

greatly developed as it has since been, could only give China a fraction of her needs from the outside world. Besides, the policy of straining communications demanded fighting. In the winter campaign of 1942-43 we occupied the Maungdaw and Buthidaung area and later advanced to Rathedaung, but in April with the approach of the monsoon the Arakan was once more evacuated.

At the end of the monsoon began a campaign with the limited objective of breaking the China blockade. The full conquest of the country could not be attempted since combined operations required equipment in great demand in Europe. Under General Wingate the Chindits landed by air in rear of Jap communications in Central Burma.

March—April, 1944

It so happened that our offensive met a Japanese offensive aimed at cutting off the troops in the Arakan and severing communications in the north by an advance into India through Manipur. In neither of these objectives did they succeed for, though Kohima and Imphal were under severe enemy pressure from April to July, the isolated units were supplied by air until the pressure was relieved. Indeed the Japs by leaving the close jungle country placed themselves on ground more favourable to the 14th Army. Meanwhile General Stillwell, advancing from the north with a mixed force, aided by the airborne force, who cut Japanese rail communications north of Mandalay, and supported by Chinese troops who crossed the Salween in Yunnan, had captured Mogaung (28th June, 1944) and Myitkyina (3rd August), the main centres of N. Burma, without serious threat to his communications. These campaigns cost the Japanese between 50,000 and 60,000 killed.

5. The Pacific

In the Pacific the Americans have continued the policy of hammer and encroach. Rabaul, Truk and many other places, including Japan and Formosa, have felt the weight of growing air power, and farther north an attack on the Marianas, after causing heavy loss to the defenders, has restored to the U.S.A. Saipan and the naval base of Guam (9th August, 1944).

6. Finishing The Job

Thus in the Far East, too, the forces against the aggressor are gathering, but the final fight there must wait until Germany is beaten, and the immense resources of men and material, of ships and aircraft, of guns and machines are available to deal with the immense task.

Burma, Thailand, French Indo-China, Malaya, the East Indies, the Philippines, Hong Kong and large areas of China have yet to be cleansed of the Japanese scourge.

Only when this is done can the Allies straighten their backs and with the clear eyes of honourable men who have done their duty turn to the greater task of rebuilding the world on the ashes of totalitarian tyranny.

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FIVE YEARS OF WAR

(September, 1939—September, 1944)

By

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WAR

Issued fortnightly
by

THE ARMY BUREAU
OF CURRENT AFFAIRS

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No. 81

(Reprinted in Canada December, 1944, by permission of the Controller, His Majesty's Stationery Office).

November 11th, 1944

27M-12-44 (4148) H.Q. 70-44

Lines of Thought

1. In this number we take you back over five years of war. The inception of this issue was the demand by repatriated prisoners of war for something that would bring them up to date. Ever since their capture they have been deprived of the truth and fed only on the German version of affairs. They wanted a chance to catch up. But it was felt that we all suffer in varying degrees from a lack of something to help us to catch up with events. There must be very few men in the Army who have read the day's paper every morning without a break since the war started. It was decided that everyone might well benefit from a short lesson in recent history.

★ ★ ★

2. The word "history" seems inseparably linked with the word "lesson," which is a pity. You can look at history in two ways: as a record of what men thought and did in the past, or as an explanation of why we are where we are today. If you use the word "history" at all when talking about this pamphlet it is probably better to follow the second of the two lines of approach.

★ ★ ★

3. We are where we are today because of things that happened in the past. Some of those were our personal acts, or omissions. Others seem to have been events over which we had no control, the greeds, ambitions and failures of the few, the carelessness of the many. If you want to branch out into civics, here is a thread to follow.

★ ★ ★

4. But do it individually. Ask a man what any date you pick out of a hat means to him, both in general and in particular terms. It may be about the time he first made a stripe, or embarked for overseas, or got engaged. Then show him, from this issue, where the war had got to by then and unravel how much of his private life had already been affected by the major events. Use that to rub in that his life is going to go on being affected that way for as long as he is above ground, and whether he likes it or not. We are writing history now and there is a lot to be said for influencing the pen the way we want it to go.

★ ★ ★

5. Another approach is to start off with a quiz, with you in the happy position of knowing (from the pages that follow) all the answers. But try to keep the discussion

from being simply an argument about what someone else might have done to achieve a rather more satisfactory five years. Suggest it's worth while thinking, too, on what we ourselves might have done.

★ ★ ★

6. And, if your men are keen on discussing their future in the post-war world (or, to put another way, what they will think of "history" in twenty-five years time), this is a Heaven-sent chance of providing innumerable leads into that world. Point out that history shows the causes of events. They—we—have to work out the consequences for ourselves.

★ ★ ★

7. A parallel you might find amusing to pursue is to use your unit as the equivalent of a community working out its own history. You have gone through many different phases, in many different locations, and with many different individuals involved. So has any community. What have the last five years taught your unit-community and how have the lessons been learnt? The parallel isn't complete, but it is interesting to see where and why it breaks down.

