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JONATHAN CAPE
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INTRODUCTION

THIS book was begun before the war. Its object was to combat the reiterated assertions that were current in the year between Munich and the outbreak of war that Britain could not stand by herself, and that the defeat of France must inevitably be followed by the immediate defeat of our own country.

The decision in 1939 to send a military force to France should war break out put publication out of the question for the time being. But the collapse of the French in 1940, which the author had for some time thought not unlikely, not only restored the possibility of publication but even invested it with the white raiment of counter-despondency, since the book gave a reassuring message regarding the extremely forbidding situation then before the British people, a situation which they had previously been repeatedly informed by the 'continental' school of strategists must end in disaster.

Even so, I confess that I approached the question of publication with some slight trepidation; for, to judge by the general tenor of press articles and correspondence during the previous two years, I was very nearly alone in holding the views that I did[1]. The book's reception soon dispelled my misgivings. From the numerous letters which readers were kind enough to send me expressing approval of the book, I realized that there were many more people in the country whose views coincided with my own than a previous study of published opinion could possibly have led me to suppose.

[1]There were one or two notable exceptions.

The process of bringing the book up to date prior to first publication was far from easy, for things were moving very rapidly at the time, and the general import of great events had to be estimated on what was often very inadequate information while they were actually occurring.

A great deal more has happened since the book made its appearance. The Battle of Britain has come and gone, and the campaigns in Libya, Greece, and Crete have been fought out, all with their lessons bearing on the general conclusions I had put forward. I think I may claim that though points of detail have had — rather naturally — to be corrected and certain estimates adjusted, that nevertheless this new evidence has not demanded the abandonment or even the serious modification of any of the main arguments originally developed.

In revising the book for a second edition, which is once again being done in the midst of a highly fluid situation, the subject that has inevitably received chief attention has been the air. The chapter dealing specially with air power has been completely rewritten, so as to embody all the striking developments of the last year in which the air has played so prominent a part.

I have happily been able to leave the remainder of the book substantially unaltered, but have brought it up to date as necessary, small amounts of new matter, and in particular one or two replies to certain points of published criticism, being introduced in some of the later chapters.

CHAPTER I

THE RISE OF GERMAN SEA POWER

DURING the greater part of the years 1888 and 1889, an obscure American naval officer was engaged in the depressing task of trying to find a publisher for a book which no one seemed to want. Following the forlorn path trodden by so many authors, he submitted his manuscript to one firm after another, only to be met with successive refusals. By the autumn of 1889, he had become profoundly discouraged and was on the point of relinquishing any further efforts. At last, at the eleventh hour, Messrs. Little, Brown & Company of Boston came forward with an acceptance, and thus became the publishers of what was destined to be one of the famous books of the nineteenth century.

Six years before, Captain A. T. Mahan, of the United States Navy, had been offered the post of lecturer at the newly-created Naval War College at Newport, then in its first session. His duties at the college were not, however, to commence for nearly two years, and Mahan made full use of this intervening time to prepare himself for what was coming. He embarked on an intensive course of reading, out of which was to grow the series of lectures on naval tactics and history that he was to give at the college. In this period of preparatory study, Mahan enjoyed the advantages of the pioneer. The War College was a new institution, feeling its first uncertain way

along an untrodden path, amid a naval atmosphere that was generally hostile. But if its youthful way was encumbered with prejudice and obstruction, at least it had not had time to build up round itself a wall of tradition and established doctrine. Mahan could therefore do his reading with an open mind.

His aim was to study history from the naval angle, with a view to establishing principles of naval warfare for future use; and as he read on, and pondered over what he had been reading, the conviction came eventually to him that 'the control of the sea was an historic factor which had never been systematically appreciated and expounded'.[1] Once this idea had taken hold of him, it was natural that his further studies would be pursued with added zest, for he now felt himself an explorer following a hitherto unsuspected but fascinating trail.

When in due course he took up his duties at the War College, his lectures, reflecting his own novel and enthusiastic conceptions of sea power, made a great impression. Commodore Luce, the retiring President, had delivered the opening address, in which he had declared that 'we must find someone to do for naval science what Jomini did for military science'. At the end of Mahan's series of lectures, Luce spoke again. Reminding his audience of his earlier reference to a naval successor to Jomini, he exclaimed enthusiastically: 'He is here and his name is Mahan.'

Gratified by the success of his lectures, Mahan conceived the idea of publishing them in book form. He wanted to carry his theories beyond the confines of the War College to the American public, whose members he

[1] *Mahan* – CAPTAIN W. D. PULESTON.

felt to be considerably in need of enlightenment on the importance of sea power to their national life. As we have seen, however, the 'vague feeling of contempt for the past'[1] which he sensed among his generation was nearly too much for him. His book only just managed to get itself into print.

The book appeared in 1890 under the title of *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, and was a triumphant success. In the United States, indeed, its reception, though favourable, was not outstandingly cordial. A few discerning men in high places read it with interest and appreciated its message. Among such was Mr. Theodore Roosevelt, shortly to be the President of the United States and then a Civil Service Commissioner, who wrote Mahan a letter of congratulation concluding with the prescient conviction that the book would 'become a naval classic'. On the whole, however, the American public remained politely congratulatory but only partially interested.

A much more agreeable reception awaited the book in Europe. In England, the principal maritime nation of the world, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* was immediately acclaimed as the classic that Theodore Roosevelt had predicted for it. Flattering reviews and opinions appeared on all sides. It happened that the moment was singularly auspicious for the book's appearance in Britain. The British Navy had recently been passing through one of its periodic seasons of neglect. During the early '80s, public interest in the fleet had been languid and the naval strength of the country had been allowed to decline. This had caused growing

[1] *Mahan*—CAPTAIN W. D. PULESTON, p. 103.

anxiety in certain naval and political circles, resulting in a public agitation for a larger fleet by a small group of writers and politicians. Just before the publication of Mahan's book, this agitation had succeeded in bringing about the official adoption of the 'two-power standard' as the measure of British naval policy. To the Big Navy group in Britain, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* came as a gift from on high. Not only was the book very obviously a landmark in naval literature by its originality in conception and ability in presentation, but it provided a most happy abundance of argument in support of their own cause. Mahan, as the new champion of sea power, was their natural ally; and what made him doubly welcome was that his championship was founded mainly on the glorious past deeds of the British Navy itself.

Among naval officers, or that section of them given to serious reading, the book also made a great impression. Within a few months of publication, Captain Gerard Noel, later an Admiral of the Fleet, wrote to Mahan to tell him that 'I have never before read or seen any work on naval matters more full of interest, more clearly written, or displaying fuller or more accurate knowledge of the subject than *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*.'

It cannot be said, however, that the previous three-quarters of a century had been a period of great intellectual activity in the British naval service. The Navy had been busy enough in practical matters. An examination of the watch bills of the '80s shows, for instance, that on the Mediterranean station in summer the work of the fleet began at 4.30 in the morning. In smartness, in

seamanlike efficiency, in pride of performance, the British Navy had no superior. But it has to be confessed that in abstract thought concerning the problems of naval warfare its achievements had not been outstanding. No doubt, its dazzling successes at the turn of the previous century were partly responsible, by inducing a spirit of intellectual complacency. For many years British naval officers could bask comfortably in the warm afterglow of Trafalgar, assuring themselves that to 'engage the enemy more closely' was the master key to all warlike problems. But by the 1880's the spirit of inquiry was beginning to reassert itself. The Navy was changing from sail to steam, and officers were coming to wonder how the change was likely to affect the traditional methods of waging war on the sea. Discussion was taking place at the Royal United Service Institution and in the pages of the newly created *Brassey's Naval Annual*, as well as in the more popular journals dealing with service matters. While, however, this discussion was competent enough on the technical and tactical aspects of the case, it cannot be said to have reached any very high level on the major planes of strategy and general war policy. The truth was that the Navy was not in the habit of thinking very much further than the naval battle. The naval officer knew how to fight a fleet action but had only very hazy ideas on how to conduct a war.

The prime difficulty was that naval warfare as a connected whole had never been properly studied. There had at that time appeared no true philosophy of naval warfare. There were plenty of naval histories, but they were mainly narratives. They told of the glorious exploits of the Royal Navy and of how they happened.

What they did not tell was why they happened, and whether the policy that brought them about was well or ill conceived. There were those who realized this unfortunate gap in the state of naval knowledge. Rear-Admiral P. H. Colomb was one of them, and already in 1885 had published a book on Naval Strategy. But Colomb, though painstaking, was not a very inspired writer and had not succeeded in advancing matters very much further.

A comprehensive analytic study of naval warfare in the English language that would provide not only naval men but intelligent civilians as well with a sure foundation for an understanding of the true meaning of sea power, its characteristics and possibilities, had still to be written. It was left to Mahan to produce such a book, for which many in Britain had been waiting for some time; and the instant acclamation that surrounded *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* was the measure of its success in satisfying the latent demand. Generous recognition came from Admiral Colomb, 'I was delighted to see,' he wrote in a preface of his own, 'by the publication of Captain Mahan's *Influence of Sea Power upon History* that, on the other side of the Atlantic, an abler pen and a deeper thinker had been at work on thoughts something like our own'; and his approbation was echoed by Professor J. K. Laughton of the Royal Naval College and Mr. J. R. Thursfield, a student of naval history on the staff of *The Times*.

While *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* was making its first stir among naval, political and intellectual circles in Britain, Mahan was already busy on a second book. Like the first, it arose out of lectures he was giving

at the Naval War College. In the lectures which were embodied in *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, he had made a survey of naval warfare over the period 1660-1783. In later lectures, Mahan went on to examine the next subsequent period. Two years after the appearance of his first book, these lectures were published in two volumes under the title of *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire*. The new book was an even greater success than its predecessor. The author's reputation was already made. He was now covering the romantic period of the dazzling Nelsonian victories, and was dealing with a struggle that was especially rich in material to suit his purpose of elucidating the nature and value of sea power. He made full use of his opportunity. Examining the long series of Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, he showed that they developed essentially into a grim contest between the predominant land power and the predominant sea power, out of which the predominant sea power had emerged triumphant. The theme, as treated by Mahan, was a striking demonstration of the power of the naval weapon, which made a great impression in many quarters. Indeed, one of his passages in which he emphasized the immense if invisible influence of fleets very quickly became world renowned; that in which he declared that 'those far distant, storm-beaten ships, on which the Grand Army had never looked, stood between it and the Dominion of the world'.

The effect of these two books was remarkable. As *The Times* said, 'by his pregnant conception of sea power and his masterly exposition of its influence upon the history of the British Isles, Captain Mahan may almost be said

to have effected a revolution in the study of naval history similar in kind to that effected by Copernicus in the domain of astronomy'. In Britain, the admiration aroused by his first book was turned almost to fervour by his second. Mr. Gibson Bowles, an ardent big Navyite, wrote to say that 'he was eagerly reading both works, and wished to be considered "as a personal disciple and friend of yours".'[1]

Nor were such sentiments by any means confined to Britain. In most of the maritime countries of the world, Mahan's interpretations of naval history excited lively interest and discussion, and called into being a body of supporters. But there was one European country in particular where the Mahan thesis was studied with specially close attention. To the military leaders of Germany, the lessons pointed by Mahan seemed pregnant with meaning; and to no one more than their supreme head. The young Kaiser Wilhelm II was enthralled by the brilliant seascape that Mahan had painted. 'I am just now', he wrote, 'not reading but devouring Captain Mahan's book; and am trying to learn it by heart . . . It is or board all my ships and constantly quoted by my captains and officers.' He was already possessed of the world's most powerful army. But at sea Germany was weak; had always been weak. Compared to that of either Britain or France, the German fleet was insignificant. Neither Bismarck nor his predecessors had seen the need for naval strength. German land forces alone had sufficed to crush the Danes, the Austrians and the French in succession. But now that the unification of the German states into a German Empire was an accomplished fact,

[1] *Mahan* – CAPTAIN W. D. PULESTON.

the German rulers were busy with dreams of further glorious achievements by the Greater Germany that had come into being. And just at this moment along came Mahan's books with their startling revelation of the potency of sea power. To a great military nation bent on further expansion and aggrandizement, the message of *The Influence of Sea Power* volumes must have seemed almost like a divinely inspired signpost along the road to glory. With a powerful fleet as well as a powerful army, Germany's place in the sun should be assured.

The new orientation of German policy was announced by the Kaiser in a public speech in which he used the famous phrase that 'Germany's future lay on the water'. His Lieutenants elaborated the theme. Captain von Luttwitz of the General Staff declared that: 'In the last century, we were too late to partake of the general partition [of Colonial territories]. But a second partition is forthcoming. We need only consider the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the isolation of China, the unstable condition of many South American states, to see what rich opportunities await us . . . In order not to miss these opportunities, this time we require a fleet. We must be so strong at sea,' he added, 'that no nation which feels itself safe from our military power, may care to overlook us in partition negotiations, and there is no time to be lost.' It was obvious enough that these words were directed towards Britain; and Britain accepted them as such. With their utterance, the keel plate of the Great War may be said to have been laid.

On the German side, words were soon translated into action. The Kiel Canal was completed in 1895, providing a secure route between the Baltic and the North Sea.

In 1898, the first German Navy Law was passed, authorizing an increase of the fleet; followed by a second one in 1900, in which the programme was considerably extended. It was an open challenge to British sea power and Britain took alarm at once, as she always does at such a threat. She, too, set about increases of the fleet. The result was a naval race between the two countries, that went on with increasing tempo up to the outbreak of war in 1914.

The comment has not infrequently been made that Mahan's teachings gave the first impetus to a movement that led directly to the world upheaval of 1914-18, and must therefore be regarded as one of the prime factors in bringing the war about. Whether such comment is just or otherwise must remain an open question. It may be thought that the German nation of Kaiser Wilhelm II, glorying in its new-found unity and strength, and fortified by the successful military campaigns of the recent past, was almost bound to follow the impulse of ambition towards further increases of power and prestige until opposition from some quarter or another set a limit to further expansion; but it can at least be doubted whether, without Mahan to lure the Kaiser and his advisers on to maritime aspirations, the war, when it came, would have taken the form that it did. It is possible that, failing the deliberate challenge to her naval position that followed the Kaiser's boast that Germany's future lay upon the water, Britain might have taken a more detached view of the European scene. She had not intervened to save France from defeat at Prussian hands in 1870. It is conceivable that she might not have intervened to protect her against Greater Germany in 1914. Whatever may have been the

influences leading to a possible war between Germany and France, the conclusion cannot be avoided that the publication of Mahan's books on sea power played an important part in bringing on the war between Germany and Britain.

CHAPTER II

THE ANGLO-FRENCH ENTENTE AND ITS STRATEGICAL CONSEQUENCES

An early consequence of the German challenge to British sea power was the Anglo-French entente. It was a measure of the alarm engendered in British official circles by the German Navy laws; for although Britain had often been a sedulous weaver of foreign alliances in times of acute external danger in the past, her instinct in periods of reasonable security, as during the greater part of the nineteenth century, had always been to keep carefully aloof from foreign entanglements. Moreover, her relations with France had not generally been distinguished by cordiality. The recollection of the long Anglo-French hostility of the eighteenth century, culminating in the bitter struggle of the Napoleonic period, was still very much alive in 1900, and British schoolboys of that time were still growing up to regard Frenchmen as their 'hereditary enemies'. Nor was this only a matter of traditional prejudice. British and French interests and aspirations were still in conflict in various parts of the world, notably in Egypt and Morocco. Throughout the nineteenth century, British defence measures had been based primarily on the possibility of French attack. Indeed, only two years before the end of the century, the Fashoda incident in the Sudan had brought Britain and France to the very edge of war.

The growing German menace, to the French on land, to the British on the sea, brought the two Governments together. In the face of a common danger, the impulse to adjust their mutual differences was natural. In 1904 this accommodation was successfully achieved. The French agreed to give the British a free hand in Egypt, while Britain consented to regard Morocco as a French sphere of influence. With these two troublesome questions comfortably settled, the way was clear for collaboration against Germany to whatever extent might be decided on.

What that extent was to be was a matter about which the two parties held different feelings. To the British, the Entente in its early form was regarded mostly as a moral gesture, a linking of arms, an assurance of friendship and pledge of solidarity. The idea of material support, either in one form or another, was very much in the background. In the Britain of those days, isolationist sentiment and the instinct for keeping a free hand in matters of foreign policy were strong; much stronger than they were to become after the war of 1914-18 had introduced the British people to the idea of Continental military warfare. The nation was still essentially naval in outlook. The Navy was the Senior Service and the first line of defence, and upon it 'under the good Providence of God' as the preamble to the naval disciplinary regulations have said for over 200 years, 'the safety, honour and welfare of the realm did chiefly depend'.

By comparison, the Army was regarded as a secondary weapon. Its generally accepted role was almost exclusively that of the Home defence of the British Isles and of the Overseas Colonies and Possessions. This had been so for a long time, and had been officially on record for at least

sixteen years before the conclusion of the Entente. In 1888, the Army's functions had been defined by the then Secretary of State for War as

1. Support of the Civil Power in all parts of the United Kingdom.
2. The provision of men for India.
3. The garrisoning of all fortresses and coaling stations at home and abroad.
4. The rapid mobilization for Home defence of the Army Corps of Regulars, and one partly composed of Regulars and partly of Militia, and the organization for related duties of auxiliary forces not allotted to Army Corps or Garrisons.
5. The ability, 'subject to the foregoing considerations and to their financial obligations' to send abroad in case of necessity two complete Army Corps, with Cavalry Division and Line of Communications. 'But it will be distinctly understood that the probability of the employment of an Army Corps in the field in any European war is sufficiently improbable to make it the primary duty of the military authorities to organize our forces efficiently for the defence of this country'.

These principles, as the Royal Commission on the South African War said in its report, had 'governed the whole of the preparations of this country for a possible war' from 1888 to 1903, the date of the Commission's report.[1]

'It is thus clear that for at least a decade and a half before the Entente of 1904, successive British Governments had regarded a British military intervention in

[1] *The British Army and the Continent*, 1904-1914 – J. E. TYLER.

continental warfare as extremely unlikely. Moreover, national sentiment had been so fully in accord with that principle that its public declaration had evoked no criticism. The policy of aloofness from continental struggles was accepted as a matter of course. It is also of interest, in view of what was to come, that the original statement of 1887 had been drawn up in consultation with the Admiralty and 'with knowledge of the assistance which the Navy was capable of rendering in the most likely contingencies'. This was a long time before the institution of the Committee of Imperial Defence for the purpose of co-ordinating Britain's defence measures. Nevertheless, it is clear that the men of 1888 had managed to achieve that co-ordination, even without a co-ordinating Committee. They had evidently examined what the Navy could do and what the Army could do and had made a balanced decision on the respective functions of the two services in relation to each other. Not that we should conclude that a basis of national strategy had thus been drawn up after exhaustive and laborious examination of the subject in its every aspect. It has always been extremely difficult to induce British Governments to devote more than a fleeting attention to strategical problems in normal times of peace. But the statement of 1888 which discountenanced a European role for the Army in favour of a Home and Colonial defence function represented what was then and had for a long time been the common conception of its proper employment; a conception which unquestionably still held the field in 1904. Thus Brigadier-General Waters records that only two years before, in 1902, the War Office, in considering the new possibility of a German war, contemplated the use

of military forces against the German Colonies but not on the Continent of Europe;[1] while the Secretary of State for War spoke in the same sense to the Colonial Conference of the same year. It is not, of course, improbable that the German menace was causing the General Staff to take some sort of stock of the European military scene. But the tradition of British non-intervention on the Continent was very firmly established and was not to be easily upset. As an indication that this 'isolationist' tradition was known and appreciated outside Britain, we find the Paris *Matin* printing a story in the autumn of 1905, a year after the Entente had come into being, that in the event of a German attack on France, Britain had promised to mobilize the fleet, occupy the Kiel Canal, and land 100,000 men in Schleswig-Holstein.[2]

If this signified the French Government's acquiescence in Britain's own conception of her duty as an ally, that assent was not to last. At first, indeed, the French authorities had been in no hurry to make either strategic or political capital out of the British friendship. They feared that to do so might frustrate the understanding with Germany that was being sought. But the German attitude during and after the dismissal of M. Delcassé convinced the French that conciliation was a vain hope. They then turned to Britain in earnest, the more so since the unsuccessful outcome of the Russo-Japanese war had left their ally Russia in a bad way.

In the Entente agreement of 1904, Britain had promised France, in certain circumstances, her diplomatic support against Germany; but no more than that.

[1] *Private and Personal* – BRIGADIER-GENERAL W. H.-H. WATERS.
[2] *The British Army and the Continent* – J. E. TYLER.

However in January 1906, on January 10th to be precise, the French ambassador in London approached Sir Edward Grey the Foreign Secretary in the new Liberal Government, to ask whether France could expect armed assistance from Britain as well as diplomatic support in the event of a German attack. Grey, though being careful not to commit himself to a definite assurance, said that he believed that France could do so. He went on to say, that he had no objection to naval and military conversations being undertaken in anticipation of and preparation for this British assistance being given. Two days later, Grey met Haldane, the Secretary of State for War, and mentioned to him the conversation with M. Cambon and the permission that had been given for Anglo-French military conversations to take place. Haldane at once consulted the General Staff at the War Office and reached the conclusion that, in the event of war, a British force would have to be sent to the Continent to 'make up for the inadequacy of the French armies', and that plans to this end must be taken in hand at once. It was in pursuance of this opinion that the 'Haldane' reorganization of the Army and the military conversations with the French were both put seriously in train. Four days later, on January 16th, the Anglo-French military conversations were officially opened.

A noteworthy feature of these transactions is the speed, indeed the precipitation, with which they were conducted. The decisions reached were of an importance that cannot be exaggerated. They brought about a revolution in Britain's method of waging war, leading, as they eventually did, to the adoption of conscription and the raising of national armies on a scale that had never before been dreamed of. Yet those epoch-making decisions,

that were to have such a tremendous effect on British national life, were hurried through in six short days.

That the Foreign Secretary was primarily responsible for these momentous decisions cannot be doubted. The unhesitating readiness with which he agreed to Cambon's suggestion for Staff consultations invites the supposition that Grey had previously discussed with his Cabinet colleagues the possibility of some such proposal being put forward by the French and had obtained their concurrence to the reply which he purposed to give. We know, however, that this had not been done. The majority of the Cabinet knew nothing of the Staff talks either beforehand or for a long time afterwards. Five years later, when the Agadir crisis brought the subject out into the open, most of them were still unaware that the talks had been taking place.

It does not appear very certain that Grey had even discussed the matter beforehand with the Prime Minister. The latter was decidedly of an 'anti-Continental' turn of mind. As Under-Secretary of State for War in 1871 he had expounded in the House of Commons 'the best blue-water doctrine in answer to Tory militarists who insisted on comparing the British Army with the Prussian. "Comparaison n'est pas raison", he had retorted, and had argued that "the sea gives us time", and that "the instantly mobilizable army-corps system was unnecessary and inappropriate to our needs" '.[1] Again, in 1889, he had dissented from the majority opinion as a member of the Hartington Commission on army organization, and had written in a minority report that 'those [continental] countries differ

[1] *Life of Campbell-Bannerman* — J. A. SPENDER.

fundamentally from Great Britain in the Constitution of their army and its government as well as in the purpose for which it is maintained'.[1]

With views thus antagonistic to anything savouring of continental intervention, the natural presumption is that the Prime Minister would not have given his consent to the Staff talks, had his advice been sought beforehand; an hypothesis to which colour is lent by a remark he made in a letter to Lord Ripon on February 2nd, three weeks after the Grey-Cambon interview. 'I do not like', he wrote, 'the stress laid upon joint preparations. It comes very close indeed to an honourable undertaking.' This comment, while not absolutely ruling out prior consultation, suggests very strongly that the Prime Minister had not been approached on the subject of possible Staff talks before the Foreign Secretary gave permission for such talks to commence. Indeed, the Prime Minister's misgivings regarding these joint preparations are hardly intelligible if he had previously given his approval for them to be instituted. It seems much more probable that Grey presented him with a *fait accompli*.

So naturally averse was Campbell-Bannerman to the very object which must clearly have formed the background of the Anglo-French Staff conversations, that he was to observe to Clemenceau in 1907, more than a year after the conversations had first been begun, that he doubted if public opinion in Britain would permit British troops being employed on the Continent in the event of war. Clemenceau, who was thoroughly well acquainted with the Staff conversations, was so flabbergasted by this remark that he came to wonder whether the conversations

[1] *Life of Campbell-Bannerman* – J. A. SPENDER.

could possibly be taking place without the British Prime Minister's knowledge.

Nor can it be said that the Service Departments were known to be unitedly behind the action that the Foreign Secretary had taken it upon himself to initiate. Quite the contrary. The War Office and the Admiralty were in nearly complete dis-accord on the subject. A few weeks before Grey's meeting with Cambon on January 10th, some unofficial sounding of French opinion had gone on through an intermediary in the person of Colonel Repington, the Military Correspondent of *The Times*. In response to his inquiries, the French Government allowed it to be known that in the event of war with Germany they looked for the immediate dispatch of a British military force to the Continent for close co-operation with the French Army. Moreover, this British force should be under French command, whether it was acting in direct contact with the French Army or not.

