

wooded area in which rockets had been seen on reconnaissance photographs taken in December. The Hotel Promenade was attacked on three occasions, and attacks were also made on other suspected storage areas at the Hague, Wassenaar, and the Hook of Holland, as well as on railway targets. The Second Tactical Air Force continued to attack communications, as hitherto, in the course of their armed reconnaissance and rail interdiction programmes.

217. Meanwhile, in consequence of the rise in the scale of rocket attack, towards the end of January the Air Ministry had begun to press me to intensify my efforts against the firing and storage areas. Nevertheless they were still unwilling to see any part of Bomber Command's effort diverted to the attack of such targets. On the 26th of the month, however, the Defence Committee agreed to invite the Air Ministry to ask Supreme Headquarters to sanction the precise attacks on selected targets by the light bombers of No. 2 Group, which I had been urging since the previous autumn. Shortly before this I had arranged to raise the strength of the force earmarked for exclusive use against rocket targets from four squadrons to six, and to equip and use all six squadrons regularly as fighter-bomber squadrons.* I now negotiated a new agreement with the Second Tactical Air Force whereby my area of responsibility was extended as far east as Amersfoort. On days when the weather was unsuitable for precise attack on objectives at the Hague, our fighter-bombers were now attacking rail targets; and the inclusion of Amersfoort in our area would enable us to bomb the railway junction there—a bottleneck through which all traffic from Germany to the firing areas in western Holland passed. Under the terms of the new agreement the Second Tactical Air Force would use any light or medium bombers that they could spare from the battle on land to attack rocket targets chosen from lists provided by my staff.

218. The full effect of the expansion of the "Big Ben" fighter-bomber force was seen in the second half of February, when Fighter Command made 548 sorties and dropped 108 tons of bombs—precisely the same weight in two weeks as in the previous six. At the suggestion of my Chief Intelligence Officer, who recommended that we should try the effect of concentrating our efforts on a single target for at least a week, nearly three-quarters of this bomb tonnage was aimed at the Haagsche Bosch, where severe damage was done, particularly on the 22nd February, when a film studio which the Germans used for storage was gutted. An almost complete cessation of rocket fire over a period of more than sixty hours followed this attack; and on the 24th February photographic reconnaissance failed to reveal a single rocket anywhere in the square mile or so of wooded parkland that the Haagsche Bosch comprised. Other evidence strengthened the inference that the Germans had been driven from the Haagsche Bosch, at least for the time being, and suggested that they had been forced to improvise facilities in the racecourse area at Duindigt, further to the north.

219. So far as they went, these results of our new policy of concentrating on one area were encouraging; but events soon showed that no lasting effect on the Germans had been achieved. When firing was resumed (apparently from Duindigt) on the 26th, no appreciable decline in its quality or quantity was apparent. Nor did the first of No. 2 Group's long-awaited bombing attacks, which was delivered on the 3rd March, have any better effect. The attack was delivered by 56 Mitchells, and the target chosen—not without some misgivings since the continued presence of the Germans and their gear was doubtful—was the Haagsche Bosch. Unfortunately the bombing was not sufficiently accurate, in consequence of which casualties occurred among Dutch civilians and their property was damaged. After this unhappy experience, Air Marshal Coningham decided to make no more attacks on targets at the Hague.

220. Another counter-measure considered at this stage was the use of anti-aircraft artillery to fire at approaching rockets and explode them in the air. If only because the rockets travelled many times faster than the fastest bomber and completed their parabolic flight from Holland in less than five minutes, the problems involved seemed formidable. Indeed, proposals in this sense had been carefully considered before the attacks began and found impracticable. General Pile raised the subject again in December, 1944, when he asked permission to make an operational trial of a scheme designed to ensure that the rockets would pass through a curtain of shell-fragments as they approached the earth. An essential requirement of the plan was accurate and timely warning that a rocket was on its way. Although there were still difficulties in the way of disseminating such warnings to the public, for operational purposes reliable information of this kind was now available. There were some obvious drawbacks to the scheme: for example, the expenditure of rounds required to explode even one rocket was likely to be extravagant and possibly alarming to the public. Nevertheless, I was satisfied that it contained the germ of a successful countermeasure, which might become important in the future, and that on purely operational grounds a practical trial was desirable. I made recommendations to this effect when submitting General Pile's proposal to higher authority. The committee before whom the scheme was laid, after taking the opinion of eminent men of science, one of whom put the chances of a successful engagement at one in a hundred and another at one in a thousand, decided that an operational trial would be premature. They invited those concerned to seek ways of improving the scheme, and promised to consider it again in March.

221. Accordingly General Pile repeated his request for an operational trial towards the end of that month. He pointed out that time was clearly running out: the opportunity of testing the scheme in practice would soon have passed. In response, on the 26th March a panel of scientists were asked to prepare a theoretical estimate of success. They reported on the same day that if 400 rounds were fired against any one rocket the chance of scoring a hit would, at best, be one in thirty. After a further statement by General Pile, who said

* The additional squadrons selected were Nos. 451 (Spitfire XVI) and 124 (Spitfire IX, modified for bombing).