OUTPOSTS OF VICTORY

Also by GORDON YOUNG

VOYAGE OF STATE, the story of the Royal tour of Canada and the United States, 1939.

OUTPOSTS OF WAR, the story of experiences as a foreign correspondent in Germany, Finland, Holland, Palestine, Syria, Turkey and the Western Desert.

OUTPOSTS OF VICTORY

by

GORDON YOUNG

Illustrated with the author's own snapshots and other photographs

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TO ALL THE FRIENDS AND FAMILIES WHO
HAVE BEEN SEPARATED BY THIS WAR

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NOTE

My journeyings of about 25,000 miles in the past year as a war correspondent for the *Daily Express* have taken me largely to the more distant places of the war. I have collected this record of experiences partly in an attempt to provide some background for fresh events to come, but mainly with the idea of showing how the activities of the united nations—and of all members of those nations, soldiers, sailors, airman, diplomats and other technicians of every kind—are contributing to the general "design for victory." If, as Stalin used to say, "Peace is indivisible," so, surely, is this war; and widely diverse activities in far-flung corners of the world are beginning now to be seen as weaving themselves into a general pattern of united action for a common end.

I have to express my thanks to Arthur Christiansen, the Editor of the *Daily Express*, for permission to write this book at the same time as I was serving as one of his special correspondents. Actually, I have far more to thank him for than this—for journalistic education and encouragement dating back to ten years ago, when he was a prodigy and Assistant Editor of the *Sunday Express* in his middle twenties and I was a harassed sub-editor. Many of those people in Fleet Street to whom Christiansen has given first of all training, then self-confidence and then opportunity understand well how he has been able to build up a store of personal loyalty from such a mixed assortment of personalities as are to be found in any newspaper office.

I must certainly also thank Charles Foley, my Foreign

Editor, for having kept up a constant stream of inspired cables of guidance and good-will, couched in such ingenious terms that they were often a joyous problem both to myself and to the censors through whose hands they passed. (One, in high-spirited Latin, lay for eight days on the desk of a puzzled Major before I was called in to help with the construing of it!)

I am grateful, too, to my former rival and present colleague, the saturnine Cedric Salter, for acting as "guest artist" by contributing his vivid picture of conditions in Burma and to Norman Smart for his first-hand account of the taking of Tripoli.

Finally, I must thank my mother, Mrs. James Young, for constant practical aid—in blitzes and out of them—at the London end of the production of both my "Outpost" books.

1943. GORDON YOUNG.

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I

OUT TO THE EAST

"When the 'arf-made recruity goes out to the East . . ."
—KIPLING, *The Young British Soldier.*

IT happened, like several other important moments of my life, at the Savoy Hotel.

I was lunching with Christiansen and Bernard Rickatson-Hatt, formerly my Editor-in-Chief at Reuters and now an adviser to the Bank of England.

We were discussing Fleet Street's part in the war and other matters, when Christiansen suddenly turned to me and said: "Why don't you join the *Express*?" To Rickatson-Hatt he said: "You know, I've been asking him that for years." Then he began to talk about something different.

I sat there quietly, realising that I had reached one of those decisive moments which crop up periodically in one's life. The more I reflected on what he had said, the more clearly I realised how pleased I would be, for a number of reasons, to change my work, and yet how many misgivings I had (after fifteen contented years with Reuters) about taking so decisive a step.

Christiansen said no more about it until the coffee came, because he is a good psychologist. Then he said: "You could go as our accredited correspondent to General Wavell's headquarters—especially as you were through his first campaign in Libya."

I said: "I'll either have to decide to do it now or not at all—and I think I'll do it now."

So Christiansen ordered from a waiter pen, ink, note-

paper to settle the matter, and three brandies to celebrate it.

Christopher Chancellor, Reuters' Joint General Manager, took my written resignation with his customary tact. It was not until I had handed in my letter to him that I realised that I had not even mentioned to Christiansen either my future salary or the conditions of my contract. But I knew that they would be all right and, when I saw him next day, they were.

So, on Monday, February 9, 1942, I said good-bye to my Reuter friends—to Randall Neale who, as Acting Editor, had done so much to keep the Reuter ship steady during the difficult year immediately following the resignation of Sir Roderick Jones; to Fergus Ferguson, that wily old Diplomatic Correspondent; to Fleetwood-May, Guy Bettany, Thomas Stockwell and the rest. One disillusioned doorman gave me a warning lest I might feel too secure in this coming phase of my life. He summed up his philosophy of Fleet Street in the splendid sentence: "What I always says is, Sir, the higher up you goes, the nearer you are to the door."

Finally, I "crossed the street" literally, and left Lutyens' sober white Reuter building for that lively black palace of glass which is the *Express* office, where I smelt once again the stimulating incense of damp proofs still fresh from the press, where there were rumbling rotaries instead of ticker machines and where the messenger boys, instead of being dignified figures in Reuter uniforms who said: "Certainly, Sir," were scallywags in shabby suits who said (provided they agreed with you at all): "Owkay."

I spent three weeks in the *Express* office, listening in to Christiansen's daily editorial conference (daily lessons in how a great newspaper is made), writing articles on foreign matters and working alongside Charles Foley, who

is the paper's Foreign Editor, and from whom I drew both inspiration and enlightenment. Foley has a dry humour, no illusions and an inborn talent for the creative handling of men. I found that the *Express*, while still largely maintaining its traditional liveliness and its independent attitude to officialdom, had, in growing older, grown also more factual. It seemed to me to be concentrating on the single aim of doing an efficient job of colourful but accurate war-time reporting.

* * * * *

By the time I had joined the *Express*, General Wavell's headquarters had moved from Java to New Delhi. So I prepared for a journey to India and, while waiting for transport, made a round of visits to those who could best give me information and advice about the country which was going to seem to me so new and strange.

Mr. L. S. Amery, a trim, alert figure behind a high desk in the Secretary of State's room at the India Office, told me to study the political map, and see for myself how many were the states that went to India's composition.

Mr. Lal, then Acting High Commissioner for India in London, advised me to keep the Statistical Abstract by my side day and night, to check for myself the truth of such propagandist assertions as might be made to me.

Lady Willingdon said severely that travelling Englishmen in India might do much harm unless they behaved with tact.

Mr. A. H. Joyce, Press Officer to the India Office, gave me much help and good counsel.

At Hatchards I bought books for the voyage—E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, John Gunther's *Inside Asia*, the autobiographies of Kipling and Pandit Nehru, Murrays' *Handbook to India* (though Murray is no Baedeker), *India and Democracy*, by Sir George Schuster and Guy Wint.

I was inoculated against yellow fever, for the journey through West Africa. At the Army and Navy Stores I bought quinine for the journey to Assam. To my mother I promised to "take care of myself," and to my editor to keep my mind open and my expenses low.

So, with a wealth of preparation and good advice, I set out on my passage to India, at about the same time as some thousands of British soldiers and airmen were going there to defend it. We had one thing in common. We were all equally ignorant of Eastern ways.

* * * * *

I travelled from Britain with the Navy.

Early one Sunday morning a launch took me across the calm waters of the Clyde to a large grey armed merchant cruiser which was waiting, with other ships, to form the escort of one of the year's largest convoys to Africa.

My ship, which I will call H.M.S. *Magnificent*, was a former British luxury liner which had rolled up her sleeves for action. For years before the war, film stars, magnates and rich holidaymakers had slept in her cabins and played on her decks. Now, her bright paintwork was covered with naval grey and her decks bore guns and shell-racks.

Strange war-time contrasts hit you wherever you went in this ship. The high panelled dining-hall had seamen's hammocks slung between the pillars, and the old orchestra gallery had become the place where they hung out the seamen's washing. All the glory had been stripped from the oriental wintergarden, where playboys once drank their sunny mornings away. It had become the bosun's storeroom.

Like the ship, the officers and crew were peaceable people who had "gone tough" for the duration of the war. The Captain had been on the Stock Exchange; the Com-

mander had been a businessman with a pleasant home in Surrey. Both had been regular naval officers in the First German War of 1914. I found one old friend on board, for the "Number one" turned out to be a Lieutenant Commander from Brighton whom I had last met as an officer in the *Empress of Australia* when that ship took the King and Queen to Canada. Down in the crew's quarters were many of the seamen who had helped to run the ship in the good old days of peace, when people still believed that the perils of the sea meant icebergs. All these men had left good homes in Glasgow, Liverpool, Southampton and London to join a form of sea warfare which has its own particular kind of dangers, as was shown by the gallant action early in the war by another merchant cruiser of this type, the *Jervis Bay*. These merchant cruisers often patrol the sea for six weeks or more looking for raiders and without any sight of land. On one occasion the *Magnificent* had run straight into a German raider, blazed away at her for over an hour, although the German had heavier guns, and battered her so hard that the German broke off the action and escaped.

We were fairly crowded on board on this particular trip for the Navy was carrying a lot of passengers. Some were naval officers *en route* to other ships; army officers were returning from leave; there was a sprinkling of R.A.F. and a handful of North Country business men with tweed suits and mysterious blueprints. The Navy carried us all with cheerfulness and good-will, although they were being greatly inconvenienced by the presence of so many strangers. We not only occupied cabins belonging to ship's officers and filled so many chairs in their wardroom that they themselves could hardly find a place to sit; but we also helped to deplete their limited supplies of cigarettes, beer and gin. But the officers of the *Magnificent*

bore it with infinite patience, though sometimes one, in a confidential moment, would venture the casual reminder "of course you must remember this is really a fighting ship."

I shared a cabin with Cecil Beaton, the brilliant photographer, who was on his way to record the activities of the R.A.F. in the Middle East; Cole, a quiet, efficient cable expert; and a tough young fighter pilot who had won the D.F.C. in the Battle of Britain.

In the early hours of one morning, before it was light, we slipped away from Scotland and took our place in the convoy. As dawn broke the full majesty of the spectacle of a great line of ships at sea could be properly appreciated. The ships—many of them liners bearing names well-known to ocean travellers—covered the calm sea almost to the horizon, while heavy grey warships lurked in the centre and busy corvettes danced in vigilant attendance on the fringe.

We left British waters undisturbed, except for one air raid alert which set the gunners fingering their triggers but gave them nothing to shoot at. An enemy aircraft had passed above the thick cloud overhead, and had apparently not spotted us.

Our first excitement came a few days later. Just as we were going in to lunch, two great explosions shook the ship. We looked outside and saw a ring of smoke buoys on the calm sea, marking the spot where another of the escorting ships had dropped two depth charges. Submarines had located us and from then on we assumed that our passage was being reported back to the Germans.

One evening a message came over from the Captain of our convoy: "We have several U-boats between us and Freetown; great care should be taken." Two nights later, just before dawn, a whole series of depth

charges set our bunks shaking. Later we learned that our convoy was claiming at least one U-boat sunk and another as a strong "probable."

Other reports of U-boat movements came in from day to day, but even now I cannot describe in detail all the things we did to confuse the enemy. Some of our more rapid changes of course, with the dozens of great ships in the convoy all going in different directions, while flying fish skimmed the waves, made the ocean look like a Bateman drawing of confusion, though actually every ship was performing an exact manœuvre.

We took no chances at all. As one officer explained to me: "We would rather get this lot safely into harbour with our brains than with our guns"—and that was what they did.

In almost record time for a war-time trip we steamed into Freetown harbour, where the sunshine dancing on the blue water, the red rock and the brilliant green tropical trees makes that decrepit township look from the sea far more attractive than it really is. For truth to tell, the capital of our oldest colony is not all that it might be. Its modern amenities are few, and if you walk down Oxford Street, Freetown, all you will find is a row of tin shacks with some dusty, half-naked children playing on the pavement. There is no adequate hotel to which the thousands of officers passing through the port can repair for a meal. There is not even, after all these years, an efficient water supply. It seemed to me a pity that thousands of our troops and sailors from home should see in Freetown their first glimpse of what Britain's Empire overseas was like. It did not do us justice.

For duty rather than pleasure, then, I went ashore at Freetown, and with the kindly aid of the Information Officer and of Mr. S. Milburn, of the Secretariat, I was able to negotiate a long despatch through the channels of

censorship to my newspaper. There was one more pleasant night to be spent aboard the *Magnificent* and then (we had been assured in London) the R.A.F. would see that we were flown to India.

Next morning the R.A.F. came aboard, in the shape of a cheerful young Embarkation Officer, who told us amiably that he had never heard of us. He would, he said, nevertheless, try to improvise something.

What he improvised was grim, but it was the best he could do in the circumstances. It was the ship we called the *Altmark*.

A slim, high-speed R.A.F. launch like a millionaire's cabin cruiser took Beaton, Cole and myself, down the harbour from the *Magnificent* to our new ship. The idea was that we should sail in her to another West Coast port, from whence we might find more aircraft available to take us to Cairo. Even when we first saw the *Altmark* she looked sinister, a dark hulk on the sunny water—with a heavy list to port. She was a ship of 3,000 tons which had been built in Tyneside many years ago and had been operated by a Canadian company on cruises to Labrador. She may have been a good ship once, but now she had certainly gone down in the world. Just at that moment she was the best thing that could be allocated to the task in hand, but she certainly had just about everything that can make a ship a nightmare.

She was dirty; and she had bugs, flies, ants and cockroaches, especially cockroaches. They were all over the place—not only in the dining-saloon, cabins and the little smoking-room, but even on the open decks, and even as high up as the boat deck. They seemed to get everywhere. Moreover, she was short of water. Supplies were cut off entirely except between 6 a.m., and 8 a.m. and for two hours in the evening. And while the water was cut off, and although there were hundreds of men on board,

and although we were in the tropics, the lavatories did not work.

She was crowded. Bunks to cram in extra men had been built in every corner of the ship. What had once been the main lounge, the size of a large room in an average country house, contained bunks for sixty men, with no portholes open at night. Our own cabin, on a lower deck, contained six berths in tiers, and it measured 9 feet by 13 feet.

We had a madman on board, too. He was a native who was being transported from Bathurst. He was in a cabin on the main deck, guarded by another native with a crowbar. He cried and yelled intermittently all day long, and at night his cries kept everybody awake who was sleeping nearby. The crew of the ship took him as a matter of course. "You don't want to take no notice of 'im, sir," said one old sailor, "'es as 'armless as a lamb. You just tells 'im to shut up, that's all."

We passengers were a mixed lot. We included civilians, air force personnel, army officers and some native troops. One thing we all agreed upon. We didn't like the ship. The fact that she was being used at all was a measure of the efforts Britain was making at the time to put every ton of shipping space to the fullest possible use. Still, the *Altmark* was no pleasure-boat, and Beaton and I, sleeping on deck in our overcoats, viewed the prospect of a week's voyage in her without enthusiasm. India seemed still a long way off.

We stayed in port for three days loading cargo. Then a miracle happened. The R.A.F., after all, were able to come to our aid with an offer of air transport. Late one night the gleaming launch came alongside again and took the first party of us off. A blazing searchlight from the launch lit our way down the harbour to a dramatic "smuggler's cove" which was the R.A.F.'s landing-stage.

Our genial embarkation officer found us food and beds. And at dawn next day we took off on the first stage of the 5,000-mile flight across Africa to Cairo.

However hardbitten a traveller you may be, it is impossible to make this trans-African stage of the journey to India without marvelling at man's increasing conquest of time and space. In a few hours you fly over jungle and desert which only a few years ago took the explorer many months of hard travel, fraught with dangers of drought, famine and disease. To-day, thanks to the pioneer work done by British airmen and the intensive development carried out by the Americans, you do the whole journey in a few days and with home comforts never far away. Well-tried passenger aircraft are largely used on this trip, though they are stripped of all luxury seats and upholstery to enable them to carry greater cargo loads.

So, sitting on top of a couple of boxes of ammunition piled on the floor of the aircraft, I flew on successive days from one jungle aerodrome to another and everywhere saw the great air route organisation in progress. One landing-field which has not yet been publicised abroad was created in a way typical of the intensive effort which the Americans have put into this part of their contribution to the war. Only six months before we landed there, nothing had existed on the spot except steaming jungle, where snakes and mosquitoes lived unmolested by man. Using native labour, and shipping from the United States every modern machine for land clearance used by the farmers of the Middle West, the Americans had the jungle cleared and the runways serviceable within three months. We landed there early one morning and were led to a row of brick-built, mosquito-proof airport buildings for a typical American breakfast of iced fruit juice, cereals, bacon and eggs and waffles and maple syrup. A radio played softly, and in one corner a notice announced that

the airport's own cinema was shortly showing "Target for To-night."

After another long day's flight we spent a night at a desert aerodrome, sleeping in the open air beneath a roof of rough straw matting—but the beds were of standard American hotel pattern, and there was an ice-box with cold water to every few beds.

So we came *via* Khartoum at last to Cairo, and found that city, which in the early days of the war was one of the last strongholds of war-time luxury, making a stern effort to align itself with total warfare like other capitals, closing its restaurants early and rationing certain things.

While waiting for a place in the 'plane to India I went to a small but remarkable gathering at which Alice Delysia, resplendent in a blue uniform, sang for the first time a newly-composed anthem for the Free French army. It was ostensibly a birthday gathering to make a presentation to André Glarner, veteran correspondent of the *Exchange Telegraph*, but with General Catroux, many French officers, Fighting French leaders in Cairo and all the war correspondents there, it became a sort of formal tribute to the whole Fighting French movement. The basement room filled with smoke, soldiers leaned against the walls recalling memories of London leaves in the last war as Delysia sang, with all her old fire and artistry, the chorus for which my ex-Reuter colleague, Alexander Clifford, had done the translation:

> Lift up your hearts, ye doughty lads of France,
> Those who are free, and those in chains to-day;
> Men from Lorraine, from Brittany, Provence;
> Lift up your hearts, for we shall make them pay.

As one of Cairo's French newspapers wrote next morning: "*L'emotion regnait . . . même les correspondents de guerre étaient émus.*"

A place in a flying-boat was found for me next day and soon after dawn I was on the last lap of the journey to India.

Flying to India from Egypt, the first glimpse you get of your strange new world is the eerie white desert bordering the Arabian sea. The flying-boat skirts the coast and roars low over the still blue waters, travelling as steadily as a motor omnibus. As you gaze from the windows a nightmare-like scene unfolds. All over the dazzling white sands are tall columns of dark basalt rock, thrusting out here and there into the infinite blue sky. Pondering on the picture framed by the flying-boat's window, you realise that you would need only to put down, somewhere in the foreground of the scene, a guitar, a woman's torso and a chest of drawers, to have a perfect replica of a surrealist painting of the 1925 period.

For your first night in India the flying-boat brings you down in the smooth harbour of Karachi, capital of the province of Scind, skimming in low among a confusing mass of ships' funnels, cranes and sails.

Indian customs formalities took no great time, and I realised that I was indeed at last in an outpost of Empire as I read on the customs declaration form that, among those personal necessities which a traveller might import free of duty, were "two saddles and bridles." As we drove from the airport to a dingy old hotel I saw for the first time in my life camels harnessed in carts like horses and bullocks asleep on the pavements.

* * * * *

You are not in India an hour before politics get you. Buying an armful of newspapers outside the hotel, I found myself plunging into a ferment of political writing—the aftermath of the Cripps visit. One Karachi editor was suing his former chief reporter for alleged "intimidation" (has, in Britain, a reporter ever managed to intimidate his

editor?). The Moslem leader, Mr. Jinnah, was being furiously accused of having insulted a Hindu newspaperman. The Bombay government were being scathingly attacked for having suspended a local evening paper. The London *Times* was being roundly abused for some leader it had presumed to write upon the Indian question. Wordy commentators were endeavouring to elucidate the true meaning of Mr. Gandhi's latest pronouncement on the exact degree of "non-violent non-co-operation" with which the Japanese might be received by a good Congressman. And a mysterious individual called the "Press Adviser," who appeared to live in Delhi, was being called into contempt for insufficiently appreciating the merits of a free Press.

In all this mass of words, the stranger could make out little clearly, unless it was the passage in an outspoken leader in the Calcutta *Statesman* which sorrowfully referred to India as a "crank's corner among the nations," and added frankly: "India to-day is a country of bitterness. A public word of friendliness to Britain is as rare as a mango in December."

It was May. Burma was falling and the Japanese were approaching closer to India every day. Yet, apart from the routine war news carried in the Reuter service, there was little sign that the Indian newspapers, or Indians as a whole, had any great concern with the larger issues. It seemed that, as far as they cared, the war might have been in the moon. An incident which happened to me in a telegraph office reinforced this impression that the people of India as a whole had, at that time, no idea at all of what the war really meant. A babu clerk behind the counter took great trouble to help me, and, when I turned to go, I thanked him politely. "Not at all, sir," he said, pointing to the shoulder-badges on my uniform which stated that I was a "British War Correspondent,"

—"Not at all; after all, sir, you are fighting this war in the better way; *you* are fighting it with the pen, while *these* men (pointing to some British soldiers nearby) are only fighting with the sword." I nearly fell through the floor with embarrassment!

In the bar of the dark hotel a strange mixture of races assembled before dinner. Vigorous members of the United States Army Air Force were beginning to infuse into the ancient capital the hearty zest of a Middle West farming town. British business men talked with Chinese gentlemen who wore khaki shirts but no distinguishing insignia. Symbolically, I heard a Canadian R.A.F. Flying Officer making friends with a bearded pilot of the Indian Air Force who, instead of a forage cap, was wearing a turban constructed of Air Force blue. The Indian was hampered by language difficulty; the Canadian by a bad stutter, but they were making progress nevertheless.

"So you have come to fight for India now," said the Indian officer, to which the Canadian replied: "Oh, I g-g-guess this war's p-p-pretty much all one w-w-wherever you are."

We left Karachi before dawn, flew over the tip of the Himalayas and finally, around noon on a blazingly hot morning, found ourselves over the lake of Gwalior, which is about a hundred and fifty miles south of Delhi, and is the capital of a native state whose ruler is entitled to a salute of twenty-one guns.

As the sun blazed down and the heat haze rolled up, it almost seemed as though the little lake which was our destination would dry up before we got down on to it. No drop of rain had fallen at Gwalior for two years, and the level of the lake had fallen by eighteen feet. A rough landing-stage, many yards long, had been built out to reach the sunken water.

We were driven some miles into the town, deposited at the oddly-named Hotel de Gwalior, and then the whole complex organisation of British Airways, which, from the time we left Cairo had fed us, carried us, cared for us and guided us, vanished suddenly into the hot air, and we were left, a forlorn and puzzled party, to fend for ourselves in a strange land of thin cattle and slow-moving, dusty people. Where could we change money, how could we send a telegram, was there a train to anywhere? The Indian manager of the pleasant hotel did his gallant best to cope with our needs. On the wall of his office hung a notice which offered us, for the equivalent of ten shillings, an afternoon's hire of an elephant "to seat four," on which we might have visited the sights of the town. Alas, we had too many problems of our own.

Finally, in the full heat of the afternoon a stolid line of bearers carried our luggage from the hotel to the railway station, where we climbed aboard a train and I learned with a shock that no trains in India have corridors nor are they (except for a rare special coach) protected against the heat like the double-roofed carriages in the Sudan. I pulled open the door of a first-class compartment, setting up a swirl of dust inside as I did so. The windows were shut and the blinds were down to keep out the sun and the heat, but in the darkness of the carriage I could just discern that three of the four berths were occupied by perspiring bodies laid out on towels and each attired only in a pair of cellular pants. I climbed on to the remaining upper berth, made a pillow from my overcoat and, gasping from the heat and dust, went finally to sleep.

When I awoke it was getting dark and we were nearing our destination. Movement had begun among the human wreckage lying below and a sound of splashing came from the toilet next door. After half an hour of much bustling, scrubbing and brushing, the three molten jellies whom I

had seen when I first entered the carriage emerged spick and span at the station in the full glory of khaki uniforms and red tabs as a brigadier and two colonels. An Indian summer is a great leveller.

I paid a quick visit to Bombay to see Alan Moorehead, who had flown down from Cairo to cover the visit of Sir Stafford Cripps and was now waiting to put me in the picture about India before returning there. I have always thought Moorehead one of the best correspondents produced by this war, so that I was not surprised when I found that, in the space of a two-hour conversation in a corner of the giant Taj Mahal hotel, he was able to give me a concise, clear outline of the situation, more valuable to a newcomer than a study of a score of books.

I stayed only one day with Moorehead in Bombay. I had no time to lose. The Burma campaign was just coming to an end and the war correspondents knew—though for obvious security reasons we could not at that stage say—that the British army was withdrawing for the time being into Assam. The interests of my newspaper clearly demanded that I should proceed as quickly as I could to Calcutta, to Assam and, if still possible, to Burma itself.

I went up to Delhi, but I stopped there only long enough to get my accreditation papers through, buy some tropical uniform and pay a formal visit to General Wavell. I had not seen him since I had left Cairo two years previously.

Now, although New Delhi is a city of so much formality, there was, I found, nothing formal at all about a visit to General Wavell. The low, white residence of the Commander-in-Chief, which stands in a fine garden some way from the Secretariat, is certainly an imposing one, with its smart Indian sentry at the gates and the gleaming antique brass cannon on the lawn. But once you are

inside, the atmosphere is that of any large English country home.

General Wavell had asked me to luncheon, and as I arrived I found I was a little early. So I walked in feeling slightly self-conscious in khaki shorts and a brand new bush-shirt, a loose comfortable garment, but one which I was now wearing for the first time. I found General Wavell passing through the hall, and he greeted me cheerfully. "Come upstairs," he said, "I've got an air-conditioned office and we can have a drink and a talk before lunch."

He looked a little older than when I had last seen him after his Libyan campaign, but the first impression which he gave me was still that of a great shaggy bear, very tough, very determined and very free from all the insincerities of life in an administrative capital. The informality of General Wavell is not an affectation, I am sure; he infinitely prefers living hard with his men at the front to being hemmed in by red plush and ceremony. (One colleague told me that, accompanying Wavell down a crimson carpet on some state occasion, while gloriously apparelled Guards of Honour clicked their heels and presented arms, he heard Wavell grumpily growling to himself: "Lot o' nonsense, lot o' nonsense!")

We sat in his study and talked effortlessly. It was before India's defences in Eastern Bengal had been put into a satisfactory state, and Wavell was in a cagey mood as far as military matters were concerned. So, for the most part, we talked about conditions of living in the London which I had just left, the general situation in India, and of the arrangements which were being made for the war correspondents. Studying General Wavell's rugged face as he talked, I was struck once again (as I had been when I saw him during his first campaign in Libya) with the strange combination which there is in his

character of determination and insight, "toughness" and quick intelligence. Wavell is not like most of the generals you meet. He is really not a typical modern figure at all. He is an Elizabethan Englishman*, a Sir Francis Drake, a mixture of poet and pirate and careful, shrewd contriver.

It is because Wavell has just that extra bit of insight and intuition which some other soldiers have not got that he has considerable political, as well as military, understanding. Almost from the moment he arrived in India, he became a widely-popular figure among Indians of all classes. The periodical broadcasts which he made helped much to hold the country together in its difficult times. It was, for instance, at the moment when India seemed most directly threatened by Japanese invasion (and when, truth to tell, our own forces for defence were no more than adequate) that Wavell went to the microphone, on April 21, 1942, and allayed the people's anxieties by telling them bluntly:

"You have on your side the four toughest and most enduring races in the world. The British may be idle and easy-going in times of peace, but their core is as hard and unyielding as ever; adversity strips off the soft husk and reveals that core; they will never give in. The Chinese, the oldest civilisation in the world, have, though half-armed, stubbornly defended their civilisation for nearly five years against the upstart Japanese, and will continue to do so to the end. The Russians have endured an armoured onslaught by the Germans on a scale never

* It was at this point, in checking over my manuscript, that a worried military censor in Delhi exclaimed: "Here, old boy, you'd better not call Wavell Elizabethan—the Japs may use it to prove our army is old-fashioned!" It is only fair to add that the general level of censorship in Delhi was far above the intellectual level of that remark.

equalled and have thrown it back as they have thrown back so many invaders; their endurance is everlasting. And the Americans, of whose determination to assist India to the utmost of their inexhaustible resources you already see such evidence, do they strike you as a people who will let go once they have taken hold?

"So you need not worry about our victory, it is only a question of when and how."

When we went into the drawing-room, we found Lady Wavell, in a white overall, directing the moving about of furniture.

Lady Wavell is an impressive figure, but she is quite as unaffected as her husband. When the war broke out, she at once joined the Women's Voluntary Service, and the canteens which she has organised for the troops in India have been a godsend in a land where amenities for ordinary people are not in a highly-developed state. The luncheon was a good but simple one. There was no undue lingering over the coffee-cups before General Wavell and the several officers who were also guests went back to their work.

* * * * *

Next day, I caught the train to Calcutta, and I was lucky enough to get a place in the only air-conditioned coach. I spent most of the thirty-six-hour journey asleep under a sheet that was actually cool when you touched it.

When we finally steamed into Howrah station, Calcutta, stepping from the air-conditioned coach on to the platform was like climbing from an ice-box into a roaring oven.

A crowd of barefooted bearers, hitching up their ragged *dhotis* (the garment formed by yards of cheese-cloth wound unscientifically around the legs) pushed and struggled to obtain possession of my luggage. Four of

them seized one piece each and went off down the long platform. We picked our way over crowds of Indian men, women and children who sat and lay all over the platform. Some were sleeping, some dozing, some eating food with their fingers from plates made of green leaves, some spitting out the juice of the red betel-nut which they had been chewing. Rubbish lay everywhere—old banana skins, shells of coco-nuts broken open for their milk, scraps of paper, broken fragments of the clay mugs which Hindus drink from once, then throw away. At the exit stood a hideous old hag, her tattered clothes hiding little of her shrunken body. One arm was raised in an appeal for alms; from the other the cloth had been drawn back to show that it ended in an amputated stump at the elbow. A little girl of about four, completely naked, her hair matted with dirt, ran among the travellers with a shrill, incessant cry of "Baksheesh!"

So this was India?

II

WIND IN THE PALM TREES

"For the wind is in the palm-trees, and the temple bells they say:
Come you back, you British soldier, come you back to Mandalay."

KIPLING, *The Road to Mandalay*.

THE first thing I found when I got a room at one of Calcutta's dingy hotels was a telegram from Foley, which said:

"Opposition offwiping us exface earth Burma messages

columns long crammed colour personal adventure blood sweat tears counting your utmost directly you arrive—Foley."

I propped this up in front of me while I had lunch, and considered what was the best thing to do. I decided that the next major story to break would be the actual arrival of General Alexander's retreating army at the Burma-India frontier. Therefore I thought I had better get up to them as quickly as I could, meet them inside Burma if possible, or at any rate make sure that the *Express* got the first story of how the men came out.

I went round to the Army's Public Relations office and found that one other correspondent, Marsland Gander, of the *Daily Telegraph*, was about to leave for the Assam-Burma frontier, so I spent a hectic two hours buying supplies which included food, a camp bed, a mosquito net, two bottles of gin and a pair of gum-boots in case the monsoon broke, and set off with Gander in the mail train. We were bound for Assam certainly, and for Burma we hoped.

I found that Gander was a good companion for a journey. He played chess, had an even temper and carried with him a case of whisky which was to make us acceptable guests at all the many places at which we craved hospitality.

The journey up through the tropical green forests of Assam was a relief after the hot dusty plains of central India. The train runs up the valley of the Brahmaputra, in the very shadow of the Himalayas, crossing many streams and rivers. We ran through lush green fields where carpets of wild hyacinths spread out in flaming colours on either side of us, and at nightfall the croaking of frogs drowned even the noise of the train as we rumbled along in a leisurely way. There were trees which flamed

with red flowers and monkeys which chased each other over the tin roofs of wayside stations.

Around midnight on the second day, a narrow-gauge train into which we had changed jolted us into the station which was the railhead for the supply route which the British authorities had been driving into Burma. Even at this late hour work was going on under flickering arc lights and we fought our way from the station through a confusion of shouting coolies, shunting trucks, crates, sacks and piles of army stores. Not far away we camped down for the night in a bamboo hut set in a jungle clearing in which stood a line of weird high stone monolithic monuments, the tribute which natives had paid to primitive gods thousands of years before.

Coming there as strangers, it seemed to us that the whole jungle was awake to receive us. Bright fireflies danced through the forest like thousands of men bearing lanterns; myriads of grasshoppers kept up so loud a chirping that they sounded like a sawmill; armies of mosquitoes, scenting fresh new blood, swarmed down upon us, buzzing past our ears and noses in perpetual dive attacks. And under one of the rough wooden beds inside the bamboo hut there was curled a banded krite, that small thin snake whose yellow and black stripes makes him look as though he were wearing a football jersey—and whose bite kills you within an hour.

Our first objective was to see General Wavell again for a formal interview. I had learned in Delhi that he was making a flying visit to the Assam and Burma front. Early next morning Gander and I heard from Alfred Wagg, an energetic American correspondent, and the only other reporter up in Assam at that time, that our luck was in, for the Commander-in-Chief was expected that very day.

We spent most of the day chasing General Wavell.

Through the long hot afternoon we waited at a railway siding where his old-fashioned brown special coach was standing. Then we learned that he was not likely to leave until later and was at that moment not very far away. So we piled into a car and drove over bumpy roads to a clearing in the jungle where there stood a couple of bamboo houses. An A.D.C. took in our request for an interview, and a few minutes later General Wavell joined us, greeting us with a broad and cheerful smile.

As dusk was falling, we walked up and down the little clearing in the jungle, we three correspondents putting questions to the General and he answering them with good-nature and discretion. He was wearing a bush shirt, open at the neck, and shorts of khaki drill, and the whole of our conversation was punctuated by all of us perpetually slapping our bare knees as mosquitoes kept up their persistent guerrilla attacks.

The army in Burma had been through a period of almost non-stop retreat and we urged General Wavell to give us his frank opinion of what he had seen at the front. As always, he was stolid, solid and careful—never was there a "military spokesman" less glib or specious—but he was not unduly anxious, and he gave us his reasons why.

"After all, the Japanese are not supermen," he said, "and once we begin to fight them on more favourable terms we ought to be able to stop them. Our original retreat in Burma was inevitable once Rangoon had fallen, provided the Japanese exerted sufficient effort. And they did. Their five divisions—probably more—in addition to the local Burmese traitors, were bound to succeed in pushing us back.

"Our original aim in Burma was to hold the north part of the country until the rains came and our partial disappointment in that respect was partly due to the enforced withdrawal of the Chinese from Lashio and

partly to the extraordinary strain and handicaps under which our men had to fight, their lack of rest or reinforcements and their difficulties with the small proportion of disloyal Burmese."

We thanked General Wavell for receiving us, and then raced away to get our despatches off.

Back in the army's base camp, where we slept, the first men of Alexander's army were coming in from Burma. They were the walking wounded, who had made the long trek by fighting their way through the jungle, tramping down bridle paths and jumping on lorries or bullock carts. Their clothes were tattered, they were unshaven and many wore dirty, ragged bandages. I spent that evening with them, drinking mugs of army tea in rough bamboo huts and hearing scores of personal adventures from the battle which had lasted for over five months, almost without a pause.

One story, typical of scores, was that told me by a Major in the Inniskillings. He was taken prisoner at Yenangyuang. He had seen a party of Chinese soldiers standing talking by a bridge and with other British officers had gone forward to meet them. They had all stood round talking and offering each other cigarettes. Then the "Chinese" suddenly revealed that they were, in fact, Japanese troops. They seized our men and shut them up inside a house in the village. Twenty-four hours later a battle raged into the village and flames swept through the houses. In the confusion the Major and some of the others escaped and made the long tramp into Assam, living on local rice picked up as they went along.

As he sipped the first cup of tea he had tasted for a week, the Major said with a wry smile: "At least the Japs will never be able to surprise us again. These last months have taught us all about their tactics. One important lesson we learned in Burma was to hold our fire at night-

time. The Japanese used to creep up, let off a few rounds, sometimes even only a few fireworks, and tempt us to reveal our positions. If we did so, they shelled us very accurately with their mortars. We shan't fall for that sort of thing again, I hope. I honestly do think that we are the better fighters, you know, as far as straight fighting goes. When the time comes for us to go in again, we shall do much better."

I stayed on one more day, to send back to my paper as much as I could about the Burma army, then set off with Gander and the cheerful, efficient Major S. W. Packwood of the Punjabis, to make the journey down the Manipur Road as far as we could into Burma. We piled bed-rolls, food and water into our car, which began the journey as a sleek new Chevrolet and ended its gruelling trip with battered panels, shattered mudguards and a wheezing, remonstrating engine.

The first day was comparatively easy going, up a winding, precipitous road like the roads in Switzerland to a village four thousand feet high in the midst of the Naga hills. We passed thousands of tribesmen working on the widening of this road under the supervision of Assam tea planters—nearly all Scotsmen—who had spent their whole lives in this part of the world, but were, for the time being, giving up their tea plantation work to help rush road communications through to the British army. British tea-planters in Assam did wonderful work, both in helping the army with its communications, and in caring for refugees from Burma.

The Naga tribesmen, who are headhunters in their spare time, were a picturesque and cheerful lot of little men. They wore their hair long on their shoulders like a woman's and nothing on their stocky brown bodies except a small loin-cloth in front and a gleaming sharp knife strapped to a belt and hanging over their rounded behinds. How they

avoided cutting themselves every time they sat down I never fathomed. But they were first-rate workers on the roads, and a tough lot. Some of them were in France as soldiers in the last war and they astonished our more conventional soldiery by their habits and their toughness. One officer told me that one of his Naga troops, feeling hungry one evening, took off his boots (which the Nagas regarded as an unnecessary appendage anyway) and then boiled them and ate them as an extra evening meal. I am bound to add that the Naga was exceedingly ill with indigestion afterwards.

