rhodes which had been planned to start on 20 October provided that single engined fighter squadrons could be established on Cos to give short range cover over the beaches and the sea approaches to Rhodes. The immediate aim therefore became the successful occupation and equipment of Cos as a fighter base before that date. For this there was no real pre-conceived plan, although a wealth of detailed instructions had already been drawn up in previous plans for the occupation and defence of Rhodes. It was necessary therefore to run the Cos operation on the basis of the Accolade plan amended by day to day opportunities.

It was therefore apparent that if Cos could be occupied and held while sufficient landing grounds from which to operate several fighter squadrons were developed, any further offensive operations within the area would be simplified very greatly. In addition, the constant threat to the enemy's lines of communication that such an occupation would achieve, would be of the utmost value. Similarly, the basing of small warships in Porto Lago, the main harbour of Leros, would constitute an additional threat although this could only be done if sufficient air forces were available in the vicinity. Thus not only the successful occupation of the islands but the whole potential value of their occupation depended on the air forces effort and this effort was itself dependent on the construction and on the maintenance in a serviceable state, of adequate landing grounds.

Force 292
Sit. report
16 Sept. 1943

The G.O.C. Force 292 had visited the islands of Cos, Leros and Samos on 15 and 16 September. As a result of his visit to Cos he had decided that only one battalion was necessary there and that the Royal Artillery personnel already in the island could be reduced in numbers. Lt. Colonel Kenyon was appointed to command all troops in the island of Cos, and Major C. F. Blagden was placed in charge of Civil Affairs.

R.A.F. Arrangements on Cos

Accolade
outline plan

R.A.F.
Aegean Op.
In File
A.O.C./262/6

In accordance with the Accolade plan, Wing Commander R. C. Love, who was to have commanded at the Maritza airfield in Rhodes, arrived in Cos on the 18th to take charge of No. 243 (Fighter) Wing which had been formed at Antimachia. He was accompanied by Squadron Leader E. A. D. Heath the Chief Filter Officer of No. 33 Sector. The headquarters of the Wing was situated within a few hundred yards of Antimachia landing ground with the Signals Section located in a cave nearby. The personnel at Antimachia used a wadi where several buildings already existed near the landing ground as a domestic site, but in spite of a co-operative spirit shown by the Italians who shared the same mess, living conditions were primitive and amounted to little more than a cookhouse and water point. There was, for example, not enough accommodation for sleeping and individuals slept where, as well as when, they could.

Communications.

The first wireless pack set together with a cypher officer, a signals non-commissioned officer and airmen had been brought into Cos by the original reconnaissance Beaufighter with this equipment and personnel as a start. With the help of existing telephone lines and Italian Warning Unit wireless sets, satisfactory communications were built up by No. 8 Air Formation Signals and No. 6 A.L.G. Signals Section, who had reached Cos on 19 and 23 September respectively.

The air reporting system finally comprised three Italian Warning Unit posts on Cos and two on Leros all of which told to an Italian Reporting Centre in Leros whence plots were relayed to No. 243 Wing by submarine cable. These posts of No. 13 Warning Unit were located respectively on Samos, Leros and Cos, all of which told to No. 243 Wing as did Nos. 610 and 625 A.M.E. Stations on Cos. Plots from Nos. 606 and 607 A.M.E. Stations sited on Leros were relayed to Antimachia by the Leros Warning Unit. It was intended at a later date to co-ordinate all information available on Leros and pass filtered plots.

The Second Landing Ground

There is no doubt that the period of occupation was a very trying time for all concerned. Owing to an almost complete lack of airfield engineering machinery such as tractors and bulldozers, there was a full time job to be done in repairing the landing ground which the enemy cratered again as soon as it was serviceable. On the 19th Lt. Colonel Mc Dowell, an experienced airfield engineer, arrived. Work was started on a second landing ground near Cos town although the equipment available consisted of only one hundred picks, one hundred and fifty shovels afterwards reinforced from Italian sources by one tractor, one farm wagon, one half-yard roll over scoop, one two bladed plough, one two ton concrete roller and four oxen which were set to drag an improvised trammel. The tractor and the oxen were the only motive power available. Yet with only these available, a strip, one thousand one hundred by fifty yards was ready by the following morning and the width had been increased to one hundred yards by the evening of the 21st. This enabled Dakotas to resume their ferrying of supplies, although each night's landings (because of the poor quality of the strip) entailed considerable maintenance work on the following day.

At midday on the 20th six reinforcing Spitfires were able to land and a bomb disposal squadron was flown in by Beaufighters while a second squadron was sent to Castelrosso by flying boat for onward movement by sea.

There was also a very great shortage of ordinary motor transport,⁽¹⁾ other than the eleven jeeps which had been brought in by air, this made great demands on personnel in the unloading and dispersing of supplies arriving by air, and afterwards by sea. For example, the Galway Castle which arrived at Cos on the 24th was not able to complete off loading until 30 September, through lack of transport to clear her cargo of fuel and ammunition in spite of continuous day and night work by the few available jeeps.

On the afternoon of 24 September, the Air Force Commander,⁽²⁾ who had been visiting his advanced headquarters in Cyprus, was flown into Cos. He spent the night on the island, inspected No. 243 Wing, and saw for himself the strenuous efforts which were being made by all concerned to improve the situation in the face of almost overwhelming difficulties and air attacks.

Enemy bombing Attacks on Airfields

The enemy continued to build up his medium bomber force in the Athens area, and on 26 September attacked two British destroyers which were lying in harbour at Leros after having completed an offensive sweep for enemy shipping between Crete and Rhodes. Spitfires on patrol over Cos harbour and other aircraft which took off from Cos attempted to intercept, but failed to make contact with the enemy in the haze. A second attack was made at about 1200 hours by two formations of Ju.88s. Spitfires on patrol over Cos, at the time chased two Me.109's but were unable to close and long range bursts were fired. Two other Spitfires, which took off from Antimachia, intercepted five Ju.88s and four Me.109s north of Leros. Both aircraft attacked in the face of controlled return fire and bits were seen to fly from the fuselage of one Ju.88 which was destroyed. One destroyer was sunk and the other damaged and capsized in the harbour of Leros, and naval store buildings were set on fire.

The next day forces of between fifteen and twenty Ju.88s escorted by Me.109s bombed Antimachia landing ground rendering it unserviceable. They bombed from an altitude beyond the range of the Bofors guns which had just been landed and installed for the defence of the airfield. Spitfires of No. 7 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron intercepted the formation but did not destroy any enemy aircraft. Craters were made on the landing ground rendering it temporarily unserviceable. One Spitfire was damaged on the ground and two Spitfires were missing. During the afternoon another bombing attack was made on Leros. Strong forces of Me.109s preceded the bombers and attacked the Spitfires on patrol which were operating from the new landing ground near the town of Cos. One Me.109 and two Cant.Z.501s were destroyed for the loss of one Spitfire.

Cos was again attacked on the 28th. The first time at 1045 hours by twenty-four low flying Ju.88's escorted by

Orders of Battle
Luftwaffe South
Eastern Command

ADEM
report Nos.
9 - 10

Luftwaffe
Operational
Losses South
Eastern Command
26 Sept.

ADEM
No. 11

Luftwaffe
Operational
Losses South
Eastern Command
27 Sept.

(1) There was also a shortage of M.T. petrol.
(2) A.V.M. R. E. Saul.

ADEM
No. 12 and
No. 74 Sqdn.
O.R.B.

Me.109's. No fighter action could be taken as both airfields were unserviceable. A second attack was made at 1745 hours against the Cos landing ground by more than fifteen Ju.88's escorted by Me.109's. The landing ground was badly cratered. Two sections of Spitfires on standing patrol intercepted and forced part of the formation to jettison their bombs. Two Spitfires were missing. During the day nine Spitfires of No. 74 Squadron left Nicosia to reinforce No. 243 Wing at Cos. Eight arrived safely, (1) the pilot of the other aircraft was seen to bale out near Castelrosso and was not picked up.

ADEM
No. 14 and
No. 74 Sqdn.
O.R.B.

On 29 September eighteen Ju.88's escorted by about twelve Me.109's raided Antimachia at about 1050 hours. Seventeen craters were made and thirteen unexploded bombs fell on the landing ground. One Spitfire of No. 74 Squadron was damaged by splinters. Two sections of Spitfires intercepted. One formation of enemy aircraft was broken up and one Ju.88 was claimed as destroyed, another probably destroyed, and a third damaged. (2) After this raid the Spitfires had to operate from a third air strip which was being prepared. At 1720 hours that afternoon twenty-four Ju.88's escorted by Me.109's attacked Antimachia again. Forty craters were made on the runway and some buildings were demolished. A number of delayed action bombs were also dropped. The R.A.F. Signal Station was damaged by blast, the equipment was, however, dug out and wireless communication was re-established by 0230 hours the next morning. Casualties to personnel on the ground were two killed and ten injured.

R.A.F.
Aegean Ops.

The new landing strip near the town of Cos had been used by Dakotas each night and every effort had been made to conceal this procedure from the enemy. But an enemy reconnaissance at dawn on the 28th discovered the presence of a Dakota which had been unable to leave owing to unserviceability the night before although it had been towed off the landing area and every effort made to conceal it by camouflage. The attack on the 28th destroyed this landing ground and all airborne supplies had from then onwards to be dropped by parachute. The Antimachia strip was serviceable until after the arrival of No. 74 Squadron, but the damage done on the 29th again rendered it useless. In addition to this a landing strip of one thousand by fifty yards which had just been completed on the Salt Pans situated on the north coast of the Island midway between Antimachia and Cos was found to be flooded owing to a blockage of a drain.

Possible sites for Landing Strips

Colonel Mc Dowell had left Cos on 22 September after finding four more possible sites for landing strips on the plain to the north of the Island and initiating work on one at Marmari which was to have been ready by 1 October. He visited the headquarters of Force 292 and the Air Defence Headquarters, Eastern Mediterranean, where the Air Defence Commander had told him that it was essential that there should be four operational landing grounds on the Island for future operations against Rhodes. It had been arranged that supplies of coir matting and Sommerfeld tracking in addition to as much airfield construction equipment as was available

Report by
Col. Mc Dowell
Appendix E
in file
ACC/262/6

- (1) They were in action during the second attack.
(2) Luftwaffe operational losses do not confirm these claims.

should be sent to Cos as soon as possible. He returned to Cos on 30 September in a Walrus in daylight owing to the urgency of the work to be done.(1) The following extract from his report is enlightening. 'The bulldozers(2) were kept in operation eighteen hours out of the twenty-four, there being only two operators to each bulldozer. The men were utterly worn out but were still carrying on Italian labour was being used, but the small party of approximately twenty (men) of the Durham Light Infantry was worth ten times the value of the Italians, who vanished at each air raid warning. It took at least an hour to round them up from the various funkholes in order to get any work done at all.'

The landing ground situation on Cos, when Colonel Mc Dowell returned on the 30th was that repairs were going on at the Cos strip, the new strip at Marmari was being developed, the strip at the Salt Pans (Pili) was completed and could be used for forced landings. The headquarters of No. 243 Wing had been established with the wireless station in an orchard about one mile to the north-east of Antimachia. On 1 October the landing ground at Cos was made serviceable sufficiently for aircraft of No. 74 Squadron to take off and land on the Salt Flats. The personnel camped under the trees five hundred yards from the landing strip. The aircraft were camouflaged by men of the Durham Light Infantry and the pilots. There was no more flying. Inspections, refuelling, re-arming and a change of tyres was done by the pilots assisted by three airmen of No. 7 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron.

ADEM
Int. report

Confidential
Report on Cos
up to 2 Oct.
A.H.B./ILJ8/
50/14B

All aircraft on Cos were compelled to use the Antimachia strip as the other landing grounds were not ready and were not defended. After the morning raid on the 29th four aircraft took off by swerving between the craters, and when in the air, announced their intention of returning to Cyprus. The ground crews of No. 7 (S.A.A.F.) Squadron were told to go to the south coast and get some rest, while No. 74 Squadron went to Cos to await orders. Until Field Units of the 'Y' Service(3) were established the first warnings received had always been from coast watchers. The radar was unfortunately badly sited both at Cos and Leros. On 30 September tests were made and plans carried out to change the locations, but by then there was no protection. Until 28 September there were only four jeeps and two trailers on Cos. Italian transport had dwindled to practically nothing due to wear and tear, and magnetos and carburettors had been stolen from them. Tractors for use on the airfields had disappeared, although there was supposed to be eight serviceable on the island; those that were found had parts missing, but by a process of cannibalisation, three were made serviceable. Between the 28th and 30th more jeeps and fifteen trailers arrived. None were distributed but were put into a central pool to clear the enormous accumulation of petrol, ammunition, and other stores at the harbour. Shipping had dwindled down to one landing craft which plied between Leros and Cos. The rest of the work had to be done by

-
- (1) On the same day a Walrus carrying Flight Lieutenant Rashleigh, who had been sent to effect improvements in communications, was shot down by enemy fighters while flying between Cos and Leros. There were no survivors.
 - (2) Two small bulldozers had arrived on 23 September.
 - (3) 'Y' was the Signals Intercept Service.

caiques, of which there were only four of any size, and these soon ran out of fuel and were stopped awaiting supplies.

The defence system was also chaotic. One group composed of Royal Air Force and men belonging to the Durham Light Infantry were at Antimachia. After the raid on the 29th when all buildings had been destroyed (there were no tents) the personnel gradually moved to the village about one mile away from the landing ground and distributed themselves over an area of about two miles. No transport or telephonic communications were available up to the evening of 2 October. The Durham Light Infantry withdrew their guns to wadis and other suitable cover until the airfield could be brought into use again or fresh plans made. In the town of Cos itself the troops were scattered in cottages and schools and were without any transport. No ground defences were dug or posts prepared as the impression seems to have been prevalent that the forces were about to be moved elsewhere in the near future.

Photographic Reconnaissance

After the occupation of the Islands by the British Forces it was essential to obtain detailed information of any redistribution of air, sea, and ground forces by the enemy, in order to assess his reaction to this penetration of his main outer defence ring. Photographic reconnaissance was supplemented by a greatly increased reconnaissance effort by No. 201 Group aircraft. Photographs were taken on most patrols, and with a few exceptions the Cyclades Group and Southern Aegean were covered daily throughout the month. Frequent sorties were also made over the west coast of Greece and the Dodecanese. Successful naval and air attacks on supply convoys intended for Rhodes forced the enemy to use new routes. Towards the end of the month of September daily reconnaissance flights were made over Suda Bay and Candia (Crete) to watch for active shipping which might attempt a fast night passage to Rhodes. Offensive operations were directed principally against targets in the Aegean. Night bombing attacks were made chiefly on land targets, airfields in Crete and Rhodes, which had received considerable reinforcements, being attacked frequently during the latter half of the month.

No. 201 Group
O.R.B.
Appendix C.

ADEM
Report No. 12

One group of Liberators of the Ninth (U.S.) Bomber Command, operating from the Benghazi area attacked the airfield at Maritza on 22 September, and a second Group attacked the Eleusis airfield near Athens at the same time. On the night of the 27/28th five Liberators of No. 178 Squadron and two Halifax of No. 462 Squadron⁽¹⁾ attacked Larissa airfield but owing to the failure of the aircraft carrying the flares to illuminate the target three aircraft only bombed what was believed to be the airfield and the remainder jettisoned their bombs.

From 10 September when Castelrosso was taken over from the Italians, various small craft from high speed launches to caiques were assembled for use in the further operations and did excellent work carrying personnel and supplies from Cyprus and Castelrosso and between the Islands. Leros having been found suitable as a naval base, two Hunt class destroyers

(1) No. 240 Group.

R.A.F.
 Aegean Ops.
 in file
 A.O.C./262/6

arrived there on 17 September with an initial base and communications party and some equipment. This was an important step as it enabled supplies to be taken by sea to Leros and ferried to those islands without suitable harbours by the small craft already mentioned. Unfortunately the destroyer service to Leros was ended abruptly by the sinkings in harbour of two fleet destroyers(1) during daylight on 26 September, and with fighter escorts becoming increasingly fitful owing to the unserviceability of aircraft and landing grounds on Cos, the Navy became increasingly chary of risking further sinkings in such dangerous waters. Thus several destroyer sweeps were called off at midnight in order that the ships should be clear of the area by dawn on occasions when air escort could not be provided.

Luftwaffe
 Strength
 Returns
 (A.H.B.6)

G.A.F. Strength in Eastern Mediterranean

The strength of the German Air Forces in Greece and Crete(2) at the beginning of September was:-

Reconnaissance aircraft	52	29
Fighters	42	33
Long range bombers		N I L
Dive bombers	75	68
Coastal	46	35
Transport	69	41
Total (incl. Transport)	<u>284</u>	<u>206</u>

The absence of long range bombers was explained by the fact that from the time of the Allied invasion of Sicily, all serviceable German bombers had been withdrawn from the Eastern Mediterranean to Italy. In the subsequent two months no long range bomber operations were carried out in the Eastern Mediterranean and German air operations in this area, apart from small scale operations against guerillas, had been limited to reconnaissance and escort duties.

Ops. against
 Cos, Leros and
 Samos. Int.
 A.H.B./ILJ8/36B

The Allied occupation of the Cos/Leros/Samos Group Islands represented a serious threat to the German flank in the Balkans and led to vigorous German reaction. Within a week of the landings long range bomber reinforcements began to arrive in Greece. Current intelligence reports estimated that before the end of September three bomber Gruppen, one fighter Gruppe and a reconnaissance Staffel had arrived in Greece. This was an over estimate, only two bomber Gruppen, one fighter Gruppe and one half of a reconnaissance Staffel having arrived. These reinforcements were drawn from France, Austria and Russia. On 1 October the total German Air Force strength in the Greece/Aegean area had risen to 285 operational aircraft and 77 transport aircraft.

Luftwaffe
 Strength
 Returns
 (A.H.B.6)

Reconnaissance aircraft	44	29
Fighters	54	37
Long range bombers	68	19
Dive bombers	69	47
Coastal	50	30
Transport	77	51
	<u>362</u>	<u>213</u>

- (1) H.M.S. Queen Olga sunk and H.M.S. Intrepid capsized.
 (2) For full order of battle of G.A.F. South Eastern Command see Appendix 1.

SECRET

22

For the Aegean operations the German Air Force had a decisive advantage in air bases. The nearest airfields available for use by the Allies were in Cyprus (350 miles from Cos) and at Gambut (380 miles from Cos). At such ranges fighter cover was quite impossible. The Germans on the other hand, had two good airfields on Rhodes, Marizza and Calato (Gadurra) at a distance of approximately seventy miles from Cos, and two more on Crete (Herakleion and Kastelli) at a distance of one hundred and fifty miles from Cos. On the Greek mainland they had at least half a dozen well equipped bomber bases of which three were in the Athens area, one at Larissa, and two at Salonika, and a further two dive bomber bases at Megara and Argos.

In early September the main area of resistance to the Germans was in Western Greece and the Islands of Cephalonia and Corfu. To assist in the assault of these Islands, all available Ju.87's were moved temporarily from their bases at Megara and Argos to Araxos and Agrinion and operated with great effect against the Italian garrisons on the Islands. By 27 September these operations were virtually completed.