When these suggestions were brought to the notice of Sir John Fisher, the powerful and volcanic First Sea Lord of the Admiralty, he opposed them with characteristic vehemence. Subordinate participation in another nation's continental campaigning did not appeal to him at all. His idea for the proper utilization of the British Army was that the Navy should throw it ashore at some unexpected part of the enemy's coast whence it could take the enemy army in flank or rear. By this means, the important element of surprise to be conferred by the high mobility of the fleet could be taken advantage of, and the benefit of superior sea power utilized to the full. Nor was Fisher by any means alone in this conception of our proper strategy. There existed a strong school of thought

favouring this 'Admiralty' policy, which included among others, Colonel Sir George Clarke, the Secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence. The conclusion, in fact, cannot be avoided that when Grey gave his consent to the commencement of the Staff talks, he was doing so nearly, if not entirely, on his own responsibility.

That he should have staked so much on his own judgment must be regarded as surprising. In Britain, governed as she is, certain questions cannot legitimately be decided by individuals, however eminent. One of these questions is the vitally important problem of the general strategy to be pursued in war. Such a problem should unquestionably go before a Council of State, not necessarily of the whole Cabinet, but at the least consisting of a suitable and properly constituted Cabinet Committee, where the necessarily grave issues involved could be examined and weighed up in the light of the expert views expressed by both (or now all three) of the Service Departments. That this is the right and proper procedure in such circumstances is indisputable. It was the procedure evidently followed, as we have seen, by the responsible authorities in 1888, even before the introduction of special co-ordinating machinery such as came into existence later. By 1906, Grey had this machinery at his disposal in the shape of the Committee of Imperial Defence. He did not, however, make any use of it. The question did not go officially before that Committee until another five years had passed, by which time a number of assurances had been given which it would have been difficult to withdraw and lines of co-operation established with the French which it would have been hard to break. Meanwhile, Grey himself was the principal

deciding factor in these all-important matters. Whether he decided well or ill is for the moment beside the point. The interesting thing is that, in viewing these arbitrary personal decisions on matters of supreme national consequence, we are presumed to be examining the workings of the Cabinet system under a representative democratic Government.

The official military conversations began on January 16th., 1906, and lasted, with varying degrees of activity, until the war. On the British side, they were conducted by the Director of Military Operations for the time being, beginning with Colonel Grierson. From the first, Grierson found himself with a choice of objects. The conversations had originated in an inquiry by the French Ambassador regarding a possible German attack on France. But no sooner did one begin to examine the most likely nature of that attack than another factor entered the field. The French were convinced that the Germans would attack through Belgium. But if they did, the Belgian guarantee arose as an important issue. In 1839, Britain had affixed her signature as one of the guarantors of Belgian neutrality. If the Germans, in order to attack France, were to violate Belgian neutrality, the question of implementing the guarantee came up as a separate contingency. Both the desirability of honouring the guarantee and the well-known traditional sensitiveness of the British people to the possession of the Low Countries by a first-class power called for aid to be sent to the Belgians. And if a German advance through Belgium was what the French most feared and was what they chiefly wanted British help to prevent, then if the British Army were sent to succour Belgium, no doubt its dispatch thither would

serve the dual purpose of preserving British interests in the Low Countries and of protecting France as well. That may well have been Grierson's process of thought, although the records of his conversations, particularly with the French, are too meagre to show.

At all events, the Grierson plan for the British Expeditionary Force was one that looked towards Belgium rather than France. It allowed for the dispatch to Belgium of 105,000 men. They were not, however, to go direct, but would disembark at French ports and be transferred to Belgium through northern France. This was apparently because Fisher at the Admiralty refused to guarantee the direct shipment until the 'command of the sea had been gained'. Later on, when this had been achieved, the base was to be shifted to Antwerp. The chief thing was that the British Expeditionary Force was to operate in Belgium as a separate force, and was not to co-operate directly with the French Army. Thus, the awkward claim of the French for the supreme command over British as well as their own forces would be avoided, and the maximum of control retained for the British authorities. Grierson was hostile to the 'Fisher' conception of the army's role. Nevertheless, it may be observed that his plan for operating in Belgium with an eventual base at Antwerp embraced at least one of the basic principles on which Fisher relied, in that from Belgium a British Force would be in a position to threaten the flank or even the rear of a German Army advancing into France.

Grierson was succeeded as Director of Military Operations by Colonel Ewart in October 1906, and for the four years of the latter's tenure of the post the Anglo-French consultations remained in a state of comparative quiescence

and some uncertainty. The close contact that had subsisted between Grierson and Huguet, the French military attaché in London, was not maintained by Ewart. But the talks went on, if only through subordinates. Meanwhile, the reorganization of the British Army under the Haldane reforms was steadily proceeding, and progress was also being made with some of the Staff work connected with the passage of an Expeditionary Force to the Continent.

On the question of the destination of the Force, the Belgian plan of the Grierson regime seems to have remained in general favour. Nevertheless, the French, through Huguet, were losing no favourable opportunity to press for a British alignment alongside and as part of the French Armies. They were also continuing to demand a French supreme command over the combined Anglo-French forces. As between the British Admiralty and War Office, Sir John Fisher had receded not an inch from his belief in a 'maritime' strategy for the Army, though he was co-operating with the soldiers to the extent of facilitating the naval staff calculations relative to the sea transport of the Expeditionary Force. But whenever he had an official opportunity of expressing his views on the larger question, he did not hesitate to do so with his customary violence. One such occasion was at a Committee of Imperial Defence meeting in 1909, when he told the Committee that 'the British Army should be absolutely restricted to operations consisting of sudden descents on the coast, the recovery of Heligoland, and the garrisoning of Antwerp. He pointed out that there was a stretch of 10 miles of hard sand on the Pomeranian coast which is only 90 miles from Berlin. Were the British army to seize and entrench that strip, a million Germans

would find occupation; but to dispatch British troops to the front in a continental war would be an act of suicidal idiocy arising from the distorted view of war produced by Mr. Haldane's speeches, and childish arrangements for training terriers after war broke out'.[1]

In August 1910, Ewart was relieved as Director of Military Operations by Henry Wilson; and with his arrival the military conversations with the French and the question of the employment of the British Army took a new turn. Wilson was an ardent Francophile who had already, when Commandant of the Staff College at Camberley, gone out of his way to cultivate the acquaintance of the leading French soldiers and to absorb as much as he could of the doctrines of the French École Supérieure de Guerre. Wilson's published diaries have given the world a luminous insight into his mental processes, and there can be no doubt that while he was a merciless critic of his own country's policy, political and military, he regarded all things French with an admiration that was almost unqualified. As has been said, 'his devotion to France not only, in all probability, exceeded that of any of his colleagues, but perhaps also of many Frenchmen. It is hard to deny that it verged on the fanatical'.[2]

It is not, therefore, surprising that in the matter of the part to be played by the British military forces in a war against Germany, the new Director of Military Operations was free of all harassing doubts or hesitations. His ideas on what should be done were fixed and definite. He believed that the largest possible British Army should go across in the shortest possible time after the outbreak of

[1] *Life of Lord Fisher*, vol. II – ADMIRAL SIR REGINALD BACON.
[2] *The British Army and the Continent* – J. E. TYLER.

war to join up with the French Field Army. To further these aims he bent all his energies, from the first day of entering a post which placed him in a unique position to prosecute them. Of this the French were quickly made aware. Discouraged, no doubt, by the reserve previously shown by Ewart, Huguet showed a certain discretion in his approach to the new Director. The question of the movement of a British force to France in the event of war was, he suggested tentatively, an important one, which should, perhaps, receive greater attention than it had recently been getting. Wilson's reply resolved any misgivings Huguet may have had. 'Important question!' the former retorted. 'But it is vital. There is no other.'

With intense energy, Wilson set to work to ensure that all should be in readiness to send the British Army where he intended it should go. Examining the situation as he found it, he discovered that the transport and other Staff arrangements for moving a force quickly to the Continent were in a rudimentary state. This probably was explicable by the fact that there was still official uncertainty in Britain as to what it was proposed to do. Although the military conversations had been in progress, off and on, for several years, the British Government had always been careful to insist on their non-committal nature. Moreover, it was still by no means decided whether the Expeditionary Force should go to France or to Belgium, if indeed it went to either. And even that was not wholly certain. There still remained in the background, hostile and unsubdued, the Admiralty with its conceptions of 'amphibious warfare'.

Wilson did not waste time attacking strongholds of doctrinal principle. He proceeded to plan and organize

on the assumption that his own views would be put into practice. He made frequent visits to France, during which he strengthened and enlarged his contacts with the French military authorities, and discussed with them the burning question of the participation of the British Army in continental warfare in alignment with the French. On one such visit, as Wilson records in his diary, Foch impressed upon him the necessity of an intimate Anglo-French understanding and that 'all our plans must be worked out in the minutest detail so that we may be quite clear of the action and the line to take'.

This was what Wilson had already set himself to do. To further his endeavours, he could count on certainly two members of the Cabinet: Haldane, his own chief, and Grey. We have already noted the forward part the Foreign Secretary had played in sanctioning the commencement of the military conversations in 1906. His attitude had not changed by the time Wilson came to the War Office, and throughout the following four years, up to the outbreak of war, the latter was to find in Grey a ready ally.

The Wilson-Haldane-Grey combination was soon to show its strength. In March 1911, the French were informed that, in case of British intervention in a war against Germany, all six divisions of the Expeditionary Force would be sent to the Continent at once. A month later, Foch, possibly at Wilson's suggestion, had a conversation with the British military attaché in Paris, in which he urged the necessity for a definite agreement between the French and British Governments for as large a British force as possible to be sent immediately on the outbreak of war to fight alongside the French Army. The

report of this proposal for a clear-cut military alliance seems to have been received at the British Foreign Office with favourable comment; but in view of the immense importance of the issue raised it was recommended that the matter should go before the Committee of Imperial Defence. This was unquestionably the correct course to have taken. The proposition was one which must obviously have the most profound bearing on Britain's basic war policy, and was therefore an entirely proper subject to go before the Committee, where the views of both the Service Departments could be expressed upon it. Grey, however, intervened; with the result that the only Ministers who received knowledge of the French proposals were the Prime Minister, the Lord President of the Council (Mr. Morley), Mr. Haldane, and Grey himself. The First Lord of the Admiralty, it will be observed, was not informed.

In July, there was a further development, which was to draw still tighter the cords drawing the British Army over towards the Continent. Wilson went to Paris and met General Dubail, the French Chief of Staff. With him Wilson proceeded to sign an agreement providing for the dispatch of six divisions of the Expeditionary Force to France on certain specified days after mobilization, and enumerating the French ports where they were to disembark and the zone of concentration in France to which they were to proceed. It is beyond question that this agreement must have had the prior approval of the Foreign Secretary and also, at the least, of the Secretary of State for War. Any other supposition is inconceivable. It is equally certain that the Admiralty did not know of it; for if it had, it cannot be imagined that the First Sea Lord

could have advocated the strategical policy that he was to put forward only a few weeks later.

Sir Edward Grey has received the reputation of being a particularly high-principled and honourable man, and it goes without saying that, in the part that he played in connection with the French military conversations, he was sincerely convinced of the rightness of the course he was pursuing. At the same time, it is difficult to avoid the feeling that there was something anomalous, even dubious, in the way he seems to have kept the Admiralty in ignorance about what was afoot between the British and French military authorities. Grey must have been aware of the Admiralty's attitude and of its opposition to a 'continental' strategy; and knowing of that opposition, for either him or Haldane to have prosecuted clandestine negotiations tending to present their Admiralty colleague, Mr. McKenna, with a *fait accompli* can hardly be advertised as a shining example of Cabinet loyalty, if nothing else. On the general question whether the limiting of information regarding vital questions of foreign policy to a small coterie of Ministers is consistent with the theory of Cabinet responsibility as understood in Britain, it is outside the scope of this book to inquire. But whichever Ministers should or should not have been kept fully informed of the progress of and intention regarding any military negotiations with France, it is incontestible that the First Lord of the Admiralty was one of those who should.

The situation in this respect is seen to be all the more curious when its origins are recollected. The first link in the whole chain of events that led up to the Entente Cordiale and the Anglo-French military conversations was

the German challenge to Britain's *naval* power. That challenge, in its turn, owed its inception to the new gospel of sea power preached by Mahan. The Kaiser read and was powerfully impressed. He determined to build up a navy and thereby reap some of the advantages that had previously been chiefly enjoyed by the world's pre-eminent naval power, Great Britain. The astonishing thing is that while the German ruler had been eagerly assimilating the lessons of sea power that Mahan had laid before the world, the Foreign Minister of the country from whose history Mahan had chiefly drawn in elucidating those lessons seems to have passed them by without a glance. In meeting a naval threat to Britain's naval position, Sir Edward Grey was not, as might have been supposed, consulting chiefly with the country's sea officers. On the contrary, he was consorting with its soldiers, and was in league with them in pursuit of a 'continental' military strategy that was to lead to conscription and a vast military effort on land. Thus, we have the strange paradox that while the world's greatest military power was eagerly preparing to seek its further fortune on the water, the world's greatest sea power, alarmed at the menace of its neighbour's growing naval strategy, was working hard, under the guidance of a civilian Foreign Minister, to turn itself into a great land power, and was keeping its naval advisers carefully in the dark while it clamped the shackles of French militarism round its own ankles.

The latent antagonism between the Admiralty and the War Office views of Britain's proper strategy was not, however, to remain undisclosed much longer. In August 1911, a month after the conclusion of the Wilson-

Dubail agreement, the Moroccan question reached a crisis in the Agadir incident. War was very near, and the Prime Minister summoned a full meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence to consider what should be done if the worst came to the worst. At the meeting were the Prime Minister (Mr. Asquith), the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Lloyd George), the Secretary of State for War (Mr. Haldane), the Foreign Secretary (Sir Edward Grey), the First Lord of the Admiralty (Mr. McKenna), the Home Secretary (Mr. Churchill), and the service representatives. It sat all day. In the morning, Henry Wilson, for the War Office, propounded the Army view of the situation. He was a very facile speaker and there is no doubt that he put the case for a 'continental' strategy with great skill and lucidity. In the afternoon, it was the Navy's turn, and Admiral of the Fleet Sir Arthur Wilson took the floor. He proceeded to outline an entirely different scheme of procedure to what had been put forward in the morning. In the First Sea Lord's view, the main British effort should be confined to the sea. If the Army were to be used offensively, it should be on the lines of the 'Admiralty' policy of flank attacks and coastal raids which the naval men had believed in from the beginning and which Fisher had declared for so explosively on that occasion two years before.

It is not surprising that the naval proposals were violently assailed by the opposing party. For five years, Haldane had been labouring to reorganize the Army with a view to its going to the Continent, and Henry Wilson had been working and manœuvring for as long a period to the same end. The naval conception of

strategy threatened to destroy all their work. Besides, they knew, as the sailors did not, to what extent they were already committed to go to the aid of the French. Had not an agreement been signed only a month before? They fell upon the naval proposals with vigour. Their onslaught, coupled no doubt with the fact that Sir Arthur Wilson was one of the most silent and secretive members of a reputedly silent service, seems to have impressed most of the non-service members of the meeting. Mr. Haldane seized the occasion to carry the war into the enemy's camp. Declaring that the outrageous views uttered by the First Sea Lord were indicative of the urgent need for the establishment of a naval staff at the Admiralty on something approximating to Army lines, he announced to the Prime Minister that he would no longer be responsible for the War Office unless this was done. These tactics were completely successful. The Government accepted the War Office standpoint, and Mr. Churchill was sent to the Admiralty charged with the twofold task of introducing a naval staff system and of exorcizing from the minds of the naval Lords their heretical views on military operations and thus ensuring that no further opposition would be raised by the Navy to the Army's continental aspirations.

Henry Wilson had won a great victory, and the way now seemed clear for the realization of his design to get the Expeditionary Force across at the earliest possible moment into alignment with the French Army. That being so, it is interesting to note that not till after the issue had been decided did Wilson have any idea of what the British Army might be required to do when it had taken up that alignment. 'Hugent came to see me,' he

notes in his Diary in September, the month following the C.I.D. meeting. 'He told me where the French General Staff wants us to go and what their plans are. This is the first time I have been told.'

However, he could work now more confidently and more openly for the anticipated moment. There was a great deal still to be thought out and arranged for; mobilization details, railway time tables, sea transport arrangements, embarkation and disembarkation, entrainment in France, billeting, and so on. That it was all most thoroughly planned and organized for was shown by the smoothness of the working when the time came in 1914.

But though all should have been now fairly plain sailing, Wilson was not yet out of the wood. In 1912, Sir John French became Chief of the General Staff, and what should he do but begin to make inquiries about the possibility of landing the Expeditionary Force on the Belgian coast; at Zeebrugge, Ostend and Antwerp. This was a development that must have caused Wilson much anxiety. It was easy to deal ruthlessly with the Navy. His own military chief was a more difficult problem. One must presume that Sir John French was fully acquainted with the state of the negotiations and commitments to the French. Or perhaps even he did not realize their full scope and significance. At all events, he was to bring the Belgian question up again on a later occasion.

When at last the crisis of 1914 flared up, and war on the Continent was actually breaking out, there were, for Wilson, unlooked for and agonizing hesitations and counter-proposals. At first, it seemed even uncertain whether this country would enter the war at all. Wilson

was terrified that his long-nurtured plans might miscarry. He pulled every string he could. He telephoned to or hurried round to see politicians, pressmen, and anyone else of influence whom he thought might help to bring the nation into the war. He even went so far as to send a message to the French Ambassador urging him to threaten the British Government with a severance of relations if Britain did not declare herself.

Even after the British ultimatum had been presented and expired, he was not quit of his troubles. His own service then began to show signs of waywardness. Sir John French, the Commander-in-Chief designate, brought up again his project of going to Antwerp. There was a good deal to be said for Sir John's point of view. The British *casus belli* had been the violation of Belgian neutrality. And if it was the threat to Belgium that was bringing Britain into the war, it could not be unreasonable to suggest that Belgium was the place to which the British Expeditionary Force should go. So also thought Lord Roberts, who had been invited to give his opinion. But Wilson was not interested in Belgium. He had spent four hectic years working out in the minutest detail the arrangements for the British Expeditionary Force to leave the country as quickly as possible after the outbreak of war and fall into line with the French Army; and it maddened him to think that these careful plans might be upset at the last moment. Then, as a further distraction, Sir Douglas Haig suggested that, wherever the Expeditionary Force went, it should not leave England for two or three months.

But Wilson need not have agitated himself. The numerous threads of moral obligation that he and Grey

had stretched between the British Army and the left of the French line were stronger than he thought. And they were reinforced by the fact that the Wilson plan to bring the Expeditionary Force into immediate alignment with the French was there, complete, worked out in great detail, ready for instant execution. To have neglected it at the last moment, besides opening the way to French accusations of perfidy, was to throw the whole General Staff arrangements back into the melting-pot. It was as nearly certain as anything could be that the plan would be adopted; and so it was. The British Expeditionary Force went across as Wilson had previously arranged.

He had achieved the aim for which he had worked so hard. And so, too, it may be useful to remark, had the French. Or very nearly so. It will be remembered that in the unofficial negotiations in 1905 conducted through Colonel Repington, they had expressed their desire for the immediate dispatch of the largest possible British Army to the Continent to operate as part of the French Army and to come under the orders of the French High Command. Now that the moment had come, a British Force was going immediately to operate with, and virtually as part of, the French Armies. It is true that it was not actually the largest force that could have gone. But that was to be rectified. By 1917, the strength of the British forces in France and Flanders was two million men. It is also true that the initial British Expeditionary Force was not under the French Command. But that, too, was to be rectified before the war was over.

CHAPTER III

THE CHANNEL PORTS

Now that the British Expeditionary Force was definitely to go to the Continent, what was it to do when it got there? A great and laborious effort of military organization had been in progress for the previous four years, designed to transport the Army as expeditiously as possible to a certain area in France. The plans made in connection therewith were extraordinarily detailed and admirably complete and reflected great credit on Sir Henry Wilson and all others who were concerned in working them out. But these plans, excellent though they might be, were but the administrative preliminary to warlike operations; and it was the latter which mattered most. In what manner and in pursuit of what object was the Expeditionary Force to fight when it had got across? Curiously, Sir Henry Wilson does not seem to have given this aspect of the matter very much thought. No doubt he had more than enough to do in superintending the transport arrangements. Moreover, he might have plausibly argued that the handling of the weapon was the main concern of the man who would control it when the time came; namely, the Commander-in-Chief in the field. But there was another factor which must have allowed him to concentrate on the administrative side of his work with an easy conscience.

Wilson unquestionably had an unwavering faith in the wisdom and competence of the French High Command.

Ever since his first visit to Foch at the École Supérieure de Guerre in 1906, he had been a worshipper at the shrine of French military doctrine, and had absorbed its tenets with the eager acceptance of the true disciple. Whatever the French Generals did was sure to be right. The war, as Wilson saw it, would be a matter of weeks; provided, of course, that the British Army took its place in the French line. If it did, the war on land would become a glorious forward march into Germany, about which the only doubtful point could be the exact date for the crossing of the Rhine.[1] It was sufficient, therefore, for the British Force to be joined up with the French Armies. The rest could safely be left to the French High Command, whether the British knew what they were proposing to do or not.

In the circumstances, that was a particularly comforting consideration, for the British knew all too little of what the French did propose to do. Wilson may have known privately. That is to say, certain things may have been imparted to him confidentially from time to time. There is, however, a good deal of difference between a private intimation to an individual and an official communication through the regular channels. The former can, if necessary, convey less than the complete truth without official breach of faith. The latter cannot. While, therefore, Sir Henry Wilson may have had a shrewd idea of what the French intended to do in the event of war, it does not appear that the British Government had been officially informed of those intentions before the outbreak. Nor are the French in any

[1] Even the unexpected and disconcerting retreat into France did not stifle this hopeful attitude. On September 12th, after the battle of the Marne, Wilson thought that four more weeks would see the Allies on German soil. (Wilson's diaries.)

way open to criticism on this account. Sir Edward Grey had insisted throughout on the non-committal nature of the Staff conversations and had made it clear that Britain reserved the right to come or not to come to France's assistance against Germany. Denied the definite assurance of British support, it was hardly unreasonable for the French to have kept their all-important war plans to themselves, and to have declined to communicate them to us. The consequence was that when the moment for action arrived, and the British Government took the decision to send the Expeditionary Force across to reinforce the French Army, it found itself in the peculiar position of not knowing what that army proposed to do. This meant that the British Force was virtually being handed over unconditionally to the French Army Command. Whatever the French Army did, the British Army would be practically bound to do likewise, whether it suited Britain's purpose or not. As Sir Frederick Maurice has said, the French were being given a blank cheque.[1]

Under these obscure conditions, with the fog of war covering Allied as well as enemy actions, the determination of the British military object was far from easy. No doubt, if the pre-war Wilsonian conception of a rapid and victorious Anglo-French march into Germany had been fulfilled, the question would have received the automatic answer of immediate success. But unfortunately it happened that the exact reverse took place. The British Force was immediately swept up into and carried along with the great French retreat into France. And by the time the situation had stabilized, the British

[1] *British Strategy* – GENERAL SIR FREDERICK MAURICE.

Generals found themselves standing on the defensive on the wrong side of the frontier.

It was inevitable that, in these untoward circumstances, considerations of what the Expeditionary Force was engaged in defending were bound to arise. The British public had initially been told that the nation was going to war to defend Belgium. By October 1914, however, that plea could no longer be advanced. The British Army, instead of going to Belgium, had gone to France, and in so doing had left the Belgians to their fate; and by far the greater part of their country was by now under German occupation.

Some other justification for the British Army's defensive situation had to be found; and what must have seemed the obvious candidates for the post were the French Channel ports. It is true that no mention of them whatever is to be found in the original instructions given to Sir John French by Lord Kitchener. Nor were they specifically adopted by the Home authorities as the chief objectives of the British defensive strategy as soon as the situation on the Western Front had crystallized into a war of position. Nevertheless, a legend began to grow up about that time and has since come into tacit acceptance that it was, in fact, the Channel ports that the British Army was directly defending. There is no need to substantiate this proposition by specific quotation. It has been openly declared since 1918 on thousands of occasions and in countless published opinions. The loss of the Channel ports to the enemy, it is always said, would have had disastrous consequences for this country.

So much has been made to depend on this alleged vital significance to us of the hostile or otherwise possession

of the Channel ports that the proposition is one that calls for a careful and searching examination before it should be unqualifiedly accepted. Was it, in fact, really true that the capture of the French Channel ports by the Germans opened up possibilities so forbidding that it was worth almost any sacrifice to prevent it? The evidence available in 1914, consisting mainly of the history of the old wars of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, did not indicate that it was. For the French themselves had been our chief enemy in most of those wars, and the Channel ports had therefore been continually in hostile hands without bringing England to her knees. In the eighteenth century, for example, the English had fought five wars against the French, during which England was faced with a row of enemy naval bases from Ushant to the Straits of Dover; and since she had emerged not only unconquered but often with substantial advantage from those wars, it obviously could not be said that the enemy character of the Channel ports constituted, at that time at all events, a vital threat to British security.

