

THE SECOND FRONT AND A GLOBAL WAR

By J. E. WALLACE STERLING

Associate Professor of History, California Institute of Technology

Two years ago General Sir Archibald Wavell delivered at Trinity College, Cambridge University, the Lee Knowles Lectures. His subject was *Generals and Generalship*. In his first lecture on "The Good General" he sought to "explain the qualities necessary for a general and the conditions in which he has to exercise his calling." He sought evidence in history and found what seemed to him "the real root of the matter" in a statement "attributed to a wise man named Socrates." This statement read as follows:

The general must know how to get his men their rations and every other kind of stores needed for war. He must have imagination to originate plans, practical sense and energy to carry them through. He must be observant, untiring, shrewd; kindly and cruel; simple and crafty; a watchman and a robber; lavish and miserly; generous and stingy; rash and conservative. All these and many other qualities, natural and acquired, he must have. He should also, as a matter of course, know his tactics; for a disorderly mob is no more an army than a heap of building material is a house.

General Wavell was most attracted to this definition by the fact that it began with the matter of administration, which is to his mind "the real crux of generalship," and placed tactics, the handling of troops in battle, at the end. He goes on to say that it does not take a trained and experienced military scientist to devise strategy; an intelligent amateur can do it. But the carrying out of that strategy requires an expert, one who knows the function and performance of the weapons at his disposal and how to get to the scene of battle "fustest with the mostest."

This brief article is being written on the morrow of the Commando raid on Dieppe, when speculation on the imminence of a second front seems to dominate all conversations about the war. Few pause to define "second front;" indeed, such definition is hardly necessary, for there is tacit agreement that "second front" means the invasion of the continent of Europe by land forces in great strength, supported adequately by sea and from the air. Inevitably there is speculation also as to where such an invasion would strike; and again there is widespread acceptance of the view that the blow will fall somewhere in northwestern Europe. The Dieppe operation would seem to rule out any other possibility, since such success as it enjoyed was to a significant degree due to the "umbrella" of superior air strength with which the United Nations were able to cover the operational area. This air strength necessarily

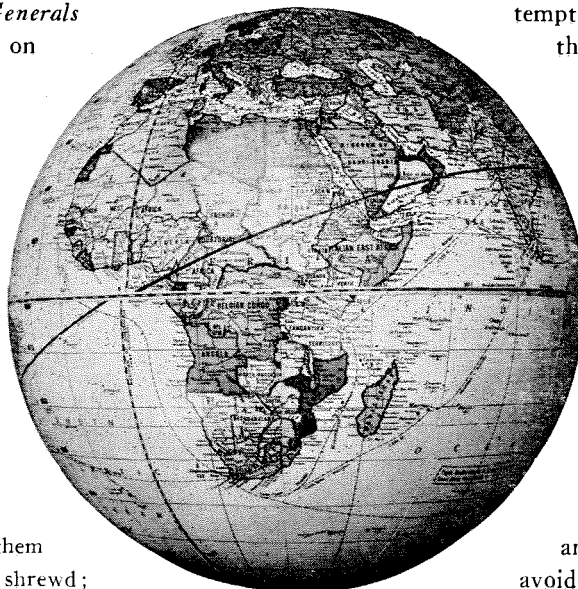
included fast fighter planes land-based on Britain. It is permissible to doubt that any initial invasion attempt made at a point beyond the range of these vital fighter planes would be practicable.

So long as Russia remains a real fighting force, the logic of such a second front is simple and sound. It does not take a four-star general to appreciate the advantages that would accrue to the United Nations from catching the enemy between two fires. But the appreciation of these advantages does not always carry with it a corresponding appreciation of the technical difficulties involved in preparing and launching such an invasion, and in successfully sustaining it so as to avoid another Gallipoli or Dunkirk. These

difficulties would be great even if the war were confined to Europe alone; they are increased many times by the global nature of the struggle and its inherent problem of strategic priorities.