In the meantime, long range bombers began to arrive at Greek airfields, and air attacks had started against Cos. Further bomber and fighter reinforcements arrived in Greece between 20 and 25 September and, at the end of September, dive bombers and fighters moved back from Western Greece to Athens, and from there to Crete and Rhodes.

The defence situation on Cos on 1 October 1943 was that Colonel Kenyon, the officer commanding the troops on the island from his headquarters close to the town of Cos, had at his disposal fifteen hundred British troops of which only eleven hundred were combatant; and some four thousand armed Italians whose morale was very doubtful. Although the air forces claimed to have destroyed fifteen, probably destroyed three, and damaged seven enemy aircraft (the combined effort of No. 7 (S.A.A.F.), 74 and 89 Squadrons as well as No. 2909 Squadron R.A.F. Regiment), they had lost eight pilots and twelve Spitfires in the course of the operation and were now neutralised by unserviceability and the destruction of their landing grounds.(1) At mid-day on 1 October Cos was bombed from about eighteen thousand feet, six instantaneous and six delayed action bombs fell near the landing ground but the landing strip was not affected. No casualties were suffered and no enemy aircraft were destroyed.

On 2 October, Colonel Kenyon, Lt. Colonel W. J. McDowell, R. E. and Wing Commander R.C. Love held a conference at Antimachia. It was agreed that it had become impossible to try and keep the Antimachia landing ground in operation owing to the bombing attacks and the presence of unexploded bombs; and that the only solution was to continue the preparation of strips on the northern plain, which would be kept secret from the enemy for as long as possible, pending the arrival of the airfield plant promised by Force 292. It was also decided that with only three anti-aircraft guns being provided by Force 292, it was useless to divide these, and that the best plan would be to cover with an efficient 'ack-ack umbrella' the group of landing grounds on the northern plain, at the same time defending

(1) Only four Spitfires were in serviceable condition.

Force 292
Sit. Report

Aegean R.A.F.
AOC/262/6

ADEM
Sit. report
No. 16

Antimechia and Lambi (Cos Town landing ground) with fighter aircraft operating from these strips when it became practicable to bring five or six squadrons into the island. There was no possibility of making an airfield on Leros, at Samos an existing strip could be extended, but the work would require heavy plant as the ground was terraced.

At about 2330 hours that night the first Dakota aircraft landed on the repaired strip at Lambi, and was followed by four more. All the aircraft landed and took off safely, in spite of the limitations of the strip, the flare path being fifty yards wide by seven hundred long. The last aircraft left at about 0400 hours on the morning of 3 October.

That night three Beaufighters of No. 46 Squadron and two of No. 89 Squadron, operating singly, made intruder patrols over Rhodes Island. No activity or lights were seen on Maritza or Calato airfields. Six 250 lb bombs were dropped on the hangars and dispersal areas at Maritza, but the results were unobserved. Two bombs of the same weight were also dropped on Calato without apparent result.

Cosintrep
No. 12

Cosintrep
No. 11

On 1 October three 'Hunt' class destroyers had left Alexandria for an anti-shipping patrol in the vicinity of Crete and Rhodes and with the intention of repeating the sweep on the night 2/3 October. Information had been received on 30 September that three merchant vessels, three lighters, and one naval auxiliary vessel, which had been seen previously at Pireaus were reported as having moved to Suda Bay in Crete.

Force 292
Appendix 'C'

Force 292
War Diary

At 2005 hours on 2 October a signal was received by Force 292 from the Senior Naval officer in the Aegean⁽¹⁾ stating 'Force of two destroyers, two submarines, three transports, three 'E' boats reported off Paros steering east. Next reported south of Naxos moving easterly. 1530 (hours) lost sight of. No further information from outlying islands. Time element now indicates objective not Leros possible heading for Rhodes'. This message was repeated by the British Mission in Leros to Cairo. It was again transmitted by telephone to the headquarters of Force 292 at 0010 hours on 3 October by Air Headquarters who added that the force was protected by six aircraft and that the C.-in-C. Levant, the headquarters A.D.E.M., No. 243 Wing and Cos had been informed, and that the Royal Air Force were sending all available aircraft for a strike at first light.

Report
McDowell.
SASO.
CC/80/5.
A.H.B./ILJ8/36B.

Report.
Blagden.
Force 292.
Appendix J.

Meanwhile, on Cos, Colonel McDowell had been with Colonel Kenyon (the officer commanding the troops on the Island) from approximately 2000 hours until 2230 discussing the situation. 'At no time did Colonel Kenyon refer to receipt of a signal from Force 292 intimating the presence of enemy transports in the Aegean'. However, it was not until 0300 hours on the 3rd that Major Blagden (then acting as Staff Officer to Colonel Kenyon) was called to the telephone to receive a signal message from the Royal Air Force Headquarters at Antimachia. The signal was to the effect that 'an enemy convoy of one 7,000 ton steamer, two steamers of 2 to 3,000 tons, two destroyers and some 'E' boats had been sighted at 1120 hours on October at a position about twelve miles south of Melos - course and speed of the convoy were given as east

(1) Captain E. H. B. Baker, R.N.

SECRET

24

twelve knots. Assuming the course and speed to have remained constant this should have brought the convoy to Rhodes during the night 2/3 October. I roused Colonel Kenyon immediately and passed on the information. After some discussion and in view of information contained in recent Force Sitreps coupled with that fact that no further news of the convoy had been received after 1120 hours 2 October, in spite of ideal reconnaissance weather, Colonel Kenyon decided that it was a Rhodes reinforcement. I was in agreement - no action was taken other than repeating the message to Leros. I was woken again about 0540 hours by the air raid siren but took no notice of this. Shortly after Major Webb informed me there was a general alarm and that the enemy was reported to have landed'.

Report.
Love in
A.H.B./LIS/36B

Wing Commander Love reported 'when dawn broke large forces of enemy bombers and fighters began to attack both Cos and Antimachia landing grounds. Half an hour later twenty-one Ju.52's were seen to drop approximately 250 parachutists some four miles west of Antimachia. One company of Durham Light Infantry allocated to Antimachia was reinforced by half of the crews of each of the Bofors and Hispano guns and took up positions on the west of the aerodrome to meet any attack enemy parachutists might make. It now became apparent that the enemy were landing a force of some 3,000 men with many mortars and heavy machine guns and were moving both on the town of Cos and Antimachia. Towards mid-day it became apparent that the enemy were making considerable ground and all unnecessary Royal Air Force personnel including the F.U., A.M.E.S., and W.U. were divided into small parties under an officer and ordered to move off to the south-east. By four o'clock in the afternoon the Italian garrison at Antimachia had ceased firing as had the Italian anti-aircraft guns. Enemy air activity was still on a large scale, Ju.88's, Ju.87's, Me.110's and Me.109's being used. One by one the Bofors guns were put out of action by bombing and the destruction of secret publications and equipment was ordered. By 1700 hours the position at Antimachia was critical and British troops were ordered to withdraw southwards towards the coast. The destruction of the wireless station was carried out and the remaining Royal Air Force personnel, except the Royal Air Force Regiment withdrew just before dusk small parties made their way to the hills and parts of the coast or joined units of the Durham Light Infantry which were putting up an organised resistance. Except for the Royal Air Force Regiment, however, who were armed with rifles, there was little they could do to help and in many cases were told by Army Officers to make their own way from the island'.

Report.
McDowell.

The four remaining serviceable Spitfires which had been parked on the strip at the Salt Pans were captured by the enemy immediately upon landing. The aircraft guards had been killed, but the pilots and a few ground crews, who were sleeping about half a mile away, managed to escape.

ADEM
Sit. reports
Nos. 15 & 16.

The three 'Hunt' class destroyers which had sailed from Alexandria on 1 October had been escorted on the first day by Beaufighters of No. 237 Wing. On 2 October they had continued their search for enemy shipping and co-operation had been arranged by No. 201 Group with four Wellingtons operating singly and with Hudsons on cross over patrols in the Aegean Sea, but at midnight on that date they were ordered to return to Alexandria as it was considered that as long as the enemy had complete air superiority it was impossible to operate

CC/320
3rd Oct.

(8516)28

SECRET

this type of destroyer. Thus only the Air Forces were left to oppose the German invasion.

Nos. 46,
252, 227 Sqdn.
O.R.B's.

The only striking force available was the Beaufighters operating from Cyprus. These were quickly in action. Between 0400 and 0850 hours four Beaufighters of No. 46 Squadron engaged on an offensive strike against enemy shipping at Cos sighted and attacked two enemy merchant vessels, one destroyer and one enemy 'flak' ship. No hits with bombs were claimed, but strikes were made by cannon and machine guns. Between 0510 and 1000 hours three Beaufighters of No. 227 Squadron located and attacked two merchant vessels of about 2,000 tons each escorted by several small boats on the west coast of Cos. Bombs were dropped with unobserved results, but many strikes with cannon were obtained. One Beaufighter was hit by anti-aircraft fire and was last seen on fire over the target diving into the sea. 'Flak' was reported as intense and accurate.

Between 0610 and 1045 hours seven aircraft of No. 252 Squadron attacked an enemy vessel and one small escort ship two miles off shore, and two landing craft which were unloading on the beach. One bomb was seen to burst under the stern of the merchant vessel, but no other results were seen. Attacks were made on both ships by cannon and machine gun fire and both vessels were left smoking. By noon No. 237 Wing aircraft had made 24 sorties.

No. 46 Sqdn.
O.R.B.

Between 0700 and 1145 hours one Beaufighter of No. 46 Squadron and two from No. 89 Sqdn. attacked with cannon an escort vessel, two landing craft, and two 'E' boats about 20 miles north-west of Cape Daphni. Strikes were seen on the escort vessel and the landing craft. The Beaufighters were attacked by about 12 Arado 196's. The Beaufighter leader was shot down into the sea, but the other two managed to return to their base although badly damaged by 'flak'.

A photographic reconnaissance report originated at 1200 hours stated that there were five enemy merchant vessels and seven 'F' boats in the Pseremo Channel, north of Cos. The 'F' boats were plying between the shore and the merchant vessels. Three 'E' boats, six caiques and two other small ships were also seen in this area. Three landing craft were ramped to the shore about one mile south-east of Cos harbour. One armed merchant cruiser and two 'F' boats were reported south of the southern end of Cos, as well as a merchant vessel with escort to the west of Cos.

Three Beaufighters of No. 227 Squadron making a reconnaissance during the early afternoon saw no shipping to the south of Cos, but observed two flights of three Ju.87's engaged in dive bombing Antimachia; while another flight of three Ju.87's were also seen approaching Cos from the south at about 1,500 feet. These were intercepted. Both the Ju.87's and the Beaufighters jettisoned their bombs before the attack began which resulted in the destruction of two Ju.87's without loss to the Beaufighters.

Between 1510 and 1935 hours one Beaufighter of No. 46 Squadron and three of No. 227 Squadron while over Cos saw a white smoke screen extending for a great distance along the north coast of the island, rising to a height of over eighty feet. Three Me.109's were seen approaching above the smoke over the town of Cos, but these were seen to turn back. Two

large merchant vessels, four 'E' boats, and four armed caiques were also seen on the western fringe of the smoke and attacks were attempted upon them, but these were foiled by intense and accurate 'flak'. All four aircraft returned safely.

No. 46 Sqdn.
O.R.B.

The last sortie of the day ended in disaster. At about 1708 hours four Beaufighters of No. 46 Squadron attacked three large merchant vessels, a destroyer, and a large number of 'E' boats and barges south of Capari Island. Several cannon and machine gun strikes were observed, but only one aircraft survived. The rest of this formation were shot down into the sea.

ADEM
Sit. Report
No. 18.

That night five Liberators of No. 178 Squadron and seven Halifaxes of No. 462 Squadron attacked the airfield at Herakleion. The target was well illuminated by flares and aircraft were seen dispersed, among which several sticks of bombs were seen to fall; bursts were also observed on the barracks located to the west of the airfield.

Early on the morning of the 4th some resistance was still going on in the Cos town area. The situation was, however, hopeless and shortly after 0600 hours the final message received from the garrison stated; 'Cos town untenable. Intend continuing to fight elsewhere. Destroying wireless set'. This was the end of organised resistance, although fighting continued in the hills. Special Army patrols were put into Cos from Leros with the object of harassing the enemy and helping the survivors to escape.

Int. Report.
D/AOC/CC/52A.
part III.

The landing on Cos on 3 October was given maximum support from the air. Ju.87's, operating from Rhodes, and Ju.88's from Greece operated in close support of the landing parties and parachutists and also attacked airfields, anti-aircraft gun positions, troop concentrations and strong points. Owing to the lack of British fighter cover the German enjoyed practically unrestricted air superiority, subject only to anti-aircraft fire from the ground, and were able to operate to a maximum effect. It is estimated that about 140 bomber sorties were made against Cos on this day, of which 55 were Ju.88's and eighty-five Ju.87's. The bombing was accompanied by a small parachute operation in which ten Ju.52's were employed to drop a force of about one company in strength. The following day, the effort against Cos was sixty-five Ju.87's and fifteen Ju.88's. In addition fifteen Ju.88's attacked the harbour and shipping at Leros. During operations on the 4th Ju.87's were used continuously in close support, being employed to attack any strong points holding up the German advance. The effectiveness of the Ju.87 in a close support role and when in a position to operate without encountering fighter opposition, was again demonstrated. Resistance rapidly crumbled and by the evening of the 4th, the Island was virtually in German hands and the majority of the Axis shipping employed in the operation returned towards Piraeus.

CHAPTER 3

CONFLICTING POLICIES

Med. & M.E. Air
Policy for M.E.
Operations J.S. 2020

A.H.B./IL08/90/15A
and B

The Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief in the Middle East had realised, before the Aegean operations were undertaken, that he would be obliged to ask for help from the Mediterranean Air Command, with its vastly superior aircraft resources. On 11 September, when the situation had appeared to be developing favourably in Rhodes, the Italian Governor had asked that the airfields at Maritza and Galato, which were then in German hands, should be bombed. There were no suitable air forces for this task in the Middle East so that the Mediterranean Air Command were asked to divert the Ninth (U.S.) Bomber Command (Strategic Air Force) for this purpose. This request had been granted.

On 17 September in a report to the Chief of the Air Staff giving an optimistic account of the situation on Cos the A.O.C.-in-C. M.E. wished that they had a bomber striking force in the Middle East to attack Rhodes aerodrome but added that 'he realised this was asking a lot until situation improves. Would Tedder bear this in mind however for the future.' To this the A.O.C.-in-C. M.A.C. had replied that he was sorry he had not been able to give more help in the Dodecanese and that he would give what assistance he could.

Ibid

On 20 September the Mediterranean Air Command was asked to lend No. 240 Wing for Aegean operations for a period of one week, and that the Ninth (U.S.) Bomber Command should make one command sortie on airfields in the Athens area before they left North Africa for Italy. Both these requests were granted.

Ibid

By 29 September, when the situation on Cos had deteriorated the Mediterranean Air Command was asked to consider if they would devote the effort of the North West African Air Forces against airfields in Greece, especially Larissa and airfields in the Athens area, as the German Air Force there had been recently greatly reinforced. In addition they were asked to leave No. 240 Wing to operate under the Middle East Command for an indefinite period, and that the Ninth (U.S.) Bomber Command should be moved back to the Benghazi area for operations against Rhodes. It was agreed that No. 240 Wing should remain as requested, but the proposal to send back the Ninth was resisted on the grounds that they had only just completed their move to Tunisia and that they were standing by for an attack on Wiener Neustadt and moreover these heavy bombers were the only means the Mediterranean Air Command had of dealing with enemy communications with Northern Italy.

The A.O.C.-in-C., Mediterranean Air Command, added that he was very concerned at the way in which the Aegean operations had developed, involving him in commitments of which he had no prior opportunity of assessing. Moreover, although the Aegean was outside the Allied Commander-in-Chief's area, operations there and diversion of forces to that area directly affected the Allied operations in the Italian theatre. The procedure by which Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East, launched operations without full consultation with the Allied Commander-in-Chief and the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Mediterranean Air Command was most dangerous. 'I do not wish to waste time by criticising the best way to help,

but I must insist on being kept fully informed as to plans for future operations so that the possible commitments and consequent moves of an employment of air forces can be properly balanced.'

C.A.S. Views

At the same time the Chief of the Air Staff was writing to both these air commanders that he was very pleased with the forward policy adopted at Cos and that he was strongly in favour of doing everything possible to build up the defensive strength in fighters and anti-aircraft guns. He was of the opinion that the German Air Force should be fought wherever it went. The Allies could better afford a diversion to the Aegean than the Germans and wastage inflicted in Greece and the Aegean was just as desirable as anywhere else. The air forces in the Mediterranean were ample to enable the Allies to afford the fighter aircraft and bombing support necessary for maintaining their position in the Aegean and defeating the German attempt to dislodge them by air action.

Ibid On 3 October the situation on Cos was critical, it was realised that its fall was imminent. Middle East asked that at least six squadrons of Lightnings or Mustangs should be sent them to cover possible movements of naval craft by day in the Dodecanese area; that the Transport Group promised for the Accolade operation should be despatched to them at once; and that the Mediterranean Air Command's bombing programme should be extended to cover airfields on Crete and Rhodes. The Prime Minister sent a message to Air Chief Marshal Tedder:- 'Cos is highly important and a reverse there would be most vexatious. I am sure I can rely upon you to turn on all your heat from every quarter especially during this lull in Italy.'

Ibid As a result two Groups of Liberators were sent to Benghazi to operate for a period of two days, pending a decision as to whether they should remain longer. Four Groups of Fortresses were to attack Greek airfields on the 4th and Mitchells and Lightnings were immediately directed upon the same targets. Later it was decided that the Liberator Groups should remain until further notice, and it was hoped that Lightnings might also be sent.

Aims of R.A.F., Middle East

On 5 October, Air Headquarters, Middle East, informed the Mediterranean Air Command that they attached great importance to the continuation of sustained attacks on the landing grounds in Greece, in order to reduce the enemy air forces in the Aegean. Their aims were to prevent the enemy from reinforcing Rhodes, to prevent attacks on Leros, Samos or Simi by dispersing enemy shipping concentrations, to improve information about the Germans by maintaining outposts in Cos, Calino, Stampalia and other islands, to build Castelrosso up into a secure advanced base, to put patrols and/or agents in Rhodes, Naxos and other islands, and to endeavour to strengthen Leros and explore the possibility of air supply and the development of landing strips.

