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**'DOWDING SHOULD GO'. CHANGES IN
LEADERSHIP, STRATEGY AND TACTICS AT
FIGHTER COMMAND, JULY TO DECEMBER
1940, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE
BIG WING CONTROVERSY.**

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

JOHN PHILIP RAY

Volume 2

Volume 2

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19 AUGUST - 7 SEPTEMBER

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION AND PRE-WAR BACKGROUND
TO FIGHTER COMMAND TACTICS

The period from 19 August to 7 September was marked by a growing intensity of German raids on the mainland of southern Britain. Their prime purpose was the destruction, or neutralising, of Fighter Command which had responded so vigorously to earlier attacks. At that stage RAF pilots, especially those in No.11 Group, were subjected to greater strain than they had experienced since the start of the war.

The resulting pressure led to the deepening of divisions within Fighter Command, with Park on the one hand and Leigh-Mallory on the other at growing odds over the most effective tactics to be employed in defence. Park, following the agreed policy of early response to bombers before they reached their targets, despatched fighters in single, or double squadron strength. In his view there was insufficient warning to organise larger groups and, anyway, he did not believe that Wings of three or more squadrons were the most effective formations in defence. On the other side, Leigh-Mallory, especially towards the end of this period, was convinced that Wing tactics brought greater casualties to the attackers and fewer to the defenders; he wanted the Duxford Wing to be used in conjunction with Park's squadrons.

By 7 September, when this phase of the battle ended, the rift between the two Group commanders was pronounced. Park surmised that No.12 Group aircraft were to provide a source of

reinforcement for him, when he requested; Leigh-Mallory believed that his squadrons should be allowed to operate in their own right over No.11 Group's area. The separate interpretations may be traced back to the vagueness of pre-war arrangements and Dowding, as Commander-in-Chief, was in a unique position to exercise authority and resolve the developing quarrel at this stage. However, he failed to intervene. In this way, it is true to say that he lost control of the tactical fighting of the battle and allowed an inordinate and unnecessary burden to fall on Park and the pilots of No.11 Group.

* * *

In view of the criticism made later of Dowding's tactical handling of the battle, it is important to appreciate a point seldom noted. That is that the seeds of a cardinal difference over tactics between staff in the Air Ministry and those at Headquarters, Fighter Command were sown before the war began and were to have a great effect on the Command's leadership as the Battle of Britain progressed. At issue was the division of responsibilities between Groups and the tactics to be employed against German bomber formations attacking Great Britain.

Within the limits of his planning for defence, Dowding gave considerable power to his commanders of Groups, believing that they, as experienced and loyal colleagues, would follow his policy to the letter. Yet although each Group was responsible for its own defensive position, there would be times of interdependence when the need for help and reinforcement arose. Different interpretations of orders and tactics could then become thorny problems, partly through Dowding's failure to plan

completely for the synchronization of the actions of his Groups and to predict the result of divergent tactics. Therein lay the main fault in a flawed system which was to lead directly to the Big Wing controversy.(1)

The fault was underlined after the Air Defence Exercises of 1939, when a conference was held at Bentley Priory to discuss results and lessons learned. A particular difficulty was the procedure for handing over raids from one Group to another or between Sectors. The problem was never adequately solved then, nor, as events were to prove, a year later.(2)

The root of the subsequent Big Wing controversy in August 1940 was that Leigh-Mallory's belief in using fighter Wings of three or more squadrons was taken up by a cabal within the Air Staff and used against Dowding and Park who asserted that they were, for the conditions at that time, both unwieldy and inefficient.

* * *

1. See AIR 16/25, Reinforcement of sectors in 12 Group from neighbouring sectors, September 1939 - July 1940. In September 1939 Dowding wrote to Leigh-Mallory, 'I have delegated tactical control almost completely to Groups and Sectors, but I have not delegated strategical control and the threat to the line must be regarded as a whole and not parochially'. He finished, 'and I would only ask you to remember that the Fighter Command has to operate as a whole'.

2. See CAB 3/8, CID 308A, Review of arrangements for the Air Defence of Great Britain. A memo from the Home Defence Committee on 7 July 1939 said that it had been necessary 'to provide a sufficiently elastic ground organisation to permit of reinforcement by squadrons from one area to another'. However, the details of who was to control the aircraft and the form in which the assistance would be despatched were not resolved. See AIR 16/129, Home Defence Exercise, August 1939: reports. See also AIR 16/294, Operational Instructions No.12 Fighter Group: September 1938 - September 1939. Wykeham, pp.76-77, explains that 'though a procedure was standardized for handover, it remained a troublesome problem for many years'.

The tactical use of RAF fighters had exercised the minds of a number of the Air Staff before 1939. For several of them, estimates of the most effective employment of squadrons were based on their own former careers as pilots in the First World War, flying biplanes in France or Britain.(3) Little had been learned about the use of modern fighters in war, either from the experience of the Japanese air force in their campaigns against China and Russia from 1937-8, or from that of the newly formed Luftwaffe during the Spanish Civil War. The world's major air forces which had not taken part in these campaigns - those of the United States, France and Great Britain - had to learn their lessons expensively after 1939.(4)

In 1936 a report anticipated that the taking of 'a considerable toll of attacking aircraft' would, in itself, 'prove a powerful deterrent to continuance of German air attacks against this country'. If, after each raid, a percentage of bombers failed to return, this would 'undoubtedly have a cumulative effect upon the morale of pilots'. This estimate, written before the

3. Harold Balfour, then Under-Secretary of State for Air, later described the early wartime Air Council. 'Air Marshals, World War One, no doubt in their day were active and gallant pilots. But they'd none of them flown modern aircraft at all. I think I was the only member of the Air Council when I joined the Air Council as Vice-President in 1938 who could really fly Service aircraft'. See 'The Forgotten Pilots: The Women Who Flew in the Second World War', television programme, BBC South, 25 May 1984. Among Dowding's principal opponents in the Air Ministry who were covered by this description during the period, July to December 1940 were Saundby, Slessor, Joubert, Douglas, Harris and Newall himself.

4. See Spick, Chapter 4, where tactics used and lessons learned are clearly demonstrated.

introduction of Hurricanes and Spitfires can, in retrospect, be seen as a sanguine hope, yet showed a conception of Fighter Command being used in an aggressive role.(5)

Subsequently, although by 1938 more members of the Air Staff were resigned to accepting the limitations of the RAF's ability to settle the outcome of a European conflict by implementing bombing, Trenchard's spirit of attack died hard. In August 1938 they produced a document: 'Air Staff note on fighter strength and defence plan against the German scale of attack of 1,000 long-range bombers a day'.(6) Douglas, then Assistant Chief of the Air Staff, thanked Group-Captain Stevenson, Deputy Director of Operations (D.D.Ops.) for a sight of the paper and commented in a style which would have gladdened Trenchard's heart: 'I think it is immaterial in the long view whether the enemy bomber is shot down before or after he has dropped his bombs on his objective. Our object is not to prevent bombers reaching their objectives - though it would be very nice if we could - but to cause a high casualty rate among the enemy bombers, with the result that the scale of attack will dwindle rapidly to bearable

5. CAB 55/8, Committee of Imperial Defence, Joint Planning Committee: Minutes and Memoranda, JPC report, 1936.

6. See AIR 16/91, September 1938, Possible scale of German bombing attack.

proportions'. He went on to say that Stevenson had implied this in his Minute, 'but I think it ought to be clearly stated on the file'.(7)

Dowding was critical of these plans for defence, but his opponents believed that he offered no better policy. His letter to the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff of 12 October 1938 was seen by Stevenson who noted that 'the general criticism of C-in-C's remarks on our plan at Enclosure 18A is that while it aims at exploding the basis of our calculation and plan it makes no constructive suggestion for an alternative'. Stevenson then stated categorically that the object underlying the Air Ministry's plan was to destroy the enemy scale of attack, as opposed to inflicting a possibly low rate of casualties. Further, he suggested that 'In default of a constructive alternative from the C-in-C, I should be very sorry to see the main principle of the plan go. I suggest, therefore, that we should proceed to implement the plan'.(8)

7. AIR 2/3034, Document 26A, Douglas to Stevenson, 11 August 1938. The importance of the document to the later Big Wing controversy and to Douglas's part in having Dowding replaced is that Douglas was consistent in his advocacy of large fighter formations. See AIR 16/367, December 1940 - March 1943: Organisation of Fighter Wing, Minute by Douglas, 17 December 1940, where he recommended 'the abandonment of the policy that we must try and interpose a small number of fighters all the time between the enemy bomber and his objective'. See also Douglas Papers, File 2, Douglas to J.B. Collier, 14 February 1956, where he strongly advocates Wings. 'The best way of causing casualties to an enemy bomber force is to meet him with large (if possible, superior) numbers of fighters operating in a cohesive formation'.

8. AIR 2/3034, Document 18A, Minute by Stevenson, 12 August 1938.

At this time Dowding felt confident that, no matter which tactics were employed against bomber formations, the Luftwaffe could be prevented from sustaining attacks over Britain. The Hurricanes and Spitfires under his command, growing in numbers, albeit too slowly for his liking, had every advantage over unescorted bombers such as the Heinkel 111 or the Dornier 17 which would be the mainstays of an enemy campaign. In this vein he wrote to Newall, the CAS, on 24 February 1939, predicting heavy German casualties which would bring attacks to a rapid halt.(9)

With the benefit of RDF stations, which were able, in spite of early teething troubles, to detect attacks well before their arrival, Fighter Command's policy at that time was to locate and engage enemy formations beyond, or on, the coast.(10) Dowding had a quiet confidence that his squadrons could offer a sound defence, but with one important proviso - that they were not whittled away for duties outside Britain.

Nonetheless, the question of tactics was raised again in the following month, when AVM Gossage, AOC, No.11 Group, wrote to seek Dowding's advice. A crucial question had been put to him during a lecture at the RAF Staff College, Andover. 'The

9. AIR 16/261, Dowding to CAS, 24 February 1939; See above, Chapter 3, note 15. Dowding's optimism is supported by comparing the top speeds of the Heinkel He.111P (247 m.p.h.) and the Dornier Do.17z (265 m.p.h.) with those of the Hurricane I (328 m.p.h.) and the Spitfire 1A (362 m.p.h.). See Mason, *Battle Over Britain*, Appendix C.

10. See AIR 16/45, Air Ministry Conference to discuss problems of interception, 28 June 1939. See also Douglas, *Years of Command*, p.43.

question concerns the interception of hostile raids directed against this country and the principle was put forward that the annihilation of a few raids was decidedly preferable to the interception of as many as possible, as appears to be visualised by our existing defence policy and procedure'. Gossage believed that it was impossible to disagree with the principle of annihilation, but pointed out that the existing resources precluded the adoption of that policy exclusively. 'We are, therefore, driven to a compromise and it was rather on these lines that I answered the question', he added and went on to say that he would welcome Dowding's comments, as it was a matter which had been on his mind for some time.(11)

In his reply Dowding agreed that the point was so important that his views should be written down. 'The principle towards which we should work is to match machine with machine'. He warned against sending too many fighters to intercept because that would 'facilitate the method already discussed by Continental nations of sending over a small attack to draw our defences, and then to deliver a heavy attack when our fighters are on the ground rearming and refuelling'. He added, however, that 'to send small forces to "nibble" at the enemy is bad tactics'. His letter concluded by pointing out that as far ahead as he could see, the squadron would be the largest tactical unit, and although two or more squadrons might be sent in company to meet large raids, the individual squadron commanders would act on their own initiative when the interception was made.(12)

11. AIR 16/254, Fighter Command: interception policy, September 1938 - March 1939, Gossage to Dowding, 10 March 1939.

12. Ibid, Dowding to Gossage, 14 March 1939.

On 9 August 1939 the question of air tactics was raised again with Dowding. The Director of Staff Studies (DOSS), at the Air Ministry enquired the policy to be adopted to meet raids made by large numbers of German aircraft. Were trials to be held to decide the best method of defence? The Director had realised that there were two views. One suggested that, as Luftwaffe aircraft would arrive in separate 'squadron formations in quick succession, possibly some hundreds of yards apart', they would not be met by formations 'exceeding squadron strength'. Another believed that as over one hundred aircraft might arrive in formation, several squadrons would have to fight against them, working as a tactical unit.(13)

Two officers on Dowding's staff offered opinions on the size of fighter units. The first was Wing-Commander Lawson, W/C Ops.1, writing to the Senior Air Staff Officer (SASO), who, in turn, passed on suggestions to the Commander-in-Chief. Of particular interest in the development of the later Big Wing Controversy is that Dowding's SASO from July 1938 had been Air-Commodore Keith Park and it is instructive to note their unanimity of belief on the issue of tactics.(14)

The tenor of their advice was that Wings were inefficient, wasting time in manoeuvring, being at a disadvantage in poor weather and lacking the most effective fire-power. Time in interception was more important than a slow concentration of

13. AIR 16/131, Fighter tactics v. massed bomber formations, Minute 2, 15 August 1939.

14. For a background of Park's RAF service from 1936-39, see Orange, pp.67-82.

strength. Lawson believed that it would be possible in peacetime to practise Wing tactics, but doubted 'whether it would be practicable to maintain that high standard in war'.(15) Park's comment was pragmatic. 'We have not yet fully studied and practised squadron attacks'. Until that was done, he suggested, it would be a waste of time to experiment with larger formations.(16)

Dowding's reply ten days later demonstrated his disapproval of Big Wings for several reasons. These varied from the argument that pilots might collide or shoot at each other, to the far more practical cause that squadrons had not trained for this kind of attack. He suggested that it might be possible to have 'mass deployment at some future time', but that 'even tentative and experimental work in this connection would be premature at present'. His own opinion deflated the hopes of those at the Air Ministry who wanted fighter attacks to be made by a large force, when he said that the squadron 'will always be the largest practical unit which it will be practically expedient to employ'.

The Commander-in-Chief, thinking in terms of raids made by unescorted bombers, envisaged the enemy arriving in formations each of about thirty aircraft. These would be met by a succession of attacks from flights, then from squadrons of fighters. Their main aim was to gain superiority of fire, 'and each individual fighter has at present so great a superiority

15. AIR 16/131, Minute 2, 15 August 1939.

16. Ibid, Minute 3, 17 August 1939.

of fire against its "opposite number" that the situation may be considered satisfactory'. Dowding added that the speed, flexibility and safety of Fighter Command's plans should not be given up 'for theoretical advantages which are likely to be illusory in practice'.(17)

These views, discussed in peace-time, added to the Air Ministry's opinion of Dowding as a less than co-operative commander. It was appreciated, nonetheless, that as Commander-in-Chief he had the right to lead Fighter Command as he saw fit. However, the realities of war by late August 1940 showed that Dowding was still employing a system of defence designed to meet a challenge whose nature and style had changed since plans were laid before 1939. In the eyes of the Air Ministry he was thereby doubly at fault. Firstly, he was placing too great a burden on the squadrons of No.11 Group by allowing them to be constantly outnumbered; secondly, he was not making tactical use of a concentration of fighter forces which would cause the Luftwaffe unacceptable losses. Inevitably, the blame they attached to Dowding extended by association to Park, who had helped to found the system and was attempting with fidelity to implement it.(18)

* * *

17. Ibid, Enclosure 4A, Dowding to Under-Secretary of State, 19 August 1939.

18. Herein lies the parting of the ways between the admirers and critics of Dowding. To the former, he was showing tenacity of purpose in operating a system which was successfully holding off the Luftwaffe. To the latter, better tactics would have achieved the target earlier and at lower cost. For example, see, on the one hand, Wright, especially Chapter 10, Orange, Deighton and Terraine, all passim. On the other hand, see Allen, *Who Won?* and Lucas, *Flying Colours*, both passim, and the Bader Notes, Appendix 1.

PART TWO: GROWING PRESSURE ON BOTH SIDES BY 7 SEPTEMBER

Matters came to a head in the period between 24 August and 7 September, when the concentration of German effort, especially against south-eastern airfields was so great that the squadrons of No.11 Group were brought close to defeat.(19) The weather, which was mainly cloudy from the 19th to the 23rd of the month, improved next day, enabling the Luftwaffe to launch a series of sustained attacks.(20)

In most of these, bomber formations, in accordance with Goering's new ruling, were closely escorted by fighters. Inevitably, the interception of bombers, laid down as Fighter Command's chief target, became more difficult.(21) In addition, the pilots of Nos. 10 and 11 Groups continually found themselves up against superior numbers of the enemy.(22) Another disadvantage for British airmen, and one seldom assessed in relation to the battle, was that the Luftwaffe customarily sent fighters into action in larger formations than those used by the RAF; through

19. See Allen, *Who Won?*, p.178 who believes that the Germans had gained local air superiority by 1 September.

20. See Hough and Richards, p.361. Also see Wood and Dempster, pp.299 and 302.

21. See above, Chapter 3, note 80.

22. The change of German tactics was recognised in an aviation magazine at the time. 'The frequency of attacks increased and more fighters were sent with fewer bombers'. 'Parrying the Blitzkrieg', *Aeroplane*, 6 September 1940.

reasons of organisation alone, Fighter Command pilots found themselves outnumbered even before combat began, a wearying prospect. (23)

The prime reason for the change in German policy was the failure of the Luftwaffe thus far to destroy sufficient RAF fighters, which had caused heavy losses among bombers. (24) Goering's conference at Karinhall on the 19th laid down new guidelines and tactics, with the specific aim of defeating Fighter Command. Therefore intensive raids were planned on the airfields of No. 11 Group. The aircraft industry was listed as a second target. He set out clearly the aim of his force. 'The task of Luftflotten 2 and 3 remains for the time being to beat the RAF fighter force wherever possible'. This was to be achieved by constant attacks, drawing Hurricanes and Spitfires into unrelenting defensive action.

23. Fighter Command's insistence on maintaining the squadron as the prime fighting unit resulted in groups of twelve to sixteen aircraft flying into action. For the Germans, 'the Gruppe was the basic flying unit for operational and administrative purposes. Normally one complete Gruppe occupied a single airfield'. The Gruppe consisted of thirty aircraft. See Price, *Luftwaffe Handbook*, p.14.

24. The German Naval War Diary reported, 'The units report zeal by enemy fighters has fallen off but not stubbornness of attacks on bombers and their pursuit after attack ... Air Operations Staff sticks by continuation of the battle against enemy fighters under all circumstances'. SKL KTB 18 August 1940.

However, in an attempt to fulfil this ambition, Luftwaffe commanders took one decision that went some way towards eliminating the superiority of German fighter tactics. Fighter pilots were instructed to stay close to their bombers in immediate escort (*Unmittelbar Begleitschutz*), a policy to which many objected strongly because it limited their ability to implement the 'free-hunt' techniques which they considered essential for success in combat.(25)

In support of the new aim, nevertheless, Luftwaffe commanders showed themselves more aware than their counterparts in Fighter Command of the tactical benefits of concentration of force. Many of Luftflotte III's fighters were moved up to the Pas de Calais, under Kesselring's command, as close as possible to their targets.(26)

The scene was set for a *guerre à outrance* over the southern approaches to London, where the perimeter of action would be drawn at the extreme range of the Luftwaffe's single-engined fighters. Britain's air defences had faced no more daunting threat.

* * *

25. See Irving, *Rise and Fall*, pp.100-01. He refers, p.378, to Milch Documents: 65, pp.7521ff, which was a report of Goering's conference. For a German fighter pilot's highly critical reaction to Goering's order, see R.Jackson, *Douglas Bader: a biography* (London, 1953), p.74.

26. See Hough and Richards, p.219; Allen, *Who Won?*, p.150; Wood and Dempster, p.300. A further threat to Fighter Command by late August came from German attempts at using radio message interception. See H.Michel, *Peuples et Civilisations XXI, La Seconde Guerre Mondiale, Tome 1* (Paris, 1968), p.169. This led to a reduction in German losses, but did not offset the RAF's advantages stemming from the use of RDF.

In that fortnight, Park's resources were taxed to the limit, when not only his fighter aerodromes, but also, and more important to the Dowding System, his Sector stations, were attacked. For example, Hornchurch was bombed on the 24th, 25th and twice on the 31st. Biggin Hill was raided on the 26th, twice on the 30th, which was a day of intense fighting, and twice on each of the succeeding days. Kenley was hit on the 26th and 30th.

A fuller appreciation of the stress on No.11 Group's airfields comes from a detailed examination of German raids on the 31st. At 8 a.m. North Weald and Debden were attacked, followed by Eastchurch and Detling just over an hour later. Croydon and Biggin Hill were hit at 12.55 p.m. and Hornchurch at 1.15 p.m. The last two were raided again at 5.30 p.m.(27)

Park suffered a particular problem, at least part of which had its roots in the defensive system established by him and Dowding. He tended to view the main battle as his fight taking place over his area and involving his squadrons; No.12 Group, in his opinion, were to be called for mainly to cover his aerodromes while his pilots were in action further south.(28) As a result he and the Commander-in-Chief lost the opportunity of using the

27. See Wood and Dempster, Chapter 16. See also Hough and Richards, Chapter 15.

28. See AIR 16/635, 11(F) Group's activities against German mass formations, 1940, Note, Douglas to Dowding, 3 November 1940. Douglas wrote that 'Park still has a sub-conscious aversion to another Group coming down and fighting in his area'. See also Bader Notes, p.8, for Park's reaction when No.12 Group squadrons flew south of the Thames on 27 September 1940.

power of No.12 Group's squadrons to their best advantage, as an aggressive, supporting force fighting between London and the south coast.(29)

A second problem for Park, again stemming from the accepted policy, was the pressure of battle thereby placed on both pilots and squadrons in his Group. For example, No.85 Squadron was moved to Croydon on the 19th, into heavy action, being involved in combat three times on the 31st. In about a fortnight, four pilots, including two flight commanders, were killed in action and six others, including the C.O. wounded. On 2 September patrols could be put up at only half strength.(30) The effect on individual pilots in the Group varied, although all suffered from the tiredness following continuous strain. 'In those desperate days', one wrote later, 'if you were twenty-one, you were an old man'.(31)

By 6 September, Fighter Command 'though still very much in being, was a wasting asset'.(32) Yet Britain's fate in resistance, as well as German strategy in attack, depended on its ability to survive.

* * *

29. Bader Notes, pp.6-8.

30. According to T.Taylor, *Breaking Wave*, p.149, on 31 August the Luftwaffe flew 1,450 sorties. See Robinson, pp.189-90 for the effect of casualties on No.85 Squadron. By 30 August No.111 Squadron could operate only nine Hurricanes out of its complement of twelve.

31. Quoted in Gelb, p.177.

32. Hough and Richards, p.251.

What is often overlooked by those who stress the weight of the burden laid on Fighter Command is that the pilots of the German Air Force were also under great tension, especially in the period 19 August to 6 September. They understood their role in having to clear the way for seaborne invasion, yet the stubbornness of Fighter Command's defence provided them with the largest problem faced since the formation of the Luftwaffe.(33)

They suffered specific disadvantages. First, they had to make two crossings of the Channel and the sea for them was a natural hazard. Second, by parachuting over England they would save their lives, but lose freedom. Third, fighter pilots were particularly constrained by having to remain close to bombers, giving up the 'free-hunt' tactics which they favoured. Fourth, as the battle moved inland, the vulnerability of Me.109s increased, through their short range.(34)

And yet they felt the approach of success by the early days of September. They flew 1,345 sorties on the 30th and 1,450 the next day, when 39 RAF fighters were lost.(35) Fighter Command had a greater need of pilots than of machines.(36)

33. None of the Luftwaffe's previous campaigns, from the Spanish Civil War to the defeat of France had been against an air force as large, well equipped or carefully organised as the RAF.

34. See AHB Translation, vol.9, VII/121, p.18. Galland comments on the Me.109s that, with fuel tanks, 'their endurance would have been increased by 30 to 40 minutes'. See also K.Bartz *Swastika in the Air* (London, 1956), pp.70-71.

35. T.Taylor, *Breaking Wave*, p.149.

36. See *ibid*, p.151, which shows that on 6 September, 127 Hurricanes and Spitfires were in ready reserve and 160 nearly finished. During August, however, 260 pilots finished training, while in action 148 were killed and 156 wounded.

Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that the same factor affected the German Air Force. In Murray's view, 'for five months, from May through September, the Luftwaffe, with only a short pause, was continually in action'.(37) Losses among aircrew were heavier because of the number of bombers involved.(38)

* * *

During the period from 19th August to the first major daylight raids on London, Churchill maintained a keen and searching interest in the air fighting. His remarkable talents encompassed both wood and trees; he viewed the present and the future of the war in the widest terms, but also had what some found to be a disconcerting eye for detail.

He was compelled to adjudicate in the struggle between the ministries of Beaverbrook and Sinclair over the question of whether or not pilots should be sent to Canada for training. Here he supported the Air Ministry's view. What is of particular importance in relation to Fighter Command and the later fates of Dowding and Park was Churchill's ruling over the power of a department of government. In a private letter to Beaverbrook he showed clearly his view of the freedom that should be offered

37. Murray, p.43.

38. See P.Stahl, *The Diving Eagle: A Ju 88 Pilot's Diary* (London, 1984), pp.58-59. On 25 August he wrote, 'It is being said that the British are already on their last legs, but when one hears what the operational pilots - and in particular bombers' crews - have to report, we're obviously still a long way from victory. The losses suffered by our bomber units must be terrible'.

to a Ministry to make decisions. 'They are the Department responsible, and they are all united', he wrote. 'It is not usual to overrule Service Departments upon an essential part of the policy for which they are responsible'.(39)

Yet on 25 August Churchill was pressing Sinclair to strengthen fighting squadrons at the expense of what he believed to be a surfeit of communications squadrons. 'Ought you not every day to call in question in your own mind every non-military aspect of the Air Force?' he wrote briskly, with the impression that Sinclair had been less than dominant in his Ministry. But the Prime Minister added the balm that he hoped the Secretary of State would be able 'to give some consideration to these wishes of your old friend'.(40)

Nevertheless, Churchill's restless spirit towards the leadership of the RAF was manifested four days later. He had been 'much concerned' the previous day while visiting Manston, to notice that craters had been left unfilled. There followed a detailed account of how to complete a job which he obviously felt that the Air Ministry had neglected.(41)

39. 'Private', Churchill to Beaverbrook, 27 August 1940, quoted in Gilbert, vi, p.759.

40. 'Private', Churchill to Sinclair, 25 August 1940, quoted in Gilbert, vi, p.760.

41. Prime Minister's Personal Minute, No.M.47, 29 August 1940, quoted in Gilbert, vi, p.761.

The growing intensity of German attacks on No.11 Group was in the forefront of the Prime Minister's mind. On 30 August he told the War Cabinet that RAF and Luftwaffe losses were roughly equal and that British reserves were being used up 'at a dangerous rate'.(42) The next day he visited Park's headquarters at Uxbridge to watch the progress of the battle and that evening Dowding dined with him at Chequers.(43) Fighter Command was now under great strain and Churchill returned to No.11 Group's headquarters on 1 September, taking Park back to Chequers for dinner afterwards.(44)

There is no evidence at this stage that the Prime Minister was aware of the conflict over tactics then building within Fighter Command, and of the frustrations felt by Park and Leigh-Mallory towards each other's policy. In fact, after his second visit Churchill showed a comparative contentment with the RAF by claiming that the Admiralty 'is now the weak spot. The Air is all right'.(45)

* * *

42. War Cabinet No.238 of 30 August 1940, 11.30 a.m., Minute 1, Confidential Annex, CAB 65/14, quoted in Gilbert, vi, p.763.

43. Among matters discussed was the morality of shooting at enemy pilots descending by parachute. Surprisingly, Dowding approved, while Churchill thought it wrong. See Colville *Diaries*, 31 August 1940, p.235. Colville wrote, 'Dowding is splendid; he stands up to the P.M.'.

44. *Ibid*, 1 September 1940, p.238.

45. *Ibid*.

PART THREE: NO.11 GROUP'S BURDEN AND THE GROWTH OF DISSENT

In Park's area during late August the notice of attack was inevitably short. When German formations started to gather over Northern France they were detected by RDF which was more accurate in locating bearings than in assessing height and numbers. Nor, obviously, could RDF stations predict where and when German sorties would develop.(46) Field-Marshal Kesselring, with Luftflotte II, enjoyed the luxury of moving formations on feint raids, or suddenly altering the direction of a thrust, having all the advantages of an attacker to whom a defender is compelled to respond.(47)

Time was No.11 Group's greatest enemy because the Germans were so near their targets. For example, the distance from the Pas de Calais to an inland station such as Kenley, was only 95 miles, so the strain on Park's Controllers was immense. RDF stations

46. In spite of the immense value of RDF to the defensive system, there were a number of critical drawbacks. See AHB Monograph, R.E.Skelley, Signals (3), vol.4, Radar in Raid Reporting, CD 1063, AHB/II/116/21(C) (London, 1950), pp.112-13, also issued as AIR 41/12. This shows how Fighter Command failed to implement a recommended scheme to meet 'difficulties if the enemy resorted to mass raids'. On 7 September, some of the RDF tubes were swamped by large enemy numbers (p.122). See also Nissen, p.84, for difficulties in assessing numbers of German aircraft on the same attack.

47. The various advantages enjoyed by Kesselring do not appear in his pessimistic version of the battle. See Kesselring Memoirs, Chapter 11.

in Kent, which naturally gained the greatest experience at an early stage of the battle could, by August, give about twenty minutes' advance warning of Luftwaffe activity.(48)

To be set against this, however, was the fact that, because of the nature of the organised system of defence, a period of four minutes often elapsed before the actual RDF contact appeared as a plot on the table of the Operations Rooms at Stanmore or Uxbridge. Even in that short time, an enemy formation flying at 200 m.p.h. would have advanced more than thirteen miles. German aircraft gained height while assembling over Northern France, or while crossing the Channel. RAF fighters, having to react to their initiative, were thus pressed for time. First, following the order to 'Scramble', a squadron of Spitfires needed thirteen minutes to climb to 20,000 feet; Hurricanes needed sixteen minutes.(49) Secondly, at that stage a screen of Me.109s almost invariably flew above their bombers, which, as Dowding's and Park's orders clearly insisted, were the prime target and, as RAF fighters attacked, they in turn were assaulted from above. Soon, some squadron leaders, when ordered to fly at a given height, added on their own initiative two or three thousand feet in an attempt to meet the enemy on more equal terms; others devised

48. Two of the closest Luftwaffe fighter formations were JG 51 and JG 52, stationed at Wissant and Coquelles respectively. See map in T.Taylor, *Breaking Wave*, pp.80-81. AIR 41/12, (*Signals*, vol.4), p.122 states that RDF stations were 'rarely giving less than 10 minutes' notice before the Germans were crossing the coast'.

49. Robinson, p.24.

alternative methods to avoid being caught from above.(50) Thirdly, the sun, one of a pilot's greatest allies, usually favoured the Germans. Luftwaffe aircraft, progressing from a generally southerly direction, had the sun behind them, a distinct advantage in the positioning of formations even before combat began.(51)

A further stress of time on squadrons during August came when they were on their aerodromes after having taken part in sorties. Their closeness to Luftwaffe bases resulted in many pilots of No.11 Group being called into action several times a day and therefore the refuelling and rearming of fighters were operations to be carried out at high speed; also, when Hurricanes and Spitfires were being replenished by groundcrew they were most vulnerable targets for bombing attacks.

The Prime Minister, with his noted eye for detail, had become interested in this process late in June, after talking to Flight-Lieutenant Malan of No.74 Squadron, who told him that more refuelling tankers were needed on aerodromes. An urgent note was sent to General Ismay, his personal representative on the COS Committee, to examine the problem. The rapid reply to the Prime Minister informed him that the real bottleneck was not refuelling, but rearming, an aircraft. 'Time required to re-arm

50. See R.Hillary, *The Last Enemy* (London, 1942), p.103, for one method used. 'We would fly on the reciprocal of the course given us by the controller until we got to 15,000 feet, and then fly back again, climbing all the time'.

51. D.Crook, *Spitfire Pilot* (London, 1942), p.40, wrote, 'It was a very clear day, with a brilliant sun - just the sort of day that the Germans love, because they come out at a very big height and dive down to attack out of the sun. We hated these clear days and always prayed for some high cloud to cover the sun'.

guns. Hurricane and Spitfire 10 to 15 minutes. One fuel trailer or one three boom tanker will supply sufficient fuel for 3 Hurricanes and Spitfires. Three Hurricanes or Spitfires can be refuelled during the time taken to re-arm guns'.(52)

Dowding's policy of allowing No.11 Group to carry the main burden of defence brought great hardship to squadrons. The knowledge that action never lay far distant in time lay heavily on pilots. Temporary relaxation came when a squadron was 'Released', a short dispensation from being required for operations. Then it was called to 'Available', twenty minutes before take-off. 'Readiness' was ordered as a five minute warning, followed by 'Stand-by', which gave pilots two minutes. At 'Scramble' there was a frenetic rush to get the squadron into the air, arranged in formation and turned towards the enemy. In reality, for many men the movement into action was a relief after the psychological drain of waiting, but the overall strain was great.(53)

* * *

52. See AIR 16/659, Enclosure 5A, Churchill to Ismay, 20 June 1940, and Enclosure 6B, Fighter Command to Ismay, 28 June 1940. The time speeded up during the battle. Townsend, *Duel of Eagles*, p.405, wrote, 'Five minutes, and the Hurricane is ready to go again'.

53. See Crook, p.64, who flew with No.609 Squadron. 'The strain on everybody in Fighter Command was very heavy indeed during this period'. See also Gelb, pp.187-91, who quotes the experiences of ten pilots. For more on feelings of men going into action, see R.Beamont in RAF Benevolent Fund's publication, M.Pierce et al., *So Few* (London, 1990), pp.32-34.

According to the Report on the battle which Park rapidly provided for Headquarters, Fighter Command, after a request was made to him on 6 September, the second phase lasted from 19 August to 5 September. This proved to be the period of greatest difficulty for the Command and especially for No.11 Group and, after the Report was submitted to the Air Ministry, there was a distinct division of opinion over the quality of his tactics.(54)

The battle changed course, in his reckoning, on 19 August, when German attacks which had hitherto been directed particularly against coastal shipping, were launched on mainland targets, primarily aerodromes, aircraft factories and RDF stations.

Park on the same day issued a further set of Instructions to Controllers, informing them of the new phase and laying down guidelines to be followed. 'Against enemy attacks inland', he wrote, 'despatch a minimum number of squadrons to engage enemy fighters'. The main object, he declared, was to engage bombers.(55)

In this he was following Dowding's policy that combats between fighters would be costly and play into the hands of the Germans. The role of Fighter Command was to prevent Luftwaffe bombers from reaching their targets; if possible, every enemy raid should be interrupted before reaching its objective, an aim certainly not shared by all officers in the Air Ministry.

54. AIR 2/7281, Enclosure 5B, Headquarters No.11 Group to Headquarters Fighter Command, 12 September 1940.

55. AIR 41/15, ADGB, ii, Appendix 6, No.11 Group Instructions to Controllers, No.4, 19 August 1940.

Nevertheless, Park realised the danger facing No.11 Group's airfields when his fighters were airborne. Therefore he went on, 'If all our Squadrons around London are off the ground engaging enemy mass attacks, ask No.12 Group or Command Controller to provide Squadrons to patrol aerodromes DEBDEN, NORTH WEALD, HORNCHURCH'. This would enable those pilots flying from airfields in his Group to be reassured that their own stations were receiving protection. He next displayed an anxiety that such a defence should be given. 'If heavy attacks have crossed the coast and are proceeding towards aerodromes, put a Squadron, or even the Sector Training Flight to patrol under clouds over each Sector aerodrome'.

This Instruction demonstrates Dowding's view that No.11 Group squadrons would be the prime fighters of the battle, calling on assistance when needed from Nos.10 and 12 Groups. In this case Park was asking Leigh-Mallory to despatch some of the squadrons available in the southern part of No.12 Group to patrol and guard three vital Sector stations in the northern area of No.11 Group. Park's fears for his aerodromes were not unfounded. On the previous day bombers had reached Biggin Hill, Croydon and West Malling, with little success, but at Kenley considerable damage was caused and for a short period the Sector Operations Room was put out of action.(56)

56. For accounts of German attacks and their results, see, for example, Mason, *Battle Over Britain*, pp.257-84; Price, *Hardest Day*, Chapter 5; Ramsey, *Blitz*, i, p.211; Richards and Saunders, i, pp.173-74.

Dr. Alfred Price, in his encyclopaedic study of the events of 18 August, states that on that day, 'Regarding the direction of the British fighter squadrons, there is little that can be criticized ... the No.11 and No.12 Group controllers worked together well and the latter put up 45 fighters to cover the former's airfields'. This, however, was a co-operative partnership destined to fade as fighting grew in intensity over the following two weeks.(57)

Dowding had planned for the replacement of squadrons which were exhausted and, in the early stages of the battle, 'the most satisfactory way of reinforcement was by means of moving complete units, and this was done when time allowed'.(58) A fresh squadron would usually consist of sixteen aircraft and about twenty pilots and they would fight until only nine aircraft were left before they themselves were relieved. 'The normal period was a month to six weeks, but some units had to be replaced after a week or ten days'.(59) Dowding's Despatch explained the dilemma that by early September fresh squadrons could become exhausted before any of the resting squadrons were ready to return.(60).

57. Price, *Hardest Day*, p.60.

58. AIR 8/863, p.4554, paragraph 169.

59. *Ibid*, paragraph 172.

60. *Ibid*, paragraph 175.

A further difficulty now confronted Park. As German formations came inland, some broke away to raid separate targets and this brought confusion to ground defences. Before long there were times when No.11 Group Controllers were inundated by reports from, for example, the Observer Corps, listing enemy aircraft in many parts of the Group area. Attempting to solve the resulting confusion, Park issued an Instruction to Controllers on 26 August.⁽⁶¹⁾ A number of failures to intercept had occurred, 'owing to accidents of cloud and inaccuracies of sound plotting by ground observers'. Therefore, he instructed, leaders of flights or squadrons were to report the rough strength of enemy formations, their height, course and approximate position immediately on sighting them. This measure is another example of his difficulties at that time. He offered a specimen message of the kind he required: 'Tally Ho! thirty bombers and forty fighters Angels 20 proceeding North Guildford', and explained that such help would enable the enemy to be engaged on more equal terms.

The deterioration in collaboration between the two Groups now became marked. On 26 August Park sent a letter to Stanmore in which he made a strong, though indirect complaint about No.12 Group. He was most unhappy about the quality of squadrons posted to No.11 Group by Leigh-Mallory, compared with those sent by AVM Saul of No.13 Group. Therefore, he suggested, 'only highly trained and experienced eight-gun fighter squadrons' should be

61. AIR 41/15, ADGB, ii, Appendix 9, No.11 Group Instructions to Controllers, No.6, 26 August 1940.

sent to him. To make his point, Park compared the fortunes of five squadrons sent to reinforce his area, three of which had come from No.13 Group and two from No.12. According to his figures, Saul's squadrons, while with No.11 Group, had destroyed 43 German aircraft for the loss of four of their own; Leigh-Mallory's squadrons, on the other hand, had shot down seventeen, but had lost thirteen.

Park contended that these relative figures resulted from the fact that No.13 Group had always made a practice of sending 'their most experienced squadrons, because of the appreciation of the heavy fighting up to date in the South of England'. Although no explanation of No.12 Group's failures was added, his omission of comment was full of implication. A similar approach was employed in his fourth paragraph, where he merely noted that his Sector Commanders had made favourable comments about 'the high standard of flying and fighting efficiency of the several squadrons of No.13 Group'. Again, the lack of comment on Leigh-Mallory's squadrons was not without importance.(62)

The disagreement went a stage further on the following day, when Park issued Group Instructions to his Controllers under the heading 'Reinforcement from 10 and 12 Groups'. His first three notes praised 'the friendly co-operation afforded by 10 Group' and laid down measures to sustain the joint action. However,

62. AIR 16/330, Reinforcement of No.11 Group, August 1940 - December 1942, Enclosure 1A, Headquarters, No.11 Group, to Headquarters, Fighter Command, 26 August 1940.

the following point set out clearly the fact that, in his opinion, No.12 Group had proved less than co-operative. 'The result of this attitude', he claimed, 'has been that on occasions recently when No.12 Group offered assistance and were requested by us to patrol our aerodromes, their Squadrons did not in fact patrol over our aerodromes'. He continued by noting that on both occasions the aerodromes suffered from bombing, 'because our own patrols were not strong enough to turn all the enemy back before they reached their objective'.(63)

Here, Park was referring to the bombing of North Weald on 24 August and of Debden two days later. The former was raided by twenty bombers, with considerable damage caused to buildings and stores, though the operational efficiency of the aerodrome was barely affected. The latter was attacked by about half a dozen unescorted Dornier 17s which, again, damaged buildings as well as the landing area.(64)

In fact, on the first occasion Leigh-Mallory put up squadrons and attempted to assemble them in Wing formation over Duxford, but only the Spitfires of No.19 Squadron managed to engage the enemy. His other aircraft arrived too late, finding the result of German

63. Ibid, Enclosure 2B, No.11 Group Instructions to Controllers, No.7, 27 August 1940. It is noticeable that Park was not reticent to lay out his troubles before the staff of his own Group.

64. See Ramsey, *Blitz*, i, pp.232-238, which gives detail of the raid on North Weald. Over 200 bombs were dropped 'in an accurate attack on the technical site'. See *ibid*, pp.247-51 for details of the attack on Debden.

bombing on the ground below. On the 26th the same squadron patrolled above cloud while the enemy were below it, although Hurricanes of the Free Czech Squadron, No.310, also from Duxford, saw action against the main Luftwaffe formation.(65)

Park felt great frustration at what he considered to be Leigh-Mallory's tardy reaction to policy laid down, especially as Duxford and Debden are only seven miles apart; therefore he added two new Directives. In future his Controllers were to 'put their requests to Controller, Fighter Command, stating clearly when and where reinforcing Squadrons from the North are required to patrol'. Such requests should be put only when enemy formations numbered 160 or more and 'it appears that our own Squadrons are unlikely to prevent their reaching inland objectives'. Secondly, he pointed out that such requests, going through Stanmore, would lead to assistance arriving later, 'but they should ensure that the reinforcing Squadrons from the North are in fact placed where they can be of the greatest assistance'. His last sentence showed his expectation that No.12 Group squadrons would be subsidiary to his own because 'their obvious task is to patrol aerodromes or other inland objectives to engage enemy formations that break through our fighter patrols.(66)

65. For an account of events on the 24th, written by the C.O. of No.19 Squadron, Squadron-Leader B.J.Lane, see D.Sarkar, *Spitfire Squadron* (New Malden, 1990), pp.56-58. See also AIR 27/252, 24 August and 26 August, 1940.

66. AIR 16/330, No.11 Group Instructions to Controllers, No.7, 27 August 1940.

On the same day and in similar vein Park wrote to AVM D.Evill, Dowding's SASO and asked him to instruct his staff accordingly. Evill passed on the information to his Controllers on the 28th and, at the same time minuted Dowding, enclosing copies of all Park's submissions; the Commander-in-Chief was kept fully informed of the relationships existing among various Groups. (67)

What had happened to the scale of co-operation between Nos.11 and 12 Groups during the eight days following 19 August to cause such complaints from Park's pen ? To unravel the answer several factors must be examined. Park's Instruction No.7 claimed directly that Leigh-Mallory's squadrons failed in their task by not protecting No.11 Group's aerodromes, an accusation the latter rebutted at a later date in a letter to Dowding. 'In actual fact', Leigh-Mallory stated, 'this occurred on one of the first occasions that assistance was asked for and on that occasion one Squadron was asked to patrol each aerodrome, but the request was made too late for my Squadrons to reach the area of the attack at the height of the enemy formation and therefore the bombing took place before my Squadrons intervened'. (68)

Leigh-Mallory was making two points here. First, he refers to only one squadron being called for, a policy of which he disapproved. He strengthened his case in the letter by adding, 'on no occasion when the Wing has been operating have either HORNCHURCH, NORTH WEALD OR DEBDEN been bombed'. Second, he is

67. Ibid, Minute 4, Evill (SASO) to Dowding, 28 August 1940.

68. Ibid, Enclosure 48A, Leigh-Mallory to Dowding, 9 October 1940.

offering the opinion of a number of pilots in his Group that they were given far too short notice to enable them to take-off, gain height and establish a good attacking position against the enemy. (69)

Each Commander saw the point from a different position. The time factor always constrained Park who had no opportunity of organising large formations before German attacks were arriving. Leigh-Mallory, on the other hand, had the advantage of viewing the battle from some distance and believed that, with time to organise Wings of fighters, he could provide help for the hard-pressed squadrons to the south. Dowding's task was to use the abilities of both commanders in a fully integrated and co-ordinated system of holding off the Luftwaffe from what obviously was the main area of operations, namely south-eastern and southern England.

