

elements of air defence formerly controlled operationally by Fighter Command".

(d) To conduct "defensive and offensive operations which involve the use of squadrons of both A.D.G.B. and T.A.F. as heretofore under instructions issued to both headquarters until fresh instructions are issued".

(e) To develop air interception methods and apparatus for eventual use in A.D.G.B. and other theatres.

6. The reference in article (d) to offensive operations by squadrons of the Tactical Air Force was hardly more than a convenient fiction. Its purpose was not so much to place these operations under my control, as to prevent them from prematurely absorbing the energies of the Air Officer Commanding and staff of the Tactical Air Force, to the detriment of their more important task of preparing for the coming events in Europe. Although the operations were planned and their execution ordered from the headquarters of No. 11 Group, which was part of my command, they were supervised until the 15th March, 1944, by the Air Commander-in-Chief himself. Thereafter they were directed by the Air Marshal Commanding, Second Tactical Air Force (Air Marshal Sir Arthur Coningham, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.C., D.F.C., A.F.C.). This arrangement was typical of a series of complex relationships brought about by the special circumstances of the time. In effect it meant that the Air Officer Commanding, No. 11 Group (Air Vice-Marshal H. W. L. Saunders, C.B., C.B.E., M.C., D.F.C., M.M.), while he never ceased to be constitutionally my subordinate, acted for certain purposes as the agent first of Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory and later of Air Marshal Coningham.

7. My real task, then, was that set out in articles (a), (b), (c) and (e) of the directive, and as much of article (d) as related to operations by formations under my own command. In short, it was primarily a defensive one. Although squadrons of A.D.G.B. were to play their part in operations over France during the assault phase of the European operations, the Overall Air Plan issued by the Air Commander-in-Chief showed that my most significant responsibility even in that phase would be to stand guard over the base. Obviously, we were approaching a stage at which the needs of the offensive must have priority. The directive of the 17th November emphasized the need for economy in defence "in order to make greater provision for offence", and called upon me to suggest changes in organisation with this need in mind. My problem, in fact, was to ensure, with limited resources, that the United Kingdom was securely defended from air attack as a base for the great operations by land, sea, and air which were being planned.

(b) *Resources Available.*

8. In the circumstances some "rolling up" of the Group and sector organisation seemed clearly justified. No. 14 Group, in the north of Scotland, had already been amalgamated with No. 13 Group before the time of my appointment. During the next few months I secured approval for further reductions. By 6th June, 1944 (D Day) the number of operational fighter Groups had been reduced to four and the number of active sectors from 19 to 14

—less than half the number in existence at the end of 1941. Still further reductions were made later.

9. Plans for translating the Air Commander-in-Chief's directive into practice were worked out by my staff and his in consultation. The basic strength of A.D.G.B. was fixed at ten day-fighter and eleven night-fighter squadrons. In addition six night-fighter squadrons earmarked for allotment to No. 85 Group—a Group formed for the purpose of defending the overseas base after the land forces should have advanced beyond the lodgment area—were to be put under my command for the time being. So long as I retained them I should be responsible for the night-fighter defence of the lodgment area as well as the United Kingdom and the waters between. Similarly, six day-fighter squadrons intended ultimately for No. 85 Group were to be put at my disposal to enable me to keep German reconnaissance aircraft at bay, and perform a number of other tasks arising directly out of the situation created by the coming assault. Finally, another fifteen day-fighter squadrons were to remain nominally in A.D.G.B., but be lent to the Second Tactical Air Force for the duration of the assault phase. Only in an emergency would these squadrons revert to my operational control before the end of that phase. It was agreed, however, that if a serious situation should arise, the Air Officer Commanding, No. 11 Group, would be justified in using any part of his uncommitted resources (other than American units) for the daylight defence of his Group area. A few aircraft of the Royal Navy would also operate under my control.

10. Thus, the maximum number of Royal Air Force, Dominion and Allied squadrons on which I was expected to call—including the fifteen squadrons lent to the Second Tactical Air Force—would be 48: rather less than half the number that had been considered necessary for the defence of the United Kingdom at the end of 1941, when the main theatre was in Russia.

11. However, since 1941 much progress had been made in the technique of fighter interception, especially at night. The German Air Force, on the contrary, was known to have lost a great deal of its hitting power since those days, and its offensive spirit had declined. Furthermore, great advances had been made in the technical methods and equipment on which the "static" elements of the air defence system relied. Against this I had to reckon with the psychological difficulty of maintaining the fighting spirit of men placed on the defensive while their opposite numbers were fighting an offensive battle. But despite this handicap, and despite the numerical limitations of the forces under my operational control, it was my opinion that the air defences would give a good account of themselves against any attack by orthodox weapons that the German Air Force might deliver.

(c) *Appreciation of the General Situation before the start of the German Flying Bomb Offensive.*

12. From the time of my appointment until the beginning of the flying-bomb offensive a