Allied C.-in-C.'s Intervention

At this point came an intervention by General Eisenhower who wrote to Air Chief Marshal Tedder on 6 October as follows:- 'We will continue to study in the most sympathetic way the

Ibid

possibilities of helping in Accolade if that operation is to be undertaken. However, at this time we cannot make any specific commitments other than those involving the blasting of enemy airfields in Greece, which you and I have already concluded is necessary both from the viewpoint of the Middle East and of this theatre. We cannot forget the mission given this theatre by the Combined Chiefs of Staff and we cannot disperse strength where that strength is necessary to our own job. All our experience has shown that when the land forces undertake a major move, a period of most intensive work devolves upon the air forces, and since we not now anticipate that late October will be one of intense ground activity, we know that our air must be ready to operate to maximum extent at that time. All the probabilities point to the fact that we will be able to do little beyond the airfield bombing above mentioned. In view of this diminishing power of our Lightnings because of temporary suspension of replacements, we must be particularly careful in respect of these groups. As a consequence of these considerations no firm commitments can be made to the Middle East at this time. Since the matter of assisting the Middle East has not been referred to me by the Combined Chiefs of Staff but has been handled as a matter of co-operation and upon suggestions from London, I suggest that you explain to the Chief of the Air Staff our whole situation so that he will understand that we are sympathetic to the needs of the Middle East but cannot possibly afford to meet them at the expense of jeopardising our own important campaign in Italy. If the decision to undertake Accolade depends upon a firm commitment for the diversion from our own operations of a material portion of our air force, then Accolade will have to be postponed. We will be inferior to the enemy in ground strength throughout the winter. Our air force is the asset that we count on to permit us taking the offensive in spite of this fact. Our first purpose must remain.'

The Conference at La Marsa

Ibid

General Eisenhower then held a meeting at La Marsa, on 9 October at which all the Commanders, Naval, Military and Air from Italy and the Middle East were present. At the conclusion of the conference it was agreed that the Allied resources in the Mediterranean were not large enough to allow them to undertake the capture of Rhodes and at the same time secure their immediate objectives in Italy. It was necessary therefore to choose between Rhodes and Rome. It was decided to concentrate on the Italian campaign and it was recommended that Accolade should be postponed until such time as weather conditions and availability of forces made the operation a reasonable undertaking. It was suggested that the Combined Chiefs of Staff should examine the situation as it would exist after the Allies had captured Rome.

The Commanders-in-Chief in the Middle East did not agree. They believed that they could hold on for one month to the islands which they had occupied. They realised that the garrison there would be in a precarious position for some time owing to the shortage of heavy weapons in British hands. It was hoped to remedy the position as opportunity offered, but it could not be done on a large scale.

Ibid

The Prime Minister, in a message to the President of the United States, after he had read General Eisenhower's report of the meeting at La Marsa, stated that he agreed with the

General's conclusion. 'I have now to face the situation in the Aegean. Even if we had decided to attack Rhodes on the 23rd, Leros might well have fallen before that date. I have asked Eden to examine with General Wilson and Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham whether with resources still belonging to the Middle East anything can be done to regain Cos on the basis that Turkey lets us use the landing grounds close by. If nothing can be worked out on these lines, and unless we have luck tonight or tomorrow night in destroying one of the assaulting convoys, the fate of Leros is sealed. I propose, therefore, to tell General Wilson that he is free, if he judges the position hopeless, to order the garrison to evacuate by night taking with them all Italian officers and as many other Italians as possible and destroying the guns and defences. The Italians cannot be relied upon to fight and we have only twelve hundred men, quite insufficient to man even a small portion of the necessary batteries, let alone the perimeter. I will not waste words in explaining how painful this decision is to me.'

Ibid

Conference in Middle East

On 12 October a conference was held in the Middle East at which the First Sea Lord, Foreign Secretary, General Ismay and the Commander-in-Chief were present. They believed that the enemy attack on Leros which was expected had been delayed because of the bad weather then prevalent, and that they would be able to maintain Leros through Turkey and the additional naval resources which the First Sea Lord thought could be made available. In consequence it was agreed that the evacuation of Leros should not be considered. It was evident that the enemy depended for the success of his attack upon the availability of all landing craft of which he had assembled seven or eight in the Cos-Calino area. The conference were strongly of the opinion that exceptional measures should be taken to attempt their destruction. It was stressed by the Air representative that the chances of success against such small and dispersed targets by air attack would be slight, but the conference felt that if the attack could be frustrated before it was launched the enemy would find it difficult to stage another in the near future. The Mediterranean Air Command were therefore asked to make a heavy scale attack against the enemy 'F' boats as early as possible on 13 October.

Ibid

The reply came that the weather conditions as forecast, the range at which the aircraft would have to operate, and the time available for the transfer of aircraft, all made it impracticable to execute the proposed heavy scale attack on the 'F' boats. 'I can only suggest that you make your attacks using Beaufighters and aircraft now available to you.'

The conference also examined the possibilities of the recapture of Cos but reached the unanimous conclusion that this would demand an effort by the air forces equal to that required for Accolade. The use of Turkish airfields was considered but dismissed as impracticable. It was decided therefore to concentrate on the retention of Leros.

Reinforcements to the Middle East from M.A.C.

However, on the next day Air Chief Marshal Tedder informed Middle East that he was considering sending over approximately six Mitchell Bomber Groups armed with 75-mm. cannon for air

Ibid

attack on the Leros convoy concentration if it were not too late. But in fact only twelve Mitchells and six transport aircraft were sent to Gambut, and these were at first under orders to remain for only long enough to make two sorties. They were gratefully received by Middle East and a further request was made for the loan of a squadron of long range fighter bombers but these could not be sent as the only long range bombers suitable for the purpose were Lightnings and were already fully employed in escorting the bombers attacking Greek airfields. The Mediterranean Air Command promised, however, to go on bombing these airfields while the weather permitted, and as long as they were profitable targets. Later it was decided that the Mitchells could remain in Middle East for an indefinite period subject to return to the Mediterranean Air Command at twenty-four hours notice.

Ibid

On 23 October, it was planned to send reinforcements to Leros in destroyers, in spite of the fact that the enemy's night bombing activity had greatly increased both in strength and accuracy. Urgent representations were made to the Mediterranean Air Command that a maximum effort should be made by their heavy bombers against the Greek airfields from which the enemy night bombers were operating. In reply the Mediterranean Air Command stated that they were already attacking the Greek airfields whenever the weather permitted and when satisfactory targets existed. It was emphasised that aircraft on the ground and widely dispersed were not satisfactory targets. They had already had experience of this at Foggia and knew that the results achieved were not commensurate with the effort involved. While they sympathised with Middle East's desire to have the enemy's effort reduced further, the diversion of the heavy bombers was not likely to achieve this to any great extent. This decision had been influenced by the fact that the heavy bombers were already very much behind their programme in their attempts to cut the enemy's communications in Italy, and this was particularly important as the ground forces in Italy appeared to be almost at a standstill and might remain so for the whole winter if the air forces were unable to give full assistance. This had been discussed with General Eisenhower who fully agreed that the diversion of the heavy bomber force from more vital targets would not be justified and would be strategically unsound.

Ibid
Part II

By 26 October when the assault on Leros appeared to be imminent Middle East asked that the bombing attacks on the Greek airfields be intensified and requested an attack against the airfield at Eleusis. It was also requested that the two Groups of the Ninth (U.S.) Bomber Command should be returned to the Middle East to assist in these operations. No satisfactory reply was received from the Mediterranean Air Command as Air Chief Marshal Tedder was not at his headquarters but on the 29th he replied that in his view the move of the two Groups would be a mistake except in circumstances which would require them to operate exclusively against Greek and Aegean targets. While based in North Africa these Groups were within range of all the major targets in Greece as well as those in North Italy and beyond. As soon as they were transferred to the Benghazi area they would cease to be available for the more northerly targets, could not be operated as part of the heavy bomber force, and their operational capacity would become circumscribed both by distance and weather. The Groups would therefore lose a great deal of their flexibility and in addition the whole

Ibid
Part II

bomber force would lose its power of concentration. While he did not underrate the importance of Leros and Samos, and was fully aware of the threat to the islands, this should not allow him to be forced into making a poor disposition of his forces. When the situation demanded it he would put the whole of such portion of the heavy bomber force as was necessary on those targets, but he felt that the existing situation did not require the full use of these Groups in addition to the forces already available to the Middle East.

Ibid

With regard to the long range fighters, of the three Groups he had, one was employed solely on Middle East targets although it was working with the Mitchells in the heel of Italy and was not employed in the role which Middle East desired. The Mitchells must have this escort if they were to operate effectively and in any case the Lightnings were frequently achieving far better results than the bombers when aircraft on the airfields were well dispersed. This Group therefore could not be released. The transfer of either of the other two Lightning Groups would affect the operation of the whole of the strategic force. He therefore was obliged to adhere to his previous decision that the existing allocation of these groups was correct.⁽¹⁾ He had discussed this subject with General Eisenhower and he had been firmly opposed to such transference and would strongly resist any movement which would result in the air force at his disposal being placed in a position where it could not take on strategic targets in North Italy, France or Austria and could not at the same time be made readily available to intervene in the land battle either in Italy or the Aegean should this be necessary.

Ibid

Two days later Air Chief Marshal Tedder sent a long message to the Chief of the Air Staff in which he reviewed the current problems. After dealing with the situation in Italy he went on to describe the Aegean problem. At the Combined Commanders-in-Chief meeting the whole question had been fully examined and a limited scale of air effort had been explained and agreed. Since then he had sent to the Middle East in addition a Beaufighter squadron and the equivalent of a Mitchell squadron (fitted with 75-mm. guns). He had left with the Middle East, No. 240 Wing which were the only heavy night bombers in his command. During October the North West African Air Forces had flown over 1,500 sorties against targets in the Balkans, the majority against enemy aircraft on the ground. Interpretation of photographs had indicated that over 100 enemy aircraft had been destroyed on the ground and his experience from examination of captured airfields in Italy and Sicily suggested that the real damage was probably well above this figure. All this was additional to what had been done by aircraft operating directly under the Middle East. Despite this he was continually being subjected to pressure to revise the decisions of the La Marsa meeting and divert further air forces to the Middle East. He had a feeling that the old (and he hoped discredited) process of building up the air as an alibi for failure was once again in full swing. As he saw it the Cos - Leros operation was a gamble for very big political stakes. As he had not the full facts he could not say how far failure to hold Cos was or was not due to weakness

(1) At this time the Air Forces in the Middle East were further depleted. No. 203 Squadron (Baltimore) was transferred to India at the beginning of November.

Ibid

in planning or execution, but to him it was clear that once Cos had fallen and effective air cover was no longer possible one of the main foundations of all Aegean operations had collapsed. The gamble having failed he was being pressed to throw good money after bad. Middle East had pressed him to send the Mitchell Group back to Cyrenaica and to send also the Lightning Group then in Sardinia. Even the adoption of these forces could not, especially in the weather conditions then prevalent, materially affect a situation which was fundamentally unsound owing mainly to the simple but quite unalterable facts of geography. An attempt was being made to maintain garrisons and operate surface ships outside the effective range of the Allied fighter forces and under the very noses of enemy shore based aircraft. 'I feel this false alibi needs smashing whenever it rears its ugly head and have told Douglas so.'

Ibid

In a subsequent letter to the Air Officer Commanding the Middle East, he gave his solution to the problem. The only remedy was to establish single engined fighters within effective range and that was impossible. There were quite mistaken ideas as to what could be done to 'neutralise' enemy air by bombing airfields. In the preparatory phase of the Invasion of Sicily the Allied air forces virtually 'knocked enemy air off the relatively restricted area' of that island by means of a long drawn out systematic campaign by practically the whole available bomber and fighter force. For army and naval officers to believe that the handful of enemy aircraft operating from anywhere between Salonica and Rhodes and being so troublesome over Leros could be 'neutralised' indefinitely by any force likely to be available, was to delude themselves. The B-24 (Liberator) Group suggested would not, especially at the time of the year, begin to look at the job. It was mistaken to think that B-24's could operate from Cyrenaica against Italian or Austrian targets and co-ordinate effectively with the heavies and fighters from Tunisia and Italy. It was largely because of their losses due to unsuccessful co-ordination that he had moved them to Italy.

Ibid

To this the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief in the Middle East replied that he did not consider his fellow Commanders-in-Chief were trying to build up the air as an alibi for failure. They were playing fair but they were naturally anxious to get as much assistance from the air as possible. The logical deduction from loss of the fighter bases at Cos was that the Middle East forces ought to evacuate Leros and Samos. If this was his view then the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Middle East felt that he should inform his fellow Commanders-in-Chief since his opinion would obviously affect their judgement on the ticklish question of the advisability of evacuation. He could not, however, accept the phrase 'handful of enemy aircraft operating between Salonica and Rhodes'. There were in fact some 335 aircraft including over 200 bombers. The fact remained that apart from No. 240 Wing and the small effort that No. 201 Group could provide he had no striking force on which he could rely at short notice. The bombers in the North West African Air Force could reach the targets which he particularly wished to attack, namely, the airfields at Maritza, Calato and Herakleion. Furthermore, the long range fighter force in Middle East was inadequate for the demands upon it.

Ibid

On 3 November, Middle East asked the Mediterranean Air Command for a maximum air effort on the airfields at Eleusis and Kalamati as it was desired to minimise the enemy air

attack on the destroyers which were about to bring reinforcements into Leros. No. 321 Group⁽¹⁾ were ordered by the Mediterranean Air Command to do their utmost to meet these requirements, but bad weather prevented their effective intervention. Similarly six Mitchells of No. 310 Group failed to arrive at Gambut in time because they were completely bogged on their own airfield and were unable to take off.

In a personal letter to A.O.C.-in-C., M.A.C. the Chief of the Air Staff on 13 November trusted now that the battle for Leros was virtually being fought that M.A.C. was doing everything possible to help the garrison. He realised to the full the difficulties of distance, of weather, and of communications, while Army operations in Italy should not be seriously prejudiced by diversion of air effort to the Aegean, he felt that Leros was more important at that moment than say strategical objectives in Southern France and North Italy. 'Even if you have nothing more than a bomb line', he continued, 'could not your medium and heavy bombers and long range fighters help enormously to sustain morale of the garrison and lower that of the attackers?'

To this the A.O.C.-in-C., M.A.C. replied on the same day. For the past few days Mitchells and Lightning groups based in the heel of Italy had been given Greek airfields as their first priority targets. On 12 November 138 Mitchells had set out but had had to return owing to the bad weather. Lightnings and Mitchells operating from Sardinia had been equally frustrated on the 13th. With the best will in the world it was not possible to swing bomber forces to and fro across the Mediterranean and operate effectively at a moment's notice. Leros was completely out of range of his medium bombers in the heel of Italy and of his heavy bombers in Tunisia. To move air units into Cyrenaica was a major operation involving movements of personnel and equipment. He was doing his best and felt sure that he had done all he could having regard to his primary commitment.

Ibid

(1) Strategic Air Force.

CHAPTER 4.

THE CAPITULATION OF LEROS

Force 292
German Ops in
the Aegean.

The German air and sea borne attack on Cos had been made with some 2,000 men of which one hundred and fifty were paratroopers. The majority of these had been brought either from the Greek mainland or from Crete where the Germans had a garrison of over 30,000 men. After the fall of Cos on 4 October a further battalion was brought in and it was estimated that the Germans had some 3,000 troops, or the equivalent of a brigade group, on the island. Such a large force was unnecessary for the holding of the island and it was clear that a considerable portion would be available for further operations. The fall of Cos was intended by the enemy to be followed immediately by an assault on Leros. They proceeded to occupy the small islands around Leros and to increase the scale of air bombardment.(1)

Island of Leros

The island of Leros consists of three mountainous regions connected by two narrow necks of land, neither of which is much more than a thousand yards in breadth, and so indented is the coastline that no point on the island is more than a mile from the sea. The northern and southern mountain areas are both penetrated by a valley which runs roughly from north to south, so that an easy natural course is afforded to the main road; the central mountains alone are continuous, and here the main road has to skirt the coast to avoid the hills. There are practically no possibilities of movement across country; the mountains are steep, stony and scored with ravines. The lower flatter areas, which are intensely cultivated, are cut up into small fields by low rubble walls, which are a constant barrier to movement. Under the Italians the defences of Leros had not been well developed; much of the anti-aircraft material was out of date, and the system of fire control was deplorable; certain types of ammunition were in short supply, and motor transport was always inadequate.

Force 292
report
2 Oct.

Operations in the Aegean were controlled by the Middle East Command through the III Corps Headquarters (Force 292) and the 234th Brigade (Major General Brittorous) on Leros. The original garrison, which had arrived between 17 September and 2 October, comprised the 234th Brigade Headquarters, and the 2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers, with a company from the 2nd Royal West Kents, the remainder of the battalion being on Samos. The total British troops on the island was 1,100 men in addition to the Italian garrison. The Officer Commanding 234th Brigade had been unable to send reinforcements to Cos during the invasion because of the paucity of his forces, the lack of shipping, and the fact that the Italians in Leros were clamouring for reinforcements. He was obliged to confine his efforts to a demand for combined sea and air action.

As soon as the loss of Cos became known in England the Prime Minister sent a message to General Wilson asking why the enemy convoy had met with no resistance and why there had

(1) On 4 October the refrigerator ship Ivoreia was hit in Leros harbour and damaged beyond repair with 2,000 tons of frozen meat still on board.

been no mortar or anti-tank guns on Cos. Further he wished to know what steps were being taken to deal with a probable attack on Leros. 'It is quite right to run risks but foresight and energy are all the more required.'

OZ/3069
5 Oct.

O/18774
Oct.

C.I.C./127
6 Oct.

O/18905
6 Oct.

The reason given for the lack of artillery on Cos was that the troops had been conveyed there by small craft and, had, therefore, only carried their personal weapons. The Navy was making sweeps in the Aegean and had submarines in position to cover Leros, while Air Force Wellingtons were to attack the Piraeus, and Mitchells with Lightning escorts were to attack Rhodes. In addition, wireless observation posts were to be established on possible lines of enemy approach; reinforcements were to be sent to Castelrosso and Piat mortars were to be dropped on Leros.

Commander-in-Chief, M.E. explains loss of Cos.

General Wilson amplified this on 8 October in a long personal message to the Prime Minister. He was fully aware that great risks had been taken in order to exploit a favourable situation but the Italians had failed him. The Navy had had only one British and two Greek Hunt class destroyers available for offensive use in the Aegean. Although the possibility of seaborne attack had been foreseen intelligence from all sources pointed strongly to the probability that this would be preceded by the reinforcements of Rhodes, and naval and air dispositions had been made on this assumption. There had been nothing to indicate that the enemy would be able to collect and launch at such short notice an expedition of the magnitude which he had made the assault on Cos. As a result of these faulty dispositions the three 'Hunt' class destroyers, after a period of patrol south of Rhodes, had had to be withdrawn to refuel. Special air measures had been taken to deal with what was thought to be the reinforcement of the Rhodes convoy on the receipt, through the Senior Naval Officer in Leros, of a somewhat obscure and delayed report. But this convoy was not located and in the end no attack was made until after the landing on Cos had begun. The two submarines on patrol had been offensively disposed in the North and Western Aegean and considerable time had therefore elapsed before they could be moved to the vicinity of Cos by which time the enemy transports had been withdrawn.

C.I.C./132
8 Oct.