Yet there was an additional, and deeper, facet of the controversy not far below the surface and in this Park and Leigh-Mallory were, through force of circumstances, no more than spokesmen, or targets. Within the senior ranks of the RAF, as the Battle of Britain developed, were two conflicting theories on the employment of fighters to counter enemy raids - and the long-standing disagreements between Dowding and the Air Staff sharpened the disagreement. The conservatively and defensively minded Commander-in-Chief, ever aware that by reckless use of his limited resources, he could, like Jellicoe, 'lose the war in an

69. See Lucas, *Flying Colours*, Chapters 9-12 inclusive. See also Bader Notes, p.3.

afternoon', believed that the squadron was the prime flying unit. His close staff agreed with him, none more than the ever loyal Park. In the other camp sat officers such as Douglas and Saundby, Stevenson and Crowe. Leigh-Mallory certainly represented their view that aggressively employed fighter Wings were more effective in dealing with large enemy bomber formations, especially now that they were being escorted well inland by fighters.

Little guidance or intervention in the matter came from Headquarters, Fighter Command and this compounded the difference between the two Group leaders. A resolution of their difficulties at that stage could have been instituted by Dowding, but he remained quiet on the issue. The matter of controversy must have been known to him because Park's Instruction No.7 of 27 August, instructing his Controllers to appeal to Stanmore when needing help from No.12 Group squadrons was a clear breach of the system so meticulously laid down by the Commander-in-Chief himself. That Instruction was also a *cri de coeur* from a frustrated man and its importance cannot have escaped Dowding; however, he did not become closely involved at that stage.

Then, on 1st September, Park, a tenacious fighter for his own cause, aimed another complaint at Leigh-Mallory in a cable to Headquarters, Fighter Command. One of No.12 Group's squadrons which he had criticised in his letter of 26 August was No.616. Now, he reported, 'Sector Commander, Kenley reports 616 Squadron have made second application to return to their station in 12 Group which he strongly recommends because of their low fighting efficiency'. He continued that they had received heavy losses for small returns and requested 'that they be replaced by a

squadron from 10 or 13 Group if 12 Group is unable to spare an experienced squadron'. The message was clearly set out for Dowding to see. (70)

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70. AIR 16/330, Enclosure 5A, Cable from Headquarters, No.11 Group to Headquarters, Fighter Command, 11.35 a.m., 1 September 1940.

PART FOUR: DOWDING'S RESPONSE TO CRISIS

A further worrying feature of this period of the battle was that aircraft factories were hit, causing alarm at the Ministry of Aircraft Production, especially to its ebullient leader, Beaverbrook. There is no doubt that Beaverbrook still held Dowding in the highest esteem. However, his fears of the raids being launched against factories caused him to make very strong representations to the Air Ministry for their defence, a task which, naturally, Sinclair and the air marshals passed over to Dowding. In this way, inadvertently, Beaverbrook helped to increase the stress brought upon Fighter Command and its Commander-in-Chief at a very difficult moment.(71)

* * *

Park's frustration with the reinforcement from Leigh-Mallory surfaced again on 4 September and, in an attempt to provide a remedy, he sent a Cypher to Stanmore. As information had been

71. Beaverbrook's worry over the protection of factories was shown during an interview on 24 August. See Crozier, p.197, who was told 'We've got to think of dispersing some of our works and sections of production so that they won't be so easily found and damaged. They are beginning to find our works now'. Slessor, then working with the Ministry of Aircraft Production, later supported this concern, referring to 'the threat to the aircraft industry, soon to take practical shape with alarming initial results in August and September'; Slessor, p.305. Beaverbrook's faith in Dowding was shown when he called him 'the man whom I regard as coming to the front in everything that relates to the war'. Interview, 12 noon, 29 August; Crozier, pp.199-201.

received(72) that the Germans were sending about 160 long-range bombers from Norway to France and Belgium, and that 400 dive-bombers were being drawn up opposite Kent, could not his Group be allocated two extra fighter squadrons ? His true motive for the request was contained in the final sentence. 'This would obviate necessity for 12 Group also 10 Group to send Squadrons to operate near the centre of 11 Group'. Then came the inevitable, veiled, yet definite knock at Leigh-Mallory, because he claimed that these squadrons were frequently out of Radio Telephone (R/T) range and could not be co-ordinated with his own formations, as well as causing 'confusion to Observer Corps and A.A. Gun Defences who cannot be kept informed of their movements'.(73)

His request found some fertile ground because, after both Dowding and Evill had read the Cypher, action was taken on the following day. No.504 Squadron was brought down from Catterick to Hendon, while No.73 Squadron from Church Fenton was exchanged with No.85 Squadron which had suffered severe losses at Debden. These moves alleviated No.11 Group's desperate position but did not

72. The origin of the information is shown in Hinsley, i, p.184. See also AIR 40/2321, Minute 10, from Group-Captain Inglis, DDI, Air Ministry, 2 September 1940.

73. AIR 16/330, Enclosure 11A, Cypher from Park to Headquarters, Fighter Command, 20.35 hours., 4 September 1940.

solve Park's great burden of attempting to live in harmony with No.12 Group; over the following days, because of increasing Luftwaffe attacks, Leigh-Mallory's squadrons had further reason to be called south into No.11 Group's area.(74)

On 5 September Park issued his Instruction No.10 to Controllers and its opening point proved that Beaverbrook's complaints were having an effect. He started by announcing that Dowding had directed that certain aircraft factories were to be given 'maximum fighter cover' and named them as Hawker's, Kingston-on-Thames, Langley, Brooklands and Southampton. His fifth point was a tactical advice. 'The enemy's main attack must be met in maximum strength between the coast and our line of sector aerodromes', a restatement of his basic tenet of defence. Spitfires should engage German fighters at 20,000 feet and above, while Hurricanes, 'because of their inferior performance' should tackle bombers, which rarely exceeded 16,000 feet by day.

Finally, Park reminded his Controllers that when aerodrome protection was needed north of the Thames, No.12 Group squadrons were to be requested, through Stanmore, to cover four vital places. The imputation that they might be late was added in the next sentence. 'Pending arrival of 12 Group squadrons, the

74. The movements of sixty-three Fighter Command squadrons involved in the battle are shown in Robinson, pp.274-78. Unfortunately he gives no dates of movements.

Group Controller should cover our sector aerodromes by one or two squadrons'. He concluded by restating his view of the relative roles of the two Groups, because his squadrons should be sent forward 'into the main battle' as soon as Leigh-Mallory's squadrons arrived. (75)

Dowding's policy of exchanging complete squadrons was causing a dilemma by 1 September and he rethought strategy over the following days. Sometimes the imported squadrons were inexperienced, certainly unused to the new German tactics and therefore suffered heavy initial losses on arriving in the firing line. His problem was whether or not to use them in preference to experienced, but exhausted squadrons which were sometimes down to eight or ten 'planes. (76)

He decided to change policy even when the battle was at its height and called a small conference on 7 September. An important presence that afternoon was Douglas from the Air Ministry, protagonist of Big Wings, who expressed surprise when

75. AIR 41/15, ADGB, ii, No.11 Group Instructions to Controllers, No.10, 5 September 1940. The aerodromes to be covered were North Weald, Stapleford, Hornchurch and Debden.

76. For Dowding's own view on the problem, see AIR 8/863, pp.4554-55, paragraphs 169-78. For one pilot's view of the effect on squadrons, see H.R.Allen, *Spitfire Squadron* (London, 1979), p.66. On p.72 he noted that 'sometimes when No.66 Squadron raced into the air, the formation consisted of six or less Spitfires'. See also AIR 16/330, Enclosure 12A, Cypher from Park to Headquarters, Fighter Command, 12.45 p.m., 2 September 1940. Although No.11 Group had been reinforced by two squadrons the previous day, Park reported, '7 Squadrons reduced to half squadron strength after this morning's first engagement though they operated in pairs'. The last four words prove that he was aware of the criticisms being levelled at his tactics.

Dowding announced that the meeting had been arranged to plan for Fighter Command to 'go downhill'. Faced with the overwhelming difficulty of pilot shortage and depleted squadrons, Dowding had decided to create three classes.(77)

His arrangements were transmitted next day in a note from AVM Nicholl, Air Officer (AO) i/c Administration, Fighter Command, under the heading. 'Policy for Maintenance of Fighter Squadrons in Pilots'. Three classes were listed in order of priority. First were Class A Squadrons of No.11 Group, 'to be maintained constantly at minimum strength of sixteen operational pilots'. Next were Class A Squadrons of Nos.10 and 12 Groups, kept to a 'minimum of sixteen operational plus non-operational as convenient'. Class B Squadrons were required to have 'a minimum strength of sixteen operational pilots with up to six more non-operational'. Blenheim and Defiant squadrons were to remain unaffected. The last category, Class C Squadrons, would retain 'a minimum of three operational pilots to act as leaders', except for three named squadrons which would have eight.

77. Regarding the shortage of pilots, see Deere, pp.150-52. See AIR 16/330, Enclosure 15A, 8 September 1940, for the Minutes of the meeting. They demonstrate the widening gulf between Dowding and Douglas, who represented the Air Ministry. Minute 22 shows the difficulty of persuading Douglas that 'the situation is extremely grave'. A month later, Dowding referred to this gravity in a letter to Park. 'I resisted your request to be made up in your strength of operational pilots from squadrons in other Groups as long as I could and I finally had to give way, not because I liked the system, but because it was becoming impossible to change squadrons quickly enough as their strength in operational pilots ran down'. Ibid, Enclosure 44A, Dowding to Park, 8 October 1940. A revealing insight into the breadth of Dowding's responsibility is found in Minute 37. 'The thing which gave him the greatest anxiety was the night flying aspect; however, that was one of the things that had to be accepted'. See also Orange, pp.105-06.

Nicholl's second point reinforced Dowding's belief in the importance of No.11 Group by stipulating that all pilots posted to its squadrons were to be operational and drawn from Class C squadrons. Each day, Stanmore would inform Nos.10, 12 and 13 Groups of the number of operational pilots required from them to serve in No.11 Group. In conclusion, he announced that the AOsC, Groups, would be allowed to post operational pilots to Classes A and B squadrons at their discretion but added that these squadrons, 'except in No.11 Group, shall whenever possible maintain their minimum strength of operational pilots by training of non-operational pilots from the usual sources'.(78)

The following day, a Minute from Dowding to Evill showed how serious the position of No.11 Group's squadrons had grown under the previous fortnight's attrition of Luftwaffe attacks. 'It is now apparent', he stated, 'that the scheme must be implemented immediately and that it will only be possible to maintain a few squadrons, outside the battle, in a condition to effect interchange of units'. By using the phrase 'outside the battle', Dowding was acknowledging that the main area of fighting was in the south-east; as depleted and exhausted squadrons were being sent north, his policy of sharing good squadrons among all Groups

78. AIR 16/330, Enclosure 18A, Note from AVM H.Nicholl, Air Officer i/c Administration, Fighter Command, 'Policy for Maintenance of Fighter Squadrons in Pilots', 8 September 1940. The three named squadrons were Nos.3, 232 and 245.

had, by force of circumstances, gone by the wayside. This adds weight to the argument that No.11 Group should have been reinforced earlier.(79)

Douglas was far from content with the meeting and its outcome. On receiving a copy of Nicholl's note he wrote to Evill suggesting that there were too many Class C squadrons. He also referred to the draft Minutes of the meeting, claiming that he had been placed in the role of the music-hall comedian, 'usually called "Mutt"', who asked foolish questions of his partner, 'which call down upon his devoted head laughter-making sallies from his more quick-witted partner ... Frankly, I consider the minutes were drafted by someone with a distinct bias in favour of everything said by a member of Fighter Command', a statement which in itself shows that there were two 'camps' at the meeting and that he was in the opposite one to Dowding and Park. 'However', he added, 'life is too strenuous in these days to bother about the wording of minutes', an interesting omen of what was to happen on October 17th.(80) In the matter of running the battle, there was no doubting his belief that better use could and should be made of Leigh-Mallory's squadrons.

* * *

79. Ibid, Minute 17, Dowding to Evill, 9 September 1940. See also Burns, p.87, who criticises the new arrangements, asking 'whether, when No.11 Group was becoming so short of pilots, it was justifiable for No.12 Group to maintain five 'A' Class squadrons - 130 pilots whom Leigh-Mallory had no intention should ever reinforce No.11 Group ?'

80. AIR 16/330, Enclosure 23A, Douglas to Evill, 14 September 1940, and reply, Evill to Douglas, 14 September 1940. The 'interesting omen' refers to the Minutes of the Air Ministry meeting held on 17 October 1940 and Douglas's comment on them. See below, Chapter 7.

A move which strengthened that case had been made by the Germans themselves even while the meeting on 7 September at Stanmore was still in progress. The pilots of No.11 Group had anticipated yet another day of onslaught on aerodromes, aircraft factories and themselves, but there was a seductive calm until late afternoon. Then, with a change of plan, some 300 Luftwaffe bombers, escorted by twice their number of fighters, launched the heaviest raids thus far experienced. The new target was London. For over an hour they bombed areas of Dockland in the east of the city, killing over 300 civilians and starting the largest fires seen in Britain since the conflagration of 1666.(81)

Victory over the RAF was not arriving at sufficient speed by the early days of September and this was the prime reason why there was a change in strategy. A number of writers have suggested that attacks with London as the main target were brought about largely as retaliation for the Bomber Command raids on

81. For a detailed background of the London raid, see *The Blitz, Then and Now*, vol.ii, edited by W.G.Ramsey (London, 1988), pp.41-61. See also *Front Line*, pp.10-12. For an individual view, see Mrs.R.Henrey, *London Under Fire, 1940-45* (London, 1969), pp.33-34. For a vivid diary account, see C.Perry, *The Boy in the Blitz* (London, 1972), pp.106-17. See also A.Calder, *The People's War* (London, 1969), pp.154-59; Sir Aylmer Firebrace, *Fire Service Memories* (London, 1949), pp.168-69; Sir Harold Scott, *Your Obedient Servant* (London, 1959), pp.126-27. An account of the raid from a German pilot's viewpoint is given in Steinhilper and Osborne, pp.291-92.

Berlin.(82) Evidence, however, suggests otherwise. Hauptmann Otto Bechtle's lecture, given in 1944, was categorical that although 'the wearing down of British fighter forces was not abandoned, economic war from the air could be embarked upon with full fury, and the morale of the civilian population subjected at the same time to a heavy strain'.(83)

General Deichmann, when questioned later on the matter, was adamant that military reasons for the change were predominant. 'The Commander-in-Chief, no doubt, considered the political implications as well as the military ones. After all, the chief aim was to make Great Britain ripe for peace negotiations'. Nevertheless, he added that Luftwaffe II believed the mass attacks to be necessary 'if a decisive victory was to be won'.

82. See, for example, Taylor, *English History*, p.499; Gelb, p.288. For a German civilian's view of RAF bombing, see *The Berlin Diaries, 1940-1945*, of Marie 'Missie' Vassiltchikov, edited by G.H.Vassiltchikov (London, 1987), pp.28-33, entries for the period 28 August - 26 October, 1940. See also K.W.Koch, 'The Strategic Air Offensive Against Germany: The Early Phase, May - September 1940', in *HJ*, 34, 1 (1991). pp.117-39. Although something of an apologia for the Luftwaffe and guilty of several inaccuracies of quotation, the article does show that while the Battle of Britain was in progress, RAF bombing of Germany had some effect.

83. AHB Translation, German Air Force General Staff/8th Abteilung, 'German Air Force Operations Against Great Britain, Tactics and Lessons Learnt, 1940-1941', 2 February 1944.

He also pointed out that Hitler demanded night attacks, not day attacks and this shows that the opportunity of retaliation could not have been far from the Fuhrer's mind.(84)

Such a motive can be deduced from his words during a speech at the Sportpalast on 4 September, when he threatened clearly a retaliation for RAF bombing of Berlin.(85) However, at a tactical level, one of the greatest values for the Luftwaffe of attacks on London was that what they considered to be the few remaining RAF fighters would be drawn into action more surely than by any other means. This would afford the best opportunity of overwhelming Fighter Command.

At a stroke, although the propaganda effect of the raids was electrifying in many parts of the world, some degree of burden was lifted from Fighter Command's aerodromes. With it came an expectation that the striking of the new target was the forerunner of seaborne invasion.(86) During the evening Park flew over the city in his own Hurricane and realised that the devastation below offered a small intermission.(87)

84. Collier Collection, Document No.22, 'Reasons of Luftwaffe for changing over to mass attacks on London', General P.Deichmann, Chief Control Officer of the Karlsruhe Study, 1953-58. See also Murray, p.54, who suggests that German losses led to a change in strategy; see also AHB Translation, vol.4, VII/83, 'German Aircraft Losses, September 1939 - December 1940', which shows that by 30 September Luftwaffe bombers had suffered a 69% casualty rate. Also see *Kesselring Memoirs*, pp.75-78.

85. Text of speech in Van Rohden Collection, Alexandria, Virginia, USA, quoted in T.Taylor, *Breaking Wave*, pp.157-58. Hitler announced 'When they declare that they will attack our cities in great strength, then we will eradicate their cities'.

86. See Gilbert, vi, p.774.

87. See Orange, pp.107-08.

Strategically speaking, the Germans placed themselves at a disadvantage by raiding so far inland. Although there was an obvious and eminent attraction in attacking what was then the world's largest city, and the heart of their enemy's empire, their fighter formations were subjected to some risk. No superiority of numbers could make up for the limited range of the Me.109s. (88)

The large daylight raid on London was a watershed in the battle for both sides. It was to have a lasting effect on German intentions of using the Luftwaffe's effort as a forerunner to invasion. Also, it brought to the surface the undercurrents of dissension and controversy over strategy and tactics that had existed in Fighter Command for some time.

For the Germans, the raid was the use of the last option, other than covering landings, which remained to the Luftwaffe in their efforts to defeat Dowding's squadrons. They had, since late June, attacked Channel shipping and coastal ports, aircraft factories and aerodromes, without being able to resolve the trial of strength. With the dates available for successful landings running out and with Hitler's mind divided between 'Sealion' and preparations for an Eastern Campaign, an early decision was necessary. To a large extent this would depend upon the effectiveness of bombing the new target. In this respect, after his claims and promises, Goering's prestige was at stake.

88. See Galland, *First and Last*, p.83. 'All formations had to take the shortest route to London because the escorting fighters had a reserve of only ten minutes' combat time'. Apart from dissipating the effects of the loads of their medium bombers on the world's largest target, the Germans, at a stroke, neutralised the value of their best fighter.

However, the attack on London was even more important for the RAF. It led, no doubt unintentionally at first, to the destruction of residential areas on a scale not seen earlier in the battle. This brought a rise in civilian casualties and raised again, especially in the minds of politicians, the question of how the morale of the general population would respond to heavy bombing. Consequently the responsibility of Dowding, with Fighter Command, for the defence of civilians, was open to scrutiny.(89) As the start of the new phase was accompanied that evening by raids lasting through the night, again with heavy damage and casualties, the question became more urgent.(90)

Much has been made of the relief brought to Park's squadrons by the change of German target.(91) However, it is infrequently realised that one of the main benefits was the opportunity presented for a restoration of morale. Pilots were still drawn

89. Ironically, on the previous Saturday, Dowding had told Colville that 'he could not understand why the Germans kept on coming in waves instead of concentrating on one mass raid which could not be effectively parried'. *Colville Diaries*, 31 August 1940, p.235.

90. Collier, *Defence of the United Kingdom*, p.237, remarks that the daylight raid was a 'victory for the German bombers, most of which had reached their targets without much difficulty, dropping more than three hundred tons of high-explosive and many thousands of incendiaries on and round the capital within an hour and a half'. According to Terraine, p.208, by the next morning 306 civilians were dead and 1,337 badly injured.

91. See Orange, p.107. On seeing the fires from London, Park reflected 'that he would have time to repair his control systems and so maintain an effective daylight challenge to enemy attack'. See also Churchill, ii, p.292, who wrote that the new German raids were 'a breathing-space of which we had the utmost need'. See also Gelb, p.234.

into heavy action over the following week, but, with the pressure from bombing of airfields mainly lifted, and the opportunity for new pilots to be posted to depleted squadrons, spirits rose. Thus, when a further great challenge arrived on the 15th, No.11 Group was better able to respond. For a few days the noise of battle did not cease, but the volume of strain was reduced.

* * *

However, the main importance of 7 September for Fighter Command's leadership was that it was a turning point in the Big Wing Controversy. Those in the Air Ministry and in No.12 Group who believed that poor tactics were being used in the south-east felt a certain justification of their criticisms when the enemy was able to reach and bomb the capital with intervention from comparatively small numbers of RAF fighters. If, as appeared likely, German attacks on London were to be sustained, the importance of No.12 Group squadrons was increased. In the first place, the Luftwaffe was now flying closer to their area, while secondly, by employing large Wings of fighters, they anticipated causing heavier losses to the raiders.(92)

Lastly, it is noticeable that, with the opening of heavy attacks on the capital, those who believed that Dowding had served his passage of time as C-in-C, Fighter Command and that there should be a replacement, gained in strength. At the Air Ministry it had always been hoped that his appointment would end in October, in spite of the Prime Minister's interventions on his behalf. Over the subsequent month, as will be shown, Churchill himself was to

be confronted with further criticisms of Dowding, this time not emanating from the Air Ministry, and was to feel, through meetings in committee, that the Commander-in-Chief could be intransigent. (93)

To summarise, the period from mid-August until the opening of the German bombing offensive against London was very difficult for Dowding. His men were put under increasing pressure from Luftwaffe attacks which were aimed specifically at eliminating or neutralising Fighter Command. By 7 September the Germans had gone some way to achieving this superiority over No.11 Group. (94) There, Park fought what he considered to be his battle 'by the book' and deployed his squadrons tactically as well as he was able.

However, Dowding, with overall command and a panoramic view of the battle, failed to introduce the relief that the squadrons of No.12 Group would undoubtedly have brought south of the Thames. As a result, he failed to resolve the spreading disagreement between his two chief Group commanders.

In a sense, it was the Luftwaffe's poor strategic decision which brought some respite for Fighter Command. Their change of target on 7 September did not alter Dowding's overall responsibility for defence, yet it enabled his hardest-pressed squadrons to prepare for the next phase of battle.

* * *

93. See below, Chapter 7.

94. For the German Order of Battle on 7 September 1940, see Bickers, p.65.

CHAPTER FIVETHE BATTLE WITHIN A BATTLE, 7 SEPTEMBER - 16 OCTOBER

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CHAPTER FIVEPART ONE: INTRODUCTION, AND SQUADRON LEADER BADER'S INFLUENCE
ON TACTICS

From 7 September to 16 October the controversy over tactics, especially between Park and Leigh-Mallory, grew more intense. As Dowding took no firm action to settle these differences, the question came under increasing scrutiny at the Air Ministry where, eventually, the decision was taken to hold a conference aimed at resolving methods of air defence by day.(1)

Because the opinion is widely held, albeit mistakenly, that the fate of Dowding and Park was linked almost solely with the Big Wing Controversy(2), it will be a pertinent digression to examine some opinions of Park and Leigh-Mallory, the two chief antagonists. These views were offered by men who served closely with them at the time and came to know them well, as opposed to the first impressions of those who met the commanders only once or twice. Such a study helps to redress a balance. In general, books dealing with the controversy have painted Park as an affable, quietly suffering hero and victim, with Leigh-Mallory portrayed as a pompous, self-seeking saboteur. Such works rely

1. AIR 2/7281, Enclosure 14A, Stevenson to Dowding, 14 October 1940.

2. See, for example, Terraine, pp.214-17; Wright, Chapter 13; Wykeham, pp.145-47; Deighton, pp.271-73; Taylor, *English History*, p.500.

heavily on the post-war opinions of Dowding and Park, who had many opportunities of presenting their views, or on assessments made without reference to documents.

Leigh-Mallory did not survive the war and left no record of what he believed, to explain his policy. He has, therefore, in his absence, been turned into a scapegoat and his reputation has suffered accordingly. His critics have presented him as unco-operative and scheming, placing him centrally in a plot to unseat Dowding and Park through the use of political influence. Such opinions are unsupported by evidence and do injustice to his memory. (3)

First, it must be said that Park was a highly competent leader who received full and deserved praise for the part he played in the battle. He was quick-thinking and decisive, 'knowing the system inside out because he'd helped to institute it'. (4) His shrewdness allowed few details to escape his notice. (5) There

3. For highly critical views of Leigh-Mallory, see, for example, Orange, who has no approving word to say of him, especially pp.120-39; Terraine, especially pp.196 and 199-201. On p.204 he accuses Leigh-Mallory of 'allowing political intervention on No.12 Group'; Wright, especially Chapters 11 and 12; Wood and Dempster, especially pp.309-10 and pp.411-14, although the authors are unreliable on p.412 by stating that 'in November a post mortem was held'; Collier, *Leader of the Few*, p.212 and pp.220-27; Deighton, especially pp.228-31, 262-63 and 271-73. See also the obituary of Sir Keith Park, *The Times*, 7 February 1975, p.16, which refers to the conference of 17 October 1940, 'instigated primarily by the AOC No.12 Group'.

4. Porter interview, Bristol, 19 August 1991.

5. Cross interview, RAF Club, Piccadilly, 25 September 1989. Similar points of Park's competence were made by Professor D.Wiseman, who, as a Flying-Officer, was his Personal Assistant during the Battle. He added that Park was 'first and foremost a New Zealander'. Interview, Professor D.Wiseman, Tadworth, 30 April 1992.

are doubts, however, on his abilities as an innovative commander. His biographer has commended him because he 'actually listened to what he was told'.(6) Yet Air Vice-Marshal A.V.R. Johnstone called this his 'capacity for listening then inwardly digesting what he had heard, before distributing others' ideas as products of his own inspired thinking'. In Johnstone's view, 'Park was a vain man ... he loved to be the centre of attention', and this may have led to some unpopularity.(7)

In the opinion of Sir Philip Joubert, an opponent of Dowding, Park 'was not a great commander but at least he was a successful one'. He was 'highly strung' and 'suffered from a sensitive ego'. In Joubert's judgement, Leigh-Mallory '"could run rings round Park" intellectually'.(8) Another officer who saw a less publicised side of Park, and who worked with him daily throughout the battle, made the point that although he ran his Group well, 'Park was an unlovable man'. He could be unnecessarily harsh on those he felt were not up to scratch and he was somewhat temperamental.(9)

Was there, in spite of the avalanche of criticism later aimed at him, a better side to Leigh-Mallory? In the experience of various officers who worked closely with him, Leigh-Mallory was industrious, caring for his pilots, loyal to his friends and ready to take advice. One gave him credit for building up No.12

6. Dr V.Orange, in Probert and Cox, p.36.

7. A.V.R. Johnstone in *Thanks for the Memory*, edited by L. Lucas (London, 1989), pp.205-06.

8. Joubert, p.137.

9. Porter interview, 19 August 1991.

Group from nothing in pre-war days by dint of hard work.(10) Another remembered the pleasurable surprise of finding an Air Vice-Marshal who came into a Mess, then sat and talked directly with young pilots.(11) A third recollected how, when faced with a problem, Leigh-Mallory liked to have near him men on whose experience he could draw immediately. What appeared to be pomposity or vanity was a cover for shyness and, in reality, he 'was a very nice man, both kind and thoughtful', not lacking a sense of humour.(12) Several wondered if part of Leigh-Mallory's ambitious drive stemmed from a wish not to be 'in the shadow of his brother'.(13)

Leigh-Mallory generally approved of employing a large number of fighters as a combined force in combat and in this he was closer to Air Ministry thinking than to the Dowding System of immediate, forward response with small numbers, employed by Park south of the Thames. He had a variety of reasons, both professional and personal, for taking a keen interest in a battle being fought mainly outside 'his' area at this stage. Therefore, in No.12 Group he had moved two squadrons to Duxford one week before the great Luftwaffe raid on London. The aerodrome's Operations

10. Cross interview, 25 September 1989.

11. Crowley-Milling interview, Shell House, 14 December 1989.

12. Porter interview, 19 August 1991.

13. Broadhurst interview, RAF Club, Piccadilly, 10 November 1989. Leigh-Mallory's half-brother was the famous mountaineer, George Mallory who died, with Irvine, near the summit of Mount Everest in June 1924.

Record Book for 31 August shows 'am 611 and 242 arrived to reinforce sector'. He was now ready to play a full part in the action. (14)

* * *

It is possible that he did this for four main reasons. In the first place he believed that insufficient use was being made of the potential of his squadrons and his judgment was shared by others. The single considerable attack on his Group area on 15 August had been easily repulsed and thereafter he had what he considered to be underemployed squadrons ready for action. These forces were No.11 Group's main tactical reserve and it was high time to use them, taking some pressure from formations to the south. Dowding's supporters would claim this to be wishful thinking, especially as his Group and Sector control was not organised to take additional squadrons. Nevertheless, Park's situation was desperate and Leigh-Mallory had a legitimate opposite view. (15)

14. AIR 28/232, Duxford ORB, 31 August 1940. Lucas, *Flying Colours*, p.119, gives the date as 30 August. Until then No.242 Squadron had been based at Coltishall and No.611 at Digby.

15. See AIR 41/15, ADGB, ii, pp.567-74, which points out that 'the squadrons which No.12 Group could spare for the battle in the south-east represented the only tactical reserve which could support No.11 Group; and it was right, therefore, that they should have been used in the battle'. A good reason for this was that, as Dowding failed to reinforce No.11 Group, 'the bulk of the German Air Force was opposed by little more than half of the squadrons of the Command'. For some of the feelings in No.12 Group, see N.Monks, *Squadrons Up!* (London, 1940), p.246. 'During this period I visited several R.A.F. fighter squadrons in the Midlands. The pilots were cursing the ill-luck that kept them up there, away from the scrapping that was going on down south'. See also AIR 25/219, No.12 Group Operations Record Book, where regularly, through July and August, only little enemy activity was reported by day in Leigh-Mallory's area.

Secondly, Leigh-Mallory's ambition had been frustrated earlier in the year when Park had received the command of No.11 Group; Park was junior both in rank and seniority to Leigh-Mallory. There is no doubt in the minds of those who served under him in those days that, as he was the senior Group Commander, Leigh-Mallory considered that he should have received the appointment. He was an ambitious man and wanted to play an active part in the battle which he knew was crucial to the nation's future and which he sincerely believed was being allowed to slip away from the RAF. (16)

In the third place, by forming a Wing of fighters based at Duxford he would guarantee the chance, when asked by Controllers at Uxbridge or Stanmore, of moving squadrons quickly into action. It has already been noted that the customary riposte offered to those who complained about the slow arrival of his aircraft was

16. See Air Ministry, *The Air Force List*, February 1940, Index, Nos. 221 and 222-23, which shows that Leigh-Mallory became an Air Vice-Marshal on 1 November 1938, whereas Park held the rank of Air-Commodore from 1 July 1938. Park took over No.11 Group on 20 April 1940; see Orange, p.83. His rank of Air Vice-Marshal was confirmed in July 1940; see obituary, *The Times*, 7 February 1975, p.16. Subsequently there was a 'personal antipathy between Park and Leigh-Mallory', see Douglas Papers, Imperial War Museum, File 2, Douglas to J.B.Collier, 14 February 1956. A strong reason for appointing Park, in Dowding's eyes, was that he had helped to prepare the defensive system and, as SASO, had agreed with the C-in-C. Another evidence of the coolness between Dowding and Leigh-Mallory came from ACM Sir Harry Broadhurst. When at Coltishall in 1940 and visited by Dowding, Broadhurst invited his Group Commander, Leigh-Mallory, to be present. During lunch his guests sat one each side of him and 'there was not much love lost between them'. Leigh-Mallory soon asked to be excused to return to his office work. Broadhurst interview, 10 November 1989.

that they were almost always called too late.(17) Positioning squadrons at Duxford, very close to No.11 Group's boundary, was partly an attempt to overcome this criticism.

But overall, in the opinion of those who knew both men, was the fact that Leigh-Mallory was strongly influenced by one of his squadron-leaders, Douglas Bader. Few active Service leaders in the war had Bader's charisma in leadership, lack of fear and insatiably pugnacious desire to wrestle with the enemy. These qualities, combined with freely expressed views and an unvarying confidence in his own opinions brought him, first, the command of No.242 Squadron, then the ear of his Group Commander when he preached with evangelistic ardour the virtues of employing Big Wing tactics.(18)

The part played by Bader in the Big Wing Controversy was considerable. This was not because he intervened personally and intentionally in the various controversies over the leadership of Fighter Command. He had no deliberate wish to remove Dowding, or to have Park replaced, yet his ideas and enthusiasms soon became the focal point for those who did.

17. See Bader Notes, p.4. For Bader's impatience at being called late into action, see Air Marshal Sir Denis Crowley-Milling in *So Few*, p.69.

18. Bader took command on 26 June 1940. He had previously been a flight-commander with No.222 Squadron. See Lucas, *Flying Colours*, p.106. In Broadhurst's view, Leigh-Mallory was 'seduced' by Bader's ideas; Broadhurst interview, 10 November 1989. In the opinion of Sir Hugh Dundas, who flew in 1940 with No.616 Squadron, 'Douglas Bader was a leader among leaders. He possessed, in greater degree than any other officer known to me personally, the characteristics which can raise the courage and performance of followers far above their natural level'. H.Dundas, 'Sir Douglas Bader', in Lucas, *Thanks for the Memory*, p.337.

It is important to appreciate a crucial, yet seldom recognised, aspect of the disagreement over tactics which developed in the summer of 1940. This is that there were, in fact, two Big Wing controversies, not one. The first was over the view, held primarily by Bader and his Group commander, Leigh-Mallory, that the squadrons of No.12 Group which were stationed closest to London, should be employed in action over the No.11 Group area, giving support to their hard pressed pilots. Although he believed that formations of at least three squadrons, flying together as a Wing, were more effective than three squadrons going into action separately, Bader appreciated that No.11 Group lacked time to implement this tactic themselves.

His position is made clear in the Bader Notes, where he recorded the bias of his critics. 'None of the post-war writers - in their books on the Battle of Britain - have taken the trouble to discuss the matter with me'. Later, he commented that the 'suggestion that has been accepted over the years that Keith Park should have operated wings like the 12 Group one is also nonsense. You cannot operate large formations from close to an attacking enemy'. He added that his Group Commander shared this opinion. 'At no time, and I say this with certainty, was it in Leigh-Mallory's mind'.(19)

The second Big Wing controversy was the disagreement which had existed since pre-war days between the Air Ministry and Fighter Command over the best way to defeat attacks made by large enemy

19. Bader Notes, p.4.

formations. Dowding's opponents there, who believed him to be unco-operative and unsuited to his Command, seized eagerly on others who disagreed with his policies. In this way, Leigh-Mallory and Bader were drawn into controversy and used by those who saw No.12 Group's theories as a useful lever to discredit Dowding and his lieutenant, Park.(20)

To understand Bader's appeal to the senior officers who were wedded to a more aggressive approach in fighter defence, it must be remembered that he set up as his heroes those fighter pilots of the First World War who had achieved success in combat. Writing a foreword to a book in 1956, he referred to 'the tradition of our famous predecessors of World War 1, Ball, McCudden, Mannock and Bishop. Never let it be forgotten that our generation of fighter pilots learned the basic rules of air fighting from them'.(21) What his brother-in-law termed 'the three basic articles of a First World War fighter pilot's faith' were set in Bader's mind:

He who has the height controls the battle.
 He who has the sun achieves surprise.
 He who gets in close shoots them down.(22)

20. ACM Sir Kenneth Cross recalled that during the Battle of Britain there was little telephone conversation between either Leigh-Mallory and Dowding, or Leigh-Mallory and Park, yet there was 'plenty between Leigh-Mallory and Sholto Douglas'. He believed that Douglas was an *éminence grise* behind the scenes in the Big Wing Controversy. Cross interview, 25 September 1989.

21. J.Johnson, *Wing Leader* (London, 1956), Foreword.

22. Lucas, *Flying Colours*, p.95.

Bader's persistence in wanting to return to the RAF after an accident which would have left most men in a wheelchair for the rest of their lives was an example of formidable spirit attacking adversity. In his case it was helped in two ways. First, he was a graduate of Cranwell and a number of his contemporaries there had gained advancement in the Service and 'were in a position to be useful and certainly to try to help'. Second, it was Bader's custom 'if he wanted something badly, to go to the top'. On this occasion the approach was made to the then Air Marshal Portal, Air Member for Personnel (AMP). Gradually, his tenacity of purpose which 'has caused some raised eyebrows, and even some sore toes' brought results and he was re-admitted to the Service. (23)

However, some believe that Bader's period outside the RAF - he crashed in 1931 and did not rejoin until late 1939 - worked to his disadvantage. For over eight years he had been out of touch with the theory and practice of flying in Fighter Command. In their view, his ideas of aerial combat had been overtaken by rapid developments in fighters and defence systems. Others,

23. Ibid, pp.83-84. For Bader's help from his Cranwell contacts, see also Burns, pp.28-29.

nonetheless, would claim that basic principles of fighter combat never change and that Bader was maintaining them in his approach. (24)

Within the Air Ministry, the heralds of Big Wings judged success in terms of figures. Their criterion, from pre-war days, had been to destroy so many aircraft that the enemy's attack would be rapidly reduced, or abandoned. It is important to note, in judging the actions of various leaders involved, that from the moment of Bader's entry into the main battle during the last days of August, his claims were excessive, yet accepted by his superiors at the Air Ministry as accurate and proof positive of the validity of their theories. (25)

For example, on 30 August, No.242 Squadron was scrambled at 4.45 p.m. (26) His log-book for the day stated: 'August 30th. Hurricane D 1 hour, 30 minutes. Intercepted 100 E/A with Squadron. Shot down 12. Self two Me.110s'. A note added, 'Met about 100 E/A bombers at 15,000 feet just west of Enfield. Was

24. Sir Harry Broadhurst believed that Bader's absence from the RAF in those years counted against him. In Sir Kenneth Cross's view Bader had a loud voice, was rather conceited, always aggressive in fighting, showed no fear, was an inspiring leader, but with a narrow overall view of matters. Sir Denis Crowley-Milling said that Bader was the best leader he had known, a strong personality who was older than most other pilots. Broadhurst (10 November 1989), Cross (25 September 1989) and Crowley-Milling (14 December 1989), interviews. Terraine, p.198, believes that Bader did not understand the Dowding System and suggests that Leigh-Mallory neither understood nor agreed with it.

25. Both sides made excessive claims against enemy aircraft, as post-war research has shown. Such claims are an understandable propaganda ploy, but a danger when used as the basis for a change in strategy. See Deighton, p.276, 'Table 3. Comparison of British and German figures for aircraft lost'.

26. P.Brickhill, *Reach for the Sky* (London, 1956), p.186.

up-sun and above them. Dived the whole squadron into attack from above and behind. Squadron destroyed 12 E/A for loss of none. No bullet holes in any aeroplane'. (27)

If these claims are compared with the known casualties of the day, discrepancies appear. For example, one authority offers two prizes, both Heinkel 111s, to No.242 Squadron and lists four Me.110s shot down that day as victims of other squadrons which, however, destroyed them before noon. (28)

The second authority allocated no German losses specifically to No.242 Squadron, but showed two Me.110s, both shot down at 4.55 p.m., near Ponders End, although Bader's claims are unsubstantiated by its account. (29) A third account confirms the shooting down of two Me.110s about that time, but then mistakenly adds a Heinkel 111 as a 'possible'; this aircraft, however, was shot down at 4.35 p.m., before No.242 Squadron had taken off. (30)

27. Lucas, *Flying Colours*, p.120.

28. See Mason, *Battle Over Britain*, pp.320-27. Mason bases his figures on the Luftwaffe Quartermaster-General's Returns (Oberbefehlshaber der Luftwaffe Genst. Gen. Qu./6 Abteilung/ 409 K dos.1C), notified to Reichsmarschallstab.

29. See Ramsey, *Battle of Britain*, pp.606-09. This work is based on the Luftwaffe Quartermaster-General's Returns, 1940, together with the assistance of the Bundesarchiv Zentralhachweisstelle, Koblenz, the Deutsche Dienststelle (WASSt), Berlin, and the Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgraberfirsoge e.V.Kassel.

30. Ramsey, *Blitz*, i, pp.269-76.

But soon after this action, when Leigh-Mallory phoned Bader, he was told, 'If I had had more fighters we would have shot down more of the enemy'. The AOC No.12 Group was impressed and, in Bader's words, 'a few days later the Duxford Wing of 3 squadrons was born'.(31)

* * *

On 2 September Leigh-Mallory wrote to Headquarters, Fighter Command in connection with their letter of 26 June, regarding the provision of Tactical Memoranda. He claimed that insufficient information about fighter tactics and lessons learned in combat had been produced by Nos.10 and 11 Groups. The only information so far received had come from combat reports and intelligence summaries which did not 'go sufficiently deeply into the tactics employed by our own fighters'. He recommended, therefore, that an experienced officer who had seen action, yet was now unfit for flying, should visit stations, giving lectures and holding discussions.(32)

In this, Leigh-Mallory gave the impression that No.12 Group had been neglected. He felt a great loyalty for his squadrons and wanted them to have the best possible preparation for combat. An obvious difficulty in this respect was that the course of battle was so intense that there was little opportunity to organise such visits, yet it is also apparent that pilots on the

31. Bader Notes, p.2.

32. AIR 16/281, Enclosure 94A, Leigh-Mallory to Headquarters, Fighter Command, 2 September 1940.

edges of the main battle were very keen, with not altogether altruistic reasons, to learn the lessons gleaned from combat.

To make this point more strongly, Leigh-Mallory wrote to Headquarters, Fighter Command on 8 September, enclosing a copy of the type of advice which he believed should be given to squadrons. It was, he said, written by 'the O.C., No.242 Squadron in connection with the tactics they employed on the 30th August, which proved to be very successful'. He added that copies had been sent to all No.12 Group squadrons for their information.(33)

The document is of some importance. It had been written by Squadron-Leader Bader six days earlier 'at the suggestion of the Intelligence Officer' and was addressed in the first place to the O.C., Coltishall. At that time Bader wished fervently to be drawn into action in the south, was critical of the lateness of the call from No.11 Group and used the opportunity of setting out his ideas of the tactics to be used against escorted bomber formations. In the opening paragraph he suggested that his report might be of use because of 'the warning signal from 11 Group of increased casualties suffered in that Group due to enemy tactics of tight formation with bombers and escort fighters intermingled'.

The report, nine paragraphs and nearly a thousand words in length, then described his squadron's action, supporting his basic beliefs in principles to be followed, all of which would

33. Ibid, Enclosure 95A, 8 September 1940.

have been approved by any first-rate fighter pilot. At the start 'it was decided to attack down sun'. Green Section engaged the enemy top aircraft, while his other three sections tackled the main formation. The severity of the attack broke up the enemy formations and 'the result of all this was a general shambles which it had been the original intention of 242 Squadron to create'. After that, disorganised Germans were at the mercy of the Hurricanes. He mentioned the need for height advantage and spoke of 'point blank shots'.

Many pilots of No.11 Group would have smiled ruefully at one sentence in his seventh paragraph. 'It was anticipated (and the fight in question proved it) that if a squadron of Hurricanes or Spitfires met a large enemy bomber and fighter formation (provided there were no single-seater escorts) the Hurricanes or Spitfires would have the advantage (in spite of numerical inferiority) if the enemy formation could be broken up and provided the Squadron started with the height advantage'. Time and again in their combats south of the Thames, there had been no opportunity of meeting the two crucial criteria which Bader stipulated; first, there were Me.109 escorts and second there was no time to gain height advantage. Nevertheless, had Bader's precepts been followed, some relief would have been brought to the sorely pressed No.11 Group. His aircraft could have entered the battle with height advantage.

The report was modest in explaining that for this particular action, fighting conditions were very favourable and that, for No.242 Squadron, 'luck definitely played a part'. It added that

the squadron enjoyed 'complete immunity from damage to aeroplanes or personnel' and made no mention at all of the number of enemy aircraft claimed as shot down or damaged.(34)

In the long run the report served a double purpose. It gave Leigh-Mallory an opportunity of involving himself more closely with the battle, showing that he was not lacking in opinions and was caring for the interests of his Group. Secondly, it brought the name of Squadron-Leader Bader to the notice of those senior officers who did not already know it, proving that he had some definite views on the tactics of battle and no fear in expressing them. A number of those officers in the Air Ministry seized upon Bader's claims and prepared to use them as a weapon in their struggle with Dowding.