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8. Finally, don't think that this is a complete history of the war. That can't be done in the space available. Being an Army publication, the emphasis is rather on events on land, but do not allow anyone to think that means events on land are of greater importance than the related events at sea and in the air. All are dependent on one another. If the R.A.F. had not fought off the Luftwaffe in 1940, there might have been an invasion, the invasion might have been successful and the Army thereafter would have assumed a very different shape from that which it has. If the Navy had not beaten and cowed the Italian fleet into impotence, the land war around the Mediterranean would have followed a different pattern. A bomber crew drops a bomb on an oil refinery in 1943 which, in 1944, immobilises a tank on your immediate front. If the menace of the U-boat had not been kept in check, who can tell what would have happened to the community as a whole? Neither should you allow it to be thought that the full story of our Allies is here. From the Russian and American armies to the Norwegian Merchant Marine, from Polish parachutists to Dutch seamen, they have all had some hand in what has already been achieved.

Five Years of War

(September, 1939—September, 1944)

I. THE "PHONEY" PHASE

1. As Usual We Weren't Ready

1st September, 1939

WHEN at dawn on 1st September, 1939, German forces crossed the Polish frontier, Great Britain faced the ugliest international situation in her history. Not only had Nazi Germany become the most powerful state in Europe, a state which had already swallowed Austria and Czechoslovakia by merely shaking her mailed fist, but she was piling up armaments for her fanatical armies and huge air force at a much greater rate than the combined output of Britain and France. Negotiations for an alliance between the Western Powers and the Soviet Union had broken down, and Russia had played for time to strengthen herself by concluding a non-aggression pact with Germany. This had the unfortunate effect of leaving Germany free to crush Poland, while holding off Britain and France in the west.

2. Poland Was Overrun

12th March, 1940

Within a month Poland was completely overrun. Warsaw surrendered on 27th September, after an heroic siege. By marching into the eastern part of the country, Soviet armies prevented the whole of Poland falling into the Nazi grasp and Russia's invasion of Finland on 30th November was similarly designed to anticipate German occupation and cover her own frontiers. The Russo-Finnish campaign which ended on 12th March, 1940, gave the outside world and, incidentally, the Germans, a quite inadequate idea of Soviet power.

3. It Wasn't Altogether Phoney

13th December, 1939—16th February, 1940

Meanwhile the war in the west was being described in neutral U.S.A. as "phoney." The dreaded bombing of Britain had not begun, no direct assistance to Poland had been possible and after an initial attempt to break through the Siegfried Line, British and French forces settled down for months of comparative inactivity inside the Maginot Line and, as it proved, its totally inefficient northern extensions behind Belgium. Both Britain and France were increasing armament production, but not nearly enough. Only at sea were the Allies more than holding their own. The German scuttling of their pocket battleship "*Graf Spee*" rather than force further action against a British force, and the exploit of H.M.S. *Cossack* in rescuing British

prisoners of war from a German prison ship skulking in Norwegian waters, once more made Britons "Thank God for the Royal Navy."

4. The Nazis in Scandinavia

9th April, 1940—May, 1940

Early on 9th April, 1940, the Germans crossed into Denmark and moved on to occupy Copenhagen, simultaneously making landings in Norway. In Denmark they were too rapidly successful to give any chance of effective allied intervention, but strong Norwegian resistance enabled help to be given there. On 10th April was fought the first battle of Narvik, followed by a second battle three days later. Both of these, despite losses, inflicted considerable loss on the enemy and again showed that the Royal Navy retained its old fire and dash. On subsequent days British troops landed at Narvik, Namsos and Andalsnes, supported by a force of French troops, and for nearly a month fought gallantly against odds that were too great for them until crisis in France led to a complete withdrawal from Norway. German gains were considerable; they now held the entrance to the Baltic and from the ports and airfields of Norway they could menace sea routes from Iceland to N. Europe.

5. Blitzkrieg

10th May, 1940

The lovely spring weather of early May, 1940 could not altogether dispel the feeling that all was not going well in Norway. Into this atmosphere of sunny uncertainty came the news on 10th May, 1940, that Germany had invaded the neutral states of Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg. Maestricht fell, Luxembourg was overrun, British and French troops moved into Holland and Belgium. *The time for action had come*: Mr. Churchill replaced Mr. Chamberlain as Prime Minister.

28th May, 1940

The attack on Holland and Belgium opened with all the methods of the German blitzkrieg; Dutch and Belgian towns were mercilessly bombed; tanks and motorised infantry poured over an undestroyed bridge on the Albert Canal; paratroops rained from the sky; fifth columnists everywhere stampeded the civil population. Within five days the Dutch, overwhelmed by the Wehrmacht and the Luftwaffe, capitulated. British and French troops wheeled into Belgium and, pivoting on Sedan, advanced to Brussels: but the Germans struck at the pivot, pierced the French line, and all attempts to restore it failed. The Germans advanced in a wide sweep aimed at cutting the British communications with their main bases and the reduction of the Channel ports; holding the British forces, they engaged and defeated the French 9th Army. On 23rd May Boulogne was occupied and two days later the Germans claimed Calais. Meanwhile the B.E.F.

had been engaged and when the Belgian capitulation on 28th May exposed their left flank it seemed for some days that the destruction of the entire British force could not be avoided. Doggedly they hung on to the ever-shrinking strip of coast around Dunkirk, hard pressed from the east and with pressure from the west increasing daily. Then came the miracle. Supported by 222 naval vessels, 635 British craft of all sorts and sizes, carried out under air bombardment the evacuation of the bulk of that British force; 224,585 British and 112,546 Belgians and Frenchmen were taken to England. This was a grand achievement but losses were heavy: 700 tanks, 50,000 vehicles, 2,400 guns, 6 destroyers and 24 smaller war vessels were lost and some 40,000 prisoners were left in German hands.

