

11. It is difficult to fix the exact date on which the "Battle of Britain" can be said to have begun. Operations of various kinds merged into one another almost insensibly, and there are grounds for choosing the date of the 8th August, on which was made the first attack in force against laid objectives in this country, as the beginning of the Battle.

12. On the other hand, the heavy attacks made against our Channel convoys probably constituted, in fact, the beginning of the German offensive; because the weight and scale of the attack indicates that the primary object was rather to bring our Fighters to battle than to destroy the hulls and cargoes of the small ships engaged in the coastal trade. While we were fighting in Belgium and France, we suffered the disadvantage that even the temporary stoppage of an engine involved the loss of pilot and aircraft, whereas, in similar circumstances, the German pilot might be fighting again the same day, and his aircraft be airborne again in a matter of hours.

13. In fighting over England these considerations were reversed, and the moral and material disadvantages of fighting over enemy country may well have determined the Germans to open the attack with a phase of fighting in which the advantages were more evenly balanced. I have therefore, somewhat arbitrarily, chosen the events of the 10th July as the opening of the Battle. Although many attacks had previously been made on convoys, and even on land objectives such as Portland, the 10th July saw the employment by the Germans of the first really big formation (70 aircraft) intended primarily to bring our Fighter Defence to battle on a large scale.

14. I had 59 squadrons in various stages of efficiency. A list of these units, with supplementary information, is given in Appendix A. Many of them were still suffering from the effects of the fighting in Holland and Flanders, at Dunkerque, and during the subsequent operations in France. Others were in process of formation and training. But, if the lessons of the Battle are to be correctly appreciated, due consideration must be given to the factors leading up to the situation existing when it began. Leaving out of account peace-time preparations and training, the Battle of Britain began for me in the Autumn of 1939.

15. The first major problem arose during the discussion of the question of sending Fighter Squadrons to France. The decisive factor was that of Supply. Our output at the beginning of the war was about 2 Hurricanes and 2 Spitfires per diem; and, although there were hopes of increasing Hurricane production, there was then no hope that Spitfire production would be materially increased for about a year. It is true that certain optimistic estimates had been made, but there were reasons to believe that these could not be implemented. At that time, we in England were out of range of German Fighters, and I had good hopes that unescorted bomb raids on this country could be met and defeated with a very small loss in Fighters; but there could be no illusions concerning the wastage which would occur if we came up against the German Fighters in France.

16. I therefore regarded with some apprehension the general policy of sending Home Defence Fighter Units to France; but, as it was

clear that such an attitude was politically untenable, I wrote on the 16th September, 1939, a letter to the Air Ministry. In this letter I pointed out that the Air Staff Estimate of the number of Fighter Squadrons necessary for the defence of this country was 52, and that on the outbreak of war I had the equivalent of 34 (allowing for the fact that some Auxiliary Squadrons were only partially trained and equipped).

17. I wanted 12 new squadrons, but asked that 8 should be raised immediately, and made proposals for their location and employment. In a letter dated the 21st September the Air Ministry regretted that the most they could do towards meeting my requirements was to form 2 new squadrons and 2 operational training units. I was invited to a meeting of the Air Council on the 26th September,

18. On the 25th September I wrote expressing my disappointment and asking for a reconsideration. As a result of this letter, the Air Council Meeting, and a further meeting under the Chairmanship of the Deputy Chief of Air Staff, the Air Ministry wrote on the 9th October sanctioning the immediate formation of 8 new squadrons, though 6 of these could be formed initially only as half-squadrons owing to shortage of resources. This correspondence is too lengthy to reproduce here, but it deals also with my apprehensions concerning Hurricane wastage in France, which were realised in the Spring of 1940. It also dealt with an estimate worked out by the Air Ministry Organisation Staff that after 3 months of fighting we might expect the Fighter strength to have been reduced to 26 squadrons.

19. In October, 1939, the Air Ministry further reconsidered their policy, and ordered the formation of 10 additional Fighter Squadrons, 4 of which were destined for the Coastal Command.

20. In January, 1940, the Northern flank of our continuous Defence organisation was on the Forth, and the South-Western flank was at Tangmere in Sussex (with the exception of an isolated station at Filton for the local defence of Bristol and the mouth of the Severn). On the 2nd and 4th February I wrote two letters pointing out these limitations, and asking for an extension of Aerodrome facilities, Intelligence cover and communications.

21. On the 9th February I was told that a paper was in preparation, and that I would be given an opportunity to remark on the proposals at a later stage.

22. On the 16th March I received the paper referred to and forwarded my comments on the 23rd March.

23. On the 8th May I received a letter saying that a reply had been delayed. The proposals were now approved, and decisions would shortly be taken.

24. This delay was presumably unavoidable, but the result was that the organisation and development of the defences of the South and West of England were very incomplete when they were called upon to withstand the attacks which the German occupation of French aerodromes made possible.

25. The fighting in Norway has only an indirect bearing on this paper. Certain useful tactical lessons were gained, particularly with regard to deflection shooting, and I trust