

moving all the guns to the coast was sound. At the same time I learned that Sir Robert Watson-Watt, the Scientific Adviser on Telecommunications to the Air Ministry, had made an independent study of the problem and reached substantially the same conclusions as Air Commodore Ambler. Sir Robert's opinion, coming from such a distinguished pioneer of radar, carried all the more weight since better conditions for the radar equipment of the guns was one of the main advantages claimed for the proposed change.

90. On the other hand the matter had necessarily to be considered from many aspects besides that to which Air Commodore Ambler, as an Air Staff Officer, had properly confined himself. Even if I accepted the argument that the material and moral effect on pilots of splitting their sphere of operation into two would be no worse than that of excluding them from the existing gun-belt, many practical and administrative factors had still to be taken into account. Hundreds of guns, with all their equipment, were now in position on the Downs. Great reserves of ammunition had been collected there. Thousands of miles of telephone cables had been laid over a period of six months. Accommodation had been found or improvised for the gunners. The best positions available for the guns themselves and their equipment had been selected. In short, a small city was spread out between Redhill and the Thames. The proposal was that we should pick up this city bodily and transport it thirty or forty miles further south. On top of this, for the last two weeks men had been busy building permanent emplacements for the guns among the apple orchards and on the slopes of the chalk hills in Kent and Surrey. The organism was taking root. To transplant it might still be possible, but would not long remain so. Air Commodore Ambler's proposal, with all its consequences, must be endorsed or rejected without delay.

91. I decided to think the matter over during the day and hold a conference late that afternoon, primarily for the purpose of discussing it with General Pile. In the meantime I took steps to acquaint him with the proposal so that he might be in a position to give a considered opinion when the time came. My reflections were punctuated by the intermittent clatter of the bombs, which continually reminded me of the hourly toll of lives and property. The attack that day was the lightest we had had yet; nevertheless sixteen flying bombs crashed into Greater London.

92. General Pile came to the conference with three of his staff. At my request, Sir Robert Watson-Watt also attended, as did the Air Officer Commanding, No. 11 Group, with two of his staff, a representative of the Air Commander-in-Chief, and several of my own staff officers.

93. I opened the conference by outlining the situation. I then asked General Pile whether he supported the proposal to move all the guns to the coast, leaving the balloons where they were, and creating two areas for fighters, one between the balloons and the new gun-belt, and the other in front of the gun-belt, over the sea. He replied that he was in full agreement with it: and in fact, the merits of siting the guns along the coast had been under consideration in A.A. Command for some time.

From the gunners' point of view, such a deployment would present notable advantages. General Pile now proposed that the guns be deployed between St. Margaret's Bay and Beachy Head, and asked that they be given freedom of action inside a strip extending 10,000 yards out to sea and 5,000 yards inland.

94. Air Vice-Marshal Saunders, the Air Officer Commanding, No. 11 Group, might have been expected to demur, since the plan would throw a barrier across the area in which his fighters operated. On the contrary, he welcomed the proposal, which he said was "certainly the most satisfactory plan that had yet been produced". Sir Robert Watson-Watt also spoke in favour of the plan, and undertook to produce improved radar equipment for controlling fighters over the sea.

95. On hearing these opinions, which confirmed the conviction that had been growing in my mind throughout the day, I decided to adopt the plan. This left two courses open to me. On the one hand, since the forces which I intended to re-dispose had already been allotted to me for the defence of London against flying bombs, and no move of guns from one defended area to another was involved, I might regard the change as a tactical one and act at once on my own responsibility. On the other hand, bearing in mind that no move involving so many guns had ever been made on purely tactical grounds before, I might adopt a more proscriptive attitude and refer the matter to higher authority first, as I should have done, for example, if I had proposed to move guns from, say, Manchester to the "Diver" belt, or from Birmingham to Bristol.

96. I decided in favour of the former course. I felt that the situation had reached such a point that no delay could be accepted. If the work on the gun-emplacements on the Downs were allowed to proceed even for another week, the opportunity to shift the guns would be lost. They must be shifted now, or anchored where they were. It seemed to me, rightly or wrongly, that if I were to pause and consult higher authority at this juncture, controversial questions of such magnitude might arise and the further authorities who might claim to be consulted would be so numerous, that I should not reasonably be able to count on a decision before it was too late. Time was running out. It was now or never.

97. I therefore gave instructions before the meeting closed for the new arrangements to be set in train forthwith. General Pile returned to his headquarters, and within a few hours advance parties were on their way to the coast.

98. During the following week vehicles of Anti-Aircraft Command travelled an aggregate distance of two-and-three-quarter million miles in consequence of this decision. Stores and ammunition weighing as much as two battle-ships, as well as the guns themselves and 23,000 men and women, were moved to the coast, and telephone cables long enough in the aggregate to have stretched from London to New York were laid. By dawn on the 17th July all the heavy guns were in action in their new positions, where they were joined by the light guns two days later.

99. After the conference I acquainted the Air Commander-in-Chief with its outcome. He asked me whether we could not make a trial