* * *

34. Ibid.

PART TWO: GROWTH OF DISAGREEMENT OVER TACTICS

On 9 September, Headquarters, No.11 Group sent a message to Stanmore which began, 'Reference visit of C-in-C here 7/9 HQ 12 Group state it will take twenty-five minutes from time of request to provide fighter formation to patrol line of aerodromes North Weald, Stapleford Abbots, Hornchurch in event of mass attacks'. Obviously, during Dowding's visit the question of co-operation between the two Groups had been raised and Park had been making some subsequent investigation. The AOC No.11 Group continued by restating his views and thus setting out explicitly the difference of policy between him and Leigh-Mallory. He would rather have, he said, one squadron arriving on the patrol line within fifteen minutes than more squadrons appearing after aerodromes had been bombed. 'If No.12 Group cannot reinforce by less than a whole wing then we would suggest for your consideration that their first and second squadrons proceed direct to the line of aerodromes mentioned and form Wing there instead of in the North outside the battle area'. This, claimed Park, would enable the enemy to be met before they reached the Sector aerodromes. (35)

The note was read by Evill, SASO at Stanmore, who then minuted Dowding. What he said was in favour of No.12 Group and undoubtedly influenced the thinking of the C-in-C on the matter.

35. AIR 16/330, Enclosure 19A, Park to Headquarters, Fighter Command, 13.05 hrs., 9 September 1940.

He started by mentioning the importance of the time factor for No.11 Group, 'nevertheless No.12 Group's Wing has been very successful on the two occasions when it has been used as such and one doubts whether the rendezvous over North Weald, etc would prove very reliable'. Evill favoured the maintenance of the present practice 'though it will mean I'm afraid an increase in the frequency of demands from 11 Group who will be reluctant to wait before calling for assistance'.(36)

Having read Evill's advice, Dowding gave judgement. Although he appeared unwilling to intervene in what he knew was a considerable difference of opinion between his two Group Commanders, the C-in-C here sided with Leigh-Mallory. 'I will not press 12 Group to send single squadrons into battle', he minuted, 'or to rendezvous in the battle area'.(37) Dowding's attitude on this occasion seems at first to be a refutation of the criticism of him, that he did not exercise powers of leadership during a quarrel in his Command. However, the enigma is that he did not side with the ever loyal Park who was attempting, under the most severe handicaps, to implement the Dowding System. Later accounts of the battle, including Dowding's own recollections, neglect to point out that the C-in-C did give his approval to Leigh-Mallory's interpretation of tactics required. In reality, Dowding, burdened with his own defensive system, was being indecisive.

36. Ibid, Minute 20, Evill to Dowding, 10 September 1940.

37. Ibid, Minute 21, Dowding to Evill, 10 September 1940. See also below, Note 64.

Noting that there had been a small change in German tactics over the previous few days, Park issued another Instruction to Controllers, on 11 September. This showed that he had come to appreciate the use of squadrons in pairs over his Group area. It is difficult to say whether the idea was brought about by No.12 Group's policy of employing Wings, or whether he realised from his own experience and his squadrons that better results might be achieved, and fewer casualties suffered, from using larger formations. Controllers were told to despatch squadrons 'in pairs to engage first wave of enemy'. Spitfires were to tackle the fighter screen, and Hurricanes the bombers and close escorts. In the case of squadrons to meet a third wave of attack 'they should be sent in pairs as follows: Debden and North Weald squadrons together; Hornchurch and Biggin Hill squadrons together; Kenley and Northolt squadrons together'. Controllers were then advised to name the base over which the pairs of squadrons would rendezvous and to select one of the squadrons to be the leader. It was important for the two squadrons to maintain close contact. This policy was as far as Park would go in linking squadrons; to the proponents of Big Wings, nonetheless, it was no more than a half-hearted attempt. (38)

Undoubtedly, Park's small, but significant, change of policy came at least partly from a meeting held at Uxbridge on 30 August. The Official Narrative points out that 'there was a general feeling throughout No.11 Group that everything should be done to

38. AIR 16/842, German attacks on R.A.F. aerodromes: tactical information gained, August-November, 1940. No.11 Group Instructions to Controllers, No.16, 11 September 1940.

put more aircraft into one flying formation and that if this meant sending squadrons into the Group from quiet Sectors, then these should be sent'. Suggestions for increasing the strength of Sector patrols were turned down firstly because heavy demands were already made on squadrons and secondly because of 'the Commander-in-Chief's policy of maintaining No.11 Group at a strength of three day fighter squadrons in each Sector and no more'. The North Weald Commander, Wing-Commander F.Beamish, suggested that two squadrons in one Sector should go into action together, but this idea was rejected 'though the Group Commander was clearly sympathetic to the idea of larger formations if there was time to assemble them'. Later, 'A.V.M. Park agreed however that the time had come for larger formations to be used' and plans were made that, in future, pairs of squadrons from adjacent Sectors should rendezvous before engaging the enemy. Park's critics would have noted the subsequent delay in implementing policy, because it 'was applied for the first time on 2 September but not until the second week in September did it become the rule rather than the exception'.(39)

What is noticeable here is that Park was constrained by Dowding's insistence on limiting the number of squadrons in each Sector and on not organising reinforcement from No.12 Group, which had the inestimable factor of time in arranging squadrons at height before they engaged the enemy. The Minutes of this meeting add weight to Leigh-Mallory's and Bader's case for the employment of the Duxford Wing.(40)

39. AIR 41/15, ADGB, ii, p.574.

40. Ibid.

Even before Dowding issued his Minute of 10 September, refusing to force No.12 Group to alter its arrangements for employing fighters, the Duxford Wing, under Bader's command, had flown two Wing patrols down into No.11 Group's area. On each of these, 7 and 9 September, they employed three squadrons, Nos.19, 242 and 310. Another was flown on 11 September, consisting of four squadrons, before the battle over London reached its climax on the 15th, when the Wing was twice in action, using five squadrons each time.(41) Leigh-Mallory took a keen interest in the progress of these operations and travelled to Duxford on the 13th to hold a conference.(42)

* * *

The change of policy which had caused the Germans to alter the centre of attack to London quickly became counter-productive. In this matter the Luftwaffe suffered from a grave misjudgement, again caused by faulty Intelligence. Thus, although unknown to Dowding or the Air Ministry, Churchill or British Intelligence, Hitler decided to call off 'Sealion' on 17 September.(43) The

41. AIR 16/281, Enclosure 98B, Leigh-Mallory to Evill, 17 September 1940.

42. See AIR 28/232, Duxford ORB, 13 September 1940, 'AOC visited the Station and held a Conference'.

43. See Ansel, pp.252 ff., quoting the War Diary of the German Naval Staff from 10 September. See particularly SKL KTB, Part A, 17 September 1940. The reason given was that the RAF 'was by no means defeated'. On 12 October, 'Sealion' was put off till the following Spring, but the threat of invasion was to be maintained. Keitel's order, STL KTB, 12 October 1940, announced '(1) The Fuhrer has decided that from now on until Spring, preparations for "Sea Lion" shall be continued solely for the purpose of maintaining political and military pressure on England'. Hints of these changes came to the British, but according to Hinsley, i, p.168, 'until well into October, however, these hints were less powerful than were the indications that preparations for invasion were at an advanced stage, if not actually complete'.

air battle went on but the contest which the RAF had set out to fight had been won or, more exactly, had not been lost; this, however, brought no pause to the civil war now raging between two commanders inside Fighter Command.

Although the Germans were not alone in putting forward, and believing, greatly exaggerated claims of aircraft shot down or damaged, such miscalculations were more damaging to them than to the RAF. This was so because their basic aim was to destroy, or at least incapacitate, Fighter Command before the seaborne invasion of Britain could begin. As the battle progressed, Dowding's intention, on the other hand, was not to destroy the Luftwaffe, or even, pace Big Wings, to cause it to scale down or abandon attacks. Instead, using defensive techniques, the Germans were to be held at bay until the weather made invasion impossible.

During the period 26 August to 7 September, Luftwaffe claims were from three to four times greater than the RAF's true losses. For example, taking the five days, 26 and 28 August, 1, 3, and 7 September, Luftwaffe claims totalled 309; the true figure was 96.(44) It was small wonder that when Kesselring launched the great raids on 15 September, some Luftwaffe aircrew had been told that the RAF was down to its last fifty fighters. The shock of reality was intense. 'Imagine then the disillusionment when on this September 15th hundreds of fighters once more pounced on the German bombers ... when at the climax of the fight, just after 13.30, some 300 Spitfires and Hurricanes were in the air

44. AHB Translation, vol.4, VII/83. See also Ramsey, *Battle of Britain*, p.707.

simultaneously ... and not a single German bomber formation reached its target unmolested'.(45)

On that day matters went well for Fighter Command. There had been no massive raid since 7 September, their airfields had in that time suffered fewer raids and the new designation of squadrons had enabled many units in No.11 Group to renew their strength. Morale was certainly higher than it had been a fortnight before.(46)

In terms of tactical application of resources, the Germans did little on the 15th to advance their own cause. The morning build up over the Pas de Calais was slow and detected thoroughly by British RDF, which gave Park the benefit of time to prepare squadrons. Luftwaffe formations thereafter had to fight their way laboriously to London and, as they reached the capital at midday, the Duxford Wing of five squadrons launched a heavy attack. German bombers were scattered and a series of contests developed over many parts of Kent.(47)

As the next raid did not grow until about 2 p.m., Fighter Command squadrons were offered an unexpected respite both for machines and men. Then an even larger formation of bombers, heavily

45. See Bekker, p.224. See also AIR 41/15, ADGB, ii, Appendix 36, for discrepancies of claims. For example, in the week 29 August - 4 September, RAF claims against German aircraft were : Destroyed, 303; Probables, 123; Damaged, 156. The actual number identified as destroyed was 141.

46. See Richards and Saunders, i, p.186. See also Gelb, p.234, quoting Squadron-Leader Sandy Johnstone.

47. See AIR 41/15, ADGB, ii, pp.454-55. See also AIR 25/219, entry for 15 September, which shows Leigh-Mallory's belief that attacks should be co-ordinated. Bader's Wing attacked the enemy 'according to plan - the Spitfire Squadrons dealing with the enemy fighters and the Hurricanes the bombers'.

protected by fighters, was again detected, tracked and met. Over London in the early afternoon they were attacked by the combined strength of six squadrons from No.11 Group, two from No.10 Group and, from No.12 Group, the Duxford Wing of five squadrons. Once again, Luftwaffe formations were broken up and suffered heavy casualties.(48)

The results of the day brought some comfort to No.11 Group, whose squadrons had borne the brunt of the early attacks; that gave satisfaction to Park. The intervention of the Duxford Wing provided a sense of achievement for the pilots of No.12 Group and, in Leigh-Mallory's view, justified his use of the Big Wing. Nevertheless, Park was not to know the importance of that day's fighting in the context of the main air battle, neither could he predict what problems the Germans might offer him next. Therefore on 16 September another Group Instruction was issued.(49) In the first section, headed 'Engagement of Mass Attacks,' he listed seven deficiencies that he had noticed over the prior week. In two of these he showed an awareness of the value of squadrons working together, by highlighting difficulties: 'b. Individual squadrons being detailed to big raids' and 'd. Individual squadrons being given rendezvous so far forward as to become engaged before meeting their paired squadron'. Others mentioned such faults as 'a persistent tendency of Group Controllers to delay in detailing pairs of squadrons that have reached their height and rendezvous on to individual raids'.

48. For a general account of the afternoon's raids, see Hough and Richards, pp.277-83. See also Ramsey, *Blitz*, ii, pp.95-104.

49. AIR 41/15, ADGB, ii, No.11 Group Instruction to Controllers, No.18, 16 September 1940.

Under the heading 'Fresh Instructions', he issued new orders for dealing with very high flying enemy fighters, now operating at between 25,000 and 30,000 feet. His fifth heading, on diversions by enemy fighters, shows an awareness of the importance of using aircraft in larger than single squadron strength. '1. Detail not less than several pairs of Spitfires to fighter screen. 2. Get ample Hurricane squadrons rendezvoused in pairs in the region of sector aerodromes. 3. Get Northolt and Tangmere squadrons to readiness, to despatch as Wings of three squadrons to intercept the enemy's second or third wave which normally contains bombers'. This part of the document is revealing in refuting the often stated idea that Park did not believe in the value of squadrons working together in No.11 Group. The impression is gained, nonetheless, that the pressure from No.12 Group was beginning to tell and that he was going out of his way to recommend pairs and Wings as a result. His opponents at the Air Ministry, not comprehending his difficulties, would have called this a late, and Damascene, conversion.

The very next day, the debate on the value of Big Wings was given further impetus when Leigh-Mallory submitted to Stanmore a 'Report on Wing Patrols Sent up by No.12 Group, 7th, 9th, 11th, 15th September 1940'.(50) He opened by reasoning that, as the German mass attacks had used larger formations, both of fighters and bombers, 'it was considered wholly inadequate to send up single Squadrons for this purpose and therefore a Wing has been employed'. Definite roles had been allocated; the Spitfires were

50. AIR 16/281, Enclosure 98B, Leigh-Mallory to Headquarters, Fighter Command, 17 September 1940.

to tackle the fighters and hold them off, while the Hurricanes were to attack the bombers. In dealing with the first Wing patrol of 7 September, Leigh-Mallory voiced Bader's usual complaint of being called off too late: 'The three Squadrons were at a disadvantage through the necessity of having to climb up to the enemy. There was the added disadvantage in that when attacking the bombers, the fighters were coming down on them from the sun'.

Bader's influence over his Group Commander was also shown in the report on the Second Wing Patrol of 9 September, which finished by saying that 'the leader of the Wing' considered that more than twenty further bombers could have been destroyed if he had had additional fighters. German formations met on the Third Wing Patrol were described and it was pointed out that Spitfires tackled the fighters, while No.74 Squadron attacked the bombers.(51)

The report continued by setting out tactical conclusions from the first three patrols. There had been two main difficulties, both of which were attributed to lack of fighter numbers. In the first place there were insufficient aircraft 'both to neutralise the enemy fighters and to attack the bombers successfully', while in the second, many enemy bombers could not be attacked because no fighters were left 'with sufficient ammunition to carry on the engagement'.

51. See Robinson, pp.151-52, using particularly AIR 50/32, which shows that the reality of the battle for No.74 squadron was different from the plan laid down.

In listing his conclusions, Leigh-Mallory, once again using Bader's arguments, stressed the need for greater numbers. In his view, it was considered that at least two Spitfire squadrons were required to tackle the fighters and three others to break up the bomber formations.

However, accounts of the fourth and fifth Wing patrols, both on 15 September, reached fanciful areas in their claims. 'The Hurricanes were able to destroy all the Dorniers they could see'. Another squadron, encountering a further formation of Dorniers 'promptly destroyed the lot'. German fighters were unable to protect their bombers, 'which were destroyed by the three Hurricane Squadrons at their leisure'.

To his credit, throughout the report Leigh-Mallory never complained about, or referred directly to, any supposed failings of No.11 Group in the manner that Park had voiced criticism of No.12 Group. Yet an equal fault was committed in 'Appendix A' of the report, when setting out the number of enemy machines claimed. The long-term danger resulted from an acceptance of the accuracy of the totals by a number of people, especially those on the Air Staff, whose belief from pre-war days had been that the scale of attack would be reduced by heavy losses. For them, in their contest with Dowding, Bader's figures were manna from Heaven.

To place No.12 Group's case for Big Wings in perspective, it is necessary to set their claims against the reality of German casualties for those days. Altogether on the five Wing patrols, according to Leigh-Mallory, 105 German aircraft were shot down, with forty probables and eighteen damaged, giving a total of 163

aircraft. According to one authority whose figures were extrapolated from German records, (52) on the four days in question the total Luftwaffe losses from all sources, including those aircraft not on combat missions and those judged at less than 100% write-offs, totalled 234 machines. To break the figures down further, on 7 September, the three squadrons of the Duxford Wing claimed to have destroyed twenty German aircraft; the whole of Fighter Command's claims for that day totalled 103 destroyed; the actual figure was forty-one. Setting the Duxford Wing's claims for fighters shot down on their five patrols against the figures now known is revealing. The Wing's figures for Me.109s and Me.110s destroyed was forty-eight machines; the reality is that the combined total achieved by all squadrons of Fighter Command on those five occasions was 81. (53)

The cardinal point here is not so much that the claims were exaggerated, as they certainly were by both sides, but that the assertions made by Bader, and transmitted under the signature of his Group Commander, were used as a potent weapon by those who wanted to remove Dowding and Park.

Accompanying his report, Leigh-Mallory sent two letters. One, to Dowding, was reasonably non-committal, leaving the Commander-in-Chief to draw his own conclusions. He hoped that as pilots gained more experience, results would improve and claimed that matters were 'distinctly encouraging'. (54)

52. See Mason, *Battle Over Britain*, Chapter 8.

53. See Ramsey, *Battle of Britain*, pp.706-07.

54. AIR 16/281, Enclosure 98A, Leigh-Mallory to Dowding, 17 September 1940.

In the other letter, to Evill, Leigh-Mallory was far more forthcoming. 'I am convinced myself that it is the correct way to tackle these large German formations', he wrote, adding that Wing operations needed much more experience. He was sure that they would progress in time, and, again, called them 'distinctly encouraging'.(55)

A copy of Leigh-Mallory's report soon found its way to the Air Ministry.(56) Two days later, Dowding sent them a report written by Park on 12 September, entitled 'German Air Attacks on England, 8th August - 10th September', in which the AOC, No.11 Group detailed the events of that month, especially the strain which had been exerted on his Command.(57)

55. Ibid, Enclosure 98B, Leigh-Mallory to Evill, 17 September 1940.

56. An enigma surrounds Leigh-Mallory's report on Wing Patrols, which was written on 17 September. It was forwarded to Headquarters, Fighter Command, where Dowding replied, on 23 September, that he was 'sending a copy to the Air Ministry for information'; (AIR 16/281, Enclosure 101A, Dowding to Air Ministry, 24 September 1940). However, the Air Ministry already had a copy; (AIR 2/7281, Enclosure 1A, Headquarters, Fighter Command to Air Ministry, 20 September 1940). The document was commented on by Crowe and Saundby on 22 September; (Ibid, Minute 2 and Minute 3, 22 September 1940). How was it that Dowding was by-passed by this copy, which had come from his Headquarters? One possible explanation is that Evill, who showed sympathy to No.12 Group's use of Wings, was responsible. He would have seen the report before Dowding and could rapidly have forwarded a copy to the Air Ministry without telling his Commander-in-Chief. Another explanation is not easy to find.

57. AIR 2/7281, Enclosure 5B, Park to Headquarters, Fighter Command, 12 September 1940 and Enclosure 5A, Dowding to Air Ministry, 22 September 1940.

Never a man to mince his words, Park took the opportunity not only of explaining his perennial views on the style of tactics best suited to his Group, but also laid about him with criticism of Headquarters, Fighter Command and the Air Staff themselves. He had been particularly disconcerted by requests for information from 'Higher Authority', (58) even while he was completely absorbed in fighting the battle. The organisation set up at No.11 Group 'worked smoothly and most efficiently, but was quite inadequate to provide the following classes of information which was continually being demanded by Fighter Command for passing to Air Staff, Air Ministry'. Three items were listed. They were telephoned requests for information before squadrons had taken off, before they had returned and then seeking casualties, although 'all details were forwarded by teleprinter report as soon as possible'.

In paragraph 49, Park pointed out the results of what he considered to be a waste of his staff's time. 'The Intelligence Staff was so overworked that they could not cope with the above type of telephone enquiries, which were received from Higher Authority from early morning to late at night', a remark hardly likely to be well received by those reading the report. Yet they had offended further, because they tried to obtain information for the Air Ministry by telephone requests directly to him or the Group Operations Staff. Such 'importunate demands' had choked telephone lines and impeded staff in their duty. Park's strictures were extremely sharp.

58. For a previous reference to 'Higher Authority', see above, Chapter 3, Note 92.

Thus senior officers at the Air Ministry, within a short period, had laid before them accounts of each Group Commander's activities, policy and hopes. At this stage the divisions over the tactical employment of fighters grew deeper, still without intervention from Dowding.

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PART THREE: AIR MINISTRY OPINIONS ON TACTICS

On 22 September, at the Air Ministry, Group-Captain Crowe, Deputy Director of Air Tactics (DDAT), forwarded Leigh-Mallory's report to Air Vice-Marshal Saundby, Assistant Chief of the Air Staff, Technical Requirements, (ACAS,[T]), with a Minute which termed it 'most interesting' in its reference to Wing patrols 'which have recently proved so successful'. He added, 'It is to be hoped that the wing tactics developed by No.12 Group will be followed by the other groups', thereby showing an ignorance of their differences of geographical position, if nothing else.(59)

Saundby's subsequent Minute went further. 'It shows that the policy for escorting bombers by single seater fighters fails when there are sufficient fighters to contain the escort fighters and deal with the bombers', and added that the Air Fighting Committee had reached that conclusion 'years ago'.(60) The report was then passed on in the general direction of Douglas.

Dowding entered the lists on 23 September, at a time when he was being heavily pressed on changes needed to meet night bombers.(61) On that day he wrote, in his own hand, a Minute to

59. AIR 2/7281, Minute 2, Crowe to Saundby, 22 September 1940. This Minute reinforces the contention that there were two Big Wing theories.

60. Ibid, Minute 3, Saundby to Douglas, 22 September 1940.

61. See Chapter 6. See especially AIR 16/387, Document 6B, The Salmond Report, 25 September 1940, and AIR 2/7341, Air Ministry to Dowding, 25 September 1940.

Evill which contained one of his infrequently displayed shafts of humour in official documents. 'I am sure that L-Mallory is thinking on the right lines, but the figures do not support his theory. More aircraft per Squadron were brought down by the combin. strength of 3 Squadrons (though fewer bombers)'. A pun followed, concerning the Free Czech Squadron, No.310. 'Little Check is placed on the estimate of 310 Squadron (joke) who generally are exuberant in their claims'. Some claims, he added, were 'mere thoughtful wishing', but he wanted Leigh-Mallory's report to be forwarded to the Air Ministry, adding that the figures in the Appendix were 'only approximate'.(62)

On the same day he wrote to Leigh-Mallory, thanking him for the report, which 'I have read with much interest'. His tone was guarded and, instead of calling for an urgent discussion of tactics, the C-in-C appeared to do no more than engage in debate by letter.(63)

The next day a copy of the report was sent on to the Air Ministry, with a covering note. In this, Dowding repeated his reservations over claims made, but concluded that 'the losses incurred by the Wing were reduced and I am, in any case, of the opinion that the AOC No.12 Group is working on the right lines

62. AIR 16/281, Minute 99, Dowding to Evill, 23 September 1940. For an account of the pilots of No.310 Squadron and their general approval of Big Wing tactics, see Johnson pp.34-36.

63. AIR 16/281, Enclosure 100A, Dowding to Leigh-Mallory, 23 September 1940.

in organising his operations in strength'. The critics of Dowding's opponents omit to mention his approbation here of Leigh-Mallory's intentions.(64)

Consequently Dowding was both aware of and involved in the controversy. It is understandable that some of those who knew the principals at the time, as well as historians later, have reflected why he did not at that stage call the chief antagonists together to resolve the differences. He, as Commander-in-Chief had not only to make policy, but also to ensure that it was enforced.(65)

* * *

Douglas on 24 September wrote a strongly worded Minute in reply to Saundby's observation and thus gave a firm momentum to the wheels of change already turning in the Air Ministry. He claimed to have received recent criticisms about Fighter Command's tactics, especially those in No.11 Group, in the way they tackled large enemy formations. 'It is alleged that squadrons go up with no very clear idea as to how many other squadrons are in the air and no instructions as to how they are to work in co-operation with them'. For example, he went on, even in 1918 in France, some aircraft had been sent to hold off the fighter screen while others attacked the bombers. He feared that the points made in

64. AIR 2/7281, Enclosure 6A, Dowding to Air Ministry, 24 September 1940.

65. The point may also be made that Dowding's senior officer in the Service did not intervene. Newall must have known the extent of the controversy, but chose not to become involved, possibly adding weight to the case of those who wanted him replaced.

Fighter Command's tactical memorandum on dealing with escorted bombers were not being followed in practice. There was need for a co-ordinated plan of action and it was undesirable for squadrons to attack "piecemeal" without any idea of what other squadrons are in the air, and what they are doing'. He believed that problems could be solved; three or four squadrons could have the same radio wavelength. The DDAT was then asked to consult the staff of Fighter Command 'and see what can be done. I would like to know the result'.(66)

On reading this note, Saundby minuted the DDAT, asking for a report. He showed his preference when adding, 'the fighter wing tactics now being tried by 12 Group have a bearing on this'.(67)

Douglas maintained his criticisms of Park in a note written on 28 September for the benefit of the Chief of the Air Staff, the Vice-Chief of the Air Staff, with a copy going to the Director of Home Operations. He neither made mention of Park's attack on 'Higher Authority', nor of his opinions on fighter tactics, but selected a different target for censure. 'You will notice that Air Vice-Marshal Park's report deals almost entirely with day fighting', he wrote. 'Night fighting is barely mentioned, save for a brief reference in the final paragraph'. Douglas felt that the question of night raids, at that time a particular burden for Fighter Command, might have been dealt with more fully.(68)

66. AIR 2/7281, Minute 7, Douglas to Saundby, 24 September 1940. Also see below, Note 98, which shows that the origin of Douglas's allegations could have been Evill.

67. AIR 2/7281, Minute 8, Saundby to Crowe, 27 September 1940.

68. Ibid, note with Enclosure 5A, Douglas to CAS, VCAS, copy to DHO, 28 September 1940.

Douglas had a growing concern with night defence, in which he was deeply and increasingly involved. Yet his failure to examine the details of Park's opinions on day fighting can lead to one of two conclusions; either he disagreed so strongly that he was not prepared to spend time discussing them in writing; or the ideas had been discussed verbally at the Air Ministry and a general opinion formed which there was no need to write down. Either way, Park appeared to be on a losing wicket.

By this time, Park was ready to express firm opinions to his Controllers on what he considered to be the weaknesses of Wings. An Instruction issued on 28 September remarked that bomber raids were now being made with close escort, and without high fighter screen. He then asserted that it had been hoped to use three squadrons in a Wing, but they took too long to form up and could lose contact. It appeared to take three squadrons twice as long to reach a point as it took two squadrons and 'from five to fifteen minutes' could not be afforded while they were sorting out. Controllers should therefore put up pairs of squadrons, although three might occasionally be needed 'in the winter and frequently in the coming Spring' when it was hoped to go over to the offensive. (69)

The final sentence showed an optimism and offensive spirit which had been denied to Park ever since he had taken command of No.11 Group in April. The litany of defence and disaster had darkened his steps, but there were some shafts of light by late September.

69. AIR 41/15, ADGB, ii, Appendix 25, No.11 Group Instruction to Controllers, No.19, 25 September 1940.

The previous weeks' pressure had eased a little, morale had risen, and the supply of new pilots and aircraft was encouraging. Now he was thinking in terms of engaging the Germans in a manner which would have drawn approval from the Air Staff, had their commendation not already been turned towards Leigh-Mallory.

The next day, Park went further, firing a heavy broadside against No.12 Group in a letter to Stanmore, entitled 'Major Tactics in Home Defence'.(70) His frustration concerning the criticisms made of him, both overt and covert, showed through. He started by commenting at some length and with considerable praise on the role played by No.10 Group. They were called on only when a heavy threat developed. Conversely, they could call on reinforcement from No.11 Group and it is noticeable that Park stressed the speed of response in saying that 'these are always provided immediately if No.11 Group is not heavily engaged'.

The arrangement had worked for the previous two months and followed the principles he believed to be incumbent on all Groups of Fighter Command. 'The Group requiring reinforcement shall state the number of Squadrons required, when and where, also the height they are required'. That was the basis of his belief and what he assumed his Commander-in-Chief agreed. Both Groups had to keep in close touch to avoid confusion.

Park went on to force home his opinion. Matters had worked well with No.10 Group because he and their Group Commander, Air Vice-

70. AIR 16/330, Enclosure 37A, Park to Headquarters, Fighter Command, 29 September 1940.

Marshal Quintin Brand, had agreed that it was essential to get a small number of squadrons quickly to the point required. Wings were slow in forming and would arrive 'after vital objectives had been bombed and the enemy was retreating'. He continued with another sharp swing at No.12 Group, saying that they might secure 'a bigger "bag" of enemy aircraft', but would fail to prevent the bombing of vital places.

Warming to the attack, he turned with bitterness to Leigh-Mallory's approach. Arrangements here, he claimed, had led to confusion with the Observer Corps, his own squadrons and Sector Controllers. Giving detail, he referred to two occasions in August when No.12 Group had been requested to provide cover for Debden and North Weald; on both occasions the airfields were bombed because 'having been told that No.12 Group would patrol these aerodromes, I despatched all my Squadrons to engage the enemy between the coast and the objectives'. Therefore, he continued, he had asked that requests for assistance from No.12 Group should be put to the Command Controller, but even that had not worked. Recently, he had enquired whether their squadrons were patrolling the North Weald - Hornchurch area, only to learn that they were 'somewhere down near the Coast'.

To add to his frustrations, a member of his staff had been told by 'a formation leader of No.19 Squadron' that the Duxford Wing never patrolled the North Weald - Hornchurch area, 'but went off down into the Dover area when ordered to reinforce'. Therefore, on the previous day he had declined the Command Controller's suggestion of seeking help from Leigh-Mallory only to learn shortly afterwards that he had 'a Wing of five squadrons in the Hornchurch area'.

Park's descriptive complaint gives an impression of the Duxford Wing acting as a type of independent robber band plundering its way across his Group area, a description to which Squadron-Leader Bader might not have taken exception. In the letter he explained what confusion could result. The fact that some formations had recently 'roamed into Kent', uninvited and unknown to his Controllers, might have accounted for Observer Corps reports of large raids in East Kent. However, when he sent his own squadrons to investigate, they found 'only friendly fighters'. His note carries an air of exasperation.

He set out five points to which he believed No.12 Group should adhere when asked to reinforce. First, they should send squadrons 'where and at the height requested'. Second, no fighters should be sent unless asked for. Next, his Controllers should be informed of the whereabouts of these squadrons. Fourth, no squadrons should alter their patrol lines without informing his Group Controller. Last, No.12 Group, when asked for two or three squadrons, should not waste time trying to form a Wing of five squadrons. These five points underscore the value that employing one overall commander would have brought to Fighter Command.

The Duxford Wing's claim of victories irked Park and he wrote that their eagerness 'to obtain a good "bag" is understandable', but offered his own belief that the primary task of fighter squadrons was to protect aircraft factories, Sector aerodromes and London Docks; gaining high scores was only a means to that end.

The letter maintained its attack to the conclusion. The final paragraph praised the offensive spirit of No.12 Group squadrons

and suggested that the best way of channelling it would be for them to be exchanged sometimes with his own squadrons. Many of these were tired, lacking sleep and relaxation because of constant raids and night bombing. He was sure that some of his squadrons would be glad of an exchange for a month 'to have a spell of undisturbed nights'. Reinforcing squadrons, he concluded, had advantages because they entered the battle after the enemy had been tackled by No.11 Group squadrons 'whose one endeavour is to meet the enemy bombers, plus escort, before they reach their objectives'.(71)

The impression is gained at this stage that Park was battling alone against a rising tide of criticism. His Commander-in-Chief was offering little support for his contentions regarding tactics of the day battle which, though being fought on a reduced scale by the end of September, was still occupying the full skills and attention of Fighter Command. Without doubt, one important reason for this was the amount of time and thought that Dowding was having to spend on the growing problem of night defence.(72) Thus no clear statement concerning day tactics came from Stanmore, whereas others were making a closer examination of what had gone on and what changes might be made.

On 1 October, Park sent another paper, entitled 'Wing Formations', this time to the Commanding Officers of his seven Sector Headquarters, and to each fighter squadron under his command.(73) The document clearly set out Park's views on the

71. Ibid.

72. See AIR 2/7341 and AIR 16/387, both passim.

73. AIR 2/7281, Enclosure 15C, Headquarters, No.11 Group to Sector Commanders and Squadron Commanders, 1 October 1940.

use of Wings, yet opened on a defensive note, evidence of his awareness of the criticisms being levelled at his handling of the battle. 'There is a feeling among pilots in some Squadrons', he began, 'that the only way to defeat the enemy raiders against this country is to employ our fighter Squadrons in Wings of three Squadrons'. The object of his note was to explain why such formations had been used 'off and on during the past five months', yet were not the usual method of employing fighters in home defence.

He referred to the use of fighters during the French campaign, when he had employed the squadrons first in pairs, then in Wings of three; conditions then were quite different, because there was time to gather formations before sending them across the Channel. The difference now was that the enemy 'can and has made four heavy attacks in one day', with minimal warning given. The best results over France, he added, were not obtained by Wings of three squadrons, but by pairs working together.

Each of the next three paragraphs contains the phrase 'experience has shown' to underline the case that he was not talking of the theory of tactics in war, but of the harsh reality of what he had learned under battle conditions. Wings were, in his view, uneconomic in home defence and frequently had been attacked while climbing. 'It has been found better to have even one strong Squadron of our fighters over the enemy than a Wing of three

climbing up below them.' London Sectors rarely had time to bring a Wing to height before the enemy bombed. (74)

Park then set out one of the greatest difficulties of integrating squadrons from various Groups into a co-ordinated defence, because without VHF in all aircraft, three squadrons in a Wing could not work on a common R/T frequency. The Dowding System, built meticulously round the ability of RDF stations and the Observer Corps to locate the enemy, and the judgement of Controllers in assisting squadrons to make contact, could accommodate pairs of squadrons working on a common frequency, but not a Wing of three.

The only person who could decide eventually on the number of squadrons to employ was, in Park's opinion, the Group Controller, who 'has the complete picture of the enemy's movements on a wide front from Lowestoft to Bournemouth'. Nevertheless, he concluded, Wings would probably become more common in the Spring of the following year. (75)

Douglas Bader disagreed with this policy, wanting more power of decision to be given to commanders of flying formations actually in touch with the enemy. It is interesting that this view of the position of Controllers was felt elsewhere. Group-Captain

74. If it is accepted that Bader's main aim was to enter the battle area at height, and not to suggest that No.11 Group's squadrons should form Wings before engaging, then Park again is missing the potential of the Duxford Wing. No steps were taken to integrate forces and thereby add to the defence. See Bader Notes.

75. Park's Senior Controller was Air-Commodore Baron Willoughby de Broke. For references to him, see Orange, pp.107, 122, 146 and 148.

H. Darley, C.O. of No. 609 Squadron in No. 10 Group, believed that Controllers did not know the weather. He did. He could tell a 'Junkers 88 day', or a 'fighter-bomber day', or a 'big bomber day' and could use his discretion accordingly. (76)

* * *

On the same day that Park was publishing this detailed report, a quite different view was being taken at the Air Ministry. Group-Captain Crowe, obeying Saundby's instructions of 27 September, wrote a reply at some length in the form of a Minute. Two days earlier he had discussed matters at Uxbridge and 'from various conversations recently' had learned that fighter squadrons had gone into action with little plan for co-operative effort.

As squadrons came from separate aerodromes there had been difficulty over making rendezvous with other units. To overcome this, he suggested that fighter Wings should operate from the same airfield or from airfields close together. They could fly from as far back 'as, say, Hatfield or Northolt' and thus meet the enemy at operational height after a straight climb, instead of the customary practice of flying away from the coast to gain height 'and so do not actually intercept any quicker than units further back'.

76. Interview, Group-Captain H. Darley, Southborough, 15 March 1991. See Bader Notes also. On Sinclair's opinion of Controllers, see below, Note 102.

If squadrons of a Wing were stationed on one aerodrome, units would 'get to know each other', discussing combat and tactics. Pilots would learn to co-operate within the Wing. Referring to the reports on operations received from Park and Leigh-Mallory, he noted that both had detached some fighters to tackle the high-flying escort, while others engaged the bombers. Commenting on the Duxford Wing employed on 15 September, with five squadrons, he considered that 'even with the good communications that V.H.F. will give' a Wing leader should not be asked to control more aircraft than that.

The first suggestion that a conference should be held was planted in his eighth paragraph, when referring to Park's methods of dealing with large raids. 'The development of plans of this nature', Crowe suggested, 'seems to be a matter for discussion in conference with the Fighter Group commanders and the C-in-C, Fighter Command'. His Minute ended by mentioning the advantages that VHF sets would bring to Wings; they were being delivered at the rate of 680 a month for fighters, and one and a half sets a week for Sector Stations.(77)

Saundby read the Minute, added a brief note,(78) and passed it on to Douglas, who, by now, was taking definite steps within the Air Ministry to alter policies. Not only was he a firm supporter of Leigh-Mallory's belief in Big Wings, but also was playing an increasing role in night air defence; in both fields he was opposed to Dowding's general policy.

77. AIR 2/7281, Minute 9, Crowe to Saundby, 1 October 1940.

78. Ibid, Minute 10, Saundby to Douglas, 1 October 1940.

Douglas wrote, 'This is all right as a beginning. But I am still far from happy.' In his view, a Wing was better than a squadron and a Group needed a tactical plan which allowed Wings to fight as their commander saw fit. He asked for Stevenson, the Director of Home Operations, (DHO), to see the papers and, after discussion, to hear his views.(79)

In the meantime, Leigh-Mallory was keeping in close touch with those airmen through whom he was able to intervene in the battle. On 3 October, a day of poor weather when few demands were made on his squadrons, he visited Duxford again for discussions.(80)

At the same time, investigations were being made at Stanmore into Park's strong and detailed criticisms made on 29 September. Group-Captain G.M.Lawson, G/C, Ops.1, passed a Minute to Evill. If No.12 Group squadrons had been 'wandering over Kent', he could imagine the confusion. In his view, Park's arrangements, if followed, should work well.(81)

In the midst of an increasingly acrimonious argument, Evill took a balanced view and, with his customary succinct appreciation, wrote a summary for the C-in-C. He mentioned Park's request for a speedy despatch of small numbers, and Leigh-Mallory's preference for sending a Wing, but added, 'I do not think it would be correct to imply that 12 Group are not prepared to send

79. Ibid, Minute 11, Douglas to Saundby, 1 October 1940.

80. AIR 28/232, Duxford ORB, 3 October 1940.

81. AIR 16/330, Minute 38, Lawson to Evill, 3 October 1940.

smaller formations when these are urgently needed. In fact I have knowledge of their recently having sent one and two Squadrons to 11 Group's assistance'.

He explained that there was 'a fundamental difference of attitude between the two Groups'; this related to pressure of time. Evill believed it wrong for No.12 Group's Wings 'to rove without control over 11 Group's Sectors' and he presumed that Dowding wanted that stopped. While granting that Park's requests were reasonable, he believed that some of No.11 Group's squadrons had been adversely affected by fighting constantly against larger numbers; a Wing could be of great help to them because it was bad for the Germans if a large formation was employed sometimes. He felt that Park should recognise this fact and should arrange to 'use the strength of the Duxford Wing against a mass raid'.(82) At the end, he expressed his belief that an increase in the use of VHF radio would make the control of a Wing practicable. So, too, would 'good co-operation between Groups'.(83)

Thus Dowding was left in no doubt as to the extent of the problem and its background. Evill's Minute had explained the 'fundamental differences' without taking sides and, in the case of No.12 Group's Wing flying freely over Kent had remarked, 'I presume that you will wish this stopped'. He had made suggestions for using the strengths of both Groups, but knew that the C-in-C alone had the power to act decisively in the matter.

82. In reality, the authority for, and organisation of this sensible suggestion would have come better from Dowding himself. See Bader Notes and Lucas, *Flying Colours*, p.123.

83. AIR 16/330, Minute 39, Evill to Dowding, 5 October 1940.

Later accounts often portray Dowding as victim of the Big Wing Controversy, but it is puzzling that he took no immediate, firm step to dissolve the trouble, when a meeting between him and the Group Commanders was patently called for. Possibly the pressures of meeting the German day attacks had temporarily taken their toll of his energies. Certainly, the increasing demands for change being placed on Fighter Command's attitudes towards night fighting were exercising both his mind and patience. In Bader's later opinion, he was reaping the unwelcome fruits of not having one commander in the field, controlling the whole battle. For whatever reason, Dowding was comparatively slow to react.(84)

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84. In the view of Sir Denis Crowley-Milling, 'Dowding should have called a conference to resolve the difficulties'. Sir Harry Broadhurst believed that 'Dowding should have called Park and Leigh-Mallory together and told them what he wanted'. Crowley-Milling interview, 14 December 1989; Broadhurst interview, 10 November 1989.

PART FOUR: INDECISION AT HEADQUARTERS, FIGHTER COMMAND,
AND PLANS FOR A CONFERENCE

On 8 October, Dowding wrote to Leigh-Mallory and the letter shows some indecision. He enclosed the letter received from Park which had complained so bitterly about No.12 Group's irregularities. 'You have spoken to me about your desire to meet the enemy always in the maximum strength and this is, of course, a sound principle of war'. Dowding next asked for comments on Park's assertions that relatively weak reinforcements arriving on time were better than a stronger help appearing after the attack. He also posed Park's criticisms of Wings failing to patrol where asked and entering his area uninvited.(85)

It is noticeable that Dowding neither made judgement, nor set down his own policy. At that stage he knew only too well that the abrasive nature of the quarrel was giving no help and succour to the running of Fighter Command. The response then throws doubt on the acceptance of a later claim, when, writing of Park, he said, 'I wish he had kept me more personally informed about his difficulties with Leigh-Mallory. I now know that he tried to fight it out for himself ... But I might have been able to help him more. When the time came for me to intervene it was too

85. AIR 16/330, Enclosure 43A, Dowding to Leigh-Mallory, 8 October 1940.

late ... too late for both of us'. From the evidence of documents, the 'Commander-in-Chief's memory here was less than infallible; it also, unfairly, implies blame on Park for not speaking out soon enough. (86)

Obviously stung by the tone of Park's criticisms, Leigh-Mallory replied at once. He hoped that Dowding did not believe 'that we are merely trying to get a "bag"'. There were, in his estimation, two main objects of Wing formations. First, he wanted to meet the Germans on favourable terms, thus incurring fewer casualties; second, he wanted to raise the morale of squadrons depressed by heavy losses, caused by the fact that 'a small number of our fighters have had to tackle overwhelmingly superior numbers of GERMAN aircraft'; he hoped that his Wings had, in part, achieved both objects. (87) In his main letter, Leigh-Mallory set out briskly to refute Park's allegations. He complained of the late call for his squadrons, which accounted for the bombing of aerodromes.

On the thorny issue of timely assistance being preferred to greater help arriving late, he made a telling comparison. 'I would like to point out that the distance from DUXFORD to HORNCHURCH is approximately the same as the distance from HORNCHURCH to ASHFORD in Kent. If I am permitted to send up the Wing when the GERMAN activity is boiling up over the FRENCH coast, there is ample time for the Wing to get down to the HORNCHURCH area'. He had, on his own initiative, had squadrons

86. Wright, p.199.

87. AIR 16/330, Enclosure 49A, Leigh-Mallory to Dowding, 9 October 1940.

airborne over Duxford because he knew that they would be called late, not 'until the enemy are somewhere between MAIDSTONE and LONDON'. He wanted his squadrons to be called at the same time as those of No.11 Group.

As for Park's recommendations for action by No.12 Group, Leigh-Mallory agreed with three, but not with a) because, through being called late, his squadrons found themselves with a disadvantage in height; or e) because there would be time to place a Wing over Hornchurch 'if I am requested to send up my Squadrons when enemy formations are in the CHANNEL'.

He went on to deal with the accusations of his squadrons 'roaming over Kent' and agreed, but, he claimed, they had been ordered there by Fighter Command. On other occasions events followed naturally from patrolling over Hornchurch 'and seeing large enemy formations immediately to the south', which were, of course, engaged. (88)

Having dealt with Park's complaints, Leigh-Mallory went on to the offensive. He had noticed that German formations had inflicted much damage on London recently; if he were allowed to scramble squadrons from Duxford when the enemy was at the French coast, his Wing would be at 20,000 feet before the Luftwaffe arrived 'and I submit that if I had been allowed to do this in the last ten days, many raids which did penetrate over LONDON would have been engaged before they got there'.

88. Ibid, Enclosure 48A, Leigh-Mallory to Headquarters, Fighter Command, 9 October 1940.

The letter finished very strongly and patriotically, with a claim that he wished to co-operate with No.11 Group and felt that the main object must be to prevent the enemy from reaching London. Duxford was well situated to serve that purpose. In view of the vital importance of the capital, Leigh-Mallory hoped that he might be allowed 'to render assistance which I believe would be most effective'.(89)

Next day, Park wrote to Dowding with suggestions for incorporating No.12 Group's Wings into his defensive system. They would need to be under the control of one of his Sectors and, to achieve their best, should live and work there for a time. Possibly some squadrons could be exchanged with his own, or, perhaps Leigh-Mallory could send a Wing of three squadrons to operate under the Kenley or Biggin Hill Controllers each day. His letter misses the point of employing the Duxford Wing to its best advantage; it also reinforces the impression of two Groups fighting separate battles with disjointed aerial forces. Here was a fine opportunity for Headquarters, Fighter Command to blend them into one; however, this was not taken.(90)

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89. Ibid. The evidence of this letter suggests that Leigh-Mallory was not recommending the employment of Big Wings by No.11 Group.

