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All through these anxious days another battle was being fought, the Battle of the Atlantic, in which the Royal Navy and the Merchant Service were fighting to keep going the flow of food and munitions from U.S.A. and the British Dominions. The United States was neutral, but it was well understood by her leaders whose battle the British were fighting. When, early in 1941, British funds began to run out, a new device called Lend-Lease was invented to take the place of cash. The flow of planes and munitions went on. At sea the British sailor was fighting with all his old courage and something more than his old resources. For a short time magnetic mines gave us a nasty turn, but the scientists came to our aid and the work went on. The losses were colossal; in the single month of March, 1941, they were just under half-a-million tons and still rising, but the British seaman showed he could take it: in many a merchant ship, like *Rawalpindi* and *Jervis Bay*, the spirit of Captain Fryatt and the sea-dogs of 1914-18 was still awake, and in the monotonous day-to-day work of the convoys or in spectacular jobs like the boarding of the *Altmark* and the evacuation of Dunkirk, the Royal Navy showed it still could do its stuff. On the sea, as well as in the air, we were holding our own.

On land also we were now not doing badly. Early in June, 1940, a new enemy loomed up in Mussolini and a new danger had to be met in the Italian armies on the borders of Egypt. In the thick of the blitz the British Government decided to send supplies and men around by the Cape to the Middle East—little as they could then be spared; and, when in September the Italian army moved towards Suez, we had an army ready to meet them. It was not very big but it was enough. A swift and vigorous assault, in which South African and Indian troops were prominent, began the clearance of Abyssinia; and Wavell launched a brilliantly successful attack on the invaders of Egypt. By the end of the year 1940 the Italians were in full retreat towards Benghazi.

But the triumphant advance of our army in North Africa was suddenly checked by two events, the diversion of part of Wavell's small army to Greece and the arrival in Africa of the redoubtable Rommel and a powerful force of Germans.

The Greek campaign was brief. The Greeks were more than holding their own against the army that Mussolini had launched against them through Albania in October of 1940, when they were suddenly threatened in April of the following year by a German army coming down through Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. This was too much. In response to their appeal for help, a force of some 60,000 men, including the New Zealand and Australian divisions, were hurried across from North Africa. They too were unequal to the weight of men and armour that the Germans were able to put in the field. In a

succession of short and sharp engagements they were driven out, but continued to fight in Crete; then Crete also was lost and the 15,000 survivors returned to Egypt. Greece, like Flanders, was a hard school, but we were learning.

Meanwhile at the beginning of April, 1941, Rommel had attacked in Cyrenaica. He failed to take Tobruk or to pass the borders of Egypt, but he drove us back. For several months the position was critical, but supplies were now pouring into Suez and, when the hot weather arrived, the danger was over. The Germans were left to sizzle for a month or two in the sand. A little to the north in Syria, during the same period, another German stunt had miscarried; in order to crush the attempt to open Iraq to the Germans, we had been obliged in April to force the hand of the French in Syria, and in a short and sharp campaign we disarmed the French and crushed the rising in Iraq in the month of June. The northern approaches to Suez were now secure.

The year that ended in July, 1941, had been critical. But we had held our own. The invasion of Britain had been prevented, the Luftwaffe had received a nasty knock, the Atlantic had been kept open, we had failed in Greece and Crete, but the Navy was still in the Mediterranean and Malta was holding out, we had won a great victory in Abyssinia and Italian East Africa, we had kept the Germans out of Syria, and held them off in Egypt. We no longer feared the Italians either on land or sea or air, and we had taken the measure of the enemy and were ready for more. Britain and



### PHASE 3— Hitler Attacks Russia

During six months the Germans advance into Russia and are driven out of Egypt.

(July — December, 1941)

THE invasion of Russia may have been madness, but it was at first a great success. The Russians appear to have been concentrated too far forward, and in the first few weeks they suffered terrific losses of men and supplies. The Germans advanced in four great drives, through Finland in the north and Rumania in the south, and a double thrust from East Prussia and occupied Poland in the west. It seemed as if nothing could stop them. They were soon at the gates of Leningrad.

A great armoured drive along the edge of the Pripet Marshes overran Smolensk and opened the way towards Moscow, and another drive to the south-east under the walls of Kiev opened the way to the rich cornlands of the Ukraine. When the first snows were falling in the north in September, Kiev was taken; a month later

Egypt were still besieged fortresses, but behind the walls the preparation for better things could still be carried on. The outlook in June of 1941 was still pretty black, but in the following month there was an important change; in July Hitler launched his armies on his long-prepared crusade to destroy the Soviet Union. However this crusade might go, it was going to use up a lot of German resources, and Britain was no longer alone.

Russian women watching their houses burning after a German attack.

Odessa fell, the approaches to the Crimea were threatened and Moscow itself was in serious danger. The Russians, however, were not routed; they retreated in good order, scorching the countryside as they went and leaving hardy guerilla forces to harry the German lines in the rear. They took a heavy toll of the invading troops and the fighting became extremely bitter. By the end of November, when the Russians' never-failing ally, General Winter, arrived on the scene, the invaders were knocking at the doors of Leningrad and Moscow, and had entered Rostov-on-the-Don. The great Dnieper Dam had been put out of action and the whole of the rich grain lands of the Ukraine and much of the raw materials of Soviet industry were now in German hands. There were many in Allied countries who reckoned that all would soon be over.

During these critical six months, while the Russians were steadily retreating and peace in the Far East hung in the balance, events were moving fast in North Africa. Under a new commander, Auchinleck, the 8th Army attacked and drove the Axis forces back. At the end of November the siege of Tobruk was raised, and by the end of the year we had reached Benghazi and were pushing towards the west. In this area things looked hopeful, but at the beginning of December something happened in the Pacific that was to alter the whole course of the war.

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