

WAR DIARY

HISTORY AS IT HAPPENS

In this section weekly will appear a day by day record of the events of history in the making. As some time elapses in the publication of "The Listener" this diary is one week retrospective.

Wednesday, December 25

A Cairo communique stated that a vast concentration of troops and artillery has been pouring into Libya and massing around Bardia.

The Greeks announced the fall of Himara with the capture of over 700 prisoners and quantities of material.

In the Far East a substantial reinforcement of all arms recently arrived at Singapore, and American naval experts were reported to have made preliminary plans for a "road to Singapore" comprising a chain of naval stations across the Pacific.

The New Zealand Official War Correspondent in the Western Desert reported that New Zealand A.S.C. drivers took part in the big advance.

Thursday, December 26

The Christmas Day speech of H.M. the King was fully reported and broadcast. The King stated: "We have surmounted a grave crisis. We do not underestimate any difficulties which confront us still, but we take courage and comfort from the successes our fighting men and their allies have won at heavy odds by land, sea and air."

There were no raids over either England or Germany over Christmas.

Dr. Benes broadcast from London that a German victory was now definitely impossible and it would not be long before Italy was out of the struggle.

Reports continued that German army trains were moving across Hungary to Rumania to take 300,000 new German troops to Rumania within a month.

Friday, December 27

With a slight abatement of the piercing cold on the Albanian front the battle for El Basan had been continued with increased violence. The Greeks vigorously attacked north of Pogradec. An Italian prisoner, a veteran of the Libyan war of 1912 said: "This campaign is a worse defeat than Caporetto and is largely due to the breakdown of the transport system."

The British and Dominion troops round Bardia were being reinforced and were taking up positions for an attack.

A correspondent of "The Times" who voyaged 3,000 miles with the Mediterranean fleet and saw no sign of the enemy asked whether this was due to Italy being short of fuel or the nation tired of the war.

For the third night in succession there was no enemy air activity over Britain, the longest spell of quiet Britain had known since September.

Broadcasting to America the Prime Minister of Eire, Mr. de Valera, appealed to "Ireland's American friends" for more weapons and foodstuffs, and said that if attacked Ireland would defend itself to the utmost of its power. He fully realised what his country's neutral decision involved.

Saturday and Sunday, December 28 and 29

Important negotiations have been in progress between the Vichy Government

and Germany but obscurity still cloaked the situation. A number of French naval units have already gone to North Africa from Toulon and Marshal Petain is said to have refused Hitler's demands for the French fleet.

A preliminary audit of the British resources in the United States revealed that Britain would run out of cash to pay for war materials early in the Autumn. A plan was being discussed to build 500 fighter aeroplanes daily in idle automobile plants.

The Germans renewed their air attack on England with raids against Southampton and against London.

American authorities reported the probable arming of 12 German vessels in Japanese ports for raiding activities in the Pacific as Hitler's aid to Japan in starting her programme of southward expansion timed to coincide with action by Germany in South-east Europe.

It was reported that the garrison at Bardia were preparing to evacuate when an urgent order was received direct from Mussolini that they must defend the town at all costs. Marshal Graziani was reported to be building additional fortifications at Tobruk as a second line of defence.

Monday, December 30

The full text has been published of President Roosevelt's broadcast talk in which he appealed to the American nation to turn itself into "the great arsenal of democracy" and pledged the government to expand its aid to Britain. He said: "If Britain were defeated the United States would be living at the point of a gun," and concluded, "I believe the Axis powers are not going to win this war."

Units of the Royal Navy engaged and damaged a powerful German warship in a short action in the North Atlantic.

The Germans carried out one of the severest raids of the war on London in which they tried to set fire to the city with incendiary bombs.

Admiral Darlan was reported to have conveyed to Germany Marshal Petain's view that he would not tolerate the passage of German troops across unoccupied France nor the German employment of the French navy, and that assurances on these points had been given to Britain.

Tuesday, December 31

The Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. P. Fraser, announced the rescue by an Australian ship of 500 people landed on a small island of the Bismarck Group from enemy commerce raiders. They were survivors from a number of vessels sunk in the South Pacific and the Tasman Sea.