90. Ibid, Park to Dowding, 10 October 1940. The disadvantage of placing No.12 Group squadrons 'to live and work' in Park's area was, of course, the loss of time and height to be gained by their flying from airfields further north.

But by then the nature of German attacks had changed and, although larger raids had been made across the south and the south-east after 15 September, they did not again reach the intensity and scale of the earlier offensive. Wings were called into action and employed on later dates, but as the Germans set aside their plans for invasion, the Luftwaffe, having suffered so severely, adopted a new role.(91)

On 16 September, Goering held a conference with various commanders at his forward headquarters and new tactics were decided on. Big daylight raids would be attempted only in the best weather and then only by bombers flying under heavy escort. Attacks were to be maintained so that the British were not aware that 'Sealion' was being postponed; Goering, anyway, still hoped that his enemy could be defeated through the destruction of the economy and civilian morale.(92)

Yet, as ever, he lacked the sustained interest needed for successful leadership. On the 21st he returned to Rominten for some hunting; Galland, who visited him there five days later, wrote 'that night no mention was made of the war in general or the Battle of Britain in particular'.(93) Although a number of

91. See *The Goebbels Diaries*, p.140. The entry for 12 October read, 'Our Luftwaffe is moving into winter quarters. There is no longer much hope of a quick peace. But we shall hold on. This is not a crisis, but more in the nature of a disappointment, which we shall easily shrug off'. It appears that Goebbels was believing his own propaganda. Certainly the German euphoria of June had been dampened by Fighter Command's tenacity.

92. See T.Taylor, *Breaking Wave*, pp.166-67.

93. Galland, *First and Last*, p.88.

writers regard the daylight battle as only part of the continuing German offensive against Britain, Goering knew that in this phase his Luftwaffe had failed, for the first time, to gain a decisive victory. If the German Air Force was not defeated, its considerable efforts were, at the very least, frustrated.

According to Telford Taylor, by 16 September 'the main emphasis of the bomber offensive was shifting toward night operations'. Day bombing was 'dwindling rapidly' and apart from a few, belated yet accurate raids against aircraft factories, the last massed bomber attack took place on 30 September.(94) Sure proof of the Luftwaffe's inability to force an issue was shown by the increasing use of Me.109s and Me.110s as fighter-bombers, in annoying raids of pinprick proportion.

The raids on aircraft factories were worrying, bringing heavy criticism for the Air Ministry. Ironically, the loud, constant and sometimes intemperate plea made for their protection by Lord Beaverbrook put further pressure on his friend, Dowding. The impression was given that Fighter Command and AA guns were incapable of offering an adequate defence to buildings which were required for the production of vitally needed aircraft. On 6 October Beaverbrook complained of this in a memorandum to Churchill. 'The balloon barrage is too thin. Just as important as night bombing is the defence of aircraft factories and their aerodromes. Two Hurricanes lost at Northolt yesterday. Can we have action now'.(95)

94. For examples of raids on aircraft factories, see C.R.Russell, *Spitfire Odyssey* (Southampton, 1985), pp.72-83. Russell worked at the Supermarine Aviation Works, Woolston.

95. Beaverbrook Papers, BBK D/28, Ministry of Aircraft Production, Beaverbrook to Churchill, 6 October 1940.

The sense of exasperation he roused in others is sensed in a reply from his old adversary, Sinclair, on 10 October. Nor is it difficult to assess Sinclair's feelings for Dowding from the tone of his second sentence, which laid the responsibility for all air defence at the door of the Commander-in-Chief, Fighter Command. 'As I have repeatedly told you over the telephone and in letters', he wrote, 'I do not yield an inch to you in my anxiety to give all possible production [sic] to the factories you mention'. Then, one suspects, with some relief he passed on the responsibility. 'It is not, as you suggest, a job for the Air Staff, but for your devoted friend the Commander-in-Chief, Fighter Command. I am sending him your letters at once and asking him to do all he can to meet your requirements as I know he himself will be anxious to do'.(96)

* * *

A Minute written by Evill to Dowding on 13 October showed that the SASO was feeling concern over several matters which went to the root of the strategy and tactics employed by Fighter Command. 'You recently instructed me to keep an eye open on the progress of day operations', he began, then went on to list faults he had noticed.

One of these was that reports submitted after action by Groups, especially No.11 Group, gave 'no general statement of the action taken'. He complained that 'we do not know whether their

96. Ibid, BBK D/32, Ministry of Aircraft Production, Sinclair to Beaverbrook, 10 October 1940.

Squadrons are sent up singly or in twos or threes', going on to say that little was disclosed 'about the way in which they conduct operations'.

Evill appeared diffident over suggesting remedies. 'I fully understand that you delegate the tactical conduct of operations to the Groups', and they should be shown no 'lack of confidence', yet the staff at Headquarters, Fighter Command 'is in no position to appreciate reliably what the Groups are doing'. He felt sure that Groups had 'some system whereby they instruct Controllers as to tactical methods and dispositions', but these were not known at Stanmore. (97)

The SASO is underlining the point, intentionally or otherwise, that there was a lack of tactical leadership at the time and in this, Evill shared the opinion held in the Air Ministry, especially by Douglas. Not enough information was being provided for Headquarters, Fighter Command, although, as Dowding was not controlling the battle immediately, it is difficult to know what differences to strategy and tactics such information would have brought. As Park had complained earlier, there was often a surfeit of demands - from 'Higher Authority' - which meant that both Stanmore and the Air Ministry wanted to know what was going on.

The solution would have been to have a single commander for the battle, who would ask for reports and act immediately on them by amending tactics as necessary. Such a leader would not have a

double jury sitting at short distance behind him and would be able to synchronise the actions of his Groups as and when he saw fit.

An interesting deduction may be made from Evill's Minute here. It is that when Douglas minuted Saundby on 24 September, he offered no source for his statement that it had been 'alleged' that squadrons were being sent up with no instructions of how to work with other squadrons. The source could well have been Evill; it is unclear whether he voiced his criticisms before or after Douglas made them, but it could have been the former.(98)

What also is of interest is Dowding's reply to Evill. Instead of appreciating that the Minute touched on a severe weakness in the method of command, he merely asked that the report form should be changed 'so that they would have to get the information and give it to us, or else confess their failure by leaving the compartments empty'.(99)

Evill's reply to that asked again that Groups should submit studies, reviews and recommendations after their operations. However, no solution was found to this problem until after the Group Commanders' conference of 30 October, towards the end of Dowding's time as leader of Fighter Command.(100)

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98. See AIR 2/7281, Minute 7, Douglas to Saundby, 29 September 1940. Also see above, Note 66.

99. AIR 16/635, Minute 23, Dowding to Evill, 24 October 1940.

100. See *ibid*, Enclosure 28A, Item 5, Minutes of the conference, 1 November 1940.

While Headquarters, Fighter Command were examining the charges and counter-charges made by Park and Leigh-Mallory, an apparently innocuous note arrived for Dowding from the Air Ministry. Sent by Stevenson, the DHO, it announced 'a small conference' called by Newall, the CAS, to be held in his room on 17 October 'to discuss major tactics by fighter formations, and to hear a report on the progress of night interception'.(101)

He included an Air Staff note which was a commentary on fighter tactics produced by Stevenson himself. His points were no neutral attempt to discuss Wings, but a commendation to promote them, going virtually hand-in-hand with Leigh-Mallory's beliefs, as taken up by Douglas in the Air Ministry.

In the Introduction, he referred to Park's report and soon opened his criticism in line with the current Air Staff opinion. 'But he does not report whether squadrons were vectored into the air battle singly, in pairs or in larger formations. Nor does he report upon the allocation of role to the squadrons employed in a general action'.

His second paragraph was a reminder that the Air Staff had foreseen the launching of mass raids and that Dowding had 'welcomed this form of attack as the one he was best able to meet'. However, it was realised that much remained to be learned about the best method of deploying a large fighter force against such an attack.

101. AIR 2/7281, Enclosure 14A, Stevenson to Dowding, 14 October 1940.

Stevenson then referred to Leigh-Mallory's report, a copy of which, significantly, was attached to the agenda, and noted that 'no less than 105 enemy aircraft were destroyed at a cost of 14 of our fighters'. By using a force of between three and five squadrons, 'the enemy's mass formation was broken up and severe casualties inflicted at slight cost'. He explained that the object of the 'Balbo' was threefold; to neutralise German fighters, break up the bomber formations, and then shoot down the bombers afterwards.

Looking ahead, he predicted heavier attacks in the future, so lessons learned should be applied 'to enable the fighter force to operate at maximum efficiency'. He believed that the German Air Force had been defeated in their attempt to gain 'day air superiority' over Britain, but 'we must be prepared in all respects to defeat enemy mass formations effectively'.

He referred to the attached note from the Air Staff as 'a basis for discussion'. No more than a cursory glance was needed, however, to appreciate that most of the discussion had already taken place in the Air Ministry and that the results were a foregone conclusion. 'It has become apparent that on some occasions our fighters have been meeting the enemy on unequal terms both as regards numbers and height', the document stated. To overcome the disadvantage, fighters should be flown 'in tactical units large enough to deal with enemy formations', and should be well controlled.

Several disadvantages suffered by RAF squadrons were then listed. There had been numerical inferiority, with a lack of co-ordination between squadrons and Groups. Formation leaders had

had little chance to plan operations together. Fighters had often been sent up with a height disadvantage. A number of squadrons could not be operated together because of the limitations of High Frequency (HF) R/T.

Then came a clear statement of what the Air Ministry wanted. 'The minimum fighter unit to meet large enemy formations should be a wing of three squadrons'. In certain circumstances this might become two Wings, called a 'Balbo'. One of the squadron commanders should be present with the Sector Controller to help him control the Wing. He did not foresee insuperable difficulties if Wings were not within radio contact with their Sectors. 'When this happens', he reasoned, 'it may confidently be expected that weather conditions will be such that large enemy formations will be clearly visible from a distance and vectoring therefore will be unnecessary'.

The influence of Bader is felt here, with the assumption that a Controller's task was no more than to place the fighters close to the enemy and leave the rest to the Wing Commander's discretion. He did not suggest a way in which the tactics of the

two Groups might readily be blended into an effective whole; and his reasoning certainly assumed that the Dowding System, so intricately designed, was to be by-passed. (102)

The accompanying agenda was a reinforcement of what Dowding and Park would have called prejudice, but what the Air Ministry saw as a dynamic new approach. For example, Item 2 asked three questions, and the second and third of these presumed an affirmative answer to the first. 'Is it agreed that a larger fighter formation than a wing should operate as a tactical unit? If so, is it agreed that this unit should consist of two wings? By what name should such a unit (referred to in these Agenda as a "BALBO") be known?' The only apparently neutral item on the agenda was No.10, the last, which stated briskly, 'Short report by C-in-C Fighter Command on present position regarding night interception'. (103)

102. See Beaverbrook Papers, BBK D/35, Ministry of Aircraft Production, Sinclair to Beaverbrook, 29 September 1940. An interesting reflection on the Air Ministry's opinion of some Controllers is shown in this letter. 'Up till now Control Rooms have been largely manned by officers who have little or no experience of fighting', he wrote, 'and I know from my own talks with fighter pilots and station commanders that opinion in the squadrons is strongly in favour of the employment of men with fighting experience whenever they are available'. Sinclair went on, 'The lack of good Sector Controllers has been a weak point in Fighter Command for a long time and it has not been easy to find pilots who possess experience in modern types of aircraft and whose seniority is sufficient to enable them to represent adequately the Sector Commander in giving orders to squadron leaders in the air'. Although the letter was written primarily in regard to the need for Controllers in night-flying, it displays overt criticism of the Dowding System in practice.

103. AIR 2/7281, Enclosure 14B, Agenda of meeting, 14 October 1940.

Park replied at once to Stevenson, explaining what, in his carefully reasoned opinion, were the vices of using Wing tactics in his area and the virtues of his own Group's formations. His annoyance is sensed from having to repeat once again the principle. 'We in 11 Group used Wings of three Squadrons in May, June, July, August, September and are still using them when conditions of time, space and weather make them effective'. He complained that Stevenson's note appeared to be based on the experience of No.12 Group's Wings on five occasions only.

As the Duxford Wing's claimed results had been included in the papers for the conference, Park asked that those for Nos.10 and 11 Groups should also be circulated. Then he returned with tenacity to his basic belief. 'I may be wrong in imagining that our primary task is to protect London, Aircraft factories, Sector Aerodromes, against enemy bombers, and not merely to secure the maximum bag of enemy aircraft after they have done their fiendish damage'. That appeal, however, fell on deaf ears.

Park's final paragraph was another swing at No.12 Group's squadrons which, he asserted, mainly engaged outgoing, not incoming, raids 'after they have been attacked by pairs of Spitfire also Hurricane Squadrons located around London and have had their close escort and themselves pretty badly shaken by A.A. fire'.(104)

104. AIR 16/375, Major air tactics of Fighter Forces by day, October 1940-January 1942, Enclosure 46A, Park to Stevenson, 15 October 1940.

By this time, the opponents of Dowding and Park were clear on the course to follow and took pains to prepare a case. For example, it cannot have been unrelated that Wing-Commander Woodhall, Controller of the Duxford Wing, was called to Headquarters, No.12 Group for a conference on 16 October. Matters were not to be left to chance.(105)

* * *

While that smaller conference was going on an effort was being made at Stanmore to investigate Leigh-Mallory's claim that his squadrons had been 'roaming over Kent' because they had been ordered to by Fighter Command. G/C Ops.1 had inconclusive results because the Controller's records were insufficiently detailed. Evill then minuted Dowding and threw doubt on Leigh-Mallory's assertion. On such occasions, he noted, 'the form of action, strength and locality is that requested by 11 Group', but then added sagely that whether No.12 Group 'always conformed to these requests is a different matter and difficult to check'.(106)

There follows a most interesting and informative addition to the Minute Sheet. Dowding obviously studied the last Minute and jotted down a few words in pencil. First, he boxed in 'Information to 11 Group as to position of 12 Group's Squadrons'. Under that, also boxed, was 'Barnett?' At one side he wrote '8th

105. AIR 28/232, Duxford ORB, 16 October 1940. 'W/Cdr A.B.Woodhall proceeded to 12 Group Headquarters for a discussion and returned P.M.'

106. AIR 16/330, Minute 55, G/C Ops. to Evill, 16 October 1940 and Minute 56, Evill to Dowding, 16 October 1940.

October, Raids not plotted'. It is, however, the final note that shows his realisation of what was needed, although for a variety of reasons he failed to do it. In spite of his later protestations of ignorance of the problem, the Commander-in-Chief pencilled in 'Compose differences between Groups'. His own future, as well as those of his Group Commanders, might well have been different if he had succeeded. (107)

* * *

To recapitulate, the extent of the 'battle within a battle' taking place at Fighter Command from 7 September to 16 October is not widely known. Very often the form of the daylight fighting, with success for the RAF over the Luftwaffe's attempt to gain supremacy is explored in depth, without an acknowledgement that grave disquiet was being shown in the Air Ministry at the tactics employed by Dowding and Park.

During this period, differences of opinion between Park and Leigh-Mallory became more marked. The latter, using the claims of Douglas Bader, pressed forcefully for the inclusion of his Duxford Wing in the battle. The former, equally strongly, rejected Wings as unsuitable formations over his area. In reality, but unknown to the principal antagonists, the

107. Ibid, following Minute 55. The extent of Dowding's fallibility of memory on the matter of the controversy is shown in the Douglas Papers, Box 2, letter from Robert Wright to Lord Douglas, 28 March 1961. 'Stuffy tells me that in actual fact he knew nothing about this difference between Park and Leigh-Mallory until it had reached a fairly advanced stage, when, to his great surprise, the S.of S. mentioned to him the views advanced to him by Leigh-Mallory based on the idea put forward by Bader'. Dowding's assertion here is completely contradicted by the evidence from contemporary documents.

controversy had lost most of its point by the end of September, as German tactics changed; their disagreements were concerned with what might have been, not with what was or would be.

At that stage, Fighter Command looked to Dowding for decision in leadership that he was either unwilling, or unable, to give. His hesitancy allowed the controversy to simmer. Therefore it is understandable that officers at the Air Ministry, under the prompting of Douglas, pressed for definite action to be taken and requested a conference. The question must be asked why Newall, as Chief of the Air Staff, took no lead in these steps. The fact that they seized upon the cause and claims of Leigh-Mallory showed how ready they were to support a leader who believed that Dowding was not making best use of his resources. In doing so they gave an overall blessing to the employment of Big Wings as a *sine qua non* ingredient for all Groups, thereby missing the point of Leigh-Mallory's and Bader's argument, which referred only to the possibilities open to the Duxford Wing, used over Park's area, where there was no time to gather the local squadrons into Wings.

By 16 October, as the following chapter will attempt to show, mistrust of Dowding's powers of command, combined with fears over his attitude to meeting the threat of the night bomber, led to a forceful campaign for his removal. On that day, steps were well under way to have him replaced.

CHAPTER SIXNIGHT AIR DEFENCE, TO 16 OCTOBER

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PART ONE: BACKGROUND TO DOWDING AND NIGHT AIR DEFENCE

BEFORE SEPTEMBER, 1940

The publication in 1981 of Group-Captain Haslam's article, *How Lord Dowding Came to Leave Fighter Command*, (1) was the start of a restoration of balance in exploring the leadership of the RAF forty years earlier. He was prompted to produce the piece in reply to two contributions written by Len Deighton which praised, excessively in Haslam's opinion, Dowding's leadership in the Battle of Britain. (2) Haslam criticised that very quality in the Commander-in-Chief, claiming that 'it was precisely for his apparent lack of control and leadership' that he was replaced, but then opened a further, and largely unexplored, field as an area of controversy between Dowding and the Air Staff. 'The evidence in documents tends to support the view that it was not his handling of day-time raids but of night-time German attacks that eventually precipitated the call for Dowding's replacement by Sholto-Douglas'.

Since the Battle of Britain so much attention has been paid by biographers and historians to the ebb and flow of the daylight battle, especially as it was conspicuous to millions of people, that the importance of the threat from night bombing has received

1. Haslam, 'How Lord Dowding came to leave Fighter Command', *JSS*, 4, 2 (1981), pp.175-86.

2. Deighton's contributions were, L. Deighton, *Fighter: The true story of the Battle of Britain* (London, 1977), and L. Deighton, 'Forty years On', *Sunday Times*, Colour Supplement, 14 September 1980.

scant attention. As a result of the Luftwaffe's failure to overwhelm Fighter Command by a day campaign, paving the way for a successful occupation, Dowding has been accorded general acclaim for his part in keeping Britain in the war. This judgement, based on the end result, has overlooked the importance to the air campaign, during the early autumn of 1940, of the alternative German strategy and of Dowding's efforts to counteract it. If Haslam's claim is examined, strong evidence emerges that, especially from 7 September, when the first heavy night attack was launched against London, a number of influential men, both Service leaders and politicians, directed blame at Dowding. This was prompted largely for three reasons.

In the first place, by the nature of his appointment, the Commander-in Chief, Fighter Command was responsible for the aerial defence of Great Britain both by day and night. If that defence was found wanting, the responsibility and attendant blame were reckoned to be largely his. (3) Secondly, when pressure grew for rapid and urgent changes in the system of night defence to counter what was considered to be a major threat, Dowding appeared to be unwilling to make them speedily, thus adding to his reputation as unco-operative. Thirdly, and underlying these two reasons, was the fact that Dowding's opponents in the Air Ministry, already critical of his handling of the day battle, were not displeased to find another cudgel with which to beat his declining renown; they made the most of it.

3. See Air Chief-Marshal Lord Dowding, 'Night Fighters Hunt the Bombers', *Star*, 24 September 1951, p.2. Dowding wrote, 'The Fighter Command was not created only to defend the country by day and so most nights, when flying was possible, found me at the aerodromes and operations rooms where the experimental work was in progress'.

Consequently, a point often unrecognised is that by the time Dowding was called to the Air Ministry conference on 17 October, largely to discuss day fighting tactics, there was a strong current of opinion highly critical of his conduct of night air defence. These feelings were held, as might have been expected, by his long-standing adversaries inside the Air Council. However, at that stage mistrust of his policies, emanating from the Ministry of Aircraft Production, was being laid forcefully before the Prime Minister; and the essential political support which Dowding had received from Beaverbrook and Churchill was waning. It is therefore necessary, in order to gain a balanced view of leadership, strategy and tactics in Fighter Command at that time, to make a close exploration of minutes and papers relating to night air defence; they certainly add power to Haslam's claim.

Nonetheless, what Haslam's article omits to underline, as Dowding's critics of 1940 also conveniently failed to observe, was that the lack of sufficient night air defences, in terms of suitable fighters and ground equipment, was not the fault of the Commander-in-Chief, Fighter Command. The general neglect of the RAF until the late spurt from 1938 had to be laid at the doors of the government of the day, or of the Air Ministry. It was permissible to disagree with his employment of the resources available, but unfair of politicians to have provided so little. (4)

* * *

4. For a background to pre-war planning of night air defence, see AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, 'Night Air Defence, June 1940 to December 1941', pp.1-4, which shows the belief that night defence should not take too great a fraction of the whole national effort.

The background to the potential dangers of night bombing was deeply embedded in the memories of many people who had lived in Britain during the First World War. Much of the German campaign launched then, less than a quarter of a century before, consisted of attacks made at dusk or during the hours of darkness; the effect, especially on civilian morale, certainly exceeded the cost in terms of airships or bombers lost.

It is interesting to note that German ambitions then, as judged by an historian of the time, were very similar to those of the Luftwaffe in the Second World War. 'The underlying motive of these raids', he wrote, 'was to unnerve the British public, to make life unbearable by destroying their homes and by crippling their means of supply'. Thereby, he continued, heavy casualties would compel the British people 'to sacrifice their national honour rather than suffer a continuance of air attacks'.(5)

In an attempt to achieve these ends, the Germans had dropped nearly 9,000 bombs, weighing 280 tons, on Britain, mainly at night. They killed 1,413 people and injured a further 3,408, with Londoners suffering about half of the casualties.(6) The effect of these raids was clearly remembered in 1940 by those aged thirty-five years and over and, as bombers had developed both in power and numbers, the prospect of new attacks brought considerable trepidation.

5. Captain J.Morris, *The German Air Raids on Great Britain, 1914-1918* (London, 1927), Preface.

6. *Ibid*, Preface. See also AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, Chapter 1, p.1; 'sixty-two and a half tons of bombs had been dropped on London killing 670 people and affecting the output of munitions'.

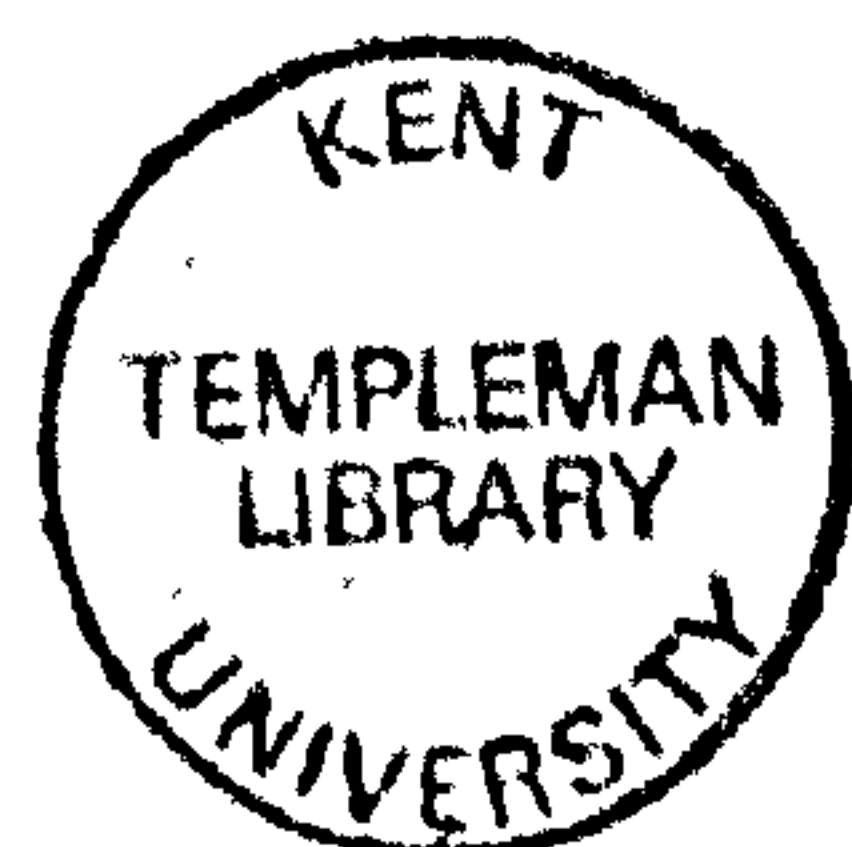
A writer in 1934 recollected the effect on morale of one Gotha(7) raid made in 1917. For several weeks afterwards, he reported, London's Underground stations were filled nightly 'to suffocation'. An estimate was made that 300,000 people 'descended to these shelters every night', while half a million others went to cellars. 'The mere rumour of a raid was sufficient to stampede thousands to these refuges'. Raids had affected industrial production. For example, a false report of one Zeppelin approaching Scarborough 'caused the lights in munitions factories to be extinguished as far apart as Nottingham, Bath, Gloucester and Worcester'.(8)

Therefore the British defence system in 1940, when the Germans intensified night raids, was faced with no new problems. Thousands of civilians had undergone the ordeal before. The new factor for them, however, was that technological advances enabled greater numbers of enemy bombers to carry larger loads, possibly including gas,(9) at higher speeds than in the previous war. Their hope was that similar advances would enable the threat to be met successfully by ground defences and the power of Fighter Command. This had happened in 1917-18, when counter-measures led

7. The Gotha G V had a speed at ground level of 87 m.p.h., a range of 520 miles and a bomb load of 1,300 lb. For more details of the early development of heavy bombers, and the fear brought by their raids, see Cooper, pp.35-45.

8. P.R.C.Groves, *Behind the Smoke Screen* (London, 1934), pp.154-55.

9. See Taylor, *English History*, pp.427-28. At the time of Munich, 'thirty-eight million gas masks' were distributed in Britain.



to the scaling down of German raids(10); the public expectation was that a comparable defence, the responsibility of Dowding's Command, could be offered in 1940.

It was, perhaps, fortunate for public morale that civilians had little idea of the extent to which, in night bombing, the attacker enjoyed immunity. In the later words of General F.Pile, Commander-in-Chief, AA Command, 'at that time night fighter defence was deplorably inefficient'.(11) And, as the Ministry of Information's Official Survey pointed out in 1943, with a frankness not always displayed in Government publications, 'London at the time was not adequately defended. All over England there was still a shortage of anti-aircraft guns'.(12)

* * *

However, although night air defence was causing increasing concern by the start of the Second World War, it was not in the forefront of RAF planning. When Government and, subsequently, RAF policy changed from the end of 1937 and, more particularly, after the international crises of 1938, greater attention and resources were allocated to Fighter Command.(13) Nevertheless, the expectation was that the main German attacks would be

10. See Morris, Part II, Chapters 3 and 4.

11. Pile, p.166.

12. *Roof Over Britain*, p.48.

13. The need was great. See AIR 6/55, Air Ministry Report on the Lessons of the Emergency, 25 October 1938, which showed that of Fighter Command's 29 squadrons then available, 24 were obsolete. However, R.Higham, *Armed Forces in Peacetime* (London, 1962), Table of Annual Expenditure on the Armed Forces, 1929-1940, gives spending on the RAF rising from £82,290,000 in 1937 to £269,464,039 in 1940.

daylight raids, so most of Dowding's counter-measures were aimed at parrying these. Resources for Fighter Command were hardly extensive and, of those, few were available for night defence.

For this there were two reasons. Firstly, accurate navigation by night involved some considerable problems, so that by the outbreak of war the RAF could not guarantee that British bombers would reach and identify targets in Germany with ease.(14) Secondly, both air forces were geared to daylight campaigns. 'No air force would go over to night bombing', wrote one eminent pilot later, 'if it could manage to do the job by day'.(15)

The Luftwaffe, being mainly a tactical air force developed to co-operate closely with ground forces, had little need for night bombing. Nonetheless, they had aircrew who were at least comparatively well prepared for flying in darkness. According to Galland, 'bomber crews were adequately trained for night and blind operations (navigation under these conditions was part of their normal peace-time training)'.(16)

* * *

British counter-measures against night bombing took two main forms before 1939. It was anticipated that, together, they would prevent the Germans from achieving the disruptive effects on people's lives which had been experienced in the First World War.

14. According to the Official History, in 1939 Bomber Command 'was not trained or equipped either to penetrate into enemy territory by day or to find its target areas, let alone its targets, by night'; Webster and Frankland, i, p.125.

15. Wykeham, p.150.

16. AHB Translation, vol.9, VII/121, p.28.

The first of these was the theory of the value of the counter-offensive and was generally accepted within the RAF during the 1930s. This 'Trenchard Doctrine', as previously shown, (17) led to a slow start in the creation of an adequate fighter defence against day attacks, let alone those made at night. With hindsight it is possible to see the fragility of a strategy which relied on the threat of retaliation from a Bomber Command which was, in reality, incapable of causing irreparable damage to enemy targets at that time. (18)

Nevertheless, in assessing Dowding's attitudes, it must be remembered that, before 1938, the Commander-in-Chief, Fighter Command himself subscribed to this policy. Writing as Chairman of the Home Defence Committee (HDC) in February 1937 he stated that 'local defences however numerous and efficient cannot alone provide an adequate measure of security ... offensive action will be ultimately more efficacious in reducing the scale of attack on Great Britain than a vast increase in the number of local defence fighters'. (19) While lecturing at the Staff College three months later, he displayed similar hopes. Unless 'the bombers are systematically destroying the enemy's machines,

17. See above, Chapter 1, pp.29-30.

18. In 1934, Lord Londonderry, Secretary of State for Air, announced that 'the Home Defence Air Force would consist of approximately two-thirds of bomber squadrons and one-third of fighter squadrons'; Ministerial Committee on Disarmament (DCM), 42nd. meeting, 4 May 1934. See also H.A.Jones, *The War in the Air* (Oxford, 1934), vol.5, p.159. 'The only defence in the air likely to be effective in the long run is an offensive more powerfully sustained than that of the enemy'.

19. AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, Home Defence Committee Paper, No.270, 9 February 1937.

reserves, factories, and fuel supplies we can never ensure Home Defence by the operation of the Fighter Command and the Army Units associated in its work', Dowding stated.(20)

The second form of counter-measure was more concrete and guaranteed to bring greater reassurance to those below. This was the use of ground defences consisting of anti-aircraft guns, searchlights, sound detectors and balloons, situated mainly around large cities and industrial centres, and also at a number of RAF aerodromes. The precepts and methods used in the First World War were still largely followed. The system was based on the assumption that sound locators would detect raiders, searchlights illuminate and guns destroy them; searchlights would also enable night fighters to engage bombers.(21)

A cardinal weakness in the defence system was the shortage of guns. As already shown,(22) this was to some extent overcome in daylight when enemy machines, often flying in close defensive formation, could be seen and engaged. Difficulties were magnified in darkness, where bombers usually flew individually or in small groups. General Pile pointed out that, after Dunkirk, it was estimated that 3,744 heavy anti-aircraft guns were needed for Britain's defence.(23) On 11 July, 1,163 were available, a figure that had risen to no more than 1,271 by 21

20. AIR 16/260, A.O.C.-in-C., Fighter Command, Lecture on employment of the Fighter Command in Home Defence, 24 May 1937.

21. For details of the defence system, see AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, Chapter 1.

22. See above, Chapter 3, note 44.

23. See Pile, p.151.

August.(24) Similar shortages were found in all types of anti-aircraft equipment, from light guns to searchlights, and balloons to Gun Laying Radio Direction Finding (G/L RDF) sets, of which there were only eleven in the London area by 9 September.(25)

The two main planks on which Britain's night air defence system was based were far from sound in 1940. As German attacks intensified during darkness, many people looked naturally to Fighter Command, which had done so well in daylight operations, to bring relief.

* * *

The ability of RAF fighters to intercept German bombers was closely linked to the development of Radio Direction Finding. As far as daylight raids were concerned, the system evolved proved to be of inestimable value,(26) but when, in the later 1930s, several minds were turned towards what was then considered the lesser problem of night air defence, extensive difficulties were encountered. These were threefold.

24. Wood and Dempster, Appendix VIII, show the slowness in gun production. The number available to AA Command on 11 September 1940, of heavy guns, was 1,313, which had grown only to 1,347 by 9 October when the Luftwaffe night Blitz was well under way.

25. Pile, p.152.

26. For an excellent background summary, see E.Munday, 'Chain Home: Radar and the Blitz', in Ramsey, *Blitz*, i, pp.124-37.

Firstly, the system of Radio Direction Finding was designed to locate and track enemy aircraft as far as the coast, where, in daylight hours, the Observer Corps would take over, or airborne fighters make visual contact. However, during hours of darkness, once bombers had passed the Radio Direction Finding stations, they were 'lost' as no method of inland tracking existed.(27)

Secondly, a method had to be evolved during night attacks of bringing the defending fighter close enough to the bomber for an attack to be carried out. Little imagination is needed to appreciate the gulf between achieving this in daylight hours and doing the same in darkness. The form of airborne interception apparatus carried by fighters was necessarily small and incapable of working at distances of over three miles. Much patience and ingenuity were required from ground stations, even when inland tracking was developed, to achieve this.(28)

Thirdly, and this a problem which had dogged the RAF from pre-war days and still had not been met satisfactorily by August 1940, a suitable night fighter was required for the specialist role to be undertaken. Existing Spitfires and Hurricanes, well developed for daylight interception, suffered particular disadvantages in

27. See Air 41/17, ADGB, iii, Chapter 1, p.4. Churchill had predicted a drawback even of daytime RDF, writing in June 1939 that when a raid tracked by RDF crossed the coast 'we become dependent on the Observer Corps. This would seem a transition from the middle of the twentieth century to the early stone age'; (Churchill to Secretary of State for Air, June 1939, 11 H/148). Churchill's comment was proved to be less than fair by the contribution made to daylight defence by the Observer Corps a year later; his criticism was accurate, however, in regard to night defence.

28. For difficulties experienced by aircrew, see C.F.Rawnsley and R.Wright, *Night Fighter* (London, 1957), Chapter 2. See also Wykeham, pp.158-60 on limitations of apparatus.

night combat.(29) Blenheims were better suited, but lacked the speed necessary to track and catch the faster German bombers.(30)

The critics of Dowding's efforts at night defence overlook the fact that, with his technical knowledge, he did take an interest in experiments being made; the slowness of their results stemmed from factors outside his control. After visiting the Bawdsey experimental station(31) in July, 1939, the Commander-in-Chief wisely recommended that the ideal night fighter should carry a two-man crew, one to fly the machine and the other to concentrate on navigation. In addition, he believed that these aircraft should be twin-engined, with unobstructed forward vision, and good weight carriers.(32) The Beaufighter matched those standards and the Air Ministry ordered 300 of them even before the first one flew on 17 July 1939. However, because of teething troubles, Beaufighters did not leave the factory until August

29. One of the greatest drawbacks to single-seater fighters in night fighting was the glare from exhausts, which impaired pilots' vision. Ogilvie interview, 2 February 1989.

30. For example, see Rawnsley and Wright, pp.58-60.

31. The Bawdsey station, just north-east of Felixstowe, began experiments in 1936. See Wykeham, pp.151-52.

32. See *ibid*, p.153. Previously Dowding had expressed the view that a night-fighter should carry a crew of two; AIR 2/2964, Note of a meeting in DCAS's room, 16 November 1938.

1940, with no time for squadrons to be adequately equipped and trained before the Luftwaffe's night offensive began.(33)

* * *

Experiments relating to Radio Direction Finding and its institution into a defensive system had been in progress since the setting up of the Committee for the Scientific Survey of Air Defence, (CSSAD) under the chairmanship of Sir Henry Tizard in 1935.(34) From that time, until the early days of the war, there was a constant, and sometimes tortuous, struggle to translate the benefits of Radio Direction Finding for Fighter Command.

By February 1939 Tizard wrote to Dowding that he was 'mainly occupied with the night problem; now'. In his view, difficulties over day fighting were being solved, 'but the night problem is different and more serious, and we do want much more [sic] experiments'.(35)

33. Wykeham, pp.160-61. The Beaufighter carried a massive armament. The Mk.II in 1941 had four 20mm. cannon and six machine-guns. See Gunston, pp.98-99. However, AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, Chapter 1, p.6, points out that 'it was not until early 1941, when some German night raiding had been going on for four months, that this type of machine began to operate in anything like efficient numbers'.

34. See Air Historical Branch Monograph, Group-Captain C.Stephenson, Signals (3), vol.5, *Fighter Control and Interception*, CD 1116, AHB/II/116/21 (D), (London, 1950), p.9.

35. Quoted in R.Clark, *Tizard* (London, 1965), pp.159-60.

In July experiments were being made to equip night fighters for air-to-air combat 'in view of the present relative weakness of our night defence'.(36) At the same time, experiments continued with Radio Direction Finding so that by the outbreak of war a ground station could place a fighter within five miles of its target, and the plane's Airborne Interception (AI) apparatus could guide it from three miles down to two hundred yards, by which time it was hoped that the pilot could see the enemy machine.(37)

Limited Luftwaffe night activity in the early months of the war was a blessing for the RAF, but basic problems remained.(38) Therefore in March 1940 Air Vice-Marshal R.Peck of the Air Ministry(39) asked the Chief of the Air Staff for the formation of a committee 'to co-ordinate measures for night defence and link up research and development to the stage of practical trial ... there can be no doubt of the magnitude and urgency of the position of night interception'.(40) His point is proved by the realisation that by the following month, there were only six squadrons of Blenheims in Fighter Command and these alone

36. AHB Monograph, Signals (3), vol.5, p.113, quoting Minute from Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, 14 July 1939. See also AIR 8/863, p.4558, paragraph 232, in which Dowding wrote, 'I had long been apprehensive of the effect of Night attacks, when they should begin, and of the efficacy of our defensive measures'.

37. Wykeham, p.153.

38. For full details of these night raids, see Ramsey, *Blitz*, i, pp.24-76.

39. Air Vice-Marshal Peck was an Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (ACAS, O and I), with a special interest in night defence.

40. See Wykeham, pp.155-56.

specialised in night fighting.(41) Peck's request was met by the formation of the Night Interception Committee (NIC), from 14 March. Their meetings continued the progress being made, but with no speedy or radical breakthrough, so that by May the Chiefs of Staff Committee reported that 'our defence against night attack is still far from effective'. They doubted whether night bombardment alone would bring German victory, yet showed the long-held fear that 'morale is more vulnerable during the hours of darkness'.(42)

Consequently, as the German offensive opened in the West, Fighter Command, sorely pressed to meet the Luftwaffe's daylight onslaught, was less prepared to counter night bombing. Worse was to follow. At this stage, news of German scientific and technological advances in air warfare was laid before Britain's political and Service leaders, who were thereby confronted with problems in night defence even greater than they had anticipated.(43)

* * *

41. See AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, pp.11-12. The squadrons were Nos.23, 25, 29, 219, 600 and 604.

42. Ibid, p.9, quoting COS(40) 320, 4 May 1940. For the work of the Night Interception Committee, see AIR 16/247, Night Interception Committee, March-July 1940. At the committee's first meeting the chairman, Air Marshal Pierece was prophetic. 'Even if the enemy began by raiding in large numbers by day, our good defences would force him to adopt night bombing'; AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, p.9.

43. Yet in June night air defences had some success, largely because, at that stage, bombers flew low enough to be detected by searchlights, a fault soon remedied by the Luftwaffe. On the night 19/20 June, KG 4 lost five Heinkel 111s. For details, see Ramsey, *Blitz*, i, pp.108-10.

On 21 June, Dr. R.V. Jones, a young scientist attached to the Air Ministry, attended a Cabinet meeting at which he unfolded to a sombre audience his knowledge and predictions of German progress in work on radio beams. Research over previous months had shown that the laborious development of defensive science and technology made by Britain had been overtaken by that of the attacker. While the union of Radio Direction Finding with night fighters was making slow progress in the RAF, it became known that the Luftwaffe had at its disposal apparatus for laying radio beams across targets hundreds of miles distant, and for flying bombers along these beams with remarkable accuracy. Although Jones was at first confronted by the sceptical doubts of some other scientists, evidence soon appeared that the Luftwaffe's work was well advanced. (44)

The Germans had solved the problem of marrying science to technology with comparative ease. Theirs was the simpler task. It is far more straightforward to locate a city, a large and static target, with a beam, using powerful ground transmitters, than to follow an aircraft, a moving target, using a small, airborne device. The information provided, for example, by the *Knickerbein* beam was transmitted to bombers via the Lorenz blind approach receiver which they carried to assist landings.

44. For a background to this subject, see R.V. Jones, *Most Secret War* (London, 1979), Chapters 10 and 11. The Prime Minister's recollections of the meeting are shown in Churchill, ii, pp. 339-41. Gilbert, vi, deals with the meeting, pp. 580-84 and the deep effect that Jones's words had on his audience. Gilbert, however, is incorrect in one respect. He refers, p. 583 and, later, p. 757, to the German beams being deliberately 'bent' by British scientists. They could have been so treated, but never were, although such an effect was sometimes achieved accidentally. See A. Price, *Instruments of Darkness* (London, 1967), pp. 36-38.

Consequently, crews needed no special training or apparatus to employ it. The more accurate X-Gerat apparatus was fitted to the aircraft of KG 100 which then acted as pathfinders, attacking targets with incendiaries to light them for the main following bomber force. Luftwaffe bombers, guided by beams emitted from carefully located beacons, could be led with remarkable accuracy to targets over Britain.(45)

The extent of the threat had been made apparent to the Air Staff earlier in June. Those specially involved were Air Marshal Sir Philip Joubert, ACAS (R), Air Commodore Nutting and Air Commodore Lywood, of the Directorate of Signals. Also concerned, naturally, were Sinclair, Newall and Dowding. Counter-measures were immediately set in hand, under No.80 Wing, to locate and jam, or distort, the beams. Masking beacons, known as 'Meacons', were set up and had some reasonable success, but the extent to which the attackers held an advantage over the defenders soon became obvious.(46)

45. See R.V.Jones, 'The Electronic War', in Ramsey, *Blitz*, i, pp.282-93. See also AIR 20/1623, Air Scientific Intelligence Report No.6, 'The Crooked Leg', 28 June 1940. According to AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, p.27, Knickebein was 'found to be 400 Yards in width, with a range of approximately 300 miles'. An account of the bomber pilot's use of Knickebein is given in a diary entry for 15 November 1940; see Stahl, pp.82-83.

46. AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, p.26, referring to Night Interception Committee, 7th Meeting, 16 June 1940. This was the first occasion on which Jones met Dowding. Years later, Jones recollected, 'I was impressed by the strength of his reaction to a question of the Chairman (Sir Philip Joubert), who asked, 'Well, C-in-C, what should we do?' Dowding's reply was one word: 'JAM!'. Letter, Professor R.V.Jones, 13 April 1989.

It is instructive to note how far the Prime Minister himself was aware of the problems involved, through the closeness of Professor Lindemann, his scientific adviser who, despite some early doubts of German ability to lay beams, soon acknowledged their threat and passed on the information. (47) Churchill, while appreciating Fighter Command's magnificent defence against daylight raids, now had to face new dangers from a campaign of night bombing which was far more difficult to counter. Therefore Dowding's reactions to any German moves, and, more especially, his response to advice offered, were of vital importance and under sharp scrutiny.