Aegean Ops.
C.-in-C.
Levant

The facts, as given by the C.-in-C., Levant in his subsequent report were that, on 1 October all available 'Fleet' class destroyers had been sailed to Malta as escort to H.M.S. Howe and King George V, leaving only the 'Hunt' class destroyers whose speed and endurance made it difficult for them to operate far into the Aegean and still be clear by daylight. As a result H.M.S. Aldenham, H.H.M.S. Themistocles and H.H.M.S. Miaculis who were patrolling off the Caso Strait on the night of the 2/3 October were short of fuel and in no position to take action on an aircraft report of an enemy convoy sighted off Naxos and believed to be bound for Rhodes. They were ordered to withdraw to Alexandria for fuel.

Meanwhile, information from Greek sources, had indicated a concentration of enemy shipping in Piraeus on 6 October. That night two cruisers(1) and two destroyers(2) were

- (1) H.M.S. Sirius and Penelope.
(2) H.M.S. Faulknor and Fury.

Force 292
War Diary

operating in the Aegean. At about 0700 hours on the 7th they intercepted an enemy convoy with naval escorts off Stampalia Island. As a result of the ensuing engagement four ammunition ships, six landing craft and an assault tanker were reported as having been sunk, but later one landing craft and a small escort vessel arrived in Stampalia in a sinking condition - and were captured by the Italian garrison.

Naval Ops in
the Aegean
Appendix 7.

Luftwaffe
Operational
Losses
South Eastern
Command
7 Oct.

At first until the Naval force had engaged the enemy convoy the German escorting aircraft ignored their presence. During the engagement only spasmodic attacks were made by a few aircraft until the force had reached the Scarpanto Straits. Then at 1059 hours the ships were attacked by five Ju.88's escorted by six Me.109's. Urgent requests had been made for fighter protection and by this time eight Lightnings of the Twelfth (U.S.) Air Force, which were temporarily operating from Gambut, were escorting the Naval Force. They were directed to attack and shot down one Ju.88, damaged two others and forced the remainder to jettison their bombs. Soon afterwards the Lightnings had to return to their base and the relieving fighters failed to find the ships which were left without fighter protection. The next attack at 1130 hours was made by three Ju.88's which bombed on the glide, no hits being scored, but at 1213 hours twelve to eighteen Ju.87's made a dive bombing attack and succeeded in scoring one hit and two near misses on the cruiser Penelope. Fortunately the bomb which hit did not explode and the ship was able to continue on her course to Alexandria at reduced speed.

Luftwaffe
Operational
losses
South Eastern
Command
9 Oct.

Two days later a second force, consisting of the cruiser Carlisle and the destroyers Panther, Petard, Rockwood and H.H.M.S. Miaculis were sent on a similar task. Two Arado 66's flying low were sighted at 0750 hours, evidently shadowing the force. The single escorting Beaufighter was directed to intercept them and succeeded in damaging one, and driving off the other. Shortly afterwards, the Beaufighter had to return to its base, and the force was left without any air protection for forty minutes when two sections of Lightnings arrived. At 1205 hours when the ships were just clear of the Scarpanto Straits a mass dive bombing attack by Ju.87's took place, in which Carlisle was damaged and temporarily stopped and Panther was sunk. Unfortunately, though the Carlisle's radar was working efficiently, the plot failed to deduce that an attack was impending. The seven Lightnings which were escorting, sighted the Ju.87's in three groups at eight thousand feet with a Ju.88 at six thousand feet trailing behind. Four Lightnings climbed and attacked the Ju.87's and the other three provided cover. The Ju.88 attempted to attack the rear flight and was immediately shot down.(1) About twenty Ju.87's got through. As they headed for Rhodes after the attack they were chased by the Lightnings and in a running fight eight were destroyed, and two damaged. The Lightnings sustained no damage. In addition to this activity, other Lightning formations made offensive sweeps over Crete and Leros on the 6th and 8th, and on the 10th attacked Antimachia landing ground scoring hits among dispersed aircraft and starting a large fire. The Tenth of October

Ibid

(1) Luftwaffe operational losses for this date merely give 1 Ju.88 damaged by enemy action.

was the last day on which Lightnings operated in the Aegean area but naval units continued to search for enemy shipping and to bombard enemy occupied islands, under the protection of Beau-fighters of Nos. 237 and 235 Wings.

It is probable that the first set back to the enemy's invasion plan was the destruction of the convoy off Stampalia. The continued delay was certainly due to the naval and air offensive against shipping and German key points. However the decision had been taken in Cairo to abandon operation Accolade and to prepare plan to evacuate the Aegean islands.

091557
9 Oct.

General Anderson in a letter to the Headquarters of the Middle East on the 11th asked who was to make the plan for the evacuation. He suggested that the Joint Planning Staff should do it, observing, 'after all, Force 292 is at best only an agency for conducting the Aegean operations, and really has no say in policy and direction'. Although he did not wish to shirk responsibility for the plan, he wished to point out that he was not well placed to make it. Further, could he rely on any help from the Navy or must the whole operation be conducted by caiques, via secret bases in Turkey? The Commander-in-Chief, Levant had stated at the meeting on 10 October that no more operations would be carried out in the Aegean after that date. Did that statement apply to the proposed evacuation? He had also said that the First Sea Lord had ruled out evacuation by sea. Finally General Anderson raised other points which would have to be cleared up before any plan could be made for the evacuation of the Aegean Islands.

Force 292
Army Section
5043
11 Oct.

The presentation of the practical difficulties involved in the evacuation of the islands seems to have had some effect for it was then decided that the policy should be to hold on to Leros and Samos. It was realized that maintenance would be difficult and depend largely on the Turkish attitude. The Prime Minister asked if nothing could be done even to regain Cos. If nothing could be done then the Middle East were authorised to evacuate the garrisons from the islands. The Foreign Secretary told the Prime Minister after a conference with the Commanders-in-Chief Middle East, that it would be impossible to retake Cos with the existing air resources, and that plans were being made to maintain Leros by submarines, air forces and caiques from Samos.

C.L.C./133
10 Oct.

1021
10 Oct.

77676

00/324
12 Oct.

On 12 October there were five air raids on Leros between 0520 and 1530 hours local time. Thirty-one aircraft were reported as having taken part, the principal targets being gun and searchlight positions and the sea plane base. There had been sixty-eight such attacks in sixteen days.

Force 292
Army Section
5043
13 Oct.

General Anderson again wrote to the Middle East head-quarters saying that he fully appreciated the reasons for maintaining the maximum air effort in support of the operations in Italy, and that he realised the undesirability of locking up air forces to carry out a specific operation the date of which could not be accurately foreseen. But, at the same time, the British garrison in Leros, and perhaps Samos as well, were facing the imminent threat of invasion. The survival or defeat of the British garrisons would depend to a large extent on the counter measures taken by the Navy and the Royal Air Force prior to and during the actual attack. He felt that no effort should be spared in giving the very maximum support to these garrisons both by air and sea action,

and this had been promised them. He understood that the resources of the Air Defences of the Eastern Mediterranean were not large enough to interfere seriously with the enemy. He considered, therefore, that strenuous efforts ought to be made to have available at instant call sufficient bomber aircraft to break up and disorganise the invasion craft being used by the enemy prior to and during an attack on the garrisons. He was aware that the Commander-in-Chief Levant and the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief had been unsparing in their efforts with their limited resources but he felt that their resources were not, as far as the air was concerned, sufficient to effect any substantial relief to his own troops. Now that the Accolade plan had been postponed, he urged that the garrisons in the Aegean should be given some really strong tangible evidence of the promise to do everything possible for them.

ADEM. Sit.
Report
No.26.

The naval forces available at this time were five cruisers, Dido, Sirius, Penelope (A.A.) Aurora, and Carlisle. Eight 'Fleet' and six 'Hunt' class destroyers, one ammunition boat, some motor torpedo boats and four submarines. The operational strength of Air Defence, Eastern Mediterranean may be judged from the following summary of their operations on 12/13 October. One cruiser and two destroyers had sailed from Alexandria to operate in the Aegean that night. Continuous Beaufighter escort had been provided and had been given again the next morning on the return of this force to its base. Six Hurricanes of No. 213 Squadron had made a low level sweep over the Castelrosso area. At night eight Hudsons of No.489 Squadron, four Wellingtons of No.38 Squadron, three Baltimores of No.13 Squadron, and seven aircraft of No.240 Wing had operated in separate localities. It is true that the weather had been unfavourable at this time but even in good weather operations had had to be undertaken with very small forces.

1509150
15 Oct.

Middle East therefore requested the Mediterranean Air Command to continue their strategic bombing of the Greek airfields and a daily signal giving priority targets was sent them as a guide for the planning of these operations. But for the reasons already given in Chapter 3, this co-operation was not very successful. An appreciation of the situation by the newly appointed Naval Commander-in-Chief Levant (1) issued on 15 October asserted that the maintenance of naval patrols by day was not practicable without entailing prohibitive losses and that bad weather had prevented him getting accurate air information of enemy shipping movement. He considered that the crux of the situation was in the air and there it was necessary to trounce the enemy thoroughly.

A.O.C.315
17 Oct.
Files
A.H.B./IIJ8/
36A.

However, on the 17th, Middle East were able to report to the Mediterranean Air Command that they had had at last a stroke of luck and that in the last twenty-four hours they had collected one merchant vessel by submarine, one merchant vessel, one 'F' boat, and one 'E' boat by surface craft in addition to one 'F' boat, seriously damaged and one damaged by 75-mm. fire by Mitchells plus one motor torpedo boat well riddled and with personnel casualties by a Beaufighter. By the 20th the Middle East Air situation could be described thus:- 'Although certain surface craft had been moved to the westwards yesterday there are still sufficient enemy light

(1) Admiral Sir A.V. Willis relieved Sir J.H.D. Cunningham as C.-in-C. Levant on 14 October 1943.

craft in the Calino area to enable him to stage an attack on Leros by short distance ferry service from Calino. Our task in attempting to provide cover for naval forces is not an easy one. Besides being in marked numerical inferiority we are hampered by the distance of our bases from the scene of operations. The cover which we are able to provide for naval forces is therefore quite insufficient to enable them to work in the vicinity of Rhodes - Scarpanto in daylight. The Navy have suffered relatively heavy losses and this is naturally giving rise to criticism of the thinness of their air cover. We are doing all we can against the Crete and Dodecanese airfields with the limited resources of No.240 Wing and any short range general reconnaissance effort which can be spared. The report continued with a summary of operations for the period. During the day (19th) Baltimores had attacked a 1,000 ton merchant vessel in Syros, but the bombs had overshot the target and hit one small vessel, some caiques and the quay. During the night No.240 Wing had bombed the airfield at Maritza successfully. Hudsons had bombed the airfield and a 3,000 ton merchant vessel in Cos; torpedo Wellingtons had made no sightings in the Gulf of Athens, and leaflets had been dropped on Rhodes and Cos. During the day of 20 October two strikes had been made by Mitchells with Beaufighter escorts. It was claimed that one 'F' Lighter had been destroyed and one damaged.

The enemy continued to bomb Leros every day. The Allied naval forces reinforced the island with troops and equipment using destroyers and submarines, but not without incurring heavy losses. On the 22nd the destroyers Hurworth and Adrias were sunk and damaged respectively as a result of hitting mines off the east coast of Calino. The next day the destroyer Eclipse, with 200 of the 4th Buffs in transit to Leros, was sunk in the same locality. On the 24th the merchant vessel S.S. Taganrog (1500 tons) was bombed and sunk in harbour at Samos. On the 28th a landing craft (L.C.T.115) was sunk in a position thirty-five miles from Castelrosso while transporting troops and weapons. Twenty-two men and four anti-aircraft guns lost.

On the 30 October H.M.S. Aurora was escorting three other destroyers, Petard, Belvoir, and Beaufort to enter the Aegean. They were covered continuously by one or two sections of Beaufighters, and at 1100 hours a successful radar controlled interception resulted in the shooting down of a 'shadower' enemy aircraft, but when a series of attacks developed from 1530 hours onwards, the force was close to the Turkish coast and land echoes so confused the radar that only visual direction was possible.

At 1530 hours, two Ju.88's made a high level bombing attack from out of the sun but the bombs missed the ships. Fourteen Ju.88's and three Me.109's were sighted at 1613 hours about twenty miles ahead of the force. Beaufighters were visually directed and made contact but were driven off by the Me.109's. One Me.109 turned over on its back and was not seen again. In the ensuing dive bombing attack Aurora was hit by two small bombs and there were near misses on her and Petard. The force then split, Aurora returning to Alexandria and the destroyers proceeding on towards the Aegean. An hour later, sixteen Ju.88's escorted by three Macchi 202's made a high level pattern bombing attack on the destroyers but failed to score any hits. At 1740 hours the destroyers were again attacked, this time by eight Ju.88's. Belvoir was hit, but the bomb failed to explode

1st Sea Lords
report
24 Oct.

Cositreprs
No.40 -
3 Oct.

Naval Ops.
in the Aegean
Appendix 7.

Luftwaffe
Operational
Losses.
Southern
Eastern
Command.
31 Oct.

and it was subsequently removed and the ship went on into the Aegean. As the Ju.88's retired they were engaged by the Beaufighters who destroyed three Ju.88's and damaged another.(1)

C.-in-C.
Levant

During the last fortnight of October Castelrosso had experienced eight air raids all of them directed on the harbour. Three other raids had been made on naval craft in the vicinity. The average weight of enemy air attack had been ten to twelve Ju.87's escorted by two to four Me.109's or twelve to fourteen Ju.88's. Damage had been slight, but the threat of air attack had made it necessary to unload craft at night and to disperse them in Turkish waters during the day. These raids had also had an unfortunate effect on the morale of the local inhabitants and prevented them from working efficiently. At the end of the month intelligence had been received that the Germans had brought Do.217's to the Kalamaki airfield in Greece. This type of aircraft was used for dropping wireless controlled bombs and constituted an additional threat to the Allied naval forces.

Naval Resources

311304
3 Oct.

C.O.S.263(O)
29 Oct.

At the end of October the Commander-in-Chief, Levant's available force was, one cruiser, four 'Fleet' and six 'Hunt' class destroyers, all badly in need of maintenance. With these it was intended to bring an additional 1300 troops into Leros in order to strengthen the garrison. The Chiefs of Staff considered that this method of maintaining Leros by cruisers and destroyers was too expensive and that a better way would be to use only submarines or aircraft operating from landing strips in Turkey, if this could be arranged. The Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean thought that to send further ships to the Levant would affect his power of offence to Italy and also the amphibious operations in the Western Mediterranean area. He did not know how much longer he was likely to retain American naval assistance and he was reluctant to sail more destroyers to the Levant.

Unsatisfactory System of Command

G.H.Q. MEF.
Directive
No. 180
30 Oct.1943

The system of command had been unsatisfactory from the start of the Aegean operations. Major decisions of policy had been made by the Commanders-in-Chief Committee in Cairo; but whereas Naval operations had been conducted by the C.-in-C. Levant from his combined Naval/Coastal Air Force Headquarters at Alexandria, the Army had appointed a Corps Commander with a Headquarters in Cairo, and the Royal Air Force an Air Vice-Marshal who, though himself in Cairo, had his operational headquarters in Cyprus. This was not very successful in practice and on the 1 November, Major General Hall was appointed General Officer Commanding Aegean, with the specific task of holding Leros and Samos in order to cause as much damage as possible to the enemy's lines of communication in the Aegean. In addition, he was given command of all British, Allied and Italian land forces in the Aegean, as well as of naval personnel in shore establishments not under the Commander-in-Chief, Levant, or the Senior

(1) An analysis of the fighter protection afforded the Navy during this period shows that the majority of enemy aircraft which were destroyed were shot down after they had made their attack on the ships.

SECRET

42

British Naval Officer Aegean, in that area. General Hall and Brigadier Tilney, who was to take the post of Fortress Commander, Leros arrived at the island on 5 November, and from that date Headquarters, Aegean, started to control operations. After discussion with Major General Brittorous, who had relinquished the command of the 234th Brigade, General Hall decided to make Samos his headquarters. He remained on Leros long enough to see the defences of the island organised to his satisfaction and to clarify relations with the Italians there, and since the re-organisation of the island's defences was proceeding satisfactorily, he was able to leave for Samos on 11 November, leaving Brigadier Tilney in command on Leros.

At this time Castelrosso, Leros and Samos were under British control while the other Dodecanese Islands, with the exception of Rhodes, Scarpanto, Khalkia, Alimnia, and Kazo (all under German control) were held by co-operative Italians.

Owing to the shortage of shipping a paratroop operation was undertaken which involved the dropping of 200 officers and men of the Greek Sacred Squadron on Samos. This was done on two consecutive nights 31 October/1 November and 1/2 November by No.216 Group. On both nights five Dakotas carrying 100 troops followed by a sixth conveying supplies set off from Ramat David at fifteen minute intervals. The Greek soldiers, of whom many were middle aged men, with little experience of flying and certainly none of parachute jumping, were successfully dropped in spite of the fact that the operation was carried out on moonless nights. Only one Dakota was lost on the return flight through an error of navigation. The crew were compelled to 'bale-out' over the mountains of Southern Turkey and were interned there temporarily.

No.216 Group
O.R.B.

By the beginning of November there were clear indications of the mounting of a major assault force in the Piraeus, but it was not obvious whether the assault was to be on Samos or Leros; but a series of heavy air raids suggested that Samos was the enemy's objective. On the 3rd, landing craft and escorts were seen in Lavrion and agents reported they were engaged in landing exercises. Photographic reconnaissance on the 4th showed nine landing craft and two escort vessels in Lavrion with a further four landing craft at Zea. They were reported moving eastward on the 5th. Between then and the evening of 10 November when they arrived in the Cos/Calino area, they moved only by day under heavy fighter protection, dispersing and lying up during the night, first in the Paros/Naxos area and later in Amorgos, Levitha and Stampalia.

Naval Op. in
the Aegean
and
Enemy prepara-
tions for the
attack on
Leros
(air photos.)
A.H.B./IIJ8/49

Every effort was made to intercept the enemy force. On the 4th four Beaufighters attacked four small landing craft in Cos harbour, whose presence there had been reported by Baltimores earlier in the day. They attacked them with cannon fire and scored hits on all the vessels which were moored close together. The next day five Beauforts on an offensive reconnaissance between Castelrosso and Rhodes encountered four Me.109's ten miles off the south-east coast of Rhodes. During the ensuing engagement four of the Beauforts were shot down and only one returned to its base. Later in the day three Beaufighters carrying torpedoes and escorted by five more made an attack on shipping in Lavrion Bay. One large and two small merchant vessels were found there. All three Beaufighters released their torpedoes but the results were unobserved, although one of the escorting aircraft reported

No.201 Group
O.R.B.

having seen a torpedo track heading for the ship and a column of black smoke rising, later, from that direction. But two of the torpedo carrying Beaufighters were shot down. Attacks were also made by four other Beaufighters which shot up two caiques and a barge in Siphnos harbour. Two more Beaufighters attacked two tugs and a barge in the harbour; one tug was damaged and left smoking and all the other vessels were hit with cannon fire.