Losses might indeed have been heavier but for the R.A.F. In an exhausting effort, fighting at extreme range with few fighters, they managed, at a cost of heavy casualties to air crews, to establish local air superiority and so to deny to the enemy the full fruits of his success.

6. End of the First Phase

Attempts to hold the Germans on the Somme failed; fierce fighting took place on the Bresle and the Oise, the French continued to withdraw and the battle spread eastward. As the threat to Paris grew, Italy, in the most shameful example of political opportunism, sure that France and Britain were defeated, declared war on them and attacked France from the south-east. In the north a French retirement across the Marne exposed the capital. Paris, declared an open city, was entered on 14th June and the Germans pushed on to the Loire. Even now Mr. Churchill did not give up hope and offered to France political union with Britain, but the French Government refused.

All now seemed over bar the shouting. Alone de Gaulle exhorted the French people to fight on, but the Men of Vichy had other ideas and on the same day as de Gaulle's broadcast it was announced that Petain had asked for armistice terms. Hitler rubbed the French noses in the dirt by dictating the conditions at Compiègne in the same railway carriage which did duty for the Allies on 11th November, 1918.

II. BRITAIN ALONE

1. Bloody but Unbowed

The French capitulation produced momentarily a great gloom in Britain. Without loss of time, speaking by radio, Mr. Churchill dispelled the gloom by a fine fighting speech which will never be forgotten by those who heard it. Great was his courage, but greater was his reward, for man and boy, woman and girl, the nation rose behind him to close the ranks, and forge the weapons that were to enable Britain and the Dominions beyond the seas to stand alone and fill the breach until the offensive against Nazism could be resumed. Truly this was our finest hour.

The loss of most of the French navy was a great blow; now all the seas in all the oceans must be kept by the Royal Navy and those of the Dominions. The whole of the north of France became the spring-board for attack on England. The entire French coast provided harbours from which shipping could be attacked by surface craft, U-boat and aeroplane. No less serious was the military situation overseas, especially in North and East Africa, where the presence of French garrisons had enabled only weak British forces to be retained.

Italy lost no time in exploiting the position and early in July occupied Kassala and Galabat and forced our evacuation of Br. Somaliland. Germany, too, began to attack our channel convoys.

2. The Battle of Britain is Won

8th August, 1940—15th September, 1940

It was obvious that with the Fleet in being, supported by the R.A.F., a German invasion across the Channel would be hazardous. The next step for Germany was to destroy the R.A.F. in the hope that the Navy, deprived of air cover, would be incapable of effective intervention. Thus attacks on harbours and shipping were switched first to airfields in coastal areas and then to those lying further inland. From 8th August to mid-September the battle was on: five times during this period over 100 enemy aircraft were raked out of the sky in one day. Even the Luftwaffe could not stand losses on this scale and with a loss of 185 in their encounters with the R.A.F. on 15th September they were forced to abandon the effort. The flower of the German Air Force was withered in this scorching attack and it was never the same force again.

Defeated in daylight they changed their plan and attempted to break British resistance by the Night Blitz. Repeated attacks were made on London, the seaports, the great industrial cities and large centres of population. At first there was no effective answer to these attacks, but an intensive campaign in research, development, trial and experiment, combining the best brains of the Services and of British scientists, led to effective measures which began to give effective results in May, 1941. From September, 1940, to May, 1941, over 41,000 civilians were killed and over 53,000 wounded, and these figures can be taken as an indication of the effort called for from the R.A.F., the A.A. gunners and the civil defence services. Heavy though these casualties were they must scarcely be included in weighing the extent of the R.A.F.'s success in the battle any more than success must be reckoned by the numbers of aircraft brought down. The true success of the R.A.F. in the Battle of Britain was that an operation designed to destroy it had left it in possession of the skies. The Luftwaffe had also acquired a distinct distaste for the word "Spitfire."

During all this period preparations for the seaborne invasion were proceeding in the French channel ports, but these were incessantly bombed. Nor was this the only work of the Bombers. Turin, Milan,

the Leuna Synthetic Oil Works, Berlin, Lorient all had one or more visits from Bomber Command.

3. Both Sides of the Mediterranean

18th September, 1940

Relieved of any danger of French counter-action from Tunisia, the Italians advanced on the night of 17/18th September to Sidi Barrani in Egypt. Attention was, however, deflected from this threat by two important events in Europe. First the German occupation of Rumania early in October and towards the end of that month by the Italian attack on Greece. British help to Greece was promised. The magnificent resistance of the Greeks and the hiding they were soon giving the Italians held the world wide-eyed with admiration. A smashing attack by the Fleet Air Arm at Taranto, where damage was caused to three battleships, two cruisers and two auxiliaries of the enemy, was the most we could do to help at the time.

9th December, 1940—8th February, 1941

On 9th December General Wavell's offensive opened in the Western Desert after delay caused by sending help to Greece. At last Britons were to read the stimulating news of sweeping victories. Sidi Barrani was captured on 11th December, others followed: Sollum and Ft. Capuzzo (17th December), Bardia (5th January), Tobruk (22nd January), Derna (30th January), Benghazi (6th February), El Agheila (8th February). Thus in two months all Cyrenaica was occupied, 180,000 prisoners taken and much material captured or destroyed.

