

115. To meet this new threat I arranged with General Pile that the gun-belt should be supplemented by a gun "box" situated in the quadrilateral Rochester-Whitstable-Clacton-Chelmsford.* By the middle of August 208 heavy, 178 40 mm., and 404 20 mm. guns, besides 108 rocket barrels, were deployed in the "box". I also took steps to extend the balloon barrage to Gravesend,† and fly standing patrols over the mouth of the Thames.

116. During July and August 120 flying bombs were seen or detected approaching this country from the east: the number actually despatched from that direction was doubtless much greater, for launching the bombs from aircraft was a tricky business which must have resulted in many premature descents. There followed a lull that lasted until the early hours of the 5th September—four and a half days after the last bomb had come from northern France—when at least another nine bombs approached London from the east. The "battle of the bomb" was not yet over; but these nine missiles were Parthian shafts, which marked the end of one phase rather than the beginning of another. They were a postscript to the main attack.

(g) *Attacks with Bombs launched by Aircraft from Germany (16th September, 1944, to 14th January, 1945).*

117. The further lull that followed the launching of the last bomb by aircraft operating from Holland lasted the best part of a fortnight; and to many it seemed that "the battle of the bomb" was over. Our Armies were advancing rapidly. Before long they had driven the Germans from every part of the Continent where launching ramps within the existing range of London could be built. The German flying unit responsible for launching the bombs from the air was known to be leaving its bases in Holland and moving north-east. Not only the uninformed, but many in positions of authority concluded with relief that London's long ordeal was ended.

118. This belief was too sanguine. Further attacks with long-range weapons could not be ruled out. Lacking ramps within the existing range of the bomb, and without using their old bases in Holland, the Germans might still send flying-bombs against us. They might increase the range of the bomb and build ramps further back. They might—and certainly could—launch bombs from the air by using airfields in Germany. In the event they were to do both. Moreover, the flying bomb was not their only long-range weapon. They were known to possess a rocket capable of covering more than 200 miles and which was

* An alternative deployment envisaging the mounting of guns on ships moored in the mouth of the Thames, as well as on land, was considered, but rejected because General Pile preferred a deployment that would allow of continuous engagement of bombs by cross fire as they flew up the river, and also because, in any case, not enough ships could have been found to make the plan fully effective. Nevertheless, a few guns mounted on forts and small vessels were eventually included in the eastern "Diver" defences.

† In addition, 1,250 possible balloon-sites north of the Thames were reconnoitred; but I decided not to fly any balloons in that area unless it became essential to do so, since General Pile feared that their cables would hamper the defence of London against orthodox air attack by interfering with the radar sets belonging to the guns.

expected to be ready for use against us during the first fortnight in September. Despite some hopeful statements by men in responsible positions, my staff and I felt that, so long as the Germans continued to hold the western provinces of Holland, we ought to be prepared to meet attacks by the rocket.*

119. That the Germans might still launch flying bombs from aircraft was not disputed by the Air Ministry or the Chiefs of Staff; and I secured authority to keep the existing "Diver" defences in being.

120. By the middle of September the German flying-bomb air-launching unit had completed its move and was installed at bases in western Germany. Towards dawn on the 16th September the attack was resumed. The first bomb fell in Essex at 0549 hours. A few minutes later another came down at Barking. During the next half-hour five more bombs approached this country; one reached Woolwich, one fell at Felsted, and the remaining three were brought down by fighters, one of them into the sea. Two bombs not included in these figures were destroyed at sea by the Royal Navy.

121. After a night of inactivity the attack continued on the evening of the 17th September. Only three bombs came within range and two of them were shot down—one by a fighter and one by gunfire. More bombs followed on the succeeding nights.

122. Countering this phase of the offensive presented special difficulties, because the enemy was no longer tied to fixed ramps. Hitherto he had exploited the mobility of the kind of aerial launching-platform provided by an aircraft only to a limited extent: more than nine-tenths of all the bombs seen or detected up to the beginning of September had come from ramps. Nevertheless the few bombs launched from the air had sufficed to turn the left flank of the defences and compel us to extend it by creating the eastern "box".

123. The advance of the Allied Armies had now forced the enemy back on bases further to the north and east.† Clearly, he intended to make a virtue of necessity by attempting a further turning movement which entailed launching his bombs well out over the North Sea.

124. To meet this move General Pile and I decided to extend the defences northwards by adding to the "Diver Belt" and "Diver Box" a "Diver Strip" extending from the left flank of the "box" at Clacton up to Great Yarmouth. We had already taken some guns from the "belt" to strengthen the "box". We now carried this process a stage further. Between the 16th and 19th September orders were issued to sixteen heavy and nine light anti-aircraft batteries to move from the "belt" to the coast between Clacton and Harwich. As the month went on further moves were

* For an account of the rocket campaign, which was to start on the 8th September, 1944, see Part III.

† There were airfields in northern and central Holland which he might still have used; but tactically they would have been no more convenient than bases in Western Germany, and to supply them with bombs and fuel would have been no easy matter.