

THE MARCH OF WAR

(January 26—March 25)

WHEN Hongkong capitulated, little more than a fortnight after the outbreak of the Pacific war, Anglo-American hearts were saddened. Yet its doom had been foreseen as inevitable and, even though its defenses had been considered stronger than the short-lived resistance subsequently proved them to be, the colony's fall had little effect upon the American and British people.

The chances of guarding the Philippines against an invasion had been the subject of much controversy in the United States. Although General Douglas MacArthur was entrusted with the Army command because he assured President Manuel Quezon of the archipelago's defensibility, it was no secret that military experts in the USA generally disagreed with their more optimistic colleague. The capture of Manila and Cavite, the occupation of the greater part of Luzon and important points on other islands within a month after the great conflagration had flared up in Asia, were bitter blows for them to bear, but did not shock them.

SINGAPORE

How different was that blitz campaign in Malaya. Reams had been written on that strongest British fortress and naval base, Singapore, hub of the Empire, on its strategic and economic importance, its impregnability. Shielded on land by impenetrable jungles, barriers of mountains, and broad, swift-flowing rivers, with comparatively few roads permitting the advance of hostile mechanized detachments, the island base had been fortified for years, heavy coastal artillery built in, airfields constructed,

stores and ammunition laid in. Men had been landed, and the naval base which had been stripped of warships for a long time was at last sheltering a Far Eastern Fleet of imposing strength.

But in the hot breath of Mars all illusions withered. The disaster off Kuantan, the rapid southward withdrawal of the land forces, carried the battle to Singapore's very doorstep. Constant outflanking maneuvers characterized the last week of fighting on the peninsula. Unimpeded by the remnants of the British Fleet which had sought refuge in the Dutch East Indies, the Japanese landed troops behind the defenders' lines, thus forcing the latter to retreat lest they be cut off. Behind the columns fleeing to Singapore Island, the Johore causeway was blown up, and the short chapter of the siege began.

Violent air attacks played havoc with mighty fortifications, hangars, airfields, harbor installations, and vessels, and the huge floating dock, pride of the naval base, was sunk. This dock could hold vessels up to 50,000 tons. It had been built in Germany on Reparation account and had been towed to Singapore in two pieces. A landing on Pulo Ubin, on the eastern entrance to the Johore Straits, was a feint to distract the British. Late on February 8 and on the next morning the Japanese crossed the Straits opposite Johore, followed by tanks and other heavy equipment on the quickly repaired causeway. The Tengah airfield in the west was captured, the Bukit Timah Hill stormed, and after the fall of Seletar in the east on February 14 Singapore capitulated on the following day at 7.50 p.m. The final Japanese

report lists 95,000 British troops taken prisoner in Malaya and on Singapore Island, while the booty included 630 guns, 2,550 machine guns, 52,062 rifles, 450 tanks and armored cars, 13,830 automobiles, 200 motorcycles, one 10,000 ton steamer and three tankers of 5,000 tons each, as well as many other vehicles, arms, and equipment.

This was a loss that reverberated throughout the British Empire and the United States. The Churchill Government had to pass through a severe crisis. In the ensuing reshuffle the Prime Minister was forced to include in his Cabinet a man with pronounced Bolshevist leanings who, moreover, is a potential successor. Australian opinion was embittered. Americans did not hesitate to heap blame on the British. This again impelled the Prime Minister to remind the cousins across the sea of the crippled American Pacific Fleet in Hawaii, brusquely disavowing the affirmations of his brother-in-arms in the White House who was trying hard to minimize the losses in Pearl Harbor.

DUTCH EAST INDIES

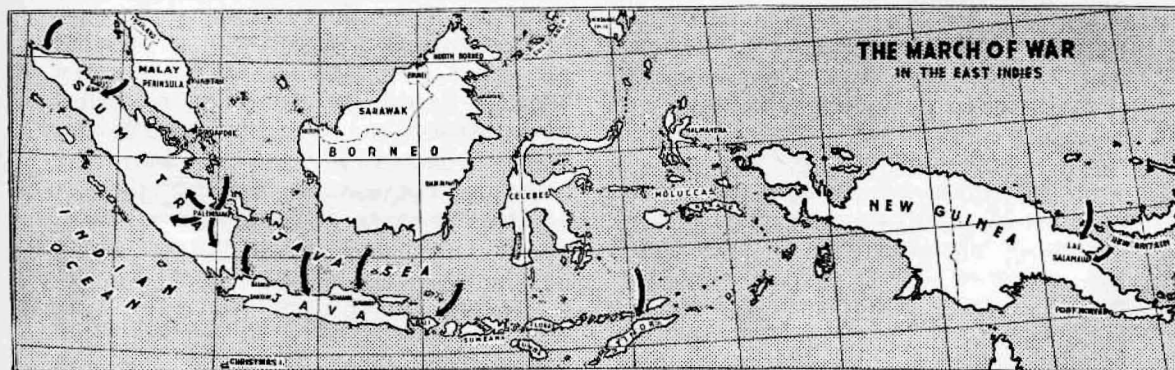
The dispute and confusion in the Allied camp were well justified. If the reputation of Singapore's defense had been exaggerated, the reputation of its strategic importance definitely had not. After the Hawaiian debacle, the loss of this bulwark sealed the fate of those positions still in Anglo-American hands.

