

Maritime

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The WWII loss of an Italian seaplane, presumably Cant Z.506B "Airone"
In the harbour of Argostoli, Kefalonia Island, on 5 June 1941

A deadly reconnaissance patrol

During a reconnaissance patrol in the Ionian Sea on 5 June 1941, a British "Maryland" reconnaissance aircraft (probably of No. 69 Squadron RAF stationed at Luqa, Malta, operating in the area at the time), sighted, attacked and destroyed an Italian seaplane, which was taxiing on the water in Argostoli harbour, Kefalonia.

The event is recorded in the "War Cabinet - Weekly Resume May 29th to June 5th 1941" under the section "Air Situation, Malta." (paragraph 53):

... "Our reconnaissance aircraft have constantly patrolled the coasts of Tunis and Tripoli and the Ionian Sea. During one of these flights a Maryland destroyed an Italian seaplane on the water at Argostoli (Cephalonia)." ...

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June 5, 1941

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WAR CABINET

WEEKLY RÉSUMÉ
(No. 92)

of the

NAVAL, MILITARY AND AIR SITUATION

from 12 noon May 29th, to
12 noon June 5th,
1941

[Circulated with the approval of
the Chiefs of Staff.]

Cabinet War Room

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45. Of the 250 long-range bombers and bomber reconnaissance aircraft plotted by day, the majority were engaged in coastal and shipping reconnaissance, and only 36 penetrated inland. Weather conditions were generally unfavourable for interception, but two Ju 88s were destroyed and several others damaged by our fighters.

46. Enemy aircraft dropped bombs on Dublin on the night of the 30th/31st May. On the night of the 1st/2nd June a concentrated attack was made on Manchester by about 75 aircraft, and on two other nights over 100 bombers operated overland against Merseyside, the Midlands, and dispersed targets on the South side of the Thames Estuary. A considerable proportion of the enemy effort was devoted to shipping reconnaissance and to minelaying; in the latter about 150 aircraft were engaged. During the week fifteen enemy aircraft were destroyed, eight by night fighters.

Coastal Operations.

47. Coastal Command flew 243 patrols and provided escorts for 92 convoys involving a total of 682 sorties. Shipping protection patrols carried out by Fighter Command totalled 946 and involved 1,114 sorties.

48. Vigorous operations against enemy shipping by aircraft of Bomber and Coastal Commands were continuing. Bomber Command claimed direct hits on five merchant vessels totalling 10,200 tons. Of these one vessel of 1,200 tons ran into the bank of the Kiel Canal at a point 5½ miles West of Kielshusen and sank. A ship of 500 tons was sunk alongside the Mole at Zeebrugge. An attack by two aircraft on a ship of 5,000 tons located at Egersund was particularly successful, four direct hits being scored. Four Blenheims were lost in the course of these operations.

49. In addition to numerous routine and special patrols, aircraft of Coastal Command carried out attacks on 21 enemy merchant vessels, some of which were escorted by Flak ships or naval units. No ships are claimed as sunk, but many were machine-gunned after bombs had narrowly missed their targets. Activities against U-boats are reported under "Naval Situation."

50. German bomber reconnaissance units from Norway and France operated over the Western and North-Western Approaches and in the English and St. George's Channels. Enemy reconnaissances of shipping were also made off the East Coast of England and Scotland.

51. Shipping was attacked about 200 miles West of the Faroes in daylight on the 1st June. Attacks on the 1st/2nd and 2nd/3rd further attacks on shipping were made 15 miles North-East of Cape Wrath and off the East and North-East Coasts respectively. The long-range bomber force in Norway is believed to have been engaged on these operations.

Malta.

52. Blenheims have again made successful attacks on shipping between Sicily and the Libyan Coast. On the 31st May three direct hits were made on a damaged merchant ship at anchor off Sfax, and on 3rd June five Blenheims were claimed to have attacked a convoy of six merchant ships and two destroyers, which had previously been located by air reconnaissance forty miles S.E. of Pantelleria. Attacks were carried out with great determination, and as a result one ship of 8,000 tons blew up with a violent explosion, and another of about 5,000 tons was left ablaze after being hit by four bombs from an aircraft which crashed after being struck by the flying debris.

53. Our reconnaissance aircraft have constantly patrolled the coasts of Tunis and Tripoli and the Ionian Sea. During one of these flights a Maryland destroyed an Italian seaplane on the water at Argostoli (Cephalonia). A few minelaying sorties have also been flown.

54. No serious attacks were made on Malta during the week. There was, however, considerable enemy reconnaissance activity.

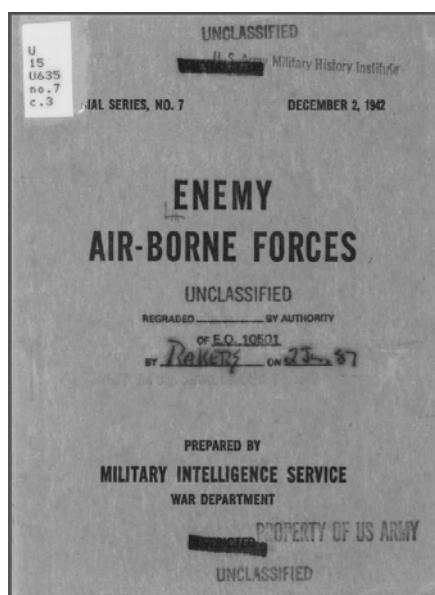
This is also reported in the newspaper “**The Courier-Mail newspaper June 6th, 1941**” (National Library of Australia), in the article titled: “ITALIANS’ CONVOY BATTERED”: ...“**LONDON, June 5. ...On a reconnaissance flight off the island of Cephalonia, a British aircraft attacked an Italian seaplane, which was taxiing on the water, and destroyed it.**” ...