* * *

The widely accepted view that the overall failure of German mass raids in daylight was the prime, or only, cause of the change to night bombing masks an important point. This is that, during the summer of 1940, although the Luftwaffe's main objective was the defeat of Fighter Command, there was an intention to attack British economic power by bombing factories and docks, road and rail centres, at night. These targets, selected even before the

47. For a background to the work, and rivalry, of Tizard and Lindemann, see Jones, *Most Secret War*, especially pp.38-47.

war started, were raided with increasing regularity after the defeat of France in June enabled Luftwaffe units to be moved closer to Britain.(48)

The raids served a number of purposes. Firstly, they provided good experience for bomber crews in using beams to reach targets in darkness. Secondly, they were a constant disturbance to civilians and thus it was hoped to affect morale, industry and transport. Thirdly, they could be carried out with far lighter losses than were incurred through day raids.(49) Lastly, they were at least partly a riposte to the night attacks made by Bomber Command on German targets from July 1940.(50) The night bomber offensive, then, should be seen in conjunction with, not separate from, the main Luftwaffe daylight campaign.(51)

48. See above, Chapter 2, pp.11-16. See also Trevor-Roper, Directive No.9 for the Conduct of the War, 29 November 1939, pp.18-21. Nevertheless, German daylight losses were a strong factor for change. In the view of Frankland, *Bombing Offensive*, pp.55-56, 'The only opportunity for a sustained air offensive was therefore under conditions in which Messerschmitts and Spitfires could not operate effectively; that is under the cover of darkness'. Seward, p.104, refers to Johannes Steinhoff, who commanded escort fighters in the daylight battle. 'He says that by the middle of September 1940 the strain of continuous operations had become so intense, and this, with the high loss rate, had reduced morale so badly that the German fighters had reached the end of their tether'. The same apparently applied to bomber crews. For Kesselring's view, which carefully avoids referring to any Luftwaffe failure, see *Kesselring Memoirs*, p.75.

49. See AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, p.34, which shows that in June the RAF and AA Command claimed to have shot down sixteen German aircraft at night, of which eleven were confirmed. In reply, the RAF lost ten. Figures taken from Air Warfare Statistical Section.

50. For Bomber Command's activities over Germany at that time, see Webster and Frankland, i, pp.144-45 and 213-33. See also Koch's article on RAF bombing of German targets, quoted in Chapter 4, Note 82.

51. According to an aviation journalist of the time, 'A series of night raids on England began on June 5. Single bombers appeared simultaneously at many points along the coast. Some penetrated well inland'; from 'The Unceasing Offensive', *Aeroplane*, 14 June 1940.

This can be shown particularly by examining some of the areas raided by night as the day battle was still in progress. For example, on the night of 10 July attacks were made on western Scotland, the home counties and the east coast.(52) A Heinkel 111 was shot down just after midnight on 26 July while laying mines in the Bristol Channel, while on the same night a Dornier 17 failed to return from bombing Rochford aerodrome.(53) On 30 July, raids were made on south Wales and the midlands, and, during the night of 15 August, after extensive day attacks had been launched, 70 Luftwaffe bombers struck at places as diverse as Birmingham, Crewe, Southampton and Bristol.(54)

At Goering's Karinhall conference on 19 August, the decision was taken to make a combination of day and night attacks on Britain. The latter were mainly allocated to Luftflotte III, many of whose fighters were moved forward to the Pas de Calais to take part in the new campaign to be launched on Fighter Command aerodromes. Thus the way was prepared for night bombing on a greatly increased scale.(55)

52. Wood and Dempster, p.239.

53. Ramsey, *Battle of Britain*, p.549.

54. Wood and Dempster, p.283. In fairness to Dowding, it should be remembered that on 16 July he warned Churchill of potential dangers to civilian morale resulting from night bombing. There was no adequate night fighter for interception. Colville was 'rather depressed' at the news. See Gilbert, vi, pp.668-69, and *Colville Diaries*, 16 July 1940.

55. See Collier Collection, Karlsruhe Document, No.25. During the conference, Goering said that 'attacks on the enemy aircraft industry are of particular importance, and should also be carried out by night ... it would appear desirable for the purpose of night operations to allocate to units particular areas which they will come to know better during each successive raid'.

The first really heavy night raid on England was carried out on 28 August, while the daylight onslaught on Fighter Command was reaching its peak. Then, 160 bombers of Luftflotte III attacked Liverpool, an important industrial centre within German plans. Raids on the city followed on each of the three succeeding nights, showing the Luftwaffe's determination to strike at a large target. (56)

Noticeable in these attacks was the inability of night fighter defences to intercept enemy aircraft. For example, on the night of 27 August, while over 200 German bombers flew across England to attack targets in the north, the midlands and East Anglia, and while mines were sown in at least six points round the coast, Fighter Command put up 47 sorties, only one of which was able to intercept a bomber, and that unsuccessfully. Three defending fighters crashed. (57)

At that stage, the Germans certainly held the initiative at night and were beginning to confront Dowding with a problem of worrying proportions. It was, in one sense, more galling for him because in day raids, his Controllers, although heavily pressed, could

56. See Price, *Instruments of Darkness*, p.35.

57. According to Ramsey, *Battle of Britain*, pp.385-86, the fighters lost were Hurricane P3897 (No.1 Squadron), Spitfire P9548 (No.92 Squadron), and Gladiator N5701 (No.247 Squadron).

follow the enemy and direct fighters towards them. In darkness Fighter Command appeared to be impotent to prevent the Germans from striking at will. (58)

* * *

58. Air Ministry Intelligence appreciated the growing scale of night bombing. A report on 3 September estimated that between 8 August and 2 September, the Luftwaffe had employed an average of 160 bombers in day attacks, and 120 at night. 'In the last week of the period these figures were considerably higher', being 230 and 220 respectively; Elmshirst Papers, ELMT 2/1, DDI Report, 3 September 1940. Referring to the first week of September, an aviation journalist noted that 'night raiding was widespread and hardly any of the larger industrial centres and ports of England and Scotland escaped'; 'Parrying the Blitzkrieg', Aeroplane, 6 September 1940. However, a vital and redeeming feature in these raids was that each aircraft carried only about one ton of bombs; see AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, p.44.

PART TWO: THE OPENING OF THE NIGHT BOMBER OFFENSIVE ON LONDON,
FROM 7 SEPTEMBER

The turning point for the RAF arrived on Saturday, 7 September. Not only did the change of target for day attacks from airfields to London take Fighter Command by surprise, but the subsequent night raid on the capital added to existing fires, some of which burned for days afterwards.(59) At one turn, the Luftwaffe had struck a grievous blow at the capital city.

Churchill visited the East End later in the day and saw for himself not only the suffering of ordinary people, but also the results of the RAF's inability to hold off the enemy. He had learned a few days earlier that in August, 1,075 civilians had been killed by air attack in the United Kingdom and, as Gilbert points out, 'As the German air raids intensified, Churchill was

59. *Front Line*, p.12, pointed out that the combined raids caused 'nine conflagrations (huge spreading areas of flame), nineteen fires that would normally have called for thirty pumps or more, forty ten-pump fires, and nearly a thousand lesser blazes'. See also Earl of Birkenhead, *Halifax* (London, 1965), p.460. Halifax and his wife were at Headquarters, Fighter Command, when the raids started. A vivid description of the night attack was given by the Russian Ambassador in I.Maisky, *Memoirs of a Soviet Ambassador* (London, 1967), p.107. AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, p.55, shows that the blaze at the Anglo-American Company's oil works at Purfleet had not been extinguished by 13 September.

concerned by their effect on the population'.(60) The bleak reality was that during the night attack, the capital's defences had offered virtually no protection. With a German invasion believed to be imminent, it was essential for public morale to be sustained and every effort made to increase the effectiveness of both anti-aircraft guns and night fighters.(61)

London's ordeal, with its attendant worries for politicians and Service leaders, continued for several nights. Extra numbers of anti-aircraft guns were sent to the capital in an attempt to bolster morale, but not until 10 September were the defences able to put up a heartening, though inaccurate, barrage.(62) On the night of 8 September, 412 further civilians were killed and 747 seriously injured, while on the following night over 1,700 casualties were suffered.(63)

60. See *Ismay Memoirs*, pp.183-84. Also see Gilbert, vi, p.760. The old fears over public morale resurfaced in official publications. *A Roof Over Britain*, p.48, claimed that 'the enemy thought that by concentrating on the East End, where there was a large and crowded population, he would cause such panic as to endanger the Government's position, if not to force them to make peace'. A politician's worries over East Enders is shown in *Channon Diaries*, p.266, diary entry for 16 September 1940. 'I drove back to London via the East End ... the damage is immense, yet the people, mostly Jewish, seemed courageous'. Compare this view with that of 'Boney' Fuller, Chapter 1, Note 57.

61. According to Gilbert, vi, p.774, the invasion codeword 'Cromwell' was issued at 8.07 p.m. Hough and Richards, p.263, say that only six night fighters took off. Blenheims of No.600 Squadron at Hornchurch were grounded by smoke from the burning London docks.

62. Pile, p.149, states that 'within twenty-four hours of that night attack reinforcements from all over the country were on their way to London, and within forty-eight hours the number of guns had been doubled'. On 12 September one headline ran, 'Terrific London Barrage Meets Greatest Raid'; *Daily Express*, 12 September 1940, p.1.

63. Wood and Dempster, pp.341-42.

The Germans, with no conspicuous success in the day battle, made the most of the damage caused to their enemy's heartland. An official of the Propaganda Ministry gave a wireless broadcast directly from a bomber over London on the night of 11 September. 'We see the blazing metropolis of England', he reported, 'the centre of plutocrats and slave holders, the capital of the world enemy number one ... here go the bombs. They have found their mark but we still circle over the city a few times, so that those below should hear that we are here'. (64)

The sudden intensification of night attacks, causing such great damage for so small an expenditure, naturally led to urgent questions of defence being raised. As Gilbert points out, 'Public concern was focused on the Blitz'. (65) How had it happened and who was responsible? The Air Historical Branch Narrative notes, of 7 September, that 'a full explanation for this unhampered progress to their objectives seems hard to find, but it remains a fact that while bombs were falling in London, two Hurricanes were patrolling their Sector station at Tangmere, though they had received no instructions to intercept the enemy'. The Narrative adds that guns in the Inner Artillery Zone (IAZ) did not open fire until 9 p.m., twenty-five minutes after bombs had landed in Battersea. (66)

64. E.H.Gombrich, *Myth and Reality in German War-Time Broadcasts* (London, 1970), p.9; broadcast made on the German Home Service, 11 September 1940.

65. Gilbert, vi, p.777.

66. AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, p.55.

The root of the matter was that while anti-aircraft guns were seen and heard to be attempting something, however ineffective, (67) Fighter Command was apparently offering little. The fact that the RAF had neither suitable apparatus nor adequate aircraft to prevent night bombing was of scant interest to civilians who understood nothing of Airborne Interception (AI), or Ground Controlled Interception (GCI), but wondered why the fighters which were defending them so staunchly by day could not offer similar protection at night. (68)

In assessing the role of Dowding and Park here, it should be remembered that the great raids on London took place on the very day of the Commander-in-Chief's conference to discuss Fighter Command 'going downhill'. His policy there was criticised by Douglas, whose influence within the Air Ministry is obvious from the preparations made for the later conference of 17 October. (69) At the time, Dowding's leadership was coming under severe examination, especially with regard to day fighting tactics, and

67. The difficulties of firing a barrage at night are shown in Pile, p.173, quoting Professor A.V.Hill; 'in order to give a one-fiftieth chance of bringing down an enemy moving at 250 miles per hour and crossing a vertical rectangle ten miles wide and four miles high (from the barrage balloons to 25,000 feet) about 3,000 3.7in. shells would be required a second'. Not surprisingly, he believed that 'nothing but aimed fire is any use'.

68. An aviation writer asked, 'Are we studying the possibilities of a special night interceptor, ? Pilots who have had much experience of night patrolling must have found by now whether or not the effective night fighter's characteristics are quite different from those of the day fighter'. "Charioteer", 'The Need for Research', *Aeroplane*, 20 September 1940.

69. See above, Chapter 5.

the new failure of night air defence added to his troubles. The criticisms embraced Park, a close follower of his C-in-C, whose squadrons guarded the capital's southern approaches.(70)

Radical methods were needed swiftly to meet the new threat. In the words of the Narrative, 'the serious character of the prevailing situation required immediately to be relieved. It was a time for ingenious improvisations', (71) but Dowding's careful and methodical mind was not tuned to variations. He knew that the Beaufighter was the real answer to the problem, and that sending Blenheims and Defiants, Spitfires and Hurricanes into the night sky would lead to few bombers being shot down. Therefore his policy was that little could be done immediately to protect targets which Germans were locating so accurately and attacking almost at will.(72)

The differences between the Commander-in-Chief and Douglas were shown in the latter's memoirs, when he commented, 'So strongly had Dowding come to believe in his radar-equipped fighters that he had become a little blinded, I felt, to the more simple hit or miss, trial and error, use of single-engined fighters'. He, and some other influential leaders of the RAF came to feel that,

70. For example, see AIR 2/7281, Enclosure 6B, Note from Douglas, 28 September 1940.

71. AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, p.55.

72. Ibid, pp.49-50, quotes Dowding's report in October (FC/S.21197), which said that 'the enemy's navigational aids are so effective that he will be able to bomb this country with sufficient accuracy for his purposes without even emerging from clouds'. He went on to say that the Germans could bomb in the poorest weather, when RAF fighters could not leave the ground. This was a 'most depressing fact'.

in spite of the obvious disadvantages, 'the effort had to be made'. Among those leaders, according to Douglas, was Air Vice-Marshal Sir C.J. Quintin Brand, AOC, No.10 Group, who had achieved success in night flying with single-engined fighters during the First World War.(73)

Dowding's efforts to meet the emergency were demonstrated on 9 September. About ten Gun Laying (GL) radar sets were borrowed from Anti-Aircraft Command and mounted at searchlight positions in the Kenley Sector, which lay on the path to London. The positions were linked to No.11 Group's Kenley Sector station which then attempted to guide night fighters towards the incoming bombers. In theory, the sets, which could plot aircraft within about forty thousand feet, should have been a welcome addition to the night fighters' defence, and Dowding pinned some faith in them. However, in practice, the Airborne Interception sets in aircraft failed, and the weather was poor. The so-called 'Kenley Experiment' continued, but without either the success, or subsequent relief, hoped for.(74)

On 11 September a meeting of the Night Interception Committee was held at the Air Ministry, under the chairmanship of Sinclair, to examine problems. There was a great deal of discussion, during

73. Douglas, *Years of Command*, pp.103-04.

74. AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, p.59. For reports on night interception trials, see AIR 16/379, Night interception: test of new system in Kenley sector, September 1940 - January 1941. In Enclosure 1A, 21 September 1940, Dowding wrote, 'Night Interception: I have decided to make KENLEY a test Sector for night interception and to supply it with all possible facilities in order that the system described below, or some modification thereof, may be generally established as soon as possible'. Dowding's opponents, however, wanted action, not experiment.

which Dowding explained that there were seven ways of operating night fighters. In spite of the talk, nonetheless, there appeared to be no solution to the difficulties.(75)

The slow development of Radio Direction Finding and fighters in night defence had led to a variety of suggestions for unorthodox approaches to the problem. One of these had appealed to both Churchill and Lindemann for some time. This was the use of small aerial mines, either dropped from aircraft or attached to small balloons, drifting along in the bomber stream. Lindemann minuted Churchill on 11 September recommending their use as 'a stop-gap until the Airborne Interception comes along', adding that 'even a hundred mines would have a good chance of bringing down a noticeable proportion of machines'. The Prime Minister, always attracted to an adventurous enterprise, forwarded Lindemann's note to Newall and Dowding, encouraging them to examine the idea. 'All this ... for which I have so long pressed is urgent', he added.(76)

Such plans were regarded without favour by most air leaders, who thought them rather bizarre. For example, in his memoirs, Douglas claimed that Lindemann's scheme 'was to give Fighter Command a particularly acute headache'. It was a 'ridiculous scheme' and 'a complete waste of time and effort'.(77) His anger

75. AIR 20/4298, Minute 1, 11 September 1940. Present at the meeting were several critics of Dowding's attitudes towards day defence, including Douglas, Joubert, Saundby, Slessor and Stevenson.

76. AIR 19/230, Minute, Lindemann to Churchill, 11 September 1940, and Churchill to Newall and Dowding.

77. Douglas, *Years of Command*, pp.106-07.

was also shown in a letter written on the matter in 1961. 'When I think of the millions of pounds and tens of millions of man hours which were wasted on such idiotic projects as 'Mutton' [the plan to sow aerial mines] and the free balloon barrage ... my blood boils'. (78)

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78. Douglas Papers, File 2, letter, Sholto Douglas to Robert Wright, 21 November 1961. For details of 'Mutton', see A. Price, *Blitz on Britain, 1939-1945* (London, 1977), pp.107-10.

PART THREE: THE SALMOND COMMITTEE AND ITS IMPORTANCE

The new and radical approach needed in night air defence came on 14 September, not, as might have been expected, from the Air Ministry, but from the Ministry of Aircraft Production. Beaverbrook wrote to Sinclair, informing him that Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Salmond was to undertake an enquiry in the Ministry of Aircraft Production with a view to giving advice on the preparation of night fighters. He asked that the Air Ministry should provide all the information he required. (79)

Beaverbrook's letter met with an instant and surprising response from a Ministry which appeared suddenly grateful that someone else had taken an initiative. On the same day, Newall wrote a reply to Beaverbrook, welcoming the move, (80) and the Air Ministry sent a letter to Dowding. This informed the Commander-in-Chief that Salmond was 'to undertake a thorough enquiry into the equipment and preparation of night fighters', but then went further. The Air Council 'have proposed that its scope should be extended to cover all matters in connection with air fighting at night which are of common interest to the two Ministries'. The note continued by suggesting that Air Vice-Marshal Quintin Brand should be a representative at the forthcoming enquiry. (81)

79. Beaverbrook Papers, BBK D/442, Subject Files, 1940-46: various collected information, Beaverbrook to Sinclair, 14 September 1940.

80. AIR 2/7341, Newall to Beaverbrook, 14 September 1940.

81. AIR 16/387, Enclosure 1A, Air Ministry to Dowding, 14 September 1940.

The choice of Salmond was widely approved. He was a highly respected officer, formerly Chief of the Air Staff, senior in age, rank and service even to Dowding, and had been appointed Director of Armament Production in the MAP at the outbreak of war. The move was a shrewd success for Beaverbrook, who was both worried by the effects that German night bombing could have on his factories, (82) and, at the same time, could show an initiative over the problem, sadly lacking in his old adversaries at the Air Ministry.

Salmond was far from unwilling to serve and it could well have been at his instigation that the matter of the investigation of night defences began. Evidence for this is strong. He had had a close working relationship with Lord Trenchard for some time and they were the nation's two most senior airmen. (83) Their attitudes, as shown from correspondence in the early days of the war, included dislikes of a separate Army Air Service, dropping leaflets over Germany, lack of governmental aggression - and Newall. Also, neither man held Dowding in special repute. (84)

82. Beaverbrook's fears over factory protection and production were given impetus when he learned of *Knickebein* and *X-Gerat*. On 11 September he sent a note to the Prime Minister, thanking him for the opportunity of seeing a report 'on the German use of wireless beams in air navigation'. On the following day, a further note to Churchill spoke of heavy losses to Hurricanes and Spitfires, whose reserves were low; Beaverbrook Papers, BBK D/414, Special Correspondence, 1940-1945, vol.i, Beaverbrook to Churchill, 11 September and 12 September, 1940.

83. According to Trenchard's biographer, 'A slight undercurrent of rivalry, not to say jealousy, still held them apart, despite the strong bond of esteem between them'; Boyle, p.675. In their dealings over Dowding, esteem outweighed rivalry.

84. The papers of MRAF Sir John Salmond, Aviation Records Department, Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon, B2638, letters, Trenchard to Salmond, 27 October 1939 and 6 November 1939, and Salmond to Trenchard, 30 November 1939.

On 12 September Salmond wrote to Trenchard, enclosing a copy of a paper on night fighting 'which I gave to Beaverbrook yesterday. He said that he would show it to "someone" last night. Who this may be I do not know. I think you will agree that the matter is extremely important, and I earnestly hope that you will come in on it'. The impression that Salmond was prepared to institute, or lead, a crusade against the tardiness of development in night defence, and thereby against Dowding, is given elsewhere in the letter. 'I have got the names of those who had intimate experience of night fighting and its organisation during the last war', he wrote, 'and there will be no dearth of experience to go on'. (85)

Salmond moved with the briskness and despatch for which he was renowned and the first meeting of his committee was held at 10 a.m. on 16 September. (86) As the enterprise had started at the Ministry of Aircraft Production this, and the committee's two subsequent meetings were held at Thames House South, (87) not at the Air Ministry, a point of some importance. The Minutes of the meeting (88) show that the discussion was held mainly among Beaverbrook's officers. Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir John Salmond, Air Chief-Marshal Sir Wilfred Freeman, Air Vice-Marshal A.W. Tedder and Group-Captain Sowrey were all from the Ministry of Aircraft Production. Air-Commodore D.F. Stevenson was the only

85. Ibid, 'Secret', Salmond to Trenchard, 12 September 1940.

86. For words in praise of Salmond, see Dean, p.87. For a general biography, see J.Laffin, *Swifter Than Eagles* (Edinburgh, 1964).

87. Thames House South was the headquarters of the Ministry of Aircraft Production.

88. AIR 20/4298, 1st Meeting, 10 a.m., 16 September 1940.

officer from the Air Ministry who was there all day. Air Vice-Marshal S. Douglas and Air Marshal Sir Philip Joubert, in the morning and the afternoon respectively, sat in on the committee and evidence was taken from two officers experienced in night fighting in Blenheims, and from a scientific officer attached to Fighter Command.

The meeting gave Douglas the opportunity of criticising Fighter Command practice over filtering, suggesting that Radio Direction Finding information might be given straight to Groups. In this he received Tedder's support.(89) The Air Ministry representatives reported that 'Air Officer Commanding Fighter Command did not care to risk aircraft, and particularly crews, in operations over enemy occupied territory', underlining Dowding's policy of offering careful defence rather than showing a spirit of aggression.(90) Joubert offered criticisms of the current use of night fighters, saying that he would be content with eighteen squadrons of sixteen initially equipped (i.e.), strength,(91) and that Airborne Interception equipped Blenheims were 'just wandering round in the hope of making a contact'.(92) However, Stevenson spoke out strongly against Tedder's suggestion, which would have horrified Dowding, that separate day and night Fighter Commands might be considered.(93)

89. Ibid, Minute 6.

90. Ibid, Minute 7.

91. Ibid, Minutes 14 and 15.

92. Ibid, Minute 14.

93. Ibid, Minute 12.

The committee's second meeting was held next day.(94) At that stage the committee consisted of five officers of the Ministry of Aircraft Production and two from the Air Ministry. Among those who 'attended to give evidence' were Air Vice-Marshal Sir C.J.Quintin Brand, and Wing-Commander Chamberlain of the Fighter Interception Unit (FIU). Brand was 'dismayed at the dependence of young pilots on R.T. [Radio Telephone] instruments', and believed that they 'should be taught real air pilotage'.(95) Chamberlain gave details of his work in Airborne Interception, but pointed out several weaknesses and noted that some operators 'were not suitable for the work'.(96)

The presence of Squadron-Leader Max Aitken can have been no random choice. Not only had he been Officer Commanding No.601 Squadron, with a fine record in action, but also he was Beaverbrook's son. Judging by the committee's later conclusions, his contribution made an impact, because he gave the opinion, certainly not shared by all other pilots, that 'the Hurricane was a good night fighter in the hands of a pilot who was well experienced in night flying'.(97) He also believed that 'experienced pilots of 26 years of age and upwards' were better for night work, which could be done by those 'who had had enough'

94. AIR 20/4298, 2nd. Meeting, 17 September 1940.

95. Ibid, Minute 28.

96. Ibid, Minute 34.

97. Ibid, Minute 27:2.

of day combat.(98) In his opinion, Airborne Interception was 'a valuable adjunct to night interception', (99) and separate night flying squadrons were essential.(100)

What is of interest at this stage, while many changes were being suggested with urgency, and evidence taken from various quarters, is that no voice had thus far been heard from either Headquarters, Fighter Command, or No.11 Group, which were most closely involved. The most charitable explanation is that the committee's members, realising how deeply involved with day fighting Dowding and Park both were at the time, thought it unreasonable to make extra demands.

There exist, nonetheless, two pieces of evidence against that explanation. The first is that Dowding was called on to attend the third and final meeting of the committee on 18 September; the second is that the committee's recommendations, in the form of a report, were produced, dated and signed by Salmond on 17 September, after the second meeting, before Dowding had even been heard.(101)

The third meeting lasted only for the morning(102) and in that time questions were asked of, and opinions received from, Dowding

98. Ibid, Minute 27:5.

99. Ibid, Minute 27:8.

100. Ibid, Minute 27:7.

101. AIR 20/4298, Enclosure 5, Salmond Committee Report, 17 September 1940.

102. Ibid, 3rd Meeting, 18 September 1940.

and Major-General Newton of Anti-Aircraft Command. Dowding agreed that a night fighter unit should be formed(103) and 'would not oppose' a night fighting section being added to Fighter Command. He was against too great a de-centralisation of control and believed that too much was left to Sector Commanders.(104) After explaining various methods of employing night fighters, he objected to the delegation of filtering from Headquarters, Fighter Command, to Groups.(105)

During the afternoon, Salmond, Tedder and Sowry, of the Ministry of Aircraft Production, together with Joubert of the Air Ministry, drafted some conclusions. Nevertheless, the bulk of the committee's work and the production of their report had been finished after the first two days. The Report, consisting of eighteen points, was then speedily sent to all of the relevant parties; the production of such a clear and concise series of recommendations within so short a time, to meet an urgent problem, had been a remarkable achievement.

At that stage, in spite of the inability of Fighter Command to inflict losses on German night bombers, Churchill obviously still held Dowding in high regard. On the evening of 21 September, Dowding, together with Lord Gort, dined at Chequers with the Prime Minister. German bombing was discussed, especially the use of parachute mines which had been dropped at night, and there was

103. Ibid, Minute 1.

104. Ibid, Minute 3.

105. Ibid, Minute 10.

talk of retaliation. In relating the visit, Colville said that 'Dowding produced a paper ("masterly" the Prime Minister described it to Beaverbrook) about the prospects of night interception in the near future; a skilful blending of Airborne Interception which was tried for the first time last night in a Beaufighter, albeit without results) and the G.L. (wireless-controlled A.A. and searchlight)'.(106)

Dowding was suggesting what would be done and could offer no sovereign remedy for the present. This point was noted by others at Chequers, who were less impressed than Churchill. Colville's diary for the following day referred to Lindemann 'who says, sotto voce, that Dowding's "masterly" paper is his first admission of a number of facts which have been impressed on him for ages'. It was a bad augury for Dowding that the Prime Minister's scientific adviser should hold this opinion of him.(107)

The Air Ministry, having received the Salmond Report, acted quickly to discuss and implement its proposals. On 22 September, Sinclair met Beaverbrook at the Ministry of Aircraft Production to examine the document;(108) two days later the Air Council was

106. *Colville Diaries*, 21 September 1940, p.245.

107. *Ibid*, 22 September 1940, p.248. Lindemann's part in the changes made to the leadership of Fighter Command was probably greater than hitherto recognised. Churchill was influenced by his scientist's advice and thus, when in late October Lindemann complained that Fighter Command could do more to counter German radio beams, yet another apparent failure of Dowding's Command was brought to the Prime Minister's notice. For a summary of Lindemann's interventions, which lasted into December, see Ramsey, *Blitz*, ii, p.310.

108. AIR 19/230, Meeting, Beaverbrook and Sinclair, 22 September 1940.

convened to review the recommendations. They had Salmond, Douglas and Joubert present to elucidate various points and appeared to be enthusiastic. (109)

Subsequently, on 25 September, a copy of the Salmond Report was sent to Dowding, (110) together with a letter from the Air Council. This referred to each paragraph of the Report and set out the recommendations which the Commander-in-Chief, Fighter Command was required to implement. In the main, the Air Council accepted Salmond's suggestions, with wide agreement over the general aims, a number of which were contrary to Dowding's belief and practice. (111)

* * *

109. AIR 20/4298, Enclosures 5 and 6, 25 September 1940.

110. AIR 16/387, Enclosure 6B, 25 September 1940.

111. AIR 2/7341, Air Ministry to Dowding, 25 September 1940.

PART FOUR: THE GROWING RIFT BETWEEN DOWDING AND THE AIR STAFF

While the Commander-in-Chief that day was mulling over these, finding fault with many of the proposals, Salmond and Trenchard were exchanging letters which show how determined both were to relieve Newall and Dowding of their Commands. When the question of Dowding's removal from office is examined, the correspondence proves that the question of his attitude towards night air defence was crucial in resolving his fate and also that Salmond and Trenchard played a previously insufficiently acknowledged part in ensuring it.

In his letter, Trenchard said, 'Yesterday I told you that I was going to call up and see if I could go round and see Beaverbrook and talk about one or two things. You said that if I did, there was something you very much wanted me to say'. He added that he would see Beaverbrook within two or three days, 'but I am waiting to fix the time until I have heard from you'.(112)

Salmond's reply, written the same day, is a remarkable letter.(113) There appears to be no document in any public collection which is more openly critical of Dowding; this, being private correspondence, lacks the inhibitions which could have restricted a formal Minute or note. At the time, many obviously

112. Salmond Papers, B 2638, Trenchard to Salmond, 25 September 1940.

113. Ibid, Salmond to Trenchard, 25 September 1940.

voiced criticism of the Commander-in-Chief; from those in high office who wrote opinions, this letter is the most powerful example and of considerable value to the historian.

Salmond opened by speaking of 'the failure to cope with night bombing', adding that on his report to Beaverbrook he included a note 'to say that I considered Dowding should go'. Because of his close work with Dowding, however, Beaverbrook expressed reservations and 'is now a bit shaken on it'. When Sinclair was told the same thing, 'I could see that he was frightened of putting it forward', although Salmond believed that the Chief of the Air Staff and 'the whole of the Air Staff, I believe, almost without exception', agreed with him.

The attack then turned to include Newall. Before the previous day's meeting of the Air Staff, Salmond told Newall that he would raise the matter of Dowding. However, he 'seemed a bit rattled at the prospect' and had asked Salmond not to do so, although he had previously told him 'how extremely keen he was that Dowding should go and what enormous difficulties he and the Air Staff had had in getting him to accept new ideas on fighting at night'. In Salmond's view Dowding had no 'qualification of a Commander in the Field', lacked humanity and imagination and was living on the reputation 'gained through the successes of the pilots in day fighting'.

Next, the fates of Dowding and Newall were linked, showing that at the time there was felt to be a need for a general change in the leadership of the RAF.(114) Beaverbrook had suggested to

Salmond, 'If Dowding is to go, why not Newall, as Newall must be responsible too'. Salmond raised no objections, listing what he saw as the Chief of the Air Staff's frailties over such matters as the Norwegian Campaign, and the RAF in France.

'If you see Beaverbrook I would very much like you to bring up the matter of Dowding, and also of Newall, because I believe that with these two in the saddle, we are not getting the best we should expect', he concluded.

This letter shows clearly the depth of feeling which existed within the Air Ministry against retaining Dowding at Fighter Command. It also demonstrates how leaders at both Service and political levels were being made aware of the controversy. What has not emerged from most previous writings on Dowding's removal is the intensity of Salmond's opposition to him. At the top of the letter, in his own hand, Salmond later added, 'My views which I eventually explained to the Prime Minister who practically blew me out of the room - after three weeks I met him again in the "Other Club". Winston said I was right. Dowding had gone, "but it nearly broke his heart." Had the Prime Minister not agreed I had decided to appeal to His Majesty'. Salmond's relentless energy for change was indeed a scythe.(115)

* * *

115. As Dowding left Fighter Command on 25 November, Salmond's meeting with Churchill could not have been before about 4 November, although he had written to the Prime Minister on 5 October. In determining Churchill's attitude towards removing Dowding, it is noteworthy that in the period from late October to early November, he heard direct criticism of the Commander-in-Chief from Flight-Lieutenant P. Macdonald, M.P., probably around 18 to 24 October, from Salmond around 4 November, and from Sir Reginald Clarry, Vice-Chairman of the 1922 Committee, on 6 November. See below, Chapter 7.

Dowding's attitude towards making changes in the organisation and techniques of night fighting at the time is really summarised by examining his copy of the Salmond Report. As was his custom, he went through the document, using mainly blue crayon marks to show his opinion of the proposals made. If he agreed with a point, it received a tick. Some reservation or doubt was awarded a question mark, while disapproval was registered with a cross. Of the letter's eighteen points, fourteen have been marked; beside these are three ticks, five question marks and no less than nine crosses.(116)

The Commander-in-Chief's long-standing reputation as less than co-operative was, in the minds of the Air Ministry, strongly reinforced by his reply, written on 27 September.(117) He was unimpressed by many of the suggestions, which he examined individually. For example, he dismissed the proposals for removing filtering from Headquarters, Fighter Command, to Groups, which had been rejected by him in January 'and was finally disposed of ... I request, therefore, that I may be spared the necessity of discussing the question afresh'.(118) Other suggestions were 'not practical',(119) or 'altogether premature',(120) 'unwise',(121) or beyond his understanding.(122)

116. AIR 16/387, Enclosure 6B, 17 September 1940.

117. AIR 2/7341, Enclosure 4A, Dowding to the Air Ministry, 27 September 1940.

118. Ibid, paragraph 2:2.

119. Ibid, paragraph 4(b).

120. Ibid, paragraph 5.

121. Ibid, paragraph 11.

122. Ibid, paragraphs 14 and 15.

Dowding was not alone in marking documents. An unknown hand at the Air Ministry added comments beside various points in his letter, including 'The need is already urgent and long overdue', (123) 'Pert', (124) 'The same reason which has prevented any change months ago', (125) and 'Obstruction. Why ?' (126)

The difference between Dowding's and the Air Ministry's reception of the Salmond Report is shown by a note sent on the same day from Sinclair to Beaverbrook. He spoke of 'useful discussions' about the findings of 'Sir John Salmond's very useful Committee' and referred to changes 'which I know you are as anxious as I am to press on with'. (127)

This urgency can also be deduced from a Minute sent by Saundby, (ACAS[T]), to Douglas on 30 September. He gave details of tests made on Blenheims without turrets and recommended the deletion of all rear armament in these machines. (128)

The next day, while moves were being made at the Air Ministry to promote the use of Big Wings in day fighting, and thus to alter the policy followed by Park and Dowding, the Commander-in-Chief

123. Ibid, paragraph 4a.

124. Ibid, paragraph 7.

125. Ibid, paragraphs 9 and 10.

126. Ibid, paragraph 13.

127. Beaverbrook Papers, BBK D/442, Subject Files, 1940-46; various collected information, Sinclair to Beaverbrook, 27 September 1940. Sinclair gave as particular needs AI sets and Mk.IV AI equipment. He added, 'Anything you can do to accelerate production of Beaufighters would be most welcome'.

128. AIR 2/7341, ACAS (T) to DCAS, 30 September 1940.

was called to a meeting on night air defence. Of those present, from Sinclair to Salmond, and Joubert to Douglas, not one can be called an ally of Dowding. 'The meeting discussed the letter from the Commander-in-Chief, Fighter Command paragraph by paragraph', the subsequent draft note stated. (129)

On 3 October, at Headquarters, Fighter Command, Evill examined the copy of the Salmond Report and minuted the Commander-in-Chief, asking what action should be taken on its various suggestions. For example, on paragraph 2, dealing with filtering at Groups, 'Will you please say on what lines action should be started?' Dowding's reply was categorical. 'NONE, except what Air Ministry specifically orders. D.' (130)

* * *

By the turn of the month the German bombing offensive was well under way and the defences had enjoyed scant success. Fighter Command's Order of Battle for 3 October shows that there were 52 day squadrons and eleven night squadrons already formed, with a further four and a half squadrons forming. (131) And yet, during

129. AIR 20/4298, Enclosure 12, 1 October 1940. The Minutes of the meeting reinforce the impression of a rift between Dowding and others. In Minute 2, Dowding 'asked that it should be placed on record that, in his view, the proposal to transfer filtering to Groups would not improve the efficiency of night interception'. Then Joubert, not to be upstaged, 'asked that it should be placed on record that, in his view, the delegation of filtering to Groups would improve day, as well as night, interception'.

130. AIR 16/387, Minute 15, 3 October 1940.

131. AIR 41/17, ADGB, ii, Appendix (1/B).

the previous month, while the Luftwaffe had flown an estimated 6,135 sorties at night, only four German bombers had been destroyed. (132)

Such attrition naturally brought sharply the question of air defence to the interest of politicians, chief among whom was the Prime Minister. Events over the following few weeks gave him the opportunity of viewing Dowding in a different light. Previously he had dealt with the Commander-in-Chief mainly through his work at Fighter Command, where Dowding was by himself, in active and successful control of the battle against day raiders. Now, however, Churchill was to deal with him against a novel background, where Dowding sat among a group of other senior RAF officers who disagreed strongly with his policies on night defence. The arguments and tensions became apparent and raised questions of the Commander-in-Chief's abilities in leadership.

Eric Seal, the Prime Minister's Private Secretary, drew his attention to the disquiet felt, on 3 October. Seal had talked with Lindemann and wrote that both of them believed more could be done to prevent night bombing. He suggested that Churchill should 'send for the responsible officers' of Fighter and Anti-Aircraft Commands 'and probe deeply into the details of what they are doing, and ask for day to day reports of progress'. He added

132. German raids in the week ending 26 September killed 1,500 civilians, of whom 1,300 were in London; (Gilbert, vi, p.812). On the night of 28 September 200 more were killed in the capital; (Ibid, p.814). During the week ending 2 October, a further 1,700 died in the city; (Ibid, p.824, quoting War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, Weekly Resumé No.57).

ominously, 'Dowding has the reputation of being very conservative, and of not being receptive to new ideas'.(133)

The attack from Trenchard and Salmond continued when, on the following day, the former wrote 'I have done all I can in the last two or three days of rubbing in about Dowding, and I am going to rub in again today. At least I know that some of my remarks have got to the right quarter'. He believed that it would be difficult for Portal, the Chief of the Air Staff designate, 'to sack Dowding unless we can get sufficient pressure to bear to bring it about'. His next sentence could imply either a degree of deviousness, for which he was not noted, or an attempt to distance himself from responsibility for the impending execution. 'I feel your pressure has done as much good as anything I know from what I have heard from other sources', he wrote, 'but I never mention that you and I are working in agreement on the matter as I feel it is more use our apparently being independent but working for the same cause'.(134)

With this support, Salmond had no hesitation in writing directly to Churchill.

I am most anxious to put to you the case for a change in the holder of the important position of Commander-in-Chief Fighter Command.

Recently on Lord Beaverbrook's instructions, I have carried out an enquiry into Night Air Defence, the result of which, together with what has since occurred, make a change, in my opinion, imperative.

133. Ibid, p.823, quoting E.A.Seal, Minute to Churchill, 3 October 1940.

134. Salmond Papers, B 2638, Trenchard to Salmond, 4 October 1940.

This opinion is also very strongly held by most, if not all, Service members of the Air Council.(135)

* * *

The pressure on Fighter Command and its leadership was maintained inadvertently by Beaverbrook, who still lost no opportunity of crossing swords with the Air Ministry over the protection of his factories. On 30 September, Beaverbrook telephoned Sinclair, suggesting that fighter squadrons should be stationed next to factories, where possible. Sinclair, in a courteous and rational letter on the following day, pointed out the impractical nature of the scheme.(136) Forty-eight hours later, Sinclair again extended an olive branch by sending Beaverbrook a copy of an American newspaper report which commented on the rift between their two ministries and was highly critical of Beaverbrook. Sinclair called it 'mischievous and contemptible tripe' and referred to the correspondent's 'eccentric opinions'.(137)

Nevertheless, on 6 October Beaverbrook sent a memo to Churchill complaining that the Hawker's factory, Langley, had been damaged and that the balloon barrage was too thin. 'Can we have action now?' he finished.(138) A Minute the same day claimed that 'The Secretary of State for Air and the Secretary of State for War

135. Ibid, Salmond to Churchill, 5 October 1940.

136. Beaverbrook Papers, BBK D/327, Ministerial and Departmental Correspondence Files, 1940-45, Air Ministry: Secretary of State for Air, Sinclair to Beaverbrook, 1 October 1940.

137. Ibid, BBK C/311, Thurso, Viscount, Archibald and Lady, 1939-64, Sinclair to Beaverbrook, 3 October 1940. The journalist was Helen Kirkpatrick, later of great renown.

138. Ibid, BBK D/28, Ministry of Aircraft Production, Memo, Beaverbrook to Churchill, 6 October 1940.

should protect the factories still in production'.(139)
Naturally, any extra demands on Fighter Command compounded Dowding's difficulties.(140)

* * *

'Whenever a new problem of high importance arose Churchill at once took over the chairmanship of the various meetings on the subject', wrote General Pile in his memoirs. 'So now he ordered a series of meetings with reference to night air defence (known as N.A.D. meetings)'.(141) Dowding was required to attend the first meeting on 7 October.

Around Churchill sat seventeen officers and officials faced with the daunting task of blunting the night Blitz, but of these only Beaverbrook and Pile could be listed as possible allies of Dowding. Those who saw the Commander-in-Chief in a less favourable light included Sinclair, Newall, Salmond, Douglas, Joubert and Lindemann, a formidable opposition.

Overall, business was conducted at pace, with discussion, *inter alia*, of Beaufighters and Airborne Interception, Gun Laying radar sets and Anti-Aircraft personnel.(142) Later, Newall chaired a

139. Ibid, BBK D/414, Special Correspondence, 1940-1945, vol.1, Minute, Beaverbrook to Churchill, 6 October 1940.

140. See also *ibid*, C/311, Thurso, Viscount, Archibald and Lady, 1939-64, Dowding to Sinclair, 14 October 1940, and Sinclair to Beaverbrook, 16 October 1940, both of which show the problems facing the Commander-in-Chief. In Dowding's letter, it is noticeable how, in paragraph 19 he shows his antipathy towards Salmond.

141. Pile, pp.165-66.

142. CAB 81/22, 1st Meeting of Night Air Defence Committee, 7 October 1940.

smaller meeting whose report was endorsed by the Prime Minister and the impression is gained that the committee was tackling a desperate problem with energy and combined purpose. (143)

However, Churchill was now able to see at first hand the division which had grown between Dowding and other senior staff. A particular point of controversy was the decentralisation of filtering. Next day, the Commander-in-Chief wrote to the Secretary of the War Cabinet, detailing disagreements with his colleagues. Regarding the Salmond Report, he claimed that when questioned about its proposals, 'I replied that I had agreed with all the proposals but in some cases unwillingly and under pressure'. Churchill had instructed him to present a report on the points with which he disagreed and Dowding wrote that the part 'with which I disagreed very strongly' was that 'the operation of filtering should be transferred from Fighter Command to Group Headquarters in order to reduce delay'. He went on in detail to object to decentralisation and the letter made twelve points to support his views. The episode certainly underlined what Dowding saw as an adherence to basic principles; to his opponents, nonetheless, it was further proof of his stubbornness and unwillingness to co-operate. (144)

143. AIR 20/4298, Enclosure 15, 7 October 1940.

144. AIR 16/387, Enclosure 18A, Dowding to Secretary of the War Cabinet, 8 October 1940.

Churchill was left to draw his own conclusions. Before doing this he minuted the Air Ministry, seeking their opinion on filtering and presented them with an opportunity of showing how far apart the two sides were.(145)

On the evening of 13 October, Dowding dined at Chequers. According to Gilbert, there was 'a sense of relief' when he reported that German night attacks lacked purpose. They 'do not concentrate on one target, or on a small area first with incendiary and then with high explosives', he announced.(146) Nevertheless, Churchill's worries were far from removed and the following night, while he was dining with Sinclair and other ministers, a particularly heavy raid was launched during which bombs landed near Downing Street.(147)

On 16 October, while Dowding was still wrestling with the controversy over employing Big Wings in the daylight campaign and preparing himself for the following day's conference on fighter

145. AIR 20/4298, Minute, Churchill to the Air Ministry, 12 October 1940.

146. *Colville Diaries*, p.265, entry for 13 October 1940, and Gilbert, vi, p.841.

147. For details of this large raid, see Gilbert, vi, pp.842-44, and Pile, p.175. For an account from the diary of a German bomber pilot taking part, see Stahl, pp.73-80. A close examination of this London raid is made by Wykeham, pp.170-72, who comments that, over the failure to prevent night bombing, night fighter units and the staff of Fighter Command were rapidly suffering from a 'guilt complex'. The most detailed examination of the raid is given in AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, 'Analysis of a Typical German Air Force Night Raid of the Period', which uses both British and German sources. The total number of Luftwaffe aircraft used was 365.

tactics, Churchill ordered his name to be added to the list of those who received Enigma decrypts.(148) At the same time, the Prime Minister learned that in the previous week, nearly 1,400 people had been killed by bombs in London alone.(149) The magnitude of the threat of the night Blitz had grown, not lessened, and he had the opportunity of experiencing at first hand the controversies it had raised within the Air Ministry. Rightly or wrongly, Dowding had given the impression of believing himself to be the only man in step.