The next blow was not long in coming. Two days after the fall of Singapore

the oil center of Palembang on Sumatra was captured by Japanese parachutists, who were soon supported by troops landed near by. They rapidly gained control of the southern part of the island, thus cutting off the island of Java from the west. By landing on Timor and Bali on February 20, the eastern access to Java was likewise blocked. The Dutch air force concentrated on Java was destroyed within a few days.

The Allies made one final attempt to loosen the suffocating grip of the Japanese forces. A great naval battle took place in the Java Sea, off Surabaya and Batavia. The Allied fleet composed of Dutch, British, American, and Australian men-of-war was annihilated during the three days from February 27 to March 1. The Japanese High Command later announced that six cruisers, seven destroyers and submarines, one gunboat, and one minesweeper had been sunk, while the Japanese sustained only minor losses. Even British experts have admitted the superiority of Japanese strategy, explaining that all the Allied units were annihilated by the end of the battle because the Japanese had judged exactly the possible developments of the sea battle and had posted submarines on the probable retreating course of the Allies.

After this shattering blow there was nothing to stop the Japanese from landing at three points, on western, central, and eastern Java. Within nine days the island was forced to capitulate,



and the Dutch had lost a three-hundred-year-old legacy. The help pledged by Washington and London remained a promise, and among the 98,000 prisoners of war in the Dutch East Indies there were but 15,000 British, Australian, and American troops.

AMERICAN AID?

But what has President Roosevelt done to alleviate the Allied position in the Pacific? What has he given beyond what he likes to call "moral succor"? Where are those deeds promised in his speeches and "fireside chats"? The only American action heard of, apart from participation in the naval battle of the Java Sea, is an attempted incursion of a US squadron into the waters of the Marshall Group, which was frustrated by Japanese units, and a vain attack upon Otori (Wake Island), which resulted in some damage on the island but cost the attackers one damaged destroyer and one cruiser set ablaze. Some time prior to this action, an American aircraft carrier, presumably the *Yorktown*, was heavily damaged by Japanese naval planes northeast of New Guinea and may have sunk.

ALLIED LOSSES IN THE EAST

The Japanese Navy, in spite of operations covering the entire south-western Pacific and the Indian Ocean, not only sank some twenty vessels aggregating 160,000 tons in American waters off the American West Coast, but one submarine even shelled the coast. Premier Tojo, in addressing the Diet on March 12, advised Indians and Australians alike that there was still time to come to an understanding and escape the fate of the Dutch East Indies. He accused the British and American Governments of boastful and mendacious propaganda and announced the total enemy losses during three months of war to be 210,000 prisoners, 1,600 airplanes, 2,100 guns, 190,000 rifles, machine guns, and pistols, and 28,000 tanks, trucks, and railway cars.

During the same session the Japanese Minister of Navy revealed the Allied naval losses to be 7 battleships, 3 aircraft carriers, 12 cruisers, 22 destroyers, 44 submarines, and 42 other units sunk, and 76 men-of-war including 4 battleships damaged.

Another ally of the Anglo-American bloc has been hard hit: Chungking. The loss of Rangoon has cut all except its air communications. Chungking will have to fight alone. Unified Allied command, common action, ABCD front, ABDA front—how old these terms seem, and yet, did we not read about them only a few weeks ago?

THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA

The Asiatic battlefield is only one of the theaters of war. Germany and Italy have not been idle. In a delaying battle against a British onslaught with superior numbers and equipment in North Africa, which was heralded by the Prime Minister as a great victory in the offing, General Rommel not only succeeded in extricating his forces intact but turned the tables and took the offensive, throwing back General Auchinleck's forces beyond Benghazi and Derna in record time. The British lost large numbers of tanks, armored cars, guns, airplanes, trucks, and other material. Moreover, recent events in the Pacific have forced the British to withdraw all Anzac troops from North Africa.

German and Italian submarines harassed British convoys and naval forces in the Mediterranean, and valuable ships went to the bottom of the sea. Malta was the objective of incessant air raids. An Italian attack of fast torpedo boats on the British Fleet at Alexandria also had a telling effect.

To what extent the British have lost control in the Mediterranean was proved in the naval battle which developed in the second half of March. A British convoy on its way from Alexandria to Malta with war material, escorted by three light cruisers and

seven destroyers, was sighted by an Italian submarine off Crete. Italian torpedo planes stationed in Libya and Sicily immediately attacked the convoy and sank one cruiser, one destroyer, and a transport of 10,000 tons. Another cruiser, one destroyer, and three merchantmen were damaged. Italian naval forces, including the battleship *Littorio*, joined in the fray and, in spite of poor visibility, managed to score hits on the British warships. The remnants of the convoy were later attacked by German bombers, which sank four vessels of altogether 24,000 tons and damaged several others.