On the 6th, eight Beaufighters attacked shipping in Port Naousa (Paros Island), which had been reported earlier by a Baltimore on reconnaissance. They found there two large barges, two naval auxiliary vessels, one 'E' boat and three caiques. The caiques and barges were attacked and the barges set on fire. The Beaufighters were intercepted by six Arado 196's and five Me.109's and the anti-aircraft fire encountered was intense and accurate. Only three Beaufighters returned to their base.

Ibid

That night two Wellingtons which were co-operating with the naval forces searched the vicinity of the islands of Naxos and Paros for enemy shipping. In Naousa harbour three escort vessels, two merchant ships and twelve landing craft were discovered and a similar convoy was seen in the Naxos Paros Channel. The Wellingtons directed the surface craft and illuminated the target with flares, but no naval action ensued.

Luftwaffe
Operational
Losses.
S.E. Command
8 Nov.

On the 8th, twelve Beaufighters, three carrying torpedoes, sighted four merchant vessels, fifteen barges and some 'F' and 'E' boats. Torpedo attacks were made but no hits were seen. The other Beaufighters attacked the convoy with cannon fire and claimed hits on one 'F' boat and four barges. The convoy was escorted by ten Arado 196's one of which was shot down during the action. No Beaufighter casualties were incurred.

Luftwaffe
Operational
Losses
S.E.
Command
9 Nov.

The next day four Beaufighters escorted one torpedo carrying Beaufighter on a shipping strike northeast of Amorgos. Ten landing craft and two schooners, all stationary, were sighted. Numerous enemy aircraft, Me.109's, Ju.88's and Arado 196's were seen patrolling the area. The torpedo was jettisoned, the strike abandoned; and the Beaufighter formation was chased for twenty-five minutes by Ju.88's but they managed to return to base undamaged. On the same day (9th) six Beaufighters, two carrying torpedoes made an offensivesweep southwest of Cos. An attack was made on a medium sized vessel found off the southwest coast of the island, but without success although cannon hits were made. One of the two Arado 196's which were protecting the vessel was shot down and the other damaged. The enemy vessel fired rocket projectiles at the Beaufighters but without effect.

On the 10th, twelve Beaufighters were despatched to attack fourteen landing craft and three other enemy vessels which had been reported northeast of Stampalia. One returned early and the remainder were intercepted and driven off by Me.109's. In addition to the actions described above an average number of four Hudsons bombed Antimachia landing ground every night, while Wellingtons laid mines in the Aegean and Baltimores kept up a ceaseless reconnaissance over the whole area.

SECRET

44

Naval Ops
in the Aegean.

Meanwhile Allied destroyers, often under air attack, searched the area where the landing craft were expected to be lying up, and bombarded harbours in these localities. These efforts met with small success due by day to the heavy scale of fighter protection the enemy maintained over the convoy and by night to the difficulty of spotting the craft which were probably beached and camouflaged in the many small bays available.

Ibid

With the arrival of the enemy convoy at Cos and Calino on the 11th, the enemy had available a total force of four 'F' boats, thirteen 'I' boats, five auxiliary naval craft and a number of caiques, and into these he loaded troops and equipment already assembled in these islands. Despite the efforts of the Allied destroyers and air forces, the enemy had succeeded in getting the bulk of his invasion flotilla to its destination. The delays imposed upon him by these activities had at any rate given time to the reinforced Leros garrison to re-organise and prepare for the impending invasion.

The bulk of the enemy invasion flotilla having arrived at Port Calino and Cos harbour, it was hoped that they would have to spend at least one night there fuelling and preparing to move up to the northern bays of Calino, from which the invasion was expected to be launched. Accordingly the destroyers Petard, Rockwood and the O.R.P. Krakowiak lying up in the Mandalya Gulf, and the destroyer Faulknor (Captain (D) Eighth Destroyer Flotilla), (1) Beaufort and Pindos entering the Aegean during the night 10/11th, were ordered to bombard Port Calino and Cos harbour respectively. Petard's force was ordered to withdraw from the Aegean on completion of her orders, and the Eighth Destroyer Flotilla's to continue north to the Mandalya Gulf.

Both bombardments were carried out as ordered. Cos harbour and roads were apparently empty. A ship which had previously been damaged in Port Calino was set on fire and capsized, but any landing craft present were probably behind the Mole and escaped damage. Both forces were bombed, the Eighth Destroyer Flotilla before opening fire, and Petard's while withdrawing. Of the latter, Rockwood was hit by a glider bomb which failed to explode and had to be towed under constant bombing attack to the Gulf of Doris. This decided Captain (D), Eighth Destroyer Flotilla to lie up at Port Deremen at the head of the Gulf of Cos, so as to be in a position to assist Petard, who was towing Rockwood, if necessary.

Air reconnaissance by Baltimores during the 11th revealed considerable movement of landing craft between Cos and Calino, and it appeared that preparations to mount the attack on Leros from the northern bays of Calino were being made. The afternoon reconnaissance showed a concentration of landing craft in Cos harbour.

The enemy's intentions were still not clear. It was necessary to conserve fuel in the Eighth Destroyer Flotilla since the 'Hunt' class destroyers had only enough fuel for one night's operation, and the next force of destroyers could not arrive in the area until late on the night 12/13th. After

(1) Captain M.S. Thomas R.N.

dark the Flotilla leader was therefore ordered to move his force to a bay nearer the area. Air reconnaissance was arranged during the early part of the night and Captain (D), Eighth Destroyer Flotilla was ordered to send the 'Hunts' to destroy any shipping located in Cos. Available bombers of No.201 Group were held in readiness to attack any landing craft found in the bays of Calino. The Flotilla force duly arrived at Alakishli Bay at 0157 hours on 12 November. Meanwhile at about 0120 hours aircraft reported two groups of eight and seven barges respectively steering northwest from Kappari Island.

It had always been expected that the enemy would launch his assault in daylight from the cover of the minefields at the northern end of Calino. The Destroyer Flotilla leader considered that the forces reported were moving up to these bays and that he would be unable to interfere with them on account of the minefield. Due to an erroneous appreciation in the Commander-in-Chief's Operation Room it was not believed that these might in fact be the assaulting forces until it was too late to order Captain (D) Eighth Destroyer Flotilla to intercept.

In the early morning the assaulting forces were reported in sight by M.L.456 patrolling off Leros. One group made for the islands north of Leros and attacked from this direction while the second group approached from the cover of the minefield. There is no doubt that had the Destroyer Flotilla leader been ordered to intercept at once, the northern assault force might have been destroyed. On the other hand, as the enemy maintained a continued night air reconnaissance in the vicinity of the Allied destroyers wherever they were and were thus able to direct their own surface forces clear of them, it is very far from certain that any of the invasion forces would have been intercepted. The failure to intercept these enemy forces after watching their progress across the Aegean was the culmination of a series of disappointments. The enemy acted with great determination and successfully called the bluff that Allied surface forces were a threat to him by day. By night he hid his craft with great skill and his very complete air reconnaissance enabled him to know exactly where the Allied destroyers were and to attack them while keeping his own forces clear.

No.201
Group O.R.B.

Early on the morning of 12 November, seven Baltimores, three Hudsons and four Wellingtons set out to attack shipping in the bays around Calino. None were found in Pezonda Bay but three Baltimores dropped bombs in the shadow of some cliffs where shipping was suspected to be lying. One Hudson bombed three landing craft in a bay on the east coast of Calino but no hits were observed. Four Baltimores and one Hudson bombed the landing ground at Antimachia. One of the Wellingtons attacked eight barges but no hit was claimed. Another Wellington attacked a large merchant vessel but failed to hit it, and yet another bombed Calino harbour and bursts were seen in the water and one on land. Four Baltimores attacked shipping in Suda Bay where four merchant vessels were seen but the results were unobserved. Three more Baltimores repeated the attack on the ships which were moored alongside the jetty and smoke was seen to be issuing from each side of it.

Later in the day a convoy of two merchant vessels and five escort ships were sighted by a Baltimore on reconnaissance. Three Mitchells, two torpedo Beaufighters and fourteen others

were sent to attack it. No torpedo hits were claimed although the Mitchells obtained hits with cannon fire. The convoy was escorted by Arado's and two were badly damaged during the fighting. Another sortie was made by fifteen Beaufighters to attack the enemy landing on Leros, but although many enemy vessels were seen it was found impossible to attack them owing to the presence of many single engined enemy fighters.

Meanwhile, the enemy had landed on Leros. Some 500 enemy troops came ashore north of Alinda Bay and a smaller force south of the bay and east of Leros town. The northern force made some progress and secured a line of high ground about half a mile inland. The southern force was counter attacked by British troops and pinned down. During this period the enemy bombers were engaged in attacking the coastal batteries (which were manned by Italian naval personnel), and in preventing the free movement of the Leros garrison by bombing them whenever signs of activity were shown. Later in the day some 800 parachutists were dropped in the area west of Leros town and secured the Rachi Ridge which bisects the narrow neck of land in the centre of the Island.

When darkness fell H.M.S. Faulknor, Beaufort and H.H.M.S. Pindos together with three motor torpedo boats swept in the Leros/Calino/Levitha area with the object of preventing enemy reinforcements reaching Leros, and at about 2210 hours Mt. Clido battery on Leros was bombarded from the eastward at the request of the Army. These ships made no sightings and returned to Turkish waters by daylight. Meanwhile H.M.S. Dulverton, Echo and Belvoir were on their way to the Aegean, they had been shadowed by enemy aircraft and at 0145 hours on the 13th H.M.S. Dulverton was hit by a glider bomb and sunk. The other ships after picking up the survivors proceeded to Turkish waters to lie up. During the night a southerly gale blew up which restricted the operations of light craft on both sides and minesweepers and motor launches which had been sent to Samos from Leros to fetch reinforcements were prevented by the weather from making the return journey.

The German forces north of Alinda Bay were reinforced early on the morning of the 13th, and made further progress. They reached a line Palma Bay in the north to S. Madonne on Alinda Bay. South of the Bay further enemy reinforcements were landed at about the same time and in this area some progress was also made resulting in the capture of Appetici which was held against a British counter attack. At about 0900 hours the German parachute force was reinforced by a further 150 men who were dropped to the west of Leros town and managed to extend their control over the whole of the neck area of the Island.

Brigadier Tilney, the Commander of the Fortress of Leros, sent a message En clair to the Air Force Headquarters in the Middle East asking for help. To which the A.O.C.-in-C. replied in a personal message, that he was doing his best to help, but Leros was out of range of single engined and at the extremity of range of twin engined fighters and that therefore the latter types were unable to remain in the vicinity of the island for any length of time. There had been 48 Beaufighter sorties over the Island that day, but continuous cover was impossible, particularly as the Beaufighter could not compete in combat with a Me.109. His bomber force was very small, it was then being employed at night against enemy airfields in

German Ops.
Leros
M.O.1.(D)
box 1056
(Cabinet).

Ops. in the
Aegean
C.-in-C.
Med.

Captain (D)
(8) report of
proceedings.

German Ops.
Leros.

A.O.C.391
No.13 in file
AOC/262/6.

Rhodes and Cos with the object of reducing the scale of air attack against Leros. These attacks had been fairly successful in that Maritza airfield in Rhodes had been rendered unserviceable that day which meant that some twenty Stukas had been unable to operate. As it was impossible to escort bombers at such long range they could not operate over Leros in daylight, whilst at night it was impossible to do pin-point bombing. Mediterranean Air Command had undertaken to make heavy scale air attacks on enemy airfields in Greece where the majority of enemy bombers operating against Leros were based; but so far this had been prevented by bad weather but it would be undertaken at the first opportunity. Middle East would try to make strikes against enemy shipping conveying reinforcements from Greece; and would send eight aircraft that night to Leros to drop supplies and hoped to increase the number to twelve on the night of 14 November.(1)

Naval Ops.
in Aegean.

During the night 13/14th H.M.S. Faulkner, Beaufort and H.H.M.S. Pindos after attempting to shell enemy positions in Leros left the Aegean owing to shortage of fuel, while H.M.S. Echo and Belvoir carried out a bombardment at the request of the Army and later made a sweep in that area without result. Troop reinforcements from Samos were unable to reach Leros owing to the weather and the small ships which had attempted the passage were compelled to lie up in Turkish waters. At the same time H.M.S. Penn, Aldenham and Blencathra entered the Aegean and lay up in the Mandalya Gulf.

German Ops.
Leros

On the morning of the 14th a strong British counter attack from the south succeeded in breaking through the German positions on the narrow neck of the Island and captured a number of Germans in the S.Quaranta area. The German parachutist force, however, made progress during the afternoon southeastwards towards Moraviglia,(2) a height just outside the town of Leros. North of Alinda Bay the German bridgehead was partially driven in by a British attack. Four Mitchells and nineteen Beaufighters were engaged on strikes around Leros, but no shipping was sighted. Several enemy aircraft were seen in the vicinity and one He.111 was shot down. Four Baltimores attacked three large merchant ships in Suda Bay without visible result. Two Beaufighters were lost as a result of these operations. At dusk H.M.S. Penn, Aldenham and Blencathra arrived in Alinda Bay and attacked enemy positions on Leros. Unfortunately only three caiques were found in the bay and these were also engaged, but during the whole time that the naval force was patrolling it was repeatedly attacked by enemy aircraft and after having searched for an enemy convoy reported by Leros and having failed to find it the force returned to the Mandalya Gulf by daylight. Meanwhile H.M.S. Echo had managed to get her two hundred and fifty troops from Samos into Porto Lago before daylight, but H.M.S. Belvoir owing to her slower speed was unable to make the passage in time and had to return and lie up off the Turkish coast with her reinforcements still on board.

No.201 Group
O.R.B.

H.M.S. Echo
Proceedings.

Just before daylight on the 15th some motor torpedo boats who had been patrolling in the area joined H.M.S. Echo as she

-
- (1) 30 Dakota sorties were made between 14 and 16 November by aircraft of No.216 Group.
(2) Leros Fortress H.Q.

German Ops.
Leros.

was returning from Porto Lago in attacking an enemy force which was approaching Alinda Bay and sank an 'F' lighter and two landing barges all laden with troops. At about the same time the British forces on Leros attacked towards S.Quaranta from the north and south but without success and this was the last British counter attack of any strength. During that afternoon German troops occupied the town of Leros and a general mopping up process was initiated, particularly south of Alinda Bay. During the night the Germans brought in a further reinforcement of some 300 men and made additional progress. In view of the fact that H.M.S. Penn and Echo had been shadowed continually by aircraft during the night of the 14/15th and bombed from time to time, the force had been ordered to remain at instant readiness in Turkish waters during the night 15/16th, and to act on enemy reports in the hope that enemy forces would be committed to a landing and could then be intercepted. But owing to the breakdown of wireless communication on Leros, reports of enemy landing craft relayed through Alexandria reached H.M.S. Penn too late for action to be taken on them and the dawn sweep ordered by the C.-in-C. Levant produced no enemy sighting. In fact, had the Commanding Officer of H.M.S. Penn acted as soon as he received the report it is possible that he might have interfered with the landing craft off the beaches in Alinda Bay. On the night of the 15th minesweepers and motor torpedo boats landed the troops from H.M.S. Belvoir in Porto Lago. H.M.S. Echo and Belvoir left the Aegean as they were short of fuel and H.M.S. Fury, Exmoor and O.R.P. Krakowiak arrived to take their place.

H.M.S. Penn
report of
proceedings.

German Ops.
Leros.

During the day 16 November the Germans made general progress in different parts of the island. A small British counter attack on Moraviglia was repulsed. Isolated parties of British troops were mopped up and that evening Brigadier Tilney was captured and the British and Italian forces surrendered. Earlier, six Baltimores on reconnaissance had reported a convoy consisting of one Siebel Ferry, an 'F' boat and another vessel off Levitha. Eight Beaufighters were sent to attack it. The convoy was located about three miles west of Calino, with an air escort of seven Arado 196's, four Ju.88's and four Me.109's. The Beaufighters attacked with cannon before the enemy aircraft had time to intervene. The Siebel Ferry was blown up, leaving only burning wreckage and two large columns of black smoke. In the ensuing fight four Beaufighters were lost, but the Germans lost one Ju.88.

No. 201
Group O.R.B.

Luftwaffe
Operational
Losses
South Eastern
Command
16 Nov.

On the night of the 16th H.M.S. Exmoor and O.R.P. Krakowiak who had been ordered to Samos to transfer the Greek Sacred Squadron to Leros rejoined H.M.S. Fury in the Gulf of Mandalya. H.M.S. Penn and Aldenhams's bombardment of the Alinda Bay area had had to be cancelled so that they bombarded Cos Harbour instead on their way south to join H.M.S. Blencathra who was towing H.M.S. Rockwood from the Gulf of Cos to Alexandria.

It was estimated that by 16 November the Germans had landed over 3,000 troops in the Island of Leros, of which approximately one third had been brought in by air. The bulk of the 2,000 sea borne force came from Cos and Calino where it had remained since the Cos operation in readiness for the attack on Leros, but it was believed that possibly some 500 additional troops may have been brought up from the Greek mainland for the assault. The parachutists were in all probability flown from Athens.

C.A.F. in
Aegean campaign
in file
Ops. agst.
Cos, Leros
and Samos
CC/80/5

The assault on Leros, on 12 November had been preceded by two days of fairly heavy bombing during which attacks were mainly directed against anti-aircraft and coast defence positions in the Alinda and Gurna Bay areas. On 10 November sixty-five bomber sorties were made, of which twenty were by Ju.87s. On the following day no Ju.87's operated, but thirty-nine Ju.88's attacked the island and six Do.217's each carrying two radio-controlled bombs, attacked British Naval units at first and last light.

Luftwaffe
Operational
Losses. South
Eastern Command
12 Nov.

On the day of the assault, 135 bomber sorties were made against the island, of which 50 were made by Ju.87 dive bombers. The Luftwaffe, however, lost two Ju.88's, one Ju.87, one Ju.53 and an Arado 196. There was a slight decline in effort for the next day (125 sorties) owing to the bad weather, but on 14, 15 and 16 November an average of almost 150 sorties each day was maintained, for the loss of only five aircraft.

Ibid
13, 14, 15
Nov.

As in the case of Cos, the absence of air opposition made it possible for bombers and dive bombers to operate uninterruptedly over the target by day. In this way they were able to achieve maximum disruptive effect by remaining over the area and making more than one bombing run on each sortie, thus doubling or trebling, in the eyes of the defenders, the apparent strength of the force employed. This fact probably accounts for reports from the defenders on the Island that 255 bomber sorties were made against them on 15 November and 460 on 16 November.

Extracts from
Daily opera-
tional Report
to Luftwaffe
Operations
Staff Io

In the course of the five days operations from 12 to 16 November the German Air Force was estimated to have dropped an average of about 125 tons of bombs each day on Leros. In addition about 200 small anti-personnel bomb containers were dropped on 14 November, but this was the only occasion on which these appear to have been used.

Ibid
12 Nov.

Parachutists were dropped on 12 November and again the following day, seventy-six Ju.52's being employed on the first occasion and sixteen on the second. The exact number of parachutists carried is not known, but it was estimated to have been about six hundred on the first and two hundred on the second drop. Single engined fighter effort was on a small scale, owing to the lack of air opposition. On the first day of the attack, single and twin engined fighters were employed in force to provide escort to shipping, transport aircraft and Ju.87's, but on subsequent days fighter effort was limited to patrols by small sections of two to four Me.109's operating from Greek airfields.