Consequently, Group-Captain Haslam's assertion that it was the Commander-in-Chief's handling of night raids 'that eventually precipitated the call for Dowding's replacement by Sholto Douglas' has much evidence to support it. Nevertheless, this cause must be set beside the equally potent one of his control of day fighting tactics through Park and Leigh-Mallory. His opponents at the Air Ministry found fault in him for both.

* * *

To summarise, in the period from 7 September to 16 October, the pressure to remove Dowding had grown stronger and, to gain perspective over the campaign against him, the importance of the events on the former date should be recognised. That day, while Dowding was planning for Fighter Command 'to go downhill', the

148. Gilbert, vi, p.849, quoting P.M.'s Personal Minute, D.92, 16 October 1940. See also above, Chapter 3, Notes 63-68 inclusive.

149. Ibid, p.855, quoting Chiefs of Staff Committee, Weekly Resumé No.59.

Luftwaffe's heavy afternoon raid on London gave impetus to the critics of his system of tactical defence. That night, when German bombers, virtually unmolested, added to the city's miseries, Dowding's responsibility for night defence was thrown into sharp focus.

It is instructive, then, to examine the burden carried by Dowding over that period of five and a half weeks, and to appreciate his dual obligation. As the day battle reached a climax on 15 September and then changed course, with some relief of the load carried, especially by No.11 Group, the troubles of the night campaign expanded.

The burden can best be realised by looking at Dowding's problems on certain days during that period. For example, on 15 September, usually celebrated since as 'Battle of Britain Day', while Dowding was following each step of an intense daytime battle, his mind was exercised also by the news, which he had received twenty-four hours earlier, of the setting up of the Salmond enquiry. (150) On 27 September, when heavy daylight raids were made on London and Bristol, with some fighter-bombers penetrating to the capital, (151) Dowding was sending his uncomplimentary observations on the Salmond Report to the Air Ministry. (152) And on 8 October, Dowding wrote not only to

150. AIR 16/387, Enclosure 1A, Air Ministry to Dowding, 14 September 1940.

151. Wood and Dempster, pp.365-66.

152. AIR 20/4298, Enclosure 10, Dowding to Air Ministry, 27 September 1940.

Leigh-Mallory concerning Park's complaints against the Duxford Wing, (153) but also to the War Cabinet over night defence, with his highly critical views on filtering. (154)

As Dowding prepared for the conference of 17 October, he well realised the weight of opposition gathered against him. By then he appreciated also that those who disagreed with his policies were trying to impale him on a Morton's Fork of criticism. In their eyes, he had failed to exercise sufficient leadership during the day battle and was showing an intransigent spirit over night defence. They were determined to disparage him for either one, or for both. In addition, it could not have escaped his attention that a guiding hand behind the groundswell of criticism was that of Air Vice-Marshal Sholto Douglas, Deputy Chief of the Air Staff.

153. AIR 16/330, Enclosure 43A, Dowding to Leigh-Mallory, 6 October 1940.

154. AIR 16/387, Enclosure 18A, Dowding to War Cabinet, 8 October 1940.

CHAPTER SEVENCHANGES AT FIGHTER COMMAND AFTER 17 OCTOBER

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NOVEMBER - DECEMBER, 1940

PART ONE: THE MEETING OF 17 OCTOBER AND SUBSEQUENT REACTIONS

The circumstances of Dowding's and Park's last days at Fighter Command have been a matter of disagreement and deep controversy. They attended the Air Ministry conference of 17 October at which Douglas, Leigh-Mallory and Bader were among those also present. This, it is suggested, was part of a plot behind which lurked No.242 Squadron's Adjutant, Flight-Lieutenant P.Macdonald, M.P., who had brought the controversy over Wings to the attention of the Prime Minister, probably after prompting from Leigh-Mallory. That controversy, in the view of a number of writers, was the prime, or only, reason why Dowding and Park were replaced as soon as conveniently possible. Therein lies the theory of a political conspiracy at the top level.(1)

Both men went virtually unrewarded, carrying with them seeds of rancour which grew throughout the remainder of their lives. In 1968 Park still felt compelled to comment that 'to my dying day I shall feel bitter at the base intrigue which was used to remove Dowding and myself as soon as we had won the battle'.(2) Dowding's similar feelings were channelled through Robert Wright's book on the battle, published in the following year.(3)

1. For example, see Wright, Chapters 12 and 13; Deighton, pp.238-39; Orange, pp.127-33; Terraine, pp.194-205 and 220-22; Wood and Dempster, pp.411-13; Bowyer, pp.86-87;; Wykeham, pp.145-47; Townsend, *Duel of Eagles*, pp.469-71; Gelb, p.266.

2. Orange, p.136.

3. Wright, *passim*.

Therefore the circumstances of 'the base intrigue' need careful investigation. 'Was there one? If so, who was involved and with what motives? An examination shows that between the conference and the replacement of Dowding and Park a number of previously little recognised factors came into play. They arrived as pressures from both political and Service sources.

* * *

The meeting of 17 October has assumed a position of such importance for those writers who see it as a carefully staged attempt to undermine Dowding and Park, that it is necessary to examine the occasion in some detail. The first point to appreciate is that this was a meeting which Dowding himself should have called. The lack of liaison between his two subordinates had led to a mutual dislike which affected the most efficient deployment of Fighter Command's resources. (4) The fact that Douglas took the initiative in convening the meeting can be seen as a step in a plan for his own advancement. Nonetheless, Dowding's indecision had left a vacuum which Douglas was ready to fill and someone in authority had to resolve difficulties. Headquarters, Fighter Command had failed in this, so the responsibility fell to the Air Ministry. Newall was at the end of his time there, and the decision was taken by his deputy, Douglas.

4. See Douglas, *Years of Command*, p.90. 'One had to see Leigh-Mallory and Park actually facing each other to realise how strong the clash was between these two forceful personalities'.

When Dowding and Park appeared at the meeting they found their opponents waiting in a metaphorical Big Wing strength. The only man in the room who could be regarded as an ally was Air Vice-Marshal Sir C.J.Quintin Brand, Air Officer Commanding, No.10 Group. Looking round, they could count six senior officers who were, or had been, opponents of their policy.(5) The seventh, Air Marshal Sir Charles Portal, the Chief of the Air Staff designate, although not party to the previous stages of the controversy, in reality favoured the majority view there. Two clerks were present to take notes. What came as a complete surprise to Dowding and Park, however, was the presence of Squadron-Leader Bader, taken along by Leigh-Mallory, in the words of a later writer, as 'one of the men actually doing the daily job'.(6)

In the absence of Newall, who was indisposed, Douglas took the Chair. To assess the full business and spirit of the meeting is not easy, because there was later disagreement over the content of the Minutes. Nevertheless, those published and accepted by a majority present give a reasonably full impression of what was covered.(7)

5. The six were Air Vice-Marshal W.S.Douglas (DCAS), Air Marshal Sir Philip Joubert (ACAS, R), Air Vice-Marshal T.L.Leigh-Mallory (AOC, No.12 Group), Air Commodore J.C.Slessor (D. of Plans), Air Commodore D.F. Stevenson (DHO), and Group-Captain H.G.Crowe (ADAT).

6. Balfour, p.135. For Park's comments, see Townsend, *Duel of Eagles*, pp.470-71. Bader's memory was mistaken when he claimed that Air Vice-Marshal Saul, AOC, No.13 Group, was present. See Bader Notes, p.5.

7. AIR 2/7281, Enclosure 19A, Final Minutes of Conference of 17 October 1940, 1 November 1940. Neither in the meeting, nor later in official correspondence, did Dowding or Park object to Bader's presence. For contrasting views, see Lucas, *Flying Colours*, pp.151-53, and Terraine, pp.215-17.

The agenda is usually examined in terms of daylight tactics, because, of the twenty-seven items noted in the Minutes, twenty-two dealt with that subject. They provide an adequate explanation of the apparent reason for calling the meeting and its main content. Yet a study of that shorter part of the meeting which dealt with night air defence, although covered by only five items in the Minutes, shows its importance. It clearly underlined the differences which had grown between Dowding and the Air Staff over the approach needed, and reinforces the contention that arguments over employing Big Wings in daylight battles were far from the sole reason for changes in the leadership of Fighter Command.

Douglas opened by setting out three propositions to be considered. The first was to outnumber the enemy; the second, to have a co-ordinated plan, with some squadrons engaging fighters while others attacked bombers; the third, for the top layer of fighters to be higher than the enemy's. These ideals, he admitted, could not always be obtained, but he invited comments. (8)

Park responded and, as might be expected, opposed the use of Wing formations in his area for reasons of time, distance and cloud. Instead, for him, pairs of squadrons had achieved better results. (9)

8. AIR 2/7281, Enclosure 19A, Minutes 2 and 3. In the three points, Douglas was being critical of Dowding and Park.

9. Ibid, Minutes 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10. For Park's later recollections of what he said, see Townsend, *Duel of Eagles*, pp.470-71.

When Dowding entered the discussion, he made, at first, no reference to the controversy that had caused such disagreement among the top echelons of his Command. Those who believed that he would restate his basic doctrine of controlled defence, or even advocate the new approaches of No.12 Group, or offer the balm of compromise, were disappointed. Instead, he began by discussing the early identification of the size and intentions of groups of raiders and of improving systems of Control.(10)

Leigh-Mallory, in his turn, said that he would welcome the opportunity of helping No.11 Group and declared that he 'could get a "Wing" of five squadrons into the air in six minutes - and it would be over Hornchurch at 20,000 feet in twenty-five minutes'. If such a formation intercepted only one in ten sorties, it would have been worthwhile.(11)

Joubert continued the criticisms of the existing system by mentioning the shortness of warnings given to Groups, a point of long-standing disagreement between him and the Commander-in-Chief. Dowding said that his orders were that an 'arrow' should be placed on the Operations Table as the first 'counter' was received, yet very high flying raids presented a problem.(12)

As discussion developed, with Park defending his position, it was generally agreed that extra fighter support would help 'since the

10. AIR 2/7281, Enclosure 19A, Minute 6. In Wright, Chapter 13, the impression is given that Dowding supported Park, yet this is not apparent from the Minutes.

11. AIR 2/7281, Enclosure 19A, Minute 11.

12. Ibid, Minutes 12 and 13.

more we could outnumber the enemy, the more we should shoot down'. Dowding then said that, with his Group Commanders, he 'could resolve any difficulties of control involved in sending such support', a rather surprising claim in view of his signal failure to achieve that earlier. All believed that the time factor was a great difficulty.(13)

Bader's presence at the meeting has been seen variously, in terms ranging from a Machiavellian plot to an honest attempt at injecting a practising pilot's realism into the Air Staff. According to the Minutes, he said little and his contribution is reported by only 41 words. He apparently told his listeners nothing new, reminding them that time was the essence of the problem and that a large number of fighters could obtain most effective results. However, the fact that he appeared on that day had a greater significance than his few words; he was being produced like a trump-card by Dowding's opponents to show that Wings actually worked in battle.(14)

After the earlier weeks of controversy, through written accusation and counter-claims, the meeting proceeded in a quiet manner. Portal sought, and received, an assurance that No.12 Group's other responsibilities would not be affected by the despatch elsewhere of a Wing. The importance of early warning from Radio Direction Finding was stressed. Then Douglas summed up.

13. Ibid, Minute 15.

14. Ibid, Minute 16.

This summary emphasised the value of Wing formations, noted that they would be able to operate over No.11 Group area and that Dowding would 'resolve any complications of control'. Sometimes two Wings would fly together and 'for want of a better name such a unit should provisionally be known as a "Balbo"'. All squadrons of a Wing should operate from the same Sector and be controlled by the Sector Commander. In a mass formation the fighter leader would dispense with Sector Control and lead his aircraft into action. When Very High Frequency (VHF) radio was used, in theory a maximum of seven Balbos could be operated. Wings should keep the same squadrons if possible and fly from aerodromes where they would not have to turn to gain height advantage over the enemy.(15)

The meeting then turned to night interception and, from the Minutes, Dowding's unwillingness to meet Air Ministry policy, a battle that had grown from 7 September, becomes clear. When it was suggested that two Hurricane and two Defiant squadrons should form a night-fighting Wing 'on a 1914-1918 basis', Dowding disagreed. He believed that employing Hurricanes in night fighting 'was a dangerous and unsound policy'. He had agreed 'with reluctance to implement the Air Staff decision to do so'. To Dowding's opponents, these opinions were proof of his lack of co-operation and were a further step in his decline.(16)

All of Park's pleadings over previous weeks had come to nothing; he left the meeting realising that, in spite of his protests,

15. Ibid, Minutes 20, 21 and 22.

16. Ibid, Minute 25.

methods would change. His Commander-in-Chief had said no public word that supported his case and had allowed himself to be outmanoeuvred by a group of officers who had previously decided what they wanted and how to obtain it.(17)

For No.12 Group, the result was a triumph. Leigh-Mallory was to be allowed to participate in what remained of the battle under terms that he had laid down. Bader's belief in independent control for a commander leading a large Wing of fighters into battle had received an accolade and this conference marked an important advance in his career.

But the day also witnessed the emergence of Douglas who thus far had played a part in the controversy only by way of Minute sheets, through staff in the Air Ministry who were concerned with tactics, and by pressure behind the scenes. Through attending meetings of the Salmond Committee just a month earlier, then the first meeting of the Night Air Defence Committee (NADC) on 7 October, he was well aware of the general feeling in the Air Ministry that Dowding was proving to be stubborn and less than co-operative over proposed changes in night defence. Therefore, when opportunities of leadership were presented to Douglas, as deputy to a retiring Chief of the Air Staff, he was not slow to take them. After the meeting of 17 October, his hopes were closer to realisation.

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17. For Park's later bitterness, see Townsend, *Duel of Eagles*, pp.470-71. Douglas 'was the public prosecutor'. He and Dowding 'were condemned - that is the only word'. The Wings controversy was used to dismiss Dowding. 'I also was sacked'.

On 20 October the draft Minutes of the conference were issued and copies despatched, with requests for any amendments.(18) As might have been expected, the replies fell into two categories. Those from what could be termed 'The Air Ministry Group' were prepared to accept them, with no more than minor alterations; however, the two senior officers whose practices had been questioned critically and, to a lesser extent, Air Vice-Marshal Sir C.J.Quintin Brand, were dissatisfied and asked for changes.(19)

Not surprisingly, the first to launch a counter-attack was Park, in a letter to the Air Ministry.(20) Enclosing a sheet of amendments, he asked urgently for their inclusion, 'because I cannot agree to the important statement which I made being omitted'. He claimed that the Air Staff note which accompanied the meeting's agenda 'contained some misinformed criticism' of his policy. Therefore at the meeting he had spoken from notes which he had previously typed and he now wanted the enclosed 'Statement by AOC 11 Group' to be included.

This codicil was hardly likely to find favour with his adversaries, as it contained, for example, in paragraph 2 the statement that Douglas, Dowding and Portal had agreed that Park had followed the correct policy, 'and must continue this against future mass attacks by bombers'. Nor were they possibly to be

18. AIR 2/7281, Enclosure 16A, 16C and 16D, 20 October 1940.

19. Ibid, Enclosure 23A, Quintin Brand to Air Ministry, 27 October 1940.

20. Ibid, Park to Air Ministry, 21 October 1940.

impressed by his fourth paragraph which criticised the morale of No.12 Group squadrons which had been taught that safety in the south-eastern area could come only by using Wings of four or five squadrons. Nor again would they approve of paragraph 6, which spoke of the Duxford Wing bringing confusion 'to the fighter defences, the ground defences and the Air Raid Warning system in the South-East'. Nevertheless, Park, a doughty fighter, was determined to speak up in his own defence against what he saw as injustice.

Dowding, in his reply, made no defence of the policy which he had instituted and Park put into practice.(21) Instead, his main attention appeared to be given to smaller quibbles. For example, he disliked the word 'Balbo'. 'I think this is quite horrible'. He would not object to 'Wing', or 'Mass', or 'Swarm', or 'any term that anyone can think of, in preference to "Balbo"'.

He showed a little more awareness, however, of the section of the Minutes that referred to night defence, where he was opposing changes. In connection with Minute 25, he wrote, 'Please do not say that I agree, reluctantly or otherwise, to the diversion of a Hurricane squadron. I am carrying out orders which I believe to be dangerous and unsound with our present strength of fighter squadrons'. This comment encapsulated, for Dowding's opponents, his intransigence. Although related to night defence, it summarised for a number of men, both inside the Air Ministry and outside, the need for a general change in the leadership of Fighter Command.

21. Ibid, Enclosure 17C, Dowding to Air Ministry, 22 October 1940.

Leigh-Mallory's reply, sent on 24 October, was pleased to accept the main part of the Minutes.(22) His only queries regarded the radio control of Balbos by High Frequency, but he contended that, with the existing Group and Command frequencies, seven Balbos could be operated at the same time, through VHF radio.

Park's request for the inclusion of his statement was a matter for thought within the Air Ministry and a Minute was sent to Douglas, asking whether alterations should be made to meet it.(23) Stevenson replied on his behalf on 31 October. 'The minutes shd, stand. D.C.A.S. ... does not agree to the inclusion of AOC No.11 Group's statement. Nor does he think that the remarks in paragraphs 4 and 6 are appropriate to the minutes of a meeting of this kind'.(24)

The same day a reply was sent to Park, informing him that the Air Staff would not agree to the inclusion of his statement, partly because of its length, and 'because it is held to be out of keeping with the rest of the minutes which are intended more as an aide-memoire than as a detailed report of the discussions'.(25)

When Quintin Brand queried several points in the Minutes, he also was told that no alterations could be made. He was informed that

22. Ibid, Enclosure 17B, Leigh-Mallory to Air Ministry, 24 October 1940.

23. Ibid, Enclosure 17D, Note from APS to CAS, to Douglas, 28 October 1940.

24. Ibid, Enclosure 17, Note from Stevenson, to APS to CAS, 31 October 1940.

25. Ibid, Enclosure 19B, Air Ministry to Park, 31 October 1940.

the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff 'was anxious to keep the minutes as short as possible', but that his letter would be placed on the relevant Air Ministry file.(26)

By this stage, the momentum gathered at the meeting, especially under Douglas's leadership, was maintained and the accuracy and fullness of Minutes were not to impede it. Those officers at the Air Ministry who were searching for changes in the leadership and tactics of Fighter Command were in no mood to give the 'Old Guard' any room to manoeuvre. Surprisingly, Dowding had raised little complaint, but the defence put up by Park, his lieutenant, had to be by-passed.

Subsequently, the final Minutes were produced on 1 November and distributed both to those who regarded them as a report of an innovative triumph and to the minority who felt their bias. Dowding's criticism of the word 'Balbo' cut no ice at the Air Ministry and the name continued to appear. However, his complaint over changes in night defence received a better hearing and the Minutes reported his opinions of 'a dangerous and unsound policy'. They added that he agreed 'with reluctance to implement the Air Staff decision', a phrase that underlined his differences with other senior officers.(27)

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26. Ibid, Enclosure 24A, Air Ministry to Quintin Brand, 1 November 1940.

27. Ibid, Enclosure 19A, Final Minutes of Conference of 17 October, 1 November 1940.

PART TWO: THE CONTROVERSY CONTINUES

Any thought that the conference would bring a rapid declaration of peace and goodwill was premature. The controversy continued, not only over the content of the Minutes, but also over the subsequent degree of co-operation between the sides. This was primarily because neither Leigh-Mallory nor Park had changed opinion about who was to exercise command of squadrons flying over the No.11 Group area. Park believed that the Duxford Wing should operate where and when he chose, but Leigh-Mallory wanted them to be under the control of Duxford, flying together as a Wing. (28)

However, the nature of the day battle had changed and the *raison d'être* of employing Big Wings to meet and break up mass attacks no longer held. Instead, during the later part of October, many raids were made by Me.109s and Me.110s, converted into fighter-bombers, making fast hit-and-run raids. Balbos were of little use in countering these tactics. Although the conference of October 17 was looking forward to a new style of fighter defence, the need for a different approach to problems arrived about the end of September, when German plans changed course. (29)

28. See below, Note 33.

29. The last big raid by a massed German formation in daylight was made on 30 September. For details, see Ramsey, *Blitz*, ii, pp.147-51.

In one sense this change was an acknowledgement by leaders of the Luftwaffe that their basic plan of destroying Fighter Command before a seaborne invasion, and of breaking British morale by the power of bombing, had failed. German views advanced since the war sometimes refer to the campaign against Britain as part of the general air war in the West, lasting from May 1940 till June 1941, an indivisible offensive.(30) Yet it was at least partly the magnitude of their bomber losses and the accompanying pressure brought upon crews which caused them to set aside the day battle in the form that they had wanted. This in itself was a victory and a solace to Fighter Command.(31)

The new tactics, using fighters in a way never intended by either their designers or pilots were certainly troublesome. But small formations of fighter-bombers, each equipped with one 250kg. bomb, flying at great heights, racing in to drop their tiny loads on London, or on airfields, presented problems more of a nuisance than a risk of defeat to the RAF and civilians below.

To meet the threat, steps were taken by Dowding and Park. These were necessary for several reasons. First, the Me.109 with a two stage supercharger had a performance above 15,000 feet better than those of Spitfires and Hurricanes. Then there were

30. See for example, *Kesselring Memoirs*, p.75, where he merely says, 'The second phase of the air battle for England, from 6 September 1940 to June 1941, saw the scrapping of the invasion idea', a masterly understatement.

31. AHB Translation, vol.iv, VII/83, 'German Aircraft Losses, September 1939 - December 1940', shows that between 30 June and 30 September, 1940, the Luftwaffe lost 621 bombers destroyed. From 1 October to 31 December, 1940, this number fell to 384.

difficulties both for Radio Direction Finding operators and for the Observer Corps in detecting and tracking German fighters flying so high, especially during cloudy weather. In addition, their speed left little time for the defence to react.

On 21 September, when the change in Luftwaffe tactics became obvious to the leaders of Fighter Command, two Spotting Flights were formed, Nos.421 and 422 (later, No.91 and 92 Squadrons). Their task was to fly very high and send back reports to Headquarters, No.11 Group at Uxbridge, on the height, size and direction of incoming raids.(32)

* * *

Leigh-Mallory wrote to Park on the day after the conference, offering the services of the Duxford Wing.(33) Park's reply, while appreciating the offer, re-iterated yet again his criticisms of past times. He would be pleased to have the Duxford Wing 'if possible once a day', but added that it was 'essential for my Group and Sector Controllers to know the position of the Duxford Wing' so that the ground defences could be warned and 'to avoid confusion to the fighter defences and the issue of unnecessary air raid warnings'.

He laid down six points under which he was prepared to accept the Wing entering his area, coming through the Hornchurch Sector. In this way, claimed Park, not allowing tact to override the

32. See Hough and Richards, p.292, for the dangers of the new work. 'The 109 operated at a higher ceiling than the Spitfire and was also faster at the 35,000 feet level these new patrols flew'.

33. AIR 16/330, Leigh-Mallory to Park, 18 October 1940.

memory of previous controversy, his own squadrons would avoid 'wasting their time investigating friendly aircraft'. After listing those elements in his area that had previously been confused by the operation of the Duxford Wing, he finished with the hope that 'it will get some good fighting'.(34)

When Park sent Evill a copy of the letter two days later, he explained that the new type of German attack might give the Duxford Wing little time to reach the action before the enemy 'would be on their way home'. Therefore he had offered No.12 Group the opportunity of flying a standing patrol, but they had declined, 'preferring to rely on sufficient warning to get into battle before the enemy has slipped out of Kent'.(35)

Never losing an opportunity of explaining what he believed to be the frailties of the Duxford Wing when operating over his area, Park wrote again to Evill on 26 October. On the previous day, Leigh-Mallory has asked permission to send four squadrons south and that was granted. However, Park had received reports of their position from No.12 Group only when they were north of the Thames; after that, they had to be tracked by the Observer Corps. Near Gravesend, the Wing 'broke up and apparently returned home by single squadrons'.

Park had felt uneasy about the actions of the Wing and had ordered his own squadrons to intercept the raid which they had been erroneously reported as engaging. 'Two good Spitfire squadrons' caught the raid 'in spite of the absence of the

34. Ibid, Enclosure 59B, Park to Leigh-Mallory, 20 October 1940.

35. Ibid, Enclosure 59, Park to Evill, 22 October 1940.

Duxford Wing', before it could 'reach and bomb any Vital Point', he wrote, hammering home lesson after lesson. As a result of the failure, 'Leigh-Mallory has now agreed to try out the simple procedure suggested to him in my letter of October 20th'. Park, who had always been doubtful of No.12 Group's ability to fix the position of its Wing when south of the Thames, wanted this information passed on to Dowding. (36)

Yet when the report was laid before Dowding on 27 October, he still appeared indecisive. He minuted, 'SASO. 12 Group had better keep out unless they are invited in', then went on to suggest that because of new German tactics, they might be needed 'in their own territory'. (37)

At that stage, a remarkable step was taken in the controversy, one which, had it occurred at the end of August or in early September, could well have altered the whole nature of Fighter Command's activities. Belatedly - and far too late to change the pattern of events - Dowding produced on 24 October an order, sent to the Air Officers Commanding, No.11 and No.12 Groups, entitled 'Reinforcement of No.11 Group by No.12 Group'. (38) He announced, with an air of decision previously lacking, that 'the following principles are laid down'.

36. Ibid, Enclosure 62A, Park to Evill, 26 October 1940.

37. Ibid, Enclosure 64, Dowding to Evill, 27 October 1940.

38. Ibid, Enclosure 57A, Headquarters, Fighter Command to Nos.11 and 12 Groups, re. Reinforcements, 24 October 1940. In this, Dowding was not disapproving of Leigh-Mallory's policy.

The first was that No.12 Group should be given as much notice as possible when help was needed. Then came the imputation that in the past No.11 Group has requested assistance too soon, and that in future it would probably be limited to times when 'further raids are building up over the Straits of Dover'. The fifth point was that Leigh-Mallory should not send less reinforcement than required, 'but he may send more at his discretion', a palliative to his views. As if to redress the balance, Dowding next said that it was 'imperatively necessary' for No.12 Group to inform No.11 Group of the position of their formations, which should stay within range of R/T control. He ordered that arrangements should be made directly between the Groups, other than in exceptional cases and finished by announcing that No.12 Group had to keep the Command Controller 'informed of the action taken'.

To maintain the momentum of action, Evill minuted the Commander-in-Chief next day, seeking permission to publish a memo to Controllers 'so that they may be aware of the arrangement and the part which they may be required to take in it'.(39) Dowding agreed, but asked his SASO to wait in case alterations were suggested by Groups.(40)

It was too late to alter the entrenched attitudes of both Group Commanders by that time and, over 'subsequent days, great interest was shown at Headquarters, Fighter Command, in the activities of the Duxford Wing over No.11 Group's area.

39. Ibid, Minute 60, Evill to Dowding, 25 October 1940.

40. Ibid, Minute 61, Dowding to Evill, 26 October 1940.

In the first place, Park issued Instruction No.35 to his Controllers, informing them of the later arrangements made for the operations of the Duxford Wing. This document, for once, did not enumerate the faults of the past, but was a clear statement of procedures to be followed. By 0900 hours each day, it was hoped that the No.12 Group Controller would inform his counterpart in No.11 Group of the hours between which the Wing would be at 'Readiness'. Then, as soon as Park's headquarters learned from RDF that raids were building up over the French coast, Leigh-Mallory's Controller would be asked to dispatch the Duxford Wing to a position near Hornchurch to await the enemy. The Hornchurch Controller would follow the progress of the Wing, notifying interested parties 'at frequent intervals'.(41)

At the same time Park wrote again to Evill and examined in further detail various claims made by No.12 Group's squadrons, especially by the 'Dux Balbo', while operating over what he called 'No.11 Group territory' during September. He pointed out that their claims of the proportion of the enemy destroyed, compared with their own losses, were far higher than any registered by other squadrons 'during six months of intensive fighting under 11 Group control; this includes just about every squadron in the Command!'.

Park was very critical of No.302 (Polish) Squadron, 'said to be one of the best performers and prime movers in the Duxford Balbo'. Although working with two excellent squadrons, Nos.229 and 615, its results had been poor when flying in a Wing of three

41. AIR 16/901, No.11 Group Instruction to Controllers, No.35, 26 October 1940.

squadrons, or as one of a pair, when 'it had done worse'. It had failed to keep in touch with other squadrons and had suffered losses 'through pilots being unable to find their way home'.

These points were listed, Park claimed, to underline a particular criticism he made of the use of Wings, namely that individual squadrons 'do not develop the essential squadron fighting tactics and learn to fend for themselves'. Looking ahead to the vagaries of weather in the forthcoming winter, when squadrons would have to work alone, Park grew bitter. 'I think that the No.12 Group mania for Balbos has done a grave disservice'.

He continued by examining three recent occasions when the Duxford squadrons had come south, with, according to him, a total lack of success even in finding, let alone engaging, the enemy. However, pairs of No.11 Group squadrons, guided towards the same raids, had achieved immediate effect. The reason for the failure of the Wing, in his opinion, was 'that the components of the Balbo are so pre-occupied in maintaining their mass formation'.

There was a need 'which I am for ever driving home to my squadron commanders', of being flexible in tactics. Yet squadrons from No.12 Group were imbued with the idea that it was unsafe to fly in formations of smaller than five squadron strength. He personally had visited Nos.74 and 302 Squadrons to explain to them the different conditions obtaining in No.11 Group where 'they are living so close to the German Air Force'.

Relentless to the last in his scorn, he compared the 'far better results' of pilots from Nos.10 and 13 Groups with those of No.12

Group, where 'the Balbo idea' had gained a hold and 'weakened the offensive spirit of individual squadrons.' Park obviously had little time for Leigh-Mallory's support.(42)

* * *

Tuesday 29 October was a day of importance for Headquarters, Fighter Command's estimate of the value of Big Wings, because reports of action submitted by No.11 Group were examined in some detail. Raids launched by the Luftwaffe were mainly attacks on London made by fast-flying Me.109s, hardly easy targets for a Balbo.

The first report dealt with attacks made between 1036 and 1345 hours and showed that RDF gave good warning, 'average times are between 32 and 39 minutes'.(43) No.12 Group's contribution, according to the times shown, was less than promising. They were requested to provide a Wing at 1030 hours; 'it left the ground at 1047 hours but left Duxford at 1107 hours'. This alleged slowness of reaction was noted, with the criticism that, with an earlier start, 'they could have intercepted the enemy raid which bombed the Charing Cross area'.

Park could not forbear to add that No.602 Squadron, 'operating as a Single squadron', tackled fifty Me.109s without any losses to themselves. 'This again emphasises that a resolute Squadron well led is more than a match for the enemy fighters'.

42. AIR 16/330, Enclosure 62A, Park to Headquarters, Fighter Command, 26 October 1940.

43. Ibid, Enclosure 71D, Report from Headquarters, No.11 Group to Headquarters, Fighter Command, 29 October 1940.

His more severe criticism of the Duxford Wing, however, was contained in the report on the afternoon battles, during which some 200 enemy aircraft attacked in three waves, and bombed several aerodromes. (44)

Having noted that the 12 Group Wing took off at 1608, the report registered their three tasks. The first was to patrol the Maidstone-Sheerness line, then to intercept two raids that were crossing the Thames Estuary into Essex. Later they were asked to make a sweep across North Kent.

Under the heading 'Action by Fighter Squadrons', Park and his staff spelt out the worrying aspects of Fighter Command's policy at that time; two Groups, with differing backgrounds, and leaders enmeshed in deep rivalry, were required to co-operate over one area, without the benefit of a single commander.

At 1630 hours the Duxford Wing was asked to intercept the German raids that were approaching Essex. However, No.11 Group Controllers had difficulty in contacting the Balbo 'because of continuous R/T traffic between the Wing and Duxford'. The chance of meeting the enemy was missed and North Weald was bombed before a pair of No.11 Group squadrons could fly there.

Nor, according to Park, were the Wing able to carry out their next allotted task, which was to intercept raids heading for Biggin Hill. Instead, 'AOC No.12 Group recalled the Duxford Wing because of a report that the weather was no longer fine at

44. Ibid, Enclosure 71D, Report from Headquarters, No.11 Group to Headquarters, Fighter Command, 29 October 1940.

Duxford and he was afraid of the difficulty of landing so many squadrons on one aerodrome'. Fortunately, Park added, the Germans took no advantage of the gap left in the defences, 'probably because they saw additional No.11 Group Squadrons climbing in the Biggin Hill area'.

Such reports, issued regularly by Park, show a sense of frustration that, in less straitened circumstances, would have bordered on farce. Nevertheless, bitterness restricted his vision and promoted inflexibility over incorporating the Duxford Wing into a composite defence system. He was attempting the superhuman task of implementing a barely workable policy in which he lacked faith, in collaboration with a fellow commander for whom he had little respect. Above them, the Commander-in-Chief, who had planned for a battle against unescorted bombers, was strangely hesitant in ensuring clarity over the tactics to be used in different circumstances.

Nonetheless, Evill, as SASO, continued to carry out his duties conscientiously. Lawson, the Group-Captain Ops., was asked by him to explore the role played by the Duxford Wing on 29 October, resulting from No.11 Group's criticisms. His report, passed forward on 2 November, mentioned that although information was rather incomplete, several deductions could be made.(45)

The first was that the Balbo need not have assembled over Duxford, but could have gained height 'during their movement to the patrol area', and that they had been ordered off in good time.

45. Ibid, Enclosure 71A, Report from Group-Captain Lawson (G/C Ops), 2 November 1940.

Then came criticism of Park's policy. 'It is not clear', Lawson stated, 'why the Duxford Wing was brought into action during the first attack'. Instead, additional squadrons from No.11 Group might have been used. This was less than fair to Park who had been pressed repeatedly to give early warning of German raids to No.12 Group and accept help from the Big Wing.

Lawson's fourth point showed an appreciation of the demanding role laid before Park. 'It would appear that it is almost impossible for No.11 Group, or No.12 Group for that matter, to control effectively the Wing when it passes into No.11 Group's area'. That was the nub of the problem and should have been foreseen and remedied long before. He mentioned an attempted solution by which a Section of No.11 Group fighters would accompany the Wing over the southern area and, working on an R/T frequency, thereby enable the Wing to be plotted by Park's Controllers. Lawson added, with no small reservation, 'It remains to be seen how this will work out in practice'.

He finished on a note of doubt. No.12 Group should watch for possible attacks on their own area when the Wing had gone south; at least one squadron should be retained in the Duxford Sector. The advantages thus far of the Balbo's operations in No.11 Group 'seem to be negligible', because they were too unwieldy 'for speedy assembly and operation'. In this he admitted that the events of 29 October appeared 'to support the view held by AOC No.11 Group'.

Evill passed this Minute to Dowding, with several recommendations. He did not think that the findings should yet be sent to the Groups, but he set out his conclusions. In the

first of these, he, too, failed to appreciate the invidious position in which Park had been placed over the timing and calling in of assistance from Leigh-Mallory. It was, in his view, difficult to understand why the Duxford Wing had been called 'within five minutes of the first plot of the nine aircraft of the first raid of the day', a judgement which passed by the roots of the controversy. In Evill's view, no call for assistance should have been made before the second or third attack. In the afternoon attacks, he also acknowledged the basic problem of controlling the Balbo while over No.11 Group's area. He concluded that, in view of German raids on East Anglian aerodromes, No.12 Group 'must be careful not to divert too great a strength away from its own responsibilities'.(46)

Dowding's Minute to Evill in reply displayed insensitivity towards the antagonism that had existed for months. On the one hand, Leigh-Mallory had been desperate to get his Wing into action in the south; on the other, Park had been blamed for calling them too late. Yet the Commander-in-Chief's response announced that No.12 Group should not be called in unless Park's squadrons were in trouble. 'It is absurd to call on No.12 Group', he concluded, 'when only two of 11 Group's Squadrons have been dispatched', a reply hardly likely to satisfy either Leigh-Mallory or Park.(47)

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46. Ibid, Minute 72, Evill to Dowding, 4 November 1940.

47. Ibid, Minute 73, Dowding to Evill, 5 November 1940.

The simmering controversy was not yet solved, but had lost a great deal of point through the change in German tactics, which presented the RAF with the awesome task of solving the problem of night bombing. This burden came to occupy Dowding's attention increasingly. Nonetheless, there was still time for him to issue a further and, as it happened, final Operational Instruction regarding the reinforcement of No.11 Group by its neighbours. Produced on 13 November, the document was divided into two sections, namely 'Principles' and 'Procedure'.(48)

Under the former heading, attempts were made at compromise, which, however, failed to address the fatal weakness that, when in action outside its own area, the Duxford Balbo was being asked to serve two masters simultaneously. Dowding's Instruction tried to limit the use of the Wing to 'special circumstances', suggesting that No.11 Group should meet its usual responsibilities with its own squadrons. The actual methods for the Balbo were to be decided by No.12 Group, 'subject to the allotted task being adequately performed'. Leigh-Mallory was reminded of his duty to protect his own area, although there was always the possibility of employing 'an occasional large reinforcing formation by pre-arrangement for the purpose of surprising the enemy'.

An innovation, suggested under 'Procedure', brought some relief to No.11 Group's Controllers, because it ordered that the Big Wing should not fly south of the River Thames, or of the south

48. Ibid, Enclosure 74A, Operational Instruction No.43, from Headquarters, Fighter Command to Nos.11 and 12 Groups, re. Reinforcing No.11 Group from No.12 Group, 13 November 1940.

bank of the Thames Estuary. Generally, No.12 Group would have two squadrons at fifteen minutes 'Readiness' and requests for more would come from the Command Controller. In action, Duxford would have R/T control of its own squadrons, while No.12 Group would be given, simultaneously with No.11 Group, 'all available RDF information down to the latitude of Dungeness-Gris Nez'.

Such arrangements, however carefully planned, depended for fulfilment on a large degree of goodwill and co-operation. Whatever quantities of those virtues had existed in early August had virtually evaporated by mid-November when Instruction No.43 was produced in an attempt to mend fences.

* * *

In fact, Park and Leigh-Mallory were still at loggerheads, through the agency of written reports, right up to 17 November, by which time the Commander-in-Chief had learned that he was to be posted on a mission to the USA. Here was proof indeed that Dowding had failed to solve their disputes. Their last argument resulted from Park's Report of 11 Group's activities in September and October, which, once again, lost no opportunity of belittling the Duxford Wing. 'In ten sorties, it effected one interception and destroyed one enemy aircraft'. At every turn he showed a dislike of the Wing's approach and methods, offering no single word of thanks for their efforts, or for incorporating their strength into a defensive system.(49)

49. AIR 16/635, Enclosure 29A, Park to Headquarters, Fighter Command, 7 November 1940.

Leigh-Mallory's reply to these points was equally direct, again blaming the lateness and paucity of information from No.11 Group as the prime cause of the lack of success for No.12 Group's squadrons. In his view, the Duxford Wing had proved that a formation of up to 60 fighters could be 'controlled satisfactorily' and also 'suffers fewer casualties'.(50)

Dowding's vacillation over these differences lasted until the end and was shown by the way in which he was able to see both points of view at the same time. In a letter to the Air Ministry on the day after the Prime Minister had confirmed Sinclair's decision to remove him from Fighter Command, Dowding wrote that he supported 'the 11 Group rather than the 12 Group point of view'. Yet, he added, this opinion 'must be qualified by the remark that the use of small formations must not involve attempts to climb in the presence of the enemy who has already achieved height superiority'. Once again, he was failing to offer a clear policy to be followed easily and harmoniously by both Group commanders.(51)

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50. Ibid, Enclosure 36B, Leigh-Mallory to Headquarters, Fighter Command, 17 November 1940.

51. Ibid, Enclosure 34A, Dowding to the Air Ministry, 15 November 1940.

PART THREE: GROWING INVOLVEMENT OF POLITICIANS IN QUESTIONS
OF LEADERSHIP

Writers who have examined Dowding's controversies with the Air Staff have made much of the conference of 17 October.(52) They have, nevertheless, overlooked the importance of another problem facing the Commander-in-Chief that day.

Marked 'Personal and Private', a letter arrived from Churchill, enclosing a paper on night air defence, written the previous day by Admiral P.S.V. Phillips, Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff (VCNS).(53) The paper had been produced at the Prime Minister's request and was 'purely private and for my information. I send it to you on the same footing'.(54) Dowding was asked to comment.

It seems that Churchill, while realising how far Dowding's views and approach diverged from those of his colleagues, nonetheless appreciated the weight of responsibility laid on his shoulders. He was attempting to offer help.

52. See above, Note 1.

53. AIR 16/676, October 1940, Night Air Defence: correspondence of AOC-in-C, Fighter Command with Prime Minister, Enclosure 2A, Paper on Night Air Defence by Admiral P.S.V. Phillips, Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff (VCNS), 16 October 1940.

54. Ibid, Enclosure 1A, Churchill to Dowding, 17 October 1940.

The gist of the paper was, however, similar to the thoughts of the Air Ministry and therefore unlikely to find favour. Phillips wrote that, to his knowledge, there was 'a very strong opinion among numbers of Officers of the Air Force both on the higher and lower levels' that the problem should be met in different ways. He said that Airborne Interception was promising for the future 'but the hard fact is that it does not deliver the goods today'. Therefore, 'simpler methods' should be introduced, using eight-gun fighter squadrons. There were, claimed Phillips, 65 fighter squadrons and as the menace of night bombing was so great, three of these should be employed on night interception.

In company with a number of Dowding's critics, he looked back to what had happened in the First World War, when two fighter squadrons had stopped the raids on London 'in about six weeks'. He then compared the situation with Fighter Command's inability at the start of the present war, to protect North Sea convoys, by using 'their modern scientific methods'. They had succeeded, he claimed, after the Admiralty's suggestion of returning to 'simpler bow and arrow methods' of patrolling the sea lanes.

The Admiral also believed that fighters should patrol over London on 'Fighter Nights', when the guns would be silent. He was sure that if 'enemy aircraft were brought tumbling down on the housetops', the population would be satisfied.

Dowding's reply gave the Admiral's opinion no quarter. The note was returned with marks beside twelve points on which he commented, often laconically, parrying almost every suggestion made. The Commander-in-Chief referred to Phillips's plan for employing fighters as 'a Micawber-like method of ordering them

to fly and wait for something to turn up'. In Dowding's view, the only salvation lay in using Airborne Interception for fighters and radio aids for searchlights. He added, in his own hand, that he would try a Fighter Night. 'Don't think it likely to succeed now. Will wish to try when fighter is better than gun'. (55)

One mark of a great tactical commander in war is his readiness and ability to improvise; in this, Dowding was singularly lacking in the face of what was feared to be a threat of magnitude. Undoubtedly, his search for the ideal air defence at night was laudable, but failed to meet the current problem. Churchill, who would not have forwarded the admiral's suggestions had he not favoured them, was unlikely to be impressed with his reply.

Three days later, the Prime Minister gained further evidence of Dowding's distance from the thinking of the Air Staff when he received a reply from Sinclair to his Minute(56) enquiring into details of filtering. In essence, Sinclair believed that Dowding's principle of passing all filtering through Headquarters, Fighter Command, brought earlier air-raid warnings for civilians, but certainly led to squadrons being called to action less quickly. The Air Ministry felt it would be better to pass filtering to Group headquarters for several reasons. Firstly, this had already been done since the formation of more remote Groups, viz., Nos.9, 10 and 14. Secondly, in the case of night interception, 'the authoritative committee under the

55. Ibid, Enclosure 1B, Dowding to Churchill, 17 October 1940.

56. AIR 20/4298, Enclosure 15, Churchill to Air Ministry, 12 October 1940.

Chairmanship of Sir John Salmond' had recommended it. Thirdly, as all aircraft would shortly be equipped with Identification Friend or Foe (IFF), filtering would be de-centralised. Lastly, when larger number numbers of aircraft were encountered in 1941, the Fighter Command filter-room would suffer 'an impossible congestion'.(57)

Once again, the Prime Minister was forced to question the principles on which Dowding had based his action. In this case, the Air Ministry gave the impression that whereas the Commander-in-Chief's scheme had worked in the past, they had longer vision and were planning for future circumstances.

The rising star of Douglas's ambition was seen on the same day, when he chaired a conference on Lorenz beams.(58) Over the following week he led a number of investigations into the urgent changes needed in night air defence. In addition, on 21 October he attended the second meeting of the Night Air Defence Committee, again under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister.(59) There, he was able to witness the Air Ministry overriding Dowding on a crucial matter. Minute 25 stated that it had been decided 'as an experiment, that three 8-gun Fighter Squadrons should be earmarked for night fighting'.(60)

57. Ibid, Enclosure 23, Air Ministry to Churchill, 20 October 1940.

58. Ibid, conference on Lorenz beams, 20 October 1940.

59. CAB 81/22, Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Night Air Defence Committee, 21 October 1940.

60. AIR 20/4298, Enclosure 18K, Minute 25, 21 October 1940. The three squadrons taken were Nos. 73 (soon to be replaced by No.87), 85 and 151. See Air 41/17, ADGB, iii, p.53.

