

WAR DIARY

1917 and 1940 Germany's War on Shipping

MR. GREENWOOD'S statement in the House of Commons recently that in the matter of shipping losses the position to-day is very much like that of April, 1917, was immediately qualified when he said that the position was not as bad as it might have been. The resemblance between the conditions of 1917 and those of to-day is indeed one of kind rather than of degree.

The position in April, 1917, was not only one of great danger, but there were then no means of reducing that danger in sight.

Admiral Sims, of the American Navy, recorded a conversation with Admiral Sir John Jellicoe, then First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, in which Jellicoe told him that he could see no means at the moment of reducing the losses of merchant shipping.

More Destroyers Needed

There is no such gloomy outlook to-day. So far as the losses to-day are the result of U-boat attack, the high rate is due solely to shortage of anti-submarine craft for convoy escorts.

The causes of that shortage are perfectly well known—the defection of the French Navy, the addition of Italy to our enemies, and the necessity for taking special measures against the danger of invasion — and the shortage is in process of being steadily made good.

Destroyers, both from British shipyards and from the American Navy, are steadily coming into service, and, thanks to the present efficiency of the Asdic and depth charge, it only needs a sufficiency of destroyers to restore the rate of destruction of U-boats to what it was in the early months of the present war.

So far as losses are the result of the new methods of air attack the position is not quite so simple. A new technique of counter action has to be devised to deal with the new form of attack, but that problem, it is to be hoped, is already on the way to solution. In any case, the air threat to shipping is nothing like so great as was the threat of the U-boat in 1917.

High Seas Raider

There is a third method of destruction in use by the enemy — the raider on the high seas, either a disguised merchant ship or a solitary man-of-war of more formidable strength.

The threat of the raider, however, is not on the level of that of the U-boat or the aircraft. If he acts so as to do a substantial amount of destruction of shipping his career is certain to be short, for he will soon be located and destroyed by superior force.

If, on the other hand, he seeks to prolong his survival by evading the defenders, he will do little execution. The Admiral Graf Spee preferred the second alternative, with the result that her bag was no more than nine ships in three months. Other raiders seem to have acted and to be acting on the same principle; that menace should soon be well in hand.



So quickly do world events move that this map may soon be out-of-date. It was published in "Time" Magazine on January 6, and shows the routes by which German troops, now in Rumania, could move into Bulgaria. Across the Danube and the 2½ miles of marshland between Giurgiu and Russe Nazi engineers are erecting a gigantic ferry and pontoon bridge

Actual Figures

Finally, a glance at the actual figures of sinkings shows the matter in true perspective. In April, 1917, the peak month of the last war, Germany succeeded in sinking very nearly 900,000 tons of shipping, of which some 550,000 was British. From that peak the losses were steadily brought down, and by the end of 1917 they were about 400,000 tons per month, of which nearly 300,000 were British.

In the present war, losses of merchant shipping were brought down to a very

low figure in March last, in which month the whole of the German Navy appears to have been engaged in preparation for the Norwegian campaign of April.

Since then, owing to the causes already noted, they have steadily mounted but they have only now reached about the level to which they were brought down by the end of 1917. That level, as Mr. Greenwood said, is far higher than it should be; but the position, as he went on to explain, is not one of imminent danger.

INDEX

Ask Aunt Daisy	45	Look Before You Listen	17
Books	11	Meet Mr. Know-All	8
Boxing Notes	15	Money in Spelling	9
Citizen Into Soldier	14	Music Under Fire	7
Editorial	4	Programmes:	
Extracts from Talks	5	National & Commercial ..	18-40
Film Reviews	16	Overseas	47
Frocks for Sale	41	Short Story	13
Letters	4	They Know the Answers	42
Listenings	10	Things to Come	6

THE LUFTWAFFE What Is Its Strength?

HOW many aeroplanes has Germany got, and how many will be thrown into the long-threatened invasion? These are questions which are being subjected to the closest analysis throughout the world, and here is a fairly authoritative survey made by the Air Correspondent of the "Sunday Times":

It will be noticed that these figures are a little higher than those given by Oliver Stewart from the BBC recently in a broadcast repeated by the NBS. He thought that Germany had a total of about 35,000 machines, whereas this expert thinks that Germany probably has an absolute total of about 40,000 machines, of which fewer than 18,000 are "combat" types, and the number available for full operation at any given time is about 9,000.

"We know there are at present three Air-fleets (Luftflotte) operating against this country, out of a total of seven regular Air-fleets.

"Each German squadron (Staffel) — fighter, bomber or reconnaissance — has a peacetime strength of nine planes, now expanded to twelve, with a further three in reserve. Three squadrons formed a wing (Gruppe), three wings a group (Geschwader). Two fighter groups and one reconnaissance wing form one air corps (Fliegerkorps), representing the fighter protection allotted to each division. Three bomber groups, one fighter group and one reconnaissance wing go to make a division with a total of about 480 machines, not counting reserves or transports.

"Each Air-fleet is composed of three divisions and one fighter air corps, making a total of about 1,700 aeroplanes, about a thousand of which are bombers, 75 are reconnaissance, and 625 are fighters. At any given time about one-quarter of these will be unserviceable — undergoing overhaul or repair. Therefore, the total effective strength of an Air-fleet at any moment is about 1,300 aeroplanes.

"The Luftwaffe also has special transport units attached to each squadron for carrying ground personnel. For instance, each fighter group of 140 machines has 30 transports attached to it.

"Thus, as far as can be estimated, without reference to official sources, the total strength plus first-line reserve immediately available and transports of the Luftwaffe may at the outset be: Six Air Fleets, 16,500; Independent Air Unit, 2,750; Naval Air Service, 1,000; Operational Training, 650; Transport Organisation, 3,500. Total, 24,400.

"Behind all this will lie the reserve pool and unfinished machines, approximately 50 per cent., as well as some 5,000 trainers, communication aircraft. This brings the absolute grand total of all planes to about 40,000.

"The strength of the coming attack is thus fairly clear. If Germany were free of all other commitments and could concentrate all her operational units, she might be able to start the attack with about 9,000 aeroplanes, 4,500 of which would be bombers. This total, irrespective of losses in action, would soon be reduced by operational forces to about 6,000."