

An Outline of the War

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were now able to send 1000 bombers at a time to raid the German industrial centres. "The skies of Germany were black with chickens coming home to roost." This was nevertheless the critical year: the balance was still a long way down on the wrong side, but, if we could stave them off in Russia and North Africa and in China and the Pacific and keep the sea-route to America open for a few more months, all would yet be well.

PHASE 5— The Tide Turns

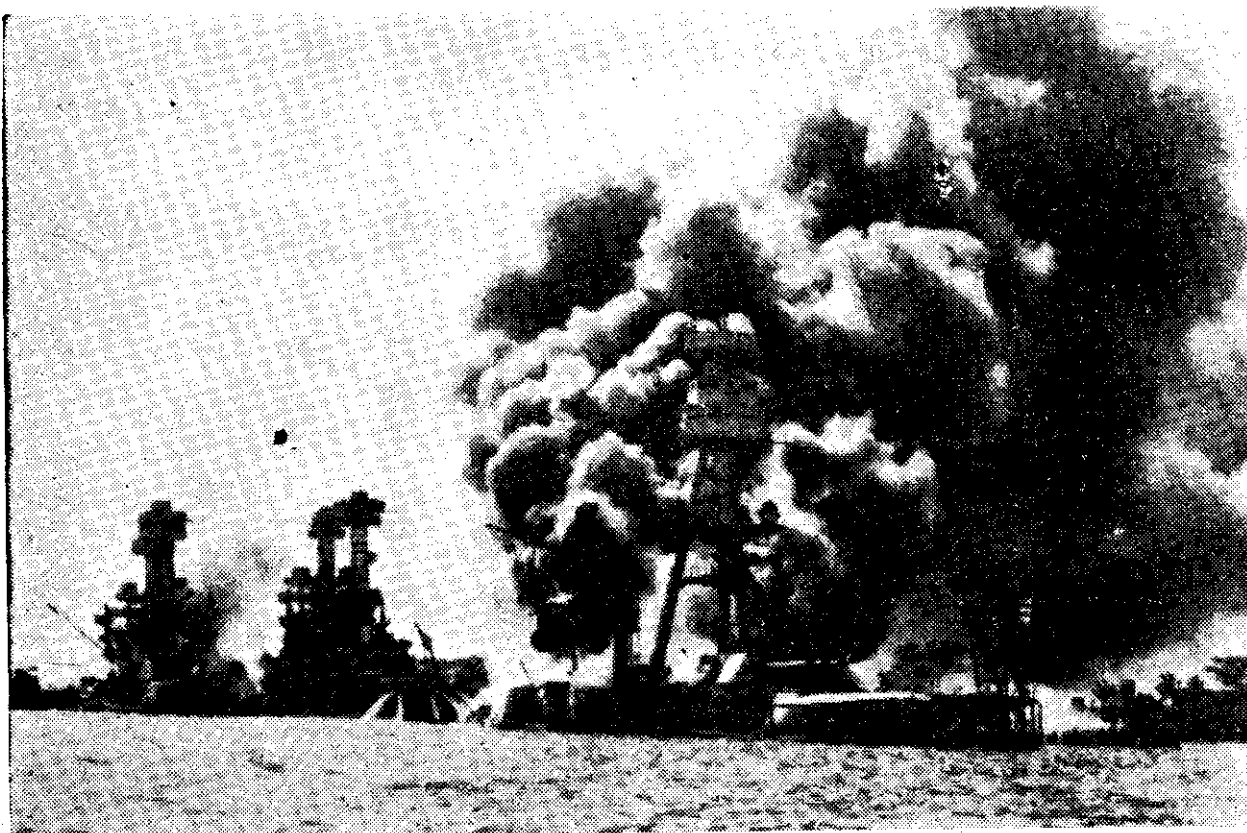
In the course of 12 months the 8th Army, with the help of a new army landed in Algiers and Morocco, drives the Germans out of Africa; Stalingrad is relieved and the German retreat begins in Russia; the Americans land on Guadalcanal and the Japanese begin to retreat in the South Pacific.

(July, 1942 — June, 1943)

IN the second half of 1942 there was a great transformation in North Africa. Under an inspiring new commander, who speedily infected all ranks with something of his own energy and confidence, and reinforced by new weapons and fresh troops, the 8th Army prepared to deal with Rommel. The splendid halo that had gathered round the German's head was about to be destroyed: in the Irish puritan, Montgomery, the dashing Nazi had met his match. On October 25 all was ready. Preceded by intense and far-ranging air attack, a terrific artillery barrage softened the enemy up, the engineers cleared the minefields, the new tanks went through, and the big battle was on. Nothing like such a concentration of firepower had yet been seen; and it was effectual. In ten days the *herrenvolk* were in full retreat and whole divisions of their Italian allies were laying down their arms. This time it was a rout: inside of a month the 8th Army was rolling into Benghazi, and by the end of December, aided by sea-borne supplies, they were approaching the port of Tripoli.

