

HISTORY AS IT HAPPENS

In this section weekly, appears 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.

Thursday, February 6

The Italians on all fronts in Africa desperately speeded up their retreat regardless of loss of equipment. British troops pressed on determined that the fleeing armies should have no chance to rest and re-form. In Eritrea the Imperial troops advanced 150 miles in a fortnight and were 4 miles from Kerin.

The Italians have evacuated 5000 square miles of Abyssinia.

The Sofia correspondent of the "Daily Mail" said that King Boris and the Bulgarian Government had slowly lost control of the situation. Troops were sent to the Greek frontier.

Enemy air attack over Britain was on a small scale, but British bombers attacked Dusseldorf and another squadron carried out a daylight sweep over northern France.

Mr. Harry Hopkins, President Roosevelt's personal representative to Britain, attended conferences at Downing Street and learned many British war secrets.

Friday, February 7

Benghazi, capital of Cyrenaica and an important port, was captured by the British forces after an advance, the speed of which was almost unparalleled in history. It was believed that the advance was encouraged by Italian settlers who were anti-Fascist and by riots that had broken out between Libyans and Italians.

More than 1500 prisoners were taken in Eritrea.

The Italians violently counter-attacked in the central sector in Albania, but suffered a disastrous defeat.

The former Prime Minister of Holland, Dirk Jan de Geer, returned to Holland from London, it was believed in order to visit his sick wife.

J. G. Winant was appointed United States Ambassador to London. He was formerly Director of the International Labour Office at Geneva.

London was again free from air raids; for the fourteenth night out of the last eighteen.

Saturday and Sunday, February 8 and 9

The British armoured column which cut off the Italians' retreat from Benghazi reached the coast 60 miles south, and were believed to be pressing on to the west. This body made a forced march of 150 miles in 30 hours which completely surprised the Italians who were trying to escape, and after a pitched battle the Italians were defeated. The fall of Benghazi was hailed throughout the American press as representing the final defeat of the Italians in Libya.

A heavy bombardment of the important Italian commercial city of Genoa was carried out by units of the Royal Navy who escaped unharmed after firing 300 tons of shells into the town.

The United States House of Representatives passed and sent to the Senate the Aid for Britain Bill. The voting was 260 in favour and 165 against, and

the Bill as passed was substantially in accord with the wishes of the administration.

The Director-General of the Home Guard, General Eastwood, again warned Britain of the possibility of invasion.

Monday, February 10

The German radio circulated rumours that Petain and Admiral Darlan had flown to Africa and rioting had occurred at Vichy, for the purpose of sowing confusion, but it was learned officially from Vichy that they were untrue. However, Admiral Darlan replaced M. Flandin as Foreign Minister, and Vice-Premier.

An inspiring speech to the world was given by Winston Churchill in a broadcast to the nation and the Empire which was rebroadcast through the United States. He reviewed the war to date, made scathing remarks about Mussolini, spoke of German infiltration into Bulgaria, and gave another serious warning of the danger of invasion and gas attacks. He concluded by saying "Give us the tools and we will finish the job."

Great increases in the strength of the Imperial garrison at Singapore were described by "The Times," which said that the garrison included British, Indian, Australian and New Zealand troops.

Tuesday, February 11

The British Government withdrew the Minister to Rumania and his staff from Bucharest. A few hours later armoured trains filled with thousands of German officers and men dressed as civilians streamed from Rumania into Bulgaria. It was believed that a strong concentration in the Balkans had caused the Turks to reconsider their policy in the light of their national needs.

An advance by British troops in the coastal area of Northern Eritrea was announced.

General Franco and the Spanish Foreign Minister, General Suner, left to confer with Mussolini.

A decree was issued at Vichy naming Admiral Darlan as Chief of State should Petain be unable to continue.

Wednesday, February 12

Important concentrations of German troops were described in Rumania and Bulgaria amid a welter of rumour in the Balkans. The Turkish press announced that Turkey was prepared for anything.

The Athens radio reported that some members of the Fascist Party secretly met in Rome to consider a peace plan.

A new threat to Addis Ababa, capital of Abyssinia, developed with an important drive on the south-eastern front by South African forces. Free French forces advanced 350 miles inside south eastern Libya from the Chad sector.

Wendell Willkie on his return from London, stated before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that if Britain collapsed the United States would be in the war within thirty days.