We spent a night in the heart of the Naga country, at a government bungalow in a small hill station called Kohima high up in the hills and as green and well-kept as Leamington Spa. Two Naga children carried my kit bags from the car, and when I gave them a couple of coins they put them into their mouths because they thought they were sweets.

Starting at dawn next day, we ran on down through the State of Manipur along roads which were becoming increasingly crowded by the pitiful stream of refugees who had walked out of Burma. Some of them were dying by the roadside from cholera or exhaustion. We saw one boy, apparently ill, being helped along the road by his father until he could go no further. He collapsed and lay silent and unmoving in a ditch, while his father cried and shook him in an effort to make him stir. Babies were born without medical assistance. Few of the refugees knew where their next meal was coming from.

There were some strange sights, too, as well as the tragic ones. We saw one man who had ridden many miles on a small elephant, to which were strapped his rations, his bedding, a rifle and two umbrellas. One woman carried a bamboo pole over her shoulder, at one

end of which dangled a bucket filled with clothes and at the other end was slung a sack containing a baby.

Mixed up with the Indian refugees were occasional European ones and at one place I found a small brunette girl from Edinburgh, wearing khaki shorts and a shirt, marching along with two British men. They had all three walked and lorry-hopped hundreds of miles together from inside Burma.

We ran through the little town of Imphal, which had just been bombed. The attack had not been severe, but it had been the first which people in those parts had ever seen, and an air of alarm hung heavily over the place. A few battered houses were still smouldering and along the main road, where the Japanese airmen had flown low and raked the roadway with their guns, there was a trail of death. Dead bullocks lay by the side of the road; two peasants lay where they had been shot while working in the fields and the trees bordering the road had branches splintered and broken off where they had been hit by the bullets.

We stayed that night sleeping on straw in a native 'basha", or bamboo house, and we were woken next morning by the weird chanting of a line of Sikh soldiers who were marching past. After a quick mug of tea, we started on the last forty miles of the journey which would take us down to Tamu, just inside the Burma frontier, where we had been informed that we might find the last Burma headquarters of General Alexander.

That last forty miles was the worst. The narrow, winding road was one which had only recently been carved out of the mountainside by army engineers working at high pressure to give the retreating Burma army a way out. On parts of this road the wheels of our car came literally within inches of a sheer thousand-foot drop. In other places where we met traffic coming out of Burma, we had

to forge past long convoys of pack-mules, lorries and tractors drawing twenty-five-pounder guns, sometimes scraping our mudguards against rocky cliff and sometimes pulling to a halt on the edge of the precipice to let the traffic pass. We went through one "valley of death" where a landslide had precipitated mules and bullocks into a ravine where their bodies still lay, and where the air was heavy with the sickly smell of decay.

But at last we came to Tamu, and found a camp being prepared there in a jungle clearing for General Alexander's men. We ate some bully-beef that was crawling with flies and drank some tea, and then pushed on again to the country beyond in search of the General's headquarters. We ran down narrow roads, over rough bullock-tracks, past pagodas and bamboo houses on stilts which were now standing deserted and forlorn because their owners had fled at the threat of the Japanese approach. Finally, as we swung past a group of bushes, a British sentry emerged. We stopped the car, walked down a side path and found the British headquarters in a Burmese peasant's house of bamboo, raised high off the ground and approached by a ladder ten feet tall.

We found the Intelligence staff sitting on the floor among their maps. They made us welcome, for we were the first people whom they had seen for many weeks who could tell them news of the outside world. We gave them some newspapers from Calcutta, and they handed round mugs of steaming tea. As we drank it, they gave us a brief picture of the course of the Burma campaign. It was a story of a historic fighting retreat which had been made by the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, the Seventh Hussars, the Cameronians, the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, the Gloucester Regiment, Indians, Gurkhas, men of the Royal Armoured Corps and others.

When Japan had launched her first attack in December,

1941, Burma had not been prepared for war either mentally or materially. Moreover, most of the few available reinforcements were sent to Singapore and when the Japanese began their operations against Burma itself, only one diluted Burman division was guarding the long frontier of the Shan States, while less than another division was distributed along the 800 miles of the Tennasserim, from Moulmein to Victoria Point. The Japanese had complete local air superiority and furthermore could attack our dispersed forces at any one of many points, while we could not concentrate anywhere. With the loss of Singapore on February 15, it was clear that the attack on Burma would be intensified—and troops who might have made all the difference to the defence of Rangoon, had been lost. Nevertheless, some reinforcements did arrive in Burma, and an attempt was still made to save Rangoon. But the Japanese made too much progress, and it finally became clear that if we held on to Rangoon indefinitely, we should run the risk of losing our men in Rangoon in the same way as we had lost our forces in Singapore. The important thing was to keep our Burma army intact as a fighting force. Therefore Rangoon was finally abandoned after a brilliant stand by the Gloucester Regiment outside the capital until everything of value had been destroyed by Royal Engineers and others (including a British civilian whose work on the oil-wells earned for him the title from General Alexander of "King of Saboteurs"). From the moment that Rangoon fell, the troops had been fighting a ceaseless and heroic rearguard action. It was a five-months' fight against the time when the northern routes into Upper Burma could be developed to supply an army properly, as they were then quite incapable of doing.

Finally, the decision to evacuate the British army from Burma altogether had been taken at the end of April, when dispositions for the defence of the Assam frontier

were also made. Stores were destroyed and so were those tanks which could not be moved. All the way back, our troops were harassed by continual bombing. In some places, as soon as our men entered a village, traitor Burmans (who had been organised by the Japanese long before the war ever began) would burn down one house. Its black remains stood out against the other houses, as a sign for the Japanese aeroplanes to come and bomb the village. When our men found this out, one of the first things they did was to camouflage all burned-out houses with tree branches.

Now the fighting retreat had become a race against the time when the monsoon rains would break and wash away the slender, hastily constructed roads which were the only way out of Burma. The men themselves, fighting grimly all the time as they went northwards and often living only on rice and fruits which they picked up by the way, probably did not realise themselves the great contribution which they had made, by holding up the Japanese so long in Burma, to the defence of India and to Wavell's eventual counter-attack. At that moment, the main British body of men were on the last lap of their trek. They were marching on foot twenty miles from Kalewa to Indainggye, from where a shuttle service of lorries was being run 100 miles to Tamu over a road which was already ten inches deep in dust and which would be completely impassable as soon as the rains began. Just as, at the time of Dunkirk, every little ship was used to rescue our soldiers, so now every lorry in Northern Assam was being pressed into service to get the men out before the rains—old native omnibuses, trucks supplied by tea planters and army vehicles of all kinds.

When we had got a rough picture of the general situation in our minds, we asked for General Alexander. He was away, but would be returning that evening, they said. So

we decided to take a stroll around. "Don't forget to camouflage your car," they warned us; "we've had our various headquarters bombed quite often enough."

We went out and covered up our car with branches which we cut from the trees. Then we went for a walk, until we found a tributary of the river Chindwin. We took off our clothes and swam in it, while flying-fish scudded over the surface and we realised that Kipling had been right about the flying-fishes playing on the road to Mandalay.

As we walked back towards headquarters, two unknown aircraft, one fighter and one bomber came nosing towards us from over the horizon. They circled round us three times, and each time they came over we all dived for a convenient ditch. Finally they flew away, and we never learned what they were trying to do.

After we had eaten a frugal evening meal of sardines and army biscuit, Gander and I walked across to the bamboo house on stilts which was serving as General Alexander's last headquarters inside the Burma frontier. We found the General, with General Winterton and the other members of his staff, sitting in the open grass space in front of the house on camp chairs and rough wooden benches around a large table which had been made from two wooden trestles and some planks. Fireflies and mosquitoes hovered around busily in the dusk.

This little party in the midst of a Burma jungle seemed an oddly conventional English gathering. The two generals and their officers were in the last few hours of their army's fighting retreat of 600 miles or so from Rangoon and they had been living hard and dangerously. Yet they looked quite unruffled and there was, indeed, that slight air of amiable formality about the group which you would have expected to find at, say, a quiet dinner-party at the United Services Club. General Winterton, Alexander's

Chief of Staff, lanky and self-possessed, was smiling and chatting to his chief, who presided at the head of the table. General Alexander's bare arms and knees bore scratches from the jungle, and his boots were dusty, but he still looked very much the Guards Officer, with his short-clipped hair and neat, bristling moustache. Gander and I sat on a wooden bench beside him.

General Sir Harold Rupert Leofric George Alexander does not make a first impression of being a soldier-philosopher in the Wavell manner. He looks what he is, a vigorous and highly-courageous man of action with a talent for leading men and winning their confidence. To-day, at the age of fifty-two, he looks lean and vigorous and still something of the athlete which he was in 1914, when he won the Irish amateur mile championship. His military motto has always been "attack, attack—even in defence."

His army career has been a remarkable one. He commanded a battalion of Irish Guards at the age of twenty-four, a brigade at forty-two and a division, as the youngest major-general in the British Army, at forty-five. He went "over the top" thirty times in the last war and was twice wounded, and he spent some of the time between the two wars in fighting on the North-West frontier of India. He has won the D.S.O. and M.C., and been five times mentioned in despatches.

In this war, the Burma withdrawal had been the second fighting retreat which he had successfully conducted. During the closing days of the evacuation of France, he had succeeded Lord Gort as British Commander-in-Chief and his example of steady cheerfulness on the beaches of Dunkirk had heartened thousands of his men. In Burma, too, he had time and again given examples of self-possession under fire. Once, five dive-bombers came over his headquarters in Burma and straddled a trench in which he was taking cover. On another occasion, when he was crossing

the Chindwin river with a thousand British troops, a heavy force of Japanese bombers attacked the steamer. But General Alexander (so one of his staff subsequently told me) had merely looked at the falling bombs and then started to unlace his boots, with the remark "I'm a jolly poor swimmer." By the end of the Burma campaign, General Alexander had not only kept some 100,000 Japanese troops in action for four months with a British force of only about 20,000 men, but had in the end brought out four-fifths of that force to safety just before the monsoon broke.

Our talk with the General went well from the beginning. Gander broke the ice by proffering an unopened half-bottle of whisky—a gift which in the Burma jungles not even a General could refuse! "Here's your baksheesh, sir," said Gander with a grin. A major fetched a corkscrew, and, as we sipped the whisky in the gathering darkness, General Alexander reviewed for us the campaign which was just ending.

"For the past four months," he said, "we have really been fighting on an island, with no communications with the outside world."

General Alexander continued: "If we had been stuck in the middle of Burma once the rains had started, I don't think you would have seen one-quarter of this force again. We had to rely entirely on supplies already in the country of food, petrol, ammunition—everything an army needs to fight with—yet I think you can say that on the whole the Burma Army has achieved a considerable measure of success.

"One of the chief difficulties which Japanese bombing in Burma caused us was that the civilian social structure largely collapsed under the effect of the bombs. It was quite different from the way people in England took the air raids. Numbers of the local population on whom we

depended packed up and went back to their homes in the jungle. We met these difficulties as best we could.

"On one occasion we swept up twenty of our junior staff officers for work as coolies, if necessary, to keep the Chindwin ferry steamers going. We got volunteers to help run the railways. River ships were run by marines, who were magnificent under continual bombings. Many of the local post and telegraph and railway people did stick to us to the end, but on the whole I think it is true to say that it was clear to us almost from the time Rangoon fell that sooner or later we should have to cease fighting in the heart of Burma itself. Then, of course, our two main aims became, firstly, to keep going as long as we possibly could, and, secondly, to extricate our men, when the time came, as efficiently as possible.

"I don't think we have done badly. We have held off the invasion of India, if the Japanese intend to carry it out, until the rains, and we have got all our guns away."

General Alexander asked Gander and me to make special mention of the 7th Hussars and 2nd Royal Tanks. "They are a grand lot," he said. "They fought gallantly without any rest, and when their vehicles were put out of action they volunteered to drive lorries or do anything to help. But all the men of the Burma Army have been splendid, and now that they are coming back for a rest you can see for yourself that they are still in very good trim, despite their long and hard fight."

General Alexander added that the first of the men of our armoured corps were just then arriving in their camp nearby, after their long trek from Kalewa, and General Winterton jumped up and offered to take us down to see them.

We climbed into one of those squat American utility trucks called "jeeps," with General Winterton at the

wheel and went bumping off down a rough track. Clouds of dust swept over us and the General had to keep wiping his eyes to see where he was going, but finally we came to the camp which was the last one on the retreat from Burma.

The troops there certainly did not look like members of a beaten army. We found them camped down in a glade beneath tall teak trees boiling tea in old petrol tins. The men were obviously needing rest and new clothes, but considering their ordeal of the past five months they were in astonishingly good form. They had brought all their weapons out with them, and their rifles were as well-cleaned as if they were just going on parade.

I squatted on the grass and drank tea with five typical members of the armoured corps. They came respectively from Middlesbrough, Woolwich, Swansea, Manchester and Chester and in peace days had been lorry drivers and garage hands. Their faces were grimy and their eyes were tired, but the first thing they asked me was "Do people at home think we put up a good show? We did our best, you know." When they had been reassured about that they began to talk about the other things foremost in their minds—when they would get any letters from home and when they might expect a decent glass of beer.

Some of them had heard strange rumours during the weeks in which they had been cut off from contact with the outside world. "Is it true that the Emperor of Japan has rung up President Roosevelt and asked him not to bomb Tokio?" one of them asked me. Another had heard that Hitler was suing for peace, another that Calcutta had been reduced to ashes by bombs. When you meet men who have been without newspapers for weeks, you begin to think that journalists may perhaps be of some use after all.

Nearby, men were grilling fish which they had caught by

the simple method of throwing a hand grenade into a river and gathering up the dead bodies left floating by the explosion.

As it was growing completely dark, Gander and I drove back with General Winterton to the group of bamboo huts that was serving as headquarters. Gander, our gallant Major Packwood (to whom we entirely owed our success in making this difficult trip) and I clambered up the ladder, spread out our bed-rolls on the rickety bamboo floor, and stretched out thankfully in the darkness. The night air was full of strange sounds: millions of grasshoppers chirruped loudly, a strange bird called incessantly, frogs croaked, and down below us, through the gaps in the bamboo flooring, we could hear a forlorn cow moving restlessly around. But we all slept soundly, all the same.

Next morning, just before dawn began to break, we stacked our bed-rolls and provisions into the car again, and set off on the journey of 200 miles of bumping, slithering and swerving back to the railhead in Assam, from where we could send our stories to Calcutta for censorship and cabling. As we passed the headquarters bungalow, General Winterton, taking an early stroll in his pyjamas, waved us farewell on our brief visit to Burma.

Our journey back was a repetition of our journey up: long lines of weary, tattered civilian refugees, some falling by the wayside with malaria and some plodding on as though hopelessness had numbed their minds into a trance. Up near Kohima, we found the Naga tribesmen holding serious meetings by the sides of the roads. Hawkers who had passed their way, and who must have been Japanese agents, had been telling them that the Japs would be in their country at any moment. They said that all the aeroplanes which were seen flying around were Japanese ones, and naturally the Nagas did not know the difference between Japanese and Allied markings. Then we saw the

District Commissioner, Mr. C. R. Pawsey, driving himself out in his little baby car to quieten them. He has lived in the Naga country for years and has built up such a store of confidence among the tribesmen that immediately he told them that the hawkers' stories were nonsense they all went quietly home, or continued their work on the roads.

It was on this journey back that I first met my colleague and chief rival, Cedric Salter, in the unpropitious surroundings of an army rest camp which had been hacked out of the virgin Assam jungle. He has a cynical humour and an ability to tell a story well which I welcomed in that uncomfortable spot. Salter had flown for the *Daily Mail* from Turkey to Burma at the beginning of the Japanese invasion. The story of his journey and of the adventures which befell him seemed to me to go far towards completing the picture of the Burma drama. He had seen it all; while I had only caught a glimpse of the last act. So, because it was already obvious that this first Burma campaign was not going to be the last one we should fight there in this war, I decided to invite him there and then to contribute a "flashback" chapter, which should tell the Burma story in greater detail than I could tell it myself.

You will see from what he says that it was an exceedingly strange campaign. But the lessons we learned from it certainly paved the way for our eventual day of reckoning with the Japanese, of which the first signs were seen in Wavell's attack, in the winter of 1942, along the Burma coastline.

III

NIGHTMARE IN PARADISE

By Cedric Salter

ON a grey afternoon in December, 1941, I turned on the radio, to hear the news from London, and peered morosely out of the rain-smeared windows of my suite in the Park Hotel at Istanbul.

The radio went on and on. The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbour; sunk the *Prince of Wales*; were marching on Malaya. Things had died down in Russia for the winter, and the whole interest seemed to have swung across to the Far East.

Acting on an impulse, which during the coming six months I was quite frequently to regret, I sent off a cable to my Editor: "Nothing likely here prosome time stop what about going Burmawards," to which I received, some forty-eight hours later, the succinct but satisfactory reply: "Okay strive Rangoonwards quickliest."

Two days before Christmas I awoke to see the Taurus mountains covered with snow, which disappeared as the train rattled down four thousand feet to Adana through the narrow gap up which Alexander the Great had once led his all-conquering armies. On Christmas Day in Baghdad the temperature was seventy degrees in the shade. In the Persian Gulf, in the territory of one of the Trucal Sheikhs, where my 'plane landed for an hour, it was seventy-six degrees, and on New Year's Eve in Calcutta eighty-two degrees. Very promptly I went down with dysentery.

On January 7, urged on by a plaintive rather than sympathetic telegram reading: "What you doing

Calcutta?" I climbed, rather shakily, into the Chinese 'plane for Chungking, that was to drop me off, four hours later, at Lashio, in the Northern Shan States of Burma.

But that four hours' flight carried me not only from one country to another but also from one century to another. Leaving the busy streets of the Second City of the Empire, built in the architecture of the Malignant Victorian style, the way led first over the vast muddy flats of the deltas of the Ganges and Brahmaputra, and then over 6,000-foot peaks through which no practicable road had ever been built. Because of these immense natural obstacles the only communications between India and Burma, until the day of the modern aeroplane, had been by sea to Rangoon. While, therefore, the modernising British and Indian influence was strong in the extreme south, it had spread very slowly north, up the Irrawaddy valley, and only in the 1880's reached the old capital of Mandalay, where King Thibaw and Queen Supayalat held their corrupt, tinsel-glittering court, that belonged more properly to the fifteenth than to the nineteenth century.

Further north, in the mountainous Shan States, the penetration was still slower and still later. Even as late as 1936 a commission, heavily protected by soldiers, was trying to determine the exact frontiers of the Wa States, east of Lashio. Considerable areas are only vaguely mapped, and the peoples, armed with bows and arrows, are still living in an almost completely primitive state. Elephant, tiger, leopard, bison, bear, buffalo and rhinoceros abound in the forests and jungles north of the Mogok Ruby Mines.

For physical reasons Burma was therefore in the kind of artificial backwater that permits a completely out-of-date civilisation to linger on long after a similar type would elsewhere have been swept out of existence by the march

of progress. The maritime powers of Portugal and Holland, in their search for trade, seemed to skip from India direct to the Pacific Islands, and although various waves of conquest swept through Burma from Tibet, China and Siam, and in the thirteenth century the Tartars, under Kublai Khan, had wiped out the brilliant Pagan Dynasty, the conquering races, being also Asiatic, brought with them comparatively few basic changes in the national development.

Through this variety of chances, geographic and historic, therefore, Burma sixty years ago was living in a kind of Arabian Nights Dream, which is difficult to associate with the world of Gladstone, Disraeli, and the childhood of many people still living to-day.

In the centre of Mandalay is a forty yards wide great expanse of lily-filled moat. Beyond it rises a high rose-red wall, guarded at regular intervals by watch towers with roofs that twist upwards at the ends with that strange formalised representation of flame that runs like a *leit motif* through all Chinese and Burmese art. Inside that wall lay the Forbidden Gem City—a city within a city. Here the last native rulers of Burma, only sixty years ago, lived out their strangely unreal lives, surrounded by the constant threat of swift and secret death by palace intrigue, but living in a world of tinsel, glittering beauty, which to them seemed the ultimate limit of luxury, and which to us seems so pathetically primitive. The world outside these walls of the Forbidden City heard only the sounds of music and revelry from within, or whispered rumours of intrigue and sudden death.

The palace, which sets the tone of the whole régime, is of wood, mostly teak, dragged by elephants from the jungle, but it is painted crimson and gold. When I saw it, bare and empty, its tawdriness was very apparent, but to picture it alive with brilliant dresses, profusion of light,

gold and precious stones, did not require much effort. A simple wooden trough, which is still on view, guarded by two bewhiskered dragons, meant to be fierce enough to keep away evil spirits, but actually looking like a couple of benevolent household cats, was believed by all good Burmese to be "the centre of the Universe," and Burma's last King Thibaw and his beautiful wife, who died only during the last war, were confident that their armies, dressed in armour and armed principally with bows and arrows, could successfully resist the remorseless pressure of the new world.

Before leaving the subject, two small incidents throw a revealing light on the court of King Thibaw, both of them pure Hollywood. The first was the presence of the baby Sacred White Elephant, which was housed in the palace only a little less gorgeously than the King himself. Each morning at dawn twenty young and beautiful Burmese matrons would line up outside the elephant's quarters and the elephant would graciously consent to suck dry the forty milk-filled breasts that were presented to him.

The other is the macabre story of the last king's fear of the silence which permitted his conscience to reproach him for the murders by which he had retained power, and of which he had been guilty at the instigation of his ambition-driven and beautiful young Queen. Day and night, for weeks at a stretch, while the King drank himself into insensibility, relays of orchestras made their loudest and wildest music so that, should he wake, he would not hear in the silence the accusing voices of his dead relatives.

My excuse for writing of such things in a chapter on the war in Burma is that this strange setting and background to the actual campaign, to me at least, seemed to colour and influence everything that was to happen during the next four months.

My 'plane set me down at Lashio, the railhead from which the real Burma supply road to China began. Actually, since Rangoon was the only supply port to which war material for China was delivered, the Burma road began in the capital 460 miles to the south, and more material travelled by the fleets of lorries that drove all the 1,250 miles from Rangoon to Chungking than came up by rail to Lashio for transference to lorry there.

Lashio itself was a boom-town, extraordinarily like those boom-towns of the '90s that were born of the gold-rushes. The original village had been completely swamped by long rows of hideous two-storied shacks, where everything that was cheap and nasty enough could be bought at five times its correct price. Everywhere were dance-halls, with tinny pianos, cheap but gaudy brothels, and bars filled with as murderous a gang of adventurers, talking Chinese, Burmese, Urdu, English and Malay, and a dozen indeterminate brands of *lingua franca*, as the world has ever seen. As the night and the liquor progressed, bar-room brawls became the normal procedure, and occasional shootings were not uncommon.

In short, if you have ever seen an American film of a frontier town during a gold-rush, you can imagine Lashio. Ugly, grasping, raw, vulgar, violent—but just teeming with life.

I did not get to know it until later, as I learned that the train took some twenty-four hours to do the 130 miles to Mandalay, from whence the express left at 6 p.m. to arrive at Rangoon the following morning, whereas if I could hire a good car I could reach Mandalay in six hours, and so save a day.

I was not very clever in my selection, having inspected the engine rather than the tyres, and after the third puncture it became obvious that I was not going to reach Mandalay by 6 p.m. This misjudgment of time was not

entirely due to the deficient qualities of my betel-nut chewing chauffeur, and the object which he regarded as a vehicle, and which he eloquently defended in the phrase: "Tuan have plenty fine motor—but tyres—him tired." We were going against the tide of a seemingly endless procession of huge lorries, that were thundering north with war material for China.

These legally had the right of way, and their Chinese drivers certainly made sure of impressing the fact. They never gave us one inch, and each time we had to drive off the narrow metalled track into the dusty wilderness that bordered it, and which is intended for ox-wagons. There we would sit, completely blinded by the heavy red dust that blotted out the sight of everything. When the rumbling of the last lorry of the convoy died away we would sit quietly another two or three minutes, while the huge red cloud slowly subsided upon us.

I learned later that Chinese drivers will never give way to anyone on the road, as to do so would be to "lose face" by admitting inferiority. The nearest approach to an example of the well-known problem of what happens if an irresistible force encounters an immovable object was afforded to me when I watched a convoy of the R.A.F., whose members always drive as if they still had all the skies at their disposal, meeting a convoy of Chinese lorry drivers on a narrow road.

Apart from this narrow strip of intense activity that lay along the road, out of range of the red dust cloud the original Burma was there, untouched. During the numerous changings of wheels I usually strolled off a few hundred yards. On one such occasion, cutting in at right angles to the road, I came upon a village that might have met the eye of Marco Polo. The houses were on bamboo stilts and thatched with palmetto. Bananas and a wild riot of flowers filled the gardens. The smoke from a

dozen fires, rising straight in the still blue air, proclaimed the preparation of the evening rice. Tiny golden bells perched on top of a small pagoda just stirred by an imperceptible breeze, drew my attention to the two shaven-headed, ochre-robed priests, that stood beside the stone entrance. As I pushed back through a fringe of jungle towards the road a flight of parakeets cut like silver-green arrows across the sky and a peacock, trailing his incredible tail feathers, clattered off screeching at my approach.

I had long ago abandoned all hope of reaching Mandalay by 6 p.m., and as the sun set and we began on our sixth puncture it became increasingly cold. All this part of the country is on a plateau of about 3,000 feet above sea level, and I was not prepared for the sudden drop of temperature. By 9 p.m., and the seventh puncture, my teeth were chattering, and my last meal—breakfast in Calcutta fifteen hours before—seemed too remote to be real. Finally, drawing into the blacked-out town of Maymyo, still forty-two miles short of Mandalay, I decided that I had had enough, and sought the comfort of a log fire, a meal and a whisky and soda in an hotel run by an elderly Yorkshireman, left over from the last war.

The next day I hired another car and dropped down off the mountains, past the Hill of a Thousand Pagodas, to Mandalay, catching the evening train and awakening thirteen hours later in Rangoon.

Rangoon, when I arrived, was still under the influence of the panic caused by the Japanese terror raids on December 23, and on Christmas Day, when, although the material damage done had been comparatively slight, something like 600 people had been killed, largely due to a regrettable tendency on the part of the Burmese, in moments of crisis, to run about like decapitated chickens, instead of taking shelter. Although since these big

raids the Japanese had confined themselves to night attacks on the aerodrome of Mingladon, eight miles north of the town, a terrific exodus of the native population was still in progress.

This had created a severe labour crisis. Valuable American war material, intended for China, was lying about the docks, simply asking to be bombed, and although in fact the Japanese studiously avoided the port, as being of immense subsequent value to themselves (so confident were they of its capture), it was nevertheless impossible to get Burmese coolies to unload the richly laden ships that crowded the harbour. Later Chinese labour squads were brought in to do the work, the Chinese, as long as they are provided with good shelters and the guarantee of substantial payments to their families in the event of their death or accident, being extremely good under fire, but at the moment of my arrival work of all kinds throughout the capital was virtually at a standstill.

To my great regret I discovered that the exodus of all native servants had compelled the only decent hotel, the Strand, which was admittedly uncomfortably near the docks, but which I had given as my address, to close, and I had great difficulty in getting a room in a dismal joint, called the Minto Mansions, which brilliantly exemplified the almost masochistic talent of my fellow-countrymen for making themselves as uncomfortable as possible under the impression that it proves how tough they are.

Here, however, I was lucky enough to run across an extremely able and charming Australian correspondent, Macdonald of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, who was also temporarily covering for the *News Chronicle*, and who took immense trouble to take me round with him, and to introduce me to all the people with whom I needed to come into contact in order to get to work, such as censors

and the cable authorities. As these were spread about the city in a variety of daily changing temporary offices, none of which appeared to be on the telephone, the value of Macdonald's assistance was incalculable.

Not all my other confrères were equally helpful, and the opposition was not only among the toughest, but also the most ruthless that I have anywhere encountered. There was O'Dowd Gallagher of the *Daily Express*, whom I had first met in Barcelona, in 1936, cloaking a shrewd and able brain behind an uncouth manner; Leyland Stowe of the *Chicago Daily News*, a brilliant descriptive writer whose beautiful white hair no hostile Japanese action was ever known to ruffle; De Luce and Berrigan, two typically tough but lighthearted American News Agency men; two more Australians, Healy of the *Daily Mirror* and Munday, who worked in a secret partnership against the rest of the world with, let it be admitted, considerable success, emerging into public life only in order to register impassioned protests about everything and everybody to anyone who would listen to them; Ian Munro of Reuters, quiet and kindly; and my good friend Ronald Matthews of the *Daily Herald*, of whom more later.

During these early days, when the main Japanese thrusts were directed against Malaya and the Philippines rather than Burma, our chief source of excitement was the almost nightly Japanese raids upon the air-field. At about 3 a.m. most mornings we would be roused by the wail of the sirens, followed by the distant crump of heavy bombs as the enemy planes came over with all their cabin lights blazing at about 8,000 feet, just comfortably out of range of the only ack-ack guns that we then possessed. After an early breakfast we would race out in our "jeeps" to Mingladon to see what damage had been done, and to interview the A.V.G. (American Volunteer Group) boys, who had their headquarters there beside the meagre

R.A.F. units that were apparently all that was available for the defence of Burma.

Much will be written of the A.V.G. one day, as they had about them that dramatic quality which is all too rare in modern warfare. They were mostly veterans, of anything between eighteen and twenty-five years, who had already had considerable battle experience against the Japs in China. They were all volunteers, who had been lent by Chiang Kai-shek to help in the task of trying to keep open the vital Burma supply road, and all, as I came to realise as I got to know them, had a deep, almost religious, hatred for the Japanese. They were flying fighters and they were superb, nearly always inflicting five or six to one losses on their opponents.

One day, when Matthews and I had gone out early to inspect the previous night's damage, the Japs staged a surprise daylight return visit, and we were treated to a ringside seat at one of their typical performances.

I shall never forget Matthews, who has a portly and dignified appearance, combined with a precise don-ish manner of speech, as he gravely replaced his sun helmet by his steel "battle bowler," and descended in a stately manner into our slit trench. Seated bolt upright he produced a small copy of *Pickwick Papers* and began to read, remarking: "I have a nasty suspicion, old boy, that before this is all over we shall be suffering from acute gin-starvation."

But even he soon forgot his Dickens and watched breathlessly one of the most thrilling aerial dog-fights that I have ever seen. The A.V.G. boys—eight of them—tore into those fifty Japs like hungry wolves. As they dived and twisted, with screaming engines, plainly visible against the hard blue sky, we could distinctly hear the machine-gun bursts, and soon five Japanese planes were hurtling towards the earth and destruction. Then thick

smoke began to stream from the tail of one of the American planes, and it came limping back towards the earth, obviously almost out of control. Somehow the pilot crash-landed not a hundred yards from us, and we saw him tearing himself free from the cockpit, and sprinting away, as I thought, to safety. Not at all—he was sprinting, hell for leather, for another plane, and two minutes later he was roaring off to join in the battle again and, as it happened, to account for two more Jap planes in the remaining ten minutes before the enemy turned tail and fled, having lost thirteen machines to the A.V.G.'s one.

One of my most treasured war souvenirs is my membership of the A.V.G.'s Short Snorters Club, the membership card of which is a dollar bill, and upon which all members inscribe their names. Any Short Snorter not being able to produce his membership card upon demand by a fellow member is obliged to stand a round of drinks. Of the twenty-two names on my dollar bill, the owners of eight are to-day dead in aerial battle—but dead, most surely, as they would have wished to die.

Militarily the situation was not very interesting. The Japanese, since the supine Vichy surrender of Indo-China, and the equally flabby behaviour of the Siamese, were in a position to push in an endless stream of men and material, which must ultimately overwhelm the slender forces at our disposal, who could only be reinforced by sea. Since the sinking of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* the enemy, too, had temporarily at least gained complete mastery of the sea, so the position right from the start was pretty hopeless, and the whole question seemed to resolve itself into whether or not we could hang on until the rains in mid-May would render impossible a further Japanese advance into India, before our defensive preparations were complete.

For the moment, however, the main Japanese effort was directed towards the conquest of Malaya, and then the Dutch East Indies, and in Burma he was contenting himself with snipping bits off the long narrow southern strip, known as Tenasserim, which was obviously quite indefensible.

The general state of mind among the British inhabitants in Burma was almost unbelievably remote from reality. One local paper reflected this all too clearly when it came out with a fine slashing article entitled "When will Russia enter the war?" Goaded on by the fact that no one seemed to find this strange I wrote, pointing out that the title appeared a trifle inapt as I had heard reliable reports suggesting that Russia had been in the war for the last seven months, and probably felt that her sacrifice of three million men compared not unfavourably as a contribution to victory with Burma's own war effort.

"The War," of course, to these worthies meant the Far East, and what was happening in Europe was of no importance.

Seeing the trend of events I cabled for and obtained permission to go to Singapore and Batavia, on the understanding that I would return to Rangoon before the end of February, which then seemed the earliest possible moment when the full-scale assault upon Burma could begin. Ronald Matthews had obtained similar permission, and the R.A.F. provided the transport. Blenheim bombers were being ferried out from the Middle East in a tardy effort to wrest the mastery of the Malayan skies from the enemy, and it was not difficult to get a place on one of them.

Before dawn we were driven out to a secret air-field by an extremely kind American colonel called St. John, and with the first light we were roaring off to the south. The normal route down the coast of Tenasserim was impossible

as it was already in enemy hands, so that we had to take a wide sweep to the west, over the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and then curve in again to Khota Raja on the extreme north-western point of Sumatra—a flight of just about one thousand miles with no possible stopping-places along the way, and the probability that running into enemy planes *en route* might further complicate the journey. Although our rear gunner spotted a "plane of unknown nationality" in the distance once, our only trouble was that we ran into heavy head winds and tropical thunderstorms and after six hours' flying we were perilously near the end of our petrol. When we finally landed my South African pilot, Lt. Pocock, concisely summed up the situation by saying that we had "just about a tablespoonful left."

The following day heavy rains delayed our start and, hugging the south coast of the great island, we were treated to the majestic spectacle of immense black mountains meeting a solid wall of equally black clouds, shot with almost continual lightning. My appreciation, however, was considerably dampened when we turned inland and over these same mountains, and promptly lost ourselves for three-quarters of an hour. After what seemed an eternity we spotted a narrow gap in the cloud-bank, and diving through it we came into a slightly clearer patch, and, just skimming the tree tops, went in search of an emergency landing-field marked on our map, which we were lucky enough to find before it grew dark.

This obscure air-field, hundreds of miles from anywhere, teeming with malaria mosquitoes and situated almost exactly on the Equator, was guarded by four Englishmen and three Dutchmen. They were very short of provisions, but with touching generosity opened up two of their scanty store of tins and gave us a kind of sausage soup which was, they admitted, their first hot meal for nearly a

fortnight. As I made off, through a cloud of mosquitoes, towards the shack, dignified by the title of Guest House, they warned me that it was infested with Mata Haris. Greatly encouraged by this prospect of the company of a beautiful dancer and spy for the night, I was distressed to learn that Mata Hari in Sumatra is the name of the deadliest of snakes. Most of the night I was kept awake not by the attentions of beautiful spies but by the eerie whistling of innumerable monkeys.

Very early in the morning I was aroused with the news that a native had just come in with a report that the sole survivor of a crashed Japanese bomber plane was asleep in a jungle hut not five miles away, and that I could go with the other seven men to round him up. We had soon surrounded the house, a palmetto thatch shack on stilts in a lonely jungle clearing, and at the agreed signal closed in upon it until it was within range. Warned perhaps by some faint sound of our approach the single occupant suddenly appeared upon the narrow platform outside the entrance. For a moment he stood there, plain to see in his Japanese pilot's uniform, and then suddenly flinging himself upon his face began to blaze away at us with his revolver, hitting one of the Dutchmen in the shoulder. After intermittent sniping the Jap had apparently used up all his ammunition. To our amazement he then suddenly stood up in full view, and in reply to our demand for surrender placed his revolver in his mouth and blew a hole in the top of his head.

This, it was explained to me, was the usual procedure. The Japanese had all been trained to believe that we tortured our prisoners and, fearing that they might break down and give away valuable information, they preferred an honourable death by suicide. This fantastic mentality is one of the most potent factors that will make the successful termination of the war with Japan a far longer

and more costly business than is readily understood by the logical non-Asiatic mind.

As my friend Gordon Young invited me to write a chapter on Burma, and I now seem to be writing about Sumatra, I will skip the story of the next four weeks. Suffice it to say that when the fall of the Dutch East Indies seemed inevitable I communicated with my paper, pointing out that, while I was quite prepared to stay on, it seemed pretty certain that, when the time came to make a run for it, the only line of retreat would be to Australia, and as events in Burma were beginning to move they told me to get back to the west.

Accordingly I boarded an old Canadian Pacific liner which was laden with over a thousand women and children from Singapore, and which, after zigzagging across the Indian Ocean for eight days, finally dropped me off at Colombo in Ceylon, from whence I flew back, *via* Madras and Calcutta, once more to Lashio, where I landed on February 24, having completed a journey of 7,000 miles in five weeks.

During my absence the whole military situation had changed for the worse. The Japs were across the natural defensive line of the River Salween and were threatening to cut the main Rangoon-Mandalay road and railway at Pegu, roughly fifty miles north-east of the capital. Chinese troops were being rushed into the country, but it seemed that Rangoon was doomed, and with it all hopes of fresh men and supplies from England or India. The replacement of General Hutton by General Alexander, with his tremendous experience of conducting a fighting withdrawal at Dunkirk, made it pretty clear that the campaign was going to develop into a grim and bitter retreat before a victorious and savage enemy with unlimited capacity for reinforcement, with no real hope of anything but the negative victory of gaining time.

