

women to men was roughly 2 to 1. Women carried out every job except those involving heavy manual labour such as loading and manning the gun itself.

The problem had been considered before the outbreak of war when I asked for the advice of Miss Caroline Haslett, C.B.E., who, after spending days and nights in the field examining the various duties, told me she had no doubt that women were capable of doing all but the heaviest tasks.

It was on 25th April, 1941, that regulations were put into force making women eligible for operational duties. In May, 1941, the first mixed battery began its training and it became operational on 21st August, 1941.

5. Two projects were formulated. The first was that all Heavy Batteries coming forward from Training Regiments would in future be Mixed Batteries and the second was that, as the number of trained women increased, some of the existing male batteries should be converted to Mixed Batteries. The Mixed units would only have static and not mobile guns. It was hoped that by the end of 1941 there would be provided just under 40 batteries through each project, but this proved an over-optimistic forecast. Nevertheless, it was now clear that we could expect both to remedy existing deficiencies and to continue the expansion of the anti-aircraft defences. I was promised that of the expected total of 220,000 A.T.S. at the end of 1942, I could anticipate having 170,000. In actual fact, this estimated figure proved over-optimistic as other Army demands on the available women power limited the number of A.T.S. in Anti-Aircraft Command to a maximum, at any time, to just over 74,000.

6. The welfare of these women was one of the considerations which was uppermost in all our minds and this had a considerable effect upon the areas in which they were deployed. I wished to be quite certain that their accommodation would be suitable, and it was also necessary to ensure that they would not find themselves in the probable path of an invading army. A high standard of accommodation was set, but the general labour shortage throughout the country resulted in the programme of building falling behind schedule and it was not always possible to supply the full standard.

7. The possibility of invasion caused additional complications. Plans to counter any invasion, adapted to our increasing resources, were steadily improved. The summer of 1941 found an elaborate and detailed plan prepared, in which the anti-aircraft guns had to be ready for rapid moves in order to fit into the needs of the situation should it arise.

8. Some time previously I had reluctantly accepted a large and expanding programme of static 3.7-inch guns rather than mobile guns because the former were so much more rapidly produced. The task of shifting a static gun was very considerable and a great deal of preparation was necessary before it could be emplaced on a new site. As soon as the Chiefs of Staff advised me which defences must remain and which must be moved in the event of invasion, an interchange of 244 mobile and static guns was ordered so that the number of moves to be made if invasion took place would be cut to a minimum.

9. This interchange had repercussions upon the deployment of Mixed batteries. Some sites where accommodation had been provided for them were now equipped with mobile guns on which women could not be deployed, so that some mixed units had perforce to be put in quarters which were below the desired standard.

10. The original projects had in fact been based upon a degree of immobility in the anti-aircraft defences which could never exist. If the enemy chose to change his objectives, as he later did, units had to be moved in accordance with operational needs rather than with some theoretical accommodation problems of our own. Consequently, as time went on and the deployment of guns changed, the general standard of accommodation for Mixed batteries became further removed from that originally set. So long as reasonable recreational facilities during periods of inaction and satisfactory ablutions at all times were available for them, the morale of women in an operational rôle was always high, and subsequent events proved their great courage. I cannot praise too highly the valuable work these women performed or the splendid spirit which they brought to it.

11. In the emergency deployments of Heavy guns later in the war, women had to be accommodated in emergency conditions if the defences were to remain operative, and they not only accepted those conditions but even chose to remain at their posts when offered an opportunity to leave.

During the temporary concentration of defences on the south coast to protect our invasion forces and later in the emergency deployments to counter the flying bomb, they were accommodated under canvas with all the accompanying inconveniences and finally some units were withdrawn from my command to serve in the anti-aircraft defence of Antwerp and Brussels during a winter campaign, a decision which was the finest possible tribute to the work of the Mixed batteries as a whole.

12. Although generally women were employed on Heavy guns where units were concentrated, the serious loss of manpower in searchlight units led me to consider whether it might not be possible to employ them in this rôle also. Owing to the impossibility of mixing the sexes in small detachments, any such units had to consist wholly of women and though one searchlight regiment was created in this form and gave a good account of itself, I was dissuaded from extending the experiment for two reasons. First, it was not possible to find a sufficient number of women officers capable of assuming tactical as well as administrative responsibility and secondly, searchlight sites were normally provided with Light Machine-Guns for local air and ground defence, and women, however willing to do so, were not allowed to handle guns of any kind.

Home Guard.

13. However, further demands for economies in manpower were already upon us. In October, 1941, a cut of 50,000 men for the Field Force was ordered. In order to man the equipment which was now reaching the Command in large quantities, the employment of Home Guards for anti-aircraft defence was once more considered. Home Guard personnel could not, however, do continuous manning and it was not easy to