

me that the co-operation of a bomber force was necessary to make these operations effective. The Chief of the Air Staff upheld this view; and it was decided that the "Circus" offensive should continue.

150. Up to this time 46 "Circus" operations had been carried out since 14th June. In those six weeks escort and support had been given to 374 bomber sorties and over 8,000 fighter sorties flown. We had lost 123 fighter pilots but it was hoped that many more German fighters than this had been destroyed. In addition, over 1,000 fighter sorties had been flown in support of 32 bomber operations against shipping, including the operations against the German capital ships on 24th July and an attack on the docks at Le Havre on 19th June. Fighter sweeps without bombers accounted for approximately another 800 sorties, and operation "Rhubarb"—resumed on 16th July after a month's pause—for a further 61. Altogether the six weeks' intensive effort had meant the expenditure of nearly 10,000 offensive sorties by my Command. This was an impressive total, but to preserve perspective it must be remembered that the effort devoted to defensive purposes was still greater, approximately this number of sorties being expended during the same period on the protection of shipping alone.

151. The "Circus" offensive was resumed on 5th August and 26 operations were carried out during the month. Blenheims of No. 2 Group provided the striking force for 24 of them and Hampdens of No. 5 Group for the other two. As the enemy gained experience in repelling these attacks his opposition grew more effective, and the balance of advantage showed a tendency to turn against us. This being so, it was for consideration whether the scale of the offensive should be reduced, if not at once, at any rate as soon as there was any sign of a more stable situation on the Eastern Front.

152. Apparently the same considerations occurred simultaneously to the Chiefs of Staff. Consequently, the problem was studied at the end of August and beginning of September in the Air Ministry as well as at my Headquarters and at Headquarters No. 11 Group. The outcome was that, although it was now clear that the offensive had not succeeded in forcing the return of German Units, at any rate in substantial numbers, from the Eastern Front, and could not now be expected to do so, it was generally agreed that it ought to be continued, although on the reduced scale which the declining season was likely to impose in any case. A suggestion made by the Air Officer Commanding No. 11 Group, which I endorsed, was that, instead of being largely concentrated against the French departments of the Nord and Pas-de-Calais, the attacks should now be delivered over a wider area so as to induce the Germans to spread their fighters more thinly along the coasts of France and the Low Countries.

153. Accordingly, twelve "Circus" operations were carried out in September and two during the first week of October. The objectives attacked by the bombers included two targets at Rouen, one at Amiens, one at Le Havre and one at Ostend.

154. By this time it was clear that demands from other theatres of war were likely to cause a shortage of fighter aircraft at home for some time to come. For this reason, and also because the weather was growing less favourable and the situation on the Eastern Front had reached a stage at which it was unlikely to be materially affected by the "Circus" offensive, on 12th October I instructed the three Group Commanders concerned with offensive operations that in future "Circus" operations must only be undertaken in specially favourable circumstances, but that a rigorous offensive should be continued against shipping and "fringe targets".

155. Early in October the Hurricane bomber, which had been under development for some time, became available for active operations, and armed with this weapon the Command assumed responsibility for what was called the "Channel Stop". The object of this operation, which hitherto had been performed mainly by Blenheims of No. 2 Group with fighter escort, was to close the area between the North Foreland, Ostend, Dieppe and Beachy Head to all hostile shipping by day.

156. When the Air Ministry decided to reduce the scale of the "Circus" offensive in September, I made arrangements at their instance to increase the scale of scope of operation "Rhubarb". Hitherto pilots had seldom been lucky enough to meet German aircraft, so that their only alternative to inaction had been to make rather aimless attacks on surface objectives. I might have taken advantage of this situation by imposing a rigid "target policy," but up to the present I had judged it inadvisable to lay down any rule which might give the impression that attacks on surface objectives were as important as the destruction of enemy aircraft. Pilots were therefore given a free hand in this matter so long as they observed the general bombardment instructions which reflected the attitude of H.M. Government to questions of humanity and international law.

157. Although the relative importance of enemy aircraft and surface objectives as objects of attack had not changed, my staff and I felt that the time had come to subordinate the ideal to the real by recognizing that on nine occasions out of ten our pilots were not likely to see any German aircraft and must either attack surface objectives or do nothing.

158. Accordingly, new instructions for operation "Rhubarb" were issued in October. Pilots were now to proceed to a selected surface objective, and if they met no German aircraft on the way, that would be their target. If they did meet German aircraft, then the destruction of those aircraft would take priority.

159. Categories from which the surface objectives were to be selected were drawn up by my staff in consultation with the Air Ministry; they included canal barges, railway tank wagons, electrical transformer stations and, for a season, factories engaged in distilling alcohol from beet. On 20th October, H.M. Government withdrew a long-standing ban on the attack of moving goods trains, so that we could now attack tank wagons on the move as well as in sidings.