

1942, and it may be noted that in the sequel, although two fighter Sectors were duly set up with Headquarters at Stornoway and Tiree, and remained in being until 1944 and 1943 respectively, it never became necessary to base there any flying units of Fighter Command.

209. In the Summer of 1941 I was instructed to provide an increased scale of defence for certain Naval anchorages in Northern Ireland and it was decided that the number of Sectors in Ulster should be increased to three. This necessitated the formation of a new Fighter Group and accordingly on 25th September, No. 82 Group under the command of Air Commodore G. M. Lawson, M.C., and with its Headquarters at Belfast, assumed operational control of these three Sectors.

210. As a result of these and other developments, the Command comprised, at the end of 1941, seven operational Groups and 33 Sectors—ten more than had existed at the beginning of the period covered by this account.

(e) *Adoption of Section of Two Aircraft and Three-Squadron Wing as Standard Tactical Units.*

211. During the Battle of Britain it became clear that from the tactical viewpoint there was much to be said for sections consisting of two or four aircraft rather than three, which was then the standard number. When a formation broke up in a dog-fight it was desirable that it should break into pairs, so that individual pilots could give and receive mutual protection. A section of three aircraft could not do this.

212. Since administrative arrangements were based on the sub-division of a squadron into two flights each comprising two sections of three aircraft, there was a conflict here between operational and administrative interests. But the tactical superiority of the section of two or four was so clear that some sacrifice of administrative convenience was obviously justified. Accordingly, it was decided that the section of two aircraft should be adopted, and in the Spring of 1941 a new sub-division of the squadron into two flights each comprising three sections of two aircraft was standardized throughout the Command.

213. Another change which arose out of experience gained in the Battle of Britain concerned the use of Wings consisting of three or more squadrons. Such wings had sometimes claimed exceptionally good results in combat with large enemy formations, and there was a body of opinion which favoured a more frequent use of them. Against this it was argued that in many cases, if time were consumed in assembling large wings, it would be impossible to attack the enemy formations before they reached their targets.

214. A conference to discuss this point was held at the Air Ministry in October, 1940. At this meeting it was confirmed that Wings of three or more Squadrons were the proper weapon to oppose large enemy formations when conditions were suitable; but as to what constituted suitable conditions for their employment no definite decision was reached. A

more concrete suggestion was that some of the squadrons in the Command should be disposed and organized in such a way as to facilitate their employment as wings when occasion called for it.

215. It was my view that the best way of defending an objective was not so much to interpose a screen of fighter squadrons between that objective and the enemy, as to shoot down a high proportion of the enemy force sent to attack it, irrespective of whether the objective was bombed on a particular occasion or not.

216. On assuming Command, therefore, I adopted the suggestion made at the conference. Provision was made to operate three-Squadron Wings from a number of Sectors in South and South-East England, and in February, 1941, the sanction of the Air Ministry was obtained for the appointment of Wing Commanders second-in-command at fifteen of the principal Stations in the Command. I arranged that these Officers should concern themselves with the operation and training of the day squadrons in their Sectors and, where there were three-Squadron Wings, Sector Commanders were encouraged to rely on them to lead the wings in battle on important occasions.

217. By that time we had turned to the offensive, and it was as an offensive weapon that I had begun to visualise the wings. If there had always been some controversy as to their practical usefulness in defensive warfare, their advantages for offensive use were clear enough. It so happened that no opportunity was to arise in 1941 to test them on the defensive, since the Germans did not resume their mass attacks of 1940. The wings became, however, an essential weapon of our own daylight offensive, which began to gather weight early in the year and was greatly intensified after the middle of June.

(f) *Growth and Development of Artillery and Balloon Defences.*

218. The development of the Group and Sector organisation in Fighter Command was accompanied by a considerable expansion of the artillery and balloon defences.

219. I exercised general operational control over these defences and was responsible for their disposition and co-ordination with other means of defence. I was not responsible for their administration nor, in the case of the artillery defences, for training or technical development, apart from the provision (during part of the period) of aircraft for anti-aircraft co-operation and exercises.

220. It is therefore necessary to mention here only a few of the more important organisational and technical changes, such as had a close bearing on the operation or disposition of the defences.

221. One of the chief of these was the re-organisation of A.A. Command which occurred at the end of 1940. Three A.A. Corps were created, the number of A.A. Divisions was increased from seven to twelve and these formations were re-grouped so as to facilitate co-operation with the formations of Fighter Command. Co-operation at the Command level had always been and remained excellent, but