Those, however, were the days of sail. It was possible that the steam navies of 1914 were subject to different rules, and that the British Navy of the new mechanical era might have to view a hostile occupation of the Channel ports with greater apprehension than was called for in the days of the three-deckers. If so, we did not seem to think so in the last few years of the nineteenth century. As late as 1897, the French were still regarded as the chief potential enemy and the principal function of the military forces in Britain, as officially expounded by Sir Garnet Wolseley, the Commander-in-Chief, was to repel

a possible French landing. Again, in the following year, the Fashoda incident brought us very close to war with France; and yet no one in England at that time seems to have thought that the use of the Channel ports by the prospective enemy must inevitably have proved fatal to us. Indeed, had it been felt that their possession by a possibly hostile France constituted a probably mortal threat to British security, the only way Britain could have been saved from certain calamity was to drive the French out of northern France; a contingency which, however, it is quite safe to say was never contemplated for a moment.

Why was it therefore that such unbridled concern came to be expressed about their possible acquisition by a hostile Germany little more than fifteen years later? Was it that Germans were so much more dangerous opponents than Frenchmen that their appearance on the Channel would have made the difference between reasonable security and probable defeat? As they never reached the Channel, the question cannot be answered with certainty. Yet there is collateral evidence to be adduced which bears so strongly on the case as to enable us to make an approximate estimate. This evidence is that of the Belgian ports.

Historically, the Belgian ports had always held a much more important place in British strategical calculations than the Channel ports of France. While we had never, prior to 1914, felt any particular anxiety regarding the latter, the former had long been the objects of our liveliest concern. For centuries, it had been a cardinal principle of British strategy that the ports of the Low Countries must not be allowed to fall into the hands of a great power

who might one day be at war with Britain. It was a principle that went back at least to Elizabethan days, when the people had been desperately alarmed at the knowledge of Parma's troops waiting in Flanders for the Armada to come and transport them over for the conquest of England.

The disturbing memory of the dreaded Spanish soldiery, with the inquisition not far behind them, waiting with hostile intent so close to English shores, had remained in the public consciousness during the centuries that followed. Handed on from the far-off days of the Spanish galleons, it dominated British strategy during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it bridged the gap between wooden line-of-battleship and steam-driven ironclad, and remains even to-day as one of the platitudes of political utterance. It was, for instance, in 1938 that Mr. Anthony Eden declared that 'we have never been able, in all our history, to dissociate ourselves from events in the Low Countries; neither in time of Elizabeth, nor in the time of Napoleon; still less at the present day, when modern developments have brought striking force so much nearer to our shores'.

This historic anxiety of the English people regarding the occupancy of the Low Countries was, of course, concerned exclusively with their ports. Regarded only as pieces of territory, it would not have mattered who possessed them. But the possession of that territory conferred also the control of the waterways running out into the North Sea straight towards the coast of England; and it was her concern for what might emerge from those waterways that gave England her interest in the ownership of the Low Countries. It was this ancient fear that had led her to

back the Dutch against the Spaniards, and later against the French, that had led her to oppose Louis XIV and Napoleon, and that had caused her to join in the international guarantee for Belgian neutrality in 1839. There was no unselfish desire for the rights of small nations behind that guarantee. England had always been constitutionally averse from continental commitments. It was regard for her own security that induced her to underwrite Belgian neutrality.

Foreigners, too, had not been insensitive to the possibilities of the Low Country ports for use against this country. Napoleon had declared Antwerp to be 'a pistol pointed at the heart of England'. If anything therefore could be regarded in 1914 as an acknowledged vital British interest it was the inviolability of the Belgian ports. Yet what happened when the war broke out? The British Army, instead of going to cover those ports, went off to France, with the result that the Belgian ports promptly fell into the enemy's hands. And in those hands they remained for the next four years; years that saw the bloodiest conflict in the history of the world, during which enormous guns were mounted on the Belgian coast and German warships made full use of the Belgian harbours. But though the dreaded emergency had come, and the vital Belgian ports had actually passed into the possession of a first-class enemy, the anticipated disaster did not descend upon us. Napoleon's pistol pointed at the heart of England was found after all to be loaded with blank. The German use of the ports of the Low Countries though it certainly caused us annoyance, was no more than an annoyance and did not develop as the desperate menace that had been expected.

And if the loss of the Belgian ports, which had always been thought to involve dire calamity for Britain, could turn out in practice to be only a minor inconvenience, would the loss of the French ports, which had never previously been credited by us with the urgent importance of their Belgian counterparts, have been any worse? If an affirmative answer is to be returned, we ought to satisfy ourselves that it is upheld by adequate and convincing reasons.

So far as is known to the writer, three reasons only have been advanced in support of the argument of the vital necessity for the British Army to protect the Channel ports in 1914. These are the dangers to be expected from submarines using the French ports, air attack on England from adjacent French soil, and the use of long range guns from the French side of the Straits of Dover against this country. In examining these three reputed dangers, we can detect at once a certain evidence of confused thinking; for only one of them, namely the submarine danger, concerns the French ports as ports. The other two are matters of territory, not of harbours, and would be just as applicable if there were no single port in the whole of the northern coast of France. Just how serious are these dangers of air and long range artillery attack due to the German capture of the French side of the Dover defile at the present time is discussed in later chapters. They can have had no possible influence on the dispatch of the Expeditionary Force in 1914, for the very good reason that artillery of that range had not then made its appearance, and the aeroplane was then so much in its infancy that no one, least of all the military authorities, took it seriously as a weapon of war. There is good

evidence that the leaders of the British Army of 1914 regarded it as an interesting toy of hardly any military value.

We therefore come down to the submarine danger as the crucial test of the strategical importance of the Channel ports. And here analysis finds itself for once in accord with popular belief; for it is unquestionably upon the feeling that the menace of the German submarines would have been immeasurably and perhaps fatally increased by their use of the French Channel ports that the public concern in this country for the safety of those ports mostly rested.

Let us therefore try to discover how much difference the use of the Channel ports by the German submarines would really have made. It should be mentioned in the first place that the special effectiveness of the submarine lay in its attack on merchant vessels and very nearly in that alone. In other respects, it was only one of the various hazards of war, and one against which the fighting fleet had from the very early days devised a fairly satisfactory counter.[1] Its power of operating unseen made it, however, a particularly deadly weapon against the stream of mercantile shipping that flowed into British ports from all parts of the world. The most voluminous and therefore the most vulnerable part of this stream was that which came from the westward, in towards the narrow confines of the Channel, and the western ports of England and Scotland. It was here, where the quarry was perforce most thickly concentrated, that the German submarines

[1] This counter was, as it happens, identical with the one that was eventually introduced for merchant shipping. It took the Navy over two years to realize that the antidote in the one case might also be the antidote in the other.

did their most destructive work. The approaches to the English Channel, the English Channel itself, the land-falls north and south of Ireland, the North and St. George's Channels leading through the Irish Sea to Liverpool and the Clyde, the narrow funnel of the Bristol Channel; it was in these localities that the sinkings were most plentiful.

When the submarine campaign was at its height, the submarines had two routes to their hunting grounds. They could cross the North Sea directly from German harbours and go round the north of Scotland; or they could proceed down the English Channel, either from German ports or from the bases in Belgium which they had acquired when their armies had overrun the greater part of that country. The cruise of the average German submarine could therefore be divided into three periods. First, the voyage out to its operating area to the west of the British Isles; second, the period on patrol; and, third, the voyage home. It was mainly in the second period that the submarine would look to achieve the greater part of its sinkings. The first and third were less fruitful of results; though they were not necessarily altogether barren of them. A submarine proceeding to or returning from its allotted area might, and not infrequently did, happen upon an odd vessel or two with which to swell its tale of victims.

Now, the advantage that the German submarines would have gained from a use of the French Channel ports would have been this; that they would have been brought much closer to their hunting grounds and that therefore the more or less sterile periods spent in getting out and back to those grounds would have been reduced in favour of

the more productive period when they were on them. That the use of the French ports would thus have brought an advantage is incontrovertible. But the important thing is how great this extra advantage would have been. Actually it would have been far less than might be supposed. Submarines happen to be particularly high endurance vessels. The large German submarines of the last war could and did remain out for five weeks at a time. Of this total period, the unproductive time spent in going out and coming back was comparatively small in comparison to the time spent in the hunting area. For instance, a submarine proceeding from Heligoland to, say, Land's End via the English Channel would take about 6 days for the journey both ways, leaving 29 days or 82 per cent of the whole voyage in its operating area.

How much would the use of the French ports have improved this position? Taking Brest as being the most westerly and therefore the most advantageous port, the productive period for a submarine operating off Land's End would have been increased to 34 days out of 35, or an increase of 15 per cent over the submarine working from Germany. Now this gain cannot be called impressive, and it should be noted that it represents practically the highest ratio of advantage obtainable. The farther from Brest that the submarine had to operate, the less the advantage over another submarine based on Flemish or German ports. For instance, as a glance at a map will show, a submarine operating off the north coast of Ireland and based on Brest would have had very little advantage over one based on Heligoland.

On examination, therefore, it is seen that the advantage

accruing to the German submarines from the acquisition of the Channel ports would have been surprisingly small. It is consequently all the more extraordinary that Sir John Jellicoe should have advanced to Sir Douglas Haig in 1917 the apprehensive and oft-quoted opinion that 'if the Army can't get the Belgian coast ports, the Navy can't hold the Channel and the war will be lost'. For the use of those Belgian ports gave the German submarines only another two days, or at most three days, operating time in the Channel itself and can therefore have added no more than 6 to 9 per cent to their effectiveness; and it is really impossible to think that victory or defeat depended on so minute a margin. But what is even more surprising is that this judgment of Jellicoe's could still be quoted, as it frequently is, in support of the 'Channel port' theory. If ever a proposition has been devastatingly falsified by events, it was that one. For the Army did not get the Belgian ports, yet the Navy did manage to hold the Channel and the war was not lost. As a witness to the value of the Channel ports, Jellicoe is plainly discredited.

It may be as well at this point to clear up the question of the Dover barrage. It may be argued, and has been argued, that the closure of the Dover Straits to German submarines, which forced them to make their westward voyage round the north of Scotland, imposed a very serious handicap on the German submarine operations, which the acquisition of the French Channel ports would have nullified. It is certainly true that the Dover barrage presented a formidable obstacle to submarines wishing to get to the western approaches, involving a very much longer time spent on the northward passage. It is also

true that the barrage was got into operation too late to be able to claim a decisive part in the defeat of the U-boats. For it is generally agreed that it was not until the early months of 1918 that the Dover barrage really became effective in preventing the passage of the German submarines through the Straits; and, by that time, as we shall see in a moment, another measure had come into play which had already written defeat to the submarine campaign. But, in any case, the question of the Dover barrage can have had no bearing on Jellicoe's forebodings regarding the Belgian ports. For those ports happened to be on the wrong side of the Dover Straits. If German submarines from the German ports could not pass the Dover barrage, nor could the submarines from the Belgian. An impenetrable barrage at the Straits meant the long north about passage for the Flanders as well as for the Heligoland submarines, in which the advantage actually lay with the Heligoland boats. An advantage could only lie with the Flanders boats in respect of the passage westward through the Straits of Dover; and for that passage the average gain over the Heligoland boats was only one day out and one day back.

The truth is that Jellicoe was giving utterance to a very obvious heresy. For, as naval history had consistently shown, and as the war in which Jellicoe was himself participating was soon once again to demonstrate, the vital factor in naval warfare is not bases but ships. The submarine campaign was defeated on the sea. Its sting was drawn when shipping was put into convoy and each convoy was surrounded with surface escorts armed with depth charges to attack any submarine that might

make its presence known. The effect of this comparatively simple operational measure was astonishing. Before the introduction of convoy, sinkings were alarmingly high; so high that the gravest fears were entertained as to whether the rate of destruction which the U-boats were inflicting on our mercantile marine would not force Britain out of the war. After its introduction they fell away to the trivial proportion of one per cent.

The failure of the German submarine campaign was nothing to do with Channel or Flemish ports. It was a matter of ships: of destroyers, sloops, patrol boats, trawlers, minelayers, decoy ships and submarines. Once the system of convoy had been adopted, the submarine attack on merchant shipping, from being chiefly a process of unopposed slaughter, took on the far less agreeable character of a gamble with the depth charges which the warship escorts were certain to release. From being a one-sided and practically dangerless encounter for the submarine, it became a nerve-wracking running of the gauntlet with death in a very terrifying form.

All this might have been gleaned from the pages of Mahan, had those pages been properly studied. They were particularly eloquent of the advantages of convoy in the old wars. They related how convoy in Nelson's time had earned the most genuine of all possible recommendations when marine insurance companies offered lower rates of premium for ships that sailed in convoy as compared to ships that did not. Moreover, in Mahan's three volumes there was to be found, for those who cared to look, the frequently recurring lesson that, provided reasonably intelligent counter measures were adopted, the *guerre de course* had never succeeded in bringing about a country's

maritime ruin. That had never been achieved except by fighting; by fighting for the command at sea. The endeavour to defeat the enemy without fighting had never brought decisive results. The French had tried it time after time; but British commerce, though it suffered losses, had never been paralysed. On the other hand, whenever the British had gained an undisputed naval supremacy, they had been able to sweep the seas virtually clear of French shipping. And the deciding factor in the commerce warfare of those Anglo-French wars had always been the men-of-war that sailed the seas; not the bases from which they worked. For be it remarked that the French had, for this purpose, bases fully as advantageous as we ourselves; having, in fact, those very Channel ports whose loss to an enemy was held to mean disaster to us a century later. It cannot but be thought surprising that Jellicoe should have proved so unmindful of the precepts which history had to offer for his guidance. For not only did he attach excessive importance to the question of bases in relation to the German submarine campaign, but he manifested considerable opposition to the introduction of convoy, the one factor which was needed to save the situation, as history plainly indicated that it would be. It should be remembered, however, that the study of naval history was not particularly encouraged in the pre-war Navy. It enjoyed no official encouragement and earned no official recognition in the way of early promotion or other material benefits. Rather the reverse. An officer who was known to study the higher branches of his profession was often looked on askance. In that connection there is an interesting story of Jellicoe's one-time membership of the Royal United Service Institution, then about

the only place where naval tactics, strategy and history were openly discussed. In his younger days, Jellicoe had joined the Institution. Sir John Fisher, however, who was just rising to be a power in the naval world, was heard to express a disparaging opinion about the Institution's activities. Jellicoe promptly resigned.

The Germans made the same error about the potentialities of commerce warfare, despite the far greater regard that the German Navy, as a body, had paid to Mahan's teachings. The High Command hoped and expected to bring about the defeat of Britain by the submarine *guerre de course*, notwithstanding the persistent lack of success of such attempts in the past. The submarine campaign certainly achieved striking results; but that was to a great extent due to the misguided strategy of the British. When the latter belatedly adopted the proper counter-measure, the campaign petered out in failure.

In time, however, the Germans themselves undoubtedly realized their mistake. Commander F. A. P. Foster, R.N., writing to the *Daily Telegraph* of March 4th, 1939, gave the following instructive account of the opinion on this question expressed by a U-boat officer captured late in the war. 'In August 1918', he said, 'I was commanding the destroyer *Martin* in the Adriatic and captured almost the entire crew of the German submarine UB 53, including her Commanding Officer, Commander Spengler. He had just returned from a period of leave in Germany, and had the latest news. His people were about to break through on a wide front, at the junction between the British and French Armies. We should be swept back upon the Channel ports, which we should

lose. Making due allowance for our genius for embarkation, we should also lose between one to two millions in killed casualties and prisoners. "But,', sighed the captive, "I shall now be a prisoner of war for 10 years".'

'If a complete German victory was at hand, I asked, why was he so pessimistic?'

'"Oh," he explained, "you will keep things going at sea for at least as long as that, in spite of everything."'

It can be repeated with advantage that sea fighting is chiefly a matter of ships. If one's ships are numerous and efficient enough and reasonably well-based themselves, it ought not to matter that the enemy may have useful bases too. If that be a true proposition, it will explain why the possession of the Channel ports by a repeatedly hostile France in the eighteenth century or the supposedly vital Belgian ports by Germany in the twentieth had failed to prove our undoing. It was because our men-of-war had dealt successfully with the hostile vessels using those ports. In the eighteenth century, our squadrons had blockaded the enemy ships in their harbours or had outfought them if they put to sea. In the twentieth, our destroyers at Dover and Harwich had kept an effective watch on the German destroyers at Zeebrugge and Ostend, while our convoy escorts proved more than a match for their submarines.

That lesson history has confirmed over and over again. It was ships that delivered us from the Spanish Armada. It was ships that preserved us against invasion in the Seven Years' War and again in Napoleon's time. The latter occasion provides, indeed, a particularly clear illustration of the relative value of ships and bases to an enemy of this country. In 1805, Napoleon had control of the

whole northern coast of Europe from the Texel to the Atlantic. Any one of the many harbours in that long stretch of seaboard, including those of the Low Countries themselves, were at his disposal for operations against England. Both French and Flemish harbours he proposed to use, but principally French. Boulogne was one of his major points of embarkation. It is noteworthy that this was a French harbour rather than one of those Belgian ports about which British opinion had always been so sensitive. Boulogne, however, offered all that Napoleon needed. It was invitingly close to English shores; so close that it would only take a few hours to ferry the Army across when the moment came. But that moment never did come; because the British fleet was in the way and could not be got out of it. The transports were ready, the troops were ready, the base was admirably situated. But Napoleon, for all his burning desire to settle with the hated islanders, would not make a move unless and until the British fleet could be withdrawn from his path; and it never was. In the outcome, the Low Countries were under Napoleon's domination and their ports available for his use for more than 10 years without his being successful in utilizing them to our serious detriment. If they were indeed a pistol pointed at the heart of England, he seemed unable to pull the trigger.

It is strange that British statesmen should have persisted in a more apprehensive view of the matter. The course of the Napoleonic struggle seems clearly to have disproved their traditional fears regarding the vital significance of the Low Countries, and might well have induced for the future a new and less anxious attitude towards the Belgian question. Yet no modification of the

doctrinal view appears to have taken place, for in 1839 we find British Ministers signing a guarantee of Belgian neutrality, the only justification for which rested on the assumption that British security was intimately involved. But if the members of the British Government of 1839 were heedless of the lesson of the Napoleonic war, they were no more obtuse than their successors of the next century. The Great War of 1914-18 brought a second disproof of the overwhelming importance to this country of the ownership of Belgium. Yet not even this additional demonstration appears to have taken effect; for British statesmen are still repeating the old but obviously discredited formula.

It should, in fact, now be clear that the vital necessity for keeping the Germans out of the Channel ports in the last war cannot be substantiated. All the evidence that we have taken in this chapter points to the conclusion that a German capture of those ports might have been annoying but would not have proved overwhelmingly dangerous. Does this dispose of the matter? Not quite. There is still one other aspect of the case. There is still the question of relative cost to be considered. Granted that there was no absolute need to keep the Germans out of the Channel ports, it was nevertheless obviously to our advantage to do so, provided the expense of keeping them out was not too great. From this point of view, the Army and the Navy were in the position of economic competitors. The Army could be used to keep the ports inviolate. Alternatively, the ports could be allowed to fall to the Germans, and the Navy could be used to neutralize the efforts of any German ships that might try to operate from them. These could be regarded as two rival methods of dealing with a non-vital danger. The question still remains to be settled,

therefore, as to which was the cheaper. If the Army method could be shown to be the more economical — that is, in lives and money — of the two, there was then a good argument for the former method. We must now proceed to scrutinize this side of the case.

If we regard the British Armies on the Western Front as being those concerned with the defence of the Channel and North Sea ports, we find that the cost in life amounted to 600,000 dead. By comparison, the naval loss of life in all theatres of war incurred in the process of obtaining and exploiting the command of the seas came to 35,000.

If the Germans had reached the French Channel ports, it is extremely unlikely that the additional naval effort required on our part to defeat the then increased potency of the German submarine campaign would have added much to the naval casualty lists. Some further losses there would doubtless have been. But generally speaking the anti-submarine activities of British men-of-war were attended by very little loss. Indeed, the German submarines had strict orders that they were not to attack the destroyers, sloops or other small craft of the convoy escorts but were to reserve their shells and torpedoes for the merchant ships. The loss in merchant seamen might have been heavier, but it is not certain that it would. Given the extra destroyer protection which we shall discuss in a moment, and remembering the high degree of immunity which convoy offered to shipping, it is by no means impossible that increased opportunities for attack on the part of the German submarines would have merely meant greater submarine losses without appreciably heavier mercantile sinkings. Before elaborating that

point, however, let us go on to examine the financial aspect of the case.

The method it is proposed to adopt here in comparing the relative financial cost of the Army and Navy in relation to the Channel ports question is to reduce the calculations to the common denominator of the individual soldier and sailor. If, in doing so, we include a proportional cost of all the so-called effective services in each case, we should obtain a formula by which the cost of a battleship containing 1200 officers and men or a destroyer containing 100 can properly be set against that of an Army Division or a battalion of so many officers and men each.

In examining the cost of the pre-war Army and Navy one would naturally expect to find that the sailor was a good deal more expensive than the soldier. The sailor had to carry the cost of the ship in which he sailed, whereas the soldier had not much more than himself and his rifle or gun. Thus, the 1912-13 Army estimates for the Regular Army (exclusive of Territorials and Indian Army) give the total net cost of all the effective Services for 167,000 men as £21,000,000; while the corresponding cost of the 137,000 men of the Navy was £44,000,000. A comparison of the chief items in each case can be seen from the following tables.

ARMY ESTIMATES — 1912-13

Effective Services	£
1. Pay, etc. of the Army,	8,536,000
2. Medical Establishments	436,000
3. Special Reserves	715,000

	£
4. Military Education	142,000
5. Quarterings, Transports, Remounts	1,624,000
6. Supplies, Clothing, etc.	4,275,000
7. Ordnance Establishments	615,000
8. Armaments and Engineers' Stores	1,718,000
9. Works and Buildings	2,602,000
10. Miscellaneous	72,000
11. War Office	440,000
Total of Effective Services (Regular Army)	21,175,000

It will be noticed from the above the high proportion of the cost of the Army absorbed by the individual maintenance of the man himself; the cost of pay, medical attention, food, and clothing coming to £13,247,000, or nearly two-thirds of the total.

The corresponding Navy Estimates were as follows:

NAVY ESTIMATES — 1912-13

Effective Services	£
1. Pay, etc., of the Navy	7,627,000
2. Victualling and Clothing	2,628,000
3. Medical Establishments	269,900
4. Naval Law	3,500
5. Naval Education	152,000
6. Scientific Services	72,000
7. Reserves	426,700
8. Shipbuilding, Repairs, Maintenance, etc.	21,626,000
9. Naval Armaments	3,919,000
10. Works, Buildings and Repairs	3,515,000

	£
11. Miscellaneous	532,000
12. Admiralty	428,000
Total of Effective Services	44,085,000

The great cost of shipbuilding and maintenance can be judged from the fact that the expense of these items alone was slightly greater than that of the total effective cost of the whole regular Army. It will also be noted that the cost of naval armaments in the peace years immediately before the Great War was higher than the similar charges for the Army.

Including, as has been previously said, a share of all these effective services in each case, the peace-time cost of the two services per head came to

Navy	£321
Army	£125

The number of men in France and Flanders in 1917 and 1918 were 2,000,000. From the foregoing calculations, worked out on a peace-time basis, the financial equivalent of these two million soldiers would have therefore been a little over 750,000 seamen, with the necessary ships, stores, ammunition, equipment, dockyard services and shore administration. Taking, as previously suggested, 1,200 officers and men for a battleship, and 100 for a destroyer, the financial counterpart of those 2,000,000 men on the Western Front was therefore 625 battleships or 7500 destroyers.

These latter figures, striking and even startling as they undoubtedly are, are if anything an understatement.

For in basing our calculations on the peace-time estimates we have left out of account the disproportionate rise of the Army's ammunition expenditure in war-time. On the naval side, the amount of ammunition fired away during the war can have differed little from the general average of peace practices. Actions at sea are, and always have been, rare occurrences. There was one period of about four months at the Dardanelles when naval guns were particularly active. Apart from that, battleships of the Grand Fleet put in a good deal of firing practice during their long years of waiting; but perhaps not very much more per ship than they were wont to do during the years of earnest preparation that had preceded the war. And if they did exceed the peace-time average, the excess must assuredly have been counterbalanced and more than counterbalanced by the falling away in the amount of practice firings carried out by the smaller ships. Large numbers of the destroyers, sloops, patrol boats, hardly fired their guns from one year's end to another. They were much too busy convoying, escorting, patrolling, sweeping, protecting the trade routes and hunting submarines.

But with the Army, there is no room for doubt. The expenditure of ammunition on the Western Front was simply prodigious. For instance, the cost of the preliminary bombardments before the three main British offensives in France in 1917 (Messines, Vimy, Passchendaele) came to £53,000,000. This bill is for 39 days' firing only, and though the firing was particularly violent, it is probably not unreasonable to think that the ordinary day-to-day expenditure of ammunition along the whole British front for the remaining 326 days of the year came

to at least as much again. We should, therefore, probably be not far out in assessing the cost of the ammunition fired on the Western Front in 1917 as being a good £100,000,000, without making any allowance for the cost of the guns.

In 1918, the pace grew even hotter. The reserve stocks on the 2nd February of that year had a value of £150,000,000. There were times during the subsequent months when shells were being fired off at the financially equivalent rate of two battleships every three days; and, in one titanic day in September, the guns actually got rid of ammunition to the value of £4,000,000.