THRILLING SEA BATTLE An Eye-Witness At Sardinia

The work of the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean, such as the attack on Genoa, has since overshadowed the sea battle off Sardinia on November 30, but one of the best eye-witness accounts of sea warfare was that written by the correspondent of the London "Observer" on board a British cruiser on that occasion

IT was ten in the morning when the electrifying news came from the Ark Royal's aircraft that a large force of Italian ships had been sighted steaming south-east twenty miles off the south coast of Sardinia and seventy miles away from our position.

At this time our main fighting force consisted of cruisers and the battle-cruiser Renown with her formidable armament of six 15-inch guns.

At full speed ahead we steamed eastward to contact the remainder of our forces, which included a battleship and destroyers.

"Hoist Battle Pennants" came the signal from the flagship, the Renown, and a few seconds later the silken ensigns floated proudly from the masts right down our battle lines as we smashed ahead to engage the enemy force.

Enemy Turns Back

It was a perfect day with a brilliant sun and a sky speckled with faint wisps of white cloud, and I found it difficult to realise we were about to plunge into the hell of a naval action.

Ploughing along astern of us came the capital ships, while the destroyers were ahead. Smoke fouling the sunlit horizon told us we were nearing the Italian ships, who had apparently turned on their original course, and were steaming back towards Cagliari, Sardinia.

We pushed forward at high speed in an endeavour to cut them off. I could feel the tremendous wave of excitement which flowed through the ship, as—just after noon, the masts of the enemy ships came within vision of the naked eye ahead and slightly to starboard.

Breathless seconds passed and then other ominous shapes looked up, the sun reflecting dully on their hulls. They were fifteen miles away.

Spurt of Flame

Puffs of black smoke appeared in the sky above them as their anti-aircraft fire peppered the torpedo bombers who had taken off from the aircraft carrier to make a preliminary attack. Rapidly the distance narrowed.

I glanced astern and saw the battle cruiser well up with us, but the pace was too hot for the battleship, in spite of miracles worked in her engine-room.

Although making her best speed, she was too far away to take an effective part in the subsequent engagement, thus giving the enemy a marked superiority.

The enemy opened fire first. From my perch on the after bridge I saw at 12.22 an evil spurt of flame come from amid the faint shapes of the enemy craft, and long seconds afterwards water spouts spumed into the air well short of the cruisers in the centre of the line. Dull booms penetrated through the cotton wool stuffed in my ears, and two minutes later I saw clouds of orange smoke billowing from the turrets of two of our cruisers.

Suddenly the iron deck beneath my feet seemed to jump, and the whole ship shuddered as the guns of the fore turrets, with a deafening colossal roar, sent shells screeching over the 20,000 yards of water separating us from our foes.

The whole cruiser squadron was now in action, and writhing coils of smoke, which almost hid the ships, were diamonded eerily with red flame as their guns sent salvos roaring over towards the enemy.

Gun flashes stabbed out from the Italian squadrons, which were now steaming on the port side on a parallel course to us. Shells plunged into the sea around the cruisers, kicking up vicious columns of water. Barely 30 feet away, below the after bridge, the muzzles of six guns were elevated to their extreme range to pound the Italians.

Italian Ship Ablaze

We were concentrating our fire on an enemy cruiser. When it was reported that the cruiser was on fire, we concentrated our salvos on another cruiser for the remainder of the action.

They were obviously drawing away before the smoke screen. When for blessed seconds the inferno of our fire ceased, I heard the dull boom of the battle-cruiser's guns, and could see the vivid flashes of her 15-inch broadsides.

The Italian battleships appeared to be firing at the cruiser *Berwick*.

I noticed no shells falling round the battle-cruiser astern, although her guns were still firing. By this time, the Italian Fleet had nearly disappeared over the horizon, running for the shelter of the shore batteries.

Our ships were then within a few miles of the enemy coast, and were forced to abandon the pursuit, as the superior speed of the enemy ships had taken them out of range.

New U.S. Ambassador

THE new American Ambassador to Britain, J. G. Winant, is a man of wider human interest than one would judge from the long lists of purely official positions. For example, he is a member of the New England Council of the Boy Scouts, and a trustee of the Y.M.C.A. headquarters. He was married less than 20 years ago so his two sons and one daughter are in their teens.

Mr. Winant served in the American Expeditionary Force in France in the last war, rising from the ranks to the post of Captain, so he knows war at first hand. His interest also includes the American Tuberculosis Association and the National Recreation Association. He was Governor of the State of New Hampshire on three separate occasions before being appointed head of the International Labour Office at Geneva.