

brought a revival, and in April and May the Germans increased their scale of attack still further in an attempt to conceal their intentions with respect to Russia.

42. Early in 1941, the Germans began to show an increasing tendency to concentrate on ports and shipping. There were other signs that an attempt to strangle our sea communications was contemplated, and at the end of February, I was instructed by the Air Ministry to provide additional "watch and ward" for coastwise shipping, and warned that the German bomber force might be expected to pay special attention in future to ports on the West Coast.

43. Early in March this was followed by a formal directive which required me to give priority to the defence of the Clyde, the Mersey and the Bristol Channel, which were now to rank above the aircraft industry in this respect.

44. I immediately took steps to strengthen the A.A. defences of these areas, partly by moving guns from other parts of the country and partly by pledging a substantial part of the anticipated production in March and April. By the middle of March, the move of 81 additional heavy A.A. guns to the West Coast ports had been ordered, and shortly afterwards further increases amounting to another 104 heavy A.A. guns were arranged. Actual increases exceeded what had been planned: 58 guns were withdrawn from the Midlands in March, and 24 guns came from the factories: by 1st June a further 106 new guns had been deployed.

45. I also modified the deployment of the night-fighter force in order to give increased protection to the Clyde and the Mersey. I considered that the Bristol Channel was already adequately defended by the squadrons deployed to cover the Southern approaches to the Midlands.

46. In spite of the enemy's growing tendency to attack ports and shipping, his attention at this stage was by no means exclusively devoted to such objectives. Many attacks were made on London and provincial towns, and the operations of German long-range fighters against our bombers and their bases caused some concern.

47. On the night of 10th May the enemy made the most ambitious attack on London that he had attempted up to that time, or indeed was ever to attempt. Although contemporary estimates were lower, it is now known that the German bomber force flew more than 500 sorties on this night. Visibility was good and the results were eminently satisfactory. A total of 60 single-engined fighters were sent to patrol at various heights over London, twenty over Beachy Head, and smaller numbers over the other approaches to the Capital, while twin-engined fighters were used to intercept the bombers as they came and went. These defensive fighters claimed between them the destruction of 23 enemy aircraft, of which the single-engined fighters claimed nineteen. A Defiant on an "Intruder" patrol over Northern France claimed one more, making 24. The A.A. gunners, although their fire was restricted by the presence of our fighters, claimed another four, making a grand total of 28 enemy aircraft, or roughly five per cent. of the enemy effort.

48. Perhaps the most remarkable feature of this night's operations was the success of the Hurricane and Spitfire flying in the Bomber Stream. On various other nights in April and May, aircraft on "Fighter Night" patrols claimed the destruction of twenty enemy aircraft in the aggregate. The impression that "Fighter Nights" was an unprofitable operation is widespread, but these figures show that, given good weather, moonlight, and a substantial concentration of enemy aircraft, these patrols could achieve satisfactory results. It was, however, only at periods when the moon was above the horizon that any success was achieved.

49. Operation "Fighter Night" was, of course, always regarded with disfavour by the A.A. gunners, whose chances of success it diminished. When it was first put into effect, the guns in the target area were forbidden to fire; but it was argued that their silence might cause apprehension amongst the public, and later they were allowed to fire up to heights safely below that of the lowest fighters. Such a restriction of A.A. fire was only justified, of course, when the conditions were particularly favourable to fighters, but the figures just quoted show that in these conditions its justification was beyond dispute. It is interesting to note that, despite the limitation imposed on them, the guns in the target area were not always barren of success on these occasions. While generally the guns kept the German bombers up to the heights at which the fighters could most conveniently engage them, it would seem that on occasions the fighters must have forced individual bombers down into the A.A. belt.

50. A night of scattered raiding on 11th May brought to an end the intensive phase which had begun eight months before. Thereafter, until the end of the year, the scale of attack was much smaller. Although a few more raids were made on London and the Midlands, the Germans devoted most of their attention for the rest of the year to targets near the coast or at sea, and to minelaying.

51. Undoubtedly the main reason for this change was a new strategic conception by the Germans. Having decided to attack the Russians, they withdrew most of their bombers from the West, leaving behind only a small force to second the German Navy's attempt to blockade the British Isles. To what extent this decision was due to the realisation by the enemy that his night offensive was failing as surely (though not so spectacularly) as his day offensive had failed in the previous Autumn, I do not know. But that the "Blitz" did fail to achieve any strategic purpose is clear enough. In eight months of intensive night raiding, the German bomber force did not succeed in breaking the spirit of the British people or preventing the expansion of our means of production and supply. Moreover, the cumulative effect of the ever-increasing losses which the Germans incurred as the defences got under way cannot have been a negligible factor, even though these losses were not sufficient in themselves to have brought the offensive to a standstill. To the country as a whole, and everyone in it, the end of the night battle was a great relief; nevertheless there was a sense in which it came to those under my command, and indeed to myself, as something of a disappointment. An