

enemy aircraft were destroyed or damaged, including 44 destroyed in two raids by Wellingtons on the Catania aerodrome.

Another heavy attack, this time mostly by night, took place over a period between 28th April and 1st May when 9 enemy aircraft were destroyed and a "probable" 6, for a loss of 6 Hurricanes.

It is noteworthy that once the German Air Force was established in Sicily, Italian bombers scarcely again appeared over Malta. C.R.42's continued to act as escorts and to make a few low machine-gun attacks, but the Germans clearly preferred escorts of their own Me.109's or 110's for their dive-bombers.

To deal with these attacks the number of Hurricanes of No. 261 Squadron was gradually increased to 34 aircraft, partly by reinforcement from the Middle East and partly as a result of operations by Aircraft Carriers from the Western Mediterranean, in which Hurricanes were "flown off" to Malta. In addition, pilots were double-banked to cope with the increased raids and larger number of enemy aircraft taking part in them. This Squadron was in action almost every day and on many nights. Though losses of our own aircraft were serious, a fair proportion of pilots were saved.

66. At the end of the period under review, despite the enemy's persistent air effort, Malta could still be regarded as an effective air base for fighters for a limited offensive against enemy communications in the Mediterranean and as a "stage post" for the reinforcing aircraft en route for Egypt. The damage done to buildings and hangars made conditions of life and work uncomfortable and repair work was difficult.

In spite of these drawbacks, the fact that operations had been carried on throughout this testing period is a great tribute to the spirit and determination of the pilots, aircrews and ground personnel under the very able direction of Air Vice-Marshal F. H. M. Maynard, A.F.C. Amongst those under his Command who rendered valuable service during this period may be mentioned the Senior Air Staff Officer, Group Captain A. C. Sanderson, D.F.C.; Group Captain R. G. Gardner, D.S.C.; Wing Commander A. D. Messenger, the Senior Signals Officer; Squadron Leader P. S. Foss, No. 148 Squadron, and Flying Officer A. Warburton, D.F.C., of the Glenn Martin Reconnaissance Unit.

#### *Palestine and Trans Jordan.*

67. During the period covered by this Despatch there is little to record of the activities in this area. No further enemy raids took place on Haifa, or elsewhere. Aqir aerodrome was completed and opened early in the year. Gaza was developed and Lydda taken over as an R.A.F. Station. These aerodromes were prepared for and subsequently occupied by the Squadron personnel evacuated from Greece, for the purpose of re-forming and re-arming them.

#### *Iraq.*

68. The political situation described in my previous Despatch continued to deteriorate, particularly after the coup d'état by Raschid Ali and the subsequent removal of the Regent Emir Abdulla Ali. We were at this period more than fully occupied in Greece and the

Western Desert, and the only aircraft available in Iraq were those of No. 4 F.T.S. at Habbaniya and the Vincents of No. 244 Squadron at Shaibah. Towards the middle of April it became obvious that air reinforcements would be necessary. The training aircraft of No. 4 F.T.S. had as far as possible been placed on an operational footing, but it was not until the 28th April that it was possible to spare some Wellingtons for Iraq. On that date 10 Wellingtons of No. 37 Squadron flew to Habbaniya and 10 Wellingtons of No. 70 Squadron to Shaibah, followed on the 1st May by a detachment of No. 203 Squadron (Blenheims).

By this time a landing of British troops at Basra had been effected and ships with additional troops were nearing Basra. It was at this moment, on the 30th April, that the Iraqis disclosed the result of their Axis intrigue by surrounding Habbaniya with a strong Iraqi force, including artillery.

#### *Egypt.*

69. At the beginning of January the Fighter defence of Egypt consisted of No. 252 Fighter Wing under Group Captain C. B. S. Spackman, D.F.C., who had most ably improvised an organisation which operated one Squadron at Amriya and a Sector Headquarters at Helwan, controlling the defensive patrols of the 2 R.E.A.F. Fighter Squadrons at Almaza and Suez respectively. Information was provided by No. 256 A.M.E.S. Wing.

During January, as a result of minelaying attacks on the Suez Canal, it was decided to build up an organisation, on the lines that had proved so successful in the U.K. Nos. 252 and 256 Wings were amalgamated as the controlling authority, the Sectors being at Amriya, Heliopolis, Fayid and Port Said. As an interim measure, a temporary Sector was formed at Ismailia to deal with the Suez Canal Zone.

In March I decided to re-form No. 202 Group, under Air Commodore T. W. Elmhirst, A.F.C., to co-ordinate all operational problems concerning the air defence of Egypt, and to co-operate with H.Q., B.T.E., on problems concerning A.A. artillery and searchlights.

Experience showed that communications in Egypt were so poor that it proved impossible to operate even 3 Sectors efficiently from one controlling authority, and accordingly the decision was taken to divide the Delta into two by a line from Baltim through Mansura, thence approximately South Eastwards to the Gulf of Suez, and to form two separate Wings each with its own filter room. No. 250 Wing formed at Ismailia to control the Sectors at Port Said and Fayid and be responsible for the defence of the Suez Canal Zone and Eastern portion of the Delta Area. No. 252 Wing was then made responsible for the control of the Sectors at Amriya and Heliopolis, and the defence of Alexandria, Cairo and the Western portion of the Delta.

70. During the actual period of this report the enemy's effort against Alexandria, Suez, Port Said and the Canal, was small in comparison to his activities elsewhere considering the many important and tempting targets open to him. There were, however, two or three effective raids on the Suez Canal which resulted in its being closed for periods up to a week or ten days on account of mines. Only one attack