

MEMORANDUM OF INFORMATION

19

ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

NOTE

At their suggestion we have made special arrangements for the United States, Canadian and Newfoundland Edition of these Memoranda to be published in future by Messrs. J. M. Dent & Sons (Canada) Ltd., whose address appears below. The Committee are very gratified with this excellent plan which Messrs. J. M. Dent proposed.

We shall be obliged if all subscribers resident in the United States, Canada and Newfoundland will in future, therefore, be good enough to renew their subscriptions direct with Messrs. J. M. Dent & Sons. All future communications from persons living in the countries concerned should be addressed to their offices.

The Memorandum, printed and published in Toronto, will be identical with the one published in London. Subscribers will, however, receive their copies more quickly than heretofore, which will greatly add to the service.

The provisional arrangement into which the Committee had entered with Harrison-Hilton Books, Inc., has been terminated and the records transferred to Toronto.

KENNETH de COURCY,

Editor.

June Issue
31.5.40

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13, Old Queen Street,
London, S.W. 1,

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Aldine House, 224, Bloor Street, West,
Toronto, Canada

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World War, 1939 - G. Britain.

A CRITICAL MONTH

Since the last issue left these offices, critical events have followed hard upon each other. As we last went to press, the Allies were launching a campaign in Scandinavia with the object of helping the Norwegians, who had just become the victims of German aggression. The tragic failure of that expedition is stamped upon all our minds, and the reasons for it are well known. The primary one is that we were unable to prevent the German occupation of Narvik, Trondheim and Bergen. If our information had been better we could have. This unhappy story was swiftly followed by an attack upon Belgium and Holland, about which there is much to report.

The
Norwegian
Failure

Dutch resistance, upon which the Allies never seriously counted, actually lasted twenty-four hours longer than most people expected. The early collapse of Belgium's first line of defence came, however, as a surprise to many observers. It was very largely due to the failure of those responsible for the demolitions at Maastricht. This was to prove only the first of many disasters. Belgium was in a stronger position than in 1914, her defences were more modern, her troops younger and better trained. Moreover, she had had ample time for preparation, while Allied troops were ready to assist her, and marched so soon as they were called upon.

The Collapse
of Holland and
Belgium's First
Line

Following the collapse of the first line, the German Army advanced rapidly along a wide front. A part of their forces were held on the second line from Antwerp to Namur, where Belgium and British forces put up a stubborn resistance, and displayed great gallantry. Unhappily, however, the enemy well knew that they could break through part of the French line just north of the main Maginot position. Having pierced the defences in that sector, there was soon a big dent, which was to develop into a bulge, and, finally, into a wide and extremely dangerous gap. These developments in the south made it absolutely vital for the Allied forces on the main Antwerp-Namur line to withdraw as rapidly as possible towards the Channel ports. It was becoming clear that the Germans were about to attempt a sweeping movement to the right with the object of turning the whole allied line, thus encircling a very important part of our forces.

Belgium's
Second Line and
the Penetration
into France

The enemy succeeded in reaching the channel ports with unexpected speed, while our forces were still engaged in Belgium, into which country they had entered at considerable risk in response to King Leopold's call for help. During the critical days between the arrival of the first German forces at Abbeville, and the capitulation of the Belgian army, General Weygand (of whose great capabilities we write in the French section) marshalled such forces as he could. This object was to hammer a way through the German corridor between Arras and Amiens in order to make contact with the British, French and Belgian troops in the north. Unfortunately, at the most critical moment, the King of the Belgians, for reasons which are not yet fully clear, surrendered his army to the enemy, an occurrence which dealt a final and shattering blow to the prospects of the Allied forces in this danger zone.

The Channel
Ports Reached

King Leopold's
Surrender

One thing at least can be said. In all the military engagements which have taken place during this war, whether at sea, on land, or in the air, our forces have shown all the highest qualities to which they are heir, and have fought with almost incredible gallantry. If we have failed to gain any general success, as yet, this is not because British sailors, soldiers, and airmen, no longer fight as they used, but because factors quite outside their control have worked against them. All three services have acquitted themselves with the utmost distinction, and have fought in the offensive spirit with vigour. In Norway, in France, and in Belgium, the British soldier as an individual fighting unit, proved himself far superior to the German.

Gallantry of
British Forces

In the Flanders campaign, the exploits of our men have been beyond praise. Knowing their peril, they fought on without flinching, and without complaint. They were faced by superior numbers, equipment, and air power; yet they won successes which would do credit to far more highly trained and better equipped soldiers. Their leadership was, of course, of the highest order. Lord Gort was the perfect fighting Commander-in-Chief. He was exactly the right man for such a situation, and he acquitted himself with the highest honours.

