

Far East. With them went No. 232 Squadron, which had returned to the Command in July after being absent for training in Combined Operations earlier in the year.

195. The outcome was that the Command reached the end of 1941 with a strength of 100 squadrons—comprising 23 night defensive squadrons, two "Intruder" Squadrons, and 75 day squadrons—in addition to ten "Turbinlite" Flights (as they were called), whose function was to carry airborne searchlights. In the event these "Turbinlite" Flights, despite the skill and enthusiasm of those concerned with them, were to accomplish little, for by the time they were used in substantial numbers the enemy had virtually ceased to send over the slower bombers with which they might have coped successfully.

196. Thus by the end of the year, the Command had achieved approximately the strength which I should have wished to have at my disposal in the Spring and Summer. The squadrons had, however, been drained of most of their more seasoned members, and the general level of experience was not so high as I could have wished. But since the size of the opposing force left in the West after the opening of the German campaign against Russia in June was only about a third of that which had opposed us in 1940, there is no doubt that at this stage the country was adequately defended.

197. On the other hand, the enemy was working on internal lines of communication and could have moved back units from Poland or the Mediterranean more quickly than we could have brought squadrons from overseas. It would be a mistake, therefore, to conclude that we were needlessly strong.

198. From August to December two Hurricane Squadrons were detached for service on the North Russian Front in No. 151 Wing under the command of Wing Commander H. N. G. Ramsbottom-Isherwood, A.F.C.

(d) *Expansion of Group and Sector System*

199. During the period covered by this account a considerable expansion of the Group and Sector system took place, mainly in accordance with plans laid before the period began.

200. The need for new Fighter Groups on the flanks of Nos. 11 and 13 Groups had become apparent at an early stage of the War. Indeed, a Group in the West of England was visualised in the Command's tentative plans even before war broke out. Accordingly, Nos. 10 and 14 Groups had been formed during the Battle of Britain. Thus by the beginning of November, 1940, there were five Groups and 23 Sectors in existence, as against the three Groups and eighteen Sectors required by the approved pre-war programme.

201. Furthermore, on the fall of France it had become necessary to plan a further extension of the air defence system up the West Coast. Clearly another Group would be needed to take charge of the Sectors which were to be formed in Wales and the West Midlands. Accordingly, No. 9 Group began to form at Preston early in August, 1940, and on 16th September its first Air Officer Commanding, Air Vice-Marshal W. A. McClaughry, D.S.O., M.C., D.F.C., took up his appointment.

202. At the beginning of November, 1940, the development of this Group had not yet reached the operational stage, mainly because the necessary airfields and communications were not yet ready. Consequently, such specific fighter defence as it was possible to allot to the area for which the Group would ultimately become responsible was still being provided by No. 12 Group.

203. In the middle of October special measures had been set in train to bring No. 9 Group to the operational stage as rapidly as possible. These efforts continued, with the result that on 1st December the Group was able to assume operational control of two of the four Sectors (later increased to five) which were allotted to it. By the middle of March, 1941, No. 9 Group had assumed responsibility for all its Sectors in daylight, although No. 12 Group, with its better night-flying facilities, continued to defend one Sector at night.

204. Before this a Sector, planned before the War, had been established in Ulster, where one fighter squadron was established in the Summer of 1940. At the same time improved facilities for operating fighters under the control of No. 13 Group were set up in South-Western Scotland.

205. These measures, of which some had been executed and all had been planned when the period under discussion opened, now bore fruit, and the twin problem of providing adequate defences in the West and protecting shipping between the Rhinns of Islay and the Bristol Channel was much eased in consequence.

206. In the Spring of 1941, there were six operational fighter Groups and 29 Sectors in existence. On the outbreak of war the flanks of the air defence system had stood on the Firth of Forth and Spithead, although there was an outlying detachment at Filton for the defence of Bristol. In a little over eighteen months the system had been so expanded that the Command was now able to operate short-range fighters, under close control, over almost every part of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and adjacent waters, with the exception of North-West Scotland.

207. Towards the end of 1940 the Command was asked to form two new Sectors in this last area in order that shipping in the Minches and objectives in the Western Highlands and the Hebrides might be brought under the shelter of the Fighter Command "umbrella". Although this desire was natural, its accomplishment was far from easy. There were no airfields suitable for short-range fighters on the mainland, and the nature of the country made it impossible to construct them. From a practical viewpoint there was much to be said for placing the responsibility for this distant area on Coastal Command, whose long-range fighters could operate in safety from airfields in the Hebrides. However, the Air Ministry rejected this solution, and eventually a compromise was adopted, whereby short-range fighters to be provided by Fighter Command would be supplemented by long-range fighters, which would be provided by Coastal Command. The latter would operate under Fighter Command when used for controlled interception.

208. The arrangements necessary to put this scheme into effect were not completed until