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D.M.

CAN JAPAN BE BEATEN AT HOME?

A.M.R. discusses this question from personal experience of Japan's inflammable—and not so inflammable—cities.

IN the Southern Solomons, Japan's expansion appears to have met something hard and delimiting. Therefore the professional strategists—professional newspaper strategists—are talking of a slow advance north to Japan itself, from island to island. Slow advance it indeed will have to be, seeing that between Guadalcanar and Hondo lies a quarter of the Pacific Ocean sown like a minefield with fortified islands. Why then people ask, struggle through the far-spun meshes of the spider's web, bursting it strand by strand? Why not strike at the centre itself? Why not bomb Japan?

* * *

APART from the usual reasons for striking at an enemy's centre, there seem special reasons why bombing Japan should be quite extraordinarily effective. Its completely war-gearred totalitarian organisation leaves next to no margin of labour, transport, or direction to deal with local emergencies; the psychological effect of disaster at home might be overwhelming upon a people convinced of the inferiority of their enemies; plane bases are comparatively near to Siberia and China; and—most striking to the imagination—Japanese cities are an incendiary's paradise.

But these facts, or contentions, as usual mean something different from what they did in abstraction and at first glimpse. For example the Japanese rail and coastal shipping system is certainly working all-out for military purposes, and the few lorries and cars there are could do nothing to relieve the impossible congestion that extra strain would throw on it. But then the bulk of Japanese short-distance traffic has never gone by either steam or petrol. On many occasions, in many streets, in all the main Japanese cities I have seen "giten-sha" jams easily as large as that tidal-bore of cyclists which pours through the Christchurch bottleneck twice daily. And each machine was a "commercial vehicle" with huge panniers and carriers, or trailer, or sidecar, or even harnessed dog alongside to help it up hills. Such a hive-like, many-footed transport system, however militarily busy its major units may be, can not be put out of action by bombing dislocations, however severe.

Again events have upset the popular belief that air attack will demoralise populations that have been accustomed to think of themselves as safe behind their armies and seas. It did not break the British. It has not broken the Germans. And the Japanese peasantry and proletariat are certainly quite as amenable to discipline as the one, and as accustomed to enduring hard conditions uncomplainingly as the other.

Potential Menaces

But what about those Chinese and Siberian aerodromes? That the Japanese High Command regards them as a

potentially serious menace is plain from their efforts to occupy Chekiang and from their concentrations alongside the Far Eastern Soviet Republic. But again let us see the situation locally. From the German-held Channel Ports to London is under a hundred miles; London to Cologne is 250 miles; London to Berlin is 500—too far to have been effectively bombed so far. But Vladivostok to Tokyo is 650 miles, Kamchatka to Tokyo 1100 miles, Midway Island to Tokyo considerably more, Lishui and Chuchow (the Chekiang 'dromes) hardly nearer, Dutch Harbour twice as far (the Japanese occupation of Kiska in the meantime neutralises Port Mears which was only 900 miles away), while the U.S. mainland itself is as distant as Brisbane, or India.

Of course to bombers able to carry twenty tons and to make a round trip of six thousand miles these distances are small. But if the European war has proved anything about aerial attack it surely is that it must be overwhelming and continuous to be successful. The reason why the all-annihilating blitz of our pre-war imaginings did not descend on or about September 3, 1939, was not, indeed, as we now tend to think, that we were panicky prophets, but that Goering was caught unprepared. He needed thousands of planes; he had only hundreds. Only once has each side staged a real blitz—the flattening by five hundred bombers of Coventry, the conquest by a thousand bombers of Cologne. A week of continuous "Coventrating" or "Cologning" by either side might bring the war to an end. But experts have been asking whether the "air-carrier off the coast of Europe" has even the physical space to make this possible, or whether a Nazi-unified Continent has, under war conditions, the productive capacity for it.

It is not likely that we shall soon see the heart of Japan's war effort stilled by sky armadas launched off Midway Island sandbank; or from the Kamchatka forests, or the Aleutian rocks, or even from Chekiang, cut off as it is from Free China proper (by mountains) and from the world outside (by Japanese-ruled seas); or even from Vladivostok, half-surrounded already by Japanese forces and half-Siberia away from the over-worked Kuznetz factories that themselves in turn must go 1300 miles further on for their coal. Attacks on Japan at present can come only from occasional long-distance bombers—flown probably from aircraft carriers and willing on landing to be interned in Siberia or stranded somewhere in China—bombers relying entirely on disorganising Japanese industrial life by hit-and-run incendiary. What are their prospects?

"An Arsonist's Rhapsody"

The light construction of Japanese houses is well known. Lying awake at night I have heard a man in the next room turning over the pages of a book! And the unpainted wooden walls and

(Continued on next page)