The Russo-German pact of August, 1939, marked the failure of British and French diplomatic efforts to line up the Soviet Union against the Axis powers. That failure made impossible for the time being the establishment of an effective eastern front against Germany, because gallant Poland was beyond the reach of allied aid and alone was no match for German brains and brawn. Almost two years were to pass before Germany's unprovoked (Hitler to the contrary notwithstanding) attack on Russia created a front in Eastern Europe. By that time, however, France had been knocked out of the war and Britain driven from the continent, so that the new Russian front stood alone: there was no second front in Europe. Nevertheless, the potential advantage to the anti-axis powers of Russian belligerency had to be seized. Accordingly, on July 12, 1941, a scant three weeks after Germany had attacked Russia, Great Britain and the Soviet Union signed in Moscow a treaty binding themselves to "render each other assistance and support of all kinds in the present war against Hitlerite Germany," and "neither [to] negotiate nor [to] conclude an armistice or treaty of peace except by mutual agreement." Six weeks later, on August 25, this pledge of military cooperation was implemented in the field by the combined Russian-British invasion of Iran. Meanwhile, arrangements had been made for not only Britain but also the United States to send all possible aid to Russia in the form of equipment and supplies.

Few persons in the West expected Russia to withstand for long the carefully prepared sledge-hammer blows of



the Reichswehr. Few but the Russians themselves had much faith in their capacity to prevent the speedy liquidation of this new eastern front. But once the western powers and populace awoke to a proper appreciation of Russia's resistance, there began a steadily growing public demand that steps be taken to establish a second land front in Europe as a means of providing the best sort of aid for Russia and of achieving ultimate victory over Germany. The history of the demand for such a second front merits attention.

Early in October, 1941, after three and a half months of campaigning in Russia, the German armies launched a tremendous offensive against Moscow. This drive was to be, in Hitler's phrase, "the last, great decisive battle of the year." As the invaders smashed their way toward their objective, the Russian army paper, *Red Star*, called on the British to relieve German pressure on the Red armies by making a diversion on a second front. This summons was echoed in the rising cry of the British public and press, especially of British labor, for "action" of some kind. By the end of the month, the "action" called for was an invasion of Western Europe while so much of German might was occupied in the East. A demand for such action was made in the House of Commons and drew from the Government the reply that Britain was in no position to risk an invasion of the continent at a moment when it might be forced to take the initiative on other fronts.

For the moment, the only offensive action Britain could contrive on the continent as aid to Russia was the bombing of industrial centers, military installations and transportation facilities in enemy territory. But British strength in heavy bombers was not sufficient to do vitally serious damage, and the reason is not far to seek. With a late and rather slow start in building up her air power, Britain had been obliged first to concentrate on production of fighter planes for the defense of the United Kingdom itself. Consequently, when the Russo-German war broke out she was unprepared for intensive bombing of Nazi Europe on a large scale and therefore could count on her air force to give little more than token aid to Russia by attacking Germany.

On November 6, 1941, the German armies were sixty-five miles from Moscow. And on that day Joseph Stalin, speaking in Moscow on the twenty-fourth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, referred to the urgent desirability of a second front in the following words: "There can be no doubt that the appearance of a second front on the continent of Europe — and undoubtedly this will appear in the near future — will essentially relieve the position of our armies to the detriment of the Germany army." Although no such front was established, relief was brought to Russia by General Auchinleck's North African army which attacked the enemy in force on November 18. This offensive in Libya is reported to have caused the German command to withdraw as much as half of its fighter-plane strength and some other units from the Russian front in order to meet the threat in North Africa. It is hard to resist the conclusion that this withdrawal contributed somewhat to the success of the spirited Russian counter-offensive which recaptured Rostov on November 29 and spread to most of the front by December 6. Presumably, also, it was this offensive which the government spokesman had in mind when, late in

October, he replied to the demand for a British invasion of Europe.

While Russian and British armies continued their separate advances during winter months, Japan entered the war and went rapidly from one victory to another. With the capture of Singapore on February 15 and the subsequent conquest of the Netherlands East Indies, the Japanese cleared the way for eventual major offensives on Australia and India, providing they retained the power to carry out such designs. Their successes induced understandable apprehension in Asia and the Southwestern Pacific. From China and Australia came pleas and demands for assistance, immediately and in volume.

