

that he would endeavour to increase the chance of success by trebling the rate of fire, the proposal went before the Chiefs of Staff, who decided on the 30th March that the likelihood of success was too small to outweigh the objections to the scheme. But in any case, by that time the campaign was over.

222. Meanwhile we had been continuing our fighter-bomber offensive against the rocket-firing organisation and its communications. After the 3rd March we made no further attacks on the Haagsche Bosch, but turned our attention to the adjoining racecourse area at Duindigt, along with other storage and firing areas and a group of buildings belonging to the Bataafsche Petroleum Company, which apparently the Germans were using as billets and offices. As before, we selected railway targets for attack when conditions were unsuitable for attacking our primary objectives. During the second week of March alone we dropped some 70 tons of bombs at Duindigt. By the middle of the month we had evidence that the Germans had abandoned the area, which was by that time so pitted with craters that, in the words of a contemporary report, "it looked as if Bomber Command, not Fighter Command, had been attacking it". This success was accompanied by another temporary decrease in the scale of rocket attack on London; and what was, perhaps, more significant was that about this time the Germans took to doing more and more of their firing in the early hours before dawn. We concluded that our efforts had spoilt their arrangements for storing rockets in the forward area and that they were being forced to bring the missiles up at night and fire them off as soon as possible. Accordingly, during the second half of March we paid little attention to storage areas and devoted most of our fighter-bomber effort to communications. Altogether we made more fighter-bomber sorties in March than in the previous four months put together, and dropped more than three times the weight of bombs dropped in February.

223. The German offensive came to an end at 1645 hours on the 27th March, when the one thousand, one hundred and fifteenth rocket to fall in this country or within sight of shore fell to earth at Orpington, in Kent. The campaign had lasted seven months. During that time the Germans had fired at least 1,300 rockets at London and some 40 or more at Norwich. Of these 518 had fallen within the London Civil Defence Region and none at all within the boundaries of the latter city. Altogether, 2,511 people had been killed and 5,869 seriously injured in London, and 213 killed and 598 seriously injured elsewhere. These figures would have been substantially smaller but for a number of unlucky incidents, in which rockets chanced to hit crowded buildings. Among the worst of these incidents were three which occurred at New Cross Road, Deptford, on the 25th November, 1944, and at Smithfield Market and Hughes Mansions, Stepney, on the 8th and 27th March respectively. Deplorable as these occurrences were, their rarity is a measure of the random quality of the long-range rocket in the stage to which the Germans had developed it.

224. Yet the A-4 rocket cannot be dismissed as a mere freak. Practically, it was a new weapon, which brought new hazards to the

lives of millions, and set new problems of defence. Its significance, and that of the flying-bomb, when posed against the wider background of the war as a whole, remain to be considered.

PART IV: A SUMMING UP.

225. In describing our countermeasures to the flying bomb and A-4 rocket, I have been at pains to point out that these measures were only a part of operations of much wider scope, ultimately extending over the greater part of Europe. Perhaps a balanced view is best preserved by remembering that although defence against these two weapons formed the main task of the air defences during a period of nearly ten months, operations directly concerned with the bomb and rocket absorbed only a fraction of the total Allied air effort, offensive and defensive. From the time when attacks on "Crossbow" targets began, in August, 1943, until the end of the war with Germany, these operations accounted for about eight per cent. of the total weight of bombs dropped by the tactical and strategic air forces in the western theatre. On the other hand, the number of guns and balloons concentrated in south-east England that summer as part of our defences against the flying bomb was certainly the greatest ever assembled in a comparable area for the purpose of air defence. The fighter squadrons deployed in this role were limited in number by geographical conditions; but they included some of our fastest aircraft, which had to be withheld from operations in the tactical area.

226. This leads naturally to the question: to what extent did this expenditure of effort prevent the Germans from doing what they set out to do? An answer calls for a few comments on what the German intentions seem to have been. When accelerated development of the A-4 rocket began in 1942, the Germans cannot have known very clearly what they meant to do with it. Not only had the capabilities of the weapon yet to be established, but in any case the formulation of precise strategic aims does not seem to have been the enemy's strong suit. In the OKW* the Germans possessed what the Allies sometimes accused themselves of lacking—namely, a permanent and fully equipped organ for the supreme direction of the war. In practice, however, it failed to come up to expectations. For this there seem to have been two reasons. For one thing, Keitel, the head of the OKW, lacked a forceful personality. For another, the selection of his staff was entrusted to the General Staff of the Army, who were not so innocent as to put a rod for their own backs into the hands of men remarkable for their vigour. Hence the OKW worked less as an authoritative body than as a kind of secretariat to the Fuehrer. Hitler was thus the only man in Germany really in a position to settle problems of overall strategy.

227. Hitler, we are told, had little taste or aptitude for long-term planning, though his intuitive judgment of immediate issues was phenomenal. Such qualities as this were not enough to ensure a consistent aim or policy. When firm direction from above was lacking, the three fighting services pursued separate and

* *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, or Supreme Command of the Armed Forces.