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THE ANTI-AIRCRAFT DEFENCE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM FROM 28TH JULY, 1939, TO 15TH APRIL, 1945.

The following despatch was submitted to the Secretary of State for War on the 21st October, 1946, by GENERAL SIR FREDERICK A. PILE, Bt., G.C.B., D.S.O., M.C., General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Anti-Aircraft Command.

PART I.

PREAMBLE.

1. I have been commanded by the Army Council to submit a report on the Anti-Aircraft defence of the United Kingdom during the war and have the honour to present my despatch herewith.

2. For convenience the report has been divided into two parts and in this first part I propose to deal with events from the outbreak of war until May, 1941.

SECTION I—GENERAL.

3. In September, 1939, the Anti-Aircraft defences of the country were organised in a Command Headquarters, seven Divisional Headquarters, a varying number of Brigades in each Division and a number of gun and search-light units in each Brigade.

4. Anti-Aircraft Command Headquarters was situated at Stanmore, adjacent to the Headquarters of Fighter Command, R.A.F., and with them was jointly responsible for the Air Defence of Great Britain, the A.O.C.-in-C. Fighter Command being in operational command.

A system of responsibility such as this obviously entailed the closest liaison and willing co-operation on both sides. I wish to put on record that the relations between my Headquarters and Fighter Command Headquarters were always most cordial.

5. The areas allotted to each of the seven Divisions were as follows:—

1st—The Metropolitan area of London.

2nd—Northern East Anglia, the East Midlands and Humber.

3rd—Scotland and Northern Ireland.

4th—North-west England, the West Midlands and North Wales.

5th—South Wales, south-west and southern England.

6th—South-east England and southern East Anglia.

7th—North-east England.

An additional organisation, directly controlled for operations from my Headquarters, was responsible for the defence of the Orkneys and Shetlands. It is essential to emphasise that A.A. Divisions were in no way comparable to Divisions in the Field Army, being of no fixed size and at times being up to four times as large and covering many thousand square miles of country.

6. The failure of our first overseas campaign in Norway confirmed my opinion of the paramount importance of the Anti-Aircraft defences; if we could obtain mastery in the air, there would be no invasion; if we could not, no expeditionary force could be launched from the United Kingdom. I therefore pressed for and secured a large expansion of our Anti-Aircraft defences during 1940.

7. At the end of 1940 I felt it essential to propose a considerable re-organisation in order to relieve the burden on the existing Command and Divisions and also to achieve closer co-ordination of boundaries with Fighter Command. Five new Divisions were created as follows:—

8th—covering the south coast as far east as Bournemouth.

9th—South Wales.

10th—Humber.

11th—the West Midlands and central Wales.

12th—Clyde and Northern Ireland.