As soon as resistance ceased on Leros, the bomber effort was switched to Samos, and on 17 November about 75 sorties were made against the island, principally on the ports. However, no further attacks were made, and the only other bomber activity until 22 November, when Samos was occupied by the Germans, (the British forces having already been evacuated) consisted of an attack on an Allied Naval force south of Castorosso on 19 November, and a small raid on Castorosso harbour the same day. German air forces in the Aegean area were then withdrawn to their main bases in Greece, presumably to rest and refit.

SECRET

1

APPENDIX 1

G.A.F. South Eastern Command

Order of Battle 31 August 1943

UNIT	TYPE OF A/C	STRENGTH	SERVICEABLE	LOCATION
<u>Close recce</u>				
Stab N.A. Gr. 2	Me.109	4	4	Greece
2/2	Me.109	15	11	"
3/2	Me.110	10	9	"
N.A. St. Kroatien	Hs.126	15	-	Croatia
	Do.17	3	-	"
<u>Long range recce</u>				
2/(F) 123	Ju.88	17	10	Greece
	Me.109	4	4	"
	Ju. 86	2	-	"
<u>S.E. fighters</u>				
I/J.G.4	Me.109	51	36	Rumania
Stab J.G.27	Me.109	2	2	Tanagra, Greece
IV/J.G.27	Me.109	27	22	" "
<u>Night fighters</u>				
IV/N.J.G. 6	Me.110	20	15	Rumania
<u>T.E. fighters</u>				
11/Z.G.26	Ju.88	13	9	Greece
<u>Bombers</u>				
15/K.G.53	Do.17	15	5	Croatia
<u>Dive Bombers</u>				
Stab St.G. 3	Ju.87	3	3	Greece
I/St. G. 3	Ju.87	40	35	"
II/St. G. 3	Ju.87	32	30	"
<u>Transport</u>				
I/T.G.4	Ju.52	48	33	Greece
Part of II/T.G.4	Ju.52	7	-	"
See Tr. St. 1	Ju.52 See	11	5	"
Kdo. S.O. Trans. St.	Ju.52	3	3	"
<u>Coastal</u>				
2/S.A.G.125	Ar.196	12	10	Greece & Crete
Stab S.A.G.126	Bv.138	1	1	" " "
I/S.A.G.126	Ar.196	12	10	" " "
2/S.A.G.126	Ar.196	11	9	" " "
3/S.A.G.126	Ar.196	10	5	" " "

SECRET

2

APPENDIX 1

G.A.F. South Eastern Command

Order of Battle 20 October 1943

UNIT	TYPE OF A/C	STRENGTH	SERVICEABLE	LOCATION
<u>Close recce</u>				
Stab N.A.G. 2	Me.109	3	2	Greece
2/2	Me.109	11	10	"
3/2	Me.110	8	5	"
Gr.12 1/12	Me.109	12	4	"
<u>Long range recce</u>				
2/(F) 123	Ju.88	8	2	"
	Me.109	1	-	"
Part of 1/(F) 122	Ju.88	4	2	"
<u>S.E. fighters</u>				
I/J.G. 4	Me.109	47	39	Rumania
Stab J.G. 27	Me.109	4	3	Greece
III/J.G. 27	Me.109	30	28	"
IV/J.G. 27	Me.109	21	17	"
10/J.G. 301	Me.109	11	4	Rumania
<u>Night fighters</u>				
IV/N.J.G.6	Me.110	22	17	Rumania
<u>T.E. fighters</u>				
11/Z.G. 26	Ju.88	4	3	
<u>Dive bombers</u>				
Stab S.G. 3	Ju.87	2	1	Greece
I/S.G. 3	Ju.87	29	20	"
II/S.G. 3	Ju.87	25	20	"
<u>Bombers</u>				
II/K.G. 6	Ju.88	15	10	Greece
II/K.G. 51	Ju.88	18	11	"
15/K.G. 53	Do.17	17	4	Croatia
<u>Transport</u>				
I/T.G. 4	Ju.52	41	29	Greece
II/T.G. 4	Ju.52	48	36	"
1/See Tr. St.	Ju.52	10	9	"
<u>Coastal</u>				
Stab S.A.G. 126	Bv.138	1	-	"
1/S.A.G. 126	Ar.196	15	11	"
2/S.A.G. 126	Ar.196	15	11	"
3/S.A.G. 126	Ar.196	8	6	"
4/S.A.G. 126	Ar.196	8	5	"
2/S.A.G. 125	Ar.196	8	6	"

SECRET

3

APPENDIX I

G.A.F. South Eastern Command

Order of Battle 10 November 1943

UNIT	TYPE OF A/C	STRENGTH	SERVICEABLE	LOCATION
<u>Close recce</u>				
Stab N.A. Gr.2	Me.109	2	2	Croatia
2/2	Me.109	9	8	"
3/2	Me.110	8	5	Greece
Stab N.A. Gr.12	Me.109	3	2	Albania
1/12	Me.109	7	5	"
2/12	Me.109	11	7	"
N.A.St. Kroatien	Hs.126	9	9	Croatia
	Do.17	4	2	"
<u>Long range recce</u>				
1/(F) 122	Ju. 88	6	4	"
2/(F) 123	Ju. 88	12	7	"
	Me.109	2	0	"
<u>S.E. fighters</u>				
4/J.G.4	Me.109	7	7	Rumania
Stab J.G.27	Me.109	3	3	Greece
III/J.G.27	Me.109	35	33	"
IV/J.G.27	Me.109	31	29	"
III/J.G.77	Me.109	37	31	Rumania (from Italy)
10/J.G.301	Me.109	12	5	"
<u>Night fighters</u>				
IV/N.J.G. 6	Me.110	26	21	Rumania
<u>T.E. fighters</u>				
11/Z.G. 26	Ju. 88	16	10	Greece
<u>Dive bombers</u>				
Stab S.G.3	Ju.87	2	2	Rhodes
I/S.G.3	Ju.87	33	31	Croatia
II/S.G.3	Ju.87	26	22	Rhodes
<u>Night ground attack</u>				
1/N.S. Gr. 7	He. 46	19	16	Croatia
2/N.S. Gr. 7	He.126	11	7	"

SECRET

4

APPENDIX I

Order of Battle 10 November 1943 (Contd.)

UNIT	TYPE OF A/C	STRENGTH	SERVICEABLE	LOCATION
<u>Bombers</u>				
Stab L.G. 1	Ju. 88	1	1	Greece
I/L.G. 1	Ju. 88	14	10	"
III/L.G. 1	Ju. 88	34	28	"
II/K.G. 51	Ju. 88	28	20	"
5/K.G. 100	Do. 217	10	8	"
15/K.G. 53	Do. 17	7	3	"
<u>Transport</u>				
I/T.G. 4	Ju. 52	42	33	"
II/T.G. 4	Ju. 52	41	37	"
Seestaffel 1	Ju. 52	9	5	"
<u>Coastal</u>				
2/SAG 125	Ar. 196	6	6	"
Stab SAG 126	Bv. 138	1	1	"
I/SAG 126	Ar. 196	12	8	"
2/SAG 126	Ar. 196	12	7	"
3/SAG 126	Ar. 196	10	5	"
4/SAG 126	Ar. 196	9	7	"

28.9.43.

ORDER OF BATTLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST COMMAND as at 28th September 1943

Reference:- A.H.B./ILJ1/31/1

UNIT	BASE	ADV.	AIRCRAFT	I.E. FUNCTION	REMARKS
<u>HEADQUARTERS, ROYAL AIR FORCE, MIDDLE EAST - CAIRO</u>					(Operational control:- H.Q., Mediterranean Air Command)
4 M.E.T.S.	c/o R.A.F. Station Ramat David		Hudson III/IV/VI Wellington IC/Vars	6 Training	Parachute School. Admin. control:- A.H.Q., Levant
148 Squadron	Tocra		Liberator II/ Halifax II	+14 plus 4 I.R.	Special Duties. Admin control- AHQ/AD.EM. (through 212 Group) Det. in Tunisia. + Temporary I.E. 20
162 Squadron	L.G.91		(Wellington IC/ Blenheim V Wellington III (R.C.M.) (R.D.F.))	15 Signals	Admin. control:- 201 Group, Dets. at Gambut, L.G. 207, and in the Levant.
680 Squadron	L.G.219 Matariya		Spitfire V/XI/ Various	12 Photo/Recce	Admin. control:-AHQ/AD.EM. (212 Group) Detachments at Tocra and Cyprus
<u>214 GROUP</u>	<u>TRIFOLI (Lib.)</u>			<u>ADMINISTRATIVE</u>	Admin. and Technical control of all units in Tripolitania except those of H.Q., D.A.F. 201, 205, 210 and 216 Groups. Admin. (only) 210 Group
"F" Beach Balloon Det.	Tripoli			Balloons	
5 Beach Balloon Det.	Tripoli			Balloons	Operational control H.Q. M.E.
6 Beach Balloon Det.	Tripoli			Balloons	" " " "
1564 Met. Flight	Tripoli (Lib.)		Hurricane I/II	4 Meteorology	

(8516)59

SECRET

SECRET

APPENDIX 2

UNIT	BASE	ADV.	AIRCRAFT	I.E. FUNCTION	REMARKS
<u>H.Q. R.A.F., M.E. -- CAIRO (Continued)</u>					
<u>216 Air Transport and Ferry Group</u>	<u>Heliopolis</u>	La Marsa (Tunis) X		<u>Ferry Transport and Communication</u>	X. Advance Group HQ under control of Rear 216 Group <u>Det. also with Adv. H.Q., D.A.F.</u>
1 M.E. Check and Conversion Unit	Bilbeis		Baltimore/Kittyhawk Harvard/Spitfire/ Blenheim/Vars.	38 Training	
17 Squadron SAAF	Bilbeis		Ventura	16 G.R. (Sht. Rge) (Ex. Lt. Bomber)	(Some personnel employed on Check and Conversion duties. To convert to Transport Duties shortly at 30 I.E.
28 Squadron SAAF	Castel Benito		Wellington IC/Anson/ Dakota I	30 Transport	(Det. at Ras el Ma (Fex), (Tunis and Catania. (Re-arming Dakota aircraft.
117 Squadron	Catania (S)		Hudson VI/Dakota I	30 Transport	Det. Bilbeis, Re-arming Dakota aircraft
173 Squadron	Heliopolis		Lodestar/Anson/Various	33 Communication	
216 Squadron	Cairo West		Dakota I (C.47)	30 Transport	
267 Squadron	Cairo West		Dakota I/II	30 Transport	Det. at El Ouina (Tunis)
1567 Met. Flight	Geneina		(To get Hurricane I)	4 Meteorology	Forming
<u>203 GROUP</u>	<u>HELIOPOLIS</u>				<u>OPERATIONAL AND ADMIN. CONTROL OF O.T.U'S</u> <u>CENTRAL GUNNERY SCHOOL 3 and 5 M.E.T.S.</u> M.E.T.S.
6 Squadron	Fayid		Hurricane IID/IV	16 Fighter Recce	(Ex. Tk.B). Admin. control:- 206 Group
RAF Central Gunnery School (Formerly 1 MEES)	Ballah		Hurricane I/II/ Harvard/Vars	54 Training	Central Gunnery and Bombing School

(8516)64

SECRET

UNIT	BASE	ADV.	AIRCRAFT	I.E.	FUNCTION	REMARKS
<u>H.Q. R.A.F., M.E. - CAIRO (Continued)</u>						
<u>203 Group (Contd.)</u>						
70 O.T.U.	Shandur		Baltimore/Blenheim/ Vars	66	O.T.U.	
71 O.T.U.	Ismailia		Hurricane/Harvard/ Vars	89	O.T.U.	Hurricane O.T.U.
73 O.T.U.	Abu Sueir		Harvard/Spitfire/ Kittyhawk/Tomahawk	116	O.T.U.	Training of S.E. Fighter and Conversion
74 O.T.U.	Peta Tiqua		Hurricane/Harvard/ Spitfire	27	O.T.U.	Army Co-operation and P.R.
75 O.T.U.	Gianaclis		Anson/Blenheim Baltimore/Vars	110	O.T.U.	Included T.E. Conversion and Refresher Flt.
76 O.T.U.	Aquir		Wellington/Blenheim		Training	Medium Bombers
5 M.E.T.S.	Shallufa		Beaufort I/Wellington (T-B)/Vars	30	Training	Torpedoes
<u>206 GROUP</u>	<u>HELIOPOLIS</u>				<u>MASTER MAINTENANCE</u>	
<u>276 WING</u>	<u>SUEZ ROAD</u>				<u>SIGNALS</u>	<u>ADMIN. CONTROL:- AHQ/AD.EM</u>
<u>283 WING</u>	<u>KHARTOUM</u>				<u>ADMIN. WING</u>	Operational and Admin. con- trol of all RAF Units in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Eritrea except operational control of 216 Group Units in this area
1412 Met. Flight	Khartoum		Gladiator I/II	4	Meteorology	
Comm. Flight	Khartoum		Various	6	Communication-	

SECRET
3

APPENDIX 2

28.9.43

(8516)82

UNIT	BASE	ADV.	AIRCRAFT	I.E. FUNCTION	REMARKS
		<u>A.H.Q., AIR DEFENCES - EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN (Rear) CAIRO</u> <u>(Advanced) Nicosia (Cyprus) X</u>			<u>X (Operating Squadrons in Cyprus)</u>
26 A.A.C.U.	El Firdan		Fulmar/Maryland/ Hurricane/Vars		Calibration Unit. Searchlights, A.M.E.S., etc. Balloons Dets. at Haifa, Mariut, Mellaha (Tripoli) and Berka
680 Squadron	Cyprus		Spitfire V/XI	P.R.U.	
<u>237 Wing</u>	<u>LAKATAMIA (Cyprus)</u>				<u>Formed for temporary duties only. Operational control:- HQ/AD.EM. Admin. control:- 201 Gp. Thro' 259 Wing</u>
227 Squadron	Lakatamia		Beaufighter VI/IX	16	T.E. Day Fighter
252 Squadron	Lakatamia		Beaufighter I/VI/IX	16	T.E. Day Fighter
294 Air/Sea Rescue Sqn. Det.	"		Various		
<u>243 Wing</u>	<u>COS (Dodecanese Isles)</u>				<u>Formed for temporary duties only</u>
7 Sqn. SAAF	Cos		Spitfire V	16	S.E. Fighter
<u>259 WING</u>	<u>NICOSIA</u>				<u>ADMINISTRATIVE (For Cyprus) Loaned from AHQ/Levant temporarily</u>

SECRET

SECRET

4

APPENDIX 2

(8516) 63

SECRET

UNIT	BASE	ADV.	AIRCRAFT	I.E.FUNCTION	REMARKS
<u>A.H.Q., A.D., E.M. (CAIRO) Continued</u>					
<u>260 WING</u>					
	<u>ISMALIA</u>			<u>BALLOONS</u>	
971 Squadron	Alexandria			45 Balloons	
973 Squadron	Haifa, Det. at Beirut (Syria)			45 Balloons	Admin. control:- AHQ/Levant
974 Squadron	Gensifa			75 Balloons	
976 Squadron	Tripoli (Lib)			45 Balloons	Admin. control:- 214 Gp. through 210 Gp.
980 Squadron	El Firdan			90 Balloons	
<u>212 GROUP</u>					
	<u>BENINA</u>			<u>FIGHTER (ONLY)</u>	<u>Defence Benghazi, Tobruk, Cyrenaica littoral and Convoys</u>
33 Squadron	Bersis		Hurricane IIC	16 S.E. Fighter	
41 Squadron	Bu Amud		Hurricane IIB	16 S.E. Fighter	
80 Squadron	Derna		Spitfire VC/IX	16 S.E. Fighter	Dets. at Savoia and Bu Amud
94 Squadron	Savoia (Cyrene)		Hurricane IIC	16 S.E. Fighter	
123 Squadron	Bu Amud		Hurricane IIC	16 S.E. Fighter	
134 Squadron	Bersis		Hurricane IIB	16 S.E. Fighter	(Ex.Lt. Bomber). Trained in incendiary bombing
178 Squadron	(see under 9th U.S.A.F.)			Heavy Bomber	Operational control:- 9th U.S. Bomber Com. Admin. control:- 212 Group
274 Squadron Det.	Derna			S.E. Fighter	(F-B)
462 Squadron	(see under 9th U.S.A.F.)			Heavy Bomber	Operational control:- 9th U.S. Bomber Com Admin. control:- 212 Group
680 Squadron Det.	Tocra		Spitfire/Various	P.R.U.	Operated through HQ/ME
1563 Met. Flight	Benina		Hurricane IIB	4 Meteorology	

5

SECRET

APPENDIX 2

UNIT	BASE	ADV.	AIRCRAFT	I.E. FUNCTION	REMARKS
<u>A.H.Q., A.D., E.M. (CAIRO) Continued</u>					
<u>210 GROUP</u>	<u>TRIPOLI (Lib)</u>				<u>OFFENSIVE FIGHTERS. Responsible for Tripoli-tania Static Defences and Coastal Shipping Admin. control by 214 Group</u>
3 Squadron SAAF	Mellaha (Tripoli)		Hurricane IIB	16	S.E. Fighter
<u>219 GROUP</u>	<u>ALEXANDRIA</u>				<u>AIR DEFENCES OF EGYPT AND FORTS AND SHIPPING FROM SOLLUM TO PALESTINE FRONTIER</u>
46 Squadron Det.	Edu		Beaufighter XI		T.E. Night Fighter
74 Squadron	Edu + Cos (Dodecanese)		Hurricane IIB/Spitfire VB/C	16	S.E. Fighter. Det. Nicosia. + Sqn. moving Cyprus 29.9.43
89 Squadron	Edu St. Jean (Det.)		Beaufighter VI	16	T.E. Night Fighter. Sqn. moving to Ceylon shortly
108 Squadron Det.	Edu		Beaufighter VI/VIII	16	T.E. Night Fighter
213 Squadron Det.	Edu		Hurricane IIC		S.E. Fighter
237 (Rhodesian) Sqn.	Edu		Hurricane IIC	18	S.E. Fighter. Ex. Fighter Recce
238 Squadron	Port Said (Gamil)		Spitfire VC/LX	16	S.E. Fighter. Det. Edu
335 (Hellenic) Sqn.	L. G. 8		Hurricane IIB/C	16	S.E. Fighter. To re-arm Hurricane IIC
336 (Hellenic) Sqn.	L. G. 121		Hurricane IIC	16	S.E. Fighter
451 Squadron RAAF	L. G. 106		Hurricane IIC/Typhoon	18	S.E. Fighter Ex Fighter Recce. To re-arm Spitfire V
<u>209 GROUP</u>	<u>HAIFA</u>				<u>STATIC FIGHTER. Operational control of Units only Levant littoral and Convoys. Admin. control:- Joint AHQ's AD/EM - Levant</u>
46 Squadron	Nicosia (Cyprus)		Beaufighter XI	16	T.E. Night Fighter Det. Edu.
89 Squadron	St. Jean		Beaufighter VI		T.E. Night Fighter

SECRET

SECRET
6

APPENDIX 2

(8516)65

UNIT	BASE	ADV.	AIRCRAFT	I.E.	FUNCTION	REMARKS
209 GROUP (Contd.)			<u>A.H.Q., A.D., E.M., CAIRO (Continued)</u>			
127 Squadron	St. Jean		Hurricane IIC/Spit- fire VC	18	S.E. Fighter	Admin. control:- AHQ/Levant. Dets. at Beirut and Nicosia (Cyprus). Temporarily opera- ting at 18 I.E. plus 3 I.R.
208 Squadron	(see AHQ Levant)					
213 Squadron	Paphos (Cyprus)		Hurricane IIC	16	S.E. Fighter.	Det. Edcu.
274 Squadron	Paphos (Cyprus)		Hurricane IIC	16	S.E. Fighter.	Det. Derna.