But by this time they were not the only Allied army in Northern Africa; away to the west the Germans had now to face a new enemy. A great Anglo-American army, borne by the greatest assembly of ships that the world had ever seen, had already landed (early in November, 1942) at a number of points on the Atlantic and Mediterranean coast, and was moving east. The landings were made with little loss either of men or ships, but the Germans got into Bizerta and Tunis first, and heavy fighting followed along mountainous approaches to these ports. There were hopes that Rommel's army might be cut off before it reached the shelter of Tunis, but these were disappointed. Instead Rommel dealt the Americans a nasty blow at the Kasserine Pass and things looked bad for a bit, but soon improved; the Allied forces from the east broke through the Mareth Line at the end of March, 1943, and joined up at last with the army of the west, to finish one of the most complete and spectacular victories of the war. The German attempt to evacuate was frustrated by the Navy and the Air Force, and more than 200,000

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United States battleships in Pearl Harbour after the Japanese attack.

PHASE 4— Japan Attacks U.S.A.

For seven months things look very bad: the Japs carry all before them in the Philippines and Malaya and the Dutch East Indies and reach New Guinea and the Solomons, Hitler still advances in Russia and Rommel drives the 8th Army back to El Alamein.

(December 7, 1941 — July, 1942)

AS early as July of 1941 the Japanese had made a deal with Vichy and had moved into Indo-China. This, together with other Japanese moves in the Far East, had produced American protests and demands for reassurances; a special Japanese envoy had been despatched to the United States and all eyes were fixed on Washington, when suddenly, early on the morning of December 7, Japanese bombers descended on the naval base at Pearl Harbour in Honolulu, caught the Americans off their guard, and sank four battleships and a good many other craft and put the whole base out of action. This terrible defeat completely altered the balance of power in the Far East. In order to make sure of the defence of Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean, the British Government had gravely weakened our Far Eastern establishments both on land and sea and in the air; with the American fleet and base disabled as well, and the French offering no resistance in Indo-China, the Japanese had it all their own way. On the day of the attack on Pearl Harbour they landed in Northern Malaya and in a few weeks captured the great naval base of Singapore and a British army of something like 60,000 men—one of the worst military disasters in the history of the

British people. Hongkong had already fallen. By the end of February, 1942, most of the Dutch East Indies had been overrun; New Guinea and the Solomons soon followed, and early in May the Philippines and the whole of Burma were also in the hands of the Japanese. The whole campaign, from the attack on Pearl Harbour to the surrender of Corregidor and the evacuation of Mandalay, had so far taken barely five months.

The Japanese, however, had suffered serious losses, especially at sea: at the end of January in the Straits of Macassar, off Bali in the middle of February, in the Coral Sea battle early in May, and away in the north at Midway early in June. Air attacks on our Ceylon bases had been beaten off with very heavy losses. But the Allies had suffered what were for the present even more serious losses, beginning with the two battleships, Prince of Wales and Repulse, off the coast of Malaya in December. Fresh Japanese landings were still taking place in the South Pacific. By the middle of 1942, it looked as if the way to Australia and New Zealand was still open. To the people in the blacked-out towns of New Zealand and especially to the indifferently-equipped home guardsmen, watching anxiously behind the wire along the beaches, the outlook was exceedingly grave.

Meanwhile, with the Germans still carrying all before them in Russia, Rommel had mounted a fierce offensive in North Africa. After steadily pushing us back between January and May, 1942, he suddenly put in all that he had: on June 13 we suffered a disastrous tank defeat, lost Tobruk and retreated into

Egypt, with alarming losses of men and material. Auchinleck reorganised his battered forces and prepared to make a last stand at El Alamein, almost within sight of the great naval base of Alexandria in the delta of the Nile. In the thick of it now was the New Zealand Division, dramatically returned from Syria to help to hold the fort. It was touch and go, but Rommel was held. His long communications, the interference of the Navy with his convoys, the terrible heat of July and August, and the grim determination of the defenders made a further advance for the present impossible.

This was a black period—the worst days of the war. With the Germans triumphant in Russia and North Africa, and the Japanese carrying all before them in the South Pacific, with the Burma Road cut and our Chinese ally tottering after five years of war on the edge of a precipice, with shipping losses in the Atlantic amounting to 600,000 tons a month, the outlook for the Allies seemed almost hopeless. But things were not in fact as bad as they seemed. Britain and the U.S.A. were now on a proper war footing, the gigantic industrial resources of both countries and of the Dominions had been mobilised, women by the hundred thousand were releasing men from the factories, immense air-training schools were in full swing in Canada and the U.S.A., and Australia and New Zealand, a great ship-building programme was under way, and improved aircraft were coming out of the factories in ever-increasing numbers. While our own industrial machine was thus expanding, we were now in a position to hamper the German effort: we