Given the German reverses in Russia and Libya, and the astonishing, even humiliating, Japanese successes in the Far East, it would not have been surprising if talk of a second front in Western Europe had died down. But such was not the case. Throughout the successive Allied disasters in and around Southeastern Asia, official spokesmen of the United Nations repeatedly affirmed the intention of attacking Nazi Europe in the west.

From conferences held in Moscow and Washington at the turn of the year and resulting in the official formation of the United Nations, there came reports and announcements which revealed that the new war in the Pacific had not taken precedence over the old war in Europe. In January, Secretary of the Navy Knox and First Lord of the Admiralty A. V. Alexander both indicated that Hitler should be considered the principal enemy and that priority should be accorded to the war against Germany. These particular utterances, coming as they did when Japan seemed irresistible, had an unfortunate effect on China, the Dutch East Indies, Australia and New Zealand. Some adjustments in the rating of strategic priorities were made out of consideration for these Far Eastern powers, but there does not appear to have been any fundamental alteration of the official opinion that Germany was the prime enemy and should be the object of primary action. Certainly, the much publicized arrival of American troops in Northern Ireland on January 26, 1942, seemed to indicate that despite the turn of events in the Pacific, steps were continuing to establish in Europe the second front that had been demanded.

Through February and March, while Japan was still unchecked, still more official pronouncements served to keep very much alive hopes of a second front in Europe. On the anniversary of the Red Army, February 23, Stalin made two pleas for allied aid. He urged once more the opening of a second front in Europe without waiting until the last button was sewn on the uniform of the last soldier. This plea was reiterated by Ambassador Litvinov in New York on March 16 and by Ambassador Maisky in London on March 25, but it was only partially answered by the increased intensity of R.A.F. bombings on such objectives as the Renault works, Rostock, Luebeck, Cologne, Essen, etc. Stalin also asked for an increase in Allied supplies sent to Russia. This second plea did not fall on deaf ears. On March 26 President Roosevelt responded by directing that barriers to the shipment of supplies to Russia be removed. Three days later Lord Beaverbrook, British Lend-Lease Coordinator in the United States, declared that "If the Russian armies were scattered beyond the Urals, all our hopes would

be scattered too." He urged that all possible supplies be sent to this "most critical battlefront in the history of civilization."

The first half of April brought bad news for the United Nations. On the ninth Bataan fell; on the tenth the Working Committee of the Indian Congress Party unanimously rejected the British proposals and on the next day Sir Stafford Cripps informed the press in Delhi that the British Government's offer to India had been withdrawn; on the fourteenth Pierre Laval returned to the Petain cabinet. The developments in the Far East suggested that Japan, with the thorn of Bataan removed from her side, might now strike in some other direction, and the stalemate in Delhi further suggested that Japan might find it advantageous to fish in India's troubled waters for great economic and strategic gains. In Europe, the return of M. Laval was read in the context of intensive Nazi preparations in Russia, the Balkans and the Mediterranean: the bombing of Malta and the raiding of Alexandria, reported concentrations of German men and equipment in Greece, Crete, and Bulgaria. These activities indicated that the expected Nazi push to the Caucasus and the Near East was dreadfully imminent, and, observed in relationship to events in Asia, justified some apprehension of a meeting between Japan and Germany in the Indian Ocean and the Middle East. Clearly there was need for some decisive action by the United Nations if these possibilities were to be obviated. Russia's armies could be depended on to give excellent account of themselves. But what could their allies do? Once again they were confronted with the problems of strategic priorities: How much of what to send where?

Excluding Russia, there were three great bases which might serve as bulwarks against enemy advances or springboards for allied attack: Australia, the Near and Middle East, and Britain; these three, and the greatest of these was Britain, — greatest because it was in itself a source of supply, because it was closest to the great North American arsenal, and because, while bristling with defensive strength, it stood most adjacent to important enemy territory. Decisions at the turn of the year had indicated that Germany held priority over Japan as Enemy No. 1. Emphasis on coming to grips with Germany in Europe did not at all mean that the United Nations, particularly Britain and the United States, would let the Far and Middle East go by default, as subsequent events have shown. Accordingly, while they nourished China's resistance and built up strength in the South Pacific and in the Near and Middle East, they increased supplies to Russia and proceeded to make such preparations in the British Isles that not only the people of the United Nations but also the enemy command expected an invasion of Western Europe. Events and official statements tended to confirm this expectation.