The Press, the Australians still protesting energetically, had been evacuated to Maymyo, north-east of Mandalay, and there I found them, angrily occupying a completely unfurnished bungalow, with an unexploded bomb blocking the only road to the town, and busily engaged in being rude to one another.

Over this difficult team presided Colonel Foucar, a kindly, unbelievably long, individual, who, as he had been a very successful lawyer, and had written some excellent novels, had been placed at the head of the Press Censorship. Under him was a tough little Australian squadron leader called Crabbe, who, although still suffering from internal injuries caused by the Christmas bombing of Rangoon, was doing a magnificent job. Having himself had newspaper experience, he realised that correspondents must occasionally have news. Being a censor he realised that the primary function of the authorities was to see that we didn't get any. How he managed to help us as much as he did, without incurring the wrath of the powers that be, is one of those unwritten histories of diplomacy of which the world will never know.

A flock of telegrams awaited me, implying that 7,000 miles in five weeks was suspiciously like total immobility. Their general trend was to urge me to get to Rangoon for the final act of the tragedy. Transport was the main difficulty, since by this time there was nothing to be hired, and I was lucky to be able to cadge a lift, seated on a vast pile of luggage, in the back of Munro's "jeep," for a party that was leaving the morning after my arrival, and which hoped to get through to the capital.

I had three hours' sleep on the very hard floor of the Press bungalow, and at dawn we set off in a convoy of three cars.

The first night we spent as guests of an American

missionary at Pyinmana, and the next afternoon wading through a mass of fear-crazed and cholera-infected Indian refugees, who told us that each night they were attacked by armed bands of Burmese, we got as far as Nyaunglebin, some eighty-five miles short of Rangoon, where we were halted with the news that the advanced elements of the enemy had cut the road just ahead of us. We hung about miserably, in terrific heat, and were then told that we could not go on. The Australians protested, and we turned back to Toungoo.

By this time it was dark, but all along the way forest fires were raging—forest fires lit by the Burmese Fifth Column to guide Japanese bombers to their targets. Ahead of us a fire, of greater proportions than anything else we had yet seen, revealed that the town that was our objective had been the victim of an unusually savage fire raid since we had passed through it that morning.

Sure enough, when we reached the outskirts it was to find the greater part of the town in flames. All the crowded bazaar district was a raging furnace. Leaving our "jeep" at a safe distance we walked among the blazing remnants. In the exact centre of all this destruction was the figure of a stone Buddha, seated in the lotus position, denoting inner contemplation; his calm, otherworldly smile lit up by the flames.

Despairing of shelter in the stricken town we decided to push on yet again to our missionary friend in Pyinmana, sixty miles away, and the next day returned to Maymyo, there to read the reproaches of our employers for having failed to reach Rangoon. Nevertheless, we felt that we had done all that was possible. In the three days of the six hundred miles' trip we had totalled six hours' sleep, eaten, perhaps, two square meals, and during the whole time had not tasted water for fear of cholera, moistening

our parched and dust-filled throats only with the juice of unripe coco-nuts whenever we were lucky enough to find them on sale.

After three days' rest various units regrouped themselves for a fresh effort to get through to Rangoon. The two Australians, Healy and Munday, still protesting, set off again down the main road, where they ran into the Battle of Pegu, and the best story of the whole campaign. Gallagher, Stowe, De Luce, Berrigan and Munro had abandoned the idea, and I was without transport. After a hectic day I contacted my good friend Major Mackenzie-Kennedy, head of the Officers' Courier Service, who was responsible for taking urgent despatches to the capital by the far longer but surer route through the oil-fields of Yenangyoung, the R.A.F. base at Magwee, and Prome, a matter of some five hundred miles. As my paper's insistence was upon reaching the capital rather than covering the front at Pegu, I felt that I was doing my best to carry out their wishes when, at 4.30 a.m., I left with Lieut. Acomb, who had recently escaped from Siam, and who, as it turned out, carried the very last despatches that were to get through to the capital.

Our first day of roughly 350 miles was without special incident except for my first and, I hope, last encounter with a Hamadryad, or King Cobra. We had paused for a breather just short of the oil-field of Kyaukpadaung, and were gazing away at the 5,000-foot Mount Popa, that loomed mysteriously through the heat-haze. During the thirteenth century the Burmese kings, from their court at Pagan, thirty-five miles away, used to pay an annual visit to this mountain to consult, through mediums, the spirits that inhabited it, as to the prospects for the coming year. Something caused me to turn from my contemplation and look down the road, where I was appalled to observe quite the largest snake that I have ever seen surging up from the

paddy-field on to the track about a hundred and fifty yards away.

Acomb immediately recognised it as a Hamadryad and hustled me back to the car. It was as well that he did, as the King Cobra always attacks on sight, unlike almost all other types of snake, which usually only strike in fear or self-defence. No sooner had His Majesty spotted us than he came straight at us at speed—all twelve feet of him. We hit him at about forty miles per hour, which made an unholy mess, but which probably saved our lives.

All through the day we pushed on west and south, past grass-grown, age-old pagodas, the heat-haze giving a strange dream-like quality to the landscape, across which the incredible fire of the flame - of - the - forest trees smouldered redly.

It was dark by the time that we groped our way into the pitch-black town of Prome, and after numerous failures, found the Circuit House, where the Indian major in command did his best to make us welcome. A still, oppressive heat lay over everything, and through this menacing quiet the thin whine of countless mosquitoes and the bell of the death cart, collecting the day's cholera victims, were the only sounds. The news from the front, only 140 miles to the south-east, was about as bad as it could be, and that indefinable feeling of hopelessness, that I remembered from Spain and Poland, lay only just behind everyone's consciousness.

Sleep on a cement floor, with the mosquitoes whining like an army of small dynamos in search of holes in my net, was little more than an exhausting pretence, and at six o'clock the next morning we were on our way again, for the final 150-mile lap.

We were now moving into the Fifth Column stronghold of the Tharrawaddy district. For some reason this area has always been a hotbed of overtly anti-Indian and

covertly anti-British agitation. These sentiments were usually vented on the Indians as being less capable of self-defence, of which there were something like a million in Burma, and the locals were already busily engaged on organising bands to attack the huge flow of refugees that were pressing on desperately north, on their 650-mile tramp towards the Assam frontier, in an attempt to escape the Japanese, from whom too they had little but death to hope.

Now, sensing the difficulty of the British position, the Burmese were beginning to summon up enough courage to attack any solitary white man unlucky enough to fall into their hands. An example of this had been given to us the night before by a Scottish sergeant, who had staggered into Prome a few days before we were there. Himself and his colonel, their regiment having been wiped out, had struggled for hours through the jungle and, after having waded and swam a river, reached, utterly exhausted, a small Burmese village, where they were received with every mark of courtesy and given food and shelter. When the villagers had realised, however, that these two men were fugitives and would not be followed by other soldiers, they had attempted to murder them. In the middle of the night the sergeant said he had awakened to find men, armed with long knives, or *dahs* as they are called, creeping into their hut. The colonel had his throat cut before he was fully awake, and the sergeant had only escaped, badly slashed, in the confusion and darkness.

On our way down, however, we saw comparatively little of this. Most of the towns and villages seemed almost deserted, though here and there small groups, centred always round the orange-robed figure of a priest, glared, muttered and spat at us as we passed near to them.

By noon we reached Rangoon, and made straight for

headquarters to deliver our messages. Almost simultaneously with our arrival a conference had been called at which the decision had to be taken as to whether or not to abandon the capital, which was in any case militarily indefensible. For half an hour I hung about outside, waiting to learn this decision, and the moment the door opened and the three generals and two brigadiers came out, one glance at their faces was sufficient to tell me what that decision had been.

One of them, spotting my correspondent's badges, came over to me and said: "Well, it seems that having just arrived you will have to turn right round and go back again. After a stiff battle at Pegu the Japanese have broken through and are now advancing on Rangoon. As you know, the only two roads, the main one through Pegu and the long one by which you came through Prome, join about eight miles north of Rangoon, so that both will be cut, and with them all means of escape from here, except perhaps by sea, as soon as the Japs get to that road junction. Therefore, at dawn to-morrow, the last convoy of troops will form up outside this building for the abandonment of the capital, leaving only a few demolition squads who will try to get out by boat as best they can. At 2 p.m. to-morrow they will set fire to this and certain other buildings, and blow up the great oil-refinery at Syriam, on the other side of the river."

I thanked him, but as I turned to go he called me back and said: "By the way, don't travel at night alone, as the Burmese around Tharrawaddy are putting down spikes and other obstacles on the roads to stop cars, and then attacking the occupants with their *dahs*. In addition to this there is reason to believe that, quite apart from the Japanese drive down the main road, the enemy are infiltrating due west from the main road at Pegu across the forty miles of jungle that separates it from the Prome

road south of Tharrawaddy, along the forest paths shown them by the Burmese fifth column."

He grinned at me and added: "You see you are in quite a tough spot. Have you ever had any experience like this before?"

"This is the seventh capital city that I have had to evacuate through enemy action in a little over three years," I replied.

"Good God!" he exploded. "People like you ought to be suppressed. You are obviously an out-size jinx."

From all that I had heard it seemed pretty definite that I should not be in Rangoon for more than another twenty-four hours, unless I wanted to spend the rest of the war as a guest of the Mikado in a Japanese concentration camp; but it promised to be an interesting twenty-four hours.

Philip Jordan, of the *News Chronicle*, seemed to be the only other correspondent that had got through, though the Australians, Healy and Munday, arrived from Pegu a little later, after having hair-raising escapes. My chief concern now, therefore, was to enquire about telegraphic communications, and pick up first-hand impressions, to be sent off from Maymyo on my return.

I found the partly ruined post office deserted except for two Anglo-Burmans, both of them asleep. Awakening one of them, who proved to be a telegraphic operator, I dictated a short piece, which he tapped out direct on to his machine, descriptive of these last hours of the doomed city. As far as I know this message never reached my office.

That walk through Rangoon, twenty-four hours before the Japanese came in, was certainly an experience that I shall never forget.

It was, as has been said, my seventh similar experience, but nowhere else had I felt quite the same almost ghostly

sense of unreality as then in the Burmese capital, on that day in March, 1942.

The streets were utterly deserted, and an extraordinary silence lay heavily over everything, so that I found myself instinctively walking softly and speaking in a hushed voice. There would be an occasional burst of rifle fire as Burmese looters were driven out of some shop, but beyond that nothing was to be heard in this once thriving city but the sound of my own footfalls and the excited cawing of the vast flock of crows who, seeming to sense death, were impatient for their obscene feast. In a side street I came across a seemingly impenetrable cloud of these birds, fighting over three bodies—three of the scores dead from cholera that I was to see during this Burma campaign.

Down on the docks a British demolition squad was sadly engaged in smashing to pieces 144 cases of Scotch whisky, for which there was no transport. I arrested their activities just long enough to put two cases in the back of my "jeep."

I spent the night in a deserted school, with one eye open for any stray band of looters, and after having carried out my own modest bit of scorched earth policy by setting fire to two abandoned motor-cycles, I made my way round to Army Headquarters just as it was getting light, and watched the last convoy forming up. As there seemed nothing much to do I spent the next hour sitting on the kerbstone, discussing salmon fishing with a friendly brigadier, whose name I never discovered.

Only part of the convoy got away before lunch, but I waited only to see the big blow of the oil-refinery before making my run for the north. On consideration I had decided not to wait for the second half of the convoy, but to try my luck alone. At the last moment someone gave me a captured Japanese rifle and some hand-grenades, in case they might be useful.

I was extremely relieved when I got to the branch road to the north-west. Fifty minutes later the Japanese reached the same point from the north-east and the remainder of the convoy had to fight its way through a roadblock with tanks. The Japanese tied a captured British officer on the front of this roadblock of teak logs, who, however, had a miraculous escape with only slight wounds.

What I did not know until later was that the jungle on either side of me was full of Japanese-officered traitor Burmans, who had orders not to fire at anything until the enemy came along, so as not to give away the position of the ambush. It was an uncomfortable thought subsequently that quite a number of these concealed gentry must have drawn a practice bead upon my unsuspecting head, as I bowled along in my completely open "jeep."

Near Tharrawaddy I came across terrible evidence of Burmese fifth column activity. A tight wire cord had been stretched across the road between two trees. A car had hit the obstacle at high speed, beheading three of the four Indian occupants. The body of the fourth, a woman, I found a few hundred yards away. She had been stripped and violated.

These were the people whom the Governor of Burma assured the public of England were loyal to a man. His Excellency omitted to mention to whom they were being loyal. It was certainly not to the British, though the Governor, having evacuated the danger area with a substantial bodyguard some days before, no doubt encountered rather different conditions from those experienced by lesser mortals.

I was not at all sorry to reach Magwe safely, with nothing worse than slight cuts from broken glass caused by bricks thrown through the windscreen by the loyal

Burmese, where I enjoyed the hospitality of the R.A.F., arriving back at Maymyo the following night.

Then began the soul-destroying business of getting my story through the censors and to London. I was determined that the public in England should know that our men were fighting not only against an overwhelmingly strong force of Japanese but were also continually menaced behind their backs by murderous Burmese fifth columnists. I was summoned to Government House, after another of my despatches on the same subject had been held up for three days, without notification to myself, on the authority of the Governor's Secretary, Colonel Binns, who informed me that my despatch was an implied criticism of the Civil Administration. He seemed surprised when I assured him that it had been intended to imply precisely that, and after reference to the Governor himself, the message was permitted to go.

This despatch contained details of the way in which, in my opinion and in that of every fighting soldier in Burma with whom I talked, the breakdown in the Civil Administration gravely prejudiced the army's already desperately difficult task.

The few vital military roads were cluttered up with unprotected hordes of Indian refugees, who should have been forcibly evacuated weeks before the fall of Rangoon. The first elements to be evacuated from the capital were the fire brigades and the local newspapers, leaving the city at the mercy of possible fire-raids, and prey to every Japanese-inspired rumour aimed at creating panic.

During the coming month I saw a good deal of General Alexander, who has since been responsible for the successes of the Eighth Army in Egypt, and also the American General Stilwell, who was commanding the Chinese forces in Burma. While they were both men of immense courage and ability, engaged in the thankless task of

doing what they could in a completely hopeless situation, it is difficult to imagine two more dissimilar personalities. General Alexander was always the smooth, polished, well-groomed Guards officer, and used to begin his Press Conferences by saying: "Well, gentlemen, I fear that I have not very much to tell you."

General Stilwell, tough, spare and weather-beaten, used always to begin: "Well, boys, I guess I'm a bum for news"—which, I suppose amounts roughly to the same thing.

The Japanese advance continued slowly but surely. By this time they had almost complete mastery of the air, and the Allied forces were suffering heavily as a result. In addition to their advance up the two main roads, with men and machines supplied comfortably through the port of Rangoon, there was always the threat of further huge forces gathering to the west of the frontier in Siam, which were obviously only waiting the psychological moment to strike west into the Shan States, as they actually did in April. Trips to the front became daily shorter, censorship stiffer, and communications more uncertain.

When the first great air-blitz on Mandalay came, early in April, all means of getting out news came completely to a standstill. Those old warhorses, Gallagher, Jordan and Stowe, had already decided that conditions, from the point of view of work, were rapidly becoming impossible, and had returned to India. After long consideration, I came to the conclusion that, as the retreat would ultimately be forced back up the Chindwin River towards Assam, I could, based on Calcutta and paying visits to the frontier, maintain a far better news service for the remaining few weeks that were obviously all that was left of the campaign, than would be possible in a country where telegraphic communications were rapidly ceasing to exist.

However, deciding to leave and actually leaving were two very different propositions. A trip to Magwe, with the object of getting a lift from the R.A.F., merely involved me in the three-day blitz on the air-field and surrounding establishments, that destroyed the last remnants of our air power in Burma, and led to the final withdrawal of the few undamaged machines to air-fields further north. Finally it was from Lashio that I succeeded in finding a 'plane, packed with sick and terrified Indian refugees, that got me to Calcutta.

* * * * *

Looking back on the campaign now, from the distance of some eight months, the issues involved and the reasons for the outcome seem comparatively clear.

It was, from first to last, a delaying action. The force and above all the material at our disposal was totally inadequate to hold an enemy who could push in endless reinforcements through Indo-China and Siam. Our only means of supply was through Rangoon. At the time we held Rangoon we were sending every available man and machine in a futile and foredoomed effort to save Singapore. By the time that Singapore and the Dutch East Indies had gone we had lost Rangoon and the means of supplying Burma.

There is a strong case to be made for the belief that if all those reinforcements that were sent to Singapore, late in January and early in February, just in time to surrender, had instead been sent to Rangoon, then we might still to-day be masters of Burma.

Despite the meagre forces which General Alexander possessed, with never more than a single armoured brigade and outnumbered five to one in the air and four to one in men, he achieved the only possible success that lay within his power, or the power of anyone else similarly placed. He held the Japanese until the monsoon broke in mid-

May, and so made a rapid enemy advance into India impossible.

Those unfortunate men who fought this hopeless, foredoomed fight for four months for the most part never realised that their sacrifices probably saved India, and so the whole British position in Persia and the Middle East, but that is nevertheless what they achieved.

During the five monsoon months from mid-May until mid-October General Wavell had time to complete his defences of India, and with the security that this has given to him to lay the foundations for an offensive that he is confident will drive the enemy from Burma and re-open our communications with China.

It was during the latter part of April and the early part of May that, on trips to the Assam-Burma frontier to meet General Alexander's battered forces, as they struggled gamely on to the Manipur Road and comparative safety, I came to know Gordon Young, formerly of Reuters and now of the *Daily Express*.

In a steaming, snake-infested camp ridden with malaria and cholera, with the monsoon thunder crashing theatrically over our leaky tent, drinking whisky and chlorinated water and wondering if we should ever again see the lights of London, he asked me to write a chapter on Burma for his proposed book.

I mention these abnormal conditions in his defence, as they may perhaps account for his having made the suggestion.

IV

ROPEY DOPIES

"Yo, ho, yo ho, it's off to work we go."—*Disney's dwarfs.*

As the last men of General Alexander's army struggled from Burma, there was a lull in the news from India's eastern frontier.

The weather was already going bad on us—great flashing thunderstorms and heavy tropical downpours, which old Calcutta residents declared were the worst examples of pre-monsoon weather they had seen for forty years. The army was now simply holding on to the Assam frontier with such thin forces as it had, while the main body of men from Burma were refitting at their bases back in Bengal and elsewhere.

Only in the R.A.F. was there, at that moment, still some offensive activity.

All over Eastern India, and especially in Eastern Bengal, the Air Force were busy providing themselves with new aerodromes—the lack of which in Burma had been the one thing which had beaten them in the heroic efforts which they had made to support the army fighting back from Rangoon. In those wretched days of retreat, when tempers were frayed by sleepless nights of fighting, some of our troops had blamed the R.A.F. for lack of air cover, while some R.A.F. pilots had blamed the army for losing the few existing aerodromes in their retreat. Actually, given the original circumstances in which both parties found themselves fighting, what happened was nobody's fault at all.

One day I had called on Air Marshal Sir Richard Peirse, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, who received me

alone for an informal talk about India's air defences. "We may be still on the short side with aircraft," he had said, "but they are coming along, and this time at any rate we are not going to be short of aerodromes. If you like, you can see for yourself what we are doing."

I accepted his offer promptly and next day I put in a formal application to the R.A.F.'s Public Relations bureau for a tour of air stations. On the spur of the moment I also asked for permission to go myself on a bombing raid over Burma.

The R.A.F. gave me a telephone call next day and asked me to go down and talk about it. When I got to Air Headquarters I found the old rival Cedric Salter already there. We had both had the same idea at once, and had both asked for the same kind of trip, including a flight over Burma. "I don't know that the prospects are very good," said the Squadron Leader, dubiously. "All we have at the moment are some ropey Blenheims—and when I say ropey I mean ropey. There might be some Wellingtons later on: or would you rather go as soon as possible?"

Unenthusiasm was (I hope) barely detectable in our voices as we said in unison that we'd like to go as soon as possible.

"There's your weight, too," said the Squadron Lleader. "I don't think they're very keen on leaving off a bomb just to fit in a war correspondent. We are so infernally short of aircraft."

We said we'd take a chance on that and finally he agreed to arrange for us to make a tour of several aerodromes in Eastern Bengal, and stand by at one of them for whatever kind of trip should offer itself.

As we turned to go, Cedric Salter said with a smile: "I see you lost a couple of machines on that Burma raid yesterday."

"Yes," said the Squadron Leader, "we lost a couple, didn't we? Well, cheerio!"

Salter and I drove back into Calcutta in a taxi. As we sat side by side we asked each other: "Exactly why did we ever start this thing, anyway?"

Marsland Gander, with whom I was sharing a room at the hotel, laughed cheerfully when he heard about the projected trip, though he said he had also applied for a similar one. "I shan't bother to take a note of your obituary, old boy," he said; "all the paper will want from me is just a few last-moment scenes."

When I called for Salter two days later, the blonde and beautiful Annette Salter flung her arms round both of us impartially, so that we went off in a pleasant warm glow of enthusiasm.

As soon as the trip was over, of course, we both realised that, by Air Force standards, it had been nothing at all. But I suspect that, as Salter and I sat around our final aerodrome for three days playing chess, gossiping and waiting for our orders, our minds were never entirely on our game.

We spent much of our time talking to the young air crews, who had come from all parts of the Empire. They were a grand lot, but just then they were all feeling somewhat downcast, partly at their shortage of aircraft, partly at the prospect of long periods of inactivity owing to bad moonson weather, and partly, because, like most of us who had just arrived in India for the first time, they were homesick and lonely. Many of them had fought in the Battle of Britain, and they accustomed themselves only gradually to the necessity for weeks of hanging about in forlorn parts of Bengal, with only flies and mosquitoes to keep them company. No, not quite only that—for on the second night of our arrival at this particular aerodrome three fighter pilots, returning from the mess,

found a cobra on our verandah, and killed it with whoops of joy.

In the daytime, around the aerodrome, aircraftsmen stripped to the waist sweated to maintain the few old planes they had in running order, despite the dust that swirled incessantly into the engines. The thermometer, in the past few days, had been up to 119 degrees, and even the station parrot had just died from heat exhaustion.

On the third day we heard that it was all set for our trip. It was not a bombing raid, but a reconnaissance flight which the Blenheims were to do, and we were to be allowed to sit beside the pilots so that we could see everything.

At four o'clock next morning, two bleary-eyed correspondents ate an early breakfast of bacon and eggs with the crews, and then bumped off in a lorry to the waiting aircraft.

The particular Blenheims assigned for this trip were war-scarred veterans from the Middle East, but they were still going strong. The fuselages of our two 'planes bore pilots' emblems, both inspired by Walt Disney. One was Dumbo and the other was Dopey. Salter and I tossed for which machine we should each take and I got Dopey. Before we had finished our six-hour flight, I thought her well-named.

The first heavy drops of tropical rain splashed down as I struggled to fix up the complicated fasteners of my mae west and parachute harness. The rain felt like warm tea.

Our Cockney sergeant gunner, whose home was back in Bramfield Road, Battersea, said: "The weather looks a bit queer."

Our pilot, a lanky New Zealander of about twenty-two, named George, said: "I think we'll catch plenty to-day."

And our navigator (who once had played a saxophone

in a Calcutta dance band) said: "Ever been lost in the air? Oh boy! you will be to-day."

They were all three right.

The two different aeroplanes taking Salter and myself set off to two different destinations. Dopey's objective was Magwe, about four hundred miles from our starting place and 150 miles inside Burma from the point where we crossed the coast. Magwe had been an important place during the retreat from Burma and the Japanese were known to have a big aerodrome there.

In our aircraft we took with us a water-bottle, a tin of apricots and six bully-beef sandwiches. The navigator sat on a packing-case in the machine's glass nose and fixed down his maps on a table in front of him with drawing pins. While the pilot tested the intercom telephone, I squeezed into a tiny seat alongside him. There wasn't any oxygen jet to spare for me, but George said: "If we have to go up high, you may feel a bit drowsy, so don't worry about that."

We rose up through a gap in the clouds and flew on in fine weather. Over Calcutta, there was a heavy heat haze, which made that city look like Manchester on a November afternoon.

We droned on over the sea in a hot, sunny sky, slowly climbing to fifteen thousand feet. George pulled on a pair of blue mittens and plugged in his oxygen tube. I dozed off and the next thing I knew was the pilot saying: "That's Burma."

We went down to about six thousand feet and below us lay the crinkly ridges of the Mayu hills just north of Akyab. The hills were solidly covered with jungle, only broken by an occasional dirty yellow river. "There's nowhere to land from on," said George cheerfully. The gunner kept out a watch for Jap fighters and I must say I did a bit of looking myself too.

Along the muddy Kaladan river there were barges moving. We swooped down and once our guns rattled out, but we didn't hang around because our objective this time was observing, not killing.

We climbed up again to cross the Pakokku hills into Minbu province, while the navigator wrote out his detailed weather notes. Rough roads spread out below us but there was no sign of movement on them. It was still early morning and from the bamboo huts of the native villages nobody stirred. No flak impeded us; no fighters rose up to meet us.

Just short of Magwe's red roofs we completed our mission, so we turned in a steep bank that sent the jungle racing up sideways, and as we did so we saw the first wisps of cloud beginning to form. They were the herald of all our troubles, but it was not until we were crossing the Bay of Bengal that things really began to happen.

As we neared the coast of India at ten thousand feet, two great mountains of black cloud loomed up before us—monsoon storms that had sprung up behind our backs. George the, pilot, skirted between both, only to find another swirling mass directly on our course. We plunged into this, and in a few seconds found ourselves flying in almost pitch darkness and bitter cold with a fierce, cold rain lashing into the cockpit. Gusts of wind caught the aircraft, tossed her up then sent her smashing down again. As cloud swirled past the windows we roared on, but there never seemed to be a break in the weather. Lightning flashed around us; our wireless wasn't working. George shouted: "I'm getting out of this." He banked steeply and we retraced our course until we saw a gap in the cloud. We raced down through it in a steep dive and found ourselves flying at five hundred feet over the interminable mud-flats and islands of the Sundarban area, which stretches six thousand square miles in front of Calcutta,

with no open field anywhere. Now it was hot again and suddenly so humid that George put a towel round his neck to catch the perspiration that poured from his face. It was like flying in a greenhouse.

The navigator still knew our course and passed up a note to George. We flew on for a few minutes, then yet another great area of black storm barred our way. We climbed and once again we tried to run through it and knew the utter loneliness which four men can feel when flying blind in a storm-tossed aircraft. Once again George finally swerved, and dived down until we ran out of the cold cloud into the swelteringly hot air just above the mudflats. The navigator got us on to our course again, and a third time our way was barred by the quickly-spreading monsoon.

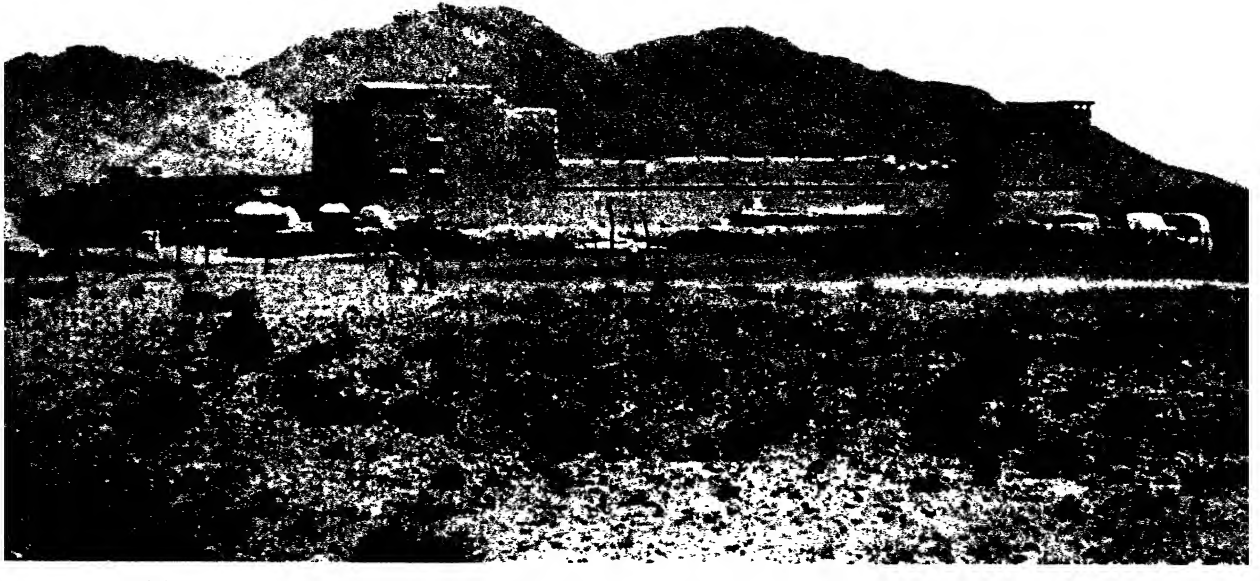
As black cloud swirled round us again, George leaned over and shouted out to me: "You'll be lucky if you ever write this story!" Then he dived down again into the clear hot air of the mudflats.

Now the navigator was folding up his maps. He shrugged his shoulders to the pilot to indicate that he had by now completely lost his course and he spent the rest of the time peering towards the ground for a landmark.

The pilot checked the petrol. There was still some in the tank, so we droned on inland. We had no idea where we were going—but we hoped for the best.

Finally, we all three together spotted in the far distance a single-track railway line. With a shout of pleasure, George swooped down along the line until we saw a tiny station. Three times we zoomed low over it, the belly of our aircraft almost touching the platform's roof, while we strained our eyes to read the station's name. We did it the third time, and when we located the station on our map we found we were only ten miles from our aerodrome, which was still hidden by monsoon clouds. We flew over

"Now it was suddenly so humid that George put a towel round his neck to catch the perspiration that poured from his face" (*p.* 80)



"We saw the square brown outline of Fort Datta Khel" (*p.* 91) (*Indian Army Photo*)

the railway track a few hundred feet above it, and finally we dropped down thankfully on to our aerodrome, where a gusty gale was blowing.

Only a few minutes after we had landed, and as I was still unstrapping my parachute harness in the rain, we saw a Lockheed Hudson circling in and out of the low clouds trying to land. Finally she came down, and as her wheels were touching the ground a specially powerful gust of the gale caught her. She bounced about twenty feet into the air, came down, bounced again and finally came down one-sidedly, with her port wing scraping the ground. As she slewed to a stop, the whole crew jumped clear and then the aircraft went "WOOF" and suddenly was a mass of flames. The petrol had ignited and the white-hot blaze sent thick black smoke spiralling up into the air. Ammunition inside the aircraft exploded in every direction and now and then a brilliant blue or red Verey light from the pilot's cockpit would shoot out of the flames. Everybody had got clear of the machine just in time. One moment we had been standing on the aerodrome idly watching the plane come in. When she had bounced for the first time one of the R.A.F. boys had said: "Golly, what a landing!" And then the machine was just a mass of melting metal. It was silly, but I had not realised that it could happen so quickly.

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After saying good-bye to the R.A.F. boys, Salter and I went back and wrote our stories of the flight. When we showed them to the Squadron Leader, he read them and smiled and said: "Well, that's certainly a very decent bit of line-shooting."

Our little sortie had, of course, in no sense been an important operation. But I think in a way it may have been all the better for that. It was so utterly typical of the everyday jobs of work which the R.A.F. in India was

having to do in those days immediately after Burma had fallen—work done in bad weather with a few old aircraft flying from God-forsaken aerodromes; and work which never won the glamour or publicity of the great raids on Germany and Italy.

It was hard for energetic pilots fresh from England to believe that those boring reconnaissance flights over Burma and the Bay of Bengal, or those little bombing raids by half a dozen bullet-marked and ropey Blenheims were really the first preparations for big air offensives later to be made against the Japanese; offensives in which not only Wellingtons but much larger and more modern aircraft, including those of the United States Air Force, would participate. But to-day they realise that it was so.

Dumbo and Dopey may not have been much to look at, but they were pioneers.

V

THE OTHER FRONTIER

"Where you can hear a breech-bolt snick
Where never a man is seen."

KIPLING, *Ballad of East and West.*

WITH Burma temporarily lost, and the monsoon bringing operations to a standstill all along the Assam frontier, there seemed no point in staying on any longer in Calcutta. So I went back to General Wavell's headquarters and spent some weeks there, collecting material for special articles and generally waiting for something to turn up.

What turned up was certainly better than anything I had expected. It was an invitation from Brigadier Ivor Jehu, General Wavell's energetic Director of Public Relations, to R. W. Cooper, the war correspondent of *The Times* and myself to visit that other vital outpost of India, the North-West Frontier. There we would be able to accompany a column under Major-General R. B. Deedes which was about to sally forth against hostile tribesmen in North Waziristan and, among other things, to relieve a British fort which had been cut off by the tribesmen for just over three months. I accepted eagerly. It was obviously going to be a chance for journalism in the old tradition of war corresponding. Moreover, we were to be among the few uniformed war correspondents seen on that frontier since the time of Winston Churchill. As a civilian correspondent in pre-war days, Brigadier Jehu himself had done some first-rate work up there for the *Times of India*.

The story had a special link with the interests of the people at home in that among the British troops who would participate in the punitive column were men who only a short time previously had been at Havre and Dunkirk. They would be fighting alongside Indian soldiers of all creeds and from all parts of the country.

As the operation was still in the stage of being planned, Cooper and I were naturally pledged to the deepest secrecy about it, so, in cabling to the *Express* for permission to disappear into the blue for about a fortnight, I told them only that I wanted to go on a journey which "should yield at least one good *Boy's Own Paper* story." Foley replied in a high-spirited wire couched in the phraseology of the periodical I had mentioned: "Okay trip, wizard wheeze."

So a few days later, after much buying of marching boots and supplies, Cooper and I left in the train for Rawalpindi

whence we were setting out to join the column in the company of one official observer for the Indian Army and a War Office photographer who, in more peaceful days had been a Gaumont-British cameraman at Shepherd's Bush.

* * * * *

The North-West Frontier of India, the traditional route of the invader from the west, has been a serious problem for the British in India for nearly a hundred years. Punitive expeditions have been going out against bandit tribesmen since 1849 and as long ago as 1877 a Viceroy of India, Lord Lytton, was writing: "I know of no other spot where, after years of peaceful occupation, a great civilised power has obtained so little influence over its semi-savage neighbours that there is absolutely no security for British life a mile or two beyond our borders." In the constant ebb and flow of warfare along this wild frontier, some of our most famous soldiers have been trained, from Lord Roberts to General Wavell and General Auchinleck.

Within the North-West Frontier Province and along the border of Afghanistan is Waziristan, an area of about five thousand square miles of rugged barren hills.

The first thing I did in preparing for our journey was to turn up the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* on the subject of Waziristan. I found that even that sober publication permitted itself considerable freedom of expression about the character of the Wazir tribesmen.

"The Wazirs are the largest tribe on the frontier," it said, "but their state of civilisation is very low. They are a race of robbers and murderers and the Waziri name is execrated even by the neighbouring Mohammedan tribesmen. They have been described as 'freeborn and murderers, hot-headed and light-hearted, self-respecting but vain.' Through the inaccessibility of his country to lowlanders, combined with the proximity of open and fertile tracts inhabited by races of inferior stamina, the Wazir

has developed into a confirmed raider. The passage through his country of mountain footpaths connecting India with Afghanistan has made him a hereditary highwayman as well."

With such material for trouble-making as this to be found on India's very doorstep, it would have been surprising if Axis propagandists had not, since the beginning of the war, done their utmost to foment additional activity among the tribesmen, under their leader, the fanatical Fakir of Ipi, formerly a village mullah, or priest, and a somewhat grotesque figure in his mountain fastness at Gorwekht. They must have been having a poor return for their money. On the whole, the frontier has stayed quiet, thanks to the little band of hardy British and Indian troops who have kept the peace there and when occasion has demanded have gone forth to do battle with the troublemakers.

The British troops up there have had a thankless task. Activities on the frontier obtain little publicity, so that the soldier's people at home must often wonder how he is spending his time. (One evening, as we sat in a frontier camp under intermittent fire from Wazir snipers, a disgruntled Scot disgustedly showed me a letter from his unimaginative girl friend, which calmly enquired: "When are you going to join in the war?") The frontier soldier's life is a hard isolated one among barren rocks and high-walled villages in which every man carries a rifle. On the North-West Frontier you realise the truth indeed of that definition of war which described it as consisting of "long periods of acute boredom alternating with short periods of acute danger."

Our trip was certainly a fascinating one, and I have seldom been a journey with a more able and good-natured colleague than Cooper proved to be. He is rotund and humorous and looks more like an English country

squire than the quick and observant reporter which he actually is.

Moreover, those officers of the Indian Army who for some mysterious reason have in England a reputation for being somewhat aloof proved in fact to be genial, lively soldiers, extremely well-informed and interested in all the world's affairs, with which they keep in touch by listening to the radio and reading that classic old newspaper the *Civil and Military Gazette*, which was the journal whereon Rudyard Kipling started his career.

Throughout the fortnight of our journey Cooper and I only twice encountered anybody who did not go out of their way to be friendly and helpful to the two strangers who had invaded this unfamiliar land. Both, funnily enough, were in the little cantonment of Bannu, about 100 miles south of Peshawar, which was the real starting-point of our expedition. On our first night there we strayed along in our war correspondents' uniform to the officers' club for a drink. As we diffidently moved towards the bar, we heard a ruddy-faced captain ask his companion in a highly-audible stage whisper:

"I say, old man, what on earth are those two follows, eh?"