4. E. Africa, Too

15th February, 1941

In East Africa also we fought back strongly in a campaign which has never received adequate notice. On 15th February Kismayu was occupied, on 20th February we crossed the Juba River to capture Mogadishu (26th February). Berbera was re-occupied on 24th February, Jigiga on 17th March, and a week later the Marda Pass was forced, while the end of the month saw the capture of the "impregnable" Keren.

5. And the Navy

28th March, 1941

The winter closed with a fitting contribution from the Navy in the victory at Cape Matapan when without damage to our ships three Italian cruisers, two destroyers and probably other ships were sunk and several, including a new battleship, were damaged.

27th May, 1941

Thus was assured the safe passage of supplies to the Desert Force. In the Atlantic, too, the battleship Bismarck, the pride of the German Navy, came out to deal a telling blow at British convoys, but she had hardly entered the Atlantic when she was stopped and sunk.

III. THE WAR WIDENS

1. Germany Invades Greece and Crete

25th March, 1941

The end of March brought new developments. On 25th March Yugoslavia signed the Tripartite pact, but the return of the Ministers brought widespread protest leading to revolution and anti-Axis demonstrations. Under King Peter, Yugoslavia threw in her lot with the Allies. On 6th April Hitler invaded Yugoslavia and Greece, and Belgrade, although declared an open city, was heavily bombed. The same day British troops, drained from N. Africa, were announced in Greece.

The ill-equipped Yugoslav Army, ordered too late to move, was unable to hold the German advance and left the Greek flank exposed. British troops in action were forced to retire to the Mt. Olympus line and four days later that, too, had to be evacuated.

On 20th April the Greeks in Epirus and Macedonia were forced to capitulate and evacuation of the remaining British forces began on 22nd April, 1941.

After their withdrawal from the mainland British forces continued to hold the large island of Crete for several weeks but were unable to repel an airborne invasion and were eventually forced to withdraw with severe losses of life and shipping. Fortunately the recent naval victory at Matapan deterred the Italian fleet from coming out.

2. Iraq and Syria

8th June, 1941—11th July, 1941

Early in April, 1941, Raschid Ali, supported by Germany, staged a coup d'etat in Iraq. With the permission of the legal Iraqi Government British troops were landed at Basra on 17th April, but when reinforcements arrived permission to land was refused until the first party was clear of the country. An ugly situation soon developed. Iraqi troops massed round the aerodrome at Habanya, which they attacked on 2nd May and it took a month to smoke out that hornets' nest and restore peace to Iraq. German participation in this revolt had led to the use, with Vichy consent, of aerodromes in Syria. Although having enough on our hands without German infiltration in the Near East, British and Free French forces, supported by the R. Navy and R.A.F., entered Syria on 8th June. A sharp campaign followed and it was not until 11th July, after Tyre, Sidon, Damascus, Palmyra, and Beirut had in turn been occupied, that the "Cease Fire" sounded.

3. Ups and Downs in Africa

15th May, 1941

Weakened by help for Greece, Wavell had withdrawn from Benghazi early in April and later lost Derna. Although Tobruk held out, Sollum fell to the Germans before the end of the month though

it was retaken on 15th May. Then followed a long period with no outstanding news, punctuated only by occasional word of navy-borne help arriving in the besieged Tobruk.

8th April, 1941

Meanwhile in E. Africa we captured Massawa (8th April) and Dessie (24th April), and Haile Selassie re-entered Addis Ababa on 5th May. The capitulation of the Duke of Aosta at Amba Alagi came on 18th May, but the remnants of Italian troops held on until late in November, when the last 10,000 surrendered at Gondar.

4. Russia—A New Ally

22nd June, 1941—18th August, 1941

On 22nd June, Hitler, by invading Russia, committed himself to the war on two fronts, which had always been the bogey of the German General Staff. By employing blitzkrieg tactics he planned to annihilate the Red Army and occupy Moscow and Leningrad before winter. The attack, swift and deadly, consisted of a series of lightning thrusts. In the Finnish theatre they had captured Kingisepp by 18th August and threatened Leningrad; north of the Pripet marshes they took Riga (1st July); south of the marshes Lvov fell by the end of June. A second advance in the north took Smolensk, while a drive into the Ukraine in July carried the Germans through Kiev, Odessa, Kharkov and Kerch to Rostov. Despite this rapid success, Leningrad and Moscow were still in Russian hands at the onset of winter and the Red Army was still in being. Time and again, escaping encirclement, it took advantage of its unlimited space for retirement; when seemingly trapped it fought on; its partisans appeared everywhere to harass the German rear; its machinery, removed from threatened areas, was set up far in the rear and restarted. Bitterly must Hitler have thought of his delayed start caused by British intervention in the Balkans and which now handicapped his campaign to capture Moscow and Leningrad before winter. Ill equipped for the Russian winter, his troops suffered terribly. With the occupation of her most fertile and most highly industrial areas Russia's plight was very serious and the full aid promised by Britain and later by America became an urgent matter. In August British and Russian troops entered Persia from south and north respectively to secure that route for supplies, and many a British sailor will remember the Arctic convoys which carried Russia much needed help by the other, northern, route.