Let us, however, take the more moderate figures already arrived at, and accept that the exchange value of the 2,000,000 soldiers that were fighting on the Western Front in the last two years of the war was 7500 destroyers. Nothing like so colossal an Armada would, of course, have been required to ensure that the German submarines, even had they acquired the use of the French Channel ports, would have been faithfully dealt with. The number of British destroyers and similar small craft employed on anti-submarine duties at home and in the Mediterranean in 1917 and 1918 was round about 400. With this number, the submarine campaign was actually defeated. Another 500 would have been more than ample to frustrate the endeavours of the German U-boats, from whatever ports they might have sailed. From which it follows that, judged as competitors in the task of protecting the country from the ill effects of the loss of the Channel ports, the Navy could have done the job for one fifteenth of the cost that was actually incurred by the

Army. Moreover, the drain on the country's man power, instead of being a front line figure of 2,000,000 would have been a mere 50,000. This would have meant immensely less disturbance of industrial organization, more than a million and three-quarters more men for continuing the country's normal commercial activities, far less need for huge imports of war materials, and more chance of maintaining our export trade. So far, therefore, as the vital security of Britain was concerned, the sanctity of her shores, and the preservation of her essential sea-borne supplies, there can be no room for doubt that this could have been achieved by naval means at vastly less financial cost than the Army on the Western Front was able to do it, and at only the minutest fraction of the cost in lives. The Army's dead alone would have sufficed to man the whole 1914 British fleet more than three times over.

These calculations, rough as they are, suffice to show that, whatever menace to our security lay in a German occupation of the Channel ports, it could have been countered just as effectively and infinitely more cheaply by the Navy than it was by the Army. In that case, the claim frequently put forward that the Expeditionary Force, by interposing between the Germans and the Channel ports, was standing between Britain and ruin is quite without foundation. Who can doubt that if the Army had succeeded in holding the Belgian ports, the same claim would have been extended to cover them too? But as it was, the Army failed to hold them, and the Navy had to be brought in to neutralize the failure from the seaward; which it did by means of destroyer forces at Dover and Harwich.

But whatever may be said now on the subject of the Channel ports and their vital importance to Britain, it is as certain as anything can be that the original Expeditionary Force, when it embarked for France, had no thought of Channel or any other ports in its mind. For when, to its surprise, the French plan completely miscarried and the Germans came sweeping into France, the British leader made no attempt to cover the Channel ports, but marched his troops away southward with the French Armies, leaving the northern harbours unguarded and exposed. And that was by no means all. For towards the end of the great retreat, the British Commander-in-Chief, shaken by the adverse turn of events and indignant at the treatment he had received from his Allies, seriously proposed to conduct his Army away out of the battle to rest and refit. Moreover, his retirement was not to be in any direction that might have been regarded as helping to give protection to the Channel ports. It was directly away from them. As he told his Inspector-General of Communications on the 29th, he had decided to make 'a definite and prolonged retreat due South, passing Paris to the East or West.'[1] And this retirement he was only dissuaded from pursuing by the personal intervention of Lord Kitchener.

Sir John French cannot possibly have had even the most fleeting idea that a German capture of the Channel ports must have meant the collapse of his country. For if he had, his intention to retire from the fighting, with its corollary of leaving the Channel ports to their fate, would have been nothing short of premeditated treason.

In any case, the question has now passed beyond the

[1] *Military Operations, France and Belgium*, 1914.

region of speculation into that of practical trial. The Channel ports have now been in the enemy's hands for over a year, and their use by his submarines has not in that period brought the disaster upon us that the Continentalists predicted. It is true that the acquisition of the Channel and Biscay ports, assisted by air reconnaissance from French occupied territory, has enabled the enemy's submarines to inflict far greater losses on our mercantile shipping than would otherwise have been possible. But the gravity of those losses, as the country is coming increasingly to appreciate, and as the emergency acquisition of 50 old American destroyers plainly indicated, is due chiefly to a lack of those very ships whose governing influence in sea warfare has been postulated earlier in this chapter. Even in the last war, when France held out, we needed over 400 destroyers and kindred craft to protect our shipping against the German submarines operating, as they were then restricted to doing, from German and Belgian ports. In the post-war years, we were misguided enough to go scrapping our destroyers and other small craft wholesale, so that the defeat of France in 1940 and the consequent passing of the Channel ports into enemy hands found us with not much more than half the escort vessels that we had needed to deal with the German submarine offensive under the, for us, far easier conditions of 1917-18.

It is no wonder that we have suffered serious losses in the last 12 to 15 months. It is no wonder that the rate of sinking remains, as the whole country is aware, uncomfortably high. The remedy, however, is on the way. Many new destroyers and similar vessels of the escort classes have lately been joining the fleet, and more

are coming. It is to be hoped that they are coming with the greatest possible rapidity and that the highest priority has accordingly been given to their construction and that of new merchant ships as well; for if the Battle of the Atlantic is lost, everything goes with it.

CHAPTER IV

THE INFLUENCE OF THE FRENCH ON BRITISH STRATEGY FROM 1914 TO 1918

THE last-war situation that we have been discussing in the previous two chapters was strongly tinctured with paradox. It was the revelation by Mahan of the immense importance of sea power, as deduced chiefly from the naval history of Great Britain, that had inspired the Germans with the ambition of becoming a sea power as well. There stood Great Britain, the wealthiest country in the world, possessor of the world's greatest empire, the envy of all beholders. And now Mahan had at last let the secret out of the cupboard and had shown to all nations who cared to look where the key to Britain's prosperity and greatness was to be found. No wonder Germany made all haste to follow the same path to dominion and power. The extraordinary thing was that when the German desire to become possessed of the magic weapon of sea power had driven Britain into armed opposition, the latter proceeded to turn her back on her maritime armoury and equip herself instead for unlimited warfare on land.

The provision of a great national army on the continental model was a new experience for this country. Nothing like it had ever happened before. British soldiers had often fought on the Continent before, but only in small numbers. The British-born troops under Welling-

ton at Waterloo numbered only 30,000; those under Marlborough at Blenheim a mere 9000.

It was in keeping with British habits and procedure that the great revolution in national strategy of 1914 did not take place as a result of long thought and anxious deliberation. We drifted into it half-consciously. One week the nation was at peace. The next it was at war, and from the steps of the Capitol Lord Kitchener was proclaiming the need for a vast army of soldiers. In characteristic British fashion, no one questioned him. He was a great and respected leader; and, where he led, the nation, especially in its new-born war enthusiasm, was ready to follow with an eager step.

But if Kitchener was the standard-bearer of the new strategy, the planning and preparation had been done by others. It was Henry Wilson and Grey who, as we have seen, had done the ground-work; above all Wilson. And behind Wilson, it is important not to forget, were the French. It was they from whom he drew all the inspiration for his untiring labours to direct the British Army across the Channel. So long as his plans gave satisfaction to the French, he cared not what his own countrymen thought of them. French approval was sufficient for him.

What the French wanted was therefore a factor of capital importance in the determination of the British national strategy. And it is obvious enough what they did want. Their desires had been stated plainly enough to Colonel Repington in 1905. They wanted the largest possible number of British soldiers to go over to their assistance as quickly as possible after the outbreak of war. Moreover, they wanted these British troops to come under their own orders. From these aims, they never

wavered. It was, of course, necessary for them to walk warily in respect of British insular traditions and susceptibilities. To have pressed their points too strongly in the early stages might and probably would have done more harm than good. That they realized this need for handling the British with care is illustrated by a pre-war remark of Foch's. Henry Wilson, on one of his visits to France, had asked Foch what was the least number of British troops that would be any use to the French. 'One man,' Foch had replied, 'and we should take good care that he was killed.' In saying this, Foch was showing his realization of the British reluctance to being committed to large-scale continental operations. He evidently hoped that even a small number of casualties in continental fighting would arouse British national pride to replace them a thousandfold — and perhaps a millionfold; in which, as the event was to show, he had forecasted accurately.

Once, however, the war had begun, the British Army was in France, and the British Government therefore more firmly committed to continental intervention, the French methods were to become more direct and less diplomatic. The claim for French command over the British forces had not been pressed in peace-time. Henry Wilson had been far from unsympathetic to that claim and had readily agreed to the French Command issuing 'directives' for the guidance, if not actually the obedience, of the British Expeditionary Force. Kitchener, however, was wholly opposed to any such subordination to French commands in any form; and as Secretary of State for War when the Expeditionary Force left this country, he issued to its Commander-in-Chief his direction that '. . . I wish you distinctly to understand that your command is an

independent one, and that you will in no case come in any sense under the orders of any allied General'.[1]

The French Generals proceeded to act, however, as if the French Supreme Command were an accomplished fact. From time to time, Sir John French, and after him Sir Douglas Haig, received from the French High Command communications that were virtually direct orders. These communications were frequently expressed in none too tactful terms. They were sometimes, indeed, boorish and provocative in the extreme. Thus, Sir Henry Wilson, writing in his diary before the Neuve Chapelle offensive, said that 'Sir John showed much anger at the tone of Joffre's letter . . . the letter was a stupid one, inaccurate in some details and rather hectoring in tone'. Again, Lord Esher has recorded that 'Joffre wrote another of his arrogant letters to Douglas Haig, asking that the original plan be *instamment* adhered to, and posing once more as the Generalissimo'.

Such assumptions of a degree of control that had not, in fact, been conceded, was a source of recurring friction between the French and British High Commands; a friction which was manifest from the beginning. Sir John French's conduct of operations in the first weeks of the war do not, as we saw at the end of the last chapter, indicate that he believed he had gone to France to safeguard any vital British interest; and it is more than likely that, as he crossed the Channel southward, he pictured himself as the leader of a crusade of knight-errantry for the rescue of the French damsel in distress. If so, he was sorely deceived if he thought that he would be received with welcoming gratitude. Hardly had the

[1] *Military Operations, France and Belgium*, 1914 – Appendix 8.

Expeditionary Force taken its place on the French left than its Commander-in-Chief found himself being treated with bewildering and astonishing rudeness by his French colleagues: by Lanrezac, by Joffre, by almost every French General he met. By the end of the great retreat, he had become so generally disgusted with his reception and what he regarded as the lack of military collaboration by his Allies that he proposed, as already related, to take his army away out of the French battle line altogether. As he wrote to Lord Kitchener, 'he had already been left several times in the lurch by his Allies, and that if there was a gap in the line it was their affair...'[1]

But if Sir John French thought he could march his men away when he pleased he was very much mistaken. Indeed, Lord Kitchener's strict injunction that he was commanding an entirely independent force proved the most futile of vain hopes. For the very instant that Sir John thought to put that independence into practice, the French rose in objection. Joffre warned the French Government, the French Government made diplomatic representations to London, and, in the end, Lord Kitchener hastened over to see Sir John French in order to prevent him doing the very thing he had been assured by Kitchener only about a fortnight before that he was perfectly free to do.

It was a significant indication of what was to follow. Lord Kitchener and Sir John French may have thought that the British Army could take its freedom of action with it across the Channel. But the French had other ideas. Ever since 1905 they had wanted a supreme command over any British force that might come to the

[1] *Military Operations, France and Belgium*, 1914.

Continent. They had now got a British force in France. They did not, however, as yet possess the power of command over it. Nor was it anywhere near as big as they considered it should be. It would be necessary to apply a good deal of pressure yet.

Sir John French, as we have just seen, was the first to experience that pressure; and he was to feel a good deal more. In the months that followed, he found himself being manœuvred willy-nilly along the path which the French desired him to follow; and none too kindly at that. By October of 1914, he was reduced to bitter indignation. 'Never throughout my career', he wrote, 'have I suffered such humiliation; and I have had to come to France to fight for the French for it to be inflicted. I will never forget it.' Nor are these unhappy difficulties explicable on the theory that Joffre was specially remarkable for a lack of tact and finesse in his relations with his British Allies. Nivelle, his immediate successor, was more dictatorial still. Of his attempt, made known at the Calais Conference of February 1917, for a French control of the British Army in France, it is related that 'General Robertson, ten years after, could not master his anger when he recalled it. His eyes would grow dark and his eyebrows bristle, as with the eye of memory he gazed once more on General Nivelle's proposals'.[1] Again, Foch's savage rudeness to Gough in 1918 is well known; and the latest volume of the official *Military History* has revealed similar acerbities to British officers on the parts of Duchene and Pétain.

But it was not only the British Commander-in-Chief who was to be made to feel the direct compulsion of the

[1] *Prelude to Victory* – BRIGADIER-GENERAL E. L. SPEARS.

French will. Joffre, for his part, was just as ready to browbeat the British Government itself. We know that over the question of reinforcements for the Near East, he went to London and threatened to resign if the British Government did not conform to his wishes; an ultimatum to which the Government promptly capitulated.

Then, as the war went on, the French Press took a hand in turning the screw. It began to publish scornful references to Britain being content 'to fight to the last Frenchman'. Looking back on this unflattering comment, it is impossible not to feel astonishment that it could have been uttered. By this time, something like a million men were in France. Though greater numbers still were to follow, nevertheless an army of this size was infinitely greater than any which Britain had ever before sent to the assistance of an ally. It is, therefore, somewhat remarkable to find it being openly derided by the country who was the first beneficiary of help on so abundant a scale.

Yet the gibe was skilfully chosen; for it touched straight on that peculiarly delicate spot in our national character, the inveterate habit of self-depreciation. It has only to be suggested by someone that we are not doing our fair share of any international undertaking for most English people to leap straight away to the conclusion that their country is scandalously in default of its duty, and to clamour for greater British activity in an agony of shamefaced self-consciousness, without pausing to reflect whether or not the accusation is well deserved. This was certainly the attitude of the British public towards this particular taunt; and continued so right up to the outbreak of the present war. Even as late as the summer of 1939 it was met with the lowered head of acknowledged guilt. Yet it

is very far from certain that the accusation could be justified. Although it may be true that the French of 1914-18 were doing more on land than we were, it does not seem to have occurred to anyone to inquire how much they were doing on the sea. The results of such an inquiry would not be uninteresting. The personnel of the British Navy, which stood at 145,000 in July 1914, expanded during the war to the neighbourhood of half a million men. By contrast, the French Navy which began the war 70,000 strong, did not increase beyond 80,000. The war-time naval personnel of Britain was therefore over five times the size of that of France. And the difference was much greater than one of numerical ratio. On the British fell almost the whole brunt of the naval war. Obsessed with the military danger on land, the French were only too glad to turn over the conduct of the sea war to us. The result was to throw a very heavy strain on to the naval resources of this country. For the whole period of the war, many hundreds of naval vessels, especially the smaller ones, were being worked as hard as their machinery and personnel would stand. Month after month, in winter and summer, fine weather and foul, cruisers, destroyers, sloops, submarines, P-boats, trawlers and drifters were convoying, escorting, sweeping for mines, hunting for submarines and patrolling the seas on the watch for enemy ships. It was common for the steaming put in by these ships to exceed 60,000 miles a year, or more than twice round the world. And on their efforts depended the stream of supplies which allowed the Allies to continue the war, and the restriction of supplies that helped so much to bring Germany down.

Nor was it only a matter of the physical strain of sea-

keeping in war-time, with all that that implies in the way of constant vigilance by night and day, lack of sleep, and the fatigue of contending with long periods of bad weather, especially in the small ships. The loss of life was not inconsiderable. In November 1918, the soldiers from the British Isles numbered 3,500,000 and 700,000 had been killed; a death-roll of 1 in 5. At the same date, the Navy numbered just over 400,000, and 35,000 had been killed or drowned; a death roll of 1 in 11. It is not often realized that, in proportion to their numbers, and in spite of the terrific slaughter in the land fighting, one sailor died for practically every two soldiers.

For the most part, the men at sea died unobtrusively. Submarines went out and did not come back. Destroyers, sloops and trawlers disappeared on minefields. Small ships went ashore in gales of wind and were overwhelmed by the seas. Not a few were lost in collision, or were swamped in heavy weather. Only rarely did seamen die in the clash and publicity of battle. Nevertheless, no less than 254 British men-of-war went to the bottom during the four years of war, compared to 53 French. The British material losses, like the totals of the respective personnel, were five times as great. Added to this must be the sinking of 8,000,000 tons of British merchant shipping and the deaths of 15,000 Merchant Navy officers and men.

These figures show the outstandingly large share that fell to Britain in the matter of keeping the seas open for the Allies and closing them to the Central Powers. It is true that we received naval help from France, America, Italy and Japan. It is also true that the main burden of the naval war fell on our country alone; for while the British lost the 254 naval vessels mentioned above, the

combined losses of all the rest of the Allies put together only came to 153 ships, or not much more than half. The chief responsibility was ours, too; and a great and heavy one it was. The British fleet was the keystone of the whole Allied war effort, and, had it broken, the whole arch must have instantly collapsed: 'in an afternoon', as one distinguished commentator has picturesquely put it. We were, in fact, the *only one* of all the Allied nations involved that had to make a major effort on the sea and on land at the same time. 'When the British effort at sea, on land, in money, and in munitions is taken as a whole, it outweighs and surpasses that of any of our great Allies, and stands the conquering counterpart of Germany herself.'[1] If the French liked to accuse us of fighting to the last French soldier, we might not unreasonably have retorted that they, for their part, were fighting to the last British bluejacket. But that would not have been like us. Our great naval effort was going very largely unappreciated, even by ourselves.

Calculations of relative sacrifice do not, in any case, reach the crux of the matter. It will hardly be gainsaid that any validity that the French accusation against us might have possessed could only rest on the premise that British security was indissolubly bound up with that of France, and that a French defeat must automatically involve a British defeat as well. That and that alone could possibly give the French 'the right', as a high Army officer recently said about a subsequent but similar crisis, 'to demand that we should play our part in preventing an enemy reaching the Channel ports'. But that premise of

[1] MR. WINSTON CHURCHILL in an article in the *Sunday Dispatch* of April 14th, 1940.

inter-connected Franco-British safety is precisely the one that we have spent the last chapter in refuting; and with its refutation, any justification for the French pleasantry must disappear. And, it may be added, any similar pleasantries on our part. For it has to be recorded that we took a leaf out of the French book in our attitude towards the United States of America in the last war. The unflattering remarks we so often directed across the Atlantic about the people of the United States taking two years to hear the bugle that had been sounded in 1914, and such like, were wholly unwarranted. By no stretch of imagination could we maintain that we were defending American vital security.

But even if we had been, and even if the French had been defending ours, it remains extremely questionable whether that would have entitled either of us to indulge in the sarcasms that we did. For the implications of those sneers is inconsistent with the theory of national sovereignty. So long as a nation is independent, it clearly has the right to decide its own fate. It must be free to make its own estimate of the dangers that beset it and to meet those dangers in its own way — or not to meet them, if it should so prefer. Consequently, danger to any one country can give it no prescriptive claim on the armed support of another. The latter's right to meet or to avoid dangers, or, if it chooses, to commit suicide through inaction cannot be questioned. Any other supposition is a denial of national sovereignty as it has always been and is at present understood. Indeed, this unfettered right of participation or non-participation has recently been strikingly illustrated over the cases of Finland and Norway.

Our readiness to be coerced by this disagreeable taunt during the last war is not therefore very easy to understand. The Americans, for their part, when they did eventually enter the conflict, did not allow themselves the same sensitiveness. As soon as their troops began to arrive in France, the greatest pressure was put upon the American Commander-in-Chief to send his troops straight into the line as units of French and British Divisions. Unless he did, he was told in the most ominous tones, the war would certainly be lost before the American Army as such would have time to be formed; and meanwhile the French and British would be fighting the Americans' battles for them. Pershing, however, refused to be moved by such arguments. He had already come to the conclusion, according to Lord Esher, that 'the French idea is to use the Americans when they are trained, as a substitute for, and not as a supplement to, the forces of France'. He was, therefore, determined to send the American Army into action as a separate entity, and neither abuse nor entreaties was going to move him from that resolve. Nor was an assumption of abrupt authority any more effective. 'I must insist on the arrangement [of Americans fighting under a French General],' Foch had said to him. 'Marshal Foch, you may insist as much as you please,' Pershing replied, 'but I decline absolutely to agree to your plan. While our army will fight wherever you may decide, it will not fight except as an independent American army.' Foch immediately succumbed.

It would, however, be shortsighted to be too critical of the French for exercising pressure on us to increase our military contribution to the continental fighting. The first duty of the French Government and Army was to

protect France; and since we had hurried over to her assistance of our own volition, French Ministers and Generals would have been something less than human if they had not tried to squeeze as much out of us as they could get. Besides, our extreme haste in going over may well have misled them into thinking that we ourselves believed that our own security demanded it; whereas it was really due much more, if not entirely, to our own Army's anxiety to join in the glorious advance towards Berlin. In that case, the French may reasonably have felt that they could justifiably put pressure on us to increase our commitments.

That pressure was certainly applied, continuously and unrelentingly; by diplomatic insistence, by political intrigue, by threats or cajolery, by Press insinuations. By every means and device at their disposal, the French worked on us to increase and increase our continental commitments, to expand our military strength on the Western Front, to adopt conscription, to take over more of the line, to undertake offensives to relieve pressure on the French Army, and so on and so forth. And with complete success. Step by step, the British Government submitted, and bit by bit the control of the British war effort passed out of its hands into that of the French. Finally, with the appointment of a French Generalissimo, a large, if not the principal, part of Britain's warlike activities were virtually being dictated by her French Allies. And with that same appointment, the original French aims of 1905 were at last fulfilled. They had now got the conscripted manhood of Britain fighting in France under French command. The French programme was complete.

In these circumstances, it was inevitable that the

development of the British strategical policy would be uncoordinated and haphazard. The British Government was a long way from being master in its own house, and whatever plans it might make for the utilization of Britain's man power, industrial resources, or financial reserves were gravely affected by the changing military and political happenings on the other side of the Channel. There was even a conflict of effort between the two sections of its own forces. The British Army on the Western Front was fighting, as it came to believe, for the safety of the Channel ports. Yet this military endeavour was, in fact, prejudicing the very situation it was being directed to preserve. For the immense effort on land was rendering it all the more difficult for the Navy to play its own vital part at sea. Since money (and energy) is never unlimited, the more of it that is devoted to one form of defence, the less there must necessarily be available for any other. Though tremendous sums were being spent on the Army, the opening of the unrestricted German submarine campaign in February 1917 found the Navy so short of destroyers and other small craft suitable for escorting our merchant shipping that the losses of mercantile tonnage very nearly brought the country to its knees. Jellicoe, who was now at the Admiralty, took so grave a view of the shortage of destroyers and escort vessels that he did not believe that there were sufficient of them to justify the introduction of convoy; and convoy, as we know, was the key measure in the defeat of the submarine. The diversion of a great part of the national resources to sustaining the military attempt to prevent the Germans reaching the Channel ports had very nearly resulted in the Navy losing the war, whether the enemy reached those ports or not.

Curiously enough, one of the reasons which led to the commencement of the Passchendaele offensive in 1917 was the hope that it might do something to ease the well-nigh insupportable pressure of the German submarine campaign at sea. We thus have the extraordinary paradox that the Army was trying by a land offensive to lighten the embarrassments of a Navy whose distresses were largely due to the crushing expense of the land operations.

Not that the material demands of the Navy had been openly overruled in favour of the Expeditionary Force. The sea service had suffered more from lack of attention than deliberate neglect. Accustomed for generation after generation to a position of predominance at sea, the British people took their Navy for granted. On the other hand, the idea of a great national army fighting on the Continent was a new conception, and was endowed with all the attractions of novelty. Lord Kitchener was appealing for hundreds of thousands of men, civilians of all classes all over the country were besieging the military recruiting offices, and the chief colour to be seen all over the land was khaki. Moreover, desperate fighting was going on on the Western Front, and the papers were ringing with the gallant deeds of the British troops, while the casualty lists were surfeited with their dead and wounded.

The creation of this great new instrument captured the imagination of the nation, and the anxious contemplation of its bloody adventures across the Channel drew the popular mind towards the trenches and away from the sea. It was the reinforcing and supplying of the ever-increasing British Divisions on the Western Front that came to occupy the chief place in the public mind. When

there was talk of a shell shortage, it was an Army shortage that was meant; and the same applied to manpower.

It is not, therefore, entirely surprising that the opening of the unrestricted German submarine campaign in 1917 found the Navy very largely unprepared to deal with it; short of ships, unready in organization, and worst of all, lacking in ideas. Had the undivided attention of the Government and the country been free to be devoted to naval defence as the principal security problem from 1914 onwards, it is hardly contestable that the chances of our being caught ill-equipped for the submarine campaign would have been very much reduced. As it was, the gaze of both politicians and people was almost monopolized by the titanic struggle and fearful bloodshed going on in France and Flanders, while a great part of their activities was necessarily directed towards meeting the insatiable material demands of the land fighting. The consequence was that we committed the elementary strategical blunder of leaving our vital communications inadequately guarded; so that while the Army was in the midst of its series of sanguinary offensives on the Western Front, the submarine campaign against our commercial life line was soon within an ace of losing us the war, whatever the armies might or might not be achieving on land.

The narrow shave we had of being starved into surrender provides an instructive confirmation of the rule that the security of the base and of the lines of communication must take precedence over the offensive; a rule that is of such common observance in all forms of combat that its neglect on this occasion on the highest plane of national strategy is all the more remarkable. No General who valued his reputation would plan an attack which

left his flank and rear open to a dangerous counterstroke. Yet this, in effect, was what we did in 1917. We were pursuing desperate offensives on the land fronts while the German submarine assault on our national communications was all but bringing the whole British effort crashing to the ground. It provides a good illustration of the danger of taking a piecemeal view of national strategy.