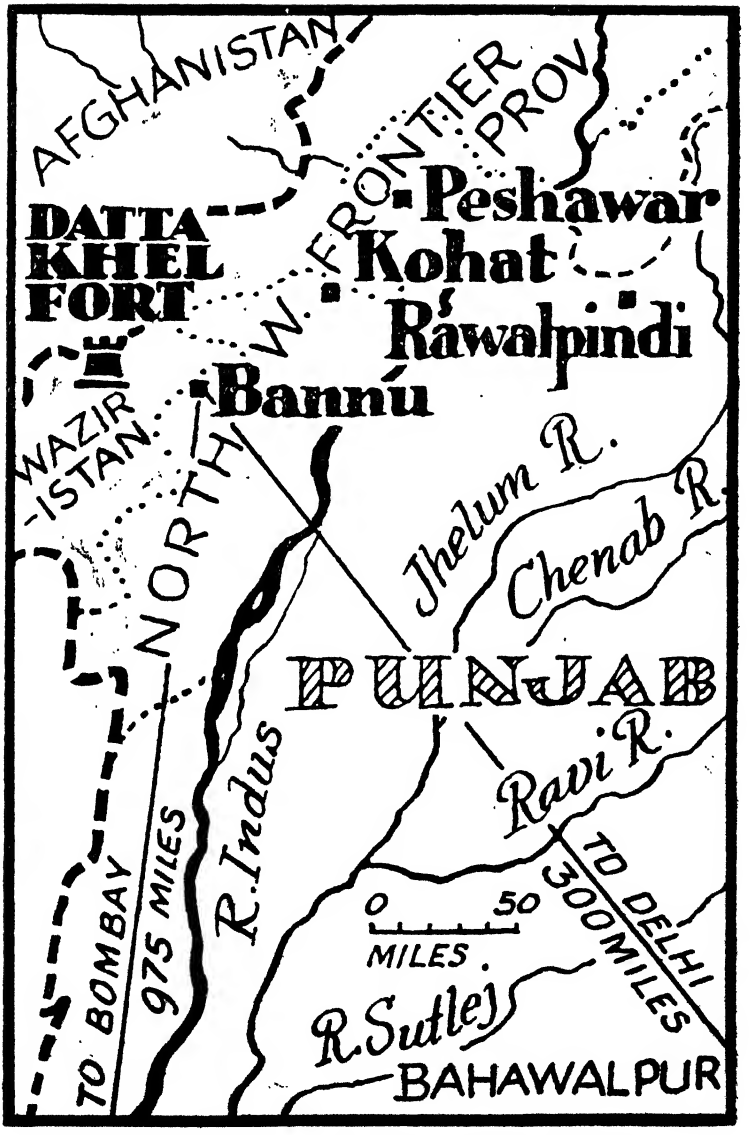
"War correspondents or something."

"My God!" said the captain, and edged hastily away.

And ten days later in the same spot we ran up against an exceedingly hostile major. But as we were at the time seeking to argue this major into providing us with an armoured car each and an armed escort for a proposed journey, perhaps it was natural that he should have been so openly allergic to newspapermen. In the end we got what we wanted.

* * * * *

While we waited in Bannu for transport further towards



"Fort Datta Khel is the furthest British outpost in Waziristan" (*p.* 88). (*Daily Express Map*)

the Afghan frontier, we learned in greater detail what the operation was about.

Three months previously, we were told, the hostile tribesmen had made a series of raids and, among other things, had cut all communications with Fort Datta Khel, which is the furthest British outpost in Waziristan and was held by a detachment of Tochi frontier scouts under the command of a British Indian officer. They had established three home-made guns in the mountains surrounding the fort and had kept it under intermittent shell-fire, though most of the shells, being home-made, did not explode. But they sniped consistently at any of the scouts who showed themselves outside the fort, and announced to the local population that British power was on the wane and that no British troops could henceforth enter that part of the world. In an attempt to show his mystic powers to the tribesmen, the Fakir of Ipi put a solemn curse on one of the mountains near the fort and declared that no soldier from India should ever set foot on it again. (This was one of the mountains over which we marched on our way to relieve the outpost.)

Fort Datta Khel itself lies about fifty miles due west of Bannu in the centre of a plain measuring about two miles wide by four miles long, but this plain is entirely encircled by a whole series of rocky mountain ranges. The ranges are a soldier's problem and a sniper's paradise, because every line of hills is commanded by another higher one immediately behind it, and every scrubby bush and rock gives cover to the cunning enemy sharp-shooters. These are the very hills of which Kipling wrote in his *Ballad of East and West,* and the conditions of frontier war—except for occasional R.A.F. patrols and some mechanisation—have changed hardly at all since Kipling wrote that poem.

The problem which faced General Deedes was to get his

forces, including something like three thousand mules, mountain batteries, lorries and armoured cars safely through the treacherous mountains under the noses of the tribesmen to the plain outside Datta Khel fort. He did it, actually, in the space of only a few days.

Cooper and I drove in a convoy escorted by armoured cars from Bannu to a point called Gardai, twelve miles south-east of Datta Khel, where General Deedes had his headquarters in an encampment surrounded by a stone perimeter wall, but under intermittent sniping from the surrounding hills. A few ineffective shells had also fallen in this camp from one of the old guns which the tribesmen were managing to maintain. Unluckily, in one of the bursts of fire, on another camp alongside, Captain J. Agar, adjutant of a battalion of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, was killed on the day of our arrival.

We stayed in Gardai Camp for a couple of days, watching the preparations being made for the column's advance.

On our first evening there, I was sitting on a large stone, having my hair cut by a bearded Indian camp barber, when enemy snipers put a burst of fire into the camp, causing some casualties. Like a London hairdresser discussing the weather, the old barber casually remarked: "We always have plenty of shooting up here, sahib," and went on with his job.

Finally the operations began at dawn on Wednesday, July 29. First of all a concentration of tribesmen in the hills immediately outside the camp was put down by a dawn barrage from the mountain batteries. As the red sun rose, I stood on the perimeter wall of the camp and watched detachments of the Somerset Light Infantry and the Gurkhas rush out of the camp, spread out over the hills and take possession of the peak of each one. From these peaks they worked along to each adjoining ridge,

so that within a few hours every ridge overlooking the winding road through the mountains was picketed by our men.

Then two long columns of our troops moved up through the valley, which was echoing with gunfire from our batteries and with the sharp crack and whine of bullets as enemy snipers revealed themselves, were met by the answering fire of our columns and were either wiped out or driven off into remoter hills. General Deedes, walking up the valley with Mr. A. D. F. Dundas, the Resident of Waziristan, had a narrow escape as enemy fire opened up suddenly at them. They dived for cover and the tribesmen were silenced by fire from one of our pickets on the other side of the valley.

In the heat of the noonday sun, with the guns still firing on the surrounding hills, the two long columns met on the summit of a low hill above a village named Mami Rogha. Gradually the apparent confusion of dusty lorries, struggling mules and shouting men resolved itself into an ordered encampment. Digging parties provided slit trenches, other hands threw up a stone perimeter wall and cooks prepared an early evening meal. Snipers still lurking in the surrounding hills kept up occasional bursts of fire until long after darkness had fallen. At dusk, Cooper and I were sitting with a genial colonel commanding the Signals and a couple of his officers, sipping whisky, as a series of bullets came whining into our section of the camp. Nobody except me seemed even to notice them.

I was too tired to dig myself in that night, so I slept under a lorry with a cheerful corporal of the Signals, who told me stories of the Plymouth blitzes.

Next morning at dawn pickets went out to cover the hills on the next section of the twisting mountain road, which led for four miles up to the five-thousand-foot

plateau named Lwargi. Soon after they had left, Cooper and I walked up with the General, accompanied by his personal staff and one Naik (Corporal) of the Dogra regiment, carrying a tommy-gun. General Deedes wanted to make sure for himself, by personal inspection, that the road was practicable for his transport, before he gave the order for the lorries to advance. In some places where the road had been destroyed, Indian army sappers were making a quick job of repairs.

There was some sniping on this second day, but less than before, and by nightfall the column was encamped on Lwargi and the surrounding hills were all displaying the signal which told us that they were safely picketed.

On the morning of the third day, while forces were maintained in the rear to guard our lines of communication, the rest of the column moved off towards Datta Khel plain, down the twisting, treacherous mountain road. There were some anxious moments, as careful Cockney drivers of the Royal Artillery swung guns and ammunition lorries round hairpin bends on wheels which seemed almost to hang over the very edges of the precipices. One section of this road was under the fire of a couple of the enemy's snipers, but they never succeeded in even halting the traffic.

I rode down this day in a truck belonging to Headquarters Signals, and as we came down on to the plain we saw the square brown outline of the fort through the afternoon heat haze. It looked exactly like a setting for the film "Beau Geste."

As the line of marching men and transport wound across the plain, we saw a tattered Union Jack flying from the fort's topmost tower, while members of the garrison stood on the ramparts to watch our coming. As the advance column drew near, "Mischief," the little white Afghan hound who had kept the fort's commander

company throughout the siege, ran out barking to greet the men.

Inside the fort was the beaming commander himself, a young Indian captain in charge of the Tochi scouts (a local frontier force, recruited from loyal Pathans). I toured the fort with Cooper, and in one corner, heavily sandbagged, we found two tired Pathan tribesmen who were expert wireless operators and who had kept the fort's wireless station working throughout the siege, providing the only contact with the outside world.

Soon a long line of lorries were taking much-needed supplies into the fort, which had been very little damaged by the enemy's mountain-made shells.

There was no room for the relieving army inside the fort, so a fresh perimeter camp was hastily built, and tents were dug into the ground in case there should be active snipers in the sorrounding hills. But we had a quiet night, and as the sun went down over the hills there were no more sounds of whining bullets to be heard, but only the weird, high-pitched chant of a column of Punjabis marching into the camp and, somewhere in the distance, the skirl of the pipes of the King's Own Scottish Borderers. With the many tents, the long mule-lines, the flying banners and the glowing camp fires, the force at Datta Khel that evening looked like some ancient army of Rome encamped in the open plain.

Cooper and I stayed on at Datta Khel for several days, for the army had still some work to do and there was not any immediate prospect of our getting any transport back. We set up our tents in a line adjoining the Signals' Mess, which was hospitably treating us as their guests, and at the end of the line we set up a placard "Fleet Street," with the result that people came and asked us if we had heard any news from the outside world—which, of course, we had not.

In the succeeding days General Deedes' men opened up another road leading from Datta Khel down the valley of the River Tochi to Miram Shah, where another frontier fort was established. This valley had been closed for some time by the tribesmen, who had set up road blocks at various points beneath positions in the hills from which they could pour down fire on to the road from their rifles. All day long, as the work of restoring this road went on, there were small skirmishes in the green hills surrounding the valley, and occasional snipers were shot or fled. Many of them were aided in slipping away by dust storms which blew up on some of the evenings and threw a haze like a white muslin curtain over the hills. But the road to Miram Shah was soon opened.

General Deedes' little operation had served other ends besides relieving a fort, opening up the countryside and discrediting the claims of the Fakir of Ipi among the tribesmen. It had given some thousands of troops their first taste of work under fire, for, apart from the British regiments and a kernel of experienced officers, the great majority of the Indian troops who had participated had come from the ranks of the recent recruits to the Indian Army. Many of the men who had been successfully driving off tribesmen with Bren guns had, less than a year previously, been riding in their village bullock-carts in remote parts of India. For such men as these the operation had been a splendid training for the day when they hoped to come to grips with the Japanese.

Apart from this one corner of Waziristan, the North-West Frontier of India has been remarkably quiet since the war, thanks to the ceaseless watch kept by the little parties of our troops. The conditions which I have described are largely the continuation of the troubles which began as long ago as 1936, but it is the hope of those who administer the country that increasing British economic

and agricultural aid will gradually spread the idea in the mind of the tribesmen that it pays best to keep quiet.

Nevertheless, it had been an exciting little show while it lasted.

Cooper and I got our despatches back to our papers after considerable difficulty. They took ten days in transmission, and had to travel successively by army truck, by armoured car, by brigadier's station wagon, then sixty miles by taxi and finally by the Frontier Mail from Peshawar to Delhi. In Delhi we had a four-day censorship discussion, but at length the despatches went off.

* * * * *

Some days after the conclusion of General Deedes' operation the semi-official account of it was issued in Delhi. This stated only:

"Military forces on the north-western frontier, aided by the militia, recently carried out a small but successful operation against a gang of outlaws who had settled in the hills in the vicinity of the most westerly scouts' post of the Tochi valley and were damaging roads, holding up traffic and interfering with peaceful local tribesmen.

"A majority of these tribesmen would have gladly got rid of these outlaws but were unable to combine among themselves to do so. They, however, gave good support to the small column of troops which set out to eliminate the gang, and succeeded in their objective. After satisfying themselves that the gangsters have dispersed, the troops have withdrawn without interference and with only a few casualties."

When I read that, I realised what the soldiers had meant when they said that their watch and ward on the frontier was a task which won them little proportionate glory.

VI

CONGRESS DOESN'T PURR

"The Congress doesn't purr: I think it swears . . .
You're young. You'll swear too ere you reach the end."
KIPLING. *One Viceroy Resigns.*

I WENT down to Wardha to see Gandhi and Nehru a few weeks before they were arrested—and I felt like Alice in Wonderland.

Nothing that was said was ever what you expected.

It was the week during which the Working Committee of the Congress Party was meeting at Gandhi's country settlement to discuss the programme of Civil Disobedience which later caused the August troubles.

I travelled down from Delhi with Stuart Emeny, the indefatigable *News Chronicle* correspondent. He had only been a week in India and so was still unaffected by heat or Eastern langour. He was organising his work in India as though he was still running the news-room of his paper in Bouverie Street, so he made a stimulating companion for a trip of this kind.

He started me working even on the journey down.

"I wonder whether there are any Congressmen in this train?" said Emeny almost before we had moved out of the station. "I'll ask the guard."

"I shouldn't bother," said I, with the bored superiority of the old Anglo-Indian. "In the first place the guard won't understand you; in the second he won't know; in the third he won't tell you, anyway."

So Emeny went and asked the guard, who understood, knew and told him.

At the next station, therefore, we climbed from our coach and went along and met the Congressman, who was

a member of the Working Committee himself. Our conversation with him threw open the flood-gates for a torrent of talk which never abated for a moment during the next four days.

Wagging a long brown finger at us, the Congressman expounded as follows:

"Anti-British feeling in India has never been worse than to-day—largely as a result of the Cripps visit. When Cripps came to India we thought he was a man speaking our language. Then something happened and the whole negotiations broke down. Cripps suddenly began to talk with the words of Amery.* The failure of his mission and the frustration of the hopes which had been aroused left great bitterness behind."

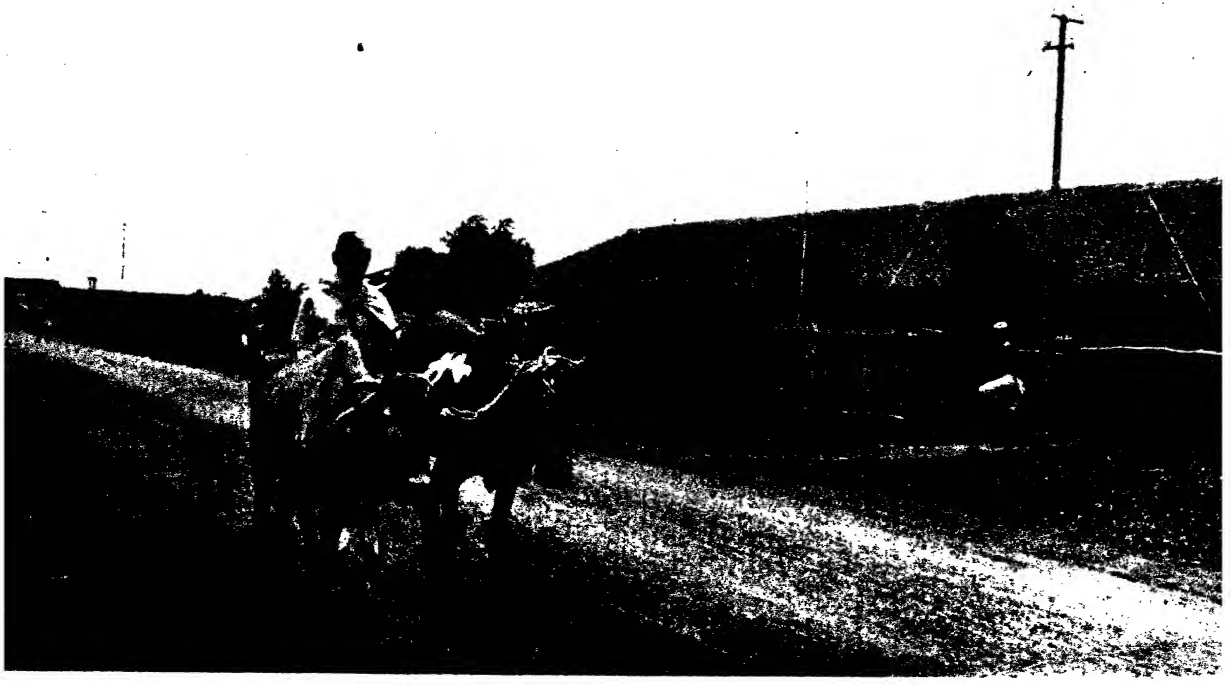
"But," said we to the Congressman, "if Britain lost the war, India would be done for anyway. Why not support Britain at least until the end of the war?"

"How can we put our fate into your hands," he replied, 'in face of your record of military inefficiency and apathy? As long ago as 1936 we were urging the setting up in India of military industries that would have been invaluable in supplying the nation's defence needs. British officials turned down all our pleas. They told us, for instance, that you could not have blast furnaces in India because the climate was too hot. But we have them going now. The real reason was the British determination that no basic industries should be set up in India to compete with British ones. That source of wealth for India has always been denied to us. No, you can't get away from the fact that grave errors have been committed by Britain in the past, and it is no wonder we think the time has come for a 'new deal' for India."

"But why not a political truce until the war is won?"

* In Congress circles the word "Amery" is regarded as a term of abuse.

"At the end of the line we set up a placard 'Fleet Street'" (*p.* 92)



"The single line of bungalows that was Gandhi's headquarters" (*p.* 98)

"Because whatever appeal we make to the people has got to be one which they can understand and appreciate. We cannot explain away to them Britian's domination."

"But if Britain promises you freedom after the war?"

"The Axis makes promises, too."

"Why is there so much hostility to Britain?"

The Congressman fingered a button on his long white coat and gazed out of the window. Then he turned and said: "Frankly, I believe one of the fundamental troubles is that British officials do not seem to like meeting Indians. They live in their offices, their homes and their clubs. We have a constant feeling of being unwanted."

The discussion went on along those lines until the train stopped again and we went back to our carriage.

"These people cling to their grievances as though they were precious stones," I said to Emeny.

"I know what you mean," said Emeny, "They have almost a persecution mania—and like it. At the same time you must remember . . ."

We debated until, four hours later, long after dark, the train arrived at Wardha station. We had been caught up in the conversational tempo of Congress.

* * * * *

Outside the station, in a confused babel of shouting and among many flashing lights, we found a collection of *tongas*, that acutely uncomfortable form of horse cab which India favours. All seemed to be there especially for the purpose of carrying us two passengers, for we were quickly surrounded by a shouting crowd of *tonga* drivers soliciting our custom. We loaded our luggage on one, took another ourselves and drove off in procession down the long dark road to the Circuit House, where a good friend at the Secretariat in Delhi had arranged that we should stay. It was the bungalow used by judges on their periodical visits to the district, but no judges were

there that day, and when we reached it the place was in darkness. A heavy rainfall had brought out millions of insects, which swarmed round us as we found a switch on the verandah and turned it on. Tiny eye-flies, little bigger than large specks of dirt, hovered incessantly in front of our faces, waiting for a chance to settle on our eyes. A note from a local official pinned on the wall, warned us of an outbreak of cholera in the district and advised us to boil all water.

We rang and knocked until finally a caretaker came. We unrolled our beds, erected our mosquito nets and went to sleep, with half a bottle of beer each in place of supper.

* * * * *

Next day dawned cool and fine and we set off in a *tonga* for Savagram, the village four miles away where Gandhi had established his Ashram, or settlement. The *tonga* was drawn by the smallest horse I have ever seen and was fitted with an old patched motor-car horn, with which we honked at the wandering and wide-eyed cattle which we met on the road.

It was a pleasant drive on that cool morning, past flat fields in which green shoots of corn were just beginning to appear. We passed peasants who saluted us and women carrying urns of water on their heads. At last we saw the red tiles of the village of Sevagram before us and soon found ourselves driving by a single line of low bungalows, each with a tiled roof, mud walls and doors of rough, unpainted wood. We stopped outside a gate on which was painted in blue the rough representation of a spinning-wheel. Washing, hung on the fences, flapped in the breeze. As we walked down the patch we were greeted by the twin sounds of wailing Indian music and busy typewriting. This was Gandhi's headquarters.

We asked to see Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's personal secretary (who died a few months later shortly after his

subsequent arrest in Bombay). We found him in a low mud house, with bare bamboo rafters, spartanly furnished with a desk and a few chairs. The only modern things in it were the typewriter and an up-to-date duplicating machine.

Mr. Desai was a tall, grave man, like a schoolmaster. I asked him to arrange for me to have an interview with Gandhi on the following day and he said he would do his best, though Gandhi was far from well. He was suffering from heat exhaustion (the thermometer had been up to 120 in Wardha—and Gandhi, at seventy-three, still refused to have any truck with such modern devilment as air conditioning plants).

After seeing Mr. Desai, Emeny and I spent several hours wandering through the bungalows of Gandhi's Ashram, chatting to everybody and learning what we could of their forceful, bitter views.

We strolled over to the little house in which the meetings of the Congress Working Committee were held. This house cost £40 to build and it measured only about thirty feet by twenty. Clean white bolsters filled with straw were being laid on the rough matting which covered the mud floor. They were for the Congress delegates to lean against as they sat cross-legged on the ground. There were little wooden desks, one foot high, on which the delegates could write their notes. And from the bare wooden rafters about our heads, two "untouchables" with a ladder were engaged in removing a nest of sparrows lest the activities of the birds should disturb the delegates' deliberations.

On the verandah of another bungalow, making tea, we found Miss Madeline Slade, the daughter of a British admiral, who is Gandhi's devoted disciple and is now known in the settlement as Mira Behn, which means Sister Mira.

I introduced myself, greeting her by her English name.

"Don't call me Miss Slade," she said. "Miss Slade has been dead for nineteen years."

She got some more cups and gave Emeny and me some tea, which we drank as we sat beside her and talked politics. She was wearing a bright sari, and I studied her as we talked and thought how strange it was that an English girl could become, even in nineteen years, so completely an Indian woman. Her intelligent face had taken on an entirely Indian cast of feature; under the burning Indian sun her skin had become as dark as any I had seen in the country; even her accents, in pronouncing English words, had taken on the staccato intonation of the educated Indian.

She had just returned from a tour of the provinces, staying in places where the British military authorities were evacuating villages at spots needed for military purposes. Her story was one of alleged muddle, unfairness and high-handedness by minor Indian and British officials.

"Of course," I said, "you must remember it is for the defence of India that these things are being done—and they are probably all being done in a great hurry."

"Being in a hurry is no reason for being thoughtless or inconsiderate," she replied primly.

I could not resist the feeling that she was determined to find a grievance at any cost. Somebody mentioned that the trains were always running late in India since the war. Sister Mira said: "Yes, it's the British troops. They get out at the stations and drink tea, and of course the trains aren't allowed to go on until they have finished."

Late that afternoon I saw Gandhi.

He walked across the compound from the hut in which he had been addressing the Congress Committee. He looked a small, shrunken figure and the bright evening sun

glinted on his steel spectacles. I went with him inside his own mud hut, where a white cotton mattress was spread on the floor. Gandhi sat at one end of the mattress, propped up by a pillow against the wall. I sat on the other end of the mattress, leaning on one elbow. The grey mud walls of the hut were almost bare and the furniture was of rough unpainted wood. Gandhi seemed to have made only two concessions to modernity. In one corner there stood a Flit gun for violently killing mosquitoes. And by his side on the floor was a little wooden rack, like a pipe-stand, carrying three fountain-pens. Outside, one of his followers was preparing a great beaker of orange-juice which was to be his evening meal.

Gandhi, on this hot summer afternoon, looked a frail and tired old man. As I sat down beside him, he bared his toothless pink gums in an amiable smile. He was on the eve of launching his "new movement" and I tried hard to get him to elucidate his real motives in doing so. He parried all my questions and we got nowhere. I asked him first of all whether he did not think that his new movement would, by adding to India's internal difficulties, make a Japanese invasion easier? Here is the dialogue of our conversation as officially recorded by Mr. Desai, who sat on the floor alongside us with a writing-pad on his knee:

YOUNG: Would you say that your movement will make it more difficult or less difficult for us to keep the Japanese out of India?

GANDHI: Our movement will make it more difficult for the Japanese to come in. But of course if there is no co-operation from Britain and the Allies, I cannot say.

YOUNG: But think of the war as a whole. Do you think that your new movement will help the Allied nations towards victory, which you have said you also desire?

GANDHI: Yes, if my submission is accepted.

YOUNG: What do you mean by your submission? That Britain should offer non-violent battle?

GANDHI: No, no. My submission that British rule in India should end. If that is accepted victory for the Allied powers is assured. Then India will become an independent power, and thus a real ally, while now she is only a slave. The result of my movement, if it is sympathetically responded to, is bound to be speedy victory. But if it is misunderstood by the British and they take up the attitude that they would like to crush it, then they would be responsible for the result, not I.

YOUNG: Mr. Gandhi, you have been in London yourself. Have you no comment to make on the heavy bombings which the British people have sustained?

GANDHI: Oh yes. I know every nook and corner of London where I lived for three years so many years ago, and somewhat of Oxford and Cambridge and Manchester too; but it is London I specially feel for. I used to read in the Inner Temple Library, and would often attend Dr. Parker's sermons in the Temple Church. My heart goes out to the people, and when I heard that the Temple Church was bombed I bled. And the bombing of the Westminster Abbey and other ancient edifices affected me deeply.

YOUNG: Then don't you think it would be wiser to postpone your movement until we have settled with the Germans and the Japanese?

GANDHI: No, because I know you will not settle with the Germans without us. If we were free, we could give you cent per cent co-operation in our own manner. It is curious that such a simple thing is not understood. Britain has to-day no contribution from a free India. To-morrow, as soon as India is free, she gains moral strength and a powerful ally in a free nation—powerful

morally. This raises England's power to the nth degree. This is surely self-proved.

It all sounded, as the quick words flowed and Gandhi emphasised them with bird-like movements of his skeleton arms, so logical—but when I took the written record home with me and read it again I could not see that it had any meaning whatsoever. Did Gandhi really think it had? I wonder. Anyway, as we broke off our conversation and he shuffled away to have his evening bath behind a partition of palm-leave matting, he looked at me with a queer, quizzical smile and said enigmatically: "Well, I hope you got everything you were wanting."

* * * * *

That night, back at the bungalow, after a day of almost non-stop activity and argument we were just finishing a late supper when the irrepressible Emeny said: "I think we ought to go up and see Nehru now, and the other members of the Working Committee." So I pushed back my plate and reached for my hat with a sigh.

Up at the Wardha Congress House, from which the party's flag of orange, green and white was flying, the first Congressman we met was a woman. It was Mrs. Sarojini Naidu who, since Tagore died, is probably India's best-known poet. She is a large, heavily-built woman, and was sitting on the verandah in a rocking-chair. She introduced herself to us in an informal, jaunty way.

"I suppose you want to see Jahwarlal Nehru," she said. "Everybody always does. Especially the girls. I tell him he ought always to wear his white Gandhi cap, so that they can't see how bald he is getting."

Mrs. Naidu went on banteringly: "I suppose you two are some more of those war correspondents who have been pouring into India out of Burma like tea out of a teapot?" We explained that we were seeking the

truth about Congress. "Well, you'll find Jahwarlal inside," she said.

Pandit Nehru was sitting immediately beneath a large picture of Gandhi, on a square white mattress on the floor of the bungalow's main room. His great, dark eyes looked even darker than usual in the subdued light of a single electric bulb some distance away, which was the room's only illumination. Around him sat a circle of admirers—other Congress men, a couple of their wives fluttering in and out with coffee cups, two Indian newspapermen, three American correspondents. Seeing the row of shoes standing outside the door, Emeny and I slipped off our own, entered in our stockinged feet and sat ourselves down on the mattress.

It is true that Pandit Nehru photographs flatteringly, that he is slightly less tall than he appears on the cinema screen, that the top of his head is bald. But he is still one of the world's most handsome politicians. His ready smile, his romantic eyes, his soft Old Harrovian voice make susceptible American women journalists his slave. To an ultimate degree he has the ability to turn on charm at will. But what is charm? One of the politicians with the greatest powers of personal fascination whom I have met was Dr. Goebbels! Nehru is a politician of the emotions rather than of the intellect. His followers like to sit back, with their eyes half-closed, and listen to his smooth, fluent stream of mellifluous conversation not analytically but as though they were listening to a concerto.

For an hour or more Emeny and I sat on our white mattress that evening, as the moths and flying ants banged their heads against the electric light outside the room, and Pandit Nehru talked of Britain's sins. He talked quickly but with care, picking his words in such a way that many of his propagandist assertions came out only

by implication. When one of the American correspondents drew a note-book from his pocket and began furtively to jot down his remarks, Nehru, without seeming to notice anything, slowed up his rate of talking that his words might the more faithfully be recorded.

What he said was all just a repetition of what Congress propagandists had said a thousand times before, except that he was more bitter than I had expected. When he languidly declared, with a kindly, wistful smile at the three American newspapermen, "Everything that people say Hitler has done in Germany can be exactly matched by what Britain has done in India" I decided that charming, intelligent, witty Nehru was a bit too much for me. So I quietly put on my shoes and went home.

* * * * *

Back in New Delhi, I saw the Viceroy. On a hot Saturday afternoon he was sitting in his shirt-sleeves still working at his huge desk in that building which is modestly known as the "Viceroy's House" but which is so big that a tour of it takes three and a quarter hours.

The Viceroy's desk is the most impressive single article of furniture I have ever seen. It has three telephones on it, three desk lamps, four bells, two trays of documents (one pile marked "Secret"), a row of family photographs and a little white stone statue of Winston Churchill wearing a top hat.

Lord Linlithgow talked to me for nearly an hour, giving me in concise and simple terms, much informative "background" on the Indian situation. As I sat and listened to him, I thought how great a pity it was that his position to some extent prevented him from having much wider contact with the country and with enquiring visitors. He was so obviously both highly intelligent and devoted to the cause he was serving. But there was no doubt that he was retiring by temperament, and that the nature of

his role emphasised this tendency. It is not easy for a Viceroy to break down barriers, to make a broad popular appeal, even if he wishes to do so, and the result is that in many cases his many real qualities are apt to be insufficiently appreciated.

At the end of 1942, it was decided to prolong Lord Linlithgow's term of office by six months from April, 1943. This decision was taken, no doubt in recognition of the discrete collaboration rendered by the Viceroy to successive Commanders-in-Chief in India, during a difficult period, in which military considerations had dominated Indian policy.

But, whatever the Viceroy might say, far away from the remote buildings of the New Delhi Secretariat and in the narrow streets of Old Delhi, in Bombay and in Wardha, India's political ferment was moving to a crisis. Enemies of Britain were being regularly encouraged by Japanese propaganda; and the blazing oppressive heat of an Indian summer did not help to make the country's temper more even. It was just that time of the year when feelings run most high in India, the period of which Kipling wrote in the *Maxims of Hafiz* when he asked:

"The temper of chums, the love of your wife, and an old piano's tune——
Which of the three will you trust at the end of an Indian June?"

New Delhi itself, too, is surely that kind of a capital city from which it is exceedingly difficult to cope efficiently with a complex situation. It cost £10,000,000 to build, but it must be one of the most inconvenient cities in the world. It is vast, impressive, spectacular, but exceedingly impracticable and exhausting as a place in which war-time work must be carried on. To me New Delhi always seemed an awful warning of the dangers of letting

famous architects dispose freely of unlimited space and great sums of money. Every building is a monument rather than an office, and every monument is separated from every other one by vast avenues lined with trees, each avenue carefully planned to provide a "vista."

But a city cannot live by vistas alone. It does not conduce to quick, efficient administration when you must travel huge distances to conduct every bit of business. The avenue which leads to the Secretariat, King's Way, is a mile long and a quarter of a mile broad. There are eight miles of echoing corridors in the vast secretariat building itself—and each corridor looks exactly like the other one, so that visitors are perpetually getting lost. If you want to do business with that live-wire news organisation the Associated Press of India, which is allied to Reuters, you will find that its office is a country house, surrounded by a large and pleasant garden. If you want to go to the bank, you will find it in the middle of something like Windsor Great Park. And if you want to buy things, you will find Connaught Circus, the "shopping centre," pillared and arcaded like the bottom layer of a wedding cake and laid out around green swards on which little boys play cricket and Congress orators hold mass demonstrations. Surveying these sun-baked open spaces, I earnestly hoped that the experts who are planning the "new London" which we are promised after the war will take warning from the inconveniences of the huge vistas of New Delhi and will give us a city which not only looks symmetrical on an architect's drawing-board but is also practical for the common business of everyday living.

Perhaps these vast distances which separate place from place in New Delhi were of little account in the days before the war, when there was plenty of petrol for motor-cars and work was at a slow and dignified tempo. But to-day,

when high officials of the Secretariat and important officers of the services must bicycle miles to work, or ride in hideous discomfort in a native *tonga*, the marvel is not that there are any points of criticism possible about the work done at Delhi, but that so much good work should have been done there at all. On top of the inconvenience of the city's lay-out has come, with its increased activity, such a great shortage of accommodation that the best hotels there can sometimes offer visitors nothing but a share in a tent in their gardens, and sometimes you cannot even get that.

Yes, New Delhi is indeed a place which it is hard to work in and one which tends to depress the newcomer, at least until he has had time to find his way about. This opinion was certainly shared by a forlorn American corporal, a boy from San Francisco, whom I met one afternoon, mooning disconsolately past the shops on Connaught Circus. It was the siesta hour and the shops were shut, to his great disgust. "Boy," he said, "Jeeze what a dump this is. If only there were *one* civilised thing in Delhi—if only there were even a negro pianist!"

For myself, I stayed most of the time not in New Delhi at all, but in the old-fashioned calm of Maiden's Hotel, Old Delhi. (This is the hotel of which the story is told by local wits of the two English girls who, staying there and running short of funds, wired home to their astonished father: "Unless we receive remittance by end this week we unable remain maidens.")

I spent as much of my time as I could in talking to people of all shades of opinion, in addition to British officials and Congress men. Very varied were the views which I obtained from such friendly and helpful men of affairs as Sir Maurice Gwyer, until recently Chief Justice, Sir Ramaswami Ayer, Hindu Premier of the native state of Travancore (who has a flashing Shavian wit and few

illusions) and Dr. Ramji Ambedkar, leader of India's 50,000,000 depressed classes, or "untouchables." A hospitable Delhi official took me a tour of pleasant Indian villages, where people seemed preoccupied with affairs of the soil rather than party politics. In one of them a village festival was in progress, and garlands of jasmine were hung round our necks.

From the leading Moslem member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, Sir Firoze Khan Noon, I heard some outspoken views about Congress. He speaks perfect English and was at one time Indian High Commissioner in London. We sat in his study surrounded by tea-cups, bundles of documents and two romping golden retrievers as he talked to me frankly about Gandhi's movement, which he described as "seeking to establish Hindu rule in India by force."

Sir Firoze went on: "Gandhi's attitude is not only sheer blackmail but also a stab in the back for all those civilised governments who are at this moment straining every nerve to withstand the Fascists."

He thought that the Congress leaders themselves were out-and-out Fascists, but he was certain they would never receive any support from India's 90,000,000 Moslems.

On similar lines, but even more forceful, was the opinion of one British business man to whom I talked. "What you visitors don't realise," he said, "is that Congress is just the same kind of racket in India as the Nazi party in Germany. Although it claims to represent the Indian working classes, it doesn't really do so, and it is financed by rich Indian business men for their own ends in exactly the same way, and for the same reasons, that German big business financed the Nazis in their early days. Indian big business men believe that, with a Congress party government in power, they would be free to develop

Indian industry on a large scale and without any of the safeguards on the conditions of the workers' employment which are imposed under British rule."

Certainly the seeker after truth in India has a perplexing path to follow!

However all that may be, the events of the Indian summer of 1942 are now ancient history and there seems at this stage little point in going into them in detail. On Sunday, August 9, moving more swiftly and more strongly than any Congressmen had expected, the Government of India, after giving a series of clear warnings, swooped on the Congress rally in Bombay and arrested Gandhi, Nehru and about fifty other members of the party on the accusation not only that they were preparing civil disobedience which would hamper India's war effort, but also that Gandhi himself had been prepared to negotiate with the Japanese. There is no doubt at all that the swift Government action caught Gandhi's followers with their movement only half-prepared.

Gandhi had apparently expected that there would be a period of negotiation and talk while he wrote a letter to the Viceroy, and while the Congress President, Maulana Azad cabled appeals to Mr. Roosevelt, M. Maisky and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.