The taking of three Hurricane squadrons was an important step in Dowding's decline, because it epitomised the superseding of his logical approach to night defence by the pragmatism of the needs of the moment. There was no time to develop the ideal solution and, with so many day squadrons available, emergency measures had to be taken.

The Prime Minister's perception of the widening gulf was sharpened by a letter he received from Dowding on 24 October, in which the Commander-in-Chief complained not only of the cost of changing the filtering procedure, but also of 'the expenditure of my time in arguing with the Air Staff every intimate detail of my organisation'. He added a point of which the Prime Minister was now acutely aware, and one which could no longer be overlooked. 'I have to fight the Air Staff on so many important issues'. (61)

Although many pilots knew that the Hurricane was far from suitable as a night-fighter, the feeling that 'something should be done' was in the minds of many. It was summarised by one of No.85 Squadron, posted south on 23 October. Seven days previously was Trafalgar Day, 'and "England expects"'. He went on, 'We were all fighters whose duty it was to defend Britain by night as well as by day'. London was being bombarded 'but where

61. AIR 16/677, May 1938-October 1940, Air Chief-Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding: correspondence, Dowding to Churchill, 24 October 1940.

were we, its appointed guardians, yet incapable of defending its seven million citizens? It was high time we came to their rescue'. The challenge was one which 'could not be refused'.(62)

* * *

During October, British scientists were able to draw deductions from the night bombing pattern adopted by the German pathfinder *Geschwader*, KG.100. Their predictions were an accurate assessment of the techniques which would be employed to great effect at certain following stages of the Blitz and which were, subsequently, used by the RAF. A note from Lindemann to Churchill on 24 October pointed out that the Luftwaffe unit was dropping many incendiary bombs and, as they could not be aimed accurately, there was reason to believe that the aircraft were 'fitted with special devices to assist in blind bombing on these expeditions in order to start fires on the target which any subsequent machines without special apparatus can use'. Such predictions from scientists were worrying for the Government and brought the defence against night bombing to wider notice.(63)

An associated unwelcome factor was the growing rate of civilian casualties, which were so much heavier during night raids than they had been during daylight attacks. Quoting official figures, a contemporary aeronautical magazine pointed out that 'air raid casualties in Great Britain during September were 6,954 killed

62. P.Townsend, *Duel in the Dark* (London, 1986), p.95.

63. Quoted in Price, *Instruments of Darkness*, p.41, Lindemann to Churchill, 24 October 1940.

and 10,605 seriously injured, an average of 250 killed and 350 injured a day'.(64) Although civilians had proved to be remarkably resilient under air attack, there was constant pressure on morale.

From the end of October until mid-November, Dowding's control over night defence was often by-passed. He still had high hopes of profit accruing from the Night Interception Trials held in the Kenley and Tangmere Sectors, although results were disappointing as a rapid solution to problems.(65) The Commander-in-Chief spent much time on night defence. 'I am just off on a nocturnal expedition', he wrote to Beaverbrook on 29 October, 'and will ring you up when I get back to try and fix a convenient time for a short talk'.(66) It is now obvious that his aim for the ideal requirement was admirable and correct, seeking fighters equipped with AI and controlled by ground radar. His nocturnal expeditions had confirmed his belief that 'haphazard methods will never succeed in producing more than an occasional fortunate encounter'.(67)

64. Aeroplane, 25 October 1940.

65. AIR 16/379, Night interception: test of new system in Kenley sector, September 1940-January 1941, Enclosure 5A, 28 October 1940; Enclosure 6A, 3 November 1940; Enclosure 7A, 4 November 1940; Enclosure 8A, 17 November 1940.

66. Beaverbrook Papers, BBK D/28, Ministry of Aircraft Production, Dowding to Beaverbrook, 29 October 1940.

67. AHB Monograph, Signals (3), vol.4, p.131. Sir Kenneth Porter recollected that, in an effort to meet criticism, Dowding insisted, on a night of bad weather, that No.264 Squadron (Defiants) should be put up to demonstrate that Fighter Command was trying to do something. Crews were instructed to bale out if unable to land. Porter Interview, 19 August 1991.

Far greater impetus came from the Air Ministry where, for example, a note from Sir Arthur Street, the Permanent Under-Secretary, to various officers, demanded action on the Salmond Report and showed how it should be registered. (68) On 30 October, Group Commanders held a conference to discuss night defence, (69) and the next day Churchill, at a meeting of the War Cabinet Defence Committee, summarised their problem. 'Our power of survival depends on the maintenance of life in this island - this postulates continued superiority in air defence and successful countering of night bombing'. (70)

The extent of the problem facing the nation, and, his enemies would have claimed, Dowding's failure to meet it, is shown by an examination of the figures of successes achieved by night-fighters. During September and October, the Luftwaffe flew an estimated 11,180 sorties in making night attacks, which caused widespread damage, especially in London, and took a heavy toll of civilians. In that period, the RAF shot down seven machines. (71)

* * *

An example of political intervention in the running of Fighter Command was shown earlier, when Miss Irene Ward's contribution

68. AIR 2/7341, Memo from Permanent Under-Secretary, 26 October 1940.

69. AIR 16/635, Enclosure 18A, Minutes of conference of 30 October 1940, 7 November 1940.

70. AHB Monograph, Signals (3), vol.4, p.127.

71. See AIR 41/17, ADGB, iii, p.194, for October figures.

was noted. (72) Those who believe that there was a political plot to overthrow Dowding are mistaken, but certainly several politicians exercised what they recognised as their duty and right to make opinions known on matters of air defence. These related directly to Dowding's strategy and tactics in battle.

The Adjutant of No.242 Squadron, under the command of Squadron-Leader Douglas Bader, was Flight-Lieutenant Peter Macdonald, then aged 45, who held a dual role. Not only did he have duties connected with his squadron, but also carried the considerable responsibility of being Member of Parliament for the Isle of Wight, a position held since 1924. Macdonald was perfectly placed to hear the 'complaints made daily at Duxford, especially by his Squadron commander, that there was little opportunity of becoming involved in the main battle.

At some stage of the controversy, Macdonald visited Parliament and met Harold Balfour, the Under-Secretary of State for Air. According to Balfour's autobiography, (73) he refused to discuss the controversy with Macdonald, who 'then asked if I could arrange for him to see Churchill. I replied that I could do no such thing, but that as an M.P. he had the right to ask to see the Prime Minister'. Macdonald followed up this advice and, through the agency of one of the Prime Minister's secretaries,

72. See above, Chapter 3, Note 175.

73. See Balfour, pp.132-33.

a meeting was arranged.(74) According to Balfour, 'He saw Churchill and hence down the pipe-line came the Churchill enquiries'.

None of the books that relate the incident offers a date for the meeting, and the only remaining source of information, the Churchill Papers, will not be open for many years.(75) Balfour is unreliable. He speaks of his own visit to Duxford, which took place on 2 November, before referring to Macdonald's intervention, which was, in his story, followed by the Air Ministry conference of 17 October. He also mentions visits made to Duxford by the Prime Minister and also the Secretary of State for Air 'just a week before he asked me to pay my visit'. An examination of the Duxford Operations Record Book shows that Sinclair was certainly there on 26 October, in company with Sir Louis Greig and Sir Hugh Seeley, but there is no mention of a visit made by Churchill; it is difficult to believe that such an event would have escaped the aerodrome's record. Nor is there any evidence in that book of Balfour's visit, but that could well have been made on a far less official basis.(76)

74. In view of his feelings towards Dowding, this was probably E.A.Seal. See above, Chapter 6, Note 133.

75. The question of the date of the meeting has been taken up in correspondence with Dr Martin Gilbert. Dr Gilbert wrote in reply, 'On your specific point, the Churchill/Peter Macdonald meeting, I have drawn a blank. The engagement diaries, though full, are not complete'. Letter, Dr M.Gilbert, 28 July 1991. He has kindly offered to continue the search.

76. AIR 28/232, Duxford ORB, 26 October 1940. Sinclair's visit is also mentioned in Sir Hugh Dundas's diary for that day. See H.Dundas, *Flying Start* (London, 1988), p.53.

Probably, Macdonald's meeting with the Prime Minister was held in the week following the Air Ministry conference of 17 October. Then, when Churchill asked for further details and investigations to be made, Sinclair visited Duxford on the 26th and Balfour about seven days later.

It is most likely that Macdonald's intervention was made entirely on his own initiative and not, as some have suggested, as part of a conspiracy at the instigation of Leigh-Mallory or Bader. His motive was uncertain. The kindest explanation offered is that he was fulfilling a Member's duty of informing the Prime Minister, in the national interest. Another reason offered is that he saw the opportunity of becoming involved in the country's affairs over a matter in which he believed No.12 Group to be in the right. The least charitable critics accuse him of 'sneaking' behind the back of his Commander-in-Chief, to whom he should have owed loyalty.(77)

77. See Bader Notes, Appendix A, pp.1-2. See also Lucas, *Flying Colours*, Chapter 13. In the opinion of Air Marshal Sir Denis Crowley-Milling, 'Douglas Bader, L-M and all of us were totally unaware of this approach ... Douglas would not have allowed it for a moment and rightly so'. Letter, Sir Denis Crowley-Milling, 4 July 1989. Of course, not all agree. J.Foreman, *Battle of Britain: The Forgotten Months, November and December, 1940* (London, 1988), p.132, writes of the 'machinations of Trafford Leigh-Mallory, Commander-in-Chief [sic] 12 Group, which were supported by Douglas Bader'. Foreman's fallibility with facts, however, is shown on the same page, where he refers to Dowding being sent to a Training Command on 25 November 1940. The 'conspiracy theory' is advanced by H.Halliday, *242 Squadron* (London, 1982), p.87, who claims that Bader 'packed clout and influence far exceeding his rank', and mentions Deighton's references to 'the influence of Macdonald, the M.P. Adjutant with upper class connections, who probably used his own influence on Bader's behalf'.

What has seldom been recognised by those who link Dowding's fate solely to the controversy over daytime tactics, is that the Prime Minister, by the time of Macdonald's intervention, had had in his possession for over two weeks Salmond's forthright letter asking for Dowding to be replaced. At the same time, Churchill himself, through his chairmanship of the Night Air Defence Committee, had been able to make a close judgement of the Commander-in-Chief.

* * *

As soon as Balfour had visited Duxford, he wrote a report, which is generally known as the Balfour Memorandum.(78) His judgement came down very firmly on the side of Bader and of Wing-Commander A.B.Woodhall, the Duxford Sector Controller, who had lost no opportunity of laying before him their ideas and complaints. Balfour said that his visit had confirmed the fears gained in the previous week by Sinclair, that 'there is a conflict of operational views as between No.12 Group and No.11 Group', and that the differences had 'become a personal issue with the pilots, who feel resentful against 11 Group and its AOC as well as the Air Ministry'.

There followed a catalogue of dissatisfaction. No improvement, they claimed, had come after the Air Ministry conference of 17 October and the Duxford Wing had not been able to engage the Germans in action since the end of September.(79)

78. AIR 16/375, Enclosure 10B, Balfour to Air Ministry, 2 November 1940.

79. Here, Balfour was displaying a lack of awareness of the change in German tactics.

Duxford squadrons 'are never called upon to function, according to their new practised tactics of Wing Formation, until too late'. Also, they were facing 'resistance by 11 Group to a point which makes them - 12 Group - so biased as to feel that 11 Group object to their poaching on that Group's territory and are jealous of the Wing Formation being likely to shoot down 11 Group Germans'. Nonetheless, they claimed to have friends serving under Park who 'are entirely sympathetic to the Wing Formation viewpoint that they are being ignored and wasted'. These 11 Group pilots were 'fine material', but, as a result of constantly having to meet the enemy forces in superior numbers, 'are becoming unnecessarily shaken in their morale'. Balfour added that they were also not holding off the enemy, which could be achieved by employing larger formations.

Bader had told him that the Duxford Wing looked forward to a renewal of the mass daylight raids, when, given time to gain height and position, 'he is absolutely certain of taking enormous toll'.

There had been a complaint that 'Fighter Command Control Room is not allowed to transmit' RDF information from south of the Thames. Woodhall had obtained some of his own from the Observer Corps, but this initiative was now stopped.

Copies of this memorandum were sent immediately to Douglas, Portal and Sinclair. Douglas at once wrote to Dowding, enclosing a copy of Balfour's findings, with a covering letter that left no doubt where his sympathies lay. (80) He referred to the

80. AIR, 16/375, Enclosure 10A, Douglas to Dowding, 3 November 1940.

differences between Park and Leigh-Mallory which 'were so patent at the conference', and continued by asking the Commander-in-Chief to act decisively. 'I think that it is important that this difference of opinion should be resolved since it seems to be leading to a good deal of bitterness not only between the two Air Officers Commanding but between the squadrons in the two Groups', a situation that he claimed had been apparent for some time. 'This obviously cannot be allowed to go on, and I think that it is for you to put the matter right by an authoritative statement of your views', a not unreasonable request for a decision which 'could be far more satisfactory than for the Air Ministry to try and act as referee'.

Douglas again unfolded his colours. 'I am inclined to support Leigh-Mallory's view', and he believed that it would be good sense 'to encourage 12 Group in their efforts to bring in superior numbers to intercept the enemy on the way home, even if they cannot get their "balbo" up in time to intercept him before he reaches his objectives'. This was a restatement of Douglas's belief, held since pre-war days, but did not fit with Dowding's plan, which demanded early interception. Nevertheless, its employment would have brought benefit to Fighter Command.

'I have feeling - which may not be justified', claimed Douglas, 'that Park still had a sub-conscious aversion to another Group coming down and fighting in his area'. He hoped that more information would be passed to No.12 Group to assist their quick response.

At the end he asked, 'May I leave the matter in your hands'. The postscript added, 'The Under-Secretary of State asks me to say that he hopes Bader will not get into trouble for having been so outspoken'.

The Balfour Memorandum was passed by Dowding to Evill for investigation and comment and the SASO concisely dissected it into four points. The first, regarding insufficient RDF information being passed to No.12 Group had been dealt with by him on 11 October, through an Order. Secondly, No.12 Group's complaint about being refused reports from the Observer Corps had arisen because, according to the Southern Area Commandant of the Corps, their requests interfered with essential work. In the third place, answering their grievance of the Wing being called too late, Evill believed that recently they had, on the contrary, been called far too early by No.11 Group. The last point, relating to lost opportunities of shooting down enemy aircraft was, in the SASO's view, now out of date, because the Germans had changed the nature of attack.(81)

Using Evill's Minute, Dowding instantly replied to Douglas, parrying each point made.(82) He admitted, however, the extent of the controversy. 'I agree that this operation is causing so much friction and ill-feeling that I must withdraw the control of combined operations between Nos.11 and 12 Groups from the Group Commanders themselves and issue orders through my own Operations Room'. At last, there was to be a single commander

81. Ibid, Minute, Evill to Dowding, 4 November 1940.

82. Ibid, Dowding to Douglas, 6 November 1940.

in battle. Dowding went on to point out that 'continuous operation of the Wing of five Squadrons cannot be justified in existing circumstances' and that No.12 Group should not overlook responsibility for their own area. 'Leigh-Mallory has many commitments of his own', he pointed out, 'and should "keep his eye in the boat"'.

Finally, the Commander-in-Chief, obviously riled, replied to the postscript. He wondered why an Under-Secretary of State had listened to 'the accusations of a junior officer against the Air Officer Commanding another Group and putting them on paper with the pious hope that the officer will not get into trouble'. He suggested that Balfour, who had been in the Service during the First World War, should have known better.

Then he turned to the Commanding Officer of No.242 Squadron, the rising star for some senior RAF officers. A good deal of the ill-feeling caused 'has been directly due to young Bader. That officer, whatever his other merits, suffers from an over-development of the critical faculties'. Recent events 'might give an opportunity of moving young Bader to another station where he would be kept in better control. His amazing gallantry will protect him from disciplinary action if it can possibly be avoided'.

By this time, unknown to him, Dowding was approaching his final days at Fighter Command. Ironically, it was he, not Bader, who was about to be moved 'to another station'. For Dowding's opponents, Bader's aggressive attitude epitomised a new chapter in the war; therefore ranks were closed to ensure protection for the chief practitioner of flying Wings in action.

On 17 November, after Dowding had learned of his own future, Portal, the new Chief of the Air Staff, wrote to him, referring to the correspondence that followed the Balfour Memorandum. The order was severe, informing him that 'the Secretary of State has directed that no reproof should be offered to either of the two officers on account of the conversations referred to'.(83) The sharp edge of criticism found in many of Dowding's previous responses to the Air Ministry had left him when a reply was made. He wrote simply, 'With reference to your letter of November 17th, no reproof has been or will be offered by me to either Woodhall or Bader'.(84)

In his position as Under-Secretary of State for Air, Balfour had, of course, a duty to be concerned with events at Fighter Command. He had a dual qualification for this, through his experiences as a former fighter pilot and also in his role as a politician, answerable to Parliament. There is no doubt where his sympathies lay in the controversy.(85)

Another example of his involvement occurred on 5 November, during a discussion with Stanley Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner, at the Air Ministry. First, Balfour gave more

83. Ibid, Enclosure 27A, Portal to Dowding, 17 November 1940.

84. Ibid, Enclosure 28A, Dowding to Portal, 17 November 1940.

85. The extent of Balfour's involvement will probably never be fully known. He was an astute politician, with 'an excellent political nose'; *Channon Diaries*, p.244. Although the Balfour Papers in the House of Lords Record Office contain a typescript, 'Dunkirk Days - Battle of Britain: As seen from desk of U.S. of S. For Air', pp.128-40, the following section on the Battle of Britain is, surprisingly, not included. HLRO, Balfour Papers, No.199, Historical Collection.

evidence of the differences between Beaverbrook and the Air Ministry; the Minister of Aircraft Production 'could only think of the war in terms of a fortnight ahead', and had influenced Churchill. They also agreed that the appointment of Portal and Freeman made 'a great improvement in their higher direction of the Air Force'.

The talk then turned to 'a good deal of feeling that the time has come when ... Dowding should be removed from the Command of Fighter Command'. Bruce put this down to 'Dowding's incapacity to co-operate with anyone'. Balfour's main argument was that there were 'so many currents running against Dowding' that he would be replaced within three months; in that case, should not the Commander-in-Chief go at once and 'avoid the friction which the next three months were certain to engender'?

As a replacement, Balfour suggested Joubert, but, according to Bruce, 'he was only one of several that they have in mind'. (86)

* * *

Another recorded political intervention came on 6 November. After a meeting of the Conservative 1922 Committee, one of its vice-chairmen, Sir Reginald Clarry, wrote to Churchill. He had chaired the meeting and 'was requested to write to you the lack

86. Bruce Papers, M/100/1, 5 November 1940, Australian Archives, Belconnen, Canberra, Australia.

of confidence in which Sir Hugh Dowding is held in certain quarters of the personnel of the Force, and the grave concern felt by my Executive'. (87)

An opinion concerning the leadership coming from such an unusual source demands some explanation. The members of the Executive Committee at the time, under the chairmanship of Mr.W.Spens, appeared to have little interest in, or knowledge of, Air Force matters. The closest, probably, was Admiral Sir Murray Sueter, who had some connections with the Royal Naval Air Service. Others, like Colonel Charles Ponsonby, or Mr.W.Emrys-Evans, were hardly close to the wrestling going on within the Air Ministry.

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 November, at which 78 members were present, show no evidence of the origin of Clarry's complaint. After the previous Minutes had been read, the business of the week was outlined, reports taken from Party groups, then 'Mr Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty addressed the Committee and answered a number of questions'.

Where did Clarry gain his information and who persuaded him to write ? The closest association with the controversy could have been through Macdonald, whose name appeared twice in the Minutes

87. Quoted in Gilbert, vi, p.909. For Clarry's letter, and Churchill's reply, which recommended that the 1922 Committee should not become 'a kind of collecting house for complaints', see PREM 4/3/6.

during 1939, or through Balfour.(88) Worries over night air defence were raised at the meeting of 16 October 1940, when Minute 6 reported that 'it was the sense of the Committee that a debate should be held in Secret Session on Air-Raid Defence generally, and especially of London'. The fact that worries over Dowding's leadership of night defence were prevalent then, and that the Air Ministry conference on fighter tactics followed the very next day could have some connection. If so, the link might have been Balfour, who addressed the Committee a little later, on 4 December, 'especially in connection with the methods being adopted to counter night-bombing'. Others taking an interest in the conduct of the air war at the time included Sir Louis Greig and Sir Hugh Seeley, both of whom accompanied Sinclair on his visit to Duxford on 26 October.(89)

Certainly, a number of politicians were well aware of what was going on between Dowding and the Air Ministry. For example, Hugh Dalton, a Labour M.P. and Minister of Economic Warfare, recorded in his diary for 15 November that he met Sinclair and discussed Portal, the new Chief of the Air Staff. 'I praise Portal', he noted 'and he says that there was strong pressure for Dowding which he is sure he was right to resist. Dowding has now got stereotyped, keeps things to himself, and has been losing the confidence both of his subordinates and his equals'. These

88. Minute Book of the Conservative Party 1922 Committee, 1938-1943, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Previous occasions when either RAF matters, or Macdonald, were mentioned in the Minutes were 11 July 1938; 27 February 1939; 27 March 1939; 4 October 1939; 22 November 1939; 6 December 1939; 17 July 1940 and 16 October 1940.

89. Ibid, 16 October 1940.

remarks summarised the opinions of Dowding held at the Air Ministry. 'Within a few days', Dalton continued, 'it will be announced that he is being shifted to a job in America where he can do very good work'. (90)

90. *The Second World War Diary of Hugh Dalton, 1940-1945*, edited by B.Pimlott (London, 1986), p.102.

PART FOUR: THE REPLACEMENT OF DOWDING AND PARK,

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER, 1940

Some of the greatest confusions regarding changes in leadership at Fighter Command after the Battle of Britain relate to the sequence of events which led to Dowding's removal from office on 25 November. These were brought to light - and considerable scrutiny - after the publication of Wright's biography in 1969. There, he quoted Dowding as saying that he was dismissed immediately by a telephone call from Sinclair 'in the second week in November'. Upon questioning the 'perfectly absurd' decision, Dowding was told that it 'had been reached, and that was that, with no explanation for such a precipitate step taken'.

To Wright, this typified 'the long story of discourtesy, and even of common decency [sic], that was shown to Dowding by officialdom', adding the Commander-in-Chief's comment, 'They just got rid of me'. The author then showed confusion over dates, placing the phone call on 16 November, which was in the third week of November, not the second. Greater confusion was to result from his diatribe over the following pages, where both he and Dowding gave the controversy over Big Wings as the root cause of the dismissal, with no mention of differences over night fighting. (91)

91. See Wright, pp.241-44.

Later, Wright explained the part played by Churchill in Dowding's fortunes, suggesting that Service commanders who earned the Prime Minister's disfavour were replaced. (92) He added that, about the time of Sinclair's phone call, a suggestion was made by Beaverbrook that Dowding should 'go on a tour' of the USA. 'At the Prime Minister's request', he added, the Commander-in-Chief went to see Churchill. According to Wright, Dowding claimed, 'Churchill told me how he felt about my being replaced as Commander-in-Chief of Fighter Command. He expressed to me his surprise that this should have been done "in the moment of victory"'. (93)

Wright then suggested that Churchill must have known what was going on. He wrote of 'the political intervention of the adjutant of Douglas Bader's squadron', adding that since Dowding's 'lone stand against Churchill at the Cabinet meeting of 15 May', until the time when 'ill-advised support was given by authority to Dowding's opponents in their conception of the big-wing tactics', the Commander-in-Chief 'was a marked man'. (94)

Such unsupported accusation carried dangers and some of these came to light in January 1970 through correspondence in *The Times*. MRAF Sir John Slessor questioned whether Sinclair would have treated Dowding in such a manner, (95) a point later

92. See *ibid*, pp.255-57. As a case in point, Wright quoted the example of Wavell.

93. Collier, *Leader of the Few*, p.227, also remarks 'Mr. Churchill expressed surprise that the change should be made "in the hour of victory"'.

94. Wright, pp.256-57.

95. *The Times*, 14 January 1970, letter, MRAF Sir John Slessor.

supported by Professor R.V.Jones, who referred to the Secretary of State as 'a Minister of exquisite courtesy'.(96) Both correspondents spoke highly of Dowding, although Slessor suggested that, possibly, the Commander-in-Chief's memory was faulty.

In reply, two broadsides were fired. First, Dowding wrote that 'in a matter as grave as this, the record of what I remembered could not fail me'. Wright, he continued, 'has recorded correctly and exactly the experiences that were mine'.(97) The next day, Wright wrote of his 'intense search over a long period of time to discover what had happened', but then trimmed by acknowledging that 'there might have been an interview'.(98)

The waves of turmoil were quietened when, for the first time in the controversy, documentary proof replaced fallible memory and accusation. A.J.P.Taylor's letter included Sinclair's notes of his meeting with Dowding, which Lady Thurso had permitted him to issue.(99) It is therefore of great importance to try to follow, as accurately as possible, the sequence of events in mid-November. These leave little doubt that the removal of Dowding, which had been likely for some time, was carried out in a proper manner.

96. Ibid, 20 January 1970, letter, Professor R.V.Jones.

97. Ibid, 19 January 1970, letter, Lord Dowding.

98. Ibid, 22 January 1970, letter, R.Wright. It is not easy to believe that Wright had made such an 'intense search over a long period of time'.

99. Ibid, 22 January 1970, letter, A.J.P.Taylor. Taylor had the advantage of access to the Beaverbrook Papers. On his elevation to the peerage, Sinclair took the title of Lord Thurso. In January 1970 he was ill and being cared for by his wife.

At the root of the matter were two forces. The first was the Air Staff's strong wish for a new leadership at Fighter Command, and, by early November, after so many objections to Dowding had been laid before him, Churchill was prepared for this. The second force, however, is seldom recognised. It was that both the Prime Minister and Beaverbrook still held Dowding in high esteem and did not want a man of such great achievements and undoubted, although sometimes individual, abilities to be dropped. They had to face the problem of his future employment.

Few opportunities were available. If ever there had been serious consideration of promoting him to be Chief of the Air Staff, that avenue had been blocked on 25 October, with the appointment of Portal. There might have been the possibility of creating a general post of inspectorate, as had been arranged for ACM Sir Edgar Ludlow-Hewitt. However, with Dowding *persona non grata* within the senior staff of the RAF, this was hardly likely.

The way out was discovered through Beaverbrook's Ministry. At this crucial stage of the war, the Ministry of Aircraft Production was engaged in the essential, difficult and sensitive issue of obtaining aircraft and supplies from the USA, via a Mission in Washington. With American appreciation by November 1940 that Great Britain had survived the main blast of the German aerial daylight storm, and with the welcome news of Roosevelt's re-election on 2 November, the time for this work to be pushed forward was propitious. No one appreciated its importance more

than Churchill himself, who had known, for so long, that Britain's only salvation lay, probably, firstly through American aid, then through that nation's military intervention.(100)

The question of sending a senior Royal Air Force officer to the United States for this work had been raised in mid-October and the names of Air Vice-Marshal Freeman and Air-Commodore Slessor mentioned. Beaverbrook, however, was not prepared to release the former officer. Sinclair wrote to him expressing sorrow 'that you were unable to agree that Freeman should go to the U.S.A. as the joint representative of the Ministry of Aircraft Production and the Air Ministry', adding that 'I have no option but to send Slessor alone'.(101) Slessor, after some difficulties, reached New York on 8 November.(102) He later wrote, with modesty, that there was a strong case at the time for sending 'a senior Air Staff officer who was thoroughly in the picture of the latest expansion policy, and could discuss problems of our requirements from American industry'.(103)

This description certainly did not fit Dowding, but, with the pressure to find him some post, together with the great prestige that had accrued during the daylight battle, Beaverbrook and Churchill obviously believed that honour would be satisfied all

100. See, for example, Gilbert, vi, pp.796-99 on Churchill's worries over missions to the USA, then pp.869-75 and 926-27.

101. Beaverbrook Papers, BBK D/21, Air Ministry; correspondence with Sir Archibald Sinclair, Sinclair to Beaverbrook, 16 October 1940.

102. Slessor, pp.320-24.

103. Ibid, p.318.

round if he were sent. Consequently, the opening step was taken on 13 November, with an interview between Sinclair and Dowding.

Dowding's memory of being dismissed by telephone call and Wright's subsequent invective are shown to be wide of the mark by an examination of the notes which Sinclair carefully made and sent next day to Beaverbrook.(104) He opened by explaining to Dowding the importance of the American mission, which required 'the driving force of a strong personality', whose influence on American leaders 'would carry weight'. In Sinclair's view, such a man could also 'go far to shape the American Air Force of the future'. The Americans had asked for Portal, but 'I felt bound to refuse to let him go'. According to Sinclair, Beaverbrook had asked for Dowding's services and after weighing 'very carefully all the factors in the problems', the Secretary of State had agreed.

Dowding was not immediately impressed and 'did not suppose that I would wish him to give an answer straightaway'. He wondered whether the mission might be temporary and that he would then return to Fighter Command. On being told that this was not to be, and that Douglas would be taking over, the Commander-in-Chief said he would think the matter over, and announced that he would like to see the Prime Minister, 'and so we parted'.

104. AIR 19/572, Enclosure 15A, Sinclair to Beaverbrook, 14 November 1940. It is noticeable that on this occasion Sinclair ensured that he and Churchill were 'on the same wavelength' over Dowding. He obviously wished to avoid receiving another broadside from the Prime Minister. See above, Chapter 3, Notes 150-54.

Sinclair would have felt far less comfortable over his Commander-in-Chief going to the Prime Minister on what was intrinsically a matter for the Air Ministry's decision had he not been assured that Churchill was thinking along the same lines. Therefore, when, on the morning of the 14th, Dowding met the Prime Minister, Churchill reinforced Sinclair's decision. A note of the meeting was sent to Sinclair later that day.(105) According to it, Dowding first expressed doubts over his ability to fulfil the mission, 'but on my telling him I wished him to undertake it in the public interest, of which I was the judge', he accepted. The weight of Churchill's last six words is not without importance; they showed the manner in which Parliament was the final arbiter in Service matters.

'I have a very great regard for this Officer', concluded Churchill, 'and admiration for his qualities and achievements'. What Sinclair and the Air Staff saw as the removal of a burden from their necks, was undoubtedly seen by Beaverbrook and Churchill as an opportunity for Dowding to fill an important role.

The saga of removal was, however, unfinished. History made by telephone calls is often unrecorded and although Terraine says that on the 16th, 'Dowding did indeed receive a telephone call telling him that his replacement would be carried out at once', there appears to be no corroborated evidence of this.(106)

105. PREM 3/466, November 1940-May 1941; Sir Hugh Dowding's mission, Churchill to Sinclair, via CAS, 14 November 1940.

106. Terraine, pp.220-21, suggests that Luftwaffe success in the bombing of Coventry on the night of 14/15 November prompted the Air Ministry to telephone Dowding on the 16th in an effort to bring forward the replacement.

The next day, nevertheless, in what must be judged a tactless letter, insensitive in its treatment of the leader who had done so much for his Command, Portal wrote to Dowding, asking him to postpone his departure as 'Douglas cannot be made available to take over until Monday week, the 25th'.(107) Dowding received the letter at 1.20 the following morning, having just returned from night operations and agreed to the request, 'if that will be convenient to you'.(108) The replacement did take place on the 25th, when Douglas arrived at Stanmore.

* * *

Park left Headquarters, No.11 Group, at Uxbridge on 18 December, when Leigh-Mallory took over. The extent of their antipathy was expressed later by Park. He commented that his successor 'did not even bother to attend the usual formality of taking over from me, so I handed over to my Senior Air Staff Officer'.(109)

Supporters of Park sometimes express surprise that he was replaced. He was a younger man than Dowding and had proved himself a leader of supreme competence in the furnace of battle. His policy of limited response, they claim, albeit forced on him by the geographical position of his Command, held off German attacks; having been in his post for only six months, he still

107. AIR 19/572, Enclosure 16A, Portal to Dowding, 17 November 1940.

108. Ibid, Enclosure 17A, Dowding to Portal, 17 November 1940. Terraine, p.256, blames Portal partly for the poor treatment received by Dowding.

109. Orange, p.136.

had much to offer.(110) On the other side, it is suggested that he was extremely tired and careworn by the end of the year. In that view, replacing him was a wise move. He had a great deal to offer Training Command and future aircrew would benefit from his experience.(111)

The reality is that he was the victim of his closeness to the Commander-in-Chief. Within the Air Ministry, opponents of the current policy linked the two men, seeing Park as the executor of Dowding's planning. For them, changes in the top echelons of the RAF needed to be comprehensive. Portal had taken over from Newall and was soon bringing in men to follow his policies. Air Vice-Marshal Freeman came to the Air Ministry as Vice-Chief of the Air Staff on 25 November, succeeding Douglas. There was to be a fresh start overall.(112)

* * *

The rancour felt by supporters of Dowding and Park is often heightened by the fact that their replacements were two officers who appeared to be their greatest opponents. In their view, Douglas and Leigh-Mallory were at the heart of an intrigue which,

110. See *ibid*, p.136.

111. See Bader Notes, p.5. 'As regards Keith Park it must be remembered that he was a tired man since he alone conducted the Battle of Britain'. According to Sir Kenneth Porter, both Dowding and Park looked and were very tired by the end of the battle. Porter Interview, 19 August 1991.

112. See Terraine, pp.254-55 and N.Longmate, *The Bombers* (London, 1983), pp.91-92.

firstly, caused the Air Ministry to have a volte face on the leadership of Fighter Command, then, secondly, brought the plotters themselves to power.

The question presents itself of why Douglas was chosen to succeed Dowding. There are several answers to this. One is that at the time he had the qualifications and ability to do so. His background in the First World War as a successful fighter pilot was followed, between 1918 and 1939 by a series of posts that gave him a wide spectrum of experience in many aspects of work within the RAF. Age was on his side. He was 48 years old and, as changes were being made generally in the Service to promote younger men to higher positions, Douglas stood to benefit. He was, in the opinion of Denis Richards, 'a very clever fellow', and if 'one had been interviewing Dowding and Douglas for a big job - one would have put one's money on Douglas'.(113)

Another reason in Douglas's favour is that he fitted, better than Dowding, into the Air Ministry's scheme for the next stage of the war. In essence, he possessed a spirit of aggression in air warfare that more closely matched their ideas of how Fighter Command should be employed. He was able to fill the need for someone 'capable of uniting readiness to make the bold stand for the claims of the defensive with assent to the Air Staff's view that henceforth increasing attention should be paid to offensive

113. Douglas's story is told in the volumes of his autobiography, *Years of Combat* (London, 1963) and *Years of Command*. During the writing of the books he had close help from Robert Wright who not only at one time had been his PA, but also had abilities as a journalist and writer. See Douglas-Wright correspondence in Douglas Papers, Box 2. See also Probert and Cox, p.77.

tasks'.(114) His views on the employment of Big Wings contrasted with those of Dowding who had, in a wide sense, a mastery of using his Command in defence, but less feeling for carrying the battle to the enemy.

Thirdly, and this a reason of the utmost importance, Douglas, in his work at the Air Ministry, was well placed to influence the influential. First among these was Sinclair who, as Secretary of State for Air, was not noted for forceful leadership and, in Beaverbrook's opinion, was governed by 'the bloody air marshals'.(115) A revealing insight into Sinclair's relationship with Douglas was given in a letter written after the war. 'You were my first friend at the Air Ministry', Sinclair said. 'You helped me enormously in those early days ... I felt as though I had won a battle when I got Fighter Command into your hands - and looking back, how right I was!'(116)

The importance of political support in the careers of senior Service officers is reinforced by exploring the relationship between Douglas and Harold Balfour. As shown earlier in the chapter, in the matter of the Big Wing controversy, Balfour's sympathies lay clearly with those who opposed Dowding.(117) Their efforts, from inside the Air Ministry, were centred round Douglas; the politician and the airman shared a common purpose.

114. Collier, *Leader of the Few*, p.226.

115. See above, Chapter 3, Note 167.

116. Douglas, *Years of Command*, p.278.

117. See above, note 85.

Douglas's advancement was helped at that stage of the war through the low esteem in which his immediate superior, the Chief of the Air Staff, was held by such people as Beaverbrook and Salmond, Bruce and Dowding himself. In spite of Slessor's verdict that, when times were at their worst, he would come out of Newall's office 'feeling as though I'd just had a stiff whisky and soda', (118) others believed that the Chief of the Air Staff was overwhelmed by the job. Douglas's own notes are instructive here. 'He was rather a thorn in my flesh during the first year of the War, especially during the time of the Battle of Norway and the Battle of Britain and the fighting in France', he wrote. Douglas believed him to be 'too conscientious and he worked far too hard. He worked himself to death', by never leaving the Air Ministry and 'consequently became an absolute bag of nerves'. (119)

The growing importance of Douglas was shown again as the controversy over Wings developed. It was he, not Newall, who called the conference on 17 October and directed its pattern. Whether the Chief of the Air Staff refused to become involved because he was on the verge of being replaced by Portal, or whether he felt unable to confront Dowding is a matter of question. The result was that Douglas was seen to be involved decisively, an effect that counted to his credit.

When the argument over night air defence developed, the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff found further powerful allies. Once

118. Slessor, p.241.

119. Douglas Papers, Boxes 2 and 3, Douglas notes for R.Wright, 3 November 1961.

again, through his position at the Air Ministry, he was able to lead the anti-Dowding faction and his stance was obviously noticed by Salmond, then by Churchill, at meetings of committees on night defence.

Douglas himself wanted a change of role and was an ambitious man. 'I was told by Cyril Newall just before he left that I would shortly be in for a change, and after the long time that I had been at the Air Ministry - by then nearly five years - I was quite pleased with the idea'. At that stage, Douglas said that he would have liked a Group in Fighter Command, 'because I knew much more about fighters than I did about bombers'. Shortly afterwards, he learned from Balfour, an old and close friend, that he was to 'take the place of Dowding, who was to retire'. (120)

The fact that Douglas and Leigh-Mallory succeeded Dowding and Park was not the end result of their scheming, and events of the time lack the elements of evil conspiracy. Both Dowding and Park had been under immense and unrelenting pressure of battlefield responsibility since the beginning of the French campaign in early May; for six full months the battle had rested heavily on them and the strain clearly told. When the decision to replace the Commander-in-Chief had been taken, it was not unnatural that his successor should want, as Air Officer Commanding the Group closest to the enemy, a man in tune with his own outlook. This was no more than Dowding had done in selecting Park, first as his

SASO, then to command No.11 Group. The choice of Leigh-Mallory fitted in with the planning of the Air Staff over the forthcoming role of Fighter Command. Park, a Dowding man, had to go.

To summarise, it is possible to see that Dowding's decline after the conference of 17 October was both steady and certain. First, it had been the Air Ministry's intention since July that he should be removed by the end of October;(121) in their eyes, the continuing clashes over policy made the replacement inevitable. The decline can be appreciated best by exploring the cumulative effects of the differences concerning defence by day and by night. The controversy between the two Group Commanders was, if anything, exacerbated after the conference, with, again, a lack of decision from the Commander-in-Chief. In night defence there were clear dissensions between Dowding and the Air Staff over filtering and the employment of Hurricane squadrons.

However, the fundamental addition to the armoury of Dowding's opponents at that stage was the power of political intervention. Through pressure from such politicians as Macdonald and Clarry, Sinclair and Balfour, combined with the opinions of influential airmen, in Trenchard and Salmond, both Beaverbrook and Churchill came to appreciate the need for change. This they accepted reluctantly, but the measure became part of new policies within the RAF, involving also the replacement of Newall by Portal.(122)

121. See above, Chapter 1, Notes 17-25.

122. See Gilbert, vi, p.820, who refers to Colville's diary for 2 October. 'There were also, Colville noted, to be changes in the Chiefs of Staff, who were "sound but slow"'. Newall was appointed Governor-General of New Zealand.

Dowding's treatment was not the 'base intrigue' of a vendetta, or a plot engineered within the Air Ministry by conspirators. It was, instead, more the result of a plan designed by politicians and Service leaders, inevitable as a different role was sought for Fighter Command in the war.

EPILOGUE

Greater perspective over changes in the leadership of Fighter Command comes from a brief examination of certain events which happened over the two months following Dowding's dismissal. These prove, on the one hand, that the controversy over Dowding still smouldered and followed him to his new appointment in the United States. On the other hand they show how Douglas at once attempted to confront the main problems with which he was faced, namely, how to address the formidable task of meeting the night Blitz and how to employ Fighter Command in a more aggressive role.

Correspondence related to the preparatory stages of his American mission reveals that Beaverbrook and Churchill, while appreciating the need for Dowding to leave Fighter Command, nonetheless were concerned for his future. It also proves that the anti-Dowding caucus in the Air Ministry were determined not only to prevent him from returning to a position of power, but also were worried over the effect he would have in the USA.

Dowding soon received information and advice about his forthcoming visit. For example, on 28 November Sir Henry Tizard sent 'American notes for Sir Hugh Dowding', together with a paper

entitled 'American Scientific Organisation'.(1) A memo from the Ministry of Aircraft Production listed some of the requirements urgently needed, such as aero engines and gun turrets.(2)

Yet the Air Ministry's worries over what they saw as Dowding's awkwardness in co-operation, combined with their regular disagreements with Beaverbrook, led to further correspondence. When Air-Commodore Slessor in the United States learned that he was to be joined by Dowding, he was less than pleased. On 2 December he sent an urgent message to London, which displayed fears for the forthcoming relationship between Dowding and the American Press. He suggested that Dowding would be 'besieged by reporters' and that interviews 'will be distasteful to him', yet had to be borne 'with as good grace as possible'. Slessor, after offering much advice on the need for tact, finished by saying that the 'Embassy will arrange, if desired, for member of British Press Service to "look after him"'.(3)

Possibly Slessor was raising unnecessarily the spectre of Dowding's personality before the former Commander-in-Chief had had an opportunity of proving himself. However, as one authority later recollected, 'When they crossed the Atlantic British missions and officials came as explorers into a strange New World of government and administration. It was a world, as one of the war-time officials put it "as different from ours as anything

1. Dowding Papers, AC 71/17/8, Tizard to Dowding, 28 November 1940 and 21 November 1940.

2. Ibid, Memo, T.C.L. Westbrook to Dowding, 28 November 1940.

3. Ibid, Secret Cypher Message from British Air Commission, Washington, to Ministry of Aircraft Production, Briny 1763, 4/12, received 5 December 1940, for transmission to the Chief of the Air Staff, from Slessor.

could be".(4) Therefore it is possible to applaud Slessor's concern that the Mission, upon which so much depended, should be successful. Another view, however, is that he was maintaining the anti-Dowding sentiment emanating from the Air Ministry. The note was passed on to Dowding by the Ministry of Aircraft Production with the explanation that 'I expect that Slessor has himself been plagued by the Press'.(5)

The intervention led to an exchange of letters between Portal and Beaverbrook. The new Chief of the Air Staff wanted to see Slessor's suggestions implemented. He pointed out that although Dowding was working for the Ministry of Aircraft Production, it was 'as a serving officer of the Royal Air Force that he will appear in America'.(6) Beaverbrook, ever ready to joust with his adversaries, wrote in response that he would 'be very glad to clear up one point with you'. It was that 'he is seconded to this Ministry. He owes no responsibility to the Air Ministry'.(7)

Portal's reply claimed that, while accepting the point, 'in view of his Royal Air Force status', he had a personal interest in the Mission's success. For this reason he wanted Slessor's advice to be taken up.(8) Beaverbrook rounded off the correspondence

4. H.D.Hall, C.C.Wrigley and J.D.Scott, *Studies of Overseas Supply* (HMSO, 1956), P.312.

5. Dowding Papers, AC 71/17/8, J.J.Llewellyn to Dowding, 5 December 1940.

6. Beaverbrook Papers, BBK D/29, Portal to Beaverbrook, 5 December 1940.

7. Ibid, Beaverbrook to Portal, 6 December 1940.

8. Ibid, Portal to Beaverbrook, 7 December 1940.

by acknowledging that the Ministry of Aircraft Production was influenced by the Air Ministry, and 'we welcome it'.(9)

A.J.P.Taylor later suggested that Beaverbrook took pleasure in moving 'men about from one office to another or in speculating how to do it', adding that he had been Lloyd George's 'errand boy in such affairs during the First World War and was delighted to be Churchill's during the Second'.(10)

Something of this propensity was seen later in December. When Portal became Chief of the Air Staff, he pressed strongly that Freeman, with whom he had a very good working relationship, should become his deputy as Vice-Chief of the Air Staff. This move was carried out on 4 November. The gap left at the Ministry of Aircraft Production had to be filled and on 19 December Beaverbrook wrote to Sinclair, reminding him that a successor was needed. 'Will you make a suggestion, please?' he concluded.(11)

The reply, two days later, contains the interesting statement, 'Assuming it is no longer your intention to appoint Sir Hugh Dowding', before going on to propose the names of Salmond, Ludlow-Hewitt and Air Vice-Marshal Hill, as RAF officers, or Tizard, a civilian who was filling Freeman's place temporarily.(12) At that stage Dowding was on the high seas,

9. Ibid, Beaverbrook to Portal, 8 December 1940.

10. Taylor, Beaverbrook, pp.458-59.

11. AIR 19/572, Enclosure 1A, Beaverbrook to Sinclair, 19 December 1940.

12. Ibid, Enclosure 2A, Sinclair to Beaverbrook, 21 December 1940.

three days out from Glasgow, bound for Newfoundland.(13) There is no evidence to show why Sinclair assumed that it was 'no longer your intention' to appoint Dowding, but the phrase makes it appear likely that the former Commander-in-Chief had at least been considered, before being sent to the USA.