Taken all round, there can be no doubt that we purchased our security, so far as it was wrapped up in the Channel ports, at an inordinately high cost. If we had trusted to our sea power, as on most occasions in the past, we could have guarded ourselves and our vital sea communications at a small fraction of the expenditure of lives and money incurred by the combination of naval action and full-blooded military intervention on the Continent that was actually employed. This twofold policy very nearly ruined us. By the spring of 1917, our international credit was virtually exhausted, and had it not been for the entry of the United States into the war on the side of the Allies, the extent of our war effort would undoubtedly have had to be drastically reduced. We entered the war the richest country in the world, with abounding supplies of capital invested abroad. In two and a half years of war, we had practically run through our entire fortune and were on the verge of collapse. The effort to fight a first class war on both sea and land at the same time had proved too much for our finances. And over and above this must be set a loss of life on a scale never before dreamed of in these islands.

All these complicated and often conflicting influences bearing on our national strategy in the last war inevitably left post-war opinion on the subject in a highly uncertain

and disordered state. There was a very natural disinclination on the nation's part to admit that the loss of over half a million men on the Western Front could possibly have been an unnecessary and ghastly mistake. Yet the desire to stifle that thought and to justify at all costs the action that we took that time led to unavoidable confusions in the public mind. For instance, the instinctive desire to justify the use of British troops on the Continent gave rise, especially in the post-Munich period of national travail, to statements in disparagement of sea power, as for example the one that 'a Navy cannot win a war'. It is most alarming that Englishmen should have said such a thing as this, and still more alarming that it should have gone unchallenged: for not only is it palpably untrue that a Navy cannot win a war, but Britain herself provides the clearest possible example to the contrary. She is the one country in the world before all others *against* whom a war quite obviously can be won by a Navy alone. We have but to be defeated at sea and we can be brought to economic surrender in a few weeks; and the German submarine campaign was not so very far off doing it.

There was also much repetition of the slogan about the vital importance of the Channel ports remaining in friendly hands. Indeed, it was repeated so often in the year or two before the present war that it came to be elevated, perhaps unconsciously, to the dignity of one of the ancient and basic principles of British foreign policy. It is possible to cite a number of Ministerial utterances of that date in which reference was made to our 'traditional' interest in seeing that the Channel ports did not pass into hostile ownership. How long a policy takes to become 'traditional' is perhaps a matter of opinion.

Nevertheless, it does seem surprising, to this writer at least, that such a claim could have been advanced in respect of ports which were held by the people who were regarded as our chief and hereditary enemies from the beginning of Queen Anne's reign to the end of Queen Victoria's.

Other equally noteworthy assertions, tending generally to support this new thesis of the Channel ports, were being freely advertised. It was being repeatedly declared that we in Britain had been sheltering ingloriously behind the Maginot Line, that the Navy was 'a defensive weapon only', that only 'an Army can take the offensive' (I quote from actual published opinions), and such like. Statements such as these demand most careful scrutiny; for many of them can be shown to be very largely fallacious, and taken in the aggregate they demonstrate to what extent a disconcerting misappreciation of sea power had taken hold of the public mind, specially remarkable in a people that affects to pride itself on being the foremost maritime nation of the world. Since then, the march of events may happily have induced a more accurate general estimate of the problem. But as some misapprehension of the matter may possibly still linger here and there, an attempt to clarify the situation by analysis can hardly be inappropriate.

CHAPTER V

SEA POWER IN DEFENCE

THE value of Sea Power in the defence of a country will naturally depend on the circumstances of the country in question. Whereas the great majority of the countries of the world have land frontiers and are therefore open to military invasion, with consequences that are easily comprehended and fairly uniform, the possible influence of sea power on different nations is much less evident and varies very greatly. For wholly continental nations such as Switzerland, Hungary, and the pre-Hitler Austria and Czecho-Slovakia, naval defence can have practically no meaning at all. For other nations, with some range of coastline, the question of sea power will depend partly on the extent of that coastline and partly on the degree of economic dependence on sea-borne commerce. Pre-war Roumania, with a small strip of territory bordering the Black Sea, could have felt little concern with sea defence as compared to the problem of her long land frontier with Russia. Russia herself has a longer coast-line than pre-war Germany, but her interest in sea power must have been a good deal less by reason of her higher degree of self-sufficiency and much smaller dependence on maritime trade. Conversely, the sea and sea power play a very important part in the security of Italy; for, besides having a very long coastline in proportion to her size, she is normally extremely dependent on overseas supplies. Something like 80 per cent of her total pre-

war trade was sea-borne, and about 70 per cent of it came through the oceanic defiles at Gibraltar and Suez. She was therefore exceedingly vulnerable to maritime pressure, and so could not fail to be vitally interested in the sentiments held towards her by the nation that rules the Atlantic and Indian ocean highways.

Naturally enough, however, the peoples to whom sea power means most are the island nations, Britain and Japan; and with these two one may properly include the United States of America; for that country, too, is almost an island strategically. It is true that she has two land frontiers. Her northern neighbour, Canada, could not, however, conceivably be a menace to her. Her southern neighbour, Mexico, is too small and weak to threaten her. It would be possible, of course, for a more powerful enemy to use Mexican territory as a base for the invasion of the Southern States. But not less than 3000 miles separates that potential Mexican base from any likely user of it, so that there is plenty of scope for sea power to come into operation.

For the island nations, sea power is of paramount importance, as is demonstrated by the fact that their war fleets head the world's navies. For whole or part land powers, sea power must be less important, according to the degree of dependence on maritime trade, and on the closeness and strength of the possible land rivals. France has twice been crushed on land while remaining superior at sea, in 1870 and 1940. Russia can be annihilated at sea and still remain practically secure on land, as happened in the Russo-Japanese war. England and Japan and the United States must be defeated at sea before any one of them can be crushed; though whether the air has

altered the position is discussed later. Moreover, for the island nations, and particularly for Britain, the importance of sea power has been steadily increasing with the growth in the volume of world trade. In earlier centuries, defeat at sea would not necessarily have been fatal to us. Our complete overthrow could only have followed if the enemy had possessed more powerful land forces than we ourselves and had thus been able to convert a naval victory into a military conquest. For instance, had our long and hard-fought naval struggle against the Dutch in the seventeenth century ended in our discomfiture, as it might not impossibly have done, the Dutch would hardly have tried to carry the war into England itself, because their population was not numerous enough, and therefore their military forces relatively powerful enough to make it worth while. Indeed, had an invasion of England stood any real chance of success, the Dutch would presumably have seized the opportunity provided by our assinine conduct in laying up the fleet in the middle of the second Dutch war, which left the enemy masters of the sea. That the Dutch contented themselves on this occasion with sailing up the Medway and burning or seizing a number of the King's warships shows that military invasion held no attraction for them.

Nowadays, however, our position is more dangerous than it was then. In the two and three-quarter centuries since the Dutch wars, the sea-borne trade which we seized from the Dutch as the result of those wars has swelled to enormous proportions, and with its increase has come a British dependence on seaborne supplies which renders our naval security much more vitally important than was the case in the seventeenth century. The position now is

that Britain can be utterly defeated on the sea alone, without a single soldier having to land on British soil. If she loses the command of the European seas she can be starved into submission in a few weeks. Little though it is sometimes realized, the forces that contribute to the maintenance of sea power have been growing more and more important to us with the passage of time.

Given the appropriate conditions, one cannot help being struck by the great strength of sea power in the defence of a country. In our own case, it has proved an unvarying bulwark through many generations, frequently against an enemy of much greater size and total power. The two objectives of attack against an island nation such as ours, are its trade and its territory, and in regard to both sea power has so far proved a sufficient safeguard. On both these subjects, history speaks quite clearly. The direct naval attack on trade by the weaker naval power has already been considered in Chapter III, and need not be gone into again in detail. Suffice it to repeat the general verdict of history that the attack made direct against commerce by a Navy that has not fought for and gained the command at sea ought never to be fatal. It can be annoying, it may at times be even disquieting; but, provided the appropriate countermeasures are taken, it should not be decisive. As a means of plunder the *guerre de course* may be gratifying; as a method of overthrowing an enemy it has so far always failed.

Nor was the one attempt that has so far been made to conduct a naval blockade from a land base any more successful. Realizing that a privateer war against Britain was not likely to be more than an irritant, Napoleon conceived the grandiose scheme of closing the whole of

commercial Europe against British trade by using his predominant military power on the Continent to enforce obedience. He would, as he said, conquer the sea by the land.

This land blockade of a sea power came into force with the issue of the Berlin decrees in 1806. It was answered by retaliatory Orders-in-Council by Britain, declaring a maritime blockade of the whole of the Continent controlled by France. The ruinous commercial struggle that ensued lasted for more than five years. For the first year or two, however, while Napoleon himself was away campaigning in Spain and Eastern Europe, the Berlin decrees were not enforced with any great vigour, and there was much evasion of them. But once free to give the matter his full attention, Napoleon pursued his anti-British blockade with grim determination. So far as he could ensure it, British commerce was vigorously excluded from the Continent, and there were periodic confiscations and public burnings of goods of British origin found in European ports and inland towns. The British, for their part, did their best to retaliate.

Both sides suffered considerably. By the end of 1810, there was much distress in Britain. Many firms were going bankrupt, and unemployment and poverty were widespread. Such were the consequences of the extreme dislocation of the normal conditions of trade that the continental system brought about. Yet it is perhaps permissible to wonder whether, to some extent, this distress was not due to a lack of knowledge on the part of the British Government and business community of how best to deal with so novel a situation. There can be no doubt that, if trade dislocation arising out of the Berlin

decrees were a primary cause of the economic malaise in Britain, this malaise was aggravated by indiscreet commercial speculation in the South American market and by the general delicacy shown by international trade under strain. We have, in the last decade, ourselves experienced how devastating can be the effects of an exceptional trade depression, even in ordinary peace-time. It is therefore conceivable that British trade, with all the overseas markets of the world open to it, might after a time have readjusted itself to the new conditions with tolerable success. It is significant that there were signs of such recovery in 1811; which might have grown, had not another spoke been thrust into the British economic wheel when, in 1812, the United States declared war.

If things, however, were bad in Britain, they were equally bad, if not worse, in France and the other European countries. The question was, indeed, which of the two sides would succumb first. In that respect, France was at a grave disadvantage in relation to Britain. For while the latter, distressed as she might be, was still a single unified nation, Napoleon had to depend for the efficacy of his system on a number of foreign countries, most of whom were only co-operating in working that system under the compulsion of French bayonets. It is true that the Tsar of Russia had more or less voluntarily embraced the system in the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807. But the rest of Europe was bowing to *force majeure*. The Prussians had been completely crushed at Jena. The Austrians had been heavily beaten the year before. The smaller nations were easily coerced.

None of these countries could be expected to take

kindly to the deprivations and hardships that Napoleon's measures against Britain brought upon them. And, as time went on, more and more pressure on Napoleon's part was required to make them put up with the sufferings that the working of the Berlin decrees was bringing in its train. By 1811, Europe was seething with suppressed revolt against the odious continental system, and Napoleon found himself driven from one ruthlessness to another, from the annexation of Holland, to the annexation of the Hansa towns, to the increased coercion of Prussia and the Northern States, in order to keep his system in operation. At last, the most important of the conforming countries raised the standard of mutiny. Russia made it clear that she would no longer operate the continental blockade of Britain effectively. Napoleon was thus faced with the alternative of an ignominious relinquishment of his economic offensive against Britain or of bringing Russia to heel. He marched eastwards towards Russia and disaster. The Russian campaign destroyed his army and led directly to his downfall. 'Thus it was that the Sea Power of Great Britain, defying his efforts otherwise, forced him into the field of its own choosing, lured him, the great exemplar of concentrated effort, to scatter his forces, and led him along a path which at last gave no choice except retreat in discomfiture or advance to certain ruin.'[1]

Napoleon's boast that the sea would be conquered by the land had proved false. The attempt had been made and it had failed; and calamitously failed. The weapon that Napoleon had hurled across the Channel to strike Britain down had become a boomerang returning to

[1] *Influence of Sea Power on French Revolution and Empire* – MAHAN.

smite France with disastrous effect. It was his own continental system against England that eventually brought Napoleon to ruin and France to defeat.

Turning to the question of invasion, we should note that since England first began to build up a regular Navy in Henry VII's time, she has often been threatened by a foreign invasion, but never successfully. The Navy has always been, as King George V said in 1914, her sure shield in her hour of danger. The invasionary threat of the Spanish Armada was defeated by the Navy alone. Troops were raised in England to meet the threat, but they were not needed. Lord Howard, Sir Francis Drake and their seamen comrades warded off the menace unaided. There have been similar threats at intervals since then. The French assembled a force for the invasion of England in the Seven Years' War. Napoleon did the same thing forty-odd years later. A French invasion was considered possible at various times during the nineteenth century; while the contingency of a German invasion was taken so seriously in the last war that large numbers of troops were kept in this country as an insurance against it.

The classic example of the efficacy of sea power in defence of an island nation is afforded by our own immunity against Napoleon between the years 1803 and 1805. During those two years, Britain and France confronted each other across the Channel in deadly enmity. Napoleon was at peace with the rest of Europe and so could concentrate his attention on the overthrow of the British enemy. Britain was without friends and so had to rely on herself alone. It is true that she was trying to attract some of the European nations to her side as allies, but she did not succeed in bringing them into effective action

until the issue had been decided. It was by her fleet that she was saved from the superior military power of France. Napoleon's army, the most powerful in the world, faced Britain's Navy and found itself impotent. It had no doubt that it could make short work of the British military forces. But it could not get at them. Try as it would, scheme as it might, those wretched ships were always found standing in its path, the sun shining unpleasantly on the muzzles of their broadside guns.

Yet the sea was a large place, and the ships of Britain were but tiny dots on its vast expanse. Surely they could be successfully evaded. Sooner or later storms would scatter them, or else they might be lured away, and then the blockaded French ships would have a chance of slipping out; and, once out and clear away, they would be lost to sight and knowledge on the broad ocean and could make for any of a score of possible destinations, the real one of which the defenders could only guess at.

So it might seem. Nevertheless, attempts to effect invasion by such means somehow or other have always appeared to miscarry. In December 1796, a considerable French expedition consisting of 17 ships-of-the-line, 19 frigates and corvettes, and 7 transports, carrying altogether 18,000 troops under General Hoche, slipped out of Brest in the temporary absence of the British blockading fleet and made for Bantry Bay, where the landing of the troops was expected to be the signal for a general rising in Ireland. Misfortune dogged the expedition from the start. To begin with, the flagship of the escorting squadron with the naval Commander-in-Chief and Hoche on board, became separated from the rest of the expedition and did not regain contact with it till a number

of days later, when it was too late. Bereft of the expected leadership, the expedition became a prey to indecision and hesitation, aggravated by heavy gales and bad seamanship. In the end, the expedition returned mournfully to Brest without having achieved anything, but having lost a number of ships from shipwreck and enemy action.

A couple of months later, a body of 1200 French irregulars were landed at Fishguard to do what damage they could before they were overcome by superior force. The damage they did was insignificant, for the reason that they did not wait to be overcome but laid down their arms at the first sign of opposition.

In the following year, while the insurrection in Ireland was still smouldering, a French expedition of about a thousand good and seasoned troops under General Humbert was successfully landed in Killala Bay in Co. Mayo. Humbert marched inland, vainly expecting to be joined by large numbers of Irish malcontents. Disappointed in this, his defeat was only a matter of time, and although he had certain successes, he was forced to surrender after being at large for a month and two days. A slightly stronger expedition which arrived at Killala Bay a month later abandoned its object on hearing of Humbert's misfortunes and hurried back to France. Fortune, in fact, does not seem to smile at endeavours of this nature.

Napoleon's discomfiture at the hands of the British Navy in his invasion project was by no means the first example of its kind. In the Seven Years' War, for instance, the Navy had constituted an adequate barrier against a similar threat of French invasion. Sixty thousand French soldiers were assembled in Northern France as the Expeditionary Force against Britain. Like Napo-

leon's Army of England; however, they did not embark; and the reason was to be found in the admitted superiority of the British at sea. The French line-of-battleships were being firmly blockaded in their ports, and if they managed to put to sea they were soon brought to action and defeated. In consequence, the French expeditionary army did not sail. Moreover, it happened that there was in power in Britain a war minister who realized, with an understanding of sea power that was comparatively rare, that in the circumstances it would be extremely unlikely to sail. The elder Pitt was intent on military designs outside Britain; and, to this end, he was willing to place a very great measure of trust in the Navy to defend the home base in order to free the maximum military force for service out of the country. He therefore troubled to make few preparations in England itself to counter the threatened invasion. As Fortescue says, the military measures were of 'astonishing insignificance'.[1] Pitt, it is clear, was content to rely on the belief that, with Hawke and Boscawen at sea off the French bases, and with the British fleet in undisputed mastery of the seas, no French army of a dangerous size would set foot on British soil; and nearly two centuries of further experience have gone to support him in that belief. There is, in fact, no case on record, since navies became an organized factor in national defence, of a successful invasion of an island nation possessing a clear superiority at sea. Pitt's reliance on sea power was not unjustified.

We should, however, be on our guard against assuming that a Navy, alone and unaided, can be certain of frustrating an invasion. However superior a fleet may be,

[1] *History of the Army*, vol. II, p. 476.

it can never guarantee that small parties of enemy troops may not elude its vigilance and effect a landing; and if there are no defending military forces whatever, the enemy raiding parties, even though small, may find no opposition. A necessary counterpart to a defending fleet is therefore a home defence army large enough to ensure that the enemy invasionary force is itself so big as to make its successful avoidance of the fleet extremely difficult.

Though sea-borne invasion by the weaker naval power had never succeeded in the days of sail, the coming of mechanized power at sea was received with ominous predictions that Britain's ancient security in this respect had been destroyed. The Duke of Wellington in a letter to Sir John Burgoyne in 1847 said that 'the introduction of steam had facilitated invasion. "As we stand now," he wrote, "and if it be true that the exertions of the fleet alone are not sufficient to provide for our defence, we are not safe for a week after the declaration of war".' [1]

The war of 1914-18 failed to confirm the Duke's forebodings. He was, in fact, completely mistaken. The balance of advantage had not moved against the superior naval power but even further in its favour. While the mechanization of the navies of the world can be said to have cut both ways by increasing the mobility of invaders and defenders to an equal extent, the remarkable improvements in the speed and reliability of methods of communication that accompanied that mechanization, notably the telegraph and telephone on land and wireless telegraphy at sea, were chiefly of advantage to the defence. Thereafter it became practically impossible for

[1] *The Invasion of Britain* — ADMIRAL SIR HERBERT RICHMOND.

an invading expedition, even supposing it could give the slip to the defending warships of the superior Navy, to make a landing anywhere without its presence becoming known to the central authorities and thence also to the fleet, whether in harbour or at sea, within a matter of an hour or two.

Air reconnaissance has still further strengthened the defence. A serious invasionary force requires a large mass of shipping for its accommodation. If ordinary tramp steamers be used, somewhere about 150 ships would be required for the transport of each 100,000 men with their equipment and weapons; while if barges and similar small craft should be relied upon, their number would have to run into thousands. In either case, it would be difficult to hide such large collections of shipping from reconnoitring aircraft, not only when at sea, but when in their ports of concentration preparatory to the embarkation of the troops.

It is true that aerial reconnaissance does not operate at night or in fog, and that it would be possible in narrow waters and with high speed landing craft to make a quick dash across under cover of darkness or mist without being seen from the air. But the Navy, which can navigate at night or in fog as well as the enemy, is naturally alive to such danger periods — which, as a matter of fact, were equally at the disposal of the enemy in the last war — and is not without ways of its own for dealing with that contingency. Moreover, the purely organizational business of getting large numbers of transports out of harbour and formed up for the passage to the landing place is far from easy, and must take a good deal longer than the average landsman imagines. Even a large fleet of high-

speed men-of-war, manned by lifelong experts in handling their ships in company, takes an hour or two to clear a harbour. For generally slower and necessarily much less adept transports, the whole process of embarking the troops, leaving harbour, sea passage, and landing on the enemy's coast must take so long that the chance of doing it all under cover of darkness, even for a short crossing such as the English Channel, must be problematical.

Admittedly, the air has introduced other factors affecting naval defence against sea-borne invasion, besides that of air reconnaissance. Those other factors are discussed in a later chapter dealing more exclusively with the air question.

Meanwhile it is important not to be led into false deductions by the German landings in Norway. It is true that men were landed from destroyers and transports at Trondjem and Narvik who had been transported thither over an uncommanded sea. The transports, however, were got into position by a *ruse de guerre*, by sailing under the Swedish flag and accumulating one by one in their destination ports in preparation for zero hour. Even so, such tactics of deception could not conceivably have been successful without the fact of widespread treachery among Norwegians themselves, by which what in effect were German transports crammed with troops and military stores were allowed to lie in key Norwegian harbours for several days on end without proper search. Treachery will confound any strategical rule.

Nevertheless, not even treachery did, in this case, actually confound the principle under discussion of the extreme difficulty of invasion over an uncommanded sea; for the troops landed at Trondjem would not by them-

selves have sufficed, or anything like sufficed, for the conquest of southern Norway. That was effected by the very much greater number of troops landed at Oslo; and, in that area, the invasion was carried out over a sea area in which the Germans enjoyed or were allowed to enjoy the local naval command. Admittedly, the air helped them to enjoy that local command. But the fact remains that in the waters between Oslo and the Baltic coast of Germany, they were able to convoy their transports to Norway without hindrance, except such as could come from harassing submarines.

One of the most striking lessons of history is the extraordinary strength and economy of naval defence to an island nation. There was a very great disparity of population between the Britain of the Napoleonic period and the enemy whose repeated attacks she was able to beat off. The British of those days numbered only 10,000,000 as compared to 26,000,000 Frenchmen. The latter had, therefore, nearly three times the numerical strength of the island people. Yet by means of their sea power, the islanders were able to preserve themselves against every assault. Time after time, sea power secured Britain against the menace of superior military force. And so it almost certainly could have done against the Germans in the last war.

The economy of naval defence is even more apparent when the relative combatant strengths are examined. The personnel of the British fleet in 1805 numbered about 150,000. Against these, Napoleon's military strength of at least a million soldiers proved impotent. Similarly, in the war of 1914-18, the personnel of the fleet amounted to not more than 500,000 men. The German

Army, on the other hand, numbered something in the region of 10,000,000 or twenty times as many.

As previously indicated, the loss of life at sea in the last war was relatively heavier than is generally appreciated. Nevertheless, owing to the much smaller naval total of personnel as compared to the British Army on the Western Front, the wastage of man power, from the national point of view, was infinitely less. We could, in fact, have fought for nearly eighty years at sea before equalling the fatal casualties of the four years' fighting in France and Flanders.

So, too, in monetary expense. The cost of the sea war was about a tenth that of the military campaigning on the continental scale that was followed. If we had relied on the fleet[1] only for our security, even allowing it to be double the size that it was, the post-war income tax would probably not have been above two shillings in the pound, instead of hovering between five and six shillings.

In view of such favourable data regarding sea power, and of the remarkable character as a protective agency that history does not hesitate to give it, it is curious that the British people should so often have shown reluctance to give it their confidence. Hardly ever has there been a sufficient public appreciation of the strength and reliability of sea power in the defence of the country. The great alarm felt at the time of the Armada was perhaps understandable. It was the first serious threat of invasion that had occurred since the Conquest, and the notorious cruelty of the Spanish character gave good cause to anticipate a Spanish victory with terror. Moreover,

[1] The Air Force was then in its infancy; and, besides, was common to both Army and Navy.

organized sea power was comparatively youthful at that time, and there had previously been no striking illustration of its potency. Yet, its triumphant success on this occasion does not seem to have made any marked impression on the British mind. Practically every succeeding instance of a known or suspected intention by an enemy to attempt the invasion of this country called forth the liveliest manifestations of popular apprehension. At the time of Napoleon, in particular, the public agitation was acute and was freely vented; while around the south and south-east coasts of England, there arose an array of Martello towers as a long-standing testimony to Britain's lack of faith in her fleet on that occasion. An unreasoning lack of faith, as it happened. For, had the fleet been defeated, and had Napoleon obtained a lodgement on British soil with secure communications to France, the great numerical superiority of the French over the British nation rendered it virtually certain that Martello towers would be of little avail.

There were two invasion scares in that period. The first was in 1801. Nelson's startling victory of the Nile had rekindled the latent antagonism to France in Europe and had brought into being a new alliance of Britain, Austria and Russia against her. Napoleon's generalship had smashed that alliance to pieces, and the First Consul had then proceeded very neatly to turn the tables on the chief instigator of that alliance by organizing against Britain the armed neutrality of the Northern Powers. This northern confederation, by threatening to deprive Britain of the superlatively important naval stores which she drew mostly from the Baltic, menaced the continued activities of the fleet on which her strength and power

depended. Just, however, as Napoleon had forcibly broken up the military combination against France, so Nelson proceeded to demolish the naval alliance against Britain. Coercing the Danes at the battle of Copenhagen, he was moving eastward to deal with the Russians and the Swedes when the assassination of the Tsar removed the strongest of the bindings that held the armed neutrality together; and it, too, fell asunder. Thus, Britain and France were left alone in the ring.

