

*Protection of the Landing Beaches.*

210. In addition to the cover given to the cross-Channel movement of the assault forces, I provided a continuous daylight fighter cover of the beach-head areas. Nine squadrons in two forces of six squadrons of low cover and three squadrons of high cover continuously patrolled over the British and American beaches. A reserve of six fighter squadrons on the ground were also kept at readiness to strengthen any point if the enemy came up to challenge.

211. On D-Day alone, 1,547 sorties were flown on beach-head cover. Night fighters also patrolled continuously during the hours of darkness over the beach-head and shipping lanes; six squadrons of Mosquitoes were available for these operations. Details of the organisation and control and of the scale of effort of the fighter forces are set out in the next section of this Despatch (see paragraph 308).

212. *Balloon Defence of the Beach-head.*—To supplement the defences provided by fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft guns, it had been decided to provide balloon protection for all beaches and artificial ports (Mulberries). It was thought that balloons would give valuable protection against low-flying attacks and would permit economies in the number of light A.A. weapons that would be needed in the early stages of the assault.

213. Operational control of these balloons was vested in the local A.A. Defence Commander. In practice, balloons flew at 2,000 feet by night and just below cloud base by day. Suitable control funnels, within which balloons were grounded by day, were arranged so as to avoid interference with approaches to air strips.

214. In Part IV of this Despatch I give further details of some of the difficulties experienced and overcome in planning the employment of these balloons. Here I need only comment on the results achieved. The passive nature of balloon defence and the monotonous lack of results make it difficult to compute its value. There were practically no reports of low-level bombing attacks by enemy aircraft during the periods the balloons were flying, and such bombing as did occur was scattered, doing little damage to the beach maintenance and none to the Mulberries. One enemy aircraft was destroyed by a balloon on the beaches in the U.S. sector. Apart from the positive value of balloons as a deterrent to low-flying enemy attacks, I feel that the presence of balloons has, in itself, a definite morale value for both Naval and Army personnel.

*Dislocation of enemy communications and control.*

215. Air operations to dislocate enemy control of operations in the field were begun on the day before the assault. This dislocation of the enemy control went even further than the previous attacks on his Radar chain. The latter had blinded the enemy to the movement of the Allied assault forces; the air operations now proceeded to impede and disrupt in advance any possible enemy moves to make good his initial setback. To do this I tried during the initial stage of the assault, to break up the enemy

machinery of control and signals communications and by so doing to make as difficult as possible the co-ordination of enemy counter-attacks. Chateaux known to house German Corps and Divisional Headquarters and also German Army telephone exchanges were attacked on the evening of 5th June and through D-Day by fighters with bombs and rocket projectiles. These operations undoubtedly seriously embarrassed the enemy, both during the assault and later, when a large number of enemy headquarters were knocked out.

216. The Air Forces also were quite successful in causing casualties among German Generals. Field Marshal Rommel himself was fatally wounded in an air attack and it is believed that a further six to eight Commanders were also casualties. The killing in an air attack of a Divisional Commander during a critical stage of the fighting at St. Lo is thought to have had an important effect on the course of the Battle.

*Airborne Operations.*

217. The general plan of the airborne operations called for the dropping and landing of three divisions of parachute and gliderborne troops, and for the initial reinforcement and re-supply of these formations.

218. Two of these divisions were the 101st and 82nd United States Airborne Divisions and their task was to assist in the capture of the Cotentin Peninsula by aiding the seaborne landing of the First United States Army, and by preventing enemy reinforcements from moving into the peninsula from the south. The particular tasks of these divisions were to capture the areas of St. Mere Eglise and St. Martin and the neighbouring coastal defences.

219. The third division was the 6th British Airborne Division and its task was to operate on the left (eastern) flank of 1st Corps of the Second British Army, in the area between the Orne and Dives Rivers. The particular tasks of this division were:—

(a) to secure intact, and hold, the two bridges over the River Orne-Caen canal at Bonouville and Ranville:

(b) to neutralise an important enemy coastal battery and capture or neutralise a key strongpoint:

(c) to secure a firm base, including bridge-heads east of the River Orne:

(d) to prevent enemy reinforcements (including Panzer units) from moving towards the British left flank from the east and south-east.

To accomplish these objects, 3 and 5 Paratroop Brigade Groups flew in with a limited number of gliders carrying details of the 6th Airborne Division Headquarters on the night of D-1/D-Day, and were followed by the 6th Air Landing Brigade on the evening of D-Day.

220. A limited number of S.A.S. troops were dropped in selected areas before and after D-Day for special missions, by aircraft of No. 38 Group.

221. The airlift of all these forces was provided by the transport aircraft of A.E.A.F.