The Italian seaplane was probably a Cant Z.506B "Airona" belonging to one of the maritime reconnaissance squadrons ("Squadriglia da Ricognizione Marittima") of the Italian Royal Air Force ("Regia Aeronautica") that took part in the assault on the Ionian Islands in April 1941 and operated from bases on the islands during the first period of the Italian-German occupation.

Airborne assault on Kefalonia

On 30 April 1941, five Cant Z.506B "Airone" seaplanes of the 35th Maritime Bomber Wing ("35o Stormo Bombardamento Marittimo") take off from a Brindisi air base. They are followed by three Savoia-Marchetti "SM.82" transport aircraft from a Galatina airbase carrying 60 paratroopers of the 2nd battalion of the 185th Parachute Division (185a Divisione Paracadutisti "Folgore"). The flight heads to Kefalonia and once over the island the Italian troop's contingent drops. The overwhelmed small Greek police force that essentially comprises the entire guard of the island is disarmed without a fight. This is the first combat use of Italian parachutists in the war and supposedly is a success although minor (some sources report that many parachutists were drowned and it is true that there were not deployed much more in the war).

A report on the "Enemy Air-borne forces prepared by (US) Military Intelligence Service December 2, 1942" (pages 14, 61, sections 12, 49 of the report), accounts for this operation:



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mountain units, and auxiliaries, such as motorcycle detachments. After the key objective area was taken and strengthened, parachutists were dropped in other areas and then the troops were spread out from one area to the next in order to make contact and increase the hold. After the establishment of such areas, new objectives were attacked in the same manner and eventually contact was made between each sector.

11. OTHER USES OF GERMAN PARACHUTISTS

During the Russian campaign, German parachutists have been employed at various points as infantry units and engineers in order to obtain combat training and experience. Casualties are said to have been high. Parachutists have been used with Marshal Rommel's Afrika Korps in North Africa. Such troops are always a potential air-borne menace to an opposing force.

12. ITALIAN PARACHUTISTS IN THE OCCUPATION OF CEPHALONIA

The first instance of the combat employment of Italian parachutists occurred on April 30, 1941, during the occupation of the Island of Cephalonia. The Axis claim that the Italian parachute infantry "met all expectations from a technical and tactical standpoint" does not agree with the opinion that many of the parachutists "fell into the sea and were drowned."

13. THE JAPANESE ATTACK ON PALEMBANG, NETHERLANDS EAST INDIES

It is not believed that the Japanese have used combatant parachutists in China, though a few telegraph

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49. FIRST COMBAT USE OF ITALIAN PARACHUTISTS

On April 30, 1941, less than a week after the Germans made their air-borne attack at the Corinth Canal, the Italians made their first combat use of parachutists during the occupation of the Island of Cephalonia, which lies off the western coast of Greece, 150 miles southeast of the heel of the Italian boot. In comparison with German attempts and achievements this action can be dismissed as insignificant.

50. GERMAN INFLUENCE UPON ITALIAN TRAINING AND TACTICS

The dearly bought lessons from the invasion of Crete and the important German technical advances are presumably well known to the Italians, who have doubtless copied freely from the Germans in their most recent training. It is said that 7 of Mussolini's men, with a Beretta machine carbine strapped to the right leg, can make a practice jump within a period of 4 seconds. Blue-colored parachutes buoying sacks containing a 3-day iron ration, a liter of water, and 400 rounds of small-arms ammunition have been known to be dropped. The signal designations on such dropped parcels have in at least one instance been noted as follows: red circle, ammunition; yellow flag, gun barrel; black circle, carriage; blue circle, wheels and trail. Such bits of information show that Italy, despite her difficulties, is actively interested in bidding for air-borne power.

51. ITALIAN PARACHUTE UNITS

In the spring of 1942, Italian parachutist headquarters was in Florence, and Tarquinia was still a large training

War loss of an Italian seaplane - Argostoli, Kefalonia - 5 June 1941

On 5 May 1941 the Italian "Acqui" Division assumes command of all Ionian Islands and the Italian Air Force installs reconnaissance/early warning stations on Kefalonia and Zante and a small airbase on Corfu that functions mainly as a refuelling station.



This photograph depicts one of the Italian seaplanes approaching the Argostoli quay wall on the day of the occupation of Kefalonia (30 April 1941), one month before an identical aircraft was destroyed on the water by British aircraft (5 June 1941).

(<http://www.ww2incolor.com/italian-forces/CZ506-CEFALONA.html>)

Researched and edited by Tilemachos Beriatos, 2010-2014.

Cant Z.506B "Airone" (meaning "Heron")

Italian 3-engine seaplane developed in 1939, as a military version of the civilian model Cant Z.506A of 1936. Only a total of 324 units were ever produced. "Airone" was initially operating as reconnaissance aircraft and torpedo bomber. However it was not fast enough for bombing and therefore was seldom employed when likely to be opposed by allied fighters. Consequently it was almost entirely withdrawn from this use and was rather utilized in maritime reconnaissance, air-sea rescue, convoy escort and anti-submarine patrol roles.

With the beginning of the war on 10 June 1940, ninety-four of these were readily operational and most of them served with the 31st and 35th Maritime Bomber Wings ("31o Stormo Autonomo Bombardamento Marittimo – B.M." and "35o Stormo B. M.") with 22 aircraft, based in Elmas, Cagliari (Sardinia island) and with 25 aircraft, based in Brindisi, respectively. Also a small number was allocated to a few Maritime Reconnaissance Squadrons ("Squadriglia da Ricognizione Marittima").

