

107. Here my practice of sharing actively and frequently in the fighter operations stood me in good stead. Trying to shoot down a missile travelling at six miles a minute while flying at the same speed and a height of perhaps a thousand feet across a narrow belt of undulating country bounded by balloons and guns was a business whose subtleties were not readily appreciable from an office chair. I found that a practical acquaintance with this business had its uses. Not only did it help me to acquire a fund of tactical knowledge that I could hardly have gained in any other way; above all it enabled me to talk on a basis of common understanding and endeavour with the pilots whose devotion it was my task to foster.

108. An incidental advantage of the abolition of the inland gun-belt was that it gave the searchlights, which remained when the guns had gone, more scope to assist night fighters. Another unlooked-for benefit of the move was that it brought the headquarters of the A.A. Batteries close to the bases from which our fighters were operating. Immediate and personal contact between Battery Commanders and Station Commanders suddenly became possible and even easy. I found during my first visits to stations after the move that advantage was not always being taken of this proximity. I was shown—as I had been shown for the last five weeks—aircraft whose pilots alleged that the guns had fired at them; I was shown marks of damage said to have been thus inflicted, and fragments of shell-casing which appeared to have entered aircraft or fallen on airfields. In each case I suggested that the Station Commander concerned should pocket the more portable of these exhibits and, armed with this evidence, go and discuss his grievances, real or imaginary, with the local Battery Commander.

109. The hint was taken. The consequences were profound and striking. As a result of these meetings between Station and Battery Commanders, the first requisite of understanding between two parties whose interests must occasionally conflict—the realisation that the other side also has a viewpoint—was attained. The mists of suspicion whose gathering had troubled me so much were dispersed almost overnight. On subsequent visits to the same stations I was again shown aircraft that had suffered minor damage from anti-aircraft fire. But this time, instead of having to listen to grievances against the gunners, I was told of pilots who had flouted discipline and good sense by venturing too near the guns. In short, pilots and gunners were beginning to understand one another's problems and work together. Unity was restored. The process reached its climax towards the close of the main attack. Flying towards the south coast on the 28th August, I could see over Romney Marsh a wall of black smoke marking the position of the "Diver" barrage. From time to time a fresh salvo would be added to repair the slow erosion of the wind. On the far side of the barrage fighters were shooting down flying bombs into the Channel; on the nearer side more fighters waited on its fringe to pounce on the occasional bomb that got so far. The whole was as fine a spectacle of co-operation as any commander could wish to see.

110. That day 97 bombs approached these shores. The defences brought down 90* and only four reached London.

111. Some weeks before this the fact that we were gaining mastery over the flying bomb had become clear to ourselves and also to the Germans. During the second week after the re-deployment of the guns, the defences brought down a higher proportion of the bombs that came within their compass than in any previous week; and only a little more than a quarter of the total got to London.

112. In the following week there was a spell of bad weather, and the fighters did not do so well; but the gunners, whom this factor affected much less, again did better than before. For the first time since the beginning of the attack they maintained a higher rate of destruction than the fighters over a full week. About this time the Meteor, our first jet-propelled fighter, came into service, and I decided to match jet against jet by trying it out against the flying bomb. At first only a few of these aircraft were available, and various problems, including that of limited endurance, had to be overcome before we could get the full benefit out of the Meteor's great speed.

113. As the month went by, all concerned gained further experience and new equipment began to yield results. Soon the overall performance of the defences, and that of the gunners in particular, surpassed all previous achievements. In the middle of August we reached the stage of being sure that, whatever the weather, we could bring down from one-half to three-quarters of all the bombs that approached this island. Indeed, it has been calculated that during the last three weeks of this phase only one out of every seven bombs that the enemy launched actually reached London. Shortly afterwards the enemy High Command permitted the publication in the German press of the significant pronouncement that the Allies had found a counter-measure to the flying bomb. In the last few days of August only an occasional bomb eluded the defences and got through to its target. Thus it is fair to claim that almost complete ascendancy over this novel and ingenious weapon had been gained when, at the beginning of September, the capture of the launching areas by our Armies ended the main attack.

(f) *Attacks with Bombs launched by Aircraft from Holland (9th July to 5th September).*

114. Meanwhile, as early as the 8th July, flying bombs had started to approach London from a new direction, namely from the east. No launching sites were known to exist in Belgium; and after a few weeks it was established that these bombs, which came only at night, were being launched by specially-equipped He. 111 aircraft operating wholly or mainly from bases in Holland.

* This figure was made up as follows :

Shot down by fighters			
over sea	13	
over land	10	
		—	23
Shot down by A.A. guns			
over sea	46	
over land	19	
		—	65
Brought down by balloons	...	—	2
		—	90
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