Lord Gort's
Force

AN EXPERIMENT ABANDONED

The Public
Shocked

All these events, from the Norwegian evacuation, to the latest developments in Western Europe, have, however, come as a very great surprise to the public, who have been deeply shocked by them. In striking westwards, Herr Hitler abandoned an experiment in strategy with which he persevered for eight months. This was to strike at limited objectives behind a screen which defended his main position. He hit at and gained three of them—Poland, Denmark and Southern Norway. In none of these cases were the Allies able to intervene effectively. Our position was consequently becoming very difficult. The effect upon neutrals was deplorable, and both the British and the French public were becoming deeply disturbed.

Herr Hitler
Abandons His
Experiment

The Allies
Frustrated

The Allied Empires, having mobilised all their resources with great solemnity, had been forced to stand helplessly by while one small country after another fell victim to aggression. The demoralising effect of this on French and British opinion might have become serious if things had continued for another six months along the same lines.

Herr Hitler's
Reasoning

Why, then, did Germany abandon a strategy which was apparently working so well? That is the question which many people are asking. Herr Hitler's original idea was to create a long pause between the conquest of Poland and the final challenge to the British Empire. During that period he hoped France would succumb to political difficulties at home. Then, at his leisure, he meant to strike at the Empire. He began to lose patience with his own experiment, however, in February, and he was only restrained from drastic action by great pressure. Once again in March he nearly lost patience, but Mussolini held him back. The abandonment of a brilliantly conceived plan seemed to many of Herr Hitler's friends and advisers quite mad. After the Norwegian collapse nothing would hold him. During the last days of April and the first week of May, reports became ever more insistent that Herr Hitler had made up his mind to give up his original policy and to launch out in the West.

Dr. Schacht's
Hopes
Frustrated

The more conservative elements like Dr. Schacht, who had come to support the war on the understanding that there would be no big conflict in the West, counted for nothing when the hour of crisis came. As in September, 1938, and August of last year, Herr Hitler, with the full support of his extremists, decided to risk all his gains for something more. This is exactly what he did at Godesberg and over Poland. This strange man has a genius for evolving a masterly plan and then casting it away for something else.

Hitler's
Temperament

In our second war issue, dated September 27th, 1939, when we first described Germany's plan for the Autumn, Winter and Spring, we ended that section with the following paragraph:—

"We are dealing with a man of uncertain temperament. It is possible that in a moment of fury he may throw all plans to the winds, and in a desire to inflict immediate pain upon his principal enemies allow personal hatred to overcome his pre-conceived strategical policy. In times like these such eventualities must, of course, be taken into account. . . ."

GERMAN ADVANTAGES

German
Espionage

Though no doubt the decision to strike was partly temperamental, it was also based upon some clear reasoning. If French morale held out, within a few months the Allies would have attained numerical superiority in the air and Great Britain would have trained and equipped a large army. By striking at once, Germany entered the conflict with a formidable array of advantages, of which she has made full use. There was her espionage system; the High Command could not have run the risks they did without first-class information. They evidently knew exactly where the French defences were weakest, and also a good deal about the disposition of French forces. Not least, they knew that in the weak sector were to be found the less satisfactory French troops, with a weak command, and poor officers.

They had also organised a very complete system of sabotage in Holland and Belgium; the Fifth Column was fully mobilised and struck effectively, thus greatly disorganising Dutch and Belgian defences. Demolitions which the Allied General Staffs had greatly counted upon were often not carried out, and generally the enemy's information and sabotage services worked admirably. Our readers may remember earlier reports upon the number of German tourists in Holland and Belgium.

Fifth Column
in the
Low Countries

It is of vital importance for us to track down and destroy this system of agents which has already played such an important part in helping the Germans. They have of course, one signal advantage, namely, the refugees. Although many of these unfortunates are innocent, the presence in so many countries of a large number of Germans, on whatever pretext, provides a wonderful cover.

Need for
More Counter
Measures

During the first months of the war refugees were to be found in the offices of many newspapers, periodicals and news agencies both in London and Paris. Often they were in close touch with Departments, acting as advisers on all sorts of questions of propaganda and information. Austrian and German male and female servants are employed in the houses of officers and officials in many parts of the country. Quite a lot of them are spies. Every side of national life is covered, from the vicarage sewing party (at which refugee servants are often to be found) to quite high advisory positions in organisations closely connected with Departments of State. The Germans are as thorough as they are aggressive. They leave nothing to chance. They even subsidise dressmakers in giving long credit to women who cannot afford it, and whose husbands know things in which Germany is interested. Of the refugees in Britain alone, about 2,000 were actual agents. They were given their exit permits, and certain financial advantages, on condition that they worked for the German Government on arriving here. There are other cases of refugees, who, while not full-time agents, have so many relations in Germany that the enemy's contact men are able to blackmail them into giving isolated pieces of information which help to build up the picture.