Both countries were weary of the war, and both possessed bargaining counters appropriate to a mutual and satisfactory exchange of concessions. The French were in occupation of certain parts of Europe which the British strongly disliked their having; while the British had previously seized and were still holding most of the French overseas possessions and those of their Dutch associates. In addition, the British had recently dispatched an expedition to turn the French Army out of Egypt, and were it to succeed, it would be dealing the French, and Napoleon personally, a specially unwelcome blow in a region about which both his countrymen and himself were particularly sensitive. Napoleon wanted peace quickly, before the expected news of the loss of Egypt should come through; and his method of expediting matters to his own advantage was to play upon the British fears of invasion. With as much publicity as possible, he collected barges and flat-bottomed boats in the Channel ports of France and moved troops into the northern departments.

The effect was all that he could have wished, and probably more than he expected. The consternation in England was extreme, among both Ministers and people.

Addington, the Prime Minister, called out the Militia and set them hastily to work throwing up earthworks in Kent and Sussex; and volunteers flocked to the recruiting centres to help repel the threatened landing. So great was the popular alarm that Nelson, fresh from his victory over the Danes, had to be sent down to take charge in the Straits of Dover, so that the magic of his reputation could help to quiet the public trepidation.

The reactions of all this on the mind of a weak Prime Minister were what might be imagined. Timorously eager to dispel the national fear of a coming invasion, Addington was prepared to agree to peace terms that played straight into Napoleon's hands. He was ready, in fact, to restore the whole of the captured French colonies, gained with fearful loss of British life in the early years of the war, without requiring France to make any corresponding restitution. He would leave her in possession of practically all her European conquests, including the Netherlands about which Britain had always been so sensitive, and would at the same time give France back all that she had lost elsewhere, if only this fearful shadow of invasion could be lifted from the British Islands. In such a hurry was he to conclude a quick peace that he would not even trouble to await the outcome of the Egyptian Expedition before agreeing to terms.

Yet the threatened invasion was nothing but a bluff. The superiority of the British Navy over the French was so great that invasion would not have had the smallest chance of success; as Napoleon knew quite well, even if British Ministers did not. 'Make what efforts we will,' he had written to the Directory only three years before, 'we shall not for many years acquire the control of the

seas. To make a descent on England, without being master of the seas, is the boldest and most difficult operation ever attempted.' His respect for British sea power was greater than the faith that the British themselves were prepared to place in it. Fortune, ever impatient with the cautious, showed her feelings towards Addington's egregious peace of Amiens with obvious irony. On the very day after the preliminaries of peace were signed, the news of the capitulation of the French Army in Egypt came through to London.

When the war was renewed in 1803, the conditions from which Addington had retreated so precipitately in 1801 presented themselves afresh; and this time with additional menace. Napoleon's preparations for invasion had every appearance of being in earnest. An 'Army of England' comprising two hundred thousand of the best French troops was assembled on the northern French coast round Boulogne and Calais, and many hundreds of barges and landing craft were built and distributed among the Flemish and French ports flanking the Dover Strait. Embarking and disembarking practices took place, and all the news that came across to England indicated that a descent on Britain was seriously intended. Once more, the public alarm was great. Once again, the Militia was called out, volunteers were enrolled, while more trenches were dug in Kent and more Martello towers sprang up on the sea coast. Again, too, the agitation in Government circles was acute and the Prime Minister 'emulating unconsciously the example of Elizabeth, prepared sword in hand to sell his life dearly.'[1]

The only people who remained unmoved by the danger

[1] *Naval Side of British History* – PROFESSOR G. H. R. CALLENDER.

threatening from the other side of the Channel were the men who would play the principal part in meeting it. The sea officers could not understand the apprehensive shivers of their shore-going countrymen. They were as certain as they could be that the French invasion could never materialize, because they felt completely confident that they could stop it on the way. The unmeasured fears of the civilians were therefore difficult to comprehend and seemed to them strangely pusillanimous. One of the greatest of the Admirals of that time did not hesitate to express his impatience with the prevailing nervousness that he knew to be unwarranted. 'I do not say,' said Lord St. Vincent before an agitated House of Lords in a phrase that deserves to be much better known than it is, 'I do not say that the French cannot come. I only say they cannot come by sea'. Events, as we know, completely justified the sailors' faith in themselves and their service.

Fifty-odd years later, there was another and costly example of ill-considered measures born of a combination of over-ready fears and inadequate thought. One of the periodical scares of a French landing was causing alarm to the Government, and it appointed a Committee on which was at least one important Admiral as well as soldiers and civilians, to consider appropriate defence measures. The Committee, with a remarkable lack of strategical perspicuity, recommended the erection of most elaborate fortifications round the three naval bases of Chatham, Portsmouth and Devonport. These were necessary, said the Committee, for repelling French attacks on the naval bases, *in case the British fleet lost the command of the Channel.*[1] And so a good many millions

[1] My italics.

were spent in digging miles and miles of moated rampart and building a chain of forts round the three dockyard ports, most of which can be seen to this day. What, however, did not seem to strike the Committee was that if the British fleet really lost the command of the Channel, something much more serious than the beleaguerement of the dockyard ports would be in prospect; namely, the complete defeat of the country. For it might reasonably have been expected that if the French were free to invest the three ports, it could well have occurred to them to be a little more ambitious and march on London itself. As it was, the whole question obviously hinged on the British fleet. If it could not hold the Channel, all was most probably lost. If it could, there was nothing to fear. It seems obvious then that instead of wasting millions on earthworks that were clearly unlikely to serve any useful purpose, the correct course was to utilize the money for building more battleships, to ensure that the command of the Channel would not be lost.

In the Great War, the feeling of insecurity in regard to a possible invasion was sufficient to keep in England troops in the region of half a million[1] in strength; most of whom went across to France in March 1918, when the British reverses during the German offensive forced the Government's hand in the matter of reserves. This retention of troops in England to confront a possible German landing was not due to any overt act on the German's part, indicative of an intention to land. On the contrary, they had no thought of doing so and made no preparatory move in that direction from the beginning

[1] *Soldiers and Statesmen*, vol. II, p. 10 – FIELD-MARSHAL SIR WILLIAM ROBERTSON.

of the war to the end. Apparently, according to Sir William Robertson, the nervousness shown was really due to the Admiralty. It had been decided quite properly before the war that the Home Army must be of such a size as to 'compel an enemy which contemplates invasion to come with such substantial force as to make it impossible for them to evade our fleet'; and a possible enemy force of 70,000 men had been fixed as the datum figure for the necessary calculations. After Sir William Robertson had become C.I.G.S. in 1916 the question was examined afresh, and the figure of the possible German landing force was increased from 70,000 to 160,000; an increase with which the Admiralty concurred. 'It may be thought,' says Sir William Robertson,[1] 'that although a hostile landing could not be absolutely prevented, the enemy's sea communications would surely be severed in the course of a few days and the whole enterprise be thereby engulfed in disaster. But, on the other hand, the main German fleet had not then been brought to battle, and who was to say, if the Admiralty would not, that the British fleet was so superior to it that the danger of invasion could be ignored?'

In this case, the Admiralty was clearly over-timid. It is true that a German landing was within the widest bounds of possibility. At the same time, all naval history showed that in the face of the superiority of the British fleet over the German, the possibility was so remote as safely to be put aside.

In extenuation of the Admiralty's cautious answer, it might be well to remember that only three or four years before Their Lordships had suffered a severe reverse on a

[1] *Soldiers and Statesmen*, vol. II, p. 9.

matter of higher strategy at the hands of their military colleagues, which may have inclined them towards a non-committal attitude on all such matters. Moreover, the very nature of their defeat by the Continentalists of the War Office lent support to their refusal to be definite on the subject of a landing on the East Coast. For the Army case for continental intervention, as expounded to the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1911 by Sir Henry Wilson, may on subsequent reflection have seemed to carry the implication that the Navy was incapable, in all the circumstances, of preventing the Germans from crossing the Channel; and, in that case, Their Lordships may perhaps have asked themselves why it should be expected to be capable of preventing them crossing the North Sea.

On the whole, however, there is a very clear and notable contrast between the degree of faith that the civil population of Britain has habitually been ready to place in sea power as the guardian of its shores and the full measure of trust that history has consistently demonstrated that it deserves. What is the explanation of this strange infidelity on the part of the principal maritime nation of the world for what has for centuries been its main source of security? This is a question that clearly calls for some examination. Before, however, we go on to explore this interesting problem, let us first take account of the offensive aspect of sea power.

CHAPTER VI

SEA POWER IN OFFENCE

THE general principles applicable to sea power in offence will naturally be much the same as those governing its employment in defence — looked at from the opposite direction. Once again, we shall find that the capabilities of sea power will be subject to very considerable variety according to the circumstances of the country against which it is sought to be applied. The application can be made in two ways. First, there is the direct assault; and second, there is economic investment. The possibility of direct assault by navies is frequently denied by advocates of the 'military' school of thought. They are in the habit of saying that since sea power in its military aspects stops at the coastline, direct attack from the sea cannot be decisive in bringing a country to submission. That, they hold, can only be achieved by an army.

Since the major premise of this argument is only partially correct, the conclusion must also suffer from the same defect. It is not quite true to say that the power of navies stops with the shore. It actually extends as far inland as the naval guns can shoot from however close in to the beach the ships are able to navigate. Up to this distance navies can exert a power of direct assault according to whatever targets are available to them in the area of their gun range. Sometimes, these targets are of only trivial value, and consequently the pressure that can be exerted on the nation to whom they belong is insignifi-

cant. But not always. It may happen here and there that a country has a national asset of vital importance situated so close to the sea that it is open to direct attack from seaward.

It might naturally be supposed that such cases would be extremely rare, but actually they are surprisingly numerous. It happens to have been the habit of men of many nations in the past to build their capital or key cities close to or even on the sea. In all such cases, a threat to bombard the capital or key city from the sea might well appear such a paralysing prospect to the intended victims as to bring about their national capitulation.

Such was the actual result in two cases that will occur readily to the mind. In 1801, Nelson sailed in with his ships to a position overlooking Copenhagen, with the determination of coercing the Danes into abandonment of the armed neutrality against Britain. First of all, he had to give his attention to the Danish floating batteries that were drawn up inshore of him protecting the City. He did so in a hotly-contested action which lasted for several hours. At last, however, most of them were silenced; and he could now move up the bomb vessels into a position for bombarding the dockyard and the City buildings. Under this threat of the destruction of their national capital, the Danes submitted to the terms which Nelson offered them. The fleet alone had brought Denmark to reason.

A very similar episode occurred in the war of 1914-18. In 1916, the Greeks were uncertain on which side of the conflict in progress their best interests lay. The nation was, in fact, divided into two factions. The Venizelists,

who followed M. Venizelos, were pro-Entente and had established themselves at Salonika, where they were in open co-operation with the Anglo-French military force which had just previously occupied the town. On the other hand, the King's party, still ensconced in Athens, had leanings towards the Central Powers. The Greek Army, which outnumbered the Allied troops at Salonika, was behind the King, and a majority of the people were probably also on his side. It was not impossible that the Greek royal forces would march on Salonika and endeavour to eject the British and French occupation troops; and if they had, the political consequences might have been exceedingly unfortunate for the Entente cause. But there was another factor, not so far mentioned, which was to be the dominant one in the situation. At Phaleron Bay, in full view of Athens and within easy gun range of it, lay a Franco-British fleet of battleships, with their turrets trained on the capital. The Royalists, comprising the legal Government of Greece, were overawed, and the Allied forces remained unmolested at Salonika, enjoying the open and increasing support of their Venizelist friends.

These are two actual cases of a country being completely subdued by sea power alone, by reason of their presenting territorial targets of superlative national importance to ships' guns. That these two cases, moreover, are not bound to be so exceptional as they might seem is indicated by a study of a map of the world. Such a study demonstrates what a large number of countries are similarly exposed in this respect. Not only the capitals of Greece and Denmark, but also of Sweden, Norway, Finland, Holland, Italy, Portugal, Japan, Brazil, Uruguay, the Argentine, Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Eire and

New Zealand are near enough to the sea to be open to sea attack; and the same can be said of the financial capitals of the United States, Australia and Egypt.

Of course, countries with such valuable objectives so invitingly close to the water will normally seek to counter a water-borne menace by the erection of suitable shore defences; and if so, sea power may not be able to get close enough to do any damage. Moreover, it would not inevitably follow that even a successful attack on a national capital would be decisive in bringing the nation concerned to its knees. We burned the political capital of the American States in the war of 1812 without this happening. At the same time, we were ready to make a most strenuous though unsuccessful naval effort in 1915, involving the loss of several battleships, to force a way past the very powerful batteries of the Dardanelles, on the confident assumption that the appearance of the fleet off the Turkish capital of Constantinople would be decisive in frightening Turkey out of the war. Whether or not that assumption was a valid one can never be known. But it is at least worthy of note that after undergoing that experience of a serious attempt against their capital, the Turks decided, after the war, to remove it to a safer position far in the interior of Anatolia. It is, in fact, fairly clear that, given the appropriate conditions, it is possible for a Navy to win a war by direct assault, and though the conditions are necessarily extremely rare, the bombardments of Genoa, of Benghazi, and other Libyan ports in the present war show that direct naval assault is still a factor to be reckoned with.

In regard to the indirect pressure by means of economic blockade, much the same general considerations will be

found to apply. In that respect, too, the claim that sea power can of itself never be decisive will be found to be equally fallacious. Given the right conditions, a decision can be reached by this means as surely as by direct assault. All naturally depends on the vulnerability of any particular country to economic investment. As was pointed out in a previous chapter, our own country offers the most striking example of all of vulnerability to this form of attack. Defeat us at sea, and we are finished; and, moreover, the victor would not need to undertake an invasion of Britain in order to complete our ruin. Our unconditional surrender could not fail to ensue, and quickly too, from the severance of our sea-borne supplies consequent on defeat at sea. It is even doubtful if actual starvation would be required to force us into humble submission. The moral shock due to the overthrow of our age-old sea supremacy would probably suffice. It is, therefore, patently incorrect to say that only military action by armies can 'win a war'; and Englishmen who make such a statement are, so far as they are sincere, groping in darkness.

On the opposite side of the world, another island nation gives further proof to the principle of economic vulnerability. Japan is also sorely dependent on overseas supplies. Less than ourselves, it is true, for she can very nearly feed herself from her own resources. But, in most other respects, the Japanese islands are relatively so poorly equipped by nature that the suppression of Japan's trade with the outside world, and particularly with the United States, China, Manchukuo and Europe must cripple her strategically. And not only strategically. Like Britain, her whole economic and industrial position is

indissolubly linked with her overseas trade; and if it were wholly cut off, the internal industrial dislocation and social distress would inevitably be very great, so great as probably to cause her collapse. Indeed, the Japanese are only too well aware of their economic vulnerability. Modern Japan could not withstand the complete economic investment that superior sea power in far eastern waters could apply to her.

Other countries are susceptible to the economic pressure of sea power according to their geographical and economic circumstances. The North American Continent,[1] being self-contained in almost every essential raw material, is practically immune from serious danger due to economic blockade. Russia, withdrawn in the inner recesses of the great European-Asiatic continental mass, and pursuing her new economic designs, is probably just as invulnerable. She was certainly less exposed to the pressure of sea power than pre-war Germany, while Germany in turn was less exposed than Italy. The latter, indeed, was particularly insecure *vis-à-vis* a hostile power controlling the sea routes, as has been indicated on page 94. Like Japan, she is poorly endowed with raw materials, many of which, and especially fuel, she must get from elsewhere; and since her comparatively small land frontier is awkwardly barricaded by the rocky rampart of the Alps, she is compelled to depend to a great extent on the maritime routes of supply. Her particular dependence on fuel brought by sea was unequivocally demonstrated during the period of 'sanctions' in 1936, when she made it clear that the extension of sanctions to include sea-borne petroleum would mean war.

[1] I include Canada with the United States for this purpose.

The degree of pressure that it is possible to bring to bear by means of maritime blockade differs, in fact, from country to country within very wide limits, according to the economic structure of the country in question. How, then, does Germany stand in this respect? In the last war, as we all know, she was desperately straitened by the British maritime blockade, which must be counted as one of the major factors in bringing about her defeat. Obviously, however, her position is not the same now as it was then. The economic structure of Germany has not remained static. Her very sufferings from the blockade of 1914-18 have led her to fabricate as many substitutes as possible for essential commodities, such for example as rubber, that she formerly had to get from overseas; while she has made great strides in the distillation of oil from coal, by which she is said to be capable of obtaining 2,000,000 tons of petrol annually. She had, moreover, even before the war, increased her territory and her population, while the totalitarian character of her Government enabled and enables her to make much more efficient use of her home resources than heretofore. And now, by overrunning the greater part of Europe, she has acquired large gains of raw materials, notably Rumanian oil. Germany has done her best to render herself less subject to maritime blockade.

There is, moreover, another variable to take into account. In considering maritime pressure in relation to continental countries with land frontiers, a lot must depend on whether friends or enemies lie beyond those frontiers. For instance, it would make a great deal of difference to the efficiency of a maritime blockade of Spain

whether the Franco-Spanish frontier were open or closed. If closed, Spain would be an economic island, blockaded on every side. This question is of very obvious importance in the case of Germany. In the last war, she was nearly in the position of an isolated Spain. With France, Russia, Italy and British sea power all against her, she was hemmed in on the east, the south, and the west. Little was to be obtained from her Austrian, Bulgarian and Turkish associates in Europe, for they too were fighting hard, and wanted as much as she did. Only from the north, across the Baltic, were supplies in any quantity to be obtained. The position to-day is not the same. With Italy an ally and the rest of Europe, except possibly Sweden, under her own control, Germany is clearly more favourably placed in regard to a maritime blockade than she was last time, while a successful outcome of the Russo-German conflict would still further strengthen her economic position.

But though Germany's position may have improved in one respect, it has worsened in another. The mechanization of warfare has led to a very great increase in the expenditure of raw materials during active operations, notably petrol. The latter is consumed in immense quantities, especially by aircraft; and although Germany's home supplies may have increased, and although she may have the Rumanian and Russian oilfields to draw upon, these sources cannot compensate her for the tremendous expenditure that modern intensive warfare demands. The British Navy stands over her replenishment of this and other vital war supplies from the main reservoirs of the outer world.

Again, Germany's conquests, though they may have

improved her position in some important respects, have worsened it in others. Each defeated country has meant a new country to feed and less food to feed it on. Every commercial port that Hitler captures becomes a dead port into which merchandise and foodstuffs no longer flow, as they previously did, to supply the country behind them. Even by the autumn of 1940, Denmark had had to slaughter a large amount of live stock for lack of the animal feeding stuffs that normally came by sea. Germany is thus piling up for herself a dangerous edifice of potential want and misery. Exactly how effective the blockade is under present conditions it is difficult to estimate by those without access to full official information; but it is significant that it has already driven Germany into war with Russia, and it may yet force her into still other aggressions in her endeavour to shake herself free of the iron grip of sea power.

We have now examined the offensive use of sea power in the direct assault and in the less direct economic pressure, and we have noticed certain popular misconceptions in regard to both. And there is yet another aspect of the offensive use of sea power about which inaccurate views are liable to be held. That aspect concerns the conjoint use of naval and military power. The combined action of sea and land forces is a subject that has not received the attention, especially in this country, that it deserves; and in consequence a certain amount of confusion of thought exists concerning it. For the passage of troops over the sea at all, a certain degree of naval strength has always been necessary; which, as the centuries have passed, has tended to become relatively greater and greater, until it can now be said that such

passage is really only possible to the side having a naval superiority sufficient to ensure the local command of the sea.[1] But this general ability enjoyed by the stronger naval power to conduct armies across the sea by no means covers the full range of amphibious warfare, although it is sometimes spoken of as if it does. On the contrary, the sea-borne transport of troops can partake of two general forms, between which it is most desirable to make a clear and careful distinction. In one case, troops can be landed to take part in operations where the enemy either fully expects to meet them, or will suffer no special disadvantage through the manner of their arrival. Two examples may be given of this form of combined operations. In the Boer War, the British Army was moved across several thousands of miles of ocean and landed in Cape Colony, whence it marched inland against the Boers. Except that it enabled them to get to South Africa at all, superior sea power was of no benefit to the British troops, and did not, therefore, embarrass the Boers. The war was a land war.

The same can be said of the Western Front in the last war. After the initial clash at Mons, and except for a minor episode that we shall notice in a moment, sea power ceased to be an active factor in the fighting in France and Flanders. The British points of disembarkation did not interest the Germans, since they did not affect the struggle, being selected merely to provide a secure route of approach to the main French battle line. Apart from the fact, as we have already agreed, that the British naval supremacy enabled the Expeditionary Force to

[1] The bearing of air power on this question of the naval command is discussed in a later chapter.

cross the Channel, British sea power played no part in the Western Front drama. In the cases both of this and of the Boer War, the Navy did not rise above the level of being the water-borne section of the army's line of communication troops.

True amphibious operations are in a different category. They consist, broadly speaking, in the utilization of sea power in connection with military operations in such a way as to augment the effectiveness of the military effort by taking the enemy at a disadvantage. For instance, an island Power which has no land frontier to protect is nearly always able to despatch against an enemy's overseas territories a more powerful force than the enemy can provide in defence. Continental nations, confronted as they all are with powerful military rivals close at hand, are bound to keep the bulk of their military forces at home, and can therefore spare no more than relatively small detachments for distant possessions. Against such detachments, it will nearly always be possible for islanders to send superior armies. It has been our almost invariable practice, when at war with a continental enemy who was considerably weaker than us at sea, as he often was, to make a collection of his colonial possessions. We did this against the France of the French Revolution, and again, a little later, of Napoleon, and yet again against the Germany of 1914-18. And these are only three instances out of many others; in which could be included as well the overseas possessions of Spain, Holland and Denmark. The fact that such places as Canada, Trinidad, Jamaica, Gibraltar, Mauritius, Ceylon, Malaya and Tanganyika, all of which we have taken from a European enemy, are coloured red upon the map of

the world, shows how widespread our employment of this form of overseas attack has been in times past. It was in nearly every case our sea power and only our sea power that enabled us to gather in these outlying prizes, for many of them were seized from nations that were far stronger than us in numbers and total military power. Provided we were decisively superior at sea, we pursued this strategy of overseas attack with equal success whether the enemy at home were hard pressed on land or not. The elder Pitt once committed himself to the statement that Canada was won on the battlefields of Germany. This statement has frequently been interpreted as meaning that the success of the British troops and their Prussian and Hanoverian allies in the European fighting was the real determining factor in the capture of Quebec and the conquest of Canada. It has been argued that the obvious inference behind Pitt's remark is that if the French had not been kept fully occupied in Europe they could somehow have prevented the seizure of their Canadian possessions.

Whether that interpretation of Pitt's meaning be correct or not, the strategical hypothesis it seeks to put into his mouth is not confirmed by the factual evidence. The dominating influence in the Canadian campaign, as in all our other colonial expeditions, was unquestionably our sea power. When it was unchallenged, the policy of overseas conquest could go forward with steady deliberation. But successful results in this field invariably declined in proportion as our sea superiority became less certain. And the reason for this is obvious enough; for without an acknowledged maritime supremacy it was open to the enemy to play the same game as ourselves of

dispatching troops overseas, in which case his often greater military resources would tend to more than counterbalance the numerical advantage we otherwise were able to develop. Such an occasion was in the war of American Independence, when the French Navy was more nearly equal to our own in strength and efficiency than at any other period. As a result, the French were enabled to move their troops across the Atlantic with freedom parallel to ours, so that French soldiers played an important, perhaps a decisive part, in driving us out of our American domains for ever.

The converse set of circumstances which were manifested twenty years later testified no less surely to sea power being the touchstone of success in overseas operations. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, Napoleon succeeded in making himself the undisputed master of Europe. One rival after another went down before him, until there were none to say him nay — on land at least. But not at sea. For it happened that this period of France's greatest military glory coincided with her lowest ebb as a naval power. Napoleon stood supreme in Europe. Britain rode supreme on the seas. If there were anything in the suggestion that Canada was won in Germany by forcing the retention of French troops in that area, its truth should now have been apparent.

But, in fact, nothing could have been less apparent. Napoleon, for all that he controlled an army of a size greatly superior to the British military forces, yet remained a passive and helpless onlooker while those same British troops captured one after another of his colonial possessions. All-powerful as his military machine was for year after year, it could not help him to succour his

overseas territories which were successively falling to what he doubtless thought of as the 'contemptible' little army of the British. And the sole reason was that the British held the command of the seas, and so could send their troops where they willed across the ocean, while he could not.