The letter sparked off a new interest. In a Personal and Secret letter to Sinclair, Beaverbrook, still searching for a suitable haven for his friend, asked, 'Would the appointment be well received by the Royal Air Force?' Both Sinclair and Portal had stipulated that Freeman's successor should be 'an Air Force officer'. Had the appointment of Dowding been agreed, several of Beaverbrook's aims would have been achieved at one turn. In particular, the Minister of Aircraft Production would have had at his side an ally in the inevitable controversies with the Air Ministry.(14)

Sinclair's response gives the impression that he had been put on the spot. It also adds weight to those who, like Beaverbrook, believed that he was governed by his air-marshals. 'My own opinion', he stated, was that Dowding's appointment would meet the requirement 'of Freeman's successor being an R.A.F. officer',

13. See Dowding Papers, AC 71/17/8, Diary list, 'Visit to Canada and U.S.A.', sent to Dowding on 21 June 1941, with accompanying letter, by F.H.X.Gwynne. Dowding left Glasgow on the S.S. *Leopoldville* on 18 December 1940 and arrived at Halifax on 28 December 1940.

14. Ibid, Enclosure 3A, Beaverbrook to Sinclair, 23 December 1940.

a statement of the patently obvious. Cautiously, he added that he would consult Portal, 'who is away for a few days', then write again. (15)

His full reply was dated 30 December, by which time Dowding had been ashore in Canada for two days. First, Sinclair hedged his bets over whether or not the former Commander-in-Chief's appointment 'would be well received by the Royal Air Force'. It would, he wrote, 'in a sense in which the appointment of no civilian, with the possible exception of Sir Henry Tizard, would be acceptable'. Then honesty broke through and he added, 'On the other hand, since you ask me, I am bound to tell you frankly that I think the appointment of Sir John Salmond or Sir Edgar Ludlow-Hewitt would be more acceptable'. (16)

There is scant documentary evidence of what discussions ensued within the Air Ministry in the days before Sinclair's reply was sent. Nonetheless, judging from previous episodes of controversy, there must have been some worry that, like Banquo's ghost, Dowding might return to a different, yet powerful position from which to haunt them. In the event, fears were unfounded and

15. Ibid, Enclosure 5A, Sinclair to Beaverbrook, 24 December 1940.

16. Ibid, Enclosure 4A, Sinclair to Beaverbrook, 30 December 1940.

Dowding remained in North America, where, before long, further controversies were fuelled over the part he was playing in the Mission. (17)

* * *

Douglas took up the appointment as Commander-in-Chief, Fighter Command, on 25 November, yet had shown worries over possible criticism of his new role five days earlier. The *Daily Express* printed an article on night bombing, which assessed what was, or was not, being done to meet the enemy threat. It claimed that although 'some authority' said that the bomber was being beaten, the raiders were coming in greater numbers and still getting back to their bases. People were being offered 'optimistic dope'. (18)

At once Douglas wrote to Beaverbrook, hoping that 'your excellent paper is not going to start to "hunt" me over the night bomber business'. He showed an appreciation of Beaverbrook's influence when adding that he would need help from him, together with time. 'Will you see that, so far as lies in your power, I get both'. Douglas's letter proves that he was sensitive to, and apprehensive of, disapproval even before taking office. (19)

17. For the background to these difficulties, see PREM 3/466, Sir Hugh Dowding's mission, and Beaverbrook Papers, BBK D/29. See also Portal Papers, Christ Church, Oxford, especially Slessor's letter to Portal, 25 January 1941, Box C.4, The Slessor Papers, which were at the RAF Museum, Hendon, have been closed to researchers because Slessor, without authorisation, retained classified documents; they are now held by the Air Historical Branch. See Jones's thesis, p.271.

18. BBK D/29, quoting '*Daily Express*', Opinion column, 20 November 1940. It should be remembered that this comment was written less than a week after the heavy night raid on Coventry.

19. Ibid, Douglas to Beaverbrook, 20 November 1940.

Beaverbrook's reply attempted to reassure him, expressing confidence that, in time, the 'night raiders' would be beaten. Then he added in his own hand, 'Your predecessor relied on my co-operation and he got it to the limit of my capacity to do things. You may be sure I will back you up to the same extent'.(20) Such a promise obviously brought reassurance to Douglas, who realised the extent of the burden he had shouldered.

His recognition of this is reinforced by studying the continuing lack of success from defensive measures by the end of the year. Anti-Aircraft Command was still almost three times as successful as Fighter Command in shooting down bombers. Between June and December 1940, guns claimed 102 of the enemy machines, while night fighters accounted for 35. General Pile, with justification, referred to that period as 'essentially a gun battle'.(21)

At the same time, the numbers of German major raids decreased in December, with fewer on London, and more on other cities.(22) Nevertheless, the rate of civilian casualties remained high, a worrying reminder both for politicians and the Air Ministry of what still had to be achieved.(23)

20. Ibid, Beaverbrook to Douglas, 22 November 1940.

21. AIR 41/17, ADGB, vol.iii, p.94, quoting General Pile's Despatch.

22. Ibid, Appendix 5. However, these figures, from the Air Warfare Analysis Section are different from those given in Appendix 16, which uses German sources.

23. See Gilbert, vi, p.963 and Ramsey, Blitz, ii, p.313. The figures for December were: killed, 3,793: injured, 5,044.

Douglas's hopes of a more aggressive employment of Fighter Command were shown in the early days of his new appointment. Discussions were held on what measures could be taken, and Leigh-Mallory proposed the organisation of Big Wings. In a lengthy Minute, written on 17 December, Douglas strongly approved of this, believing that 'we must try and out-number the enemy in the air instead of always being ourselves outnumbered'.(24) He then criticised No.11 Group who 'have been rather hypnotised by the idea that they must meet the enemy before he reaches his objective'.(25) There was to be a new policy if, with Britain still standing alone, the anticipated resumption of the Luftwaffe day offensive should restart early in 1941.

A pioneering 'small gesture of defiance'(26) was made on the afternoon of 20 December, when two Spitfires crossed the Channel to strafe Le Touquet airfield. This was the first step in a series of operations(27) which were to continue on an expanding, and, in terms of losses, an expensive scale.(28) While Dowding was in the throes of the start of his American mission, the Fighter Command which he had done so much to create was 'leaning

24. AIR 16/367, Minute from Douglas, 17 December 1940, paragraph 1.

25. Ibid, paragraph 3.

26. Wykeham, p.183.

27. Details of these early 'Rhubarb' and 'Circus' operations are given in *ibid*, Chapter 13. See also AIR 41/18, ADGB, iv, especially Part 4, and Appendices 2, Part 4.

28. See Terraine, pp.282-88.

forward into France'. Park had moved to lead 23 Group, Flying Training Command (FTC) in Gloucestershire on 27 December.(29) Douglas and Leigh-Mallory were busily engaged in preparing to attack the Luftwaffe at every opportunity.

All four men, in different ways and to varying degrees, had made contributions towards their prime objective, to protect Britain from a German victory. This had been achieved in spite of the weaknesses of a Chief of the Air Staff, Newall, who appeared to work with decreasing effect within the Service as the battle progressed. That factor was combined with a lack of authority from Sinclair, who failed to stamp his mark on the affairs of the Royal Air Force at a time when firm decision was needed. Yet although it could not be known at that stage, the threat to the security of the Home Base was not to recur. During 1941 the course of the war would change radically, with the emergence of other dangers and opportunities.

29. Orange, p.155.

CONCLUSION

Most wars are followed by some controversy over the powers of leadership exercised by commanders and a critical examination of their strategy and tactics. In this, the historian is in a position to lay a radio beam of hindsight across the target and employ the aids of documents and reminiscence to locate exactly the strengths and weaknesses of the subject. This has certainly been done since 1945 for a number of Service leaders at both strategic and tactical levels.

However, there is probably no instance of the treatment meted out to commanders coming under greater or more vigorous attack after the event than in the case of Dowding and Park. A half century on from the Battle of Britain the dissension continues unabated, with, generally, two distinct camps. This has occurred largely because hardened opinions, or prejudices, have been formed on hearsay, recollection and books, often unsupported by detailed documentary evidence. Therefore two strongly divergent views have developed and been accepted uncritically. The orthodoxy has been unfair, particularly to Leigh-Mallory who, alone of the main senior officers involved, did not survive the war to offer contributions to the debate. Also he, among all the principals, has had no biographer until 1992.

This dissertation has attempted to show that praise and, conversely blame, do not lie on one side alone. It has tried to cast a more searching light on what were both the long-standing and the immediate reasons why two commanders were removed, apparently at the moment of victory. In doing so a distinction has been drawn between the reasons for the action at that time, which were understandable, and the later treatment, particularly of Dowding, which was less than adequate. A full understanding of what happened to the two commanders requires this distinction to be made in the minds of those forming judgement. There was at the time a plan, not a conspiracy; any incompetence occurred later.

First, while accepting the immense part played by Dowding in the creation of Fighter Command and in planning its role in Home defence, it is noticeable that moves to replace him had begun well before the Battle of Britain occurred. His age and length of service were sufficient, not sinister, reasons for this. In addition, for several years he had proved to be, according to which view is accepted, either single-minded or extremely difficult in his dealings with the Air Ministry, his employers. At that stage political support for Dowding was strong. Of the three senior ministers in the government mainly working with Dowding, Beaverbrook and Churchill shared an enthusiasm for retaining him to control the defensive battle, which they regarded as a holding operation before Bomber Command was ready to hit back. Sinclair, who wished to replace him, carried less political weight and was overruled.

Second, the widely accepted view of the Luftwaffe's overwhelming relative strength in the battle must be questioned. A mere comparison of the numbers of aircraft available to each side distorts the view. The British aerial defensive system in July 1940 was the best in the world and in a stronger position than usually recognised, because it was being called upon to carry out duties for which it had been prepared. Fighter Command fought with a singular tenacity. On the other hand, the Luftwaffe was required to launch a campaign without either a clear strategy or the support of the other two Services.

The German Air Force had to carry two further burdens. First was the lack of a heavy bomber, without which any strategic bombing campaign could hardly succeed. The other was that failure of success in the battle hung finally on the employment of single-seater fighters and, of these, the Luftwaffe held only a slight preponderance in numbers and was hampered by their limited range.

Third, until mid-August German hesitancy over deciding whether to attempt seaborne landings gave Fighter Command time to test its defensive system. Lack of decision on the German side threw an even greater burden on to the Luftwaffe, which was further hindered by poor Intelligence. At that stage Hitler had an eye as much on his forthcoming campaign against Russia as he had in attempting the military defeat of Britain. Concurrently, British factory production of single-seater fighters was exceeding that of its opponents, and the aircraft repair service worked remarkably well. Nevertheless, some balance was restored by the

fact that in air fighting tactics the German Air Force was superior and some British squadrons, lacking firm direction from their commanders at Group or Command level, were slow or unwilling to adopt new formations.

Fourth, during the period up to 7 September, Dowding's inflexibility in both strategic and tactical organisation brought undue pressure to No.11 Group, on whom the main burden of defence predictably fell. By then, when the bulk of the German attack was by escorted bombers flying primarily from the south, instead of unescorted bombers coming from the east, some radical re-thinking and planning were required. In failing to introduce available reserves and by allowing the two Group commanders to fight separate battles from their own areas, the Commander-in-Chief's policy led to No.11 Group suffering very heavy losses and, some would claim, almost to being overwhelmed. At least part of the reason why 'The Few' who were defending southern Britain were so few in No.11 Group was that Dowding's policy would not allow for greater reinforcement.

The lack of co-operation between Park and Leigh-Mallory over daylight operations which followed, until 17 October, was a fifth factor and caused a more bitter controversy than often realised. This was heightened through the keenness for action and the influence exercised on Leigh-Mallory by Squadron-Leader Douglas Bader. The simmering disagreements in that period could, and should, have been settled by Dowding who, however, was placed on the horns of a dilemma by the very system he had instituted and promoted. His reticence either to take personal control of the whole battle, or to arbitrate between his subordinates, led to stalemate which the Air Ministry conference of 17 October

attempted to unravel. The conference was not primarily a conspiracy to undermine Dowding's position, but a necessary step, initiated by Douglas in view of Newall's inaction over the matter, to seek a clear lead.

Nevertheless, it is apparent that there were, in reality, two interpretations of the employment of Big Wings in action, with Bader's view differing from that of some officers in the Air Ministry. Bader's style of approach at the time has drawn odium from those who believe that he was plotting against the Commander-in-Chief, but a study of what the O.C., No.242 Squadron was really seeking shows that he had an excellent tactical appreciation of how his Wing could have been employed to take some pressure from No.11 Group. It was neither his intention nor his fault that some of Dowding's opponents in the Air Ministry used his case as a justification for their different view of how Wings should be used.

Sixth, the events of 7 September, opening the prospect of a long period of night attacks against Britain, brought Dowding's role and actions under sharper scrutiny. Here his policy was opposed increasingly by senior officers in both the Air Ministry and the Ministry of Aircraft Production. There was a general feeling that, at a time when emergency measures, though far from ideal, should be tried, the Commander-in-Chief was inflexible. His opposition and lone stance were noted by men of the calibre of Trenchard and Salmond, but also through them by Beaverbrook and Churchill, on whose support his continuation at Fighter Command finally depended. Other politicians also, worried by the effects of night bombing on public morale, questioned his policy.

Last, the combination of disagreement over both day and night defence led, in the month following the conference of 17 October, to an increasing appreciation both by the Air Council and by politicians that changes were needed in the leadership of Fighter Command. The war was altering course and the RAF moving over to a more offensive role, both from Bomber and Fighter Commands. New leadership by Portal at the Air Ministry was to be accompanied at Fighter Command by a turn towards the offensive, led by Douglas. Nevertheless, Beaverbrook and Churchill still sought hard to find a satisfactory employment for Dowding and suggestions that they were party to a plot to discard him are certainly not supported by evidence from the time.

When Dowding left it was not unreasonable that Park should be posted also. He, more than anyone, had been the fighting tactical leader during the day battle, but his earlier closeness to the Commander-in-Chief was bound to count against him. The strategy of Fighter Command was about to change and he had been under intense pressure for over six months.

The bitterness engendered by the removal tainted both men for the rest of their lives. In the case of Park, he saw events mainly in terms of the day tactics, largely by reducing them to a controversy between Leigh-Mallory and himself which the former, using devious tactics, had won. He appeared not to know of, or comprehend, the other reasons which led to Dowding's replacement. Park's undoubted abilities were restored to recognition later in the war, especially by his posting to command the air defence of Malta in 1942. For him the greatest irony came early in 1945 when he was sent to the Far East, to take over the Command of his old rival, Leigh-Mallory, who had been killed in an air crash.

Dowding's own disappointment with his removal was added to in April 1941 when, at Churchill's insistence, he was called home early from the American Mission after several complaints had been made about his lack of tact and co-operation. In the following year he was once again at odds with the Air Ministry, and this led to his final resignation and retirement. At that stage he never received the just rewards for his service and loyalty. His subdued anger was eventually allowed to emerge, near the end of his life, through Wright's biased book which has helped to form and fuel misguided opinions over the last twenty years.

The Battle of Britain is seen from different perspectives by the two contestants. In the British view this was a crucial contest, standing in its own right as a turning point in the war. Had Britain surrendered, the future of many nations would probably have been affected, especially Russia, the USA and Japan. It is also reasonable for the historian to reflect on what would have happened in the British Isles. An even darker cloud would have hung over the whole of European Jewry. On the German side, events are often regarded as one phase of Hitler's westward drive before he turned back to attack the greater enemy, Soviet Russia. The fact is that, whichever interpretation is accepted, Britain was not forced out of the war and the German war machine suffered its first setback in a year of victory.

For that much alone Fighter Command, under Dowding, deserved praise and gratitude because British people were offered at least a respite and opportunity to strengthen resources. The

Commander-in-Chief's best work for his country had been carried out before 1940 in the building of a system which, for several months, operated better in defence than did the Luftwaffe's haphazard campaign in attack.

Since the war, however, charges and counter-claims have led to a variety of accusations being made against the leaders most concerned with the battle. From evidence at present available it would appear that Dowding and Park, Douglas and Leigh-Mallory all had at heart the satisfactory defence of their country and the defeat of the Luftwaffe. In this case it should be accepted that all four men acted in an honourable way in 1940.

Nevertheless, in an environment where there were distinct weaknesses in leadership at the highest level of the RAF, personal ambition played its part in order to fill the vacuum. Newall, the Chief of the Air Staff, worked with decreasing effect as the battle progressed. This was combined with a lack of authority from Sinclair, who failed to stamp his mark as Secretary of State at a time when firm decision was required.

Dowding tended to see genuinely held differences of opinion as personal attacks and reacted abrasively. Park, always loyal, suffered from a lack of guidance and support from his C-in-C, whose strategy ensured that too heavy a burden fell on his Group. Leigh-Mallory met opposition when he rightly suggested that his squadrons could have been integrated more closely into the defensive system; he has been depicted, without evidence, as dishonourable for allowing undoubted disappointment at his lack of personal advancement to descend to a plot against the C-in-C. Through all of these events, the impression grows that Douglas,

an able and ambitious man, missed no opportunity of advancing his own cause as Dowding's reputation declined. He was well placed and took full advantage of his chances; if the Big Wing Controversy is regarded as a battle for power, then Douglas was the winner. He, more than anyone, benefited from Salmond's pleas that 'Dowding should go'.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX ATHE BADER NOTES

After the war there was controversy over the activities of the Duxford Wing and of the parts played in 1940 by Bader, Leigh-Mallory and Macdonald. According to Bader's brother-in-law, 'Laddie' Lucas, 'Douglas would never be drawn publicly into criticism of those who were criticising him'.

These notes of Douglas Bader's were written privately for Lord Balfour of Inchrye 'at the latter's request', after the publication in 1969 of Robert Wright's book, *Dowding and the Battle of Britain*, with 'its slanted content'. Balfour was starting to prepare his autobiography, *Wings Over Westminster*; the various marks and underlinings on the document were made by him.

These previously unseen notes are a clear exposition of Bader's views on the leadership, strategy and tactics employed during the Battle of Britain and are also a rebuke to Wright's inaccuracies. Their only error of fact is on page 5, where Bader believed that Air Vice-Marshal R.Saul, of No.13 Group was present at the Air Ministry meeting of 17 October 1940.

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Strictly Confidential

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11 GROUP/12 GROUP - AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1940.

During the last few years much has been written on the so-called controversy between Air Vice Marshal Keith Park of 11 Group and Trafford Leigh-Mallory of 12 Group on the subject of the Duxford Wing during the Battle of Britain.

This year as a result of the Battle of Britain film coinciding with and influenced by Robert Wright's book DOWDING AND THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN Lord Dowding's name has figured considerably and in my opinion with detriment to his reputation. In saying this it must be clear that I have read only those instalments of Wright's book which appeared in serial form in the Sunday Telegraph. In these the author has mentioned me by name, quoting Lord Dowding as his source of information. What is said is completely new to me. Frankly I do not believe what is said. It must be remembered that Lord Dowding is now 87 years of age. His authorised biography THE LEADER OF THE FEW was written some years ago by Basil Collier and gives a more accurate and more characteristic account of these events than the sensationalism associated with Wright's version. ~~or~~ Before leaving this subject of Wright's book it is reasonable to mention that none of the post-war writers - with the exception of Air Vice Marshal J.E. Johnson - in their books on the Battle of Britain have taken the trouble to discuss the matter with me. This is relevant in the context of the Duxford Wing because I led it and my Group Commander of the time, Leigh Mallory, died in a crash at Grenoble in 1944. These authors of THE NARROW MARGIN which was widely acclaimed as an accurate documentary failed completely in their views about the 12 Group Wing because they did not seek the facts. They merely identified themselves with 11 Group strategy.

The idea of a larger formation than a squadron of 12 fighters was conceived in the mind of Air Vice Marshal Leigh-Mallory as the result of a successful engagement on August 30th, 1940 by 242 Squadron which I commanded at the time. On this occasion the squadron was called off the ground in time. We met a large enemy formation under favourable conditions south west of Epping. By favourable conditions is meant that we had position, height and sun in attacking an enemy bomber formation without Me.109 escort. That evening in the course of a congratulatory telephone conversation from Air Vice Marshal Leigh-Mallory, I said to him "if I had had more fighters we would have shot down more of the enemy". A few days later the Duxford Wing of 3 squadrons was born. After discussion with the other two squadron leaders (Blackwood 310 and Lane 19) and three or four practices the Duxford Wing was ready for action. The method of operation was uncomplicated. 242 and 310/squadrons^(Hurricanes) took off from Duxford. At the same time 19 squadron (Spitfires) took off from the satellite Fowlmere. There was no joining up over the airfield. I turned straight on to course climbing quietly while the other squadrons took up position. The Hurricane squadrons flew in line astern together while the Spitfires flew 3/4,000 ft. above, behind and to one side. The intention was that the Spitfires with their better performance would guard the Hurricanes against interference by Me.109s while they attacked the enemy bomber formations. If there were no enemy fighters the Spitfires would come down on the bombers after the Hurricanes had broken them up. The Duxford Wing never took more than six minutes to get off the ground and on the way south, frequently we were off in four minutes. The whole formation arrived over the estuary at 20,000 ft. 20 minutes after take-off. The Spitfires were at 23/24,000 ft.

The Wing was first in action on September 7th. It is pertinent here to state that there was no more difficulty in the control of the Wing in the air than of a squadron. The squadrons were all on the same R/T frequency. An occasional word to the other two squadron commanders and finally my intentions when the enemy were sighted was all that was required. Suggestions from post-war writers that the big Wing was clumsy in operation are utter nonsense and completely without foundation. Indeed they are disproved by the 1941 and subsequent fighter wing operations over France. On occasion the Duxford Wing numbered 5 squadrons 3 Hurricane and 2 Spitfire.

3
PROBLEMS.

There was one fundamental problem, not only with the 12 Group Wing but with 12 Group squadrons and 11 Group squadrons. This was due for different reasons although the result was the same, namely the frequent failure of the 11 Group operations room to get squadrons off the ground in time. The 11 Group controllers who like everyone else were inexperienced when the Battle started did not appreciate that in order for a fighter to be successful he needs height and position to dominate the battle.

The vulnerable, indeed frequently fatal, position for a fighter pilot is to be climbing with the enemy above him. The German formations used to assemble in the Calais area when the bombers were at 15/17,000 ft. They were joined by the short range Me.109s and the whole lot proceeded across the Channel towards the London area. This virtually precluded a successful interception by any of the 11 Group squadrons based at Manston, Hawkinge, Detling, Gravesend and Redhill because they were too near the coast. So far as the 12 Group wing was concerned on most occasions it seemed to us at Duxford that we were sent for as an afterthought or to do what we used to term 'the lunch-time patrol' when there was no single aeroplane either German or British in the air at all. Before leaving this question let me clarify the situation by a single incident, and there were many others - 616 squadron on its first operational sortie out of Kenley lost 5 out of 12 on the climb without touching the enemy.

For some reason the 11 Group controllers would not call squadrons off the ground, and more particularly the 12 Group Wing, until the enemy were at operational height and leaving the French coast. If you look at the map and measure the distances to the 11 Group stations I have mentioned the error of this thinking is self-evident. On several occasions while the Duxford Wing was at readiness I received telephone calls from the Duxford controller saying 'stand by, the Germans are building up over the Calais area'. Every time I replied 'can we take off now' to receive the inevitable answer 'no, you must wait until 11 Group ask for you'. Duxford to Tilbury is 43 miles. Had we taken off when the Germans were building up over Calais we could have been in the Ashted/Tonbridge area under favourable conditions to control a battle of our seeking.

The period of the Battle of Britain is officially given as from July 1st to October 31st 1940. In fact the heavy fighting occurred from August until September 21st. Before and after those dates there were no large air battles. What has been built up into the big Wing controversy stemmed solely from mutterings in the Mess by the pilots of the Duxford Wing against the 11 Group habit of calling us off the ground late so that we inevitably arrived in the battle area at a disadvantage, coupled with the fact that the 11 Group headquarters used to complain when we were late which was duly passed to us by 12 Group headquarters. The result was a vicious circle with 11 Group saying that we took so long to get off the ground. Towards the latter part of the Battle of Britain matters improved. Let it be remembered that the Duxford Wing went into action first on September 7th and that the big air battles ceased after September 21st. We are talking therefore of a period of 14 days. It has been suggested by some writers, and specifically by Robert Wright, that the whole period of the Battle of Britain represented a continued and sustained intrigue by Leigh-Mallory to undermine the Commander-in-Chief, Dowding, using the big Wing formation led by Squadron Leader Bader as his spearhead. Continuing this reasoning it followed that Leigh-Mallory had won when Stuffie Dowding was replaced at the end of 1940 by Sholto Douglas as C-in-C Fighter Command and Keith Park handed over 11 Group to Leigh-Mallory. Nothing could be further from the truth. If it were true it would impute bad faith and dishonest dealing to the Air Council which is manifestly absurd.

A further suggestion that has been accepted over the years that Keith Park should have operated wings like the 12 Group one is also nonsense. You cannot operate large formations from close to an attacking enemy. At no time, and I say this with certainty, was it in Leigh-Mallory's mind.

During the course of the Battle of Britain Government ministers used to visit fighter airfields. Indeed Winston Churchill was seen at Biggin Hill. Sir Archibald Sinclair and Harold Balfour visited Duxford and other airfields in Fighter Command. I well remember (although he may not) when Harold Balfour asked me on one such occasion 'how is the Wing doing?' replying 'quite well, Sir, but I wish they would get us off the ground sooner'.

In this context my Adjutant was Flying Officer Peter Macdonald, M.F. Like any other officer at any R.A.F. station he would hear conversation

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in the Mess of an evening. At this time it was all about Wing battles and deprecating the fact that we could not get off when the Germans were building up over Calais. On his visits to London Macdonald used to pass on this sort of gossip to people like Harold Dalfour, an old friend and colleague in the House. I was not specifically aware of this until 1953 when Macdonald told my biographer, Paul Brickhill. In any case it is of no relevance except to would-be historians like Robert Wright since it can fit into his pattern of intrigue against Stuffie Dowding.

Wright also makes much of the Air Staff meeting of October 17th 1940 at which Squadron Leader Bader was present; he quotes Dowding as expressing grave disapproval that a Squadron Leader should be sitting round the table with his seniors. He only just avoids saying that Squadron Leader Bader called the meeting! The fact was that I was ordered to attend this meeting by Leigh-Mallory. I sat there unnerved and not liking it much. I well recall the scene. Sholto Douglas was in the Chair, Lord Portal, the new C.A.S., was on his right, Stuffie Dowding on his left with Keith Park, Leigh-Mallory, Brand (10 Group) and Saul (13 Group). The only other officer below Air rank was Group Captain McEvoy who was taking the minutes. Sholto Douglas asked me at one point for my views on leading big formations since I was the only officer in Fighter Command who had done so. I did not speak for long. In spite of my embarrassment I remember thinking that this could be the only time that a fighter pilot might ever be asked for his views by the Air Staff. As I recall, A.M. Sir Philip Joubert was also present.

These then are the facts. Wright has twisted them, in my opinion, to suit the theme of his book which is that Dowding was badly treated and Keith Park martyred himself in support of his C-in-C. In doing so Wright has damaged Stuffie Dowding in the eve of his life and not done much good to any of the persons he mentions. His derogatory references to Leigh-Mallory are distasteful since that very distinguished officer is dead. As regards Keith Park it must be remembered that he was a tired man since he alone conducted the Battle of Britain. Neither Dowding nor Leigh-Mallory fought the Battle, the whole weight lay squarely on Keith Park's shoulders. To suggest, however, that he was removed from 11 Group because he failed is not borne out by the facts. He won the Battle. He was rested by going to Training Command in the same way that tired fighter pilots were rested. He continued a distinguished career by commanding Malta and finally, as an Air Chief Marshal, South East Asia. At the end of 1940 Lord Dowding had been Commander-in-Chief Fighter Command for four years. He took over in 1936

7 was due to retire in 1938 but was kept on. He was finally retired after the first major air battle (indeed the vital one) of World War II, and Sholto Douglas, a man 13 years younger, succeeded him. Wright claims that Dowding was retired by Sir Archibald Sinclair over the telephone and that later Winston Churchill told Dowding that he had been unaware of this.

I do not believe it. The facts are stated in Dowding's authorised biography LEADER OF THE FEW, which is more dignified, characteristic and as a result less sensational than Robert Wright's version.

THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN.

Lord Dowding made two vital contributions to the defeat of the Luftwaffe in the summer of 1940. Firstly, during his pre-war command, he had laid down radar coverage of the south of England so that we had early warning of the Germans' intentions; secondly, he had persuaded the War Cabinet against sending more R.A.F. fighters to a defeated France in May 1940.

As Commander-in-Chief Fighter Command in August/September 1940 he failed. Instead of assuming control and direction of the air defence of Great Britain which was the C-in-C's job, he left the conduct of the battle to a subordinate Group Commander, A.V.M. Park of 11 Group. Dowding had already increased the number of squadrons in 11 Group making it the strongest in Fighter Command. Keith Park fought the Battle of Britain, not Dowding. He fought it under the disadvantage of being too near the enemy effectively to deploy the strength which Dowding had given him. His problem was compounded by his operations room displaying a map of 11 Group territory only. In other words, Park was fighting an 11 Group battle which should have been a Fighter Command battle.

A map of the whole of England lay on the plotters' table at Fighter Command. It showed every fighter airfield with the location and state of readiness of every squadron on the board above it. The difference is paramount. A controller at the Fighter Command operations room table would have seen the enemy position as it was plotted. With the whole picture spread out in front of him he would instantly have realised the need to scramble squadrons from the further away airfields first against the enemy.

This would have provided the classic air defence in depth so desperately needed to make life easier for controllers and less costly for pilots. Let me elaborate this. 11 Group controllers with their limited

(17)

operations room facilities would have given place to Fighter Command ones with the map of England in front of them. The former were being harassed by enemy raiders almost overhead which they were trying to intercept with only 11 Group squadrons available; the latter would have had time to see the problem in its entirety. It was in this context, indeed for the very reasons I have outlined, that the Duxford Wing was formed. A.V.M. Leigh-Mallory saw the problem with crystal clarity from the calm of his 12 Group headquarters; so did I from the quiet of Duxford. Easy for us, one may say, we were not in the so-called front line. Quite right. But herein lay the great error - the front line should have embraced the whole of Fighter Command not just 11 Group.

If ever Dowding should have seen the light it was at the end of August when the changing pattern of the German assault became clear beyond doubt. Vast enemy formations were to be seen congregating over the Pas de Calais. London must be the target. Surely the C-in-C, with his great reputation, with the full resources of his headquarters and operations room, would now take over control of the battle from his subordinate 11 Group Commander. It was not to be. In the event, the man who devised the impregnable air defences of this country, Sir Hugh Dowding, the most senior serving officer in the Royal Air Force, failed. A tired Group commander, with neither the authority nor the full available resources, was left to continue the struggle. It was as though General Montgomery had left a Corps Commander to fight the battle of Alamein and told him to call on other Corps commanders for assistance as necessary. Let there be no mistake the Battle was won by the efforts of tired but resolute controllers and the immense courage of 11 Group pilots. The 12 Group Wing, properly exploited could have provided the spearhead against the enemy formations, creating havoc amongst them and giving the 11 Group pilots time to gain height and position to continue the destruction. Further to emphasise this point, 11 Group squadrons sometimes climbed northwards away from the enemy to try and gain tactical advantage. At the top level of Fighter Command there seemed an utter inability to grasp the basic and proven rules of air fighting.

The Duxford Wing with three squadrons was in action on September 7th and the 9th; with five squadrons twice on September 15th; once on September 18th and on the 27th. This last sortie was a lunchtime patrol. Nothing in the sky. After one hour the Duxford controller told me to return. I replied "I will have just one more swing round", and turned the Wing southwards from the patrol line

(b)
Gravesend/Canterbury towards the Channel where we found some No.109s below us near Dover. We attacked them, destroyed several, lost one, and returned to Duxford delighted. Later we got a message from A.V.M. Park that we had been poaching on 11 Group's preserves. Good for him, we thought. It was his amusing way of congratulating us. Not long afterwards I discovered that this remark had been deadly serious and couched in the form of a complaint.

I have said that Dowding failed as a Commander-in-Chief. It is only fair, in this context, to remind ourselves that Dowding may have been considerably preoccupied in his daily contacts with the Air Staff, the War Cabinet and indeed possibly even the Prime Minister. Under such conditions of mental stress it is reasonable and indeed excusable that he may have been unaware of the changing circumstances of the Battle.

In this case he failed in not appreciating the need for overall control from Fighter Command. He should have appointed a deputy, an Air Marshal, to coordinate and direct the Battle.

DOWDING.

[To the Fighter pilots of 1940 Dowding was the father figure: Seldom seen, many pilots did not know even how he looked. Nevertheless we knew he was there in Fighter Command minding our affairs, so all was well. We held him in esteem which after the war became affection. We read about him; how he had fought the Treasury to get hard runways built on grass airfields, waterlogged and unusable in winter; how he had insisted on bulletproof windscreens in our Hurricanes and Spitfires. After the war at Battle of Britain dinners we actually saw him and spoke with him. We were proud that he had chosen to be known as Lord Dowding of Bentley Priory - our home from home - Headquarters, Fighter Command. At last we felt this gruff, withdrawn, inarticulate Stuff Dowding really had become one of us. We thought it a bad show that he had not been made a Marshal of the Royal Air Force.] We thought it, and some of us said it, long before Robert Wright wrote his book.

Wright has appeared to destroy the image. I cannot help feeling however, that this is but a passing shadow. History will place Dowding in his correct perspective.

Wright has portrayed Dowding as an embittered man, with a gigantic chip on his shoulder who for years had nursed a massive grudge against the Service which made him.

(9)

If we are to believe Wright, only now in the evening of his long life has Dowding revealed the full bitterness of his thoughts since 1940 - ALL WERE AGAINST HIM - intriguing to get rid of him, Leigh-Mallory, The Air Staff, Squadron Leader Dader, Harold Balfour, Air Minister Sir Archibald Sinclair, who sacked him by telephone, even the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, who said no one had told him about it.

Wright's is an unattractive story which contributes nothing to history and severely damages the reputations of Lord Dowding and Sir Keith Park. It is viciously inaccurate in its references to the late Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory.

[L-M (as we all knew him) was my Group Commander in 12 and 11 Groups from February 1940 until August 1941. A rather pompous manner disguised a quick, questing mind and shielded a character of charm, kindness and understanding. He was tough, enthusiastic and completely honest with his juniors from whom he expected loyalty and to whom he gave it. My lasting impression of him was that he cared about people. They mattered to him. Personally, -I had a tremendous regard and affection for him as did many others who served with him. We had all felt the rough edge of his tongue on occasion.]

Leigh-Mallory left 11 Group to become Commander-in-Chief Fighter Command and later, as an Air Chief Marshal, of the Allied Air Forces Europe. He died with his wife in an air crash in 1944. He was a great leader - a great loss.

Robert Wright will not be forgiven.

Wae Dader.

30th November 1969.

APPENDIX BGROUP-CAPTAIN GLEAVE'S OPINION OF BIG WINGS

Group-Captain Tom Gleave, CO of No.253 Squadron, was shot down and badly wounded on 31 August 1940, at the height of German attacks on RAF aerodromes. Since the war he has made a close study of the Battle and is convinced that Big Wings would not have worked for No.11 Group. Here he sets out his argument.

What his opinion overlooks, however, is the value that No.12 Group's Big Wing would have brought as an addition to No.11 Group's defensive squadrons. In that sense, his comments miss the point that benefits would have accrued from having a single command co-ordinating the resources of both Groups. The notes were enclosed in a letter from Group-Captain Gleave, dated 29 March 1989.

I thought this section from a letter I wrote some years ago might interest you.

The 'Big wing' if adopted in the Battle of Britain would have brought catastrophic defeat for us. That is before 28th September, 1940, when the Luftwaffe gave up using big bomber formations and could never thereafter inflict fatal damage on RAF Fighter Command. Park with Dowding's overall blessing set out to meet every enemy raid so far as it was possible with his meagre resources in No. 11 Group, however small the fighter formation available to meet each raid. To give an idea of the cost of letting raids through see THE NARROW MARGIN for Portsmouth 12th August, Bristol A/C factory 25th September, and the Spitfire factory at Southampton next day.

Park had no choice but to use penny packets to meet the GAF raids. The cost of using 'Big Wings' would have been prohibitive. A 'Multi-Squadron' (a better name for them) Wing could absorb 50-60 aircraft. True 100 aircraft could get off the ground using several airfields in a few minutes (Leigh-Mallory's argument) but to form them up into battle formation and get to height would take ages. As an example under average conditions:

One squadron	would take	14-15 minutes	to take off and climb						
								to 20,000 ft	
Two squadrons	" "	about 18	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "
Three squadrons	" "	about 26	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "
Four squadrons	" "	34-37	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "
Five squadrons	" "	45-48	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "

Moreover the distance covered over the ground grew less with the increase size of the wing. Yet Park's aim was to intercept as far away from the enemy's targets as possible. As you can see, and as Dowding has recorded, there was not the time nor the aircraft available to use 'Big Wings'. It is interesting to note that of 32 'Big wings' sent off by 12 Group only seven met the enemy and only once did a 'Big wing' get there first. And in the last half of October of 10 occasions in which 'Big wings' were used nine failed to intercept and the 10th shot down one Me.109. So much for the stupidity of the 'Big wings'.

APPENDIX CTHE COLLIER COLLECTION OF DOCUMENTS

Mr Richard Collier, author of *Eagle Day* (New York, 1966), and various other studies of the Second World War, most generously lent typescripts of translations made for his book. In the thesis they are referred to as the 'Collier Collection'. The translations were made by Nadia Radowitz, from the Karlsruhe Collection, Hamburg, (also at Imperial War Museum, London).

In order, they are:

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- | | |
|-------|---|
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| No.10 | Dr Karl Frydag and Mr Heinkel, interview published 13 June 1945. |
| No.61 | Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, interview published 7 July 1945. |

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|-----------|--|
| No.3 | Execution of German air-attacks in effort to win air - superiority, 31 July 1940. |
| No.5 | German attacks on R.A.F. ground installations, 13 August 1940 and 6 September 1940. |
| No.15 | 'Operation Sea of Lights', 6 August 1940. |
| No.22 | General Deichmann on reasons for Luftwaffe changing over to mass-attacks on London, undated. |
| No.23 | Order for attack on 'Loge' (London Docks), 6 September 1940. |
| No.25 | Orders given by Goering at conferences with chiefs of Flotte 2 and 3, on 1, 3, 15 and 19 August 1940: fighter protection for bomber-units. |
| No.33 | Theo Osterkamp, 'Experiences as Fighter Leader 2 on the Channel', 19 March 1953. |
| and No.34 | General von Richthofen, Private Diary, July- |

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APPENDIX DABBREVIATIONS

AA	Anti-aircraft
AAF	Auxiliary Air Force
AASF	Advanced Air Striking Force
ACAS	Assistant Chief of the Air Staff
ACM	Air Chief-Marshal
ADGB	Air Defence of Great Britain
AHB	Air Historical Branch
AI	Air Intelligence
AM	Air Marshal
AMP	Air Member for Personnel
AMRD	Air Member for Research and Development
AMSO	Air Member for Supply and Organisation
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
ASU	Aircraft Storage Unit
AVM	Air Vice-Marshal
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
CHL	Chain Home Link
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CO	Commanding Officer
COS	Chiefs of Staff

DCAS	Deputy Chief of the Air Staff
DCOS	Deputy Chief of Signals
DDAT	Deputy Director of Air Tactics
DDOI	Deputy Director of Intelligence
DDOps	Deputy Director of Operations
DD Plans	Deputy Director of Plans
D/F	Direction Finding
DHO	Director of Home Operations
DOI	Director of Intelligence
DOSS	Director of Staff Studies
D Plans	Director of Plans
FIU	Fighter Interception Unit
FTC	Flying Training Command
GAF	German Air Force
GCI	Ground Controlled Interception
GC Ops	Group Captain (Operations)
G/L	Gun Laying
GOC-in-C	General Officer, Commanding-in-Chief
HDC	Home Defence Committee
HF	High Frequency
HQ	Headquarters
IAZ	Inner Artillery Zone
IE	Initially Equipped
IFF	Identification Friend or Foe
JPC	Joint Planning Committee
MAF	Metropolitan Air Force
MAP	Ministry of Aircraft Production
MRAF	Marshal of the Royal Air Force
MTB	Motor Torpedo Boat
NADC	Night Air Defence Committee
NIC	Night Interception Committee

OC	Officer Commanding
OR	Operational Research
ORB	Operations Record Book
OTU	Operational Training Unit
PA	Personal Assistant
PPS	Parliamentary Private Secretary
PUS	Permanent Under-Secretary
QMG	Quartermaster-General
RA	Royal Artillery
RAFVR	Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve
RDF	Radio Direction Finding
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
R/T	Radio Telephone
SASO	Senior Air Staff Officer
VCAS	Vice-Chief of the Air Staff
VCNS	Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff
VHF	Very High Frequency
W/T	Wireless Telephone

APPENDIX EDOWDING'S SPIRITUALIST REFLECTIONS ON HIS PART IN THE BATTLE

In 1964 Dowding wrote to his old friend, Beaverbrook, reflecting on his role at Fighter Command before and during the Battle of Britain. Dowding, an ardent spiritualist, believed that a Divine Will had arranged for him, aided by Beaverbrook, to save the nation in 1940. This view he held of his destiny helps to explain his singular approach to command and the frustration he felt at the lack of recognition and reward he received after the battle.

'About a year after my retirement I was given a picture of the remote past. I was then the chief of one of the Mongol tribes engaged in a great Westward sweep of conquest.

I was very impetuous & always preferred to establish my tribe's footing in a new country by fighting rather than by negotiation. This led to my being mortally wounded in a battle against a tribe well armed with chariots and bows; and as I lay dying, the following message was given to me through my second in command. "Thou hast led thy people in haste: thou hast left them bereft. So in future ages thou must come again as a warrior to battle, and lead them alone. Then thou shalt serve me in spirit, and with the words of the spirit bring solace to my peoples."

I don't know who was speaking, but it would be one high in the hierarchy of this planet.

I am telling you this because I think it more than probable that your part in the Battle was laid down by the Lords of Karma as a result of some action of your own in times long past. Looking back on my own life I can see how events conspired to put me at the head of Fighter Command at the critical time, instead of

succeeding Ellington as CAS, as I had been told in 1935 that I should. I don't know if you, with your widely differing views, will think that this is all nonsense; but to me it is an integral part of my life ...

I think perhaps that the above will account for the way in which two such dissimilar characters as you and I were brought together and enabled to work harmoniously for the preservation of our dear country.'

Beaverbrook Papers, BBK C/120, Dowding to Beaverbrook, 2 June 1964.

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- AIR 19 Private Office Papers
- AIR 20 Unregistered Papers
- AIR 27 Operational Record Books, Squadrons
- AIR 28 Operational Record Books, Stations
- AIR 40 Directorate of Intelligence
- AIR 41 Air Historical Branch: Narratives and Monographs
- AIR 50 Squadron Combat Reports
-
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- CAB 4 Committee of Imperial Defence, Memoranda: Series B
- CAB 13 Home Defence Committee, Memoranda
- CAB 53 Committee of Imperial Defence, Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, Minutes and Memoranda
- CAB 55 Committee of Imperial Defence, Joint Planning Committee, Minutes and Memoranda
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