Refugees

In addition to all these advantages, Germany has her Fifth Column proper. This is made up of a number of non-Germans who for various reasons are in sympathy with, or work for the Nazi Party. If this type of person has proved extremely useful to Germany in Poland, Norway, Holland and Belgium, so they have and will elsewhere. Perhaps the strongest of all the Fifth Columns is to be found in Switzerland. If that country is ever invaded, we shall have a big shock. The Germans claim about 25,000 Nazi sympathisers there.

Other
Helpers

The Fifth Column is made up from three classes. First, of those who are sincerely in sympathy with the German system of Government. Secondly, of political adventurers who think it will pay them to be on good terms with the Nazis, and thirdly, of those who are blackmailed into treachery. The first two categories are comparatively easy to deal with. It is the third which is most dangerous. For a long time Germany has been building up a remarkable system of commercial espionage. They have a wonderful record of business concerns in this country and France. They have gone out of their way to discover the details of almost all the important shady deals which have taken place during recent years. This is the weapon they use.

Three
Classes

German agents communicate with their masters by several different means. Much use is made of short-wave wireless transmitters, and this probably accounts for the speed with which important messages reach Berlin. In addition to this there is a regular courier service, via southern Ireland, by submarine. Then there is the more usual means of communication through advertisements, and the like.

Communication
between Britain
and Germany

Another advantage in the campaign was apparent numerical superiority in the air, which is of great importance in land warfare. This factor is perhaps now more important than possession of superiority in artillery. Although our machines and pilots put up a much better performance than the Germans, lack of numbers does tell. Pilots get tired, and there is a limit to what one aircraft can do. Our force has got used to being out-numbered in nearly every engagement. They take that as quite normal, but Germany's reserve of machines and pilots has proved a very great advantage to her. Everything in this war has proved the vital importance of air power.

German
Air Power

Radio Communi-
cation between
Units on the
Move

Then, the enemy's radio communications between their mechanised units, aircraft, Divisional, Corps, and Army Headquarters, proved brilliantly successful and far superior to that of the Allies.

German
Supply System

Germany's system of supply was also very well thought out. Great use has been made of the canal system through Belgium and Northern France, thus avoiding the dangers of aerial bombardment on road and rail transports. Many supplies have been brought up by carefully camouflaged barges, and it is most regrettable that inadequate provision was made for the mining of waterways, the demolition of canal locks, and bridges.

Mechanised Units
and large
Infantry Forces

Generally, the enemy's mechanised units proved more formidable than was expected and, of course, it is no secret that so far as numbers are concerned, the Allies face forces considerably larger than their own. The French have always most earnestly stressed their anxiety on this point. For the last two or three years they have impressed the fact upon us, that Germany alone, would have a very much larger number of divisions at her disposal than France. If the Italians join in on Germany's side, the situation will become one of very great gravity, unless Great Britain can provide a very sizeable army quickly. In May, 1939, we published a memorandum on the subject, written by General Brecard (former Inspector-General of Cavalry in France). He could not have uttered a more solemn warning than he did. His statement was prepared with the full knowledge of very responsible persons in France, who were extremely anxious for the British public to understand their problem more fully. At the time it was published, many people thought his fears exaggerated and his claims too great. Events are proving, however, that far from pitching them too high, he was over-modest.

THE PRESENT SITUATION

A New Line
of Defence

At the time of going to press the situation is all too clear. Our line of defence at the moment of writing is from Abbeville, along the Somme, and the Aisne, to the Northern extremity of the Maginot Line proper. After that it continues along the fortified line to the Swiss Frontier, and thence to the Mediterranean. The precise disposition of our forces is a secret. At any moment we may be subjected to terrific pressure from the enemy. He will once again use his new technique—attacking first from the air, then with mechanised forces, dropping parachute troops behind our lines, and following up with infantry. The fortunes of France and Britain now largely depend upon the gallantry and fortitude of the French Army. Great Britain will bring all the support she can with the utmost possible speed—but it will take some little time to repair the damage of recent days.