5. The Japanese Peril

7th December, 1941—10th December, 1941

After months of truculence, Japan now came into the arena. Her plan aimed at the destruction of Allied sea power in the Pacific by the seizure of its bases and the occupation of territory which would give her valuable strategic materials which she lacked. On 7th December, while still negotiating with U.S.A., she struck a surprise blow at Pearl Harbour, causing heavy damage and, during the

following night, made landings in Siam and N.E. Malaya. Both Britain and U.S.A. declared war on Japan the following day, while attacks were opened on Guam, Midway, Wake Islands, and the Philippines. Hong Kong was also attacked by land and sea. On 10th December, a black day for the Allies, saw the loss of Khota Bharu aerodrome in N.E. Malaya, the worse loss of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* in Malayan waters, sunk by torpedo bombers when without air support; the capture of Guam; and a landing at Luzon in the Philippines. No less important was 11th December, which brought the full power of the U.S.A. into the war against Germany and Italy. By 17th December the Japs had landed in N. Borneo, and also reached within 10 miles of Penang, which was evacuated on 19th December. The weight of attack was now concentrated on Hong Kong and the Philippines.

25th December, 1941

Hong Kong, deprived of water, surrendered on Christmas Day, Manila and Cavite fell on 2nd January; Bataan held out until 9th April, but the fall of Corregidor on 6th May after a terrific struggle brought an end to organised resistance in the Philippines.

15th February, 1942

Meanwhile, Malaya had rapidly been overrun. Repeatedly a new line was outflanked by landings in our rear as Allied naval forces, with little air support, were not strong enough to contend with the battle fleet of Japan, supported by squadrons of dive-bombers. By the end of January all British forces had withdrawn to Singapore, which itself fell on 15th February. The war had spread into Burma early in January and we withdrew from Moulmein at the end of the month. For a time the enemy was held along the Salween River, but when that line was lost, Rangoon was evacuated (10th March), and, after a retreat from Lower Burma, which was tactically as brilliant as it was strategically unavailing, General Alexander led his force over the frontier into India, and touch with China by the Burma Road was lost.

Nor were these the only losses. By March Japan had occupied the Netherlands East Indies, British N. Borneo, Sarawak and Portuguese Timor, while landings in the Solomons and at Lae in New Guinea directly threatened Australia. Thus in only five months the Allies had lost vast areas containing vital sources of rubber, tin, oil and many other essential commodities, while loss of sea supremacy in the Pacific exposed Australia, India and even E. Africa to enemy attacks.

IV. HOLDING ON

1. Offensive and Counter-offensive in N. Africa

In North Africa, the 8th Army, with magnificent air support, attacked on 18th November, 1941. After a heavy and costly tank action near Sidi Rezegh, they had advanced again to Benghazi by the end of the year. Rommel, cornered at Jedabya, managed to get away in a sandstorm to El Agheila. Heavily reinforced, and taking advantage

of the withdrawal of British troops for other theatres of war, Rommel staged a big come-back on 23rd January, 1942, in a counter-offensive which reached great intensity at the end of May and the beginning of June in the gallant but unavailing defence of Bir Hakim by the French, and the "Battle of the Cauldron." On 13th June British forces suffered a very heavy loss of armour near Knightsbridge and were forced to withdraw. Tobruk fell on 21st June, 1942, and the retreat to El Alamein followed. On this position, with a 40-mile front and his left flank covered by the Quattara Depression, General Auckinleck held the Germans almost in sight of Cairo.

2. The Russian Front

Winter, 1941

The onset of winter found the Germans in full possession of the Ukraine and investing Moscow and Leningrad. In taking Rostov the Germans had left an exposed flank, and, attacking this, Timoshenko began a successful counter-offensive causing heavy enemy losses and driving the Germans back to Taganrog. Another thrust in the north relieved the pressure on Moscow, while a railway laid over the ice carried supplies into Leningrad. Although foiled in an attempt to regain Karkov owing to a large German counter-offensive, Russian territorial gains during the winter were considerable, but even more important was the loss of German morale caused by the misery of cold and the grim ferocity of the Red Army.

Summer, 1942

With the coming of summer the Huns resumed the initiative, but instead of attacking everywhere they confined themselves to one main objective—the oil of the Caucasus and Caspian. Forcing the Russian withdrawal from the Kerch Peninsula in May they isolated, and later captured, Sevastopol. Thus freed from the menace to their flank they pressed on into the Caucasus pushing on also through Rostov towards the Volga at Stalingrad, parts of which they entered in September. In the Caucasus the Maikop oilfield fell in August, and the end of summer found the Germans threatening the Grozny oilfield, in possession of Novorossisk, the Black Sea naval base, but held at Stalingrad and unable to cut the Volga lifeline.

Thus the Allies were threatened by a gigantic pincer movement, the claws of which aimed at meeting in the region of the Suez Canal.

3. At Sea

From the outbreak of war sea losses had been heavy, but now the fight was deadly, but the convoys sailed on: across the Atlantic; by the northern route to Russia; round the Cape to supply the 8th Army, and by the hazardous route to Malta, or "Bomb Alley" as it was known, owing to the incessant air attacks from both Sicily and N. Africa. The Royal Navy co-operated in land operations along the N. African coast, including the running of supplies to Tobruk during its magnificent isolation, and assisted in the combined operation in May, which forestalled enemy plans to use Madagascar as a base.

In the Far East, too, came the first checks to Japanese power when, in May, the U.S. Fleet trounced the Japs in the Coral Sea, and later scored an even greater success against them at Midway, thus easing the threat to Australia and aiding the forces fighting in the terrible conditions of New Guinea.

12th June, 1942

In the N. Pacific a new threat came with the Japanese occupation of Kiska and Attu in the Aleutians.