Lord Woolton warned the people of Britain that they would have less to eat in 1941.

The Greek advance continued methodically in spite of bad weather, and four Italian supply ships were sunk in the Adriatic.

Hungary was reported to be planning complete mobilisation by January 15.

LUFTWAFFE "NEWS" Tales Of Rescued German Airmen

THE most interesting souvenirs of the war are the souvenirs that crawl out of the wreckage of German bombers and float down on the ends of parachutes. What these German airmen say provides the best horse-laughs of the war. They don't mind being taken prisoner because, first, they confess to a healthy respect for our fighters and secondly, because they have the quaint conviction that they will be home soon (Germany, by that time, having won the war).

Their information about the way the war is going is fantastic. They believe quite honestly that German troops are already on British soil. Their first question is to ask where the German lines are situated. One of them, in fact, said that while the barrage over Central London was intense, it was nothing compared to the barrage which the German anti-aircraft guns were putting up as a protective barrage against British fighters on London's outskirts.

A few of them are undisguisedly terrified of capture because they have been told that the English will take a terrible vengeance on them for the bombing of London. Poor wretches! They regard even a kindness with horrified suspicion.

Two stories illustrate the kind of punishment which the R.A.F. prefers. Under examination, a German airman claimed that he had bombed London ten times and wished that he'd survived to bomb the city thirty times more. Asked for an explanation of his bitterness, he replied that he wanted to bomb London in revenge for the devastation which the R.A.F. had caused in Germany.

Lack of Feeling

Two enemy airmen were picked up from a raft in the English Channel by an R.A.F. launch. One, badly wounded, died as soon as he was brought aboard. His companion was not even interested in his fate. An R.A.F. officer remonstrated with him for his lack of fellow-feeling.

"Why should I worry?" replied the airman. "I've never seen the man in my life before."

The explanation may be this: Germany, in order to conceal her air losses from her own air force, is swopping airmen from station to station so that no one man can estimate the true picture of events. The system has another advantage. If the airmen don't know each other they don't trust each other. If they don't trust each other, they don't talk. It is not without significance that one aircraft has been shot down with a Nazi Storm Trooper as passenger. It doesn't seem to make the Luftwaffe any more efficient.

"Is it Dover?"

Recently a bomber was shot down at Harwich which is on the East Coast. The navigator, the only member of the

crew to survive the crash, begged the answer to one question. "Where am I? Is it Dover?" The naval ratings who captured him explained that it wasn't Dover, it was a town in the North of Scotland. The airman was bemused but satisfied. Perhaps, in part, the indiscriminate bombing is not so much indiscriminate as hopelessly inefficient.

Already in Britain?

Presumably, the impression prevalent among the German airmen that the German armies are already in Britain,

New Voices Of London

Two new sounds are becoming familiar to those of us who go about in raided London, says an English writer. One of them haunts the West End streets where bombs have dropped among the big shops at night. It is the sound of burglar alarms buzzing forlornly somewhere behind broken plate-glass windows. Nobody has time to turn them off; the owners are asleep in their own suburban shelters and the hurrying A.R.P. men have something better to do. The other sound is heard in the morning. More than once I have woken to hear it in the street outside and to wonder which of my neighbours has suffered while I slept. It is the sound of broken glass being shovelled into heaps.

that Britain is starving, and that the war is almost won, is a part of a deliberate policy of falsification. If so, the Germans are repeating the same mistake in this war that one of their most prominent leaders condemned in the last war. After discussing the dangers of underestimating the enemy, this authority said that the result of this policy in the last war was that when the Germans actually met the enemy in the flesh, they found him totally different from what they had been told. "Subsequently the policy took its revenge in a most terrible manner; for the German soldier, under the direct impression of the enemy's powers of resistance, now felt that he had been deceived by the fabricators of his information up to that moment, and, instead of strengthening his fighting keenness, it did the opposite. The men broke down under it. The British soldier never felt that the information he got from home was untrue, but this, alas! was so much the case with the German that he ended by rejecting all that came from that quarter as pure swindle."

This was written by Hitler himself.