

203. Urgent as these requests were, the entire attention of Bomber Command at the time was being absorbed by tasks to which greater importance was attached. The proposed targets at Bloemendaal were, therefore, not attacked, and after further discussion with No. 2 Group, the goods station and railway yard at Leiden and the storage site near the Hotel Promenade at the Hague were ruled out as not being suitable as precision targets for low level Mosquito attacks. Consequently the Germans were able to develop their offensive, unhampered save by such punishment as fighter-pilots could inflict in the course of armed reconnaissance sorties over an area heavily defended by anti-aircraft weapons.

204. And in fact, as October gave way to November the scale of the German attack rose sharply. During the first three weeks in October an average of two-and-a-half rounds a day reached this country. The average over the next three weeks was four a day; and the week after that it rose to six a day. Six rockets a day was not an intolerable weight of attack, for an individual rocket was not appreciably more destructive than a flying bomb. Yet I became uneasy about the fact that the scale of attack was rising and that comparatively little was being done to check it.

205. On the 17th November I expressed my concern to the Air Ministry in a formal letter. I pointed out that armed reconnaissance was clearly not an adequate method of limiting the German offensive unless supplemented by other measures. Yet no bombing attack on any rocket target at the Hague had been made for two months. Since the Tactical and Strategic Air Forces were not, at the moment, in a position to undertake such tasks, I should have to rely on my own resources. Now, the Spitfire aircraft which I was using for armed reconnaissance had recently begun to carry bombs; but their pilots were precluded from dropping their bombs in circumstances which involved any risk at all to Dutch civilian life or property. I suggested that this injunction should be relaxed to the extent of permitting pilots to bomb such targets as could be accurately located and were situated in areas from which the inhabitants were known to have been removed. In these circumstances the risk to civilian life, at least, would be small; and what we had to do was to balance the off chance of injury to life and property at the Hague against its certainty in London. I asked that this question should be carefully considered, in consultation with the Dutch civil authorities if this were thought fit. Such a concession would also apply, of course, to any attacks that the Mosquito aircraft of No. 2 Group might make.

206. Finally, I asked that consideration should also be given to the desirability of allotting a higher degree of priority to the bombing of rocket targets by Bomber Command. At that time an increase in the scale of attack by air-launched flying bombs was also causing me concern; and I took the opportunity of asking that the bases of the air-launching unit should be attacked as well.*

207. This letter, as I have said, was signed on the 17th November. On that day four rockets fell in London, killing 14 and seriously

injuring 36 people. A gas-holder was set on fire and nine factories were damaged. Only two days earlier ten rockets had landed in this country within 24 hours—six of them in London. Altogether, since the start of the campaign on the 8th September some 200 rockets had arrived in the United Kingdom—an average of three a day.

(h) *The Attacks: Fourth Phase (London, 19th November to 31st December, 1944).*

208. The suggestion made in my letter of the 17th November that the Dutch authorities be consulted was adopted; and on the 21st of the month this point and others raised in my letter were discussed at one of the Deputy Supreme Commander's conferences at Supreme Headquarters. Thereupon, with the concurrence of the Air Staff, I was authorised to undertake fighter-bomber operations on the lines I had laid down. On the other hand, I was given clearly to understand that for some time to come any assistance I could expect to receive from the Second Tactical Air Force would be virtually limited to that provided by their current rail interdiction programme.* I was also informed that, unless the enemy increased his scale of attack considerably, the Combined Chiefs of Staff would not be likely to countenance the diversion of any part of the strategic bomber effort from the attack of the German petroleum industry and communications to that of rocket targets. The Air Staff assured me, however, that if the scale of attack by "Crossbow" weapons did increase, the matter would be reconsidered.

209. No time was lost in taking advantage of the concession regarding fighter-bomber operations. My staff drew up a list of storage sites and similar objectives all situated at least 250 yards from the nearest built up area; and from the 21st November onwards the four squadrons in No. 12 Group which were assigned to this duty† took every opportunity of attacking them with bombs and machine-gun and cannon fire. The general prevalence of bad weather made these opportunities few, especially in November and the latter half of December. As a result, these squadrons had plenty of time for intensive training in pin point dive-bombing, of which they took full advantage, and during the first half of December, when the weather temporarily improved, more frequent attacks were made. Altogether, between the 21st November and the end of the year No. 12 Group made 470 fighter-bomber sorties against rocket targets

* This programme included attacks on railway bridges at Deventer, Zwolle, and Zutphen, which some competent judges considered the most promising form of countermeasure to the rocket offensive from western Holland.

† The squadrons were:

No. 453 Squadron	Spitfire XVI
No. 229 Squadron	Spitfire XVI
No. 602 Squadron	Spitfire XVI
No. 303 Squadron	Spitfire IX

The Spitfires XVI were each capable of carrying two 250 lb. bombs and an overload tank which enabled them to fly to and from their bases in England without refuelling on the Continent. By refuelling in Belgium—which became possible on a strictly limited scale at the end of November—they could dispense with the tank and carry twice the load of bombs. The Spitfire IX could carry at most one 500 lb. bomb and that only by refuelling in Belgium. At this stage, therefore, we did not normally use No. 303 Squadron to carry bombs.

* See paragraph 134, above.