V. THE TIDE TURNS

1. Dieppe

19th August, 1942

The first harbinger of offensive action to come was the reconnaissance in force at Dieppe where there was heavy fighting ashore for 9 hours. Losses were heavy but valuable data were obtained, while the R.A.F. trounced the Luftwaffe to the tune of 125 German aircraft destroyed.

2. Rommel on the Run

On the 23rd October, 1942, the 8th Army with tremendous air support, struck at El Alamein. Preceded by the greatest artillery preparation of the war, the infantry went in and secured ground for tank manœuvre. A break through by British armour in a big tank battle at El Aqqaqir on the 2nd and 3rd November caused a disorderly retreat westwards by the enemy who lost 260 tanks, 270 guns and over 9,000 prisoners. From that time the enemy race westwards, harried by British columns, was rarely free from devastating air attack. By 15th December El Agheila was ours, and by 23rd January, 1943, the very difficult crossing of Tripolitania had been achieved and Tripoli itself captured. Attack on the Mareth Line was delayed a little by the need to build up strength and refit, but by the beginning of April the Mareth Line had fallen to Montgomery's famous left hook and we had taken the Wadi Akarit position.

3. The Surprise in the N. West

9th November, 1942

While the 8th Army was chasing Rommel from Egypt, the world was astonished by news of Anglo-American landings in French N. Africa from a convoy of over 500 ships escorted by some 350 naval vessels. Secrecy had been perfect and complete surprise was achieved. Hitler's reaction was the occupation of the whole of France, but he was unable to seize the French warships at Toulon where their gallant crews scuttled them. The objectives of the North Africa expedition were Tunis and Bizerta which the Germans immediately reinforced by air. After slight Vichy resistance the landings were completed successfully and by the 16th November the 1st Army had entered Tunisia. Hindered by bad weather, the daring effort to seize Tunis and Bizerta failed by a narrow margin and Anderson consolidated on a line centred on Medjez el Bab. In January the Allies extended their positions southwards and in February a German counter-thrust

through the Kasserine Pass towards Tebessa reached higher water on the 22nd February. The Allied recapture of the Kasserine Pass led to the fall of El Guettar, Macknassy and, later, Sejane, and on the 7th April, 1943, the Americans made contact with the 8th Army. Certainly the original objective had not been attained, but the Hun had now become the nut instead of the nut crackers.

4. Stalingrad

1st January, 1943

Hammered ceaselessly by hundreds of 'planes and by some 30 divisions Stalingrad was besieged for more than two months: grimly the Red Army held on fighting from house to house. On the 19th November, 1942, the Russians attacked across the Don north-west of the city and from positions to the south of it. Despite the growing threat Hitler refused to order withdrawal: thus the city was encircled and all German efforts to relieve the investing force failing, their 6th Army was destroyed yielding 91,000 prisoners. Further to the west another large force was cut off. In the north, too, Russia took the initiative and, bypassing the German "hedgehogs," left them to be reduced in good time. Thus in January, 1943, Veliki Luki was captured and Leningrad relieved; in February Kursk, Rostov, Voroshilovgrad and Kharkov were recaptured, while March brought Rjev and Viasma into Russian hands. A German offensive later regained Kharkov and Bielgorod but the winter had restored large areas in the basins of the Don and Donetz and, more important, had bitten deeply into German fighting strength. In the Caucasus the threat to Grozny was removed and much territory regained.

5. Tunisia: The Nut is Cracked

After the fall of Mareth Rommel retired up the coast and, following him, the British after taking Sfax and Sousse confronted him on a position at Enfidaville. For the line-up on the west there were French troops at Pont du Fahs, the British 1st Army (reinforced by 3 divisions from 8th Army) facing Medjez, then the American 2nd Army Corps and finally French African troops and irregulars in the coastal area. Enfidaville fell to the 8th Army on the 20th April, 1943, and on the 21st April, the 1st Army attacked in the Medjez-Bou Arada sector followed five days later by a French advance on Pont du Fahs. The ring was closing.

The Americans captured Mateur early in May and by 7th May, 1943, Bizerta and Tunis were both in the bag. By 13th May all was over, 291,000 prisoners had been taken and one continent had been cleared of Axis troops.

6. The R.A.F. Hit Hard

Having pushed her frontiers to the seas of Western Europe, Germany felt secure from war at home, but the R.A.F. soon disillusioned her. Short of aircraft the attack was, in 1941, on a small scale but it provided training for Bomber Command. Even in 1942 it fell short of hopes. Nevertheless, German war industry suffered some telling blows which

increased in intensity during 1943 when our own vastly increased force was augmented by that of the U.S.A. From then on Germans got no rest: by night the R.A.F. pounded them and by day the Americans continued the bombardment. Concentrating in 1943 on enemy aircraft production, the plan widened in 1944 to embrace general war production with special emphasis on production of aircraft and tanks, and spreading in April, 1944, to communications, warning systems and coast defences in Northern France.

In this way the R.A.F. maintained a British offensive from Dunkirk until the landing on "D" Day, an offensive which at once gave aid to Russia, turned Germany into a battlefield and made it impossible for her to dispose sufficient power either in the air or on land ultimately to prevent the successful invasion of Europe.

