

that the story of the epic fight of No. 263 Squadron under Squadron-Leader J. W. Donaldson, D.S.O., near Andalsnes, may not be lost to History.

26. The outcome, as it affects this account, was the virtual loss of 2 squadrons in the sinking of the Aircraft Carrier *Glorious* after the evacuation of Narvik.

27. Next came the invasion of Holland, and the call to send Fighters to the assistance of the Dutch. The distance to Rotterdam was about the extreme range of the single-seater Fighter, which therefore operated under the disadvantage of having a very brief potential combat-time, followed by the necessity of a long sea crossing on the homeward way. The Blenheims, of course, had the necessary endurance, but they had not been designed as fighters, and their use against day fighters proved costly in comparison with the limited success which they attained.

28. The Defiants were used here for the first time, and, although they proved very effective against unescorted bombers, they, too, suffered heavy casualties when they encountered fighters in strength. As the result of this experience I formed the opinion that the Blenheims should be kept exclusively for night fighting, if possible, while I retained an open mind about the Defiants pending some experience of short-range fighting.

29. Then began the fighting in Belgium and Northern France, and at once my fears about the incidence of wastage in this type of fighting began to be realised.

30. At the beginning of April, 1940, there were 6 Fighter Squadrons in France.

31. Then 4 more complete squadrons were sent when the fighting began.

32. Then on the 13th May 32 pilots and aircraft were sent—say the equivalent of 2 squadrons.

33. Almost immediately afterwards 8 Half-Squadrons were sent. This was done under the impression that the loss of 8 Half-Squadrons would affect me less than that of 4 entire Squadrons, because it was supposed that I should be able to rebuild on the nuclei left behind. But this assumption was incorrect because I had neither the time nor the personnel available for purposes of reconstruction, and the remaining half-squadrons had to be amalgamated into Composite Units with a resulting disorganisation and loss of efficiency. At this time, too, I was ordered to withdraw trained pilots from squadrons and to send them overseas as reinforcements.

34. I had now lost the equivalent of 16 Squadrons, and in addition 4 Squadrons were sent to fight in France during the day and to return to English bases in the evening.

35. Other pilots were withdrawn from the Command through the system by which the Air Ministry dealt direct with Groups on questions of Personnel.

36. It must be remembered that during this period the Home Defence Squadrons were not idle, but that Hurricane Squadrons were participating in the fighting to a considerable extent, 4 Squadrons daily left S.E. England with orders to carry out an offensive patrol, to land and refuel in France or Belgium, and to carry out a second sortie before returning to England.

37. Hitherto I had succeeded generally in keeping the Spitfire Squadrons out of the Continental fighting. The reason for this, as stated above, was that the supply situation was so bad that they could not have maintained their existence in face of the Aircraft Casualty Rate experienced in France: between the 8th May and the 18th May 250 Hurricanes were lost.

38. When the Dunkerque fighting began, however, I could no longer maintain this policy, and the Spitfires had to take their share in the fighting.

39. When the Dunkerque evacuation was complete I had only 3 Day-Fighting Squadrons which had not been engaged in Continental fighting, and 12 Squadrons were in the line for the second time after having been withdrawn to rest and re-form.

40. All this time, it must be remembered, the attack on this Country had not begun; with a few accidental exceptions no bomb had been dropped on our soil. I was responsible for the Air Defence of Great Britain, and I saw my resources slipping away like sand in an hour-glass. The pressure for more and more assistance to France was relentless and inexorable. In the latter part of May, 1940, I sought and obtained permission to appear in person before the War Cabinet and to state my case. I was accorded a courteous and sympathetic hearing, and to my inexpressible relief my arguments prevailed and it was decided to send no more Fighter Reinforcements to France except to cover the final evacuation.

41. I know what it must have cost the Cabinet to reach this decision, but I am profoundly convinced that this was one of the great turning points of the war.

42. Another decision, of perhaps equal importance, was taken at about this time. I refer to the appointment of Lord Beaverbrook to the post of Minister of Aircraft Production. The effect of this appointment can only be described as magical, and thereafter the Supply situation improved to such a degree that the heavy aircraft wastage which was later incurred during the "Battle of Britain" ceased to be the primary danger, its place being taken by the difficulty of producing trained fighter pilots in adequate numbers.

43. After the Evacuation from Dunkerque the pressure on the Fighter Command became less intense, but it by no means disappeared. Hard fighting took place along the coast from Calais to Le Havre to cover the successive evacuations from that coast. Then the centre of gravity shifted to Cherbourg and its neighbourhood, and the "Battle of Britain" followed on without any appreciable opportunity to rest and re-form the units which had borne the brunt of the fighting.

44. The above considerations should be kept in mind when Appendix A (Order of Battle on the 8th July, 1940) is being studied.

45. The Guns and Searchlights available for the Air Defence of Great Britain were arranged as shown on the map which constitutes Appendix B.

46. The fall of Belgium and France had increased the danger to the South and West of England, and had necessitated a considerable modification of the original arrangements when bombing attacks could start only from German soil.