



SUPPLEMENT

TO

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TUESDAY, 23 JANUARY, 1917.

War Office,
23rd January, 1917.

The Secretary of State for War has received the following Despatch from Field-Marshal Viscount French, G.C.B., Commanding-in-Chief, Home Forces:—

*General Headquarters,
Home Forces,
Horse Guards, London, S.W.,
31st December, 1916.*

MY LORD,—I have the honour to submit the following report:—

1. When I assumed command of the Forces in the United Kingdom, I was directed to review the situation as it affected Home Defence with a view to deciding whether defensive requirements were met by the system then in force.

According to these instructions I made an exhaustive study of the situation, and came to the conclusion that modification was necessary, in view of the most recent experiences we have gained in the conduct of War under existing conditions.

The Army Council agreed generally to the proposals submitted, and a reorganisation on the new lines has since then been carried into effect.

2. On the 24th April the rebellion broke out in Dublin. I have already referred to this in my despatch of the 29th May, covering a report from the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief in Ireland, which dealt fully with the occurrence. I will only add that both in England and in Ireland the military arrangements for its suppression proved everywhere adequate, and reflect great credit on all concerned.

3. On April 25th, the morning after the outbreak in Dublin, a hostile squadron accompanied by submarines appeared off Lowestoft. No doubt the object of this demonstration was to assist the Irish Rebellion and to distract attention from Ireland. It failed entirely to accomplish its object.

The enemy opened fire at long range on the towns of Yarmouth and Lowestoft, and continued the bombardment for about twenty minutes, after which they were engaged by our Cruisers and Torpedo Boat Destroyers, and they steamed away to the north-east.

In addition to the heavier ships and submarines the squadron was accompanied by a number of Destroyers, but the results of the bombardment were comparatively small, and no damage whatever of military importance was done.

4. At the time of my assumption of command the question of the Anti-Aircraft Defences of the country was under consideration.

On the 19th February it was decided that the London Defences should be handed over to me, and on 26th February it was further decided that I should be responsible for the whole of the Anti-Aircraft Land Defences of the United Kingdom.

Previous to this I had given considerable attention to the subject of Anti-Aircraft Defence, and I submitted a scheme for consideration, which was approved and has been carried out.

During the winter there was little hostile activity in this direction, but since I assumed charge of these Defences enemy airships and aeroplanes have invaded the country whenever conditions have admitted.

The numbers of airships taking part in a raid have varied considerably. On April 3rd only one was engaged, whilst in the raid of September 2nd-3rd not less than 12 ships are believed to have taken part.

In all, nineteen raids have been made by German airships and seventeen attacks have been made by aeroplanes.

The damage done has been comparatively small, and nothing of any military importance has been effected.

Taken as a whole, the defensive measures have been successful. In very few cases have the enemy reached their objective. They have been turned, driven off, seriously damaged by gunfire, and attacked with great success by aeroplanes. Seven have been brought down, either as the result of gunfire or aeroplane attack, or of both combined.

The work of the Royal Flying Corps and of the Gun and Light Detachments, including the Royal Naval Anti-Aircraft Corps, has been arduous and has shown consistent improvement; the guns and lights have been effectively handled, and the Pilots of the Royal Flying Corps have shown both skill and daring. All are deserving of high praise.

Close co-operation with the Navy has been maintained, and the R.N.A.S., by their constant and arduous patrol work on the coast and overseas, have shared in successful attacks on the enemy.

5. The work of training troops for overseas, both drafts and new units, imposes a great and

continuous strain on the Staffs, on the Schools, and on the Reserve Formations.

All have responded loyally to the demands made on them, and I consider special credit is due to those Officers and N.C.O.'s who, with little previous military knowledge, have become most efficient Instructors and have thus liberated a great number of Officers and N.C.O.'s for duty overseas.

The country owes a special debt of gratitude to a great number of senior retired Officers who—although by their age and services they had earned an honourable rest—came forward to perform whatever duties might be required of them until serving Officers were available to take their places.

I desire here to place on record my appreciation of the valuable help in training matters that I have consistently received from the departments of the War Office concerned.

6. I am forwarding a list of those whose services are, in my opinion, deserving of special consideration, but I am anxious to acknowledge in this despatch my deep indebtedness for the valuable assistance I have received throughout from—

Major-General F. C. Shaw, C.B., Major-General, Gen. Staff.

Brevet Colonel (temp. Br.-Gen.) H. C. Lowther, C.V.O., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., Brig.-General, Gen. Staff.

Colonel (temp. Maj.-General) H. A. L. Tagart, C.B., D.S.O., late 15th Hussars, Deputy Adjt. and Qr.-Mr.-General.

Colonel Sir D. F. R. Dawson, G.C.V.O., C.M.G., Inspector of Vulnerable Points, and largely instrumental in organising the Volunteer Forces.

I have the honour to be

Your Lordship's obedient Servant,

FRENCH, Field-Marshal,

Commanding-in-Chief, Home Forces.

The Secretary of State for War,
War Office.