SECRET

SECRET

(8516)66

ORDER OF BATTLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST COMMAND AS AT 26 OCTOBER 1943

Reference: - R.H.B./IIJ1/31/1

UNIT	BASE	ADV.	AIRCRAFT	I.E.	FUNCTION	REMARKS
<u>HEADQUARTERS, ROYAL AIR FORCE, MIDDLE EAST. - CAIRO</u>						
						<u>(Operational control:- H.Q., Mediterranean Air Command)</u>
4 M.E.T.S	c/o R.A.F. Station Ramat David		Hudson III/IV/VI Wellington IC/ Vars	6	Training	Parachute School. Admin. control:- A.H.Q. Levant
148 Squadron	Toora		Liberator II/ Halifax II	+14 plus 4 I.R.		Special Duties. Admin. control:- A.H.Q/AD.EM. (Through 212 Group) + Temporary I.E.20
162 Squadron	L. G. 91		(Wellington IC/ Blenheim V. Wellington III/ Mosquito VI	15	Signals	Admin. control:- 201 Group. Dets at Gambut, L.G.207, and in the Levant. 1 Flight R.C.M. 9 I.E. 1 Flight R.D.F. 6 I.E.
624 Squadron	Protville		Venturas & Halifax	-		Special Ops. Admin. M.A.A.F.
680 Squadron	L. G. 219 Matariya		Spitfire V/XI	15	Photo Recco	Admin. control:- AHQ/AD.EM (212 Group) Detachments at Toora and Nicosia. Re-arming Spitfire XI's
<u>216 AIR TRANSPORT AND FERRY GROUP</u>		<u>HELIOPOLIS</u>		<u>NAPLES Area *</u>		<u>FERRY TRANSPORT & COMMUNICATION *</u>
1 M.E. Check and Conversion Unit	Bilbeis		Baltimore/Kittyhawk Harvard/Spitfire/ Blenheim/Vars	62	Training	Advance Group HQ under control of Rear 216 Group. <u>Det. also with Adv. H.Q., D.A.F. (C.M.F.)</u>

SECRET

8

SECRET

APPENDIX 2

(8516)67

SECRET

UNIT	BASE	ADV.	AIRCRAFT	I.E.	FUNCTION	REMARKS
<u>H.Q., R.A.F., M.E. - CAIRO (Continued)</u>						
17 Squadron SAAF	Bilbeis		Ventura	16	G.R. (Sht.Rnge) (Ex Lt. Bomber)	Moving to St. Jean shortly.
28 Squadron SAAF	Castel Benito		Wellington IG/Anson Dakota I.	30	Transport	(Dets. at Lecce(Italy). SETAF and OIJDA. (Re-arming Dakota aircraft.
117 Squadron	Catania (S)		Dakota I	30	Transport	Det. Bilbeis. Transfer to Karachi (India) to be completed by November 1.
173 Squadron	Heliopolis		Lodestar/Anson/ Beechcraft/	33	Communication	
216 "	Cairo West		Dakota I (G.47)	30	Transport	
267 "	Cairo West		Dakota I/II	30	Transport	Det. at El Ouina. (Tunis)
1567 Met. Flight	Gensina		Hurricane I	4	Meteorology	
<u>203 GROUP</u>	<u>HELIOPOLIS</u>					<u>OPERATIONAL AND ADMIN CONTROL OF O.T.U.s. CENTRAL GUNNERY SCHOOL, 3 and 5 M.E.T.S.</u>
6 Squadron	Fayid		Hurricane IV	16	Fighter Recce	Operational control 203 Group during training period. (Ex.Tk.B.) Admin. control 206 Group.
RAF Central Gunnery School. (Formerly 1 METS)	Ballah		Hurricane I/II Blenheims/Spitfires Baltimores	114	Training	Central Gunnery and Bombing School
70 O.T.U.	Shandur		Baltimore/Blenheim/ Vars	66	O.T.U.	
71 O.T.U.	Ismailia		Hurricane/Harvard/ Vars	89	O.T.U.	Hurricane O.T.U.

SECRET
9

APPENDIX 2

UNIT	BASE	ADV.	AIRCRAFT	I.E.	FUNCTION	REMARKS
<u>H.Q., R.A.F., M.E. - CAIRO (Continued)</u>						
73 O.T.U.	Abu Sueir		Harvard/Spitfire/ Kittyhawk/Tomahawk	116	O.T.U.	Training of S.E. Fighter and conversion
74 O.T.U.	Peta Tikva		Hurricane/Harvard Spitfire	27	O.T.U.	Army Co-operation and P.R.
75 O.T.U.	Gianaclis		Anson/Blenheim/ Baltimore/Vars	110	O.T.U.	Includes T.R. Conversion & Refresher Flight
76 O.T.U.	Aquir		Wellington/ Blenheim	43	Training	Medium Bombers
5 M.E.T.S.	Shallufa		Beaufort I/ Wellington (T-B) /Vars	30	Training	Torpedoes
<u>206 GROUP</u>	<u>HELIOFOLIS</u>				<u>MASTER MAINTENANCE</u>	
<u>233 WING</u>	<u>TRIPOLI</u>					<u>OPERATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROL OF ALL R.A.F. UNITS LOCATED IN TRIPOLITANIA WITH THE EXCEPTION OF UNITS AT H.Q., A.D.E.M. (3 S.A. Sqn. Excepted), 204, 214 & 216 GPS.</u>
1564 Met. Flight	Tripoli		Hurricane II	4	Meteorology	
<u>240 WING</u>	<u>TERRIA</u>				<u>HEAVY BOMBER</u>	Admin. HQ.ADEM Through 212 Group
178 Squadron	"		Liberator II/III	16	" "	Re-arming Liberator IIIs
462 Squadron	"		Halifax II	16	" "	To be re-armed Liberator IIIs
<u>276 WING</u>	<u>SUEZ ROAD</u>				<u>SIGNALS</u>	ADMIN. CONTROL:- AHQ/AD.EM.
<u>283 WING</u>	<u>KHARTOUM</u>				<u>ADMIN. WING</u>	<u>Operational and Admin. control of all R.A.F. Units in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan and Eritrea, except operational control of 216 Group, Units in this area.</u>

(8516)69

SECRET

UNIT	BASE	ADV	AIRCRAFT	I.E.	FUNCTION	REMARKS
<u>H.Q., R.A.F., M.E. - CAIRO (Continued)</u>						
1412 Met. Flight	Khartoum		Hurricane II	4	Meteorology	
Comm. Flight	Khartoum		Various	5	Communication	
<u>A.H.Q., AIR DEFENCES -- EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN -- CAIRO</u>						
3 Squadron	Mellaha (Tripoli)		Hurricane IIC	16	S.E. Fighter	Admin. 233 Wing
26 A.A.C.U.	El Firdan		Fulmar/Maryland/ Hurricane/Vars		Calibration Unit	Searchlights, A.M.E.S. etc. Balloons Dets. at Haifa, Mariut
230 Squadron Det	Aboukir		Sunderland III		Flying Boat	Operated A.D.E.M. through 201 Group Admin. A.D.E.M. (See A.H.Q., E.A.)
680 Squadron Det	Cyprus		Spitfire V/XI		P.R.U.	
<u>237 WING</u>	<u>LAKATAMIA</u> (Cyprus)					<u>Formed for temporary duties only.</u> <u>Operational control:- HQ/AD.EM. Admin.</u> <u>control:- 201 Group Through 259 Wing</u>
227 Squadron	Lakatamia		Beaufighter VI/IX	16	S.E. Day Fighter	
252 Squadron (Air Echelon only)	Lakatamia		Beaufighter I/VI/IX			See 201 Group
294 Air/Sea Rescue Sqn. Det.	"		Various			

SECRET

APPENDIX 2

(8516)70

SECRET

UNIT	BASE	ADV.	AIRCRAFT	I.E.	FUNCTION	REMARKS
<u>A.H.Q., A.D., E.M. (CAIRO) Continued</u>						
<u>260 WING</u>	<u>ISMAILIA</u>				<u>BALLOONS</u>	
971 Squadron	Alexandria			45	Balloons	
973 "	Haifa, Det. at Beirut (Syria)			45	Balloons	Admin. control:- AHQ/Levant
974 "	Geneifa			75	Balloons	
976 "	Tripoli (Lib.)			45	Balloons	Admin. control:- 233 Wing
980 "	El Firdan			90	Balloons	
<u>212 GROUP</u>	<u>BENINA</u>				<u>FIGHTER DEFENSIVE.</u>	<u>Defence Benghazi, Tobruk, Cyrenaica, Littoral and Convoys</u>
33 Squadron	Bersis		Hurricane IIC	16	S.E. Fighter	
41 " SAAF	Bu Amud		Hurricane IIB/IIC	16	S.E. Fighter	
80 "	Savoia		Spitfire VG/IX	16	S.E. Fighter	
94 "	Savoia		Hurricane IIC	16	S.E. Fighter	
123 "	Bu Amud		Hurricane IIC	16	S.E. Fighter	To move shortly to L.G. 207 prior to move India
134 "	Bersis		Hurricane IIB	16	S.E. Fighter	" " " " " " " "
178 "	(See under H.Q. M.E.)				Heavy Bomber	Operational control:- H.Q. M.E. Admin. control:- A.D. E.M. through 212 Group
462 "	" " "				" "	" " " " " "
680 Squadron Det	Tocra		Spitfire/Various		P.R.U.	Operated through HQ/ME
1563 Met. Flight	Benina		Hurricane I/II	4	Meteorology	
<u>219 GROUP</u>	<u>ALEXANDRIA</u>					<u>AIR DEFENCES OF EGYPT AND PORTS AND SHIPPING FROM SOLLUM TO PALESTINE FRONTIER</u>

SECRET
12

APPENDIX 2

(8516)71

SECRET

UNIT	BASE	ADV.	AIRCRAFT	I.E.	FUNCTION	REMARKS
<u>A.H.Q., A.D., E.M. CAIRO</u>) Continued						
7 S.A.Sqn.	Gamil		Spitfire VC	16	S.E. Fighter	Moving to Savoia shortly
46 Squadron	Edcu		Beaufighter VIII/IX	24	(T.E. Night Fighter	(Established on a 3 Flight basis; (108 Squadron Det. merged 22/9/43. Det. Lakatamia
74 Squadron	Edcu		Spitfire VB/C/IX	16	S.E. Fighter	Det. Nicosia
213 Squadron Det	Edcu		Hurricane IIC		S.E. Fighter	
237 (Rhodesian) Sqn.	Edcu		Hurricane IIC	16	S.E. Fighter	Ex Fighter Recce. Moving NAAF shortly
238 Squadron	Gamil		Spitfire VC/IX	16	S.E. Fighter	<u>Det. EDCU</u>
274 Squadron	Edcu		Spitfire VC	16	S.E. Fighter	
335 (Hellenic) Sqn.	L.G.8		Hurricane IIC/Spit- fire VB	16	S.E. Fighter	
336 (Hellenic) Sqn.	L.G.121		Hurricane IIC/Spit- fire VB	16	S.E. Fighter	
451 Squadron RAAF	L.G.106		Spitfire VC	18	S.E. Fighter	
<u>209 GROUP</u>	<u>HAIFA</u>				<u>STATIC FIGHTER.</u>	<u>Operational control of Units only</u> <u>Levant littoral and Convoys. Admin. Control:-</u> <u>Joint A.H.Q.s AD/EM - Levant</u>
46 Squadron Det		Lakatamia	Beaufighter VI/IX			
74 Squadron Det			Spitfire VC/IX			
127 Squadron	St. Jean		Hurricane IIC	16	S.E. Fighter	Admin. control AHQ Levant. <u>Dets.</u> at Beirut and Nicosia (Cyprus)
213 Squadron		Paphos	Hurricane IIC	1	S.E. Fighter	<u>Det. EDCU</u>
<u>201 GROUP - ALEXANDRIA. NAVAL CO-OPERATION - EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AREA</u>						
Comm. Flight	Mariut		Beechcraft/Wellington/ Blenheim/Various	7	Communication	(201 Group)

SECRET
13

APPENDIX 2

UNIT	BASE	ADV.	AIRCRAFT	I.E.	FUNCTION	REMARKS
<u>201 GROUP ALEXANDRIA (Continued)</u>						
<u>235 WING</u>	<u>GAMBUT 3</u>	<u>Det. L.G. 7</u>				<u>NAVAL CO-OPERATION (TOBRUK AREA)</u>
13 (Hellenic) Sqr.	Gambut 3		Blenheim V/Baltimore IIIA/IV	16	G.R.	(short range)
15 Squadron SAAF	L.G.7		Baltimore III/IIIA/IV	16	G.R.	(short range) Originally Light bombers
47 Squadron Echelon at	Gambut 3		Beaufighter X		T.E.	Fighter
459 Squadron RAAF	Gambut 3		Hudson IIIA/V/VI	16	G.R.	(short range). To re-arm Ventura. Det. at L.G.07.
603 Squadron	Gambut 3		Beaufighter X/X T.F.	16	T.E.	Fighter
<u>245 WING</u>	<u>ST. JEAN</u>	<u>Det. at L.G.91</u>				<u>NAVAL CO-OPERATION (Control of Reconnaissance and striking Force Units under 201 Group) (from Turkish border to Delta)</u>
1 G.R.U.	Ismailia		Wellington D.W.IA/IC	3	G.R.	
38 Squadron Det's	St. Jean and L.G.91		Wellington VIII/IX		G.R./T.B.	
162 Squadron		L.G.91			Signals	See H.Q., M.E.
294 Squadron		L.G.91	Wellington IC/Walrus/ Various	12	Air/Sea Rescue Det's	Berks 3 and Lakatamia
454 Squadron RAAF	St. Jean		Baltimore IV	16	G.R.	(short range) Originally Light-bombers.
<u>247 WING</u>	<u>BERKA 3</u>	<u>Det. MISURATA</u>				<u>NAVAL CO-OPERATION (Benghazi Area)</u>
16 Squadron S.A.	Berka 3		Beauforts I/II	16	G.R.	(short-range) To re-arm Beaufighters X & change over to T.E. Fighter Shipping Strike.

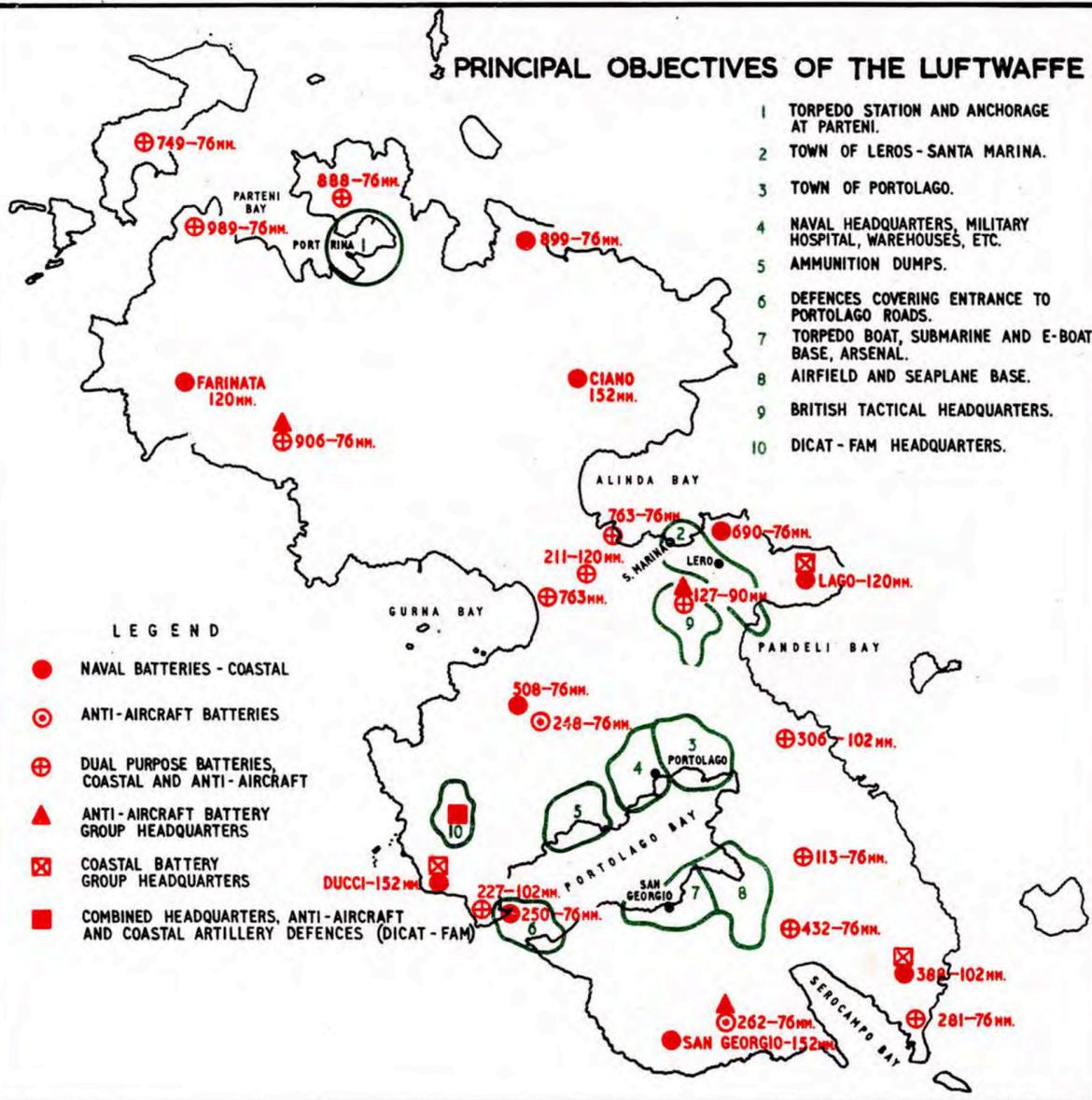
UNIT	BASE	ADV.	AIRCRAFT	I.E.	FUNCTION	REMARKS
<u>20th GROUP ALEXANDRIA (Continued)</u>						
38 Squadron	Berka 3		Wellington VIII/IX/XIII	16 +	G.R./Long Range Torpedo Bomber.	+ Temporary I.E. 20 <u>Dets.</u> at L.G.91 and St. Jean
203 Squadron	Berka 3		Baltimore I/IIIA/ IV	16	G.R. (short range).	To re-arm Wellington XIII's and transferring India.
252 Squadron	Berka 3	Air Echelon at Lakatamia	Beaufighter I/VI/ IX	16	T.E. Day Fighter	
294 Air/Sea Rescue Sqn <u>Det.</u>	Berka 3		Wellington, Walrus/Various		Air/Sea Rescue	

PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVES OF THE LUFTWAFFE

- 1 TORPEDO STATION AND ANCHORAGE AT PARTENI.
- 2 TOWN OF LEROS - SANTA MARINA.
- 3 TOWN OF PORTOLAGO.
- 4 NAVAL HEADQUARTERS, MILITARY HOSPITAL, WAREHOUSES, ETC.
- 5 AMMUNITION DUMPS.
- 6 DEFENCES COVERING ENTRANCE TO PORTOLAGO ROADS.
- 7 TORPEDO BOAT, SUBMARINE AND E-BOAT BASE, ARSENAL.
- 8 AIRFIELD AND SEAPLANE BASE.
- 9 BRITISH TACTICAL HEADQUARTERS.
- 10 DICAT - FAM HEADQUARTERS.

