

so large a fighter force by the Spring or early Summer would have entailed, and eventually the strength to which the day fighter force was to expand by April, 1941, was fixed at 64 squadrons.

78. When April came, this figure had been duly reached. However, once again the position was less strong than it appeared on paper. Of the 64 day squadrons shown in the Order of Battle, two and a half were still in process of formation and two, although formed, were temporarily out of the line. The effective strength amounted, therefore, to 59½ squadrons. Many of them had considerably less than their established complement of pilots, and the general level of experience was substantially below that of the previous Autumn.

79. On the other hand, the opposing forces had been weakened numerically by the withdrawal of Units to the Mediterranean and Balkan theatres, and were soon to be reduced still further by withdrawals to Eastern Germany and Poland in preparation for the campaign against Russia.

80. In the event, of course, the mass attacks made by the Germans in the Summer of 1940 were never to be repeated on a comparable scale, so that after the opening of the Russian campaign, the day fighter force, although still charged with important defensive duties such as the protection of coastwise shipping and the interception of bomber reconnaissance aircraft flying singly, became largely an instrument for containing enemy forces in Northern France and attempting to compel the return of Units from the Eastern Front.

81. But even then the strength of the Russian resistance could not be foreseen; it still seemed likely that the Germans might bring the Eastern campaign to a 'successful conclusion within a measurable time and then renew their daylight offensive in the West. Accordingly, further additions were made during the second half of 1941 to the day fighter force, which, despite the despatch of seven squadrons overseas in December, reached the end of the year with a strength of 75 squadrons.

(ii) *Operations, November, 1940, to February, 1941.*

82. It has been said that, although October 31st, 1940 is now regarded as the last day of the Battle of Britain, the fact that the battle had ended on that day was not apparent at the time.

83. Indeed, the first few days of November, far from constituting a lull, were days of exceptional activity. Nevertheless, 1st November did appear to mark the beginning of a new phase of the offensive. For on that day the Germans turned to a form of attack with which they had opened the battle some months earlier, by sending over bombers and dive-bombers with fighter escort to attack our shipping in the Thames Estuary and the Dover Strait.

84. Before this no mass attacks on shipping had been made for many weeks. The Ju87 dive-bomber, which appeared in substantial numbers on that day, had not been reported in action since 18th August although it now appears that, unknown to the Command and apparently also to the Air Ministry, these aircraft may have been used against shipping at

least once in September. When further attacks followed on the next day, it seemed clear that a new stage of the battle had been reached, and on 4th November the Air Officer Commanding No. 11 Group issued orders which detailed the tactical measures required to defeat this new move.

85. Both before and after the issue of these orders the fighters reported excellent results, especially against the German dive-bombers and the Italian aircraft which took part in a few of the attacks. Doubtless for this reason, the mass attacks on shipping ceased on 14th November and from that date the Ju87 virtually ceased to be employed in daylight operations on the Western Front.

86. Despite its brevity this phase was important, for it brought to a head a conflict between the claims of shipping and the aircraft industry, which had long been a source of anxiety to my predecessor.

87. Since the beginning of the War the primary task of the Command, as laid down in a directive issued by the Air Staff and endorsed by the Chiefs of Staff, had been the defence of the aircraft industry. The Command was, of course, responsible for the air defence of the United Kingdom as a whole, and it also had a somewhat ill-defined responsibility for the fighter protection of shipping close to the coast; but the directive made it quite clear that the aircraft industry had the first claim on the Commander-in-Chief's resources.

88. So far as action by fighters was concerned the defence of the aircraft industry and the general air defence of the country were practically inseparable tasks, for it was an axiom of air defence—though one which the Minister of Aircraft Production was reluctant to accept—that the best way of defending an objective such as a factory was to deploy fighters over the approaches to it rather than concentrate them near the objective itself.

89. This principle did not apply to the protection of shipping. The ships moved mostly on the perimeter of the air defence system and it was seldom possible to be sure of intercepting aircraft which might attack them except by detailing specified fighter units to protect them, either by flying standing patrols near the ships or the adjacent coastline or by assuming an advanced state of readiness at airfields near the coast.

90. The inherent extravagance and relative inefficiency of standing patrols has always been recognised by students of air defence problems; nevertheless there are occasions in which they constitute the only practicable method of defence, and in this case they were the form of protection which the Naval authorities preferred and for which they constantly pressed.

91. It was not always possible, however, to place our fighters on standing patrol near a convoy without exposing them to the risk of being caught at a tactical disadvantage by the enemy. Another difficulty was that regulations imposed for the benefit of the ships themselves forbade our pilots to come close to the ships, virtually on pain of being fired at.

92. In spite of these difficulties and uncertainties, loyal attempts were made from the beginning of the War to give every practicable