

328. On a limited number of merchant vessels, Royal Observer Corps personnel were provided, and this arrangement has drawn very favourable comments from all concerned. I have already recommended elsewhere that an extension of this use of specialised aircraft recognition personnel deserves further examination with a view to more general adoption by both the Army and the Navy.

329. *Transfer of Fighter forces to the Continent.* It was appreciated that the effort of the fighters and fighter bombers over the beach-head would inevitably be seriously reduced after three or four days if they had to operate at such distances from their bases in the U.K. In the early planning therefore, a high priority had been arranged for naval lift of the stores and equipment which would be needed to operate the fighters and fighter bomber squadrons planned to be flown into bases on the Continent as soon as possible after D-Day. This precaution was fully warranted. The weather throughout June frequently prevented the operations of squadrons based in the south of England. Had the scheduled squadrons not arrived on the Continent as planned, fighter cover over the beach-head and shipping lanes would at times have been impossible, at times, moreover, when weather would have permitted the G.A.F. to operate against us. Nor would fighter bombers have been available to answer calls by the ground forces for urgent support. Actually, the beach-head and shipping lanes were left without fighter cover only when the weather both in England and the Continent made all operations by Allied Air Forces and the G.A.F. impossible.

330. The operations of these fighter squadrons from bases on the Continent were made possible only by the work of the Airfield Construction engineers, of the maintenance personnel, and of the supply organisation which ensured the provision of the necessary stores and equipment. I refer to the work of these sections in more detail in Part IV.

331. The first British squadrons to land in France since 1940 were Nos. 130 and 303 which put down at 1200 hours on D + 4 on a strip on the "Gold" area. They were quickly followed by No. 144 (R.C.A.F.) Fighter Wing, consisting of Nos. 441, 442 and 443 squadrons, which at 1637 hours that same day, were airborne for a sweep. These were the first Allied squadrons to operate from French soil since the evacuation from Dunkirk.

332. The strength of squadrons based on the Continent was gradually built up in the first fourteen days of the operation; eight Spitfire, three Typhoon and three Auster squadrons moved in to, and were operating from, beach-head airfields by the end of this period.

333. During the following week, United States forces began moving in and nine Thunderbolt and three Mustang squadrons arrived. A further British contingent of one Spitfire, three Typhoon and one Auster squadrons arrived to make a total of thirty-one Allied squadrons operating from beach-head airfields three weeks after D-Day.

Enemy Reaction and Allied Counter-action.

334. I have dealt in para. 156 *et seq.* with the activities of the G.A.F. directed against our preparations for the assault. I now turn to

the G.A.F.'s operations after the assault was launched.

335. The strength of that part of the German Air Force likely to be committed against the invasion was estimated at 1,750 front line aircraft. This figure included such aircraft of Reserve Training Units as were expected to be operationally used. The total was made up as follows:—

Long Range Bombers ...	...	385
Ground Attack ...	...	50
Single-engine Fighters ...	...	745
Twin-engine Fighters—Day ...	...	55
—Night ...	...	395
Long Range Recce. ...	...	85
Tactical Recce. ...	...	25
Coastal Recce. ...	...	10
		<hr/>
		1,750
		<hr/>

336. The disposition of these forces is shown in the map* facing page 70. The Units based in Southern France (Mediterranean area) and in Denmark and Norway are also shown on this map, although I have not included them in the total given above.

337. The enemy air strength on D-Day was considerably greater than its strength in this area six weeks before. Bomber strength had increased by approximately 200, single-engine fighters by 500 and twin-engine fighters by 125.

338. It was estimated that the serviceability of these forces would be 55 per cent. for long-range bomber types and 60 per cent. for all others. The destruction of facilities at airfields in the rear of the assault area and the continued pounding of the fields themselves had forced the Luftwaffe to make extensive use of satellite landing fields, with the inevitable attendant difficulties of maintaining serviceability.

339. After D-Day, there was some reinforcement of units on the Western Front, though not as great as might have been expected. The reasons probably included the following:—

(i) a decision not to denude the Reich proper of its air protection, even at the expense of leaving the German armies in the field relatively uncovered.

(ii) the destruction of airfield facilities, making it difficult to service and operate from the fields at the enemy's disposal forces any larger than those already there.

(iii) the lack of fuel and lubricant supplies in the area and the difficulty of replacement of consumed stocks, owing to the dislocation of transport facilities.

340. The enemy scale of effort throughout the whole period D-Day to 30th September was considerably lower than was expected. As I have already stated, I had expected at the outset a week of fairly heavy air attacks, after which I felt confident that the enemy air effort would dwindle and require much less attention from our own air forces. In fact no serious air battle took place during this period.

341. *Enemy Air Opposition — June.* Throughout June, the squadrons which showed the most aggressiveness were bomber units which operated by night, principally on sea mining in the shipping lanes but also on

* Maps not reproduced.