He was not, it is true, completely debarred from all use of the sea for military purposes. Command of the sea is not and never can be absolute. It was open to Napoleon, or to anyone else in his position, to try the hazard of a furtive raid over a sea controlled by his enemy. But the chances of success attending such an attempt were most unpromising. We have noticed in the last chapter the unhappy fate of the French military raids on Ireland and Fishguard, dependent on a fleet too weak to fight a way to its destination and forced to rely on stealth. There was no reason why expeditions against more distant objectives which also depended on evasion should fare any better; as was suitably illustrated in the case of the projected attacks on the British West Indies during Missiessy's and Villeneuve's dashes thither in 1805. These dashes were part of Napoleon's great naval diversionary scheme, by which he hoped that a substantial detachment of the British fleet might be enticed westward on Villeneuve's trail, so that a temporary French naval command of the Channel might be achieved for long enough to allow his army of invasion to get across to England. Whether it was merely to improve the occasion or whether to add more bait to the trap that he was proposing to lay for Nelson and Cornwallis on the other side of the Atlantic, Napoleon ordered his ships to fill up with soldiers for the purpose of making descents on

the British West Indian islands when the squadrons should arrive there. Missiessy's detachment was the first to arrive and he proceeded to put his instructions into practice by landing troops for the attack on Dominica, with a partial success. Villeneuve followed him a little later, and was also on the point of commencing landing operations, this time against Barbados, when he chanced to hear of Nelson's arrival in the West Indies in chase of him. It was enough. Hastily sending back his troops to Martinique in frigates, he hurried off eastward for Europe.

The essential weakness of military expeditions based on fugitive squadrons of warships was thus revealed; and it receives further emphasis from the attitude of comparative unconcern displayed in the matter by the British Government. As soon as it got wind of the departure of the French fleets westward, it guessed that the British West Indian possessions might be in jeopardy, and steps were immediately instituted to organize and dispatch a relief force. The instructions sent to the General in command in the West Indies in connection with this force are extremely interesting. They were to the effect that it was left to his discretion to proceed at once to the recapture of any lost British Islands or to send the relief force to Canada to bide its time until the healthy season for campaigning in the tropics should come round. Nothing could be more eloquent of the advantage possessed by the superior sea power in the matter of overseas military attack than the easy assurance displayed in these instructions. The authority responsible for it evidently realized that the British held any West Indian islands in French occupation in the hollow of their hands, by virtue of their

control of the sea communications and their consequent ability to concentrate against any one of those islands a superior force of troops whenever they pleased, without serious fear of interruption.

The suggestion, therefore, cannot be sustained that the elder Pitt was obliged to see that the French Armies were kept fully occupied in Europe in order to prevent French reinforcements being sent to Canada. The British Navy at that time had established an undeniable supremacy over the French, and it is clear from the Napoleonic parallel which we have just been examining that, in view of that naval superiority, it would have been possible for Pitt to have conquered Canada irrespective of what was happening in Europe, because the British fleet should have been able to prevent French reinforcements from crossing the Atlantic or entering the St. Lawrence. Indeed, the European operations in which Pitt was taking part may be said to have been actually prejudicing his Canadian enterprise; for 'while the total strength of the forces in British pay numbered in 1760 — the last year of the Canadian campaign — close on 200,000 men, the regular forces under Amherst's command for the decisive advance against Montreal were a beggarly 10,000 all told'.[1]

It must, however, be remembered that the elder Pitt was continually confronted with a continental embarrassment with which British Ministers had become less concerned by the time his son was responsible for British policy forty years later. This was the royal connection with Hanover. When George I came over to England in 1715, he brought with him this appanage of Hanover

[1] *A Short History of the British Army* – MAJOR E. W. SHEPPARD.

to hang like a millstone round the neck of British strategy for many years after. Although Hanover was never politically joined to Britain, it nevertheless belonged to her King, and when Britain was engaged in war against a European power, British national honour was inevitably to some extent involved in securing the King's Hanoverian territory against insult; a sentiment with which political wisdom on the part of British Ministers, dependent to a considerable extent on their Sovereign's favour, clearly coincided. On the enemy's part, a move against Hanover was an obvious counter-measure to pressure which Britain might be able to bring to bear by means of her sea power. As Frederick the Great remarked to the French Ambassador shortly before the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, to march an army into Hanover was 'the surest way to get a twist on' the King of England.

This newly-acquired anxiety for the safety of Hanover powerfully reinforced the customary concern felt in England regarding the Low Countries so as to give a noticeable stimulus to the continental and military element in Britain's strategy, with a corresponding impediment to the full development of her powers at sea. Troops which might have been used offensively in conjunction with the Navy overseas were diverted to act defensively in Germany, while on more than one occasion, overseas conquests which had been gained through the supremacy of the British Navy had to be surrendered at the subsequent Peace Settlement in order to obtain a territorial readjustment in Europe. And the consequence was not merely to deprive Britain of the just fruits of her naval efforts. The traditional British conceptions of national strategy, which against the Spaniards in the

sixteenth century and the Dutch in the seventeenth had looked mainly out over the sea, were given a landward slant which was to confuse and complicate the warlike councils of the nation for a long time afterwards; all the more since the new tendency was to receive the eager support of the Army, as we shall notice in the next chapter.

Judged in the light of the Hanoverian complication, Pitt's assertion that Canada was won in Germany becomes more intelligible, even if it bears the obvious mark of exaggeration. In view of the easy conquest of French overseas territories that went on in the time of Napoleon, even in the period of his greatest military strength, it cannot seriously be argued that it was necessary to win elsewhere than in Canada itself and on the sea.

Nevertheless, the bartering of British Colonial conquests in return for the whole or partial restitution of the European *status quo* which was so frequent a feature of the eighteenth century seems to invite the query whether we did not heedlessly ignore an opportunity for applying the same principle in the twentieth. The capture of the greater part of the German colonies in the early part of the last war placed some important bargaining counters in our hands, had we been prepared to regard them as such. At any time after the point of virtual stalemate on the Western Front had been reached, say after the autumn of 1916, we might have offered a return of these captured colonies in return for the German evacuation of France and Belgium. The offer might not, of course, have been favourably received. But if it had, the ostensible object for which we went to war would have been achieved and perhaps half a million British lives would have been saved, to say nothing of the lives of

Frenchmen, Germans and other combatants. In addition, Lenin would not have been smuggled into Russia, Russian history would most probably have taken a somewhat different path, the British debt to the United States would not have been incurred; and since the peace terms would not have taken on the punitive character that they did, the subsequent deplorable European developments which many people ascribe to their ferocity would possibly have been avoided, including the rise of the Nazi party in Germany and possibly even the present war. In fact, the world, with Britain included, might have escaped a lot of extremely unpleasant things, for the avoidance of which the restitution of a number of tracts of African and Indonesian territory would have to be regarded as a trivial price to pay. Still, as I say, the offer might not have been accepted. On the other hand, it might.

However that may be, this system of attacking an enemy's overseas possessions is one method of making advantageous use of sea power in connection with military operations. By itself, however, it is not a method that is likely to be popular with continental allies. It may be gratifying for a sea power to know that it is holding valuable pledges for the redemption of its allies' misfortunes at the end of the war. Those allies will naturally prefer that the misfortunes shall not happen at all and will invariably desire more immediate assistance to prevent them happening.

Another main form of amphibious warfare centres on the mobility that sea power can offer to an army. The principle upon which this method of warfare has always relied is that the high mobility of a sea-borne army

usually carries with it the inestimable benefit of being able to effect surprise, that most potent of all factors in war. A military force afloat in transports could, at all events in the past, move so much more rapidly than an army on shore and usually with so much more secrecy as to gain greatly in effectiveness thereby. It could select a destination at any point of an enemy coastline often hundreds of miles in extent, while the enemy could generally only make the vaguest guess as to where the attack would come. It might make a landing, and after drawing towards itself strong enemy forces, could re-embark to make a further descent elsewhere. It could often take the enemy in flank or rear, or might threaten to do so. In these and similar ways, an army skilfully employed in close co-operation with sea power was able to exert an influence out of all proportion to its numbers.

An impartial study of history cannot fail to bear witness to the efficacy of this amphibious use of military force, which will usually appear as an indirect and not a direct form of attack. Take, for instance, the question of giving aid to an ally. The real problem in such a case was and is how one's own troops can occupy the attention of the greatest number of the enemy and so prevent them being directly employed against the ally in question. How that maximum degree of distraction is achieved can matter little so long as it *is* achieved. To take a simple example. Let us suppose that a British military force of 100,000 men goes over to France, as it did at the beginning of the last war, and takes its place in the main French battle-line. Let us also suppose that that British force occupies the attention of 120,000 Germans who would otherwise be an additional 120,000 men to throw

against the French. Now, suppose again that the British force were used in some other way, say as a separate body operating in and from Belgium, where it would stand on the flank of the communications of a German Army marching into France. Now, it might happen that the British outflanking threat appeared so menacing to the German High Command that they decided to mask it at all costs, and for that purpose diverted a force of 200,000 men from their main advance to hold the British in check. If that were to happen, the assistance to the French Army obviously would be greater than when the British force were sent to oppose the enemy frontally in the main battle; for in the latter case only 120,000 Germans would be withdrawn from the direct pressure on the French front as compared to 200,000 in the former. That power of attracting the enemy's attention and of diverting his effort from some other point must be the test of the relative merits of the direct and indirect application of military force.

In that respect, there certainly seems to be a good deal to be said for the indirect method. Exact comparisons are, of course, difficult to make. In the case, for instance, of the British Expeditionary Force at the beginning of the last war, no one can say precisely what was the operational influence of the four British Divisions that detrained on the left of the French line. It seems fair, however, to say that during the great retreat after the battle of Mons their influence on the German movements was small; and had Sir John French been allowed to pursue his intention of removing the British Army out of the line to rest and refit, its influence on the battle of the Marne and for some time afterwards could hardly have been other than

negligible. On the other hand, had it gone to Belgium, it seems certain that its mere presence there would have had a continually adverse effect on the Germans. The latter were extremely sensitive to their open right flank and were ready to take alarm at any rumour of a threat against it. Glancing fearfully over their right shoulders as they advanced into France, they are to be found giving exaggerated credence to every rumour that came in from the sea. The three battalions of Marines which were landed at Ostend in early September had swelled into a formidable total of 40,000 men by the time the news of them had reached German General Headquarters.[1] The strange story of the Russian troops in England arrived there as well, and was taken seriously. The Russians, they thought, must be landing in Belgium, too. These incidents give some notion of the consternation and even possibly stronger emotion that would have ensued if it really had been 40,000 men who had landed; or, better still, the whole 100,000 men of the Expeditionary Force. Had the full strength of the British Force been used in this way in a forceful stroke against the German communications it will hardly be an exaggeration to suggest that the German Armies on the Western Front might well have suffered a major disaster. It was unquestionably this general principle in the use of the British Army that Sir John Fisher had always had in mind, though whether the actual details of his plans were sound or not is another matter.

Perhaps the best-known example of an army used in conjunction with sea power to make an eccentric and harassing attack on an enemy's weak point is Wellington's

[1] *The Decisive Wars of History* – LIDDELL HART.

Peninsular War. The main battle area was in the middle of Europe, centring on the Austrians, Prussians and Russians. Wellington went nowhere near it. Instead, with the aid of the fleet, he dumped himself down in Portugal on the French rear. The subsequent history of his operations provides a remarkable illustration of the diversionary effect of an eccentric attack based on the sea. The presence of Wellington's army forced a most irritating division of force on the French. Wellington could not be ignored; for if he were, he would naturally advance and stir up trouble against the French in Spain. On the other hand, if they tried to push him into the sea, he merely retired behind his lines at Torres Vedras, with his fleet behind him as a final safeguard. So there he was, with a secure retreat in case he were outnumbered, but ready to advance at once should the pressure on him be slackened. Meanwhile, his supporting fleet enabled him to harass the French by landing troops at many different points on Spain's long coastline; and when the time for advance came, the fleet was able greatly to assist the speed of his progress by moving his base along the coast to keep pace with him as he advanced north-eastward towards France. Wellington himself was in no doubt as to the debt he owed to superior sea power for the successful outcome of his operations. 'If anyone', he said in 1813, 'wishes to know the history of this war, I will tell them that it is our maritime superiority gives me the power of maintaining my army, while the enemy are unable to do so.'[1] In these ways, he compelled the retention in the Peninsula of a much superior French Army for several years on end. Napoleon was thus forcibly committed to

[1] *Letters of Sir Byam Martin* (Navy Records Society).

that bugbear of the continental soldier, a war on two fronts, and was in consequence frequently having to bewail the necessity of having to send off south-westward to Spain troops that he badly needed farther east.

The elder Pitt relied on much the same relation of cause and effect in his coastal raids in the Seven Years' War. He was bent on the conquest of Canada from the French, but there was the safety of Hanover to be considered, and an alliance had accordingly been effected with Frederick the Great of Prussia who, with the aid of Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick, was engaged against France, Austria and Russia in Europe. When the question of giving military aid to Frederick and Ferdinand came up, Pitt conceived the idea of utilizing the indirect means of coastal raids, which it was hoped would so alarm the whole French coastal population as to force the French Ministers to divert troops from Germany to reclaim French territory from insult. Raids were accordingly dispatched at various times against Rochefort, St. Malo, Cherbourg and Belleisle. It has been the fashion among military writers to ridicule these raids as operations of war; and certainly their general diversionary effect is uncertain. But if they did not come up to expectations, the fault can be ascribed less to unsoundness in conception as to feebleness in execution. Where definite results were achieved, as at the destruction of the forts, shipping and harbour works of Cherbourg, the distracting effect on the enemy was pronounced, and the chorus of anguish and remonstrance that assailed the ears of Ministers in Paris seems unquestionably to have reacted unfavourably on the French military strength in Germany.

But, unfortunately, such results were exceptional.

More often, the raids ended in ignominious failure. They were, in fact, carried out under the most unfavourable conditions possible. The central idea of such operations was a novel one, and was inadequately apprehended by those who took part in them. The co-operation between the Army and the Navy was not good, and the Generals and Admirals in command usually managed to quarrel violently. Worst of all, the choice of leaders on the military side was deplorable. Original and difficult operations demanding a high degree of skill, imagination and dash for their successful performance were put into the hands of one cautious incompetent after another, not one of whom, moreover, really had his heart in the job he was given to do. It is no wonder that they came to grief.

A naval officer was to show at the beginning of the next century what could be done in this type of operation when it was ably conducted. Between 1806 and 1809, Lord Cochrane with a single frigate kept the Mediterranean coast of France and of French-occupied Spain in a continual ferment. By means of a number of audacious attacks on coastal ports, signal stations and batteries, he maintained such a state of alarm on the enemy coasts as to occupy the attention of large numbers of French troops, who were kept moving about in the mostly vain endeavour to anticipate and frustrate his next descent on an objective which they had no means of divining beforehand. As Fortescue says, he created 'a regular panic on the French shore. French reinforcements, which were badly needed in Spain, were kept marching backwards and forwards along their own coasts, in constant fear of an attack from the dreaded frigate, and thus, for all

practical purposes, put out of action'.[1] It was Cochrane's boast that if he could only have been given a squadron he could have forced as much diversion on the French with 3 or 4 frigates as Wellington achieved with the whole of the Peninsula Army; a claim which Fortescue is content to chronicle without disputing.

Cochrane's successes in this diversionary field certainly invite the conjecture as to what might have been accomplished if his tactics had been followed on a considerably larger scale, involving military as well as naval force. Fortescue, on the other hand, records his opinion that such operations should be conducted by the Navy. 'The truth is,' he says, in reference to Pitt's coastal raids, 'as Lord Cochrane was to prove fifty years later, that sporadic attacks on the French coast are best left to the Navy; for a single frigate under a daring and resolute officer can paralyse more troops than an expedition of ten to fifteen thousand men, with infinitely less risk and expense.'[2]

That 300 to 400 seamen could achieve more in operations which, after all, were rather more military than naval than 50 times their number of soldiers must be thought a somewhat startling proposition to be advanced by the principal historian of the British Army. If true, it could surely only be because the soldiers were totally untrained for operations of that kind. Yet if such astonishing results could be achieved by a handful of seamen and marines, the question must surely arise whether British soldiers, who had special opportunities for developing this obviously telling form of warfare, should not have

[1] *Dundonald* – HON. SIR JOHN FORTESCUE.
[2] *History of the British Army*, vol. II, p. 345.

been trained much more for joint naval and military proceedings of a diversionary kind, and much less for the grand pitched battle in the Low Countries; and the same reflection would not be entirely out of place at the present time.

What the coastal operations of the Seven Years' War do clearly demonstrate is the disturbing effect on the enemy's mind of the knowledge that an amphibious expedition is in preparation. The coming Rochefort expedition excited the liveliest apprehensions among those in authority in France. As one of them said, 'Every one of the Generals who held commands along the coast of the Channel or the North Sea felt himself threatened'; while the anxiety of Marshal Richelieu in Germany was revealed in his letter to the French War Minister. 'I must confess to you that the English expedition makes me uneasy for East Frisia. Marshal D'Estrees has always been convinced, and has told me so, that the more troops you send there the more you will lose . . . Moreover, I don't know the English will not attempt a diversion in the Netherlands. All this greatly disturbs me.'[1]

'All this greatly disturbs me.' Those five words contain an authentic testimony to the peculiar power of a sea-borne army. Richelieu was kept in a state of nervous tension not by the size of the impending British attack but by its direction. Would it come by the Ems river straight into Germany, would it descend on the Low Countries, or would it go elsewhere? That was what worried him; and the worst of it was that not until the very moment that the attack was launched could he tell within 500 miles where the point of attack was likely to

[1] *England in the Seven Years' War* – SIR JULIAN CORBETT.

be. Once embarked, the British force could be borne silently and secretly on the wide and rapid wings of sea power to a destination of its own choosing and one which he had no possible means of divining before the topsails of the expedition were to be seen from the land an hour or two before the troops came pouring ashore. All he would be able to do was to wait, racked with anxious uncertainty, looking nervously from one direction to the other.

Richelieu was, as he confessed, much disturbed; and he was neither the first nor the last General to feel the same harassing doubts about the destination of an army carried by sea. Others both before and since his time have been agitated in the same way. 'The fact remains,' says Sir Julian Corbett, speaking of amphibious diversionary expeditions,[1] 'that all the great continental masters of war have feared or valued British intervention of this character even in the most unfavourable conditions. So long as such intervention took an amphibious form they knew its disturbing effect upon a European situation was always out of all proportion to the intrinsic strength employed or the positive results it could give. Its value lay in its power of containing force greater than its own. That is all that can be claimed for it, but it may be all that is required.'

Napoleon, as Corbett points out, did his best to ignore the value of the amphibious diversion. 'For years he shut his eyes to it, laughed at it, covered it with a contempt that grew ever more irritable. In 1805 he called Craig's expedition "a pygmy combination", yet the preparation of another combined force for an entirely different destination caused him to see the first as an advance guard of a movement he could not ignore, and he sacrificed his

[1] *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* – SIR JULIAN CORBETT.

fleet in an impotent effort to deal with it.' British military writers who are inclined to pour scorn on the strategy that sent out such expeditions as Craig's might reflect that a military movement that brought on so crowning a mercy as the Battle of Trafalgar, the seal of British naval supremacy for a hundred years to come, had abundantly justified itself, if it achieved nothing else.

Eventually Napoleon came, in spite of himself, to recognize and admit the peculiarly upsetting effect of a hostile amphibious force. Alarmed by the abortive British expedition to Walcheren, he wrote to his Director of Conscription to work out a scheme for providing a permanent force of no less than 300,000 men from the National Guard to defend the French coasts. 'With 30,000 men in transports at the Downs,' he wrote, 'the English can paralyse 300,000 of my Army, and that will reduce us to the rank of a second-class power.'[1]

Nearly one hundred years later, a German General was to pay a similar tribute to the efficacy of amphibious warfare. 'I walked the sands of Scheveningen,' said Lord Fisher, in a letter quoted in his biography,[2] 'with General Gross von Schwartzhoff in June 1899 . . . I had done him a very good turn indeed; so he opened his heart to me. There was no German Navy then; we were doing Fashoda; and he expatiated on the role of the British Army — how the absolute supremacy of the British Navy gave it such inordinate power, far beyond its numerical strength, because two hundred thousand men embarked in transports, and God only knowing where they might be put ashore, was a weapon of enormous influence, and capable

[1] Napoleon's Correspondence, quoted by SIR JULIAN CORBETT.
[2] *Lord Fisher* – ADMIRAL SIR REGINALD BACON.

of deadly blows — occupying, perhaps, Antwerp, Flushing, etc. (but of course he was only thinking of the Cotentin Peninsula) . . .'

The fact is that military forces based on superior sea power possess, or at all events used to possess, a potential strength that was entirely disproportionate to their size as judged by territorial standards, this augmentation of power being primarily due to the mobility which their association with sea power conferred upon them. An army that could call sea transport to its aid had a freedom of movement and a speed of travel many times greater than that of its land counterparts. The advantages it obtained from these were exceedingly important. It could often take the enemy in flank and sometimes in rear. It could seek out his weak points and attack them, by virtue of its maritime power to reach those spots much more quickly than the enemy on land could move to defend them. In the last war, the British Army might have seized the German Frisian islands in the North Sea, as many of the sailors wanted, or it might have gone round 2000 miles to attack Austria through Italy, or to the support of Serbia, via Albania and Montenegro. Timely support in that quarter might easily have saved the Serbs from their decisive defeat and would in that case have kept open an additional line of attack on the Central Powers. In the Eastern Mediterranean, it could have turned to attack at Gallipoli, or Alexandretta, or Salonika, as it willed, and until the blow fell, the enemy should not have been able to divine to within 300 to 400 miles where it was coming.[1]

[1] At Gallipoli, we made it abundantly clear that a landing was coming, and thereby threw away most of the value of surprise.

With this power of rapid transport went a corresponding moral effect. Land powers who had to take account of sudden attack on any one of many possible points along a 3000-4000 mile perimeter could be expected to feel nervous on that account; and they did. In dealing with a territorial enemy across a land frontier, they were concerned with factors that were capable of reasonably approximate assessment. In contending with sea-borne attack, they were facing what was mostly unknown and unpredictable. The peculiarly disturbing effect of this maritime menace has received many illustrations. We have noticed the agitation of Marshal Richelieu in 1758. The readiness of the Germans in 1914 to take alarm at what might be happening at the ports on their right flank was equally marked. And, much more recently, our own rulers have confessed to the anxiety caused them by the known presence of military transports at Kiel in March 1940, at whose destination they could only guess.

It is noteworthy that General Staffs who pay involuntary tribute to the potency of sea-borne military attack when directed against themselves should so often seem oblivious to an opportunity for using it for themselves. In the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, the French made no attempt to take advantage of their command of the sea in this way. No doubt they were too occupied by the grand scale of the frontier fighting to give any thought to diversions. Yet, they might conceivably have used their naval supremacy with great effect. A sea-borne expedition against the German coast, had it been ready on the outbreak of war, might quite well have had a most unsettling influence on the Prussian plans. The French might even have thought, in those days before the torpedo,

the mine, and the submarine had come to complicate naval warfare, of Sir John Fisher's stretch of hard sand near Berlin.

More curious still is our own comparative reluctance to benefit by our superior naval position. The diversionary effect of a strong and efficient force landed at the right moment in the right place can be so powerful that it should surely have been part of our regular procedure to have such a force ready from soon after the outbreak of war. Not, however, to go to a predetermined destination, but to remain in leash, scanning the development of the situation for the appearance of the golden opportunity which will beckon to the leaders when and where to strike. Such an 'army in being', with all the power of surprise on its side, ought, if skilfully used, to have been a more influential factor in the early stages of a war than one whose exact destination had been determined long beforehand. The pre-ordained use of the British Army on the Continent, as in the last war, threw away all the military value of superior sea power. Instead of the 'Army being a shot to be fired by the Navy' at the enemy's weakest point, as Sir Edward Grey is understood to have described it, it became, under these latter conditions, merely a ferry service to transport the Army to where the enemy's strength was greatest.

There was a tardy but only partial realization some little time after the war had started that our sea power was not being made proper use of to increase our offensive military strength. The Dardanelles expedition was a return to the eccentric attack based on sea power. Unhappily we were already committed to frontal attack on the Continent, and the adoption of amphibious warfare

in the Mediterranean did but set up the two rival methods of using military power into active competition with each other. Thereafter, during the war, there was the 'eastern' school, advocating an amphibious warfare in eccentric attack, and the 'western' school which insisted that the Western Front was the decisive theatre. Whatever the relative merits of these competing policies, certain it is that to run them concurrently was ruinous to both. For instance, to conduct offensives in France and Gallipoli at one and the same time was fatally ill-judged. Reinforcements which might have turned the scale at Gallipoli were denied to that theatre till after the Loos offensive in France. That offensive, however, ate up all the reserves for Gallipoli, so that the army out there went short in any case. It cannot be doubted that to pursue a continental and an amphibious military strategy simultaneously is to invite the failure of both of them. Why, then, it may be asked, did we, of all people, make these mistakes? Why also did we turn a cold shoulder to amphibious warfare in the years before the war; and why, after we had decided to take notice of it once more in 1915, did we remain only half-heartedly in its favour till the end of the war?

It remains to inquire how far these advantages of amphibious warfare are still applicable in the present era of tanks, motorized troops and, above all, aircraft. It certainly appears on the face of it that the mechanization of land warfare has cut a large slice out of the advantage of superior mobility enjoyed by a sea-borne force.

Yet appearances may be deceptive in this matter. Harking back to the eighteenth century, we can see that the difference in speed of motion between armies

and fleets was not after all very much. The foot-soldier could do three miles per hour. The square-nosed vessels of those days, if we allow for light airs and calms, could not be relied upon to average more than about five knots; so that the ship had a lead of not more than two miles per hour over the infantryman.