LEGEND

- NAVAL BATTERIES - COASTAL
- ⊙ ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTERIES
- ⊕ DUAL PURPOSE BATTERIES, COASTAL AND ANTI-AIRCRAFT
- ▲ ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTERY GROUP HEADQUARTERS
- ⊠ COASTAL BATTERY GROUP HEADQUARTERS
- COMBINED HEADQUARTERS, ANTI-AIRCRAFT AND COASTAL ARTILLERY DEFENCES (DICAT - FAM)



A.H.B.I. DIAG. No. 794

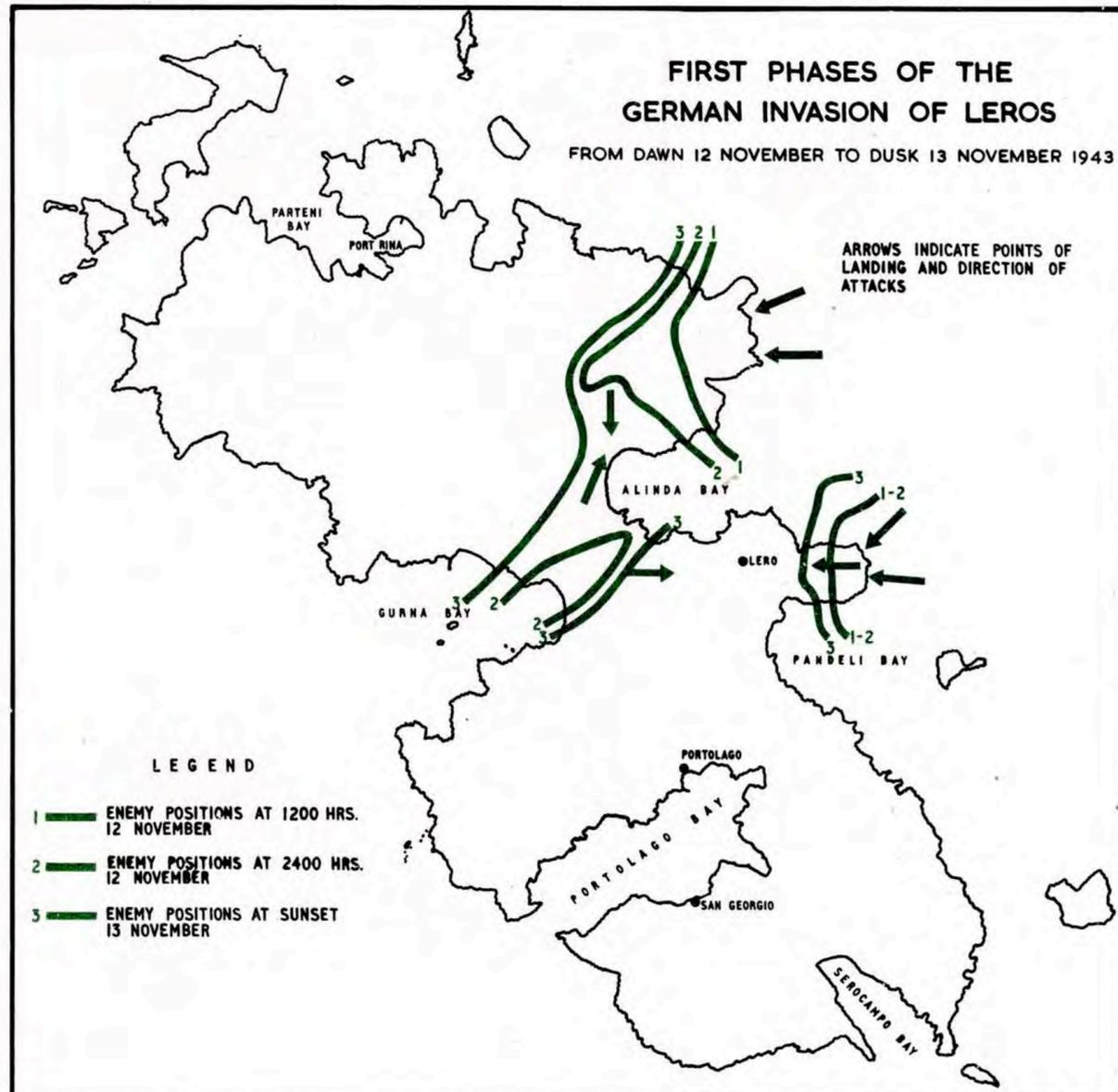
FIRST PHASES OF THE GERMAN INVASION OF LEROS

FROM DAWN 12 NOVEMBER TO DUSK 13 NOVEMBER 1943

ARROWS INDICATE POINTS OF LANDING AND DIRECTION OF ATTACKS

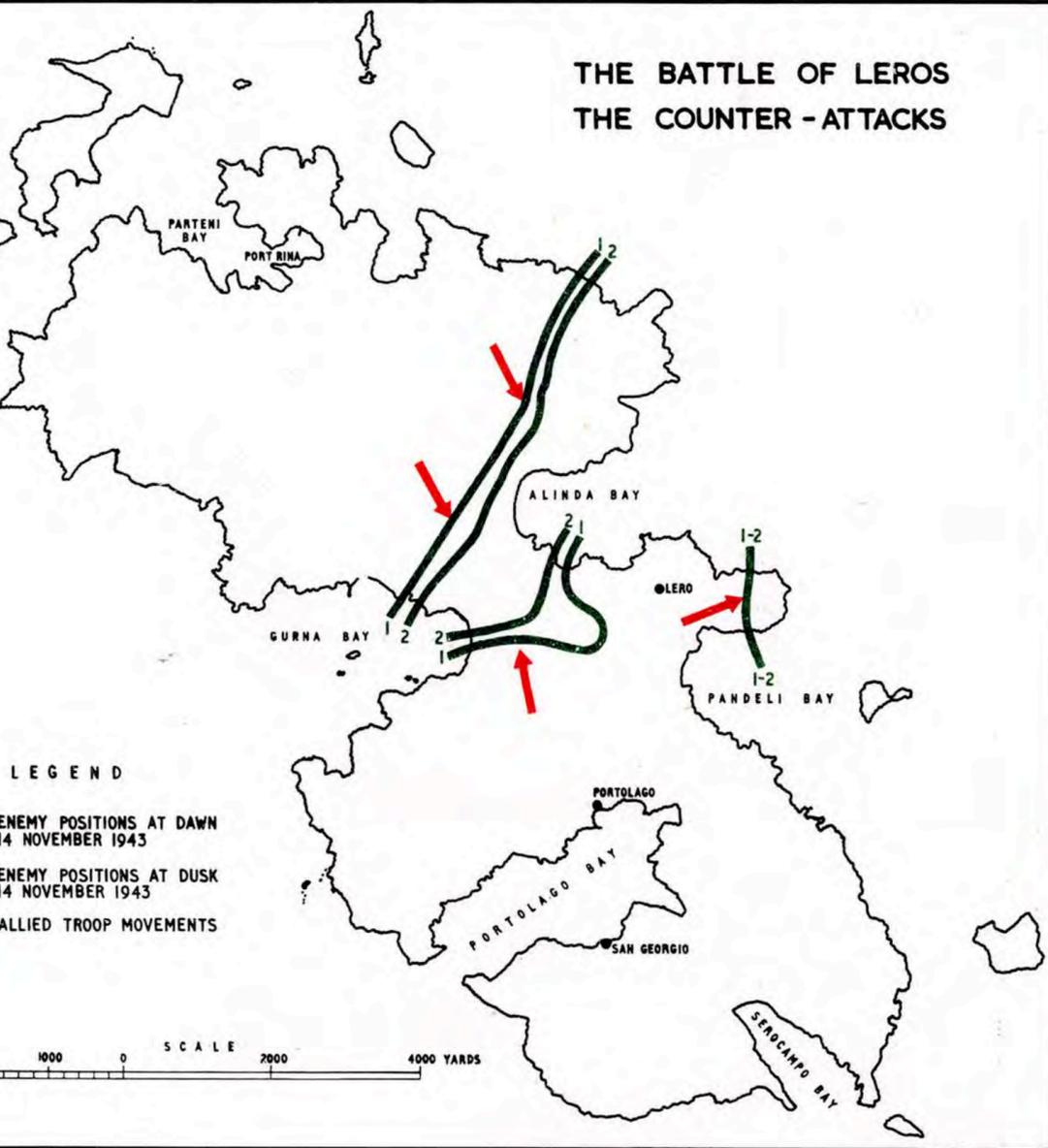
LEGEND

- 1 ENEMY POSITIONS AT 1200 HRS. 12 NOVEMBER
- 2 ENEMY POSITIONS AT 2400 HRS. 12 NOVEMBER
- 3 ENEMY POSITIONS AT SUNSET 13 NOVEMBER



A.H.B.I. DIAG. No. 791

THE BATTLE OF LEROS THE COUNTER-ATTACKS



LEGEND

- 1 ENEMY POSITIONS AT DAWN 14 NOVEMBER 1943
- 2 ENEMY POSITIONS AT DUSK 14 NOVEMBER 1943
- ← ALLIED TROOP MOVEMENTS

2000 1000 0 SCALE 2000 4000 YARDS

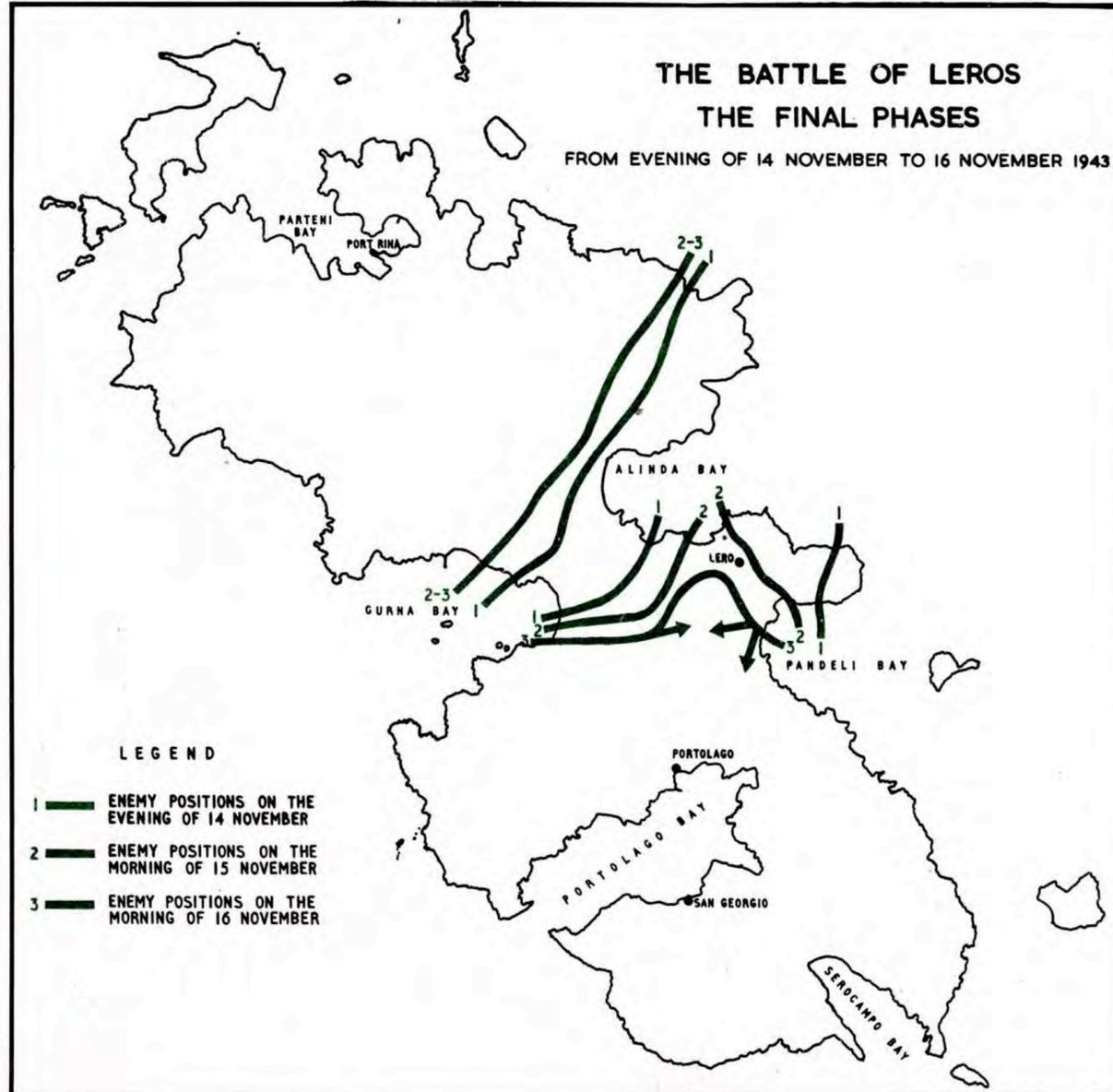
A.H.B.I. DIAG. No. 792

THE BATTLE OF LEROS THE FINAL PHASES

FROM EVENING OF 14 NOVEMBER TO 16 NOVEMBER 1943

LEGEND

- 1 ENEMY POSITIONS ON THE EVENING OF 14 NOVEMBER
- 2 ENEMY POSITIONS ON THE MORNING OF 15 NOVEMBER
- 3 ENEMY POSITIONS ON THE MORNING OF 16 NOVEMBER



A.H.B.I. DIAG. No. 793

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

MAP SHOWING ALLIED, ENEMY & NEUTRAL HELD TERRITORY AS ON THE 1 SEPTEMBER 1943

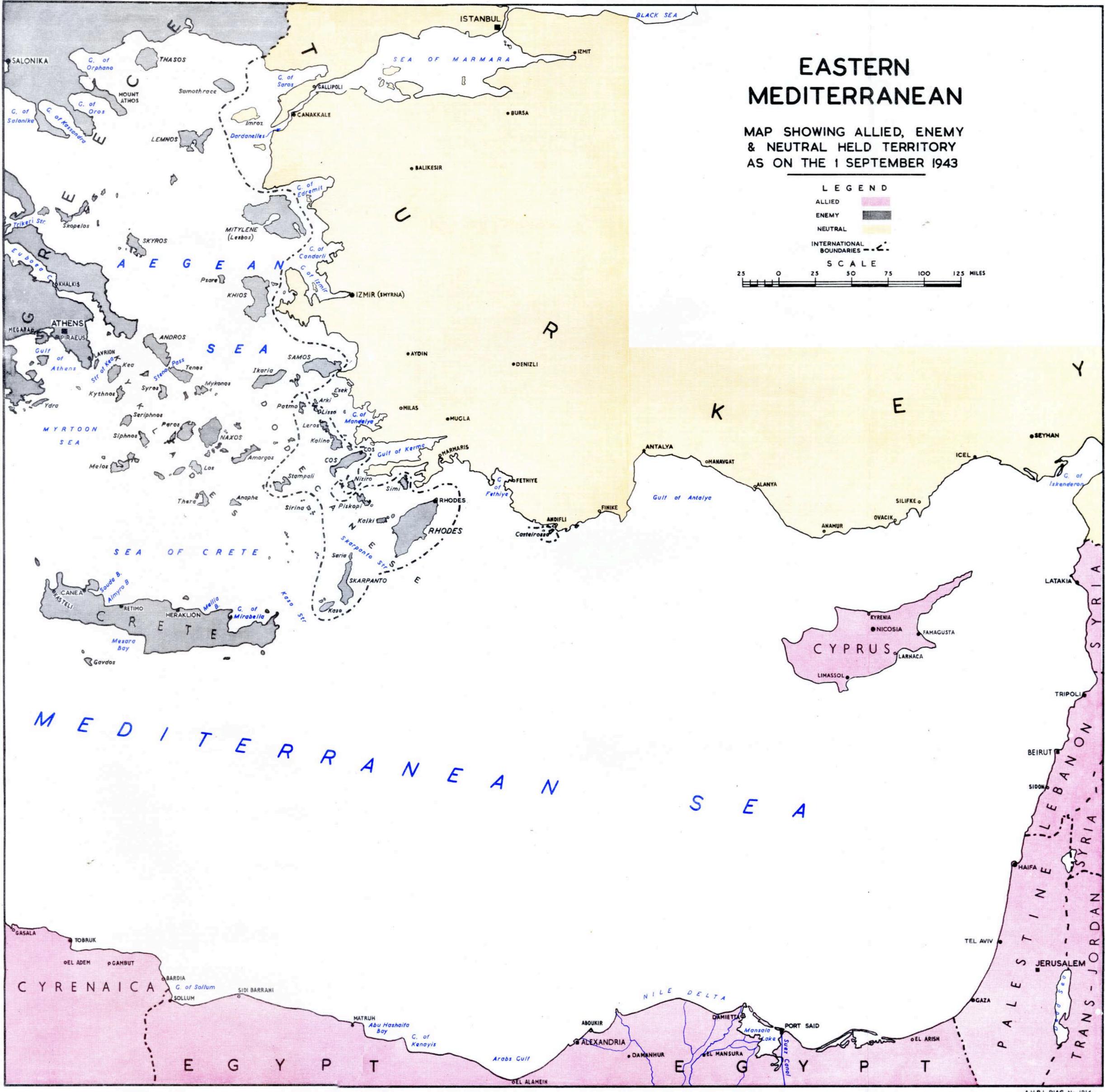
LEGEND

ALLIED 
ENEMY 
NEUTRAL 

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES 

SCALE

25 0 25 50 75 100 125 MILES



DODECANESE ISLANDS

LEGEND

- INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES (1939) 
- ROADS 
- AIRFIELDS 
- LANDING STRIPS 

SCALE