VI. ATTACK ON HITLER'S FORTRESS

1. Sicily

17th August, 1943

There was a natural lull after the Tunisian landslide, but in mid-June the capture of Pantellaria, Lampedusa and Linosa heralded fresh action. On the night 9/10th July Allied parachute troops landed on Sicily and next morning a fleet of 3,000 ships put an Allied force ashore in the southern corner of the island. U.S. troops followed a wide movement round the western and northern coasts, Canadians through the central region via Enna, and the British followed the east coast. Syracuse and Augusta fell early, but stiff resistance was met, particularly near Catania. A linking of the forces in the region of Mount Etna finally led to the capitulation of the island after a campaign lasting only 38 days and costing 25,000 Allied casualties against 165,000 suffered by the axis.

2. Italy First Phase

The loss of Sicily led quickly to Mussolini's fall and he was replaced by Badoglio who immediately came to terms with the Allies and an armistice was signed on the 3rd September, 1943. On the same day Allied troops landed on the mainland from Messina. A race followed to secure control of the peninsula, but the Germans were able to establish a line south of Naples. The Allied 5th Army landed on the 9th September at Salerno just south of Naples and behind the German line. The landing was heavily contested and for a time the situation was precarious, but the Germans were unable to prevent the union of the 5th and 8th Armies.

An even more important event occurred as a result of the armistice in the surrender of the Italian navy, much of which escaped the German bombers: with the French fleet scuttled and the Italian fleet in Allied hands the naval situation in the Mediterranean became much easier and at least part of the Mediterranean Fleet became available for work elsewhere.

Naples fell on 1st October, 1943, but hopes of the immediate fall of Rome ignored the mountainous terrain and swollen rivers which gave every help to the defence, and the end of the year saw the 8th Army near Ortona and the 5th Army in the region of the Garigliano River.

3. The Russians Come Back

5th July, 1943

Preoccupied in N. Africa and Sicily, the Germans opened their summer Russian offensive late and from the 5th to 14th July tried to reduce the Kursk salient. Immediately the Russians replied with a counter-thrust to capture Orel (5th August) thus removing the threat to Moscow. Again they attacked, this time at the southern end of the salient where Bielgorod and Kharkov were recaptured: as a result the Germans were soon thrown out of the Donetz Basin. The lack of German reserves and their general weakness now became apparent: the Russians were able to attack at will. Between August and October Taganrog, Smolensk, Briansk and Tamam had all been captured. The breaking of the Melitopol switch line cut the landward communications of the Crimea, and across the Kerch Strait the fall of Novorossisk eliminated the German foothold in the Crimea. By the 10th October the enemy had been hurled back to the Dneiper which the Russians were crossing at several points and by the end of the year even that line had been broken following the fall of Kiev in November.

The first event of 1944 was a thrust in the north which finally relieved Leningrad after nearly two years of siege. Advancing in the region of Lake Peipus and Lake Pskov, the Red Army liberated a large area, with a consequent threat to the German front in Finland and also their Baltic positions. In the south, sweeping across the Ukraine the Red Army in March cleared the lower Dneiper, crossed the Dniester and advanced to the Carpathians to threaten Rumania. On the 27th March Nikolaiev was captured, Odessa fell (10th April), and to crown these achievements Sevastopol was **retaken** on the 9th May to complete the liberation of the Crimea.

4. Rome Falls

12th May, 1944.

Owing to the difficult country and bad weather the fall of Naples did not lead to a rapid move on Rome. In an endeavour to force the pace the 5th Army made a landing at Anzio on the 22nd January, 1944. There was little opposition at first, but they were unable greatly to extend their beachhead, with the result that their transports were within range of enemy guns. Later the Germans attacked fiercely, but the troops held their ground and though unable to achieve their initial objectives, they were able greatly to assist when the time came for the general assault. Having secretly regrouped his forces in a period of lull, General Alexander opened the offensive on the **Gustav Line** on the 12th May. A key point in this line was Cassino, which

had long caused trouble owing to its dominating position. In the course of the next day the Garigliano and Rapido Rivers were crossed and by the 16th May the whole of the Gustav Line south of the Liri River had been overrun. Cassino fell on the 18th May, 1944, and on the night of the 22nd to 23rd May the Anzio force, with tremendous air cover, fell on Kesselring's right flank and the Canadians broke through the Hitler Line in the Liri Valley.

Rome, hardly damaged, fell on the 4th June, 1944.

5. "D" Day

The hush of expectancy of early June was broken on the morning of the 6th, when the world learnt that during the night airborne troops had landed just east of the Cherbourg peninsula, using 1,000 planes and gliders. Ten coast batteries received 5,000 tons of bombs from 1,300 bombers. With terrific naval and air cover the Allies went back to avenge Dunkirk; 25,000 of them landed in the first 24 hours. Allied air power smashed the Seine bridges and focal communication points. Bayeux was taken on the 8th June, 1944. The enemy chose to make a big fight for Caen, opposed by British and Canadian troops: further westward the Americans, possibly aided by the German use of his best armour at Caen, were able to make better progress up the Cherbourg peninsula. Meanwhile the front was steadily being built up from Caen to the base of the Cotentin peninsula. By "D" + 20 a million men and vast quantities of material had been put ashore on the beaches. Trying to bluff us off our strategic plan, Hitler launched his flying bombs on London and Southern England; he did not succeed; the people took their medicine and made rude jests about the "doodle bugs." The Allied plan remained unchanged.