This period of further propaganda was to be used to instruct district Congress leaders throughout India in the details of their role in the anti-British struggle. On the very evening before the Government swoop, Gandhi had said: "I don't believe they will arrest me after I have indicated that I am resorting to the usual formalities of writing to the Viceroy."

The rapidity and firmness of the action taken by the Viceroy, sitting with one British and eleven Indian members of his Executive Council, probably forestalled much more widespread riots and acts of sabotage than

those which actually occurred, though they were certainly serious enough.

The arrest of the Congress leaders was made with dramatic swiftness. Full plans for the round-up if the Congress resolution of defiance to Britain was passed were made long beforehand in New Delhi and transmitted to the Bombay police chief.

To prevent any leak of information and to stop one Congressman from warning another, all telephones in Bombay were cut off during the night. Then at five in the morning, while the city slept, three police cars drove up to Birla House where Gandhi was staying, while other police officers arrested the remaining Congressmen.

The arrests were followed by some serious rioting and a campaign of deliberate sabotage, which could not be discussed at the time, and there have been subsequent spasmodic outbreaks. But on the whole it does not now seem that India's essential war effort will be critically affected by internal dissensions. That must surely be the vital matter for the moment—whatever one's private opinions on Indian politics may be.

I do not think the time has come to discuss in detail the infinite complications of India's political future. Right up to the time of Gandhi's arrest, and after it as well, the chief thing that has been the country's curse has surely been too much talk, both inside India and abroad. Every word of even the most objective statement on Indian affairs by the most well-meaning supporter of either side is taken up eagerly by one partisan or another as a cudgel for somebody's head, or is used by German or Japanese propagandists to inflame racial hatreds inside the country. In India, perhaps, more than anywhere else in the world, is that epigram of Philip Guedalla's applicable that "any stigma is good enough to beat a dogma with."

Going around among officials of the Indian Government,

both British and Indian, I formed the impression of a body of men who sometimes were and sometimes were not highly efficient, but who were at least filled with an almost desperate determination to fulfil adequately their responsibilities to the country.

In the world's Press as a whole, and especially in America, it is possible that India has not always had a very fair deal. Troubles and shortcomings which certainly do exist tend sometimes to be over-emphasised at the expense of achievement.

When the business of defeating the Japanese has been done will surely be the proper time for open and frank discussion on India's future from every side. And when that time comes it may be hoped that the present well-administered but strict military and political censorships which at present operate in India will be abolished. At present this censorship is such that even some of the leading articles appearing in the newspapers of India may not be cabled abroad. Perhaps we must tolerate even that for the time being. But if, in the ultimate event, the British people and allied democratic powers are to play a responsible part in the shaping of India's destiny, they will surely have a right to demand, when military considerations no longer operate, that their Press shall be allowed to give them all the facts on which to form their judgment. (The same argument no doubt applies to all those countries of the Middle East where British political and military censorships now hold their war-time sway, and occasionally wander in their actions very far from their supposed basis of either military security or political expediency. It was my colleague Norman Smart who once, writing about a conference which had taken place at a British Embassy in the Middle East, included the phrase, "Members of the Embassy staff lounged against the walls," only to have it cut out by an indignant

British political censor on the grounds that British diplomats never lounge!)

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With the dying down of civil unrest in India, the office cabled me their approval of a suggestion I had made for a brief visit to Persia. I therefore set off in the flying-boat from Karachi, spent some baking days in Baghdad and finally went on to Teheran, that colourful capital, to which the war has brought so many changes.

VII

BEHIND THE CAUCASUS

"A halt on the journey, a rest, a drink from the well, and the caravan moves on at the setting of the stars."—*Persian Proverb.*

PERSIA is a saucer; a plain surrounded from the Caspian to the Persian Gulf by a ring of barren mountains.

I flew to Teheran from Baghdad in an R.A.F. transport which had such a heavy load of oxygen cylinders on its floor that I thought the bottom would drop out. We flew high, to keep clear of the mountains and the bumpy air swirling up from the hot plain. When we got to 15,000 feet the rarefied air sent me gently to sleep, and when I woke up Teheran was beneath us. It was a series of little green patches of gardens and woods, interspersed with roads and houses, all set down in the middle of the dry yellow desert. It looked like a toy town laid out on a table-top.

They call Teheran the Paris of the Middle East and it

has something of the qualities of both. Like pre-war Paris it has good restaurants, gay jewellers' shops, lively cafés, modernistic buildings and (because it is high above sea level) a clear, stimulating atmosphere. Like most places in the Middle East it has no plumbing. Your bath water comes to you down a series of spacious open channels at the sides of the roads, gathering many things on its way. The best water in the city comes from a well in the compound of the British Legation, who sell it to citizens by the bucketful. The Legation, however, has itself not got good plumbing.

Teheran is like a young and irresponsible Ankara—much livelier than the dignified Turkish capital, but in many ways much less civilised. The former Shah, Reza Shah Pahlevi, modelled himself to some extent on Ataturk, whom he much admired. But the old Shah was no Ataturk, and his efforts to clean up and westernise Persia as Ataturk had reformed Turkey did not meet with at all the same success. He never liquidated the political power of the Moslem priests, or built up an army of high efficiency, or eradicated graft from high places, or installed modern sanitation, or introduced a Roman alphabet—all things which Ataturk took in his stride.

But the Shah's career was an eventful and dramatic one. Very soon after the beginning of the 1914 war, Persia had become a battlefield. In the north-west, Russian and Turkish armies clashed, and in the south British troops took up positions to prevent a Turkish advance towards Afghanistan. As the war dragged on, Britain and Russia mutually agreed to regard the north of Persia as a zone for Russian operations, while British influence should remain predominant in the south. The subsequent Russian revolution and the withdrawal of the Czar's troops from Persia, seemed to leave Britain in undisputed sway. Under the Anglo-Persian agreement

at the end of the last war, it looked as though Persia would be little more than a British mandate. To make Persia's plight even worse, the Soviet Government sent troops to occupy the Caspian port of Pahlevi and the northern Persian town of Resht.

Then, suddenly, a Persian leader appeared, a Cossack officer named Reza Khan, who had at one time been a sergeant in the Palace Guards. At the invitation of the Government in Teheran, he marched on the capital with 3,000 men and took control. With Russian backing, the Anglo-Persian agreement was denounced and British officers and advisers were dismissed. The Russians withdrew their troops.

Reza Khan became War Minister in 1921 and Prime Minister in 1923, but from the moment he marched into Teheran he was the actual ruler of the country.

In the first years of his rule, the Shah undoubtedly did much for Persia. He initiated a construction programme which was ambitious and costly, if not always well-planned. He gave the country some good roads and a £30,000,000 railway (paid for out of the proceeds of a heavy tax on the people's sugar and tea) from the Caspian to the Persian Gulf. The railway, which wound through high mountains, was one of history's great feats of engineering—but it did not connect up with any international system of transport, because the Shah was unwilling for Persia to become a connecting link between east and west. In his rebuilding of his capital at Teheran, the Shah was equally unconventional. He ruthlessly tore down the narrow streets and ramshackle houses of the old oriental city and drove wide streets and tree-lined avenues straight through them. On sites which had accommodated secluded Persian homes and high-walled Persian gardens, he erected an expensive and seemingly-endless succession of ambitious and often unnecessarily

large modern buildings mostly designed by German architects.

The majority of these buildings were vast government offices, a police headquarters, a Ministry of Finance, a War Office, a National Bank that looked like a Berlin museum and a number of royal palaces. To these the Shah, who had been to Paris and studied the amenities of western capitals, resolved to add the two things which Teheran still lacked to make it truly occidental—a Bourse and an Opera House. A great space was cleared for the Bourse, but while the preparations were being made, there became apparent in the scheme the undeniable snag that, to have a truly successful Bourse, it was necessary to provide not only a building, but also business men with a multitude of shares to negotiate. When it was seen that these were not to be forthcoming in remote Teheran, the project was ruefully dropped and the open space for the Bourse still stands empty to-day. The opera house scheme went further; the building was half completed when it was discovered that an airy indifference to the matter of foundations had caused the whole structure to be in imminent danger of collapse. To-day the opera house stands, gaunt and neglected, in the middle of Teheran's main Ferdowsi Avenue. No builder will undertake to finish it; and nobody will spend the money to pull it down.

Simultaneously with his taxing of the people for these elaborate building schemes, the Shah was amassing a huge personal fortune by means which were often devious and unorthodox.

As the Shah's wealth and power grew, as he surrounded himself and his court with more and more "yes-men," he became increasingly a monomaniac. He flew into furious rages on the slightest provocation. When a Paris paper made a pun about the Shah and the "Chat" (or pussy-

cat), he sent his Minister in Paris to make a diplomatic protest. He carried a horsewhip with him always and did not hesitate to lash out at anybody who displeased him. Once, when his Minister of Finance informed him that Persia's budget for the year did not balance, he cut him across the face with his whip. In subsequent years the budget balanced.

Such personal idiosyncrasies might have passed without comment in a world at war, but what could not be tolerated was the Shah's constant association with the Axis powers. German influence throughout the country was growing daily. In addition to the great, modernistic German Embassy building in the centre of Teheran, there was a thriving "Brown House" in one of the main streets, where Persian politicians and business men were entertained to elaborate parties and showings of German propaganda films. German agents were active throughout the country, stirring up the tribesmen to revolt. German goods filled the shops and German specialists were everywhere. Even the manager of Persia's National Bank was a German. Persian industry was working for the Nazis. Three thousand Persians were at one time weaving the world's largest carpet for the order of Adolf Hitler, who wanted it for his Chancellery in Berlin. Its cost was to have been £12,000.

Persia has common frontiers with Irak, Russia, Baluchistan, Afghanistan. Its position in the Middle East is a vital one so that it was obvious that neither the British nor the Russians could allow the country to come completely under Axis domination, as it was well on the way to doing. Two warnings were given to the Shah. When neither of these were heeded, British and Russian forces, acting in concert—the British force under the supreme command of General Wavell—moved into Persia at the end of August, 1941. History repeated itself, for the

British and Russians once again agreed on their zones of influence, the Russians taking the northern part of the country, down to Teheran, and the British the southern portion. The Persian army did not put up any long resistance, except at isolated points. The British force which entered from Iraq was temporarily held up at the Paitek Pass, through the mountains on the road to Kermanshah. Major-General Slim, in a car with Cedric Salter, had a narrow escape when a small group of British vehicles were plastered with fire from about 8,000 Persian troops holding out at the top of the pass. But that evening a solitary R.A.F. plane was sent over the pass to bomb it and during the night the whole enemy force withdrew. When the British reached the top of the pass, they found among the enemy's abandoned equipment, two Skoda anti-tank guns, dated 1941—material evidence of the extent to which the Germans had been extending their hold on the Persian army.

The actual occupation of the country was well and swiftly carried out. It was all the more a pity that, after the allies had assumed control, the work of rounding-up those axis agents who remained was not more vigorously pursued.

However that may be, with the occupation of the country successfully completed, a suitable administration had to be found for Persia. The old Shah (who was said to have got out his horsewhip again, this time for use on his Minister of War, on account of what he felt to be the insufficient enthusiasm for his régime which had been shown by the Persian army) would clearly have to go. What was to take his place? Some observers declared that the latter activities of the Shah had made the whole Pahlevi dynasty so unpopular with the country that the appointment of a successor to him would be impossible. Enthusiastic Communists suggested a Soviet on Russian

lines. It was a grave problem for Sir Reeder Bullard, our judicious Minister in Teheran, and it was not solved before urgent questions had been asked in the British Parliament.

Finally, with general agreement, the choice fell on the young son of the Shah, Mohammad Shapur, born on October 28, 1919, and married (in 1939) to the beautiful Fawzia, sister of King Faruk of Egypt. Under pressure from the Allies his father eventually abdicated in his favour.

I met the young Shah for the first time a few days after my arrival in Teheran. It was during the visit to Teheran of Mr. Wendell Willkie, and I went with a small group of colleagues to the airport to see the Shah being taken up for his first flight by Mr. Willkie in a giant Liberator bomber. It was a strangely cosmopolitan little crowd that assembled on the tarmac on that brilliantly sunny September afternoon. Round the Liberator machine, whose polished metal gleamed spectacularly in the sun, stood half a dozen tough-looking Red Army soldiers, guardians of the airport, a handful of Persian officials, a Polish press attaché, and British and American diplomats and correspondents. Mr. Willkie strode up and down in a blue lounge suit, carrying his snap-brim grey felt hat in his hand and exposing his mane of blond hair to the breeze. A car flashed round a distant corner of an airport building and came rushing towards us, drawing up with a squeak of the brakes. It was the young Shah, driving himself, and wearing his uniform as Commander-in-Chief of the Persian army. As he walked across to the 'plane and climbed in, he looked as excited as a schoolboy on a picnic.

The bomber took off with a great roar, circled round the airport and sped away on a flight which lasted for about half an hour. Finally, just as the sun was setting in a red glow over the mountains, the aeroplane returned and

touched down on to the tarmac in a perfect landing. There was a concerted rush towards it, and when the Shah stepped out, with Mr. Willkie behind him, he found himself surrounded by officials and eager newspapermen. He was flushed with excitement and obviously only too eager to talk about his experience.

"It's been splendid," he said in perfect English, "I had no idea I should enjoy flying so much." His dark, handsome eyes were sparkling. The first impression which he makes on you is that of a very forthright, very Western young man. (He was educated in Switzerland and in his boyhood he served in Persia's Boy Scouts.)

Then somebody asked him a question about his country's foreign policy. It struck me as hardly fair to lay so perilous a trap for a very young man who was obviously very excited after his first air trip. But the answer which he gave was an astute one. Hitherto Persia's leaders had been very reserved concerning the country's foreign policy. Now the Shah apparently judged it an opportune moment to make a clear statement of his desire to develop friendship with America and the other countries allied with her.

It was the presence of mind which the young Shah showed in making so tactfully a spontaneous statement on a matter of considerable delicacy that made me feel hopeful that he would, as time went on, be able to make a secure place for himself as a ruler. At that moment, no doubt, the whole future of Persia's administration was still in the balance. There had not been time nor opportunity for the new Shah to show either his powers or his failings. To what extent did he have his father's qualities of drive and decision—to what extent his father's faults? How much had his Western education and training done for him? It was obviously too soon to answer questions like these. But at least it could be seen that the Shah was going about his new duties with circumspection and that

very soon after his accession to power, he was making the outward impression of a lively and self-possessed young statesman. His lovely wife could certainly never be anything but an asset to him in his new role. Already she has taken an active part in many social matters of interest to women. She was one of the first important women in Persia to appear (in 1935) unveiled at a public ceremony, and in doing so she gave a lead to the movement for the abolition of the veil throughout the country.

As a place to visit, Teheran was certainly full of interest in the autumn of 1942, but as a place to work I found it a sort of correspondent's nightmare, although I received much help from the members of the energetic British Information Office which has been set up in Teheran in the very same building which, before the occupation, was being used by the Nazis as their "Brown House." (Indeed, a large plaster cast of Hitler's head in the main hall still looks down upon the busy British propagandists with considerable distaste.)

The difficulties of working in the Persian capital were threefold; the triple problems of transport, the siesta habit and censorship. Although the army authorities in Baghdad had wired ahead for accommodation for me, when I got to Teheran I found that nothing had been done about it. The chief hotel in the centre of the town was packed; the main lounge had been turned into a dormitory and even that was full. So I stayed at an hotel on a hill some miles out of the city and, when I had got installed there, found that taxis could be secured only with infinite uncertainty, trouble and expense. Moreover, in addition to the difficulty of getting quickly from one place to another, there were the infinite delays caused by the long four-hour siestas which nearly all officials and business men in Teheran took during the hot afternoons. The result of this custom was that about half your day was regularly

wasted in hanging about waiting for different people to come back to their offices at around tea-time.

But such little inconveniences would not have mattered if it had not been for Teheran's astonishing censorship arrangements. There were four censors (British military, British political, Russian and Persian) and only two of them (the British political and the Russian) worked in the same office or kept even approximately the same hours.

On the day I started to work in Teheran, I wrote a cautious message for the *Express* about the situation of the fighting on the Black Sea coast. It was at the time when the Germans were nearing Novorossisk and, after careful study of a map and a gazetteer, I included in my message the very obvious remark that, if Novorossisk were lost, the Russian fleet would still have some alternative Black Sea ports left to them—Tuapse, an anchorage at Sukhum and the port of Batoum. With this message I set off cheerfully to the British military censor, who had expressed the desire to be the first to see anything I wrote. I got to his office at ten-fifteen. He had not come. Confident in the harmlessness of my despatch, I left it with his assistant, saying that I would call back for it when he had had time to read and stamp it. I went and drank coffee for an hour and a quarter and returned to the censor's office at eleven-thirty. He had been in and gone again, but he had left my message all signed and stamped. Only the piece about Novorossisk had been entirely struck out. "The Captain said," explained his deputy, "that we did not wish to envisage the possibility of the fall of Novorossisk: he thinks the Russians might not like it if we talked about things like that." (Novorossisk fell that night, but that is not the point of this anecdote.) Then I took the despatch to the joint Anglo-Russian censorship in another part of the city. The

British censor passed what remained of the despatch; but the Russian censor was out. I left a copy for him, and sent the original over to the Persian censor, some distance away. Alas, he was out. Finally the message went to the cable office at 3.45 p.m.—the censorship process having taken me exactly five and a half hours. But that, I learned, was nothing. A few days later a small financial message about an Anglo-Persian diamond deal on which I had actually obtained the signed approval of the competent member of the Commercial Department of our Legation, was held up for ten days by the British political censor on the ground that "the diamond firm in London might not like its activities being publicised."

I mention such incidents as these with no desire to imply ill-will on anybody's part but only as an indication of the blood and toil and tears which may lie behind even some of the quite minor items which appear in the newspapers these days. No doubt, in Nazi Germany, both censors and correspondents have a far easier time—since nobody expects the German Press to contain anything except official "dope" and the correspondent, writing without regard to fact but only to official orders, presents no problems to the censor.

Gradually efforts were made to get a more reasonable system of press censorship in operation, but conditions of working in Teheran seemed to me to remain always fairly difficult. I was therefore overjoyed when I received from Mr. A. Kininmonth, then head of the United Kingdom Commercial Corporation in Persia, an invitation to journey with one of his convoys of lorries taking supplies for Russia up to the Caspian Sea and at the same time obtained permission from the Soviet Embassy to go into the Northern Zone controlled by the Red Army. I accepted the U.K.C.C. invitation at once and set off a few days later on a trip which took me over caravan

routes three thousand years old, past olive groves and tea plantations, and mosques built by Haroun al Raschid, and over mountains which abound in bear and panther.

The story of how the southern supply route to Russia from the Persian Gulf ports to the Caspian Sea was organised is in itself one of the little-known romances of the war. Yet the great flow of material which we were able to send to the Russians by this means meant that the ports, roads and railways of Persia had become "outposts of victory" in a very real sense. Therefore it may, perhaps, be of interest to tell the story in some detail.

It was in September 1941 (just a year before I made the trip) that the decision was taken in London to use the Persian roads in a big way for transporting war materials shipped for Russia to the Persian Gulf ports from America, India, Australia and elsewhere. No road transport system existed in Persia and the British Army in the Middle East had no transport to spare. Finally instructions were sent from London that the Persian road service must be created by the United Kingdom Commercial Corporation, which was the British Government's trading organisation.

But the whole of the U.K.C.C.'s establishment in Persia at that time consisted only of two English business men, Alec Kininmonth, from Liverpool, and Cecil Birkle, a Cornishman, with two local assistants. The entire transport at their disposal was one touring car. Yet within four weeks they had begun delivering the first supplies to the Russians.

They first went to every motor dealer in Teheran and persuaded each to become a lorry contractor responsible for working a fixed number of lorries. When the dealers said that the majority of their available trucks were laid up in garages because lorry tyres in Persia cost £200 each and were, anyway, unobtainable, the U.K.C.C. men arranged to supply them with tyres on a "lease-lend"

basis. When any truck has done 4,000 miles, its owner can turn in one old tyre and get a new one in its place.

Then, to increase the flow of supplies going north to the Caspian seaports, the U.K.C.C. arranged that quantities of the new American lease-lend trucks arriving at Persian Gulf ports for the army should be assigned to them instead. But these trucks were merely in packing-cases and it was necessary to assemble them. So a mixed assortment of British assistants were roped in, including two officials from the London Passenger Transport Board, another from the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and several local garage owners. Working together and employing Persian labour, this little team soon had a lorry assembly plant in southern Persia turning out eight hundred trucks a month, and not only assembling lorries for transport but also preparing others to be driven direct to Russia for use by the Red Army.

It was in one of the new American trucks that I rode up to the Caspian. The driver was a scrubby-chinned but cheerful Persian from Kurdistan who had decorated the cabin of the truck with pictures torn from newspapers. They showed respectively the Shah of Persia, Mahomed, the driver's brother and a flight of Spitfires. Outside the cab was a yellow shield brightly displaying the Union Jack and the Soviet flag flying side by side and bearing the legend in Persian "Supplies for Russia."

As we drove up through the barren, rocky Elburz mountains, Mahomedan roadworkers were kneeling at the roadside touching the ground with their foreheads in noonday prayers.

Our line of lorries, carrying the most modern war-time needs, ran through country where once Crusaders had fought. When we came to the road barrier marking the "frontier" where the Russian zone of control began, two

grey-coated Red Army soldiers inspected our passes and saluted as we passed on.

Occasionally we stopped at a wayside "tea house," which is an open roadside booth beside the road, where the drivers sat cross-legged on trestles covered with thick Persian carpets, gossiped, drank glasses of watery tea, ate great flat circles of unleavened bread and were offered an occasional pull at one of the opium pipes which are still freely smoked in Persia.

We saw the sun set over mountain-tops which were already becoming capped with snow and then wound our way onwards far into the night round precipitous hairpin bends, sometimes meeting a pothole which sent you bumping against the roof of the truck. We paused for a few hours' sleep in a wayside Persian hotel, and then continued our journey into the dawn.

Finally we saw the smooth blue waters of the Caspian Sea and ran into the little harbour from which our supplies were being shipped to a Soviet port.

Soon after my arrival I was conducted round the heavily guarded harbour installation by the Russian port director, accompanied by a stocky Red Army captain, who had seen service on the Moscow front. They showed me everything and they even allowed me to take photographs—to my surprise, for I had been warned in Teheran that I might find difficulties in my way.

We stood for some time watching the line of lorry drivers check in and hand over to the Soviet officials their "waybills," on which the exact nature and quantity of their loads is specified. It is only when the officials have marked the bills as receipted that the drivers are enabled to draw payment for their services. That is all the ceremony there is in the handing over of the supplies to Russia. The Soviet's own transport organisation hire the Persian labourers who work this dock and have also

recruited a number of them to work in Caspian seaports in Russian territory, thus freeing Soviet dockers for service with the Red Army.

With much shouting and sweating the men built up great piles of sacks and packing-cases before they were hoisted by crane aboard a little grey merchantman which was flying the red flag and the internationally-known "Blue Peter." One of the ships in the harbour was a Soviet tanker which, as though in testimony to the continued strength of Russia's oil position, was actually engaged not in taking supplies away but in delivering oil to northern Persia.

After inspecting the harbour, I went back to the town's bare clean little hotel, and wrote my story in a room below the window of which a motley throng mingled in the street.

It was altogether a strange and fascinating three days which I spent in this little Caspian harbour town. At one end of it Persian fishermen were going about their daily tasks of carrying their loads of fish to the caviare factory, where you could buy a large portion of caviare for a shilling, though tinned sardines were a luxury which cost seven and sixpence! At the other end British troops mingled with Red soldiers and members of General Sikorski's Polish army which had all through the summer been coming out into Persia from their training camps in Russia. At some places you would see a British Redcap co-operating with a Soviet military policeman in directing the traffic.

The Soviet troops who were to be seen in this town were well clothed and equipped, well disciplined and exceedingly well behaved. When they were off duty they never appeared in public bars or restaurants; at the most they might permit themselves to file quietly into a couple of rows at the local cinema. One day, when I visited the Red headquarters, I found a group of privates off duty

studiously watching a game of chess. If they did any drinking, they did it in the privacy of their own quarters. I had the impression that very strict instructions had been given to all the men that their conduct in Persia was to be spectacularly correct, as, indeed it was.

As for the officers, they appeared to be able, extremely hard working and very much in earnest, as they well might be, since at that moment the Germans were reporting fresh successes every day in the Caucasus and were claiming that both Batoum and Baku would soon be in their hands. When first the small party of British officers who were working at this port on the evacuation of Polish soldiers and civilians from Russia began to make contact with their colleagues of the Red Army, they found them so reserved as to seem suspicious. But months of steady co-operation had done wonders and I saw many demonstrations of friendship between the officers of the two armies. They assisted each other in their daily tasks, hampered only by language difficulties, and they frequently dined together in the evenings.

I visited the Russian colonel who was the Town Commandant, along with a young Irish captain who had kindly volunteered to act as interpreter for us. We sat and smoked innumerable Russian cigarettes, which seem to be all cardboard stem and no tobacco, and talked about the war's prospects. The colonel, who had been given his present job because he needed a rest after having been wounded on the southern Russian front, wore a loose white military blouse, with a leather belt, black breeches and black top-boots and made an impressive figure as he leaned back in the chair behind his desk and chatted with us.

He certainly had no doubts whatsoever about the final outcome of the war—he even believed that the Russian army alone could beat the Germans, if given enough time

The British and Russians assisted each other in their daily tasks" (*p.* 12

"Long lines of lorries assembled on the flat beach at dawn" (*p.* 131)

and material. He had no special respect for German generalship and none for the German private as a fighting man.

"When the German's marching forwards, he thinks he's a great big man, like this," he said, and he held his huge arms wide apart, "but when he's on the run, why then he suddenly becomes no good at all. Some day the Germans will get what is coming to them."

There was, however, at that time a certain amount of criticism to be heard among the Russian soldiers about the contribution which Britain and America were making to the war. It was the time when both at home and abroad the clamour for the "second front" was at its height, and it was, of course, inevitable that the Red Army should share the then general view. At one of the dinner parties between the British and Russian officers at the time I was in the town, a Soviet colonel suddenly rose in his place, lifted his glass of vodka and solemnly said: "Gentlemen, I ask you to drink a toast to all the Russian, British and Polish blood which has been shed—*and will still have to be shed*—before victory is won."

Well, much blood has flowed since then and some of it has been British and American blood in North Africa. But I do not have the feeling that the average member of the Red Army, much as he welcomes us as allies and appreciates the quantities of materials which have been sent to him, really understands at all what the British contribution to the war has been. He has seen so much of his own great war on land that he has little idea of our own wars on the seas and in the air. If there is any way in which British information services could make this knowledge more readily accessible to him—which I greatly doubt—they would be doing a most valuable service in promoting Anglo-Russian understanding.

* * * * *

My return journey to Teheran was almost as interesting as my trip up, for I travelled down with the last of the great convoys of lorries taking Polish refugees from the Caspian to the interior.

This movement of Poles from Russia has never been greatly publicised, but it has been one of the greatest mass movements of population in history. The Polish men, women and children come from that portion of Poland which was occupied by the Russians at the beginning of the war and some of them have already travelled something like 50,000 miles since they left their homes. More than 100,000 people have passed through the Polish camp, which stretches for three miles along the flat sands of the Caspian seashore. The first evacuation took place in the spring of 1942, and the second "wave," of which I was seeing the termination, in the autumn of the same year. The mass movement was the result of the Russo-Polish agreement signed in 1941, by which Stalin agreed to release Polish prisoners and to assist Poland's General Anders to build up an army on Russian soil and then send out the soldiers and their families into Persia.

After the signing of this agreement, hundreds of thousands of Poles, distributed all over the Soviet Union, and all leading a fairly hard life, gradually rallied to the central camp established by General Anders, for training and refitting. The Russians supplied the most modern rifles and equipment of their own manufacture, and Britain sent huge stocks of army clothing and food *via* Archangel.

Shipment of the huge numbers of the Poles across the Caspian was smoothly carried out by the Russians, and from the moment the evacuees tramped down the wooden gangway of the Persian port, the Poles themselves took over the organisation, with the British Army supplying material aid. Three British people, working in close co-

operation with the Poles, gave special aid to this great migration. In charge of the British side of the camp's affairs was an elderly British captain from Weybridge, Surrey, who had served throughout the last war and originally joined this one as a private. The "mother" of all the children arriving in the camp was a charming Englishwoman, Mrs. Mary Shehan, from Kent, whose husband was in the Imperial Bank of Iran, while the whole task of organising the transport which took the Poles to their destinations was shouldered by a London business man, Henry Emerson Beecher, who was imprisoned in Russia in the last war, but who now was running the Caspian end of the lorries taking the supplies to the Soviets. Working daily from dawn to night, Beecher organised the unloading of the Russian supplies from the lorries and the loading-up of them with evacuees, turning round his lorries in record time and never once interfering with the flow of Russian supplies.

The evacuees arrived at an average rate of a thousand a day and there were at one time over 40,000 in the camp together, so the organisers had a very considerable task, and miracles of improvisation had to be done. Working alongside their Polish comrades, British soldiers and members of the Indian Army Service Corps distributed food, transported tents and blankets and even acted as nursemaids. Among the many strange spectacles to be seen on the Caspian shores that summer was that of a British corporal, former lightweight boxing champion of Warwickshire, washing much-travelled Polish babies all day long.

We rode off from the camp at dawn. Lines of lorries assembled on the flat beach and were filled up in an orderly way with soldiers and khaki-clad Polish girl "A.T.S." There were children, too, some of them little girls wearing cut-down British army greatcoats many sizes too large

for them. As the lorries drove off, the girls set up a chant in unison of Polish national songs. It was impossible not to be impressed by the resilience of the Polish nation, for the majority of these people had lost their homes and families and everything they possessed and had spent long and hard months in Russia. As we bounced about in the lorries over the rough Persian roads, I thought that I would not like to be a German soldier who encounters the new Polish army when it starts to fight its way home.

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Within a few days of my return to Teheran from the Caspian coast, I received instructions from the *Express* to proceed by stages to Turkey. Cedric Salter, who was then in Istanbul, had very sensibly decided to transfer his allegiance from his own newspaper to the *Daily Express*. He would take over our representation in Turkey in December, but I was to hold the fort until then, and concentrate especially on trying to get authentic news from German-occupied Europe.

The prospect of having to make the long journey back to Baghdad seemed to me to offer a good opportunity to see something, on the way, of the work of the Ninth Army Command, at that time under General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, especially as, up to that moment, no British war correspondent had visited that command. The Army's Public Relations office was good enough to place a car at my disposal, and I spent the following week motoring through Persia's plains and mountains, bumping over the muddy cobbled streets of towns and villages, visiting army units by day and sleeping at nights either in camps or in strangely unconventional Persian hotels in small provincial towns.

It was a journey full of interest, for I found that the British and Indian troops in the new command were

virtually changing the whole face of those parts of Persia in which they were stationed. This was the force which, as Mr. Churchill told the House of Commons on September 9, 1942, "may eventually give support to the Russian left flank and will, in any case, defend the soil of Iran." In addition they were at that time contributing greatly to the speeding of the supplies to Russia over Persia's roads and railways.

I made the tour with a genial conducting officer from Public Relations and another old hand from the last war, Driver Ernest Roe, whose home was in Lancaster and who before the war was driving Silver Grey coaches to Wembley. His dry comments as we went along typified the British soldier's capacity to make even the most outlandish places seem just a bit like home.

We set out from Teheran by that road which runs through the wild redstone hills which Persians name the "Valley of the Angel of Death," and on to the sacred city of Qum. We passed the shining gold dome of the Shrine of Fatemeh, which for centuries has been visited by thousands of pilgrims and beneath which legend says that twelve kings and four hundred princes lie buried. "Eh," said Roe, "we could do with a nice bit of brass like that in our back yard at Lancaster." As we drove past low grey slate hills Roe remarked: "Them's just like slagheaps up by Manchester."

Our first stop was to visit a party of Royal Engineers—they came from Norwich, Glasgow and Elstead, Surrey—who were in charge of a gang of labourers widening an important road. They said they were getting on fine now that the worst of the summer heat was over, but that they were expecting a fairly bitter winter up on the heights of Persia's rugged mountains. "Ay," said Roe realistically, "if it isn't prickly heat its chilblains."

We drove on through villages where once Haroun al

Raschid wandered but which now were bustling with halting military convoys, and met scores of tribesmen moving down for the winter from the hills with their black-shrouded womenfolk riding on the backs of mules. ("How do, Mother!") When we stopped to "brew up," the tribesmen gathered round us, chattered and smoked our Woodbines. Along our way some of the thousands of roadworkers gave us smilingly a military salute and others made the V-sign. You'd certainly never guess that these were the people whom the Axis radio claimed to be ill-disposed to the presence of the allied forces in their country.

We found the army's headquarters cunningly hidden in a series of valleys, their tents dug down into the ground (as much as a protection against extremes of climate as against any anticipated air raids) and camouflaged in special style to suit the peculiarities of the countryside. I met the camouflage officer who once was an art director in a Teddington film studio.

This headquarters was in the centre of jungle country where the bears, wolves and jackals were just then moving down into the valleys for the winter. A few nights before our arrival a panther had made a sudden raid on the camp and had carried off a dog which was the camp's mascot. Villagers in these parts build high mud walls round their huts and at nightfall drive all their cattle inside as a defence against such raiders. "Wild country, isn't it?" I said. "There now, lad, don't get me frightened," said Roe.

Next day along our route were the same succession of Royal Engineers driving bulldozers and steam-rollers and members of the Royal Corps of Signals working on communications under the fascinated gaze of a small crowd of shaggy-coated Persian shepherds and their children. We passed an armoured column, and then

by contrast, a line of mule companies. Along the road were British army traffic signs printed in English and Persian.

That night we sat down to a typical local dish for supper, a Persian pilaffe of chicken. British soldiers like British food so Roe ate the pilaffe with undisguised distaste, but he put the wish-bone of the chicken in his cigarette-case for luck anyway.

"What do you really think of being out in Persia and Irak?" I asked him as we sat smoking afterwards, and I think his answer summed up the sentiments of the British soldier of all time. "It's not too bad," he said. "Plenty of work to do—and anyway of course nobody would ever go to foreign parts for pleasure, would they now?"

A couple of days before I was due to arrive at General Maitland Wilson's headquarters, I sent a telegram in advance to the Public Relations office there, asking if they could arrange for me to have an interview with the General. When I arrived, I found that my application had not even been passed on to General Wilson, on the ground that "the General will not wish to see any journalists at present." Fortunately, however, a senior officer and a good friend from the Cairo Public Relations office was in Baghdad at the time, and I appealed for his help. He got into touch with the General's A.D.C. and General Wilson received me the same evening.

Actually, of course, General Wilson is a man who never stands on ceremony and is one of the most genial senior officers I have met. (It was a hardened war correspondent who once remarked to me: "I always find that you can get on splendidly with the Brigadiers and the Generals, and with the Captains and the 'other ranks,' of course. It is only the Majors and Colonels who sometimes give you trouble.") Although not a young man by

the army's present standards, General Wilson has an exceedingly alert mind, great driving power and great skill. Among the ribbons which he wears you will see those of the South African War, and since those days he has had experience of every sort of warfare. His handling of the Syrian campaign was extremely able, for he carried out the occupation of that country with a tiny force and against difficulties which were scarcely publicised at the time.

He is a big, stocky man, with a disarming smile. Sitting in the barely-furnished room from which he directed the army's activities in both Persia and Irak, General Wilson said: "I am glad you have come to see for yourself how the army is getting down to it here. You will certainly have seen the truth of Mr. Churchill's statement a month ago that our force is being rapidly strengthened. But I feel that this is the moment for all-out work and not for talking—certainly not for talking about the plans of the Persia-Irak Command, though we have our plans. The time to start giving statements is after you have given battle, and not before."

He swung round from his desk, leaned forward and added earnestly: "The only thing I can tell you just now is that there's not a man in this command who would not like to be fighting alongside the Russians with the shortest possible delay. We still have a great deal of work before us to overcome the vast distances in this command. It is a question of making our communications fit the job we have to do."

On the last day of my trip, the Public Relations car finally delivered me late one night in Baghdad, after a troublesome last twenty miles, when we lost our way on the desert tracks, got a puncture after dark and stopped in the middle of a pitch-black plain to find we had no air in our spare wheel and no pump either.

Jeeringly we asked Roe: "What did you do with your cup-final passengers when you got a puncture—offer them their money back?" Roe muttered somewhat to himself, but to us, with great self-restraint, he only said: "We always got 'em back somehow, just like I'll get you back, too, in time for a nice bit of hot supper in Baghdad."

Which he eventually did. I said good-bye to him and to the good-natured captain who had been my conducting officer, with regret, for it had been an unusually pleasant and profitable trip.

History will tell fully in due course of the ultimate contribution of General Wilson's men to the victory of the United Nations. But I saw enough of it during my Persian interlude to convince me that the long, hot summer and the winter of labour and training which the Ninth Army spent in the Persian plains and mountains was an invaluable prelude to the fresh work which lay before them.

The British and Indian troops have, moreover, left their mark on Persia in more than the roads they have built, the supplies they have helped to speed to Russia and the money they have spent. There is not a village through which they have passed where the people have not had their outlook on foreigners in general and British in particular changed for the better. It surely seems a reasonable hope that, besides building bridges, the Ninth Army has contributed much towards the building-up of that Anglo-Persian collaboration which it is to be hoped will, after the war, result in German influence being ousted for ever from these parts.