The Next
Moves

The Germans have three courses before them. They can pause for a time, consolidating their position, improving their communications, and preparing at leisure for their next move; they can launch a new offensive at once against the French Army, or they can remain on the defensive in France and strike at Great Britain. There is reason to believe that they have kept in reserve a considerable number of aircraft for this latter purpose, and that they have a considerable number of small submarines ready for action in the Channel and North Sea. Some extremists of the Nazi Party have for some time advocated the invasion of the British Isles, and very detailed plans have been drawn up. Whether an attempt will be made to carry them out no one can tell, but the possibility cannot be excluded. As far back as last December the special observer we sent inside Germany to make a thorough study of the enemy's plans, reported on proposals for the invasion of Britain. Other reports now tell the same story. They have been especially emphasised of late. Whether the Germans really propose to risk such a hazardous campaign it is impossible to say. At all events, we must be prepared for every emergency, including an offensive against these islands.

A FINAL SUMMARY

Unfavourable
Factors

The unfavourable factors facing us are numerous, and when arrayed look rather formidable. The British Expeditionary Force, carefully trained and equipped with our best material, has suffered heavy losses. The French Army, seriously outnumbered, is burdened with the responsibility of defending a long frontier against

one declared enemy, and a potential one on the verge of hostilities. Most of our advantages are of a long-term character. The great resources of the British, French, Belgian, and Dutch Empires, as well as those of the United States and South America, can only gradually be piled into the scales, while our great needs are very immediate. We cannot strengthen our position in the West by weakening ourselves in the Near East, because of Italy. We must also remember that a large part of France's industrial area is in enemy hands. The situation is, therefore, a very serious one, and no responsible citizen has the right to think it otherwise.

There are, however, also favourable factors. The French Army has recovered from its first shock. In the past it has performed wonderful feats of endurance and snatched great victories from near defeat. The issue now is nothing less than the defence of French soil, and this does not raise all the complicated issues which puzzled and disturbed many Frenchmen regarding Czechoslovakia and Poland. The General Staff has been sifted out and strengthened. The Supreme Commander is, as we shall see from the French section, a man who inspires the confidence of all the best elements in France. The marshes of the Somme do not offer an easy passage to the enemy. Evidently no attempt has yet been made upon the main Maginot position, which the enemy evidently regards as extremely formidable. At the time of writing, Italy has not yet entered the lists, and if she does, she will have to face French forces in North Africa, the British Navy, and Allied Forces in the Near East. She is vulnerable on more than one flank, and is not protected by a Siegfried Line.

Favourable
Factors

German air losses have been enormous and mount up every day. The morale of her pilots is not what it was eight months ago, nor even four weeks since. Little by little her reserve of planes is becoming less, while our productive capacity is steadily increasing. Her communications are getting longer and longer, and, therefore, more vulnerable. If her successes have become greater, so have her commitments. Her army casualties have been enormous and the effect of these will become felt more keenly every day by the civilian population behind the lines, where rumours will spread.

Germany's Air
Losses and Long
Communications

Despite all the glamour of victory, the middle-aged German does not yet believe in ultimate success. He remembers that very spectacular things happened between 1914 and 1918, but that in the end German Envoys eventually had to find their way to Foch's railway carriage.

Herr Hitler is deadly afraid of really serious air attacks upon big German cities, and especially upon the Ruhr. He does not know what the effect might be upon civilian morale, nor even how the German people would regard him personally, if the price of victory should be the destruction of a large part of Germany's most important industrial centres and historic cities. Many of the plants most vital to the enemy's war effort are highly vulnerable, such as her oil-from-coal installations, scientific laboratories, and barge-lifting apparatus.

Hitler's Fears
and Weaknesses

If we can pin the enemy down and hold him for a few weeks or months, we shall be able to throw into the scales such vast resources as to make an enemy victory impossible. Then, as the months succeed each other, the German public will become weary, distraught and anxious. The defeatism which is not far below the surface will surge upwards, and Herr Hitler's regime may well then be endangered. From then onwards, though we shall have to endure many difficult and arduous days, we shall have comparatively easy going. But everything depends upon pinning the enemy down in these vital weeks. If we fail to do that, the situation will take a graver turn.

The Vital
Weeks

Finally, we are entitled to remember that Herr Hitler himself, genius though he is, brilliant strategist though he has proved himself, is not a man who can easily endure reverses. Those who have known him for some years past have always found that his power of endurance in bad times is not great. If once the tide sets against him he will find it hard to show that fortitude which is an essential characteristic of leadership in difficult times. We, on the other hand, are always at our best when the clouds are darkening.