

"The Air War"

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sufficient to meet the best trained troops in Europe. It was the summer of 1916 before the grand offensive could be launched. This time we also need two years for the same task, and it may well be the summer of 1941 before an army of comparable size is at its posts in the line in France ready for a comparable task.

"At the same time, this time we have to raise, equip and train an Air Force of a size comparable only with what was achieved in the fourth year of war last time. And it may also be the summer of 1941 before peak effort in this direction is reached.

"Surely then our wisest course is to keep our powder dry; neither to engage in adventures, which may be premature; nor so to goad the enemy into action as may compel us to face the grand offensive except in our own time.

"Patience is one of the cardinal virtues which will bring victory, and most of the demands for action are based on impatience rather than on nobler convictions.

"In the last war the campaign opened with that clash of cavalry and war of movement which are the dreams of all strategists. Finally the two sides stood face to face along a line of steel, which stretched from Switzerland to the North Sea. They dug in and formed a line from which despite the most heroic sacrifices, neither side budged very much through four and a half years.

"This time, thanks to the realistic provision and faithfulness of our gallant ally, France, the line of our defense was built in the ten years prior to the conflict. We owe a great debt to France for that. So we are able to march into fixed position in the line without the battles or the casualties which characterized the opening phases of 1914 and 1915.

"If boredom has resulted from the absence of the spectacular clash, surely that is a small price to pay in exchange for battle with its inevitable list of casualties.

"The Allies will have gone a long way to victory if, in their diplomacy as well as in their strategy, they are able to induce the enemy to maintain a policy of masterly inactivity for the next 18 months while, behind the protection of that respite the task of mobilization, training, equipping and manufacturing is completed.

"Will Germany allow that lull to continue? It is in her interests to strike now and I predict she will probably do so. If so, we are ready in the air to defend this country and to preserve to her that inviolability she has known for a thousand years. That is the main task of the R.A.F. at home and, if it has been successful in the opening months of war, it is because of the high state of efficiency achieved.

"There are three R.A.F. commands concerned with active operations. The first is the Fighter Command. Under the Commander-in-Chief come all the Fighters, Barrage Balloons, AA Guns, Searchlights, Observer Corps, and the work of the Intelligence abroad.

"Every time raiders approach our coast these Fighters ascend to intercept and to bring them to combat. In over a hundred raids there have been some 60 engagements, and from 50 to 60 Nazi bombers have been brought down. Not a single British Fighter has been shot down. The reason lies in the technical superiority of the Fighter. They are built to take off quickly, to climb rapidly, to fly at

high speed, to discharge some 9,000 bullets per minute from their eight guns. But range is necessarily limited. They cannot follow the enemy too far out to sea.

"Soon you will see our new Fighters which, while preserving all these attributes, will add long range to their accomplishments. They will be able to chase enemy bombers back across the North Sea.

"But, by the organization and devices at our command, you may be assured that not a single aircraft—whether it be friendly or hostile—approaches these shores without the Fighter Command being aware; and without it being tracked and potted all the way in and out again.

"The Bomber Command is responsible for the active operations against the enemy. Day and night, throughout the worst winter in memory, thanks to the courage and fidelity of our pilots and crews, our night bombers have flown far into the heart of Germany, while our day bombers have sought the enemy and compelled him to fight over his own bases.

"Try to imagine the work of these bombers which take off in the darkness of night from aerodromes which in peace time could be lighted up to aid them; which fly for 400 miles over the North Sea in temperatures of 30 degrees below zero; with no friendly light on the waters to guide them; without the aid of wireless which in peace time could be used for navigation; bereft of those weather reports which help the pilot on his way, and which assure him of conditions governing his return; where the first intimation that they have entered a hostile land comes from the flaming lights of the AA guns as they cross the coast; where the pilots then turn on their course for hundreds of miles to their objectives either to make a reconnaissance or to drop their leaflets; where navigation is done largely by sight of the stars; where a faulty engine means the loneliness of captivity if the crew can take to their parachutes safely in the dark; or a fate much worse if they cannot; where the return journey must now be made across hundreds of miles of a territory roused to their presence; where every man's hand is against them; where the long crossing of the dark waters must again be accomplished ere home is reached; and where after perhaps a twelve hours' vigil the most dangerous task lies ahead—that of gliding in to land at perhaps a fogbound aerodrome where only the dimmed glow-lamps on the flare path (visible only from 200 feet) are the friendly guide to bring them to safe anchorage. Yet this work has been going on in conditions in which no air force has ever had to operate in any land hitherto. And it has been achieved week after week throughout the war so far.

"The work of the Coastal Command is likewise something new. The great flying boats with their range of up to 2,000 miles, have been flying in all weathers far out into the Atlantic to aid the Navy in convoying mer-

chant ships round our coasts where the 'sharks' lie in wait for them; helping to sink submarines themselves by direct action from the air; flying far into the Arctic Circle to prevent German raiders from leaving German ports or German warships from returning.

"These have been the main tasks to which the R.A.F. has committed its hand in the war so far. Soon may come the time of trial when it will also have to play its part in resisting air invasion. It must not be supposed that every bomber will be brought down or turned back. Some must get through and there will be casualties.

"But so far, both sides have kept the air war away from civilians, as they promised America. Fear of retaliation may be the only brake on the Nazi war machine. And the knowledge, by the experiences of our flights over Germany, that we can reach all parts of the Reich without hindrance at night is playing its part in sobering the extremists who have hitherto gloried in the notion that the total destruction of British cities could bring victory.

"I would, therefore, close as I commenced, by asking you to keep this larger outlook of what may be the Allied strategy constantly before you; and of not allowing yourselves to be deflected from your support of and confidence in the Allied policy, merely because an occasional air raid seems spectacular enough to dwarf long-distance views, or to eclipse them. If the Allies can be supported and are not tempted to swerve from the main strategy they have coolly conceived, victory must in the end be attained." (Prolonged applause.)

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