On April 8, Mr. Harry Hopkins and General Marshall, Chief of Staff of the United States Army, arrived in London. In the days that followed, Mr. Hopkins was particularly busy with the problems of production and transport; General Marshall was in discussion with the British and other service chiefs. These activities gave rise to much speculation. Those who interpreted the visit as of special significance for the preparation of a second front in Europe chose to find confirmation in the

remarks of General Marshall to United States forces in Northern Ireland. He said that a constant flow of United States troops would continue to reach the British Isles; that this would include air units which would be stationed all over the United Kingdom. A whole army corps, known as "Task Troops," had been trained in amphibious warfare, and would carry out raids, not necessarily only in Europe, such as those of the Commandos. The time for action, he said, was near. In this latter remark he was supported by Lord Beaverbrook in Washington who once more publicly urged Britain to establish a second front in the west so as to divide German armies.

The urgency of some action became increasingly clear during the month of May and has not been diminished by the course of the war since then. Early in that month, with a reported million and a half fresh troops concentrated in Southwestern Russia, the Germans launched their spring offensive. Their first major move was in the Crimea on May 8. This was countered by a Russian attack in the Kharkov area on May 12. But while the struggle about Kharkov swayed indecisively back and forth, the Germans increased the pressure and pace of their advance in the South. Once more there was sharp demand in Britain for a second front. In its eagerness for action the public failed, apparently, to reflect on the implications inherent in the Prime Minister's statement that the British expeditionary force which had attacked Madagascar on May 5 had been three months in preparation. What preparation would be necessary for a successful invasion of Europe the man in the street could not say, but to him the war was going badly. Russia was the only member of the United Nations who had a real fighting army in the field and the Churchill government was roundly criticised for its "defensive psychology". So sharp was this rise in public indignation and impatience that Sir Stafford Cripps saw fit to speak to the point at Bristol in the third week of May. "The whole country," he said, "feels that the long period of defensive operations is nearing its end and that the time is at hand when we must prepare ourselves to take the offensive." Later in the week, on May 20, he told the House of Commons that it was the War Cabinet's opinion that no price was too high to pay for the continued support "of the gallant Russians, even if it meant endangering part of our own territory, since it was protecting the vital heart of our resistance in Great Britain itself." He said that the heavy pounding of German industry was, in the Cabinet's view, the best way in which Britain could give assistance to Russia until such time as she would be able "to make a carefully planned attack on the continent of Europe which we intend to do."

The arrival in London during the following week of more ranking United States officers and the presence among them of Lieutenant General Henry H. Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Force, Rear Admiral John H. Towers, Chief of the Navy Bureau of Aeronautics, and Lieutenant General Brehon B. Somervell, Chief of the Army's Service of Supply, — the arrival of these men seemed to constitute a significant earnest of the intentions to invade expressed by Sir Stafford, as also did General Marshall's statement to the graduating class at West Point: "Today we find American soldiers throughout the Pacific, in Burma, China, and India. They have flown over

(Continued on page 23)

The Second Front and a Global War

(Continued from page 18)

Japan. They are landing in England, and they will land in France."

Then, in the first week of June, as if to make good Sir Stafford's statement about bombing, the R.A.F. hammered at strategic objectives in enemy territory with unprecedented intensity. On six nights between May 30 and June 6 they sent more than 7,000 planes over Nazi Europe and dropped thousands of tons of bombs, 3,000 tons on Cologne alone. These bombings constituted at least a partial reply to the Russian and public demand for a second front. And there was evidence that more ambitious undertakings were afoot to meet fully the popular demand and relieve the increasing pressure on Russia.

In the second week of June it was announced that Britain and the United States had signed pacts with Russia concerning the prosecution and conduct of the war and that these powers had reached a full understanding "with regard to the urgent tasks of creating a second front in Europe in 1942." This language still left in doubt the nature of this second front, but that it envisaged a land front was read into an announcement made in Washington and emanating from Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt. This announcement stated that there was agreement among the United Nations on action to be taken to curb submarine warfare, aid China, and "divert German strength from the attack on Russia." This latter point was emphasized by the further announcement that Major General Dwight D. Eisenhower was placed in command of American forces in the "theater of European operations," which, it was pointed out, differed from the "theater of European training" already established in the British Isles, and that this general was already in London.

