

*which were, indeed, stronger at the end of the battle than at the beginning.*" (The italics are mine.)

107. This statement, even if intended only for popular consumption, tends to lead to an attitude of complacency which may be very dangerous in the future. Whatever the study of paper returns may have shown, the fact is that the situation was critical in the extreme. Pilots had to be withdrawn from the Bomber and Coastal Commands and from the Fleet Air Arm and flung into the Battle after hasty preparation. The majority of the squadrons had been reduced to the status of training units, and were fit only for operations against unescorted bombers. The remainder were battling daily against heavy odds.

108. The indomitable courage of the Fighter Pilots and the skill of their Leaders brought us through the crises, and the morale of the Germans eventually cracked because of the stupendous losses which they sustained.

109. Any attempt to describe the events of the Battle day by day would make this Despatch unduly long and would prevent the reader from obtaining a comprehensive picture of the events. I have therefore decided to show the main features of each day's fighting in an Appendix on which our own and the Germans' aircraft casualties will be shown graphically. I shall then be able to deal with the progress of the Battle by phases, thus avoiding the tedious and confusing method of day-to-day description. The information is given in Appendix D.

110. As regards our casualties, we generally issued statements to the effect that we lost "x" aircraft from which "y" pilots were saved. This did not of course mean that "y" pilots were ready immediately to continue the Battle. Many of them were suffering from wounds, burns or other injuries which precluded their return to active flying temporarily or permanently.

111. It might also be assumed that all German crews who were in aircraft brought down during the Battle, were permanently lost to the Luftwaffe because the fighting took place on our side of the Channel. Such an assumption would not be literally true, because the Germans succeeded in rescuing a proportion of their crews from the sea by means of rescue boats, floats and aircraft which will be later described.

112. The decisive features of the Battle were the Ratio of Casualties incurred by ourselves and the Germans, and the Ratio of Casualties to the numbers actively employed on both sides. Appendix D has been drawn up with these points in mind.

113. I must disclaim any exact accuracy in the estimates of Enemy losses. All that I can say is that the utmost care was taken to arrive at the closest possible approximation. Special intelligence officers examined pilots individually after their combats, and the figures claimed are only those recorded as "Certain." If we allow for a percentage of over-statement, and the fact that two or more Fighters were sometimes firing at the same enemy aircraft without being aware of the fact, this can fairly be balanced by the certainty that a proportion of aircraft reported as "Probably Destroyed" or "Damaged" failed to return to their bases. The figures, then,

are put forward as an honest approximation. Judging by results, they are perhaps not far out.

114. The German claims were, of course, ludicrous; they may have been deceived about our casualties, but they know they were lying about their own.

115. I remember being cross-examined in August by the Secretary of State for Air about the discrepancy. He was anxious about the effect on the American people of the wide divergence between the claims of the two sides. I replied that the Americans would soon find out the truth; if the Germans' figures were accurate they would be in London in a week, otherwise they would not.

116. Our estimate of German casualties, then, may be taken as reasonably accurate for practical purposes; but our estimates of the strength in which attacks were made is based on much less reliable evidence. The Radio-Location system could give only a very approximate estimate of numbers and was sometimes in error by three or four hundred per cent. This is no reflection on the System, which was not designed or intended to be accurate in the estimation of considerable numbers; moreover, several stations were suffering from the effects of severe bombing attacks. As the average height of operations increased, the Observer Corps became less and less able to make accurate estimates of numbers, and, in fact, formations were often quite invisible from the ground.

117. Even the numerical estimates made by pilots who encountered large formations in the air are likely to be guesswork in many instances. Opportunities for deliberate counting of enemy aircraft were the exception rather than the rule.

118. Although Secret Intelligence sources supplemented the information available, it is possible that on days of heavy fighting complete formations may have escaped recorded observation altogether.

119. This is unfortunate, because it is obviously of the greatest importance to determine the relative strengths of the Attack and the Defence, and to know the ratio of losses to aircraft employed which may be expected to bring an attack to a standstill in a given time. History will doubtless elucidate the uncertainty, but perhaps not in time for the information to be of use in the present war.

120. My personal opinion is that, on days of slight activity, our estimates are reasonably accurate, but that they probably err on the low side on days of heavy fighting when many and large formations were employed.

121. As has been explained above, few squadrons were fresh and intact when the Battle began. No sufficient respite has been granted since the conclusion of the Dunkerque fighting to rest the Squadrons which had not left the Fighter Command, and to rebuild those which had undergone the ordeal of fighting from aerodromes in Northern France. These last had been driven from aerodrome to aerodrome, able only to aim at self-preservation from almost continuous attack by Bombers and Fighters; they were desperately weary and had lost the greater part of their equipment, since aircraft which were unserviceable only from slight defects had to be abandoned.