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After a few days in Baghdad (which, with its low sandy buildings and drab narrow streets is, alas, very little like the city of the fairy tales) I started on the second part of my journey towards Turkey. I travelled the 400 miles

across the Syrian desert in the Nairn streamlined motor-coach, about which I had heard much beforehand but which I thought a greatly over-rated mode of passenger transport. We swayed and bumped all through the night over the rough desert in a driving rainstorm. At dawn we stopped to rescue another coach which had been waterlogged, pulling it with a long steel cable from the wet morass into which it had slipped. Some hours late, we finally reached Damascus.

After a brief visit to Jerusalem, where I bought some civilian clothes, I caught the Taurus Express at Tripoli and the two-day journey up to Ankara was like a prolonged visit to an old familiar club. Two years previously I had been back and forth in that train repeatedly, and the conductor greeted me like an amiable hall-porter welcoming a long-absent member. And the train seemed full of old friends. There was C. A. F. Dundas, the lively chief representative of the British Council in the Middle East, with whom, on a war-time trip to England, I had once spent three weeks bouncing about in a small ship on the Atlantic run from West Africa. There was Leonard Mosley of *Allied Newspapers*, whom I had last met in the Sudan, and there were several acquaintances from the Embassy in Ankara. At the frontier there was a long and close search of the train, but the Turkish officials made no difficulties for us. I could not help feeling pleased and exhilarated at the prospect, after months of wandering in so many Eastern outposts, to be coming back at last, if only temporarily, to territory which was more familiar to me. Soon I would be in Istanbul—and that would be Europe again!

VIII

"JOHNNY TURK, ALLY"

"Don't look at the beginning, but at the end of a thing."
Old Turkish maxim.

GOING back to Turkey in October, 1942, after a two years' absence, was, indeed, an exceedingly cheering experience.

On my previous visit,* when I had been sent out from London at three days' notice by Sir Roderick Jones to do a special job for Reuters, the war was going ill for us. Within a short time of my arrival in Ankara in 1940, Italy had stabbed France in the back, France had collapsed, Dunkirk had stunned the country and a few hundred British fighter pilots seemed to be all that stood between Hitler and his dream of world conquest. In Ankara, German officials and business men filled the bars and restaurants and, though behaving with ostentatious correctitude, talked loudly of the Fuehrer's intentions for the New Order in Europe; and the Turks, while manfully sticking by their Treaty of Alliance with Great Britain, were displaying in their confidential conversations with British friends, a very natural degree of anxiety.

How different was the picture now presented.

General Alexander's resounding victory over General Rommel in Libya, coupled with the German failures at that moment in Russia, and the R.A.F.'s smashing raids on Germany and Italy, were arousing in Turkey a satisfaction which, despite efforts to maintain neutrality, could hardly be disguised. The popular Turkish weeklies came out with cartoons which can have given the Germans little reassurance, since they nearly all depicted, in some form or

* See *Outposts of War*, Chapters VII and VIII.

other, the spectacle of a small German soldier being chased, pushed or otherwise harassed by a large British, Russian or American one. Daily newspapers which for years had been openly pro-Axis, like the big-circulation *Cumhuriyet* (whose proprietor, Yunus Nadi, was commonly nicknamed "Yunus Nazi") were beginning to insert kindly, encouraging little phrases about the prospects of the United Nations. And in at least two cases, non-Turkish propagandists who had long been known to be in Axis pay, approached British citizens with genteel feelers about the financial outlook for a quick transfer of their loyalties! One of these gentlemen, in fact, went through so many permutations of patriotism during the ebb and flow of events in 1942, that he must sometimes have seriously wondered whether he was not selling out on himself.

Manifestations in public places were equally pleasing. In an Istanbul restaurant much frequented by the Germans the orchestra, seeing a party of four Englishmen taking their seats, struck up the refrain "Happy Days are Here Again," and in Ankara the British Ambassador, Sir Hugh Knatchbull-Huguessen appeared with his family at a restaurant and danced. Germans showed themselves in public much less than formerly and had a decidedly hang-dog air.

I spent a week in Ankara, looking up old friends—Muvafak Menimencioglu, the head of the Anatolian Agency and brother of the Turkish Foreign Minister, from whom visiting correspondents always receive a wealth of kindness and good advice, Selim Sarper, the vigorous head of the Press Department, Madame Sureyya Agoaglu, Turkey's famous woman lawyer, and many others. I found an old acquaintance from London in Leigh Ashton, the Press Counsellor, and a number of friendly colleagues.

At the moment when I arrived, Ankara was certainly full of interest for the student of politics. It was fun to

sit once again in Karpic's restaurant and watch the procession of personalities who lunched and dined there—M. Saracoglu, von Papen, Dr. Kroll (the "true Nazi" of the German Embassy), Turkish deputies and foreign diplomats of all nationalities. It was fun to study the diplomatic tendencies of this key-point between Europe and Asia. I toured Ankara with Cedric Salter and Ray Brock, of the *New York Times*, (who is as energetic after news as a tiger, though, to be sure, he looks more like a shaggy lion). We spent scores of Turkish pounds (each worth) 3/- on taxis to tour the various Legations, and passed about sixteen out of every twenty-four hours in earnest conversations. From such activities as these I tried to build up a picture of Turkey's position at the beginning of the fourth year of the war.

It was clear that, while the nation was having some serious problems of her own connected with food and clothing, rising prices and black markets, she was very much more confident than she had been before about the prospects of a final victory for the United Nations. About her own external position in a world at war she was going through a period of anxiety and heart-searching. The President had just made at the opening of Parliament a speech which had caused something of a sensation. In it he had frankly warned his people, "Our country finds itself to-day closer to the war than at any time since it began." In a scarcely-veiled reference to the Fascist countries, he said: "As a result of the developments which have so far occurred in the world war, it is beginning to be understood that a political institution based on the domination of a single party can neither be established nor maintained."

The President went on: "Humanity is finding itself increasingly impelled along a pitiless path where no other procedure is known than to go on killing. Both as human

beings and as a nation, we feel deep grief to see this state of things. But it seems as though the year 1943 will witness battles even more extensive and pitiless!"

In explanation of his warning of the danger of the conflict spreading, the President said: "The Assembly will understand that, in the atmosphere of continually growing hostility, surrounded by parties who daily become more nervous, the Government is beginning to find it very exhausting to maintain the policy of neutrality." They would, however, persevere in that policy and at the same time carry out a drastic programme to conserve the country's internal strength.

"A gale of confusion and moral suffering is blowing down on our country to-day," the President said, "Imposing trouble and darkness upon the true strength and solidity of our position. This state of things shows a nation whether or not she is ill and feeble. A nation with a sickly constitution quickly draws external perils upon itself. Therefore it is necessary for the Assembly to consider seriously the possibility that an aggression may be made against our country from some side which we do not know and under some pretext of which we are equally ignorant." This was a moment when the country would have to consider sacrifices as though Turkey was already at war. Steps would be taken to deal with those who sought to do damage to the nation, the black marketers and fifth columnists—"the insatiable speculator who, if he could, would make a business commodity out of the air we breathe, and those few politicians who consider all our difficulties as a great occasion for satisfying their political passions and are working on behalf of nobody knows what foreign government. Means would be found to eliminate the misdeeds of such people," added the President, and he appealed for the loyal co-operation of all citizens to help the Government face the problems which confronted them.

It was a speech of great force and frankness and was the first open warning which the country had been given of the perils which the fourth year of war were holding for the Turkish people. (When I called on M. Menimencioglu on my arrival in Ankara, almost his first action, after welcoming me, was to hand me a copy of the full text of this speech and say: "*Si vous voulez comprendre ce que se passe ici, vous devez étiuder attentivement ce discours.*")

Gradually, after a week of almost uninterrupted conversations, I formed the conclusion that Turkey was gradually moving towards a position in which it was virtually certain that, before the war was over, she would find herself involved in it—and marching on our side. It was not only the possibility of a German aggression against Turkey which seemed to me to point to this conclusion, but also the external position of Turkey herself. For it was obvious that, when the end of the war came, there could be no durable settlement of the Balkans in which Turkey did not have a voice commensurate with the importance of her political position—and for this she would need to have, and would certainly demand, representation at the final Peace Conference. Turkey's natural friendship for Britain had been powerfully reinforced by allied successes and, indeed, it had been Premier Saracoglu himself who had publicly declared: "Turkey's alliance with Britain is the most fundamental factor of our political system." Turkey might still be striving hard to maintain her neutrality but, all the same, when *Parade*, that weekly paper published for the British troops in the Middle East, had, about this time, sent a reporter to Turkey and his article had appeared under the frank heading of "Johnny Turk, Ally," nobody among the Turks had even raised an eyebrow. It was with all these considerations in mind that I took my courage in both hands and, after much reflection, sent to the *Daily Express*, on November 20,

1942, a despatch which definitely prophesied Turkey's eventual participation in the war as one of the United Nations. On two separate occasions the tide of war had swept up against the breakwater of Turkey's frontier defences—once when the Germans invaded the Balkans up to the very edge of Turkish Thrace, and garrisoned the Greek islands close to the Turkish shore; and again when the Anglo-Russian occupation of Iran and the British invasion of Syria put allied troops on Turkey's Eastern borders. It did not seem possible that the breakwater could stand for ever.

Of the personal sentiments of the men guiding Turkey's destinies, there was little doubt. Her President, Ismet Inönü, a sturdy, white-haired figure who had fought alongside Ataturk in the last war, was obviously a national leader with a talent for making just that kind of appeal to which the Turkish people most naturally responded. To him, and to his Prime Minister, Shukru Saracoglu, Turkey owed the decisive, unambiguous lines of her foreign policy.

I saw the President, sometimes, an impressive, white-haired figure, plodding up the hill above Ankara to take some exercise. He suffers from slight deafness, but this has never impaired his powers as a negotiator, so that those who have dealt with him suspect strongly that he is well able to hear anything he wants to hear. To-day, although in the sixties, he is a keen horseman. His other favourite pastime is chess.

Ismet Inönü, who was born in Smyrna fifty-eight years ago, was the son of a lawyer and he started life as a young army captain in Yemen in 1910. His special gifts as a negotiator were shown long ago, when he was appointed military adviser to the delegation which dealt with Bulgaria at the end of the Balkan wars. In the Great War he served on the staff of the First Army, and by 1918 he was a hardened soldier. During the Armistice period he

ong the road were British Army traffic signs printed in English and Persian

(*p.* 135)

HEMŞERİ

Sayısı 3 kr.

Sayısı 3 kr.

Rusyada

Çok kanlı muharebeler oluyor.

Rusların orta kesimdeki taarruzları da neticesiz kaldı, Ruslar çok asker kaybettiler.

Tunusta şiddetli savaşlar oluyor.

"The popular Turkish weeklies came out with cartoons which can have give the Germans little reassurance" (p 139)

was Under-Secretary of State in the Ministry of War and was chosen as Chairman of a commission which arranged peace terms. He had long been a friend of Ataturk (in those days known as Mustafa Kemal) and he joined him in March, 1920. His activities as a military commander culminated in his victory over the Greeks at Inönü, from which place he took his surname in the later days when Ataturk ordained that every Turk who had, according to ancient custom, been known only by his first name, should henceforth assume a family name of his choice. (Thus it is that there is one cinema proprietor in Turkey who to-day signs himself as "Filmer").

With his quiet speech and quiet manners, President Inönü seems the exact opposite of the dynamic Ataturk. Some people have wondered whether, with less spectacular methods of administration, Turkey may not start slipping backwards somewhat from the point which it had reached under its creator. But perhaps those are right who say that, after Turkey had undergone her period of revolutionary changes, what she needed most was an atmosphere of calm for her consolidation, and that this element was best provided by President Inönü. He has certainly consistently sought to guide his country along paths of friendship with Britain.

As for Premier Saracoglu, it was never any great secret that he privately held feelings which were far from being of a pro-German character. The efforts which the German Ambassador, von Papen, had at one time made to get him removed from his former post of Foreign Minister, had probably not greatly increased his cordiality towards the German Embassy.

Stocky and dignified, but full of nervous vitality, Shukru Saracoglu gives one at first sight the impression of a successful business man rather than a politician, and in fact he has been both. He was born in Izmir (or Smyrna)

in 1887 and studied political science at the University of Geneva. For some time he was engaged in the Turkish tobacco business. Then he became a deputy for his own district. When Ataturk founded the Turkish Republic and the National Assembly was established at Ankara, M. Saracoglu became a minister. He has continued in government office ever since, being successively Minister for Finance, Justice, and, finally, Foreign Affairs. Like the President he is a keen and able chess-player, though I am told that the Soviet Ambassador, M. Vinogradoff, can sometimes beat him.

The control of Turkey's foreign policy through successive years of tension and war has been a task needing an immense amount of adroitness, courage and firmness. Not only did Turkey seem to stand in the very centre of the surging waves of war, not only has her land in centuries past been on the direct eastward path of successive invaders—of Alexander the Great, the Romans, the Crusaders—but her political importance as a natural leader to the peoples of the Middle East has always made any decisions she might take of paramount importance—especially to countries such as Persia, Irak and Afghanistan, to whom Turkey is tied by the Saadabad Pact, signed in 1937.

Moreover, modern Turkey has no long-standing precedent on which her ministers can base their day-to-day actions. Turkish foreign policy in its present form dates no further back than the establishment of the Republic in 1923. Ataturk's determination to break every connection—even moral ones—with the old Ottoman Empire, caused Turkey to insist, after the Republic had been set up, on negotiating a complete new system of agreements with the foreign powers. Capitulations, like all other manifestations of the Ottoman regime, were abolished and the new agreements were designed as an acknowledgment by other

powers of the independence and sovereignty of the new Turkish nation. This was a right and proper course, but it meant that, henceforward, in devising foreign policy, a Turkish Foreign Minister had to make his own decisions as he went along.

In the past the course of Anglo-Turkish relations has by no means always been an even one. In the years before 1914 Britain had sometimes been far from fortunate in the quality of her diplomatic representatives in Turkey. There was, indeed, a famous British Ambassador in Istanbul who had been known as "the perfect lady," and whose special accomplishments had been the collection of *objets d'art* and interior decoration. Then, in the early years after the last war, some of our more conventional diplomats, well versed in the intricacies of the old Ottoman Empire, were slow to believe in the reality of Turkey's regeneration into a young and modern state. The question of the possession of the oilfields of Mossul was a mutual thorn in the flesh until 1925, when they were assigned by the League of Nations to Irak. (They may, however, some day become a problem again.) For years, too, our diplomats resisted Turkey's desire to fortify the Dardanelles, though this attitude could not be persisted in after 1935, when Turkey, following the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, agreed to join in economic sanctions against Mussolini, and even herself to fight if necessary. In view of this, Britain formally gave her blessing, at the Montreux conference in 1936, to the fortification of the straits by Turkey—and from then onwards there has not been any serious obstacle to the development of Anglo-Turkish amity.

Political harmony has been consistently strengthened by personal contact. There is no doubt that the visit of the Duke of Windsor, as King Edward VIII, to Ataturk in 1936, though it was viewed by some professional diplomats

as a gravely unorthodox procedure, was taken by the ordinary Turk as a welcome gesture of friendship from one great nation to another. The King and Ataturk made instant friends and when the British visitor left he gave the Turkish Leader a golden cigarette-case, which Ataturk greatly prized.

When Ismet Inönü, then Prime Minister, visited London for the Coronation festivities in 1937, he received an equally cordial reception. It was at this time that he began to improve his English, which he now speaks quite well. The visit to Turkey of Mr. Eden and Sir John Dill, head of the Imperial General Staff, in 1940, also helped to strengthen the ties between the two countries.

Who are the other Englishmen who have helped win and maintain official Turkey as a friend for Britain?

To Sir George Clerk and Sir Percy Loraine, our Ambassadors in the post-war years, Britain certainly owes a great debt for the close personal relations which they were able to establish with Ataturk himself. In the early days of the creation of the capital at Ankara, before an influx of "Embassy wives" had made that city unduly formal, much goodwill could be built up by the sort of free and easy personal association between Englishmen and Turkish officials for which both the British Ambassadors and Ataturk had a special talent. British Ambassadors who were not only statesmanlike but could also play a game of poker or appreciate a quiet glass of brandy were both welcomed and trusted. Our present Ambassador, Sir Hugh Knatchbull-Huguessen, too, though he may lack something of his predecessors' spontaneity in human relationships, has carefully husbanded the legacy of goodwill which had been left him and has always been a figure highly respected by the Turks. In these war years he has had some redoubtable opposition from the German Ambassador, von Papen, who if not always tactful, has

always been extremely energetic. It is related that, on one occasion, when the German Ambassador was preparing the way for the German-Turkish agreement, he made more than ten applications for an interview with the President before one was finally accorded—surely a record in diplomatic persistence! (At regular intervals during his time in Turkey, von Papen put out feelers for a compromise peace. Diplomats in Ankara told me that he still cherished the ambition that some day he would return to Germany in his former job of Chancellor and as the man who had stopped the war.)

Aiding the British Ambassador in maintaining an unostentatious but greatly appreciated contact with official Turkey in Ankara after the outbreak of war, was Admiral Sir Howard Kelly, one time Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet and a close personal friend of the old Marshal Fevzi Chakmak, Chief of the Turkish General Staff. There is no doubt, too, that the British Council, under its lively representative Michael Grant, has done good work for us in making British culture and ideals known to the Turkish people, through co-operation with the Turks' own People's Houses, and in the face of keen opposition from Teutonic scholarship.

Britain's three fighting services have also played an important part, by sending to Ankara some of their best technical instructors. The British Information Office was re-organised after the death of Sir Denison Ross, and made progress under Leigh Ashton, with an energetic ex-Reuter man, Alec Henderson, in Istanbul. Finally it is certain that the many commercial arrangements fixed up during the war years between Britain and Turkey on a very generous scale must also have done a lot to cause co-operation with Britain to be viewed with growing favour.

Simultaneously with the mutual promotion of cordiality

between Great Britain and Turkey, there began, in the autumn of 1942, a determined effort to put Turkish relations with Russia on a better footing. The Turks have always had an historic distrust of Russian ambitions, going back as far as those old days before the last war when a British music-hall song declared:

"We don't want to fight, but, by Jingo, if we do,
We've got the men, we've got the guns, we've got the money, too."

and ended with the cheer-winning line: "The Roosians shall not have Constantinople."

The Turks have always feared that the Russians might some day want, not only control of the Dardanelles (for the sake of untrammelled access to their Black Sea ports) but also to increase their influence on Turkey's extreme eastern frontier. Conversely, Russia's attitude towards Turkey was not made more cordial when, in 1941, Turkey signed a pact with Germany just a few days before Hitler invaded Soviet territory. The arrest and trial of two Russian subjects after the bomb attempt on von Papen in Ankara had also annoyed the Soviets.

But on Saturday night, November 7, 1942, I went with Salter to a reception at the Soviet Embassy in Ankara and saw what I believed was the beginning of a new turn which was being taken in Soviet-Turkish relations.

Scores of Turkey's leading personalities and foreign diplomats walked in to the great white-and-gold hall of the Embassy, to be greeted by the Soviet Ambassador, the young, red-haired M. Vinogradoff himself. The Ambassador had returned from Moscow only the previous day, after a long and significant absence, in order to be present at this party. As the party wore on and diplomats stood around the room munching caviar and sipping vodka, all eyes were centred on a gathering in the middle

of the room—M. Vinogradoff, Premier Saracoglu and the British Ambassador in long and cordial conversation.

Soon after that, Sir Hugh Knatchbull-Huguessen went on a visit to London, the American Ambassador returned to Ankara from a visit to Washington with (it was believed) a message expressing President Roosevelt's sincere hopes of Russian-Turkish amity, and M. Saracoglu one evening broke with all formality and took the unprecedented step of going to the Soviet Embassy by himself for a two-hour game of chess and a long talk with M. Vinogradoff. From then on hopes grew that Turkey's anxieties about Russia would be finally set at rest.

I realised while I was in Ankara how much useful work can be done there in promoting good relations with the Turks and in learning the true character of this young nation. The ordinary foreigner in Turkey is, perhaps, quicker to admire the Turkish people than to understand them. That takes time and experience. The Turks share with the British a certain aloofness and reserve in their attitude to strangers, which can easily be a source of misunderstanding. They have also a formality in their official dealings which is not always realised by care-free visitors from abroad. When Mr. Willkie went to Ankara, he did himself incalculable harm with a certain Turkish official by slapping him boisterously on the back the first moment he met him. The Turk was as horrified as a member of the Athenaeum would have been if a Bishop had started to turn somersaults. A visitor to another Ankara official caused great, though quite unintentional, offence by taking his dog into the office with him. When you visit a Turk on a truly formal call you should not cross your legs as you sit down, nor unbutton your coat, nor, in fact, do anything which makes it look as though you were treating his office like your own back parlour. It is all just a question of manners, of course, and British people

who go to Turkey should be on their best behaviour. Those who are not, expose themselves to firm but courteous reproof, like that silly Englishwoman whom I heard one day loudly complaining in a restaurant that the waiter would not give her any bread "just because" she had not brought her ration-card. Gravely another diner intervened: "Madam," he said, "I would willingly have given you a large piece of my own bread if you had been an uneducated person or a member of a savage race. But, since you are a cultured woman and a member of a highly civilised nation, I would expect you to conform to national customs, and I shall give you none."

Of the desire which British people have long had for friendship with Turkey and, at the same time, the difficulties they have in the past felt in completely understanding that country, Sir Percy Loraine himself wrote illuminatingly in a short article which he contributed about the time of my visit to the Istanbul weekly paper *Réalité*. It seemed to me at the time I read it to give in a few sentences the key to the understanding of the background of modern Turkey's evolution.

Sir Percy explained that, when he was Ambassador to Turkey and went home on leave, he found that the one thing which puzzled all his British friends was how Turkey in so short a time (much less than even one generation) could have become a modern progressive state with whom Britain could cultivate a friendship on a basis of perfect equality and frankness.

"They realised," he said, "that the Kemalist revolution had been a sweeping one. They accepted that. They realised that the country's institutions had been changed from top to bottom. They accepted that. They realised that the Caliphate had been uprooted. It considerably jarred their preconceived ideas, but they accepted that. They realised that the men no longer wore a fez and that

the women went unveiled. They accepted that. But what they could not understand was how the Turks were themselves managing banks, running and building railways, controlling new industries, conducting businesses, directing trading operations, creating schools and social services all over the country, and balancing a budget, when less than a generation before virtually all these major activities were in the hands of foreigners, at all events as regards their technical management, while the minor ones, such as trade and commerce—rather menial affairs which the proud Turk did not bother to concern himself with—were left to the subject races of the Ottoman Empire, many of whom had shown, in Turkey and elsewhere, a decided aptitude and resourcefulness in such matters.

"I will admit that for some time the answer to this question baffled me; for it is reasonably well established that it takes three generations of re-education, and not merely in the scholastic sense, to alter the outlook and mode of life of so large a collectivity as a nation, especially when that collectivity is a pretty homogeneous racial, religious and linguistic unit. So I had to accept the time factor as a true postulate. That set me thinking whether the other postulates in the question were equally true, and that process, I believe, put me on the track of the right answer. It was this: that if the Turks had not previously exhibited the aptitudes and capacities they were displaying under the Kemalist Republic, it was not because they did not possess them, but because either they did not choose to use them, or that their circumstances were such that they were prevented from showing them. From this I drew the conclusion that those latent, pent-up powers had been smothered and stifled under the rule of the Sultans and that, released by the emancipating and vitalizing tide of the Kemalist revolution, they had flowed

out with astonishing strength and swiftness and thus had produced the apparently inexplicable phenomenon for which my questioners had been unable to account. It was not that the Turk had *changed*, but that he had *been revealed*."

* * * * *

After some days of re-establishing old contacts in Ankara, I went on to Istanbul which, though rather frowned on by the Turks as a relic of the decadent days of the Ottoman Empire, was a far more convenient place for a foreign correspondent to work, with its abundant supply of Turkish and foreign newspapers, its close contact with the Balkans and its flow of informative travellers from many nations. And in the teeming streets of Istanbul, more than in the quiet official places of Ankara, you certainly had a more vivid impression that Turkey was, as the President had said, on the very fringe of that "pitiless path" of war.

IX

THE PITILESS PATH

"If bravery is ten, nine is strategy."
Turkish military maxim.

As a city, Istanbul, it seemed to me, was like a lovely woman who had gone rakish. Traces of her old beauty and dignity remained, and now and then you would be startled by some breath-taking vista of old mosques against a background of blue water. But for the most

part it was Istanbul's rakish character which had become predominant and she seemed a sinister city, with her steep, narrow, cobbled streets and her leaning wooden houses, which looked like, and, indeed, often were, the setting for scenes of violence and murder.

Istanbul was a city of perpetual latent drama, of intrigue and constant nervous rumours. But, though much of what one heard in Istanbul could be immediately discounted, the city was for a long time regarded by the newspaper correspondents, both Allied and Axis, as an exceedingly useful place for making cosmopolitan contacts and for picking up information from enemy-occupied countries. Of all the despatches which went out of Turkey in the first three years of war, only one in five was about the Turks. The rest were cables from British and American correspondents about conditions in occupied Europe, or reports from German and Italian ones about the affairs of Syria, Palestine and Egypt. In Istanbul, little more than a hundred miles from the frontier of German-occupied Europe, the British watched the Germans, the Germans watched the British, and no doubt the Turks, with so many dubious characters on their hands and the threat of war so close, watched everybody impartially.

I was lucky enough to be befriended in Istanbul, like so many other visiting journalists, by "Tino" (short for Constantin) Mavroudi, the permanent representative in Turkey of *The Times*, the *doyen* of the correspondents and a considerable personality.

Mavroudi, who was born in Turkey of Greek parents, was in the diplomatic service of the old Ottoman Empire, so that when he wrote of diplomatic matters he knew what he was talking about. He was a leading member of the Istanbul Club where, in the evenings between six and eight, he held a small court of his own, sitting in what had come to be known as "*Times* corner" of the club's main

salon, a dapper figure in a big leather chair, sipping arak and talking over the day's news. During the last war, while he was in the Turkish Embassy in Washington, he was on familiar terms with Franz von Papen, the German military attaché in America. One day, during the present war when Mavroudi had sent to the *Times* a message about von Papen's post-war political ambitions which had apparently greatly grieved the Reich's Ambassador to Turkey, von Papen sent a message to *The Times* correspondent through an intermediary. It said: "*Et tu*, Mavroudi."

But in fact, whatever von Papen might think, Mavroudi, I found, had an exceedingly kind heart. To my delight he suggested that instead of staying in the gloomy Pera Palas Hotel, or the modernistic Park Hotel (which at that time was so full of Germans that local citizens had christened it "The Brown House"), I could be put up at the Club. I accepted eagerly, and I remained there throughout the rest of the six weeks I stayed on in Turkey. I met some more good journalistic friends there, including Vedad Bey, the amiable editor of *La Turquie*, a pro-British evening newspaper, which in its few months of life had cut the circulation of the two little French-speaking evening rags *Istanbul* and *Beyoglu* which had Axis sympathies, down to a total circulation of about 1,000 copies between them! Towards the end of my stay, there also turned up at the club Derek Patmore, of the *News Chronicle*, whom I had not seen since the days of King Carol's abdication in Bucharest. He had just come back to Istanbul after breaking his leg in a black-out in Syria and, hobbling about with an elegant walking-stick, he looked an impressive and distinguished literary figure, rather like Montague Wooley in *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. Derek Patmore has made many friends among the Turks themselves and is a mine of information about the country.

Besides being a centre for the exchange of ideas and information, the Istanbul Club was a place where an occasional practical joke was not out of order. It had one elderly Italian member who was known to his fellow-members for his proclivity for listening in to other people's conversation. One evening a group of members decided to teach him a lesson, and the upshot of it must have been very like a comedy scene in a revue. A group of members waited until the listener-in had taken a comfortable arm-chair near-by and then one of them remarked to the others, in a clearly-audible stage-whisper: "Did you hear of the steps which the French Embassy have taken to assure supplies of food for their community this winter?"

"No," said another member, "what have they done?"

"Why," said the first, "I have just heard it from the Ambassador himself. They have imported thousands of tins of their very best sardines and they are distributing them at half the ordinary prices to members of the French colony in Istanbul. They haven't given them to the grocers, for fear they will get sold in the open market; they've decided to let the Kodak shop in the Grande Rue sell them quietly to everybody who is in the know."

Next day an elderly Italian gentleman entered the Istanbul Kodak agency, leaned over the counter, and said mysteriously to the girl behind the counter: "I will take six tins of sardines."

"But, monsieur," said the girl, "this is a camera shop."

"Do not give yourself the trouble to deceive me, mademoiselle," said the elderly gentleman, "I desire the sardines of the French Embassy. You see, I am in the know."

I have no idea how long the argument continued, but I do know that there was much quiet happiness in the

Istanbul Club that evening when an indignant Italian member sat down again in his chair in a huff and said to his friends: "*Vous savez, ils m'ont* refusé *les sardines.*"

I was glad of the homeliness and quiet of my little room at the club during those winter weeks. The weather was terrible; great gales blew which sank small ships in the Sea of Marmora; Istanbul itself was under martial law and the shadow of the war seemed to be continually growing darker over the city, only 120 miles from the frontier with German-occupied Europe. The country's internal economy had been greatly upset partly through the shortage of supplies resulting from the scarcity of sea transport, partly through the necessity of maintaining a standing army of a million men to guard the frontiers, and partly as a result of internal speculation. In the winter of 1942 Turkey —which for so long had kept war at bay—began to tighten her belt in a drastic war-time economy drive.

Bread was rationed to half a loaf daily, and queues stood outside the bakers' shops in driving rain. Restaurants were forbidden to serve *à la carte* meals and had to offer a fixed menu instead. There was a big drive to save fuel. Hot water was available only three days a week, street lighting was cut down by half, public restaurants were told that they would have to close down by eight o'clock in the evenings and places of entertainment by ten. Prices were soaring. The official price of sugar was seven shillings a pound, tea cost about £1 a pound, if you could get it at all, a 1 lb. pot of jam cost ten shillings and a pair of shoes anything between £4 and £7.

To discourage speculators and act as a brake on inflation, the Government instituted a drastic levy on capital. All banks were closed for three days while an inspection was made of everybody's account, and foreigners were temporarily forbidden to leave the country. On the basis

of the bank inspection, all holders of large sums of money were assessed to pay a certain heavy tax. When the actual amounts of the levy were finally made known, they caused consternation and dismay among business men. Some Jewish firms in Istanbul were ordered to pay up as much as £200,000 under this new law. There was no right of appeal and all payments had to be made in cash within a fortnight. Anyone failing to pay in full within the prescribed time, was threatened with forced labour on the roads in Anatolia. Many businesses closed down at once. It was a law of great severity, and of so revolutionary a character that in peace time it would have been reported more fully than it was in the world's Press and would have created something of a sensation. Turkish officials, however, justified it on the ground that Turkey's serious economic situation demanded serious measures, that the taxes would do much (as indeed they did) to reduce the dangers of inflation, and that they were, in any case, mainly aimed at forcing black-marketers, hoarders and speculators who had preyed on the country, to disgorge their ill-gotten gains. At any rate, whatever the merits of the case, it was clear that Turkey was doing her best to set her house in order for any eventualities which might befall.

She really had no choice but to do so. As the President had said, the threat of war was already near and constant. From a military point of view, Turkey has undoubtedly suffered from the handicap of not being a country with a large industrial development such as can be swung over at short notice to producing war supplies. Even by the end of 1942 it probably could not be said that her army had everything in the way of modern equipment which it might desire. Its assets were rather in the rugged nature of the country in which Turkish soldiers would have to fight, the quality and careful training of the army's

officers and the toughness and superb discipline of its men.

At the beginning of 1943 Turkey had about a million men under arms, but it was known that, in case of war, she could mobilise nearly two million.

Who are the men who run this Turkish army and who have done their best to ensure that, if ever the worst befalls, Turkey will not march down the pitiless path of war without success?

The outstanding personality, of course, has always been the old Marshal Fefzi Chakmak, the army's supreme commander, who fought with Ataturk and who chose his family name from the place at which he had once defeated an enemy. He is now in the sixties and lives a very retired and frugal life in Ankara.

A typical Turkish soldier, square-jawed, with a bristling moustache and black bushy eyebrows, straightforward and brave, the old Marshal is an intimate friend of the President. He has many personal ties with him—not only have they common memories of battles long ago, but both are deeply religious men. Therefore, though he has never involved himself in politics, his advice carries great weight with Ismet Inönü. He has always been a strong supporter of the alliance with Great Britain.

The most senior general, and the natural successor to the Marshal, is General Fahrettin Altay, Commander of the First Army, which defends and controls Thrace and Istanbul. He is also not a young man, for he is one of the heroes of the Turkish War of Independence and he fought bravely during the days of the Ottoman Empire. Also important is General Abdurrahman Nafiz, who is commander of the Aegean coast region, as head of the Second Army. Viewing the possibility of an Axis attack on Turkey, the General Staff have always considered the defence of the Aegean coastline most important in the

country's fighting scheme. General Nafiz, like the old Marshal, is also an intensely religious man. And Islam has always made good soldiers.

But the Turkish army has younger men of promise, who might become more prominent in a country which was at war. One is General Kiazim Orbay, at present Commander of the Third Army in Eastern Anatolia, and another is General Salih, now on the General Staff. Many Turks think that these two men, working together, would give Turkey her equivalent of the Alexander-Montgomery combination in Egypt. General Orbay is expected to become Chief of Staff in the event of war and he is admitted to be among the most brilliant of the younger Turkish generals. At the beginning of this war he headed a Turkish military mission to London, and he is known to be pro-Allied in his sentiments. He is still a man in his forties.

General Salih, or Salih Pasha, as he is known by every Turkish soldier, is undoubtedly the most vivid personality in the Turkish army. He is a young protégé of Kemal Ataturk and he has something of the dash and flair of his great protector and leader. He is also in the forties and is a believer in the maxim that the best means of defence is attack. Derek Patmore told me that, at the time when last Bulgaria seemed to be threatening Turkey with invasion, General Salih was said to have been a strong advocate of a quick, sharp blow at that country. That may well be so, for it is no secret that General Salih does not love the Bulgarians. They killed his father in the Balkan wars. Some of the more orthodox Turkish soldiers are inclined to say that General Salih is too impulsive, but he is universally admitted to be a brilliant commander and a man of great character and intelligence. He, too, is a staunch upholder of Turkey's alliance with Britain.

Not all officers of the Turkish army have always been

so. For it must be remembered that many of the senior Turkish officers had their original training in Germany and there learned respect for the military methods of the German army in the days before its dispositions were made at the bidding of a Fuehrer's intuition. But this background of German training which the Turkish army has means at least that its officers are well versed in German military technique. They are also highly efficient and intensely patriotic.

As for the ordinary Turkish soldier, he is a very tough man, whose life in the army is hard, but probably not so hard as his previous home life as a peasant. He wears a shabby but serviceable uniform, receives infinitesimal pay by British standards and maintains a rough humour and sturdy cheerfulness under almost any circumstances.

One reason why, since the beginning of the war, the Turkish army has had difficulties with its equipment is that, in building up her armed forces, Turkey has had to secure material from whatever sources she could. Thus she has in past years before the war taken mountain guns and howitzers from Sweden, light machine-guns from France, field guns and rifles from Germany, anti-aircraft batteries from Vickers in Britain and tanks and tractors from Czechoslovakia and Switzerland. With materials from so many sources, the problem of supplies and spare parts was always a worrying one, and in recent years much has been done to improve matters. Turkey's own military factories at Ankara, Yahsihan and Kirikkale have now for some years past produced small arms and ammunition of various types, and much new equipment, especially recently, has come from Great Britain and America.

To-day the Turkish army is certainly vastly better equipped than it has ever been before. Its chief need in

action would probably be quick, effective air support on a considerable scale.

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I greatly enjoyed the few weeks which I spent in Istanbul. Not only was it fascinating work learning all I could about the progress of our friends the Turks and our enemies across the border. It was also a tremendous relief to be freed for a time from the nervous strain of working under a formal censorship. The Turks do not admit to there being any actual censorship of cables sent from their country, though officials, if hard pressed, may agree that cables are sometimes "scrutinised." But, especially since M. Saracoglu became Prime Minister, a great deal of freedom has been allowed to foreign correspondents in Turkey. Provided he does not say anything that is positively calculated to harm the Turkish nation, a correspondent is allowed almost unlimited scope. (The strict control exercised on Turkey's own newspapers is, of course, quite a different matter, and governed by different considerations.) This comparative freedom did not mean that the little group of British correspondents in Turkey were any less careful of what they wrote. The added responsibility gave everyone a great impetus to compose careful and properly balanced reports.

At last, however, the time came for me to leave Turkey. I cabled to Foreign Editor Foley that Cedric Salter would be able to take over formally as our correspondent for Turkey and the Balkans on December 21, and Foley sent a characteristically-worded reply. He said:

"Grateful you offer salter sincerest good wishes exall cumevery expression confidence that where youve done so brilliantly he cannot fail fullstop cable his obituary and bring his picture—regards foley."

Salter and I had no illusions about that cable; it had been ingeniously contrived to butter up the departing correspondent and stimulate the new one—but we both agreed that the man who had written it had great talent for handling his foreign staff. When you are a correspondent in a far-off place, coping with innumerable local difficulties (many of which are never suspected by the people at home) and never even seeing your own newspaper for months on end, it is almost impossible for your Foreign Editor to send you too many cables of guidance and flattery—especially flattery.

Foley followed up this telegram with some fervent appeals that I should waste no time in getting myself to Cairo. It was the week in which General Montgomery's forces had begun their advance beyond El Agheila and were at last further west than our desert army had ever been before. I wired back that I would do my best to rush to Egypt.