The fact that war material is shipped to Malta from Alexandria is indeed significant. Evidently the British considered it too risky to attempt a passage from Gibraltar past Sicily. Instead they shipped the material all the way around the Cape of Good Hope and then gave the convoy all the protection they could spare in the eastern Mediterranean. Nevertheless, it was badly mauled, and little of the precious cargo so urgently required in Malta reached its destination.

BATTLE OF THE CHANNEL

At the very moment when the Churchill Government was passing through its grave crisis, it was hit by another event which almost overshadowed the impending fall of Singapore. On February 12 a German naval squadron consisting of the battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, the cruiser *Prinz Eugen*, and several smaller units, steamed through the English Channel in broad daylight. Although attacked by swarms of British planes and several naval units, it passed by the cliffs of Dover and safely reached its destination. Only one German torpedo boat sustained slight damage. German fighter planes and the ships' anti-aircraft guns accounted for 42 British planes shot down, while only 7 German planes were lost.

The significance of the battle was widely discussed and commented upon

in the Allied press. It is gradually dawning even on the most obstinate minds that Anglo-Saxon domination of the seas is a thing of the past. The Prime Minister attempted to sweeten the pill by asserting that the German passage through the Channel was just what the Admiralty had been hoping for, but this was too much even for the British press. Churchill's revelation that 3,299 air raids had been made by the RAF on the battleships anchored at Brest was hardly likely to ease British minds in regard to the effectiveness of the attacks of their air force.

WAR ON THE ATLANTIC

The Americans have had little time to conjecture about the why's and wherefore's of the misfortunes of their British cousins, for the war has descended upon their own waters. German submarines have taken a heavy toll of American and Allied tonnage all along the east coast from Newfoundland to the Gulf of Mexico, showing a devastating preference for precious tankers, of which there is already a marked shortage. And that was not all. Disregarding *politesse*, they have entered the private backyard of the United States, the Caribbean Sea, sinking more valuable tanker tonnage and shelling the oil refineries of Curaçao and Aruba, among the world's chief production centers, as though there were no American Navy at all. One German unit entered Port of Spain on Trinidad, attacking and sinking two merchantmen. Another penetrated into Port Castries on Saint Lucia, torpedoing two vessels tied up at the pier and sinking a third outside the harbor. By the middle of March the tonnage sunk in the western Atlantic exceeded one million tons, almost one half of this tonnage being tankers. Italian submarines likewise operated successfully in American waters. The total Allied tonnage sunk by German naval and air forces alone since the outbreak of the European war aggregates well over 16 million tons. This figure becomes even more imposing when it is

compared to the sinkings during the whole of the Great War, which amounted to 15 million tons.

Although engaged in the Mediterranean and the western Atlantic, the German U-boat arm was equally active in the Arctic Ocean, around the British Isles, and in the southern Atlantic off the African coast, as can be seen from the shipping losses reported from all these regions.

THE SOVIET FRONT

When an unusually hard winter arrived unusually early, the German High Command announced on December 17, 1941, the "change-over from attack to trench warfare during the winter months." Since then the picture on the Russian front has till now remained essentially the same. German advance positions were taken back in order to straighten out and shorten the front, as well as to relieve as many German and allied formations as possible from the hardship of the bitter Russian cold in a country laid waste by warfare and, to an even greater degree, by the "scorched earth" policy of the Bolsheviks. Moreover, by withdrawing their lines slightly to the west they forced the Russians to share the scorched earth with the German troops, whereas before that the Russians had been fighting from still undamaged territory against an enemy living without shelter in devastated land.

Against this thin, shortened line of winter defense the Kremlin has thrown its vast but scantily trained human reserves in one endless attack with the double purpose of depriving the German armies of any winter rest and of breaking through their lines. The first purpose was accomplished, but only against those sections of the German and allied armies which manned the winter lines so as to enable their comrades to rest and prepare for the spring. For those in the front lines

there was no relaxation for more than three months. They fought against vast human masses and against the fury of a winter which, as the Führer said, was the severest in a hundred and forty years. But they achieved what they set out to do. As the first signs of spring are appearing on the wide Russian plains, and as the sun begins once more to be felt after months of brief, icy days, the German and allied troops still hold the front from Lake Ladoga to the Sea of Azov. In spite of the Russian losses of 104,128 prisoners, 2,167 tanks, 2,519 guns, and 2,720 planes in the first three months of this year, in spite of the Russians being accustomed to the climate of their country, in spite of the thinness of the German lines, the winter has passed without the Red armies having obtained any important results.

Before new offensive operations on a large scale can be resumed by the German High Command, the German armies will have to pass one more test, that of the *rasputitsa*, the "waylessness," the period when the thawing snow turns all Eastern Europe for several weeks into a groundless morass. The Russians have never been great road-builders, for one reason because their country, in its most important and populated sections, possesses practically no rocks which can be used for the building of dependable roads. So they have come to accept the "waylessness" of the spring as a natural phenomenon that cannot be remedied. As only men and horses are mobile during the *rasputitsa*, the Red Command is likely to make use of this period for further desperate attacks by Red troops on foot and on horseback. This last chance for the Red armies will come to a close when the hot May sun has dried up the country and has once again made Russia a vast flat battleground ideally suited for large-scale operations of mechanized forces.