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W.P. (44) 320

13TH JUNE, 1944

WAR CABINET

"CROSSBOW"Report by the Chief of the Air Staff

Last night the enemy launched an attack by pilotless aircraft against this country. Full and accurate reports of the details of the attack are not yet available. From information obtained from Radar plots and the Royal Observer Corps, it appears that up to 27 pilotless aircraft may have been employed. The weather was bad at the time, making accurate visual observation difficult; the enemy operated normal aircraft intermittently over the S.E. and S.W. coast and the movement of our own aircraft made accurate plotting difficult.

2. According to reports, the first wave of pilotless aircraft appeared off Folkestone between 0407 and 0440 hours and penetrated Kent, Surrey and Sussex, four penetrating as far as Greater London. The second wave, reported to consist of thirteen aircraft, appeared over the Channel between Dungeness and South Foreland between 0458 and 0520 hours. Nine of these operated over Kent, Surrey and Sussex. The third wave, about which there is still considerable uncertainty, is reported to consist of two to four aircraft, which made landfall between Lyme Regis and Bridport from 0501 to 0535 hours. There was some movement of our own aircraft in this area at the time, and since no incidents have been reported, it may turn out that the aircraft reported were not all pilotless aircraft.

3. The aircraft were first reported to be coming in at a height of about 1,000 feet and rising gradually to a height of 4,000 feet. Their speed was estimated at between 230 and 250 m.p.h. and the path of flight of some of them was reported as being erratic.

4. Reports from the Royal Observer Corps describe the aircraft as having a long nose, small wings and showing a brilliant white light behind. This corresponds generally with the description of the pilotless aircraft based on a report on wreckage of a German pilotless aircraft recently examined in Sweden.

5. Incidents reported by the Ministry of Home Security as being due to pilotless aircraft occurred at:-

- (i) BETHNAL GREEN where the L.N.E.R. Railway bridge over Grove Road was demolished and 200 persons rendered homeless. Casualties were 2 killed and 28 injured.

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|------------------------------|---|
| (ii) STONE (Near DARTFORD) | } where slight damage, but
no casualties, was
caused. |
| (iii) PLATT (near SEVENOAKS) | |
| (iv) CUCKFIELD (Sussex) | |

6. It is not possible to state whether these pilotless aircraft attacks were delivered from the few "ski" sites which remain not completely damaged, or from the newly discovered modified sites which recent photographic reconnaissance has shown in some cases to be approaching a state of completion, permitting discharge of pilotless aircraft. Radar plots indicate, however, that most of the pilotless aircraft operating over the South East area were probably launched from sites in the Pas de Calais immediately north of the Somme. It is in this area that activity at the modified sites was recently reported and where some sites appear to be reaching an advanced stage of completion.

7. In view of the difficulties attending the attack of the small and well camouflaged sites, the Chiefs of Staff recently considered the desirability of attacking the supply sites which are suspected of constituting the servicing depots and rail heads for the modified launching sites.

8. I now feel that it would be advisable to recommend to the Supreme Allied Commander that these supply sites should be heavily attacked immediately, and that all launching sites capable of operation should also be attacked whenever effort can be spared. I am of the opinion that, in view of the present inaccuracy and light scale of attack of these pilotless aircraft, the air effort diverted should, at present, be limited to what can be spared without prejudicing in any way the urgent needs of the Battle of France.

(Intld.) C.P.

Air Ministry, S.W.1.,

13th June, 1944.