But, alas, deciding to leave Turkey and actually leaving it were two very different matters. Civil aviation had been suspended in Turkey for the winter, but an appeal to the Embassy in Ankara through Henderson got me, thanks to the good offices of Leigh Ashton the promise of a seat on a special aeroplane which was due to leave from southern Turkey across the Mediterranean to Cairo in a few days' time. "All you need now," they said, "is a Turkish exit permit."

All I needed!

It took me three days of almost uninterrupted negotiation, persuasion and remonstrance to obtain the indispensable slip of paper which would enable me to leave the country.

Turkish regulations for foreigners have always been multitudinous: and at this moment matters had been made more difficult by the new and elaborate tax on

capital, in connection with which all departures from the country had been, in principle, temporarily suspended. I applied to the police, who refused to grant me an exit permit, in accordance with the terms of the new tax law. I went to the British Embassy in Istanbul, who referred me to the Consulate. I sought out the Consulate, in a remote and dingy back street, and they gave me a letter to the Vali, or Lord Mayor of the city. I went to the Town Hall and gave this letter to the Vali's secretary, Semouk Bey, who had it countersigned by the Vali. I sent this letter, with my passport, Press permit and residence papers to the police: who said they could grant no exit permit. They rejected the whole bundle of papers, and referred me back to the Vali's secretary. I saw Semouk Bey again (after waiting an hour in his office). He shrugged his shoulders with a truly oriental gesture, and referred me back to the Consulate. They lent me sympathy and help, and sent an envoy to the police, who demanded three photographs of me. These being supplied, the police wrote a formal letter to the Vali, and the Consulate messenger took this to the Town Hall. The Vali was away. The Deputy Vali was courteous enough to interrupt a meeting while he wrote a letter back to the police assuring them that, as I was a visiting journalist who had been in the country only six weeks, and not even a British business man, I was not subject to the new tax laws. Meanwhile I sent an urgent appeal for reinforcements to Selim Sarper, of the Press Bureau in Ankara. Finally, on the following afternoon, the Consulate triumphantly announced that they had secured for me my exit permit. It had taken me three days to obtain permission to go away!

The Turkish tendency to supervise closely the movements of all foreigners has a natural and historical basis in the exploitation to which the country was subjected in the

days before Ataturk's Republic, and in the intrigues which foreigners formerly carried on in Istanbul. But it is possible that Turks themselves are becoming conscious of the effects of their own reticence with strangers. In greatly increasing numbers they are learning foreign languages, especially English. And it cannot be only by chance that one of the most popular books which I saw on sale in Turkey during my latest visit was a translation of Dale Carnegie's treatise on *How to Win Friends and Influence People*!

I believe that many, especially of the younger Turks, realise that, in carrying nationalism to excess, people may deny themselves the benefits which fresh co-operation with other countries—of course on an equitable basis—could give them. But no doubt such matters will be for discussion when the war is done and Turkey is able to take her true place in the post-war order of things.

Just now nothing really matters except that the United Nations have in Turkey a strong stabilising force in the Middle East and a friend of potentially the greatest value.

For, just as a British statesman once declared that he loved France as a woman, so can it equally well be said that Turkey is, above everything else, a man's country. It has few charms of a feminine kind, few luxuries, few indulgencies. But the qualities of the Turkish character are particularly those very ones which serve a nation best in a world at war.

They are: extreme political shrewdness, intense patriotism, tough singleness of thought—and that kind of physical courage which does not even admit the existence of such a thing as fear.

X

THUNDERBOLT OF ASSAULT

"What I have promised, I maintain."—Mussolini to Moslems of Tripoli, who presented him with "Sword of Islam," March 18, 1937.

I ARRIVED in Cairo just as the advance to Tripoli from El Agheila had got into its stride, and I did not leave until Mr. Churchill had come out to set the final seal—in Egypt, Turkey, Cyprus and Tripolitania—on the victory of the Eighth Army and the clearing of the North African coast.

That brief period of two months brought the fulfilment of Mr. Churchill's promise, made at the very beginning of the war, that Mussolini's Empire would be "torn to shreds," for it saw the end of the whole of that Empire except Albania, the end of the Mediterranean as an area to which Italian propagandists could refer as "Mare Nostrum," our sea, and the spectacular beginning of a new phase in the strategy of the United Nations.

The abandonment by Rommel, in the second week of December, of the El Agheila defensive position (which had been described as being at least as strong as the line on which Auchinleck had held the Germans at El Alamein) marked the beginning of the end for the Axis in Libya. But the decisive turn in Rommel's fortunes had come long before that—on the day when he had realised that he could not get to Cairo through the El Alamein line.

From the many old desert campaigners whom I met in Cairo on this visit (some of whom I had last seen during

the Wavell advance to Benghazi two years previously) I pieced together a general picture of the course of events which had led up to our final Libyan victory. In the scores of different accounts which were given to me there were, of course, variations of detail, but on certain fundamental points there was general agreement, and especially on the subject of the outstanding reasons for the Eighth Army's victory. These were, as almost everybody agreed:

1. The excellence of British equipment and the success (at last!) of our supply and repair organisations.

2. The co-operation (which this time was really close) between the three services, the superiority of the R.A.F. and the astonishing work—of which too little was heard by the public—done by the Navy in bringing up supplies.

3. The endurance of our men in the desert, who allowed neither months of hardship nor periods of retreat and failure to break their fighting spirit.

4. Good planning and good leadership, with (for the first time) adequate tools.

5. One fatal blunder by Rommel himself.

On the German side, what had apparently happened was this: before Rommel had ever begun his drive into Egypt, he had been warned from Berlin (so the story in Egypt went) that he should not, during 1942, attempt to advance any further East than Sidi Barrani, 300 miles from Alexandria. Hitler's general plan had been that the German army should batter the Russians into insensibility in the summer and autumn of 1942 and then should spend the winter reinforcing Rommel to the point at which it was hoped he would be able to make an irresistible advance to Suez in the spring of 1943.

But Rommel's restless impulsiveness, which had served him well in past encounters with us, was this time his undoing. He was carried forward by the impetus of his

headlong advance in June, and he never even paused at Sidi Barrani, but instead staked everything he had on a "Cairo or bust" drive forward. The decisive turn in his fortunes came on that memorable "Ash Wednesday" in Cairo when Auchinleck finally held Rommel at El Alamein, and in doing this sowed the seeds of his downfall. For Rommel then found himself holding an exposed and inconvenient forward position which he had difficulty in keeping supplied, but from which he did not dare to retreat, both for political reasons and for the sake of his own personal prestige.

Rommel was a good enough general to see clearly the dangers of the El Alamein position so he did two things. He ordered that position to be made temporarily as safe as possible. And then he went off to Berlin on a personal pretext but actually to ask Hitler to give him another command. He wanted somebody else to hold the Alamein baby while he preserved the legend of Rommel invincibility. But Hitler was adamant. He sent Rommel back to Egypt, although he must have realised even then that he could not spare him enough supplies or men from the Russian front to enable him to keep pace with the frenzied rate at which the Eighth Army was then being built up. Hitler must have seen clearly that if it was a case of Cairo or bust it would be Rommel who would bust.

Thus it was that, when Rommel lost his Agheila gamble he lost both Libya and his reputation as a miracle man.

Colleagues who were on the spot have told far better than I could now hope to tell the details of the extremely gallant battle which the Eighth Army fought at El Alamein, which was the first outstandingly successful large-scale attack by British infantry in this war. In the face of mines and wire and terrible enemy fire, our men on October 23 attacked Rommel's line at its strongest point,

and the drive to Tripoli, which took exactly three months from that date, began.

This battle of El Alamein was a desperate and historic one. For the first time in this war a strong army entrenched in depth over a narrow front was routed by infantry making a direct frontal attack. Only twenty days previously, at a gala Press reception back in Berlin, Rommel had declared (presumably as part of his effort to sell a pup to some other general), "The gates of Egypt are in our hands."

The tactics used at El Alamein were quite different from anything done in the desert before. The great encircling sweeps, such as Wavell had used against the Italians in his first desert campaign, were impracticable against the line which Rommel had built from the coast to the impassable Quattara depression; so Alexander and Montgomery decided on battering-ram tactics instead—what Mr. Churchill called, in his speech in Cairo in February, 1943, "the great thunderbolt of assault." They used hundreds of twenty-five pounders in the most spectacular creeping barrage the desert had ever seen, and infantry to mop up just behind where the shells were falling. The tanks went through only when a way had been prepared for them. Ten divisions, plus French and Greek forces, took part in this battle, and casualties were not light. Such British regiments as the Buffs, the Green Howards, the Black Watch, the Royal Sussex Regiment, the Durham Light Infantry, the East Yorkshire Regiment, the Seaforths and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders gained many names for their Rolls of Honour in the course of the Alamein struggle.

After ten days of bitter attack and counter-attack, our army broke through and the Axis forces set off on their 1,500-mile march to the Tunisian border. By November 8 we were back in Mersa Matruh, next day in Sidi Barrani,

two days later across the frontier into Tripolitania and by November 20 in Benghazi. Within twenty-four hours of our regaining that much-bombed port, the Navy were clearing it for the rushing-up of supplies for General Montgomery's further progress. There was a three-weeks' pause while the Eighth Army was equipped to go forward again. Then, when we began our advance, Rommel prudently withdrew, abandoning Mersa Brega on December 13 and Sirte on Christmas Day.

The New Year opened with the two armies facing each other in the region of Buerat across a no-man's land between a ravine called Wadi Kebir on one side and the Wadi Zemzem on the other. Here again there was a pause, this time for a fortnight, while supplies for the last lap were brought up.

Back in Cairo people were spending the New Year celebrating this long trail of victory, not riotously, but with thankful hearts. Britain's Egyptian friends (many of whom, it is only fair to say, had stood firmly by us even when German tanks had been less than a hundred miles away) were openly delighted at the final removal of the threat to their homes; desert-tanned troops, snatching brief leaves, thronged the streets, rode gaily in horse-cabs or on camels, bought fly-whisks from street hawkers and queued up all day long outside the cinemas; their officers crowded into restaurants, six of them often taking out a single girl at a time, and into the Turf Club, which had hospitably thrown open its doors to them. There was undoubtedly a mood of general relief, though people did not let up for long, because there was still too much work to be done. Still, it was an encouragingly different scene from those anxious days of 1940, when Italian troops were across the frontier of Egypt and British Tommies, wandering through the desert, chanted an impromptu refrain which would have raised the hopes of Dr. Goebbels

exceedingly high, if he had heard them. To the tune of "South of the Border" the soldiers used to sing:

"Oh Sidi Barrani,
Oh Mersa Matruh,
The Eyeties will get there,
Then what shall we do?
We'll all go home—we'll all go home."

I myself was temporarily holding the fort for the *Daily Express* in Cairo during a change-over between two chief correspondents. Alaric Jacob, a former Reuter man who, by an odd coincidence, had decided to transfer to the *Daily Express* in Egypt at almost exactly the same moment as I myself had done in London, had gone off on a visit to India, and his successor, Norman Smart (whose story of the sinking of the *Ark Royal* will be remembered) was due to come back any day from the desert to take charge. But there was little military news in that first fortnight in January while the Eighth Army was stationary at Buerat and was building up its supplies. So I filled in my time trying to learn something about the Egyptian political situation.

The remarkable story of how the present government of Nahas Pasha came into power in February, 1942, has never been told and probably will not be told until after the war, if then. For the moment it must be enough to say that in the operations which our armed forces have conducted from Egyptian soil, they have been importantly aided by the wholehearted co-operation of the present Egyptian Prime Minister. If Egypt were to have had a government which had continually tried to break the spirit, if not the letter, of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty, our campaign against Rommel might have been infinitely handicapped, so that it was certainly fortunate that, at the time of Egypt's political crisis the Nahas ministry

could be formed. For Nahas—an experienced politician—was at once a man with a wide popular following in the country and one who had staked his whole career on his backing of Britain. It was he who had signed the Anglo-Egyptian treaty with Mr. Eden in 1936 and since then he had stood loyally by his British friends, both through days of victory and of reverses.

Through the good offices of Michael Wright, of the British Embassy in Cairo (now in Washington) and of the genial Amin Osman Pasha, a close associate of Nahas Pasha who knows England well and has an English wife, I spent nearly two hours one morning sitting in the Premier's pleasant office on the first floor of the Presidency of the Council building, with its elegant mahogany furniture and its french windows looking out on to the trees and Egypt's perpetual sunshine.

Nahas Pasha had just returned from attending the funeral of Lady Tedder (who had been killed two days previously in a desert air crash), and he was wearing a black morning coat, as he sat at his great leather-topped desk, with its silver fittings and its battery of five telephones. He is a large, heavily-built man. He has a sense of fun (which is probably what makes his speeches popular with the ordinary people of Egypt, who are always ready for a smile) and an almost unquenchable fire of conversation. He is not easy to interview, because he talks along the lines which happen to interest him rather than in strict accord with the carefully-prepared questions of the journalist.

It was Nahas whose calmness at the time when Rommel was speeding towards Cairo was largely responsible for the steadiness of the Egyptian people as a whole during those anxious days. On one of the worst days, I was told, when many people were expressing their grave anxiety, Nahas quietened their fears—by simply going to bed!

He took a long siesta after lunch, and word went round the city of many rumours: "The Prime Minister is sleeping; there can be no real cause for alarm."

We conversed in French, though Nahas Pasha is beginning to speak increasingly good English.

I first asked the Prime Minister about Egypt's post-war aspirations.

"The help which we have given Britain," he replied, "has been given with a good heart because in giving it we have had only one aim—to safeguard our independence. We realised long ago that the independence of Egypt could not be guaranteed in any kind of world except one which regarded Liberty as a sacred thing." He went on: "Actually the extent of Egypt's help has been considerable and it has imposed difficulties and sacrifices on us."

British soldiers who come straight in to the teeming, busy streets of Cairo after months of fighting in the desert, have on occasion questioned the awareness of the Egyptian people as a whole to the realities of the war, so I asked the Prime Minister: "What do the people of Egypt really think about this war?"

"We realise," he replied, "that this is not a matter of people fighting for territorial gains at all, so much as an ideological war, a war of Liberty against the desire of barbarians to enslave whole nations. Egypt has shown where her sympathies lie by carrying out faithfully her obligations under the Anglo-Egyptian treaty. It is not only that treaty which unites us with Britain, however, but also our own considered desire to help forward a democratic victory."

There was much more talk along the same lines until, finally, a secretary who kept popping in as we talked seemed to indicate to the Prime Minister that other and more pressing duties were awaiting him. As I rose to go,

I asked him how he had got on with Mr. Churchill during the latter's first visit to Cairo?

"We got on famously," he said smilingly, "I liked him from the beginning because he is a man who goes straight to the point. When I lunched with him at the Embassy we both talked very frankly. Then he thanked me for my attitude during Egypt's bad days, and I for my part thanked him for the moral support which his speeches have always given me. I honestly believe that Churchill is a man who was given to Britain by Providence."

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Cairo in this war has been like Piccadilly Circus was in the last one—a place where if you stood still long enough you could be sure to meet many friends. I met one diplomat, a friend from pre-war days, who was travelling from London to Stockholm all the way round by way of Africa.

While I was in Cairo, too, there came out Jack Brebner, of the Ministry of Information, to act temporarily as Press Adviser to the Minister of State and to do some permanent galvanisation of the local Press arrangements. Brebner, genial and unassuming but tough when he wants to be, is probably the doyen of senior Ministry officials, for he went there from the Post Office before ever the war began. He is a favourite of Fleet Street, for he is one of the few Civil Servants who understand how to handle newspapermen. He gets his own way with them by the ingenious method of understanding their simple needs and being helpful to them—which is, to most officials, an exceedingly novel idea.

There seemed, indeed, to be good friends everywhere I went in Cairo. I met Captain Patrick Perry, once Reuters' correspondent in New York, who, as a lance-bombardier, was for months a gunner in Tobruk; Corporal Alfred Parsons, R.A.F., who had once sat beside me on the

desk at Reuters; Squadron Leader Lord Kinross, an old acquaintance from Fleet Street, who, as the Hon. Patrick Balfour had edited the "Londoner's Diary" in the *Evening Standard* before the war; Major H. L. Rushton, another former Reuters' man to whom, three years ago, the army gave £100, a chair and a table and orders to get on with the job of producing a paper for the troops, with the result that he now edits *Parade*, with a circulation of 65,000 copies and is editor-in-chief of three other army publications with a combined circulation of a quarter of a million; Colonel Philip Astley, who administers the movements of the war correspondents in the Middle East and has made many friends of many nationalities among them; the hospitable, irrepressible British Council Dundas; and Gerald Delany, who for years was chief representative of Reuters and Lloyd's in Egypt and is a philosopher in his own quiet way. Delany it was who once, paraphrasing an epigram of Wilde's, gave me a notable piece of advice for a young man: "Make as many friends as you can—and choose your enemies carefully."

So for a fortnight before Tripoli fell and Norman Smart came back from the desert, I did the daily round of the Cairo War Correspondent. Newspaper readers who see every day in their papers war reports, sometimes under banner headlines, "from our Cairo correspondent," may perhaps wonder how their material is collected, where the war news comes from and to whom the "military spokesman" speaks. Actually, I found the focal point of it all was a small and bare back room in a modern building in the centre of Cairo where, during the North African campaign, the daily joint communique was handed out to the correspondents every day around noon on a stencilled sheet of paper, and the regular morning and evening conferences were held. The room was not much to look at—bare walls with maps and notices pinned around them, bare

"Under the astonished eye of an Italian policeman Norman Smart (*left*) sat on a bench and wrote his story of the fall of Tripoli" (*p.* 181) (*British Army Photo*)

floorboards, a number of rickety trestle tables and a dozen or so old kitchen chairs, army issue. On the back of the door was pinned a good-natured joke about the censors, drawn by the impish hand of Paul Bewsher, of the *Daily Mail*. In one corner an old petrol tin served the purpose of a waste-paper basket, but despite its presence, and constant efforts of Abdul, the boy in the fez who was always sweeping up, the floor was perpetually littered with scraps of paper and cigarette-ends, just like a newspaper-office. When all the correspondents were gathered together, there was hardly room for them to stand up, let alone sit down.

It was to the little dais at the end of this room that there came each day the elegant monocled figure of the British Colonel who delivered himself of such information supplementary to the communique as he was able to, followed immediately by the businesslike representative of the Royal Air Force and sometimes, too, by the Public Relations Chief of the United States Army Air Force, when there were details of any special American air operations to be made known. At the end of this conference, and with the aid of any additional information which the correspondent himself had been able to acquire, he wrote his daily account of the North African war and duly delivered it, in triplicate, to the military, air force and political censors located in adjoining offices. From the purely technical point of view the Press censorship in Cairo ran with efficiency and goodwill and caused a minimum of delay: it was very different from the manner in which it had been administered at the beginning of the war, when everybody was new to the job, and the censors took a four-hour siesta after lunch! On quiet days, neither the communique nor the military conference produced much material, but on busy ones, when, for instance, the communique announced an important new operation, there

was a great scurry among the packed crowd of correspondents jammed into the little room to get their news away. The news agency men like Reuters' George Crawley, would slip quietly through the door before the conference was over, each trying to file a first brief "flash" before his rival did so, for once a message was handed in to the censorship it kept its priority all the way to Marconi's cable head—so that the man who put his cable in most quickly in Cairo would almost certainly be the first to get it published in London or New York. The newspaper correspondents banged their portable typewriters down on odd corners of the trestle tables and tried to tap out thoughtful, interpretative messages about the day's news, while, down the corridor strange noises came from a far from soundproof chamber in which Frank Gillard, of the B.B.C. was playing over for the benefit of another censor one of those white metal discs on which aspects of the war were recorded for British listeners. Altogether it was a scene which would probably have struck the casual visitor as somewhat chaotic, but somehow or other accounts of the day's news were produced by the "boys in the back room" which, when they appeared in print, looked reasonably intelligible.

In the evenings there would be a similar final rally in the Press room, to provide for the eventuality of some late news breaking. And in their remaining spare hours the correspondents would visit G.H.Q., or call on officials or acquaintances to see whether any more news could be gleaned than that which was officially distributed.

It was, of course, much less strenuous work than that of our colleagues who were up with the army in the desert but (such is the injustice of this world) the despatches of the Cairo correspondents during the advance to Tripoli often obtained a much better showing in the papers at home than those from the men at the front. The reason for this was

that, as the front got further and further away and communications became increasingly difficult, despatches from the desert inevitably took an increasingly long time to get back to the cable head, despite the energetic efforts which the army and air force made to rush them through. Thus the men at the front were sometimes forestalled by their colleagues in Cairo, gathering their information direct from G.H.Q. To the journalist, as to the soldier, communications are half the battle. It is no use writing the best despatches in the world if they arrive too late for publication in your newspaper. It was mainly for that reason, rather than for any inborn love of city life, that about half the total number of accredited correspondents in Libya could be found in Cairo at any one time during desert operations, while the remainder were at the front. The system of working was that most British newspapers maintained at least two war correspondents in Egypt (the *Express* and some others always had three), and these men alternated and arranged between themselves as to who should respectively cover the desert, the operations of the R.A.F. and the Cairo conferences. Some idea of the number, and perhaps it may be added, of the enthusiasm, of the corps of war correspondents and official photographers in the Middle East may be obtained from the fact that, up to the beginning of 1943 in that area alone, the casualty list of correspondents comprised sixteen killed, sixteen taken prisoner, five missing (two believed killed) and a couple of dozen wounded in varying degrees. Two of Colonel Astley's staff won M.C.s and, while I was in Cairo, the first award was made to a correspondent (Henry Gorrell, of the United Press), of the American Army Air Force decoration for gallantry. Several correspondents, including Alex Clifford and Alan Moorehead, have been mentioned in despatches.

In addition to the daily routine conferences, special

meetings were arranged almost weekly for the correspondents with various service chiefs. Of these one of the most instructive and certainly one of the most moving of the ones I attended, was that at the beginning of January, at which Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder came to take leave of us, on his appointment as Deputy Chief of Air Staff, which preceded his present position. This meeting took place only a few days after Lady Tedder, to whom he was devoted, had been killed while returning by air in a duststorm from a visit to a hospital in the desert.

Sir Arthur Tedder walked into our Press room without ceremony just before our daily conference was due to begin, sat on the edge of a table with his legs swinging, and said: "I came in because I just wanted to thank you all for the way in which you have understood our work while I have been out here. It isn't everybody yet who has realised that this air war is war in a new dimension. It is a separate and different war from the land and sea wars, though closely linked with them. It is only with the realisation of that fundamental fact—and I think it's one which neither the Huns nor the Japs have ever grasped—that we'll be able to stop the war from going on much longer than it need."

Then he referred in short, staccato phrases, so that the words seemed to come out with difficulty, to a message of sympathy which the correspondents had sent to him about Lady Tedder. "I was grateful to you for that," he said, "it made a difference. She loved the service—and she cared to go out on the job." He left us almost abruptly, but, in only a couple of minutes, he had made a very deep impression on the correspondents.

During this war I have travelled thousands of miles and met scores of well-known people, but only two have struck me outstandingly as having, in addition to force of char-

acter, that spark of intuition and imagination which glows from the fire of what people, for want of a more precise word, call "genius." and they have been men of very different types—Wavell and Tedder. Sir Arthur, who is 52, is a wiry, restless figure, "like a pale, thin gremlin," as somebody described him, with alert and almost bird-like eyes. He knows every detail of the Air Force's work, but his main absorption is planning air strategy on a broad and far-seeing scale.

* * * * *

By the middle of January, the Eighth Army was ready to move again—it had got up the supplies it needed for the last drive to Tripoli, thanks to magnificent behind-the-lines work by lorry-drivers, lightermen and pilots of transport aircraft. (Every old 'plane available was pressed into the work of rushing military supplies up forward. One of the desert veterans so used was an old Lockheed named "Lothair," which had been a British Airways machine before the war, had flown over a million miles, had taken Chamberlain on his "peace in our time" flights to Godesberg and Munich and now was destined to be the first transport plane which eventually reached Tripoli!)

Up in the desert, sitting in sandstorms, being dive-bombed and living on bully-beef, the energetic Norman Smart was recording the activities of the mixed force of British armour and infantry which swept along the coast from Buerat, while other columns of New Zealanders and tanks made for Tripoli over the inland desert. Smart was right up forward when the advance began and he stayed with our advance troops all the way to Tripoli. When he rode in to the city behind the tanks he dumped his belongings on the pavement of the main square and there and then, under the astonished eye of an Italian military policeman, proceeded to write a full account of how our

Tripoli victory had been won. His story was so much more graphic than anything I could myself write at second-hand that I have persuaded him to contribute to this chapter a detailed and expanded account of what took place.

This is what Norman Smart has written:

The legend of Rommel's invincibility as a general (if not of that of his military astuteness) was finally ended when the Eighth Army broke through his last static line of defence in Tripolitania at the Wadi Zemzem, south of Buerat, on January 15, 1943. Rommel had been out-generalled by a little man called Montgomery, his troops had been out-fought by the men of the Allied nations, his war materials had been bettered by British and American technicians and their manufacture had been slicker by the goodwill of every man and woman labouring in a factory at home for the Allied cause.

And in the Wadi Zemzem not only did I see the end of the Germans and the Italians in the desert and the shadow of their end in Tripolitania; I saw in that rocky, bare, unutterably dull landscape, the beginnings of our final victory against all the forces of Fascism.

The Wadi Zemzem will not figure largely in history books, but it was an important facet in the shape of our advance. It was important because, once we had gone through it, Rommel never had the chance, the power or the supplies to hold another line in Tripolitania. Whatever doubts there may have been about the end of the struggle—and the wise soldier never counts his chickens until they have plenty of feathers—they were finally resolved that day.

Before I tell you why that was so, I must give an idea of the kind of line which the Germans had made along the Wadi Zemzem. The German main positions stretched in

a rough triangle from above Buerat on the coast inland to Gheddahia and then south to Fortino. The Wadi Zemzem, stony and impassable in many places, with high cliffs lining its sides, was the geographical spine to this line. Below Fortino it was known that the Germans had armoured patrols ferreting about in the desert towards the region of Bu Ngem. They were more or less a flexible continuation of the line, with the job of seeing that the Germans were not outflanked by our armour.

Inside this triangle the German forward positions took a quarter-circle sweep from above Buerat towards Fortino. The Germans had the advantage of some small wadis, or dried watercourses before some of their defences. On ridges about these wadis they had placed their artillery in extremely good positions. I found afterwards when we had broken through this line that it was heavily mined, had strong barbed wire fences and had a number of defence trenches hewn out of the rocky ground. It was an excellent defensive line. Rommel could have made a fight of it there and caused us a certain amount of trouble. But he didn't fight. Having held us up there temporarily, he cleared out in the night, leaving a few troops to engage in a rearguard action.

It was because he cleared out of that fairly strong position on that day, January 15, 1943, that the last mists of doubt about the end of the fight for Libya were dispelled. If he could not hold that position it was fairly plain that he could not hold any other with his tattered forces. And so it turned out. All the way to Tripoli Rommel never stiffened his troops into a line of resistance. They were always fighting tough little rearguards with perhaps two hundred men, or fewer, to keep the Eighth Army from the heels of the main retreating forces.

The Zemzem line was the final door to Tripoli. We burst it open at precisely 10.30 p.m. on the night of

January 15, with a barrage lasting for an hour and a half which set the indigo desert sky afire and shook the ground for miles. It was a trifling affair compared with the barrage which broke the Germans at El Alamein, but there wasn't much point in using a sledge-hammer when a small carpenter's tool would do the job. It impressed me, however. I am always impressed by gunfire. My nerves are perpetually ready to be impressed by an accumulation of sound, probably because I have always disliked loud noises and am aware of them long after they have slipped into the commonplaces of other people's lives.

For days I had watched the steel spring of our attack being drawn back ready to thrust at the Germans. Guns, tanks, supply columns had been flooding up forward ready for this attack. They churned the desert tracks ankle-deep in dust, a choking blinding dust which eddied through the closed windows of my car making the atmosphere like a London fog. Sweeping in long clouds into the air over miles of desolation, this dust must have been marked by German reconnaissance 'planes. They probably knew an attack was coming but they did not know exactly where and they certainly did not know when.

We were going to break the German line just above Gheddahia and the barrage presaged the infantry attack. In the afternoon I had arrived a few miles behind our forward troops. Our armoured patrols were being shelled away on a ridge to the north. They were trying to probe the enemy's defence secrets. Also up forward were some infantry patrols who had been given the unenviable job of showing themselves to the enemy as much as possible so that they could draw his fire and gain as much information as they could.

They were obviously gaining some information by this dangerous method when I arrived there, because I could

hear the bursts of machine-gun fire from the German defensive positions. We needed all of that information because for the last week the Germans had been extremely fortunate in the strategical positions of their air-fields, which made aerial reconnaissance a hazardous and often profitless venture.

Behind the lines I found that I had arrived early and well before much of our fighting equipment. We were carefully keeping it dispersed around the desert until as late as possible in order to lessen the chances of its being noticed, bunched significantly together in one place, by any German or Italian reconnaissance 'plane which happened to come over.

Then, late in the afternoon, as if urged by some hidden hand, the whole battle organisation arose before my eyes like some giant circus.

Transports carrying ammunition and food began to fill the air with the dust of their wheels. A main dressing-station complete with surgeons, anæsthetists and a blood bank arose from the ground as if by magic. While I was waiting cold-bloodedly for the small battle to begin I walked around this dressing-station. There were two tents for blood transfusion cases connected by a canvas, blanket-covered alley, to an operating tent. In these two tents orderlies were fixing up a crude warming apparatus for patients with the help of the ever-useful petrol tin.

The petrol tin was again present in the operating tent. There it was being used to shade the lights over the operating table. While I was walking around this miniature hospital fresh blood was being brought in by car from a nearby air-field. On that air-field waited hospital 'planes to evacuate badly wounded men who needed specialist treatment.

Outside preparations for the scrap were going on fast.

From all over the long depression in the desert which had been chosen for battle headquarters came short bursts of small arms fire as the infantrymen tested their weapons ready for the night. Some had already gone forward to take up their positions. They were lying out there in shallow trenches out in the rocky ground, patiently awaiting the zero hour. Others were moving, like slowly crawling ants, under the shelter of a ridge towards the enemy positions. Lazy dust clouds rose up around them from the busy transports still engaged in bringing up supplies. Tanks, which give the infantry tremendous moral support, stole soundlessly into these preparations. They came soundlessly, because there was a stiff wind blowing away from me towards them. It was a mild shock to see them marshalling so quietly there, unaccompanied by the bedlam of machinery they usually bring with them. On a ridge a quarter of a mile away engineers were hastily erecting a barbed wire prison for any prisoners we might take. Just as the sun was settling on the horizon a great dust cloud blanketed everything from view as the tanks moved off to take up their positions for the attack.

Punctually to time it started. The night echoed with the strident orchestra of the artillery, each separate gun flashing with the monotonous regularity of a light-house as its shells were discharged. Shadowy figures which were infantry rose up from the desert and began stumbling forward over the rocky ground under the protection of that steel curtain flung by our gunners from far back. With them went sappers prodding the ground with bayonets, feeling for the metallic contact which means the edge of a minefield. Through the night air, pallidly but insistently, came the sound of bagpipes, fighting for a place in that tremendous noise of battle. It came from the pipers going forward with each company.

Tanks began trundling forward slowly in the wake of

the infantry. They were all going for a point ahead slightly north-west of Gheddahia, skirting a big anti-tank ditch on the way. Their path was traced for them by the tracer shells from two Bofors guns placed each flank which fenced them in so that they did not mistake the direction.

It did not take very long. Resistance was weak. The forward infantry company was reported to be twelve hundred yards from the starting-point within eighty minutes. Success signals fled upwards from Verey pistols as they captured the positions assigned to them. Within six hours of the first shell from the barrage, they had cut the enemy line and another battalion of the Highlanders went through the gap they had made in the minefield to spread out and mop up any remaining stray Italians or Germans.

Although the army had been prepared for much greater resistance at this point, great numbers of loaded supply trucks had already been gathered behind the lines ready to go forward, so that we were able to continue the pursuit without pausing. When I pushed on the following day there was a great press of these vehicles gathered at the narrow gap in the minefield impatiently waiting to go through. They steered slowly through this gap where as yet the engineers had barely had time to examine the edges for mines. After that they accelerated and spread out over the desert, dusty clouds marking the scores of paths they took in the race for Tripoli.

When I stopped, with two other war correspondents, to cadge some rations from a Scottish Camp Commandant and incidentally asked if he had seen the infantry come by, he said: "They came tearing through here like they'd all the cats in hell after them; you'll never catch them." We did catch them many miles further ahead, but they had certainly set up a cracking pace.

Tremendous competition began to develop between men of different units now that Tripoli had become something more than a mere name in the future. Before we reached Tripoli seven days later, it reached the feverish infectious competitive spirit which you see at school sports. In his personal message to the troops before the action, General Montgomery had written: "Some must stay back to begin with, but all will be in the hunt eventually." From the determined manner in which the men of the R.A.S.C. were forcing their wagons along over some of this very difficult and stony country, it looked as if they wanted to get into Tripoli before the fighting men!

I snatched a quick lunch near a deserted enemy encampment where freshly broken eggshells showed how hot was the scent of the trail we were following. Lying about in disorder amongst the rubbish left behind were bottles of Italian lemonade powder, military maps and a broken camera. We took the lemonade powder and the maps; the camera looked too suspiciously like a booby trap to be touched. A lot of us lost our way eventually through lack of signs. A military policeman who directed us explained that the advance had been so fast that the army had run out of signs. This deficiency was quickly repaired and the remainder of the Highland Division's route to Tripoli was plainly marked with cairns built of petrol tins.

I camped that night by a ruined Italian fort from which an Italian battery had been told to impede our advance. There I found the whole of that Italian battery and their guns. They had been captured intact. One of our own officers told me with a huge grin that there was only a lieutenant in charge of the battery when it was taken. The two senior officers had been blown up by one of their own "S" mines, a vicious contraption which jumps into the air when trodden on and then explodes, flinging marble-sized steel balls over a radius of a hundred yards. Their

fate tickled our infantry, who suffered many casualties from these dangerous static weapons. The captured Italians looked happy in their failure to hold the positions and welcomed their captors with almost domestic friendliness.

In their headlong forward rush our troops were in Misurata within forty-eight hours of breaking the German line. They had already by-passed Crispi. They barely checked at Misurata, slowing sufficiently to throw off a handful of men to occupy the town.

After the desert this piece of country was a paradise. There were white houses shining in the sunshine, rows of palms and even an occasional sight of real green grass. All of these small towns seemed to have plenty of water, which ran in small viaducts around the outskirts. Members of my party flung themselves from the car to drink in the one outside Crispi and lave faces which had been washed in only half a pint of water a day for a month.

Misurata was our first halt. This compact little town was a very heaven after the cruel sparseness and the discomforts of the desert. The roads had been left unmined. The only apparent sign that anything had been done by its Italian masters before they had fled was on the main road leading into the town which had been dynamited in two places. Perhaps this was the precaution exacted by the Italian police who had been left there to keep order. Perhaps they expected hordes of soldiers to come rushing into the town intent on looting and rape. I don't know. It seemed a particularly puerile thing to do and made the entry into the town during those first hours a bumpy business through a series of Arab slums.

The most astonishing thing to me when I arrived in the middle of the town was to see these Italian policemen, uniformed, jack-booted and armed with pistols and

carbines, lounging about in the sunshine and carrying on erratic conversations with the few British soldiers visible. There seemed to be more armed Italians in the place than armed British soldiers. They were not doing their job of preventing disorder very well. On the outskirts of the town the Arabs were having a field day, looting beds, bedding and small pieces of furniture like unwatched children stealing from a pantry.

While this was going on and the police dallied in the streets, the man who was supposed to be in charge of them, a fat, pendulous-bellied Neapolitan named Armedio Decara, was near nervous prostration in his finely-furnished house facing the main street. It was easy to find where he lived because of the number of guards wearing pistols who draped the entrance gates. They leapt from their lethargy and gave cracking British salutes as three War Correspondents strolled through the gates to see their chief. Decara, wearing a magnificent uniform in which he must have swaggered in less unfortunate times, was pathetically anxious to please and to give information. There were crumpled blankets on the sofa where Decara had been lying awaiting calls from British officers. He fidgeted his podgy fingers around a phial of aspirin as he talked.

He offered no hospitality other than nauseous Italian cigarettes, explaining that the Germans who had been in the town had drunk it dry and eaten almost all the food. The civilian population had been living mostly on camel meat because the local butcher was only allowed to kill one beast a week.

Luncheon in the Misurata hotel was an epicurean feast after the desert diet of bully beef. I shall not easily forget that meal. We had Minestrone soup with grated Parmesan cheese, an omelette, bread, butter and coffee. A bottle of acid Sicilian wine completed the feast. It looked

as if the fat police chief was painting a gloomier picture of the food situation than was necessary.

While I was in Misurata I heard that our troops had by-passed Garibaldi, an Italian farming community numbering about a thousand, and were pushing onwards to Zliten. We followed them early the next day. Scores of Italians who had been left behind by the Germans through lack of transport were coming forward to surrender to our troops. A single British infantry company captured two hundred men of the Pistoia Division in the marshes below Crispi. A similar number went "into the bag" in the same area because they suddenly found they had been cut off from further retreat by one of their own mine-fields. The mines had been laid by men of the German 90th Light who forgot the Italians behind—or ignored them.