6. The Advance Begins

Following the fall of Cherbourg to the Americans on the 25th June, 1944, came the fall of Caen after several weeks of heavy fighting, in which the Germans lost heavily in men and armour. They, however, continued to oppose strong forces, including their main armour, in this area. Taking advantage of this the Americans broke through in the west at Avranches on the 27th July, 1944, and a German counter-attack failed to check them. Pressing on to the Loire and cutting off the Brittany peninsula, the Americans wheeled in a wide sweep to come up on the left flank of the Germans now withdrawing under the combined pressure of British and Canadians towards the Seine, and with their superior mobility were able to trap the German 7th Army in the Falaise pocket. Free French Troops of the Interior (F.F.I.) now organised under the Supreme Command and gave much assistance in sabotaging back areas and in cleaning up pockets of Germans left by the dismal tide of retreat. In the excitement of this great sweep, the Allied landing between Marseilles and Nice on the 15th August lost much of its dramatic, though none of its real, effect. While the F.F.I. took Marseilles and Toulon the main forces pressed on up and parallel with the Rhône valley. Americans

reached Grenoble only 12 days after landing, while Avignon and Valence were in Allied hands by the end of the month.

7. France and Belgium Free

The liberation of Paris was completed by the F.F.I. on the 25th August, 1944, and Americans crossing the Seine passed through Soissons and reached Sedan. It was now the turn of the British and Canadians to show their speed; forcing the Seine below Rouen they took Amiens (31st August) and sweeping on had liberated Brussels by 3rd September, 1944, and advanced to Antwerp. Thus in under three months, except for a few pockets of resistance, mainly seaports which the enemy sought to deny to our use, all France and Belgium were free and Holland was beginning to welcome British columns as they pressed forward to the lower Rhine.

8. The Russians Close In

On the Russian front, anticipating a big attack in the south, Germany concentrated her armour there to meet it, but the attack came in the north. Beginning with a blow at Finland, the offensive spread rapidly in an advance on the Baltic States. One after another, key towns in the German defensive system fell and in under a month Russian forces were advancing on Latvia and Lithuania. Following up, the Red Army attacked south of Pripet and here again key towns fell in rapid succession: Bialystok, Lvov, Brest Litovsk, Lublin. Thus the line of the Vistula was reached in July and the battle for Warsaw opened in early August, while the northern success was completed by the capture of Kaunas. In E. Prussia, German civilians were furiously digging trenches: in Finland, after previous failures, the move for an armistice succeeded and one more satellite fell away from the Nazi cause.

9. Collapse in the Balkans

The renewal of the assault on Rumania gave impetus to negotiations already in progress and the capture of Jassy was speedily followed by the capitulation of Rumania and, indeed, their declaration of war on Germany. By the end of August, Galatz, Ploesti and Bucharest were in Russian hands. It was now Bulgaria's turn to ask the Allies for an armistice.

In Yugoslavia, Marshal Tito, whose guerillas have fought unceasingly against the invader, began to get in greater measure help and supplies so long and sorely needed to enable him to wage war on the grand scale.

10. The Great Line Up

30th September, 1944.

And so the scene was set for the final act of the drama in the west. At the end of September, 1944, British, American and Allied forces were on the frontier of Germany from Holland to Switzerland, poised for the assault on the Rhineland and the Ruhr. In Italy, General Alexander was entering the valley of the Po, where going would be more favourable for the rout of Kesselring's army than in the

mountain ridges of the Apennines. The Yugoslavs, strengthened by Allied help, stood, still fighting hard. Rumania was now fighting on our side, while Bulgaria paused to consider Allied terms. The Russians had entered Hungary, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, while their guns farther north battered Warsaw, and still farther north the Red Army was standing at the door of E. Prussia. And within the heart of Germany a great army of foreign workers waited on the chance to avenge its enslavement. The noose was tightening and the criminal Germany stood on the trap-door of retribution waiting for the bolts to be drawn.

VII. AND THEN THE JAPS

1. Setting the Final Scene

Little has been said of the Far East since the Japanese occupation of Burma. This was deliberate, for it is necessary to set the scene for the play yet to be performed after the defeat of Germany.

2. New Guinea

May, 1942

That the situation was still precarious even after the Coral Sea and Midway battles was shown by the Japanese advance on Port Moresby in July, 1942. By mid-September they were within 32 miles of it, but the Australians counter-attacked and then in October crossed the Owen Stanley range and captured Kokoda; at the end of the month Gona, too, fell.

Early in January, 1943, the Allies occupied Buna, and on the 23rd January all land fighting in Papua ceased. In the following June Americans landing in Nassau Bay made contact with the Australians who, on the 14th September, 1943, occupied Lae and Salamana. A further blow to the Japs had been the destruction of 215 planes in the Wewak area on the 14th August.

3. From Defence to Attack

Meanwhile it was obvious that Japan had overreached herself in her wide conquests; her supply problem was acute, her limited shipping still further reduced by naval encounters. Allied strategy therefore aimed at straining these communications to the full and encroaching at the same time on the Japanese perimeter. Thus in August, 1942, U.S. Marines landed at Guadalcanal and Tulagi in the Solomons and after months of bitter fighting the Japanese evacuation of Guadalcanal took place in February, 1943. Another blow fell on the Japs in March when a convoy was annihilated in the Bismarck Sea. Far away in the north U.S. forces recaptured Attu in May, 1943, and Kiska was recaptured in the following August.

4. Burma 1942-44

Apart from other considerations it was important to clear Burma in order to re-establish land communications with China. True the air route across the "Hump" was organised, but even this method,