But time would pass and work would have to be done before these pacts and appointments could be translated into desired action. It was one thing to recognize the urgency of a task, and another to carry it out. Meanwhile Germany was pushing toward the Caucasus and the Near East in a great pincer's movement. The northern arm of the movement reached eastward across Southern Russia, the south arm stretched across North Africa toward Suez. On May 23, the Germans captured Kerch and so possessed themselves of an important springboard into the Caucasus. This advantage was made secure by the capture of Sebastopol on July 5 after more than eight

months of siege. By the end of July they had driven eastward from the line Orel-Kharkov-Taganrog deep into the big bend of the Don river and had occupied Rostov, northern gateway to the Caucasus. By mid-August they had reached the foothills of the Caucasus mountains, including the oil fields of Maikop, and, while maintaining pressure in this area, were mounting a shattering offensive toward Stalingrad on the Volga. Before the month was out they were hammering at the gates of that city still unchecked.

The southern arm of the pincers had fared less well. Field Marshall Rommel attacked the Allied forces in North Africa on the night of May 26-7. In the early days of the operation, the Afrika Korps suffered reverses and setbacks. But during the first week of June they regained the initiative and from then on surged forward, escaping from what was reported to be one British trap after another, until on June 20-21 they captured Tobruk with a large proportion of its garrison. Pressing his advantage, Rommel moved on toward Suez and was within sixty miles of the naval base at Alexandria before he was checked in the first week of July and subsequently forced to fall back to the Qahara Depression. Since the middle of July there has been a lull in the desert fighting—as each side exerted itself to accumulate superior strength for the test which would certainly come. Rommel enjoys the advantage of comparative proximity to his main source of supply, although in North Africa itself Rommel's lines of communication are longer and more vulnerable than those of his enemy. And, while the northern arm of the pincers threatens to encircle Stalingrad, reports from Ankara tell of the movement of men, supplies and equipment to reinforce Rommel's armies. That the United Nations anticipate continued German attempts to extend the reach of both arms of the pincers, — toward Astrakan and deeper into the Caucasus as well as toward Suez and Syria, — is reflected in the replacement of General Auchinleck by General Sir Harold Alexander, and by the division of the Near Eastern command into two parts: the one under General Alexander to comprise in broad terms North Africa and the new one under General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson to embrace Syria, Iraq and Iran, the all important landbridge connecting Europe, Africa and Asia.

For generations German military leaders have been specialists in planning and executing campaigns, the objective of which was the destruction of the enemy's field army. To appreciate this, it is sufficient to recall the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and its battle of Sedan, the von Schlieffen plan which

WE'RE SPECIALISTS—

INDUSTRIAL ELECTRONIC MATERIAL

ASK FOR CATALOG NO. 42



Radio Specialties Company

HOLLYWOOD — LOS ANGELES — PHOENIX

was so nearly carried out in 1914, and more recently the Polish Campaign of September, 1939, and that of northern France in early summer, 1940. The length of the Russian front, opened in June 1941, made difficult the application of this strategy to the entire Russian army, and attempts to apply it piecemeal were frustrated by the stubborn, resourceful resistance of the Russian soldier and by excellent Russian staff work which managed to keep the Russian front intact in the face of desperate enemy onslaughts.

Germany's present campaign in Russia, that of 1942, may well have as its ultimate and traditional objective the "annihilation" of Russia's armies. It would appear, however, that Germany is preparing for the *coup de grace* by operations whose immediate objective is to cut off Russian armies from their sources of indispensable supply. Hence the advances in southern Russia at enormous cost to occupy important industrial areas and cut off Russian access to Caucasian oil; hence the steady defense of positions in the Baltic area from which the lines from Moscow to Murmansk can be cut; hence the attack on shipping in the Atlantic and especially on the northern route to Murmansk and Archangel; hence the preparations to renew the drive toward Suez. Should this drive materialize and develop successfully, and should the thrust toward Stalingrad carry to the Caspian Sea, Russia would be cut off, not only from her own southern resources, but also from allied supplies now brought in through the Persian Gulf. The Germans may reasonably expect another two and a half months of good campaigning weather: (it was the end of November, 1941, before the tide of battle turned against them around Rostov), that is to say as much good weather ahead of them as they have enjoyed since their offensive began, and they are now (August 26) much closer to Astrakan on the Caspian than they were to Stalingrad three months ago. In view of these circumstances, one may well wonder what transpired during the recent visit of Mr. Churchill and his associates to Moscow. Surely it was decided there whether to bring immediate aid to Russia by sending more supplies over long and dangerous routes, or to do so by establishing soon a second land front in Europe.