The holy town of Zliten, with its innumerable white tombs of dead Arabs set in fertile countryside of palms and olive groves, was the next pleasant sight on the route to Tripoli. White cloths in token of surrender fluttered from almost all the houses as we hurried through, passing lines of enthusiastic Arabs waving a welcome and shouting "*Saida!*" (Hail!)

Thirty terror-stricken Italians were hiding in the town hall when the first troops arrived. They were afraid to come out for fear of being murdered by the Arabs, so an Intelligence lieutenant temporarily took charge of the town to prevent disorder.

Homs was the last, and the most looted, town before Tripoli. Except for a few skulking Arabs there was nobody left in the town at all. The people who had been there had done a pretty thorough job of cleaning up everything which looked to be of the slightest value. In a quick tour I saw nothing but smashed furniture littering the floors of houses, flats, shops and offices. The only

thing the looters missed were two large office typewriters in the house of the Governor.

A few miles beyond this town the enemy held us up for some hours with an enormous anti-tank ditch, the biggest I have ever seen. The road had been blown and the ditch stretched for hundreds of yards on either side, finishing in country impassable for any kind of transport. The ditch was twenty feet wide and twenty feet deep. A column of stationary traffic half a mile long stood waiting before the big cavity in the road where those grand chaps, the infantrymen, were slogging away under the moon with spades, trying to make a path.

They did it in a matter of a few hours by working in shifts. Towering above them as they worked was a steep hill surmounted by a fort from which Italians had been shelling us a few hours earlier. This fort, quickly christened Edinburgh Castle, was captured by infantry almost as quickly as it was named.

It was in the shadow of this fort that, in my anxiety to get to Tripoli as quickly as possible, I had a slight brush with a genial general. His name is General D. N. Wimberley, and he commands the Highland Division. He stood for hours in that immense hole in the road encouraging the infantrymen at their work. The hole was finally filled and traffic began to move forward. Just as the fifteen hundredweight truck in which I was riding with Aubrey Hammond of *Allied Newspapers* and Henry Gorrell of *United Press*, reached the broken piece of road, General Wimberley darted from the shadows and said: "Who are you?"

"War correspondents, sir," I answered.

General Wimberley took hold of the front of the truck as if he would push it bodily from the road.

Said he: "Oh, no you don't, my lad. You take that

truck and park it over there until I tell you to move. You can't write about the war until we've won it, you know. I've got guns and ammunition to get through here as quickly as possible."

So we had to park our truck for an impatient half-hour by the roadside, while the guns and ammunition went through. General Wimberley had not forgotten us at the end of that time. He suddenly appeared again and said: "Now you can go forward, but mind you don't block the road. Good luck."

I'd like to think that all generals with major war problems on their minds would behave as charmingly as that in similar circumstances.

The anti-tank ditch was only one of the obstacles which the enemy put in the way of the advancing army before they finally got to Tripoli. All the way through there were broken bridges, blown roads, smashed culverts and annoying little ambushes. The infantrymen were often called upon to oust Germans and Italians from secure little positions overlooking the road where they had manned anti-tank guns and machine-guns. They had quite a number of casualties in these isolated little actions. The route to Tripoli along the coast road taken by part of the Eighth Army is dotted with small mounds of earth where lie fighting men who never saw the goal at which they were aiming.

By this time the urge to get to Tripoli in the shortest possible time had become a fever among the officers and the men. I saw a young Maltese infantry officer, slight in build and wearing spectacles, after one of these small infantry actions. He had five bullet wounds in his body. He argued passionately with the Medical Officer who wanted to send him back for hospital treatment. I think he got his way. The last time I saw him he had climbed into a truck and was still going westwards. . . .

On the night of January 22, we camped barely twenty miles from Tripoli. A small German pocket of resistance, coming chiefly from an eighty-eight millimetre gun a few miles up the road, made further progress impossible. All that night great red flashes lighting the sky from the direction of Tripoli showed where the enemy were blowing up useful installations before evacuating the town.

We had come forty miles that day. They were forty of the wickedest, most trying miles I have ever travelled. There were something like twenty breaches in the road made by enemy sappers, who had chosen the most awkward spots to delay their pursuers. The men of the Eighth Army didn't fight those forty miles; they hacked and dug their way through them. Only a wave of overwhelming enthusiasm inspired by the thought of the last town in the Italian Empire almost within their grasp got them through in such record time.

I spent much of the afternoon using an axe to cut a way through orchards and glades for the car, where the road had been cut and a detour had to be forged. We pushed our car up steep ascents to get on to the road again, so many times that I began to feel that I had walked most of the way.

Friendly tanks helped lighter vehicles by hauling them out of difficulties. The Commander of a Grant got our car out of a rutted track in an orchard. He hauled the car in which Alexander Clifford of the *Daily Mail* was riding out of a similar difficulty. "I shall have to charge ten cigarettes a time for this," he said, as the tank was shuttled back and forth on these haulage jobs.

At one diversion I saw a gunner major digging furiously with a shovel to get a vehicle through. Some officers got down and scrabbled at the loose earth with their hands to make a firm path for cars and wagons.

The spirit of competition to be in Tripoli first became intense. At one diversion there was one of the Provost Marshal's officers with his shoulder to the wheel of his truck as he urged the driver up an incline. Somehow batteries of guns were got through the rutted tracks churned by a squadron of tanks ahead. Every mile or so we passed dead Germans or Italians lying by the roadside under their great-coats. One of them was a German who was shot dead by the infantry just after he had blown up a culvert.

I came into Tripoli just after dawn the next morning. That eighty-eight millimetre gun up the road had been silenced during the night. More trouble in the way of diversions was expected on the way. But infantry had been working overnight at the few places where the road was destroyed and I did that last twenty miles within three-quarters of an hour.

Entering Tripoli was a tremendous thrill. Italians raised their hats, policemen saluted, Arabs waved cheerfully, as the staff car in which I was now riding rushed through the tree-lined avenues on the outskirts of the town. Like most newspapermen who have reported the way of the world for some years, I am not easily given to emotion. But nothing could stop the excitement bubbling within me. I even forgot the toothache which had been nagging me for weeks and the revolt which my always-temperamental stomach had staged against the rough desert food.

But my feelings were poor things compared with the ecstasy of the rugged men of the Eighth Army who were actually grasping the palm of victory which they had won for themselves by driving the enemy back fifteen hundred miles from Alamein. Not all of them could go into the town, but those who did must have had the supreme thrill of their lives. I

was sorry for those who had to camp outside the town and watch luckier people hurrying along the road in cars and trucks.

Tanks were parked around the fountain in the Piazza d'Italia, main square of the town, when I arrived there. A great crowd of Jews were standing on the pavement near the Bank of Rome building, staring with suppressed excitement at their deliverers. Armed Italian police stood about in the sharp morning air before the sun came over the housetops to warm the conquered city.

I took a quick look at all this, at the twin pillars fronting the harbour, one bearing the Roman wolf suckling Romulus and Remus, at the badly damaged harbour and at the wreckage wrought to the installations by the Germans and Italians before they left. All the war correspondents who had arrived were rushing about the place doing the same thing before they sat down to type their despatches in time to catch a Cairo-bound aeroplane which, so the rumour went, was leaving Castel Benito airport within a couple of hours. I sat on a stone bench beneath the old Turkish fort and typed what I saw as the sun rose on the town and the inhabitants awoke to a new régime.

A piper marching up and down the Piazza Castello filling the morning air with the music of Scotland; Italians coming on to their balconies above the square to take a peep at their conquerors; the Italian police with their polished boots, Sam Browne belts and revolvers, who clicked out salutes to British officers and were constantly being sent on errands to the police canteen near-by for cigarettes; British tank men brewing up their strong, sweet tea in the middle of the square with water fetched from the fountain; the delicious smell of frying bacon as these men cooked and ate their breakfasts; the happy fighting men

who whistled and sang in their success as they shaved and washed by their tanks.

It was fascinating to see the picture slowly being painted before my eyes.

The Grand Hotel on the sea-front seemed to be working normally. When I went in and asked for a room with a private bathroom an English-speaking receptionist took the order as if he had been doing the same thing for khaki-clad men for the last two years. He gave me my room. He gave me my private bathroom. What he didn't tell me was that water was only turned on for one hour a day through shortage of fuel at the water-pumping station, so that my bathroom was almost useless. A chambermaid just stared at my pile of dirty clothes and said they could not be washed. The food was very bad, mostly consisting of Italian bully beef and hard little biscuits. The coffee was ersatz, the red wine expensive and like vinegar.

The novelty of Tripoli quickly wore off. The mirage of a town flowing with milk and honey which danced before us in the desert faded away and the hard substance of reality was a great disappointment. I suppose one could expect nothing much of such a town in war-time. I thought it was a dirty, and, apart from the attractive white promenade, ill-conceived town.

Perhaps it was as well that Tripoli did not come up to anybody's expectations. After all, it was only the first step on the road to victory and not a place in which to dally.

XI

DESIGN FOR VICTORY

"With these military idiots, one never knows where they will attack next."—Adolf Hitler, September 30, 1942.

THE Eighth Army had been given the tools and had finished its immediate job.

It is no reflection on the achievement of General Alexander and General Montgomery to point out that they were the first of our Middle East commanders who, before they began their battle, had obtained the full amount of the equipment which they knew they needed. Auchinleck before them, and even more so Wavell, had been constantly harassed by the problem of supply; it had governed and hampered their every movement. But the Alexander-Montgomery achievement had been a great one, nevertheless. For those generals had taken over their commands in August, 1942, in circumstances which had been singularly unpropitious. Egypt appeared to be in serious peril, and our fighting men, holding doggedly on to the El Alamein position, the last before Cairo, had been exasperated, if not cast down, by Rommel's record of successes. The news of the change in the command had roused only a moderate degree of hope. The British public at home had begun to regard the whole subject of British generals with scepticism, and even the Military Correspondent of *The Times*, commenting on the new appointments, had acidly remarked: "Commanders in the Middle East have changed so frequently that the subject can now be approached only with tempered enthusiasm."

Any two generals less resolute might well have been discouraged before they began! Neither, luckily, was of a type to be affected by the varying fortunes of war. Alexander had made a triumph out of a retreat in Burma and Montgomery, wiry, spartan and indefatigable ("a Cromwellian figure," as Churchill has called him), was a soldier of such a tough, aggressive type that, after Dunkirk, where he had commanded the Third Division, he had exhorted his men: "If you run out of ammunition, tear the enemy to pieces with your hands."

Now, after only two months of hectic preparation, and three months of fighting and marching, the army of Alexander and Montgomery had delivered Egypt, conquered Tripolitania and was preparing to root out the enemy from the last Tunisian tip of Africa. It was an historic achievement; and it received an historic commemoration when Mr. Winston Churchill came to Cairo on Tuesday, January 26, after his conference with President Roosevelt at Casablanca.

For several days strenuous efforts were made (for security reasons) by the authorities in Cairo to keep secret the Prime Minister's presence. But it was a secret which was difficult to maintain. I got my own first hint of Mr. Churchill's visit within a few hours of his arrival.

I had been due to lunch that day at the Embassy. At ten o'clock in the morning an agitated A.D.C. rang up, and his state of excitement came plainly across the telephone line. "I'm so sorry," he said, "but we are going to put off that luncheon to-day. The fact is, we have had some people who have turned up here rather unexpectedly. Perhaps some other time, eh?"

The news that Mr. Churchill had been in Casablanca was already known. A first faint question-mark arose in my mind as to whether the Casablanca meeting and my own

cancelled luncheon might have any connection? I made some inquiries; in vain.

Then, an hour later, while I was sitting in the Press room writing, Clare Hollingworth, of *Allied Newspapers*, came in and said: "Have you heard this talk about Churchill?" It seemed that, going her rounds in the morning, she had encountered an army private who had jerked a thumb in the direction of some official building and informed her: "Churchill's just been in there, miss. Just popped in to 'ave a look round like, you know."

Clare and I did then manage to confirm the news for ourselves and that evening the army took the war correspondents into its confidence, but promised dire penalties for anyone who spoke about Mr. Churchill's presence. They were right, of course, for the majority of people in Cairo did not know of the Premier's arrival for at least a couple of days, and every day helped from the security point of view. But the need for secrecy led to some funny situations—of old friends, both in the know, meeting for dinner and talking about the weather or the situation in the Solomon Islands or anything to avoid the subject of The Secret which was what both really wanted to discuss. From the Press point of view, Mr. Churchill's visit to Cairo did not go nearly as badly as, so my colleagues told me, the previous one had gone. Some few details of the Premier's activities were given out each day by Donald Mallett, a former *Express* reporter now in charge of the Embassy's publicity section, and, thanks to J. H. Brebner, a highly successful Press conference was arranged for Mr. Churchill after his return from Turkey.

The ten days which Mr. Churchill spent in the Middle East were important and historic, but they were also exuberant ones. I doubt whether the Prime Minister has ever looked more energetic, youthful and gay, than he did as he went around Cairo in his blue uniform of an Air

Commodore, giving his "Victory" sign to all and sundry, or sat in the Embassy working in his favourite boiler-suit. And, indeed, the contrast between the military situation then, compared with that during his previous visit to Cairo was striking enough to make the most cautious of national leaders rejoice.

Mr. Churchill arrived out of a clear blue sky at 7.15 a.m. at an aerodrome near Cairo on that Tuesday morning, without any official welcome and watched only by the R.A.F. ground crews around the landing-field. With him in the 'plane came Sir Charles Wilson, his physician, two male secretaries, two detectives, and the rest of his party. Because of the early hour of his arrival, he had asked that neither Lord Lampson, the British Ambassador, nor Mr. Casey, the Minister of State, should meet him and, without ado, but smiling broadly at the goggling R.A.F. boys around him, he stepped into a yellow car and drove to the British Embassy, where he had a cup of tea and went straight off to bed.

After a few hours' rest, he got up, had another cup of tea, lit a cigar and drove to General Alexander's great headquarters building, where sentries rubbed their eyes as he swung in through the closely-guarded gate. He only stayed there a brief time, and then he lunched with General Alexander and Lord Lampson at the Embassy. He went back to G.H.Q. at four o'clock in the afternoon.

Very soon word began to spread around about the Prime Minister's presence. As darkness fell, windows swung open, clerks and A.T.S. girls craned out, unmindful of the black-out, in their efforts to catch a glimpse of what was happening. I stood and watched, too. For a long time all we saw were the twin figures of two palpable plain-clothes men guarding the portals of G.H.Q. and looking very conspicuous among the mass of scurrying uniforms,

and an open car full of redcaps waiting nearby. Finally, around half-past six, Mr. Churchill emerged, smoking the stub of a cigar, wearing a dark lounge suit and looking pleased with the results of his long conference. As he came out, a great wave of cheering went up from all the windows around. Mr. Churchill stood on the pavement smiling, waved his soft black hat and made the "V" sign before he got into his car and drove back to the Embassy for dinner.

The next three days were devoted to almost unremitting work inside the long, low, cream-coloured Embassy building, while Egyptian police and army redcaps stood on guard at the gates outside. Mr. Churchill used Lord Lampson's study, with its antique chairs, thick rugs and heavy gold picture frames, as his working office, and to that room there came a long succession of visitors for formal conferences or informal talks. Many of the visitors stayed to lunch. They included General Alexander, Admiral Sir Henry Harwood, General Maitland Wilson, from his Persia-Irak command, Mr. Casey, Minister of State, Mr. A. Kirk, the United States Minister, General Morshead, the Australian general who had been at Tobruk and later at El Alamein, Sir Arthur Tedder and his successor.

From all of these visitors Mr. Churchill asked scores of questions, to all of them he made his own brand of emphatic, ironical jokes. A characteristic though possibly apocryphal, story is of the Prime Minister's encounter, on his previous visit, with General Montgomery, who was expounding on the merits of his own austere way of living. "I don't smoke, I eat very little, I don't drink and I go to bed early," General Montgomery is supposed to have said, "and I'm a hundred per cent fit." To which Churchill, removing the stub of his cigar from his mouth, is alleged to have replied: "Really? Well, I smoke all I

can, I eat all I can, I do drink and I go to bed late—and I'm *two* hundred per cent fit." Another of the Churchill stories (for the accuracy of which, alas, I also cannot vouch) tells of the Prime Minister alighting from his aeroplane at a forlorn desert aerodrome. As he stepped from the machine and surveyed the bleak desolation of sand and scrub in which the Air Force men were living, he is reported to have exclaimed: "What austerity! What austerity! My goodness, this ought to be enough even for Stafford Cripps!"

Mr. Churchill finished his series of Embassy talks on Friday night and early on the morning of Saturday, January 30, he flew off in brilliant sunshine on his secret visit to Turkey. People in the streets of Cairo heard the deep throb of his four-engined aeroplane, looked up and saw it, but never guessed at the importance of its mission.

In his own account to the House of Commons on February 11, after his return to London, Mr. Churchill told of the course of his important visit to Adana, and of the talks he had there in a railway train in the shadow of the Taurus Mountains, with President Inönü, Premier Saracoglu and the Foreign Minister, M. Numan Menimencioglu. He explained: "Hitherto Turkey has maintained a solid barrier against aggression from any quarter, and by doing so, even in the darkest days, rendered us invariable service in preventing the spreading of the war.

"It is important in the interests of the United Nations and especially Great Britain that Turkey should become well armed in all the apparatus of a modern army and her brave infantry shall not lack the essential weapons.

"These weapons we and the United States are now for the first time in a position to supply to the full capacity of the Turkish railways and other communications. We can give them as much as they are able to take and give these

weapons as fast or faster than the Turkish troops can be trained to use them.

"I have made no request to Turkey except to get this rearmament business thoroughly well organised.

"And we wish to see in particular warm and friendly relations established between Turkey and our great Russian Ally northwards, to whom we are bound by the twenty-year Anglo-Russian Treaty."

Mr. Churchill tactfully cautioned those who might jump to conclusions about Turkey's immediate actions. "Do not try to read more into the communique than it conveys, he said. "It is no part of our policy to get Turkey into trouble. On the contrary, disaster to Turkey would be disaster to Britain and all the United Nations."

The journey to Turkey was undertaken at Mr. Churchill's request, and before he went there some people in Cairo had expressed their doubts about the wisdom of the trip, either fearing the perils of the flight, which, over the Gulf of Alexandretta, can be a treacherous one in winter, or else having misgivings about the degree of cordiality with which the Premier would be received. In the upshot, the visit can have done nothing except vastly strengthen the Anglo-Turkish alliance, seriously perturb the enemy, and materially aid the vital position of Turkey as a solid bastion on the eastern flank of the European theatre of war.

After a brief visit to Cyprus on his return flight, Mr. Churchill came back to Cairo and that evening received the whole corps of correspondents and local newspaper editors in the garish cream-and-gilt ballroom of the British Embassy.

We filed in at seven o'clock in the evening, a mixed assembly of about two hundred war correspondents in uniform, British and American civilians and Egyptian

editors in their bright red fezes. We took our places on the rows of gilt-and-scarlet chairs in a blaze of light. Members of the Embassy staff propped themselves against the pillars at the sides of the room and, as the last correspondent entered, three army redcaps slid quietly in front of the door, which was kept locked until the conference was finished.

Mr. Churchill, looking rather small in that great ballroom, but very smart in his Air Force uniform, came in, followed by Lord Lampson and Mr. Casey, and sat down at the green baize table in front of us. He stubbed out his cigar butt in a heavy glass ash-tray and then stood up and began to speak, very quietly and informally and without any notes.

It was a memorable occasion, and also a personal triumph for Mr. Churchill. Less than six months previously, in the closing days of August, 1942, he had met almost that same group of newspapermen in that same ballroom, when Rommel had been as he said "a morning's motor drive" from the city. On that occasion, wearing his siren suit and speaking gravely, Mr. Churchill had calmed anxieties by promising his hearers that "the soil of Egypt would be swept clear of those who have affronted it with invasion." Now, on this evening, the Eighth Army had chased Rommel for 1,400 miles and not only Egypt but Cyrenaica and Tripolitania had been cleared. Slowly, and with a faint smile of satisfaction which he was not able to disguise, Mr. Churchill said: "Now the fugitive from Egypt and Libya is endeavouring to present himself as the deliverer of Tunis. We shall see how that new character fits him, and fits the circumstances."

When he had reviewed the changed position of Egypt, Mr. Churchill paid tribute to "the prodigious victories of the Russian armies, under the general command and

direction of Premier Stalin, a great warrior and a name that will rank with those most honoured and most lasting in the history of the Russian people. Those very great events" he said, "have altered altogether the position in the East, have altered it, I think, in a way which may well prove to be permanent and favourable." He reviewed the North African landings, but warned that "very considerable fighting" must still be expected in Tunisia.

To us, as we listened, it seemed clear that, behind everything Mr. Churchill was saying, lay a growing conception of the new strategy which the new situation was making possible—a picture of the "design for victory" which was even then emerging.

He ended with a graceful tribute to the contribution made by the Press, which, he said, "has played a very helpful and useful role in sustaining the defence of Egypt and the spirit of the army." He concluded: "As to when the climax of the world struggle will be reached, as to whether further unexpected vicissitudes may lie before us, I shall attempt to say nothing to-day, but at any rate so far as we have gone we have every reason to rejoice, and in that rejoicing you are fully entitled to take your part."

There was a round of applause, somewhat chilled by the austere atmosphere of the draughty ballroom, and then the Prime Minister walked out. As he approached the door he turned back to us with an almost impish smile. "I really cannot resist doing this," he said, and, amid laughter, he gave his "V" sign, and stumped stolidly out.

On the day after his Press reception, Mr. Churchill visited King Farouk, who has always liked him. Smart blue-uniformed guards at the gates of the Royal Palace in the centre of Cairo clicked their heels and presented arms

as the Prime Minister's car, flying the Union Jack, drove in, and scarlet-liveried footmen bowed low as Mr. Churchill stepped from the car and strode down the inlaid marble corridors of the palace, past screens of richly-embroidered tapestry and paintings in heavy gilt frames. Sitting in a soft gilt chair, upholstered in scarlet plush, Mr. Churchill talked for about half an hour with King Farouk—an easy, informal chat which was afterwards said to have centred particularly on the changed situation of Egypt as a result of the Eighth Army's victory.

The rest of the day was comparatively uneventful. Mr. Churchill caught a glimpse of the pyramids when he lunched at Mr. Casey's country house on the edge of the desert at Mena. Then he did some shopping with Lady Lampson (among other things, he bought some lipsticks and a crate of oranges to take back home with him), was photographed holding the hand of the Lampsons' eighteen-months' old son Victor, and then went to the house of Mr. Kirk, American Minister, to see, in a private cinema in the basement, the newsreel pictures of his visit to Turkey and of the army's entry into Tripoli. In the course of the day he was visited by Prince Mohamed Ali, heir-apparent to the Egyptian throne, and uncle of the present King. He dined quietly at the Embassy. And the next morning, just after Cairo's air raid sirens had blown in a practice alert, he flew off to Tripoli, for a day with the desert conquerors which every man who saw him will remember for the rest of his life.

In brilliant sunshine, Mr. Churchill drove through the streets of Tripoli on that morning of February 4, past lines of British tanks which formed a guard of honour, to the city's main square, where representatives of a great number of the units of the Eighth Army were drawn up—men from the Buffs, the Middlesex Regiment, the Black Watch and many other regiments of the Highland

Division, and a small group of front-line nursing sisters. Standing with the wall of Tripoli Castle as a background, Mr. Churchill told them:

"The last time I saw this Army was in the closing days of August on those sandy and rocky bluffs near Alamein and the Ruweisat Ridge, when it was apparent from all the signs that Rommel was about to make a final thrust on Alexandria and Cairo. Then all was to be won or lost. Now I come to you a long way from Alamein and I find this Army and its famous Commander with a record of victory behind it which has undoubtedly played a decisive part in altering the whole character of the war.

"You have altered the face of the war in a most remarkable way. What it has meant in the skill and organisation of movement and manœuvre, what it has meant in the tireless endurance and self-denial of the troops and in the fearless leadership displayed in action, can be appreciated only by those who were actually on the spot. But I must tell you that the fame of the desert army has spread throughout the world."

Tough, desert-worn men listened enthralled as Mr. Churchill recalled the course of the long advance. He went on: "You were pursuing a broken enemy, dragging on behind you this ever-lengthening line of communications, carrying the whole art of desert warfare to perfection. In the words of the old hymn, you have

> "Nightly pitched your moving tents
> "A day's march nearer home.

"Yes, not only in the march of the army but in the progress of the war you have brought home nearer.

"I am here to thank you on behalf of H.M. Government, of the British Isles and of all our friends the world over. I do so from the bottom of my heart."

Mr. Churchill concluded: "Let me, then, assure you soldiers and airmen, that your fellow-countrymen regard your joint work with admiration and gratitude and that after the war, when a man is asked what he did, it will be quite sufficient to say: 'I marched and fought with the desert army.' And when history is written and all the facts are known your feats will gleam and glow and will be a source of song and story long after those of us gathered here have passed away."

Similar words of thanks were spoken to the New Zealanders and the men of the R.A.F. To many of the men there on that historic day, Mr. Churchill's visit must have seemed like a clear end of a chapter—and a fitting opening for that decisive testing-time of the war which even then most people in the Middle East were feeling to be imminent.

XII

SOMETHING TO BE DONE

"Their bloody sign of battle is hung out,
And something to be done immediately."

SHAKESPEARE, *Julius Caesar.*

THE grand strategy of the war was clearly reorienting itself. The battles to come would be fought in new ways, over new ground and in different directions.

The war correspondents in Egypt began to plan their movements for the reporting of whatever this new epoch of the war might bring. Some went to Algiers, some to Russia, and as for me, the *Daily Express* summoned me

home. Travel by regular passenger routes these days is a complicated business of negotiating priorities, waiting for vacant places, convincing a labyrinth of officials that your journey is really necessary. I spent a week of doing all this in vain, until a telegram arrived from the inexorable Foley: "Hurry along we need you badly." Thus spurred, I decided to abandon the avenues of commercial travel, and, instead, to hitch-hike my way across Africa by air. Officials warned me that I might get stuck for weeks half-way. Actually the whole journey, from Cairo to London, took me only eight days. That fact in itself was a testimony to the extent of the transformation which had taken place in the North African scene.

With the aid of the R.A.F. I pleaded for a passage with the United States Army Air Force. They made no difficulties and raised few formalities about giving me a lift to Algiers and beyond in one of the great transport planes with which they were already then covering the face of the African continent. Christopher Buckley, of the *Daily Telegraph*, and I were the first two British correspondents to celebrate the clearing of the North African coast, except Tunisia, which we hopped over, by travelling in this way.

In the pink light of an Egyptian morning I stood on an aerodrome near Cairo and watched while mountains of freight for the front were piled into a waiting aircraft which bore American markings and the affectionate nickname of Mimi. Once this machine had been on a trans-American commercial route taking business men and tourists from one city to another. Now lanky American ground-staff were filling the places where the passenger seats had been with barrels of gasolene, boxes of food, and mysterious packing-cases. It astonished me to see how much freight a modern aircraft can carry and still get off the ground. The Americans treat their transport aircraft like so many

motor lorries. They run them with an apparent lack of formality which is actually much more efficient than it looks. When you travel with American Army transports you do not get soft-padded seats—but you do get speed, safety and a vast amount of good fellowship on the way.

Through the aerodrome's barbed-wire fence I bought for twopence four tangerines the size of cricket balls which I intended to take home to friends in England. (Alas, I ate them on the journey.) I climbed in to the waiting 'plane and sat on an aluminium bench between an American army doctor (who prophesied that typhus might end the European war before military action could do so) and a British squadron-leader. Our pilot was a lanky, fair-haired expert who, until a few months ago had been on commercial routes, like his aeroplane.

Despite our heavy load, we took off without difficulty, and circled over the aerodrome, which seemed packed with machines of every type—a very different spectacle from that of the few scattered planes which I had seen there when I had passed over the same spot two years previously. We flew down the green stretch of country which is the Nile valley and is also virtually all Egypt, since all the country's wealth comes from the products of that narrow strip of fertile land. Then we turned off west and saw how that strip ends abruptly and the infinite yellow desert begins.

That 1,400-mile flight over the Libyan desert from Cairo to Tripoli was like flying through history. Spread out below us in hard shadows thrown by the sun on the glaring desert sands were clear marks all along the route of the great series of battles which have swayed backwards and forwards across the face of Libya since Wavell's first swoop on Benghasi in 1940. All along the line you could

see the clear outlines of bomb-craters, slit-trenches and dug-outs, while here and there was the black wreckage of burned-out lorries and crashed aircraft. We flew low over the Alamein battlefield. From the air those famous ridges which won fame through the battles which raged around them, such as Ruweisat ridge, looked pitifully small and unimportant desert undulations to have caused the deaths of so many men. Some of Alamein's trenches were already beginning to be sanded over by the drifting desert duststorms. Presumably some day all the traces of the desert fighting will disappear in this way—and the Libyan desert will have swallowed up the story of the Eighth Army's campaign just as, centuries ago, it swallowed up the army of Cambyses.

We came down once to refuel on the bright red soil of Benina aerodrome outside Benghasi and then droned on again over the desert until nearly dusk. I spent that night wrapped in an overcoat and four blankets sleeping on the floor of an aerodrome building at Castel Benito, outside Tripoli, amid a litter of old Italian novels, torn-up letters and empty chianti bottles, which the Italians seem to leave as a trail behind them at every place which they evacuate. We took off again soon after dawn and passed out of the green fertile country around Tripoli, over a ridge of barren mountains and on into country, the outposts of Tunisia, which grew increasingly desolate —nothing but miles of eternal sand and scrub broken only by the occasional glint of "shotts," great salt lakes now filled up with water from the heavy February rains, which, just at that time, had been bogging down our armies in Tunisia.

After we had been roaring over the desert for about four hours, glowering clouds which loomed up announced the approach of one of those heavy Mediterranean thunderstorms which blow up quickly and fiercely along this coast.

Soon our aircraft was tossing about like a small trawler in a heavy sea. You could not even sit tight on your aluminium bench, because every now and then the bench suddenly disappeared beneath you and left your body somewhere between the floor of the plane and the roof.

To my great personal satisfaction I saw that the squadron leader next to me was turning as green as I felt as a result of the bumping. After half an hour of the aircraft's lurching and swaying and as squally clouds raced by us, the squadron leader said, unsteadily, "Hell, if that's Tunisia, I've had it," and lay down suddenly on the floor. I joined him, with my head on a parachute as a pillow and for an hour we neither of us took much more interest in the landscape below us.

Up in the pilot's bay, the wireless operator was peering through the transparent nose of the machine, keeping up an incessant watch for any prowling enemy aircraft. But he never saw a thing.

Late that afternoon we climbed above the clouds to cross the dark ridge of mountains behind Algiers and ran out into temporary clear weather. We dropped down on to the great airport outside the city, where tents were whipping madly about in the wind and inches of yellow mud on the surrounding roadways made the scene look a desolate one. Our young American pilot climbed out of his cabin and surveying the damp and dismal scene said: "So this is sunny Algeria. Boy, those travel folders back home certainly fooled us."

But though our journey had not been comfortable, it had at least given us the satisfaction of feeling that at last North Africa was practically ours. Only a few months previously, anybody who wanted to travel as an ordinary passenger from one end of the Mediterranean to the other had to make a six-thousand-mile detour by

way of West Africa, which took at least a week. This direct flight of ours had taken, in total flying time, much less than twenty-four hours.

I got another feeling of pleasure, too, when I met some members of the First Army and was able, acting as a sort of unofficial link between two adjacent campaigns, to hand over a bundle of copies of the western desert newspaper *Crusader*, which I had brought from Cairo, "with the compliments and greetings of the Eighth Army."

I stayed in Algiers only long enough to fix myself up for the next stage of the journey and have brief chats with my two *Express* colleagues there, Alan Moorehead and John Redfern. Once again the Americans offered help without formality and promised me a further flight on the following day.

But the weather was still terrible. We made one brief hop from Algiers aerodrome and then, on a gusty, desolate flying-ground further towards the west we heard to our dismay that no more regular planes would be taking off that day. The oddly-assorted little party which had come from Algiers stood disconsolately around our aircraft in the muddy field—the American General John H. Lee, Chief of the Service of Supply, his adjutant, a genial British naval captain, a British army major, an R.A.F. squadron leader, Ronald Harker, who had just joined us and who in private life is a test pilot for Rolls-Royce, and myself. We ate bully-beef in our fingers out of a tin for lunch and wondered where we should be sleeping that night, for the bleak air-field looked unpromising.

It was General Lee who saved the situation for our small party. For within an hour the General was able to announce to us that he had "laid on" a special aeroplane, and a large transport machine at that, which

would take not only himself but also all of us to our next destination. Would we brave the weather, hope for the best and accompany him, or would we spend the night on that bleak landing-ground and wait for the regular machine which might or might not come next day? We took one look at the soggy aerodrome—and gratefully accepted the General's offer.

It was, in its way, a memorable flight, if only for the easy casualness with which it was carried out. We climbed into the field-grey American aircraft while rain cascaded on to its metal wings with a sound like machine-gun bullets and the wind whistled through the struts. Watching us enter, the young sergeant pilot, who looked little more than a schoolboy said with awe: "Gee, I've never had so many high officers in this plane before."

Then, as the engines roared out, the General came down the cabin to Squadron Leader Harker and shouted above the noise of the engines: "Our navigator's gone sick—will you carry on for him, or (turning to the naval captain) would you care to do it, sir?" The noble Harker, test pilot, who had never flown across North Africa before, manfully volunteered. With admiration mixed with anxiety I watched him climb into his new seat and sort out his navigation maps. I wondered if test pilots learned navigation and I also hoped that Harker knew that if we happened to pass over any piece of Spanish Morocco, which was not far away, we were likely to be fired on by neutral anti-aircraft guns.

"I shall read a book," said the Captain. "If you look out of the window you only start worrying about the weather."

We flew on just below the dark clouds which skimmed the occasional hilltops of the rocky North African coast. Inside our cabin, American bonhomie soon made us forget

any possible anxieties of the trip. First the General wrote a graceful testimonial letter to our young pilot, which we all signed. Then a poker game was started. Then we all began to get ourselves enrolled in the Short Snorters Club, that historic organisation. The General himself was an old-established member, as he proved by producing a string of dollar bills a yard long, covered with signatures of other members whom he had met in his extensive travels. While the clouds raced by outside and the rain pattered down, I paid the General and two others the equivalent of a dollar each, and my own membership of the Short Snorters was solemnly recorded on the face of the last of my Algerian bank-notes.

"Hey," said somebody to Squadron Leader Harker, putting his head round the door of the pilot's cabin, "would you like to become a Short Snorter?"

"Go away," said Harker, shuffling his maps about and making abstruse calculations in a note-book, "I'm busy."

Harker did a fine job for us, and just when we needed it the weather cleared up a good deal, too. We found our air-field, only a little way from the blind course which we had taken and, for all his youth, our pilot made a perfect landing. We said good-bye to the General and to all the American crew with gratitude and regret, for they had been grand travelling companions on a very unorthodox trip.

Now I was nearing the end of a journey of about twenty thousand miles, in which I had seen the picture of the war from half a dozen different angles. Much remained to be done, and perhaps much might remain to be faced. But it seemed clear to me that the end of this long journey of mine was coinciding with the end of one epoch in the war and the beginning of another. The United Nations were even at that moment preparing to hang out their

battle signs for new initiatives. And in the new phase of the war that was to come, two factors which might well prove decisive were those which I had seen on this journey so clearly and in so many places—in India, Persia, Egypt and Algiers—namely the toughness, adaptability and resilience of the British soldier coupled with the enterprise, zest and inventiveness with which the Americans were contributing their part.

In due course I reached Gibraltar. The sheer Englishness of that ancient stronghold, when you come to it from Eastern parts, nearly bowls you over. Its grey stone walls, like Chatham dockyard, its narrow streets, like Bath, its ancient Victorian houses and genteel, slightly seedy hotels, its red pillar-boxes, its "Imperial Tea Rooms," its policemen in blue British uniforms and its women in flat shoes and Scottish tweeds, all combine to make the British traveller from distant outposts realise that he is indeed coming very near to his spiritual home.

I spent one neutral night in Lisbon, where I ate (at a table next to one filled by Japanese diplomats) a last epicurean dinner of lobster soup and grilled sole, with Sam Herbert, our Press Attaché. Mrs. Herbert, a lively and beautiful red-head, turned out to be a sister of Jack Findon, the *Daily Express* war correspondent who was taken prisoner by the Japanese in Java, where he stayed on filing messages right up to the moment of his capture.

Only twelve hours after I had said good night to the Herberts in Lisbon, I was stepping out of an aeroplane on to that "west country airport" which so many wartime passengers now know. The wind which swept across the open fields seemed to my thinned Anglo-Indian blood a keen and bitter one. But the sandy-haired boy who carried my bag to the customs shed beamed up at me

and said: "Proper touch of spring in the air to-day, sir, eh?"

A foggy dusk was falling by the time we reached the railway station. The sepulchral stone building was grey and gloomy and the glass had all been shattered by bombs. I could not get a porter, there were no newspapers to be had, there was not time to join the long queue for a cup of tea. The train was crowded with khaki-clad men and women. I squeezed into a seat, digging my elbows into my companions on either side. As the train pulled out, past lines of grey squat houses, with many windows boarded up, I suddenly realised how overwhelmingly grateful I was to be home again.

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UNIFORM WITH

"OUTPOSTS OF VICTORY"

OUTPOSTS OF WAR

BY GORDON YOUNG

"Mr. Young read the signs in Berlin when the plot was being prepared. . . . He has certainly made the most of his powers of shrewd observation."—*The Times.*

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