Whatever decision was made in Moscow, it could not have been unrelated to United Nations successes against Japan. Beginning with the battle of the Coral Sea, through the battle of Midway Island, to the struggle in the Solomon Islands, the Japanese have suffered a series of tactical and strategic reverses. At the moment, the initiative which Japan has enjoyed in the Pacific seems in jeopardy. Contemporaneously, increased air assistance to China has aided her armies to seize the initiative from Japan on the Asiatic mainland. Do these setbacks at sea and in China mean that Japan is experiencing the harsh consequences of having overtaxed her strength? Or do they mean that she is concentrating for an attack on India or on Eastern Siberia or on both? It is reported that a strong Japanese army, based on Burma, is ready to attack India after the monsoon season, which will have passed in another two months. Against such a threat General Wavell has been building up his military strength during the summer. If military resistance to any Japanese attack on India were not undermined

by political action within India itself, it is probable that a Japanese invasion force could be successfully repelled; but with the political situation what it is, the moral and psychological factors both of which are incalculable, the military authorities may have reason to doubt their capacity simultaneously to maintain order in India and hold off the foreign enemy.

A Japanese attack on the Russian Far East was reported as imminent more than four months ago, yet has not occurred. It was assumed that Russia had been obliged so to weaken her defenses in that area, in order to hold off the Germans in the fall of 1941—that the Japanese could attack with prospect of victory. The disposition and strength of Russia's armed forces is, naturally, a closely guarded secret, but there is reason to believe that one of the most effective deterrents to a Japanese attack on Siberia has been a healthy and legitimate respect for Russian strength in that area. Relations between Russia and Japan are still governed by the neutrality pact of April 13, 1941, valid for five years. In the twelve months that followed the signing of this pact, Russia was attacked by Japan's ally and Japan attacked Russia's ally. Despite the strain of these developments both signatories stuck to the letter of their agreement. The first anniversary of the pact was celebrated amid rumors of Japanese preparations for a stab in Russia's back, and Russia saw fit to give what was regarded as a warning to Japan. *Pravda*, official organ of the Russian Communist Party, wrote on April 13, 1942, that the pact "was a result of prolonged evolution of Japanese-Soviet relations, a result of realization of the plain truth that the U.S.S.R does not belong to those countries whose interests may be violated with impunity." It recognized that the spread of hostilities had subjected the pact to a "serious trial." That the pact may continue to exist, it continued, Japan would have to show "the same attitude toward treaties as that displayed by the Soviet Union . . . It is necessary that the Japanese military and Fascist cliques whose heads have been turned by military successes realize that their prattle about an annexationist war in the north may cause damage, in the first place and most of all, to Japan herself."

If this warning represented not only Russia's determination to fight if attacked by Japan, but also her capacity to resist, then her Far Eastern strength, together with the apparently increased strength of the Chinese armies and the offensive power of the United Nations in the Southwestern Pacific may combine to turn the tide of battle against Japan in her chosen areas of conflict. Such a favorable situation in the Far East would make practicable additional emphasis on measures to aid hard-pressed Russia, by direct shipment of supplies or by the establishing of a second land front in Western Europe, or by both. But the point is, that they who must make the decision regarding the establishment of a second land front in Europe will have to consider the undertaking in terms of the global war. It is not simply a matter of preparing for the invasion of Western Europe by at least 750,000 men carried in and equipped from a minimum of 4,500,000 tons of merchant shipping appropriately convoyed by sea and air, or of sustaining and enlarging that front once established; it is also a matter of how such preparation would affect the flow of men, ships, planes and material to the extended Japanese front and to the embattled Russians.