What really made the soldier so much the slower of the two was that he could not keep going continuously, but had to stop to rest, to sleep, and replenish with fuel (food); whereas the ship, self-contained and tireless, went rolling along day and night, night and day, without making any demands on the military personnel it carried. Tanks and motorized troops are subject, *vis-à-vis* the present-day ship, to the same disabilities; if not to exactly the same at any rate to a comparable degree. They, too, must keep stopping for rest and replenishment, while at sea the army transport can reel off the miles by the hundred, and if need be by the thousand, without break or pause. Mechanized military forces are not doing badly if they advance at the rate of 60-70 miles a day. Army transports can do 300 miles with ease; and, if specially constructed, double that distance.

The air seems a good deal more damaging to the formerly bright chances of amphibious attack. We have already noted in the last chapter the awkward obstacle that air reconnaissance nowadays puts in the way of a surprise landing. But we also noted that this aerial reconnaissance ceases to operate during darkness. We agreed, at the same time, that where superior sea power is at the disposal of the defending side there was reason to think that it could go a long way towards filling the nocturnal gap left by the aircraft. And this has actually happened

twice this year already, when our destroyers sank a whole Italian troop convoy in the Sicilian Channel, and later on our men-of-war intercepted and sank the German transports and caiques making for Crete during the dark hours of May 21st.

If, however, we alter the combination so that superior sea power, instead of being on the defending side is on the attacking, the strategic situation is greatly altered; for then the attackers, in proportion to the naval surface inferiority of their opponents, will have a comparatively clear 'run for their money' during the hours of darkness. How much use they can make of it depends on the speed they can employ. If the speed of the transports is suitably high, they should cover from 200 to 300 miles during a 10-hour night; a distance which a sailing expedition of the old days would have taken 2 days to traverse.

Now, an unseen approach of 250 miles can generally give a raiding force a very wide choice of landing points, with a corresponding uncertainty for the defenders as to where it may appear. For instance, an arc of a circle of 250 mile radius drawn from a centre in the North Sea can be made to embrace a part of the coast of Norway and the whole of the North Sea coasts of Denmark, Germany, Holland and Belgium. The possibility of effecting a surprise landing is therefore by no means a thing of the past, and in fact shows a good deal of promise for the side superior at sea; provided, as previously said, that high speed is available.

Unfortunately, high speed for such enterprises was not readily available at the time we entered this war, which may account for so little having thus far been heard of amphibious operations on our part. The fact is that right

up to the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, our equipment for such operations was almost more antediluvian than that for any other field of our national strategy. It was not in the Boer War nor yet in the Crimean stage. It belonged to the days of Nelson. Slow cargo vessels as transports, open ships' lifeboats and muffled oars for landing craft; that, so far as our equipment was the measure of our mental attitude, showed how we thought of amphibious operations in the aeroplane age.

Whether we have in this matter learnt anything from the experience of two years of high speed warfare, the writer does not know. It is to be hoped that we have, because, with naval superiority at our call, the development of the war has been such as to offer us more and more opportunities for amphibious operations, of a certain type at last. For while Germany's pre-war coastline was very small and therefore comparatively easy to watch against surprise landings, her western conquests have provided many hundreds of miles of additional seaboard for the rude attentions of amphibious power, just as did the action of Napoleonic France in marching into Spain and Portugal. Germany is now vulnerable to amphibious assault from Biarritz, round along the coasts of France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark and Norway to Finland, thousands of miles of coastline inviting the stab of a combined strategy when properly equipped and based on superior sea power. One such stab has already been delivered, when a military force, carried in high speed destroyers, successfully raided the Lofoten Islands. It is true that this was a small operation. But small operations, as Lord Cochrane showed, can in appropriate circumstances be extremely effective. It is

also true that hostile air power did not come into play on this occasion. Why not? Possibly because the expedition was in fact a small one; and almost certainly because, having high speed at its disposal, it could effect surprise: which indicates that, swift and long-reaching as air power may be, it cannot be immediately available everywhere at once. Suitably staged amphibious expeditions can therefore hope for a certain period of time at least in which to work their wicked will without aerial interference.

CHAPTER VII

SEA POWER AND NATIONAL APTITUDES

We have just concluded a brief general examination of sea power in defence and offence; and we have noted in each case a number of popular misconceptions as to the nature of sea power, as to what it can achieve and what it cannot. We have also observed a curious national reluctance, both at the present time and in the past, to place that trust and confidence in sea power that its record would clearly justify, or to take full advantage of the benefits which it offers for our use. Let us therefore inquire into these peculiarities in our strategical outlook, in order to discover, if we can, the reason for our perverse behaviour towards our own special maritime weapon. Why, for instance, has concern been so frequently and anxiously expressed for the safety of the Channel ports, when there was little reason to think that their loss would be a vital matter for us? Again, why does one so often see the statement that if the British Expeditionary Force had been decisively beaten in the last war, we should have lost the war;[1] when we can now see that it would not have been so? Why also the anxiety that was manifested here after Munich to possess a large army on the continental model, with conscription, age groups, and all

[1] Except in so far as the capture of the two million of our soldiers in France and Flanders would have been such a devastating reverse that it might have brought about our collapse.

the other continental military trappings that Campbell-Bannerman so distrusted and disbelieved in?

A number of reasons can be put forward. First, it is well to remember that man is pre-eminently a land animal. Though he occasionally takes to the sea, he lives mostly on shore, and his physical constitution and mental instincts are overwhelmingly derived from and rooted in dry land. For a great many of the earth's inhabitants, probably for the large majority of them, the sea is a distant, unseen, and dangerous region, whose behaviour is generally hostile and unpleasant. Only those comparative few who make it their profession or their hobby can expect really to understand the sea and its ways. The habitual landsman does not and cannot. It is not therefore to be wondered at that the latter should feel a certain instinctive misgiving at the adequacy of naval defence. He finds it difficult to place absolute faith in an institution that he only imperfectly comprehends. All the more is this so since he is compelled to take it largely on trust. Threatened men (and women) like to have continual reassurance that they are safe. This a fleet cannot give. It is far away out of sight beyond the horizon. Its position and movements are wrapped in secrecy. Unlike belligerent armies, whose general positions are known to the whole world and whose operations are attended and reported by hordes of newspaper correspondents, the navies do their best to disappear from public sight and knowledge altogether and usually succeed in doing so. Their confidence value is thereby gravely diminished. The officers and men are not there to spread comfort among the shore population. They have gone away, no one knows where; and those few who come on leave are

not allowed to say where they have come from or to where they are returning.

It is hardly surprising that naval defence, however sure it may be, has always been ill-constituted to soothe the qualms of the man in the street. He needs something more apparent and tangible than 'far distant, storm-beaten ships' to quiet his fears. And, being unsatisfied and therefore anxious, he instinctively feels the desire for activity to occupy his mind and restore his composure. Up to very recent years, there was only one such form of activity open to the Englishman in times of danger; namely, military activity. There was little that the average person throughout the land could do to augment or assist the fleet. But he could help to augment and strengthen the Army and the military means of defence. Volunteers could be raised, the militia called out, Martello towers built up and fortifications dug. By such expedients, the reassuring bustle of military preparation for the national defence would be apparent in every county in the kingdom and almost in every village. The shoregoing Englishman's natural reaction to external menace was a military one; and is still. Though the air has now come in as something of a rival against the Army, the spell of very large numbers over the popular mind allows the latter to maintain most of its old advantage. There is a ring in the words 'half a million men' that bestows on the calling up of such a number a suggestion of added strength and safety that is not to be found in an announcement of an order for another two or three thousand bombers to be built in Canada or Australia.

There is therefore an important psychological value in military preparations in time of national danger, whatever

their real defence component may be. This psychological value needs to be given proper weight in judging the strict utility of such preparations. It alone would justify the raising of some additional troops. It would go a certain way towards justifying such strategical redundancies as the Martello towers of Napoleon's time. The problem is to know what allowance of a military nature to make for the psychological factor. Up to a point such allowance is undoubtedly beneficial. Beyond that point, it must be harmful by diverting undue energy and resources from other more truly essential services. The skilful delimitation of this point calls for a considerable degree of strategical discernment; a degree seldom possessed by the civilian Ministers who will usually have to make the decision upon it. With very few exceptions, their historical record in the matter of strategical knowledge and insight is extremely bad. One gets an instructive example of how poor the ministerial standard can be from Mr. Winston Churchill's description in his *World Crisis* of the Cabinet meeting held on August 5th, 1914, to decide 'how the war which had just started was to be fought'. Preparations for war against Germany had been in progress for ten years; intensively for three at least. Yet British Ministers had actually allowed matters to drift on until war had broken out before considering how such a war should be fought. It cannot be held surprising that Sir Henry Wilson should have described this meeting in his diary as 'an historic meeting of men, mostly ignorant of their subject'. No doubt this strategical ineptitude is an off-shoot of the democratic system of government in Britain. British democracy is not sympathetic to strategical study. Indeed, that is putting it mildly. Our

democracy is in fact strongly, almost savagely, hostile to it. It is outlawed by the great body of national teachers as 'militarism'. As a result, the State-educated population of this country grows up entirely ignorant of the problem of its own defence.

In such circumstances, and Parliamentary Government being what it is, it is not surprising that the average politician's attitude towards strategical problems is equally neglectful, and that in consequence Ministers tend to share the civil populace's instinctive leanings towards land power and its equally instinctive inhibitions regarding the sea. We have seen in Chapter II how Sir Edward Grey allied himself closely and secretly to the War Office against the Admiralty in the years before the last war. We have noticed in other chapters how terrified was Addington at the threat of invasion in 1801, and how equally alarm-stricken was the younger Pitt in 1805, neither of them being ready to credit the fleet with the ability to protect the country which it actually possessed. Most amazing of all, however, are the endeavours that British Ministers have made from time to time to blunt the weapon on which, as they themselves have for long recorded in the Statute Book, the safety and welfare of the country chiefly depend. The attitude of the different British Governments to the proposals that have been made from time to time at international conferences for the limitation of the power or size of navies must very nearly rank as the eighth wonder of the world. With the knowledge before them that the Navy was the country's principal line of defence and that in its power of blockade was also to be found a particularly potent and much dreaded offensive lever to be used against continental nations, British Ministers have

nevertheless constantly gone out of their way to welcome measures that would hazard the one and hamstring the other. In the old three-decker days, enemy goods of whatever nature were considered good prize wherever they might be found. In 1856, however, we lightheartedly signed the Declaration of Paris by which we agreed that a neutral flag should give immunity to enemy goods except contraband. By this quite gratuitous concession, it became possible for an enemy to carry on a large part of his trading under the neutral flag. Fortunately, the Declaration of Paris did not define contraband, thus leaving us a loophole through which we could avoid the worst consequences of our own stupidity. Incredibly enough, we later on proposed to stop up even this aperture. In 1910, only four years before the outbreak of the war in which the economic blockade of Germany was to play so crushing a part, we smilingly put our signature, amid beatific expressions of international goodwill, to the Declaration of London, by which certain classes of goods were to be considered as non-contraband in any circumstances. How little we realized what we were doing can be judged from the fact that these non-contraband classes included such things as rubber, metallic ores, and cotton, all three of them of great importance in the manufacture of munitions and war-like equipment. By a providential stroke, the House of Lords refused to ratify the Declaration. Even then, the Government failed to appreciate the folly from which it had been so narrowly saved; for when the war broke out in 1914, it declared that it intended to be bound by the terms of the declaration. It was not long, however, before it was realized what manacles the Government had itself

fastened round the Navy's wrists by this egregious announcement. Fortunately, the enemy came to the rescue with a wanton disregard for international law, which enabled us to invoke the principle of reprisals, by means of which one article after another was put on the contraband list, until by the end of the war it is said that only ostrich feathers remained free.

Not even, however, this narrow escape from an embarrassing and dangerous position seems to have made much impression in Ministerial circles; for no sooner was the war over than the merry game of naval reduction began; in which, after warmly seconding the American initiative at Washington, successive British Governments proceeded to lead the way — yes, actually to lead the way — in proposals for more and more naval disarmament. In consequence, large numbers of vessels, particularly of the smaller classes, were deliberately broken up, with resulting very serious shortages when war again broke out in 1939. For a governing body to allow the national defences to sink below the safety point through neglect is understandable, even if without excuse. But for it to take the initiative in knocking away the foundations of its own house can be satisfactorily explained only on the theory that it does not fully realize what it is doing.

Civilian Ministers possessing but a meagre comprehension of the sea and the strategy appropriate thereto, and therefore probably feeling an instinctive leaning towards military warfare may reasonably be expected to be naturally susceptible to the military outlook — and to military pressure. In the matter of gaining the ear of Ministers and politicians, the soldiers have an obvious advantage over the sailors. The latter are mostly at sea,

in the Mediterranean, cruising off Spain or round Scotland, out of sight and far removed from contact with influential circles. By contrast, the soldiers are close at hand: at Aldershot, at Salisbury, Colchester, or Portsmouth, where access to the centre of things is swift and easy. Moreover, permanently in London itself is the Brigade of Guards, officered to a considerable extent by members of the wealthiest and most important families in the land. Indeed, it has been the general rule for centuries for the Army to be more socially influential than the Navy. If an eldest son of the aristocracy felt the inclination for a combatant career, it was traditionally into the Army that he went, where he would be conveniently close to his family estates and to the hunting field. The Navy, on the other hand, was a poor service, and such scions of the aristocracy as entered it were nearly always the younger and impecunious members of the family, who very often went to sea to amass by means of prize money the fortune they had failed to acquire by birth.

All these factors have doubtless combined to make the soldier politically more powerful than the sailor, as he undoubtedly is. And if the political influence wielded by the Army is considerable, it requires not much imagination to divine the end to which that influence would be directed. Soldiers being human beings like the rest of us, one would reasonably expect them to use such influence as they might command to increase the importance of the Army and enlarge the scope of its operations. To say this is not to imply criticism; nor to suggest that this generalization is true of every individual soldier. That would be most unlikely. But unless soldiers are very different to most other men, it could hardly fail to be true of the majority.

We have, however, no need to rely on speculation in this matter. History gives us ample evidence of where the aspirations of the Army lie. For over two hundred years, we find Army officers showing a consistent hankering after 'la grande guerre' in Europe. Continental warfare on the largest available scale seems always to have had an irresistible fascination for them. Marlborough's victories in the campaigns of the early years of the eighteenth century are given a position of pride and veneration in the traditions of the British Army that are accorded to few, if any, of our Colonial campaigns, not even to Wolfe's conquest of Canada. Yet of Marlborough's Army only a minority were native-born British, no more than 9000 being present at Blenheim, and the material results of his victories were negative rather than positive; while, on the other hand, the colonial expeditions gave us the Empire.

The Seven Years' War of the middle of the eighteenth century gives a particularly striking illustration of the insatiable yearning of the British Army officer after the main European battlefields. Pitt's coastal raids, referred to in the last chapter, were unpopular from the first, and he had none too easy a task to find Generals to command them, which may account to some extent for the poorness of the leaders to whom he entrusted the expeditions. The soldiers disliked these raids because they were difficult, because they meant an unpleasantly close liaison with that malign element the sea, and because they seemed to offer next to no honour and glory. There was a sufficient reluctance to become engaged in them even when they were the only form of active military service available. And when, on the return from the St. Malo raid, it was

discovered that continental operations were in contemplation in direct collaboration with Frederick the Great, the dislike turned into dismay, and there was something like a stampede to get ashore in order to join up with the contingent destined for Germany. 'The effect [of the news] on the military staff was disastrous and killed on the spot any heart they had left to continue their work. They had come home with nothing that would make a decent paragraph in the *Gazette*, and heartily disgusted with the privations and discomforts of littoral warfare. To be employed scratching the French coast was bad enough when there was nothing else to do, but with the trumpets wakening the memories of la grande guerre it was intolerable. Everyone was on fire to join the force for Germany. . . .'[1] The Duke of Marlborough who had been commanding the St. Malo expedition used every scrap of his great influence to get himself transferred to the command of the German force, and was successful in doing so; the original nominee, General Bligh, being displaced and, to his disgust, relegated to the leadership of the coastal expedition which Marlborough had so unhesitatingly abandoned. Lord George Sackville, Marlborough's second in command, took a particularly drastic step to ensure his own participation in the continental warfare; for he threatened to resign his commission unless he were posted thither and away from the hateful amphibious operations.

In the wars of the French Revolution and Empire, the Army's appetite for the Continent was again displayed. Once more, there was an eager desire to take part in the grand-scale manœuvrings of the main European armies, and embrace the dazzling opportunities for glory to be

[1] *England in the Seven Years' War* – SIR J. CORBETT.

found on the continental battlefields. But unfortunately, the glory proved awkwardly elusive. The British Army kept on going over hopefully to the Continent — and returning disappointed. Something always seemed to go wrong with the operations in which it took part. The expedition to Holland in 1794 in alliance with the Austrians and the Prussians petered out in failure and triangular recriminations after eighteen months of half-hearted campaigning. The campaign in North Holland of 1799, in combination with the Russians, fared hardly any better, and once again the British troops returned to England with little to show for their efforts. After the short peace of Amiens, the same endeavour began again, and with the same results. The expedition to the Elbe in the autumn of 1805 had been sent in the hope, among other things, of inspiring a European combination against Napoleon, in which the British troops would play a prominent part. These hopes were dashed by the battle of Austerlitz, which threw Austria out of the war.

Thus three serious attempts had been made by the British over a period of twelve years, to fulfil an important military role on the Continent of Europe in collaboration with various allies; and all had been unsuccessful. Discouraged at last in the expectation of great deeds to be done in Europe, military Britain drew breath for a matter of two or three years, to see if the developing situation would present some other opportunity which might be embraced with advantage. And, after a time, such an opportunity occurred. The extension of Napoleon's continental system to the Iberian Peninsula and his designs on the sovereignty of Spain gave Britain just the chance she needed to bring into play the strategy of

limited, eccentric attack based on the fleet, which she was to develop with such success during the five to six years that followed. The Peninsular War has drawn consistent praise from military historians and critics for its fortunate blend of sea and military power, in which Britain's military strength was deployed in a manner that was economical, singularly effective, and moreover particularly well suited to the national temperament and circumstances. It is worth noting that this well-found strategy did not come into operation as a result of its recognized suitability to British needs, but as the disconsolate outcome of failure elsewhere. The first ardent devotion of the Army since the war had started in 1793 had been given to continental warfare. It was only when its repeated advances had been coldly rebuffed over a period of fifteen years that it sorrowfully bestowed its attentions in another and more maritime direction. Even then, and despite the eminently satisfactory consequences, the alliance of Britain's sea and land forces was never really whole-hearted. When given the chance, the Army did not hesitate to rush delightedly back to its first love at the time of Waterloo.

That battle still remains the altar piece of British military ambition. And from many points of view, it is entirely laudable that this should be so. To be in the thick of the biggest fight obtainable at the moment, to pit oneself against the world's greatest Captain, and to defeat the most renowned army in Europe, these are sentiments natural and proper to high-spirited members of a fighting service, whether or not they coincide with the fullest considerations of strategical wisdom or the truest interests of the country.

The Waterloo tradition may very well have played a

part in the eagerness shown by the Army a hundred years later to undertake a continental role. For, as we have seen, when the prospect of war with Germany began to loom up over the horizon in the early years of the twentieth century, the thought of supplying the garrisons of naval bases and of undertaking the capture of the enemy's overseas possessions was very far from satisfying the British Army's ambitions. It wanted the glory of another 'hundred days', and its most strenuous efforts were directed towards bringing this possibility about. Sir Henry Wilson, as Director of Military Operations, thought of little other than continental intervention and worked for it untiringly and, in the end, successfully. That, in doing so, there seems to have been a picture in his mind of another swift and glorious victory is not an unreasonable inference from the unquestioning assurance that illuminates his diaries of a rapid and triumphant march into Germany.

In the same way as the Waterloo precedent probably influenced Wilson, the example of 1914 seems undoubtedly to have affected post-war military thought. After the Munich crisis had awoken the British people to the imminent danger of war, there was an immediate clamour for the repetition of the 1914 strategy in regard to the dispatch of an army to France. This clamour was prolonged and insistent, and did not quieten down until the introduction of conscription. A study of the correspondence columns of the Press during the period of its chief activity will reveal that army officers took a very prominent part therein. The signatures of retired Generals and Colonels form an outstanding feature of that correspondence. It was, without doubt, the old army passion for la grande guerre again manifesting itself.

The Colonels and the Generals were, of course, perfectly sincere. Nevertheless, it will be instructive to examine the chief arguments they and others of the 'continental' school commonly advanced in support of their advocacy; for these arguments will be found to give evidence of some of the very inhibitions regarding sea power that we have recently been examining. The arguments in question were these: that full-scale British military action in Europe was imperative in order to 'smash the Germans', and this in turn was necessary because, if we did not smash them, they would smash us. The only alternative to their complete defeat would be the gradual (or possibly rapid) extension of their influence over all Europe; and, once they had managed to dominate the Continent, 'it would be our turn next'. In this line of reasoning, it is not very difficult to discern two of the subconscious mental processes that have been under survey in this and previous chapters. The appeal to 'smash Germany' on land, of which army officers are the outstanding protagonists, most probably has its origin in the soldier's very natural desire for grand military operations involving millions of men, for which Europe always has been and still is the land of greatest promise. Coupled with that desire, and complementary to it, is the landsman's instinctive distrust of the defensive capabilities of sea power, expressed in the common phrase about 'our turn next'. For the year following Munich, that apprehensive slogan was frequently recurring, and received, in only too many cases, a ready and uncritical acceptance. Were the Germans to obtain control of the whole Continent, there were a number of ways, it was said, by which they could aim deadly blows at this country.

They could outbuild our fleet and defeat us at sea. Our fleet could be neutralized by superior air power. They could mount long-range guns on the French Channel coast and bombard our towns, as they did Paris in the last war, and could also paralyse our sea traffic through the Straits of Dover. Again, they could establish aerodromes on the Dutch, Belgian and French coasts, and bring us under overwhelming and decisive air bombardment at close quarters; or alternatively they could invade us by parachute troops or men carried in troop-carrying aircraft, coupled possibly with sea-borne invasion made under cover of air power. Those were the principal fears; and much was made of them by those concerned to exploit their alarm-value. Some of them have already been put to the test and found to be much exaggerated. The guns on the French coast have already taken up their true perspective as minor irritants only. They are, moreover, matched by similar guns of our own on this side of the Straits.

Others of the prophesied dangers are still in the indeterminate stage. Of these is the assertion that a dominant Germany could outbuild and defeat us at sea. In theory, perhaps, Germany can outbuild us in men-of-war now that she has the best part of the Continent under her control and its accompanying resources at her disposal. But would it actually be as simple as that for her? A country that dominates Europe must do it by force of arms. There are many millions of people in Europe who are not German, twice as many in fact as are, and there is no reason to think that these non-German races would be willing accepters of German domination. Ethnic nationalism is a powerful force.

There is no evidence that any of the conquered peoples, except perhaps the French, have any liking for their recently acquired German citizenship. As for the Dutch, the Scandinavians, the Czechs, the Poles, and the Greeks, the stories are that they loathe their conquerors most heartily, a loathing which is said to be having a most depressing effect on the German occupation troops. In time, perhaps, Europe might possibly become reconciled to German sovereignty. But that would be only if the Germans exercised their domination with extreme enlightenment, and in such a way as to bring undeniable material benefits to the nations forcibly included in their system. And neither enlightened government nor material advantages to the governed are likely to ensue if the dominated countries are merely made bases of attack against Britain. It was on this very rock that Napoleon's domination came to wreck. His control of Europe might, almost certainly would, have been much more enduring but for his continental system against Britain, which was a principal factor in engendering the resentment of the other European peoples, and fanning it into hatred and eventual revolt against his rule.

Moreover, even under the most favourable conditions, a general European acceptance of German domination would take a good many years to come. Men are very slow to change their mental habits. It would really require the growth of a new generation, accustomed from childhood to German control, before anything like a friendly acceptance of that control could be expected.

In the meantime, the Germans would have to hold Europe down by main force; and a severe strain on their

energies it could not fail to be. It would involve the constant maintenance of an immense military establishment for the purely police duty of keeping their subject nations in proper subordination. Their problem would, in fact, be exactly similar to our own tiresome and exacting task of keeping order in pre-settlement Ireland—but on a much larger scale. That the magnitude and difficulty of such an undertaking is not unappreciated in our own Government circles is indicated in a speech delivered by Lord Halifax as early as January, 1940 (*The Times*, January 22nd).

> The British Commonwealth of Nations happened to be designed upon a conception that is wholly different, and we have learned by experience that unity can best be borne of liberty and cannot be artificially created by coercion. Just look at the results of the two methods as we see them in operation to-day. In Austria, in Moravia, and in Poland you see Germany being compelled to drain her reserves of military strength by sending divisions, numbers of them, to hold down by force those territories which she has incorporated in the Reich.

Precisely. And to the countries mentioned by Lord Halifax must now be added Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, France, Rumania, Jugo-Slavia and Greece—a formidable addition. Moreover, up to very recent months, Germany has also been compelled to maintain a preventive garrison on the Russian frontier. That embarrassment she is now endeavouring to liquidate by force. But even if she is successful, that will not solve her eastern problem. It will merely remove her frontier

farther eastward until eventually it marches with that of Japan along the borders of Manchuria.

Despite, therefore, her already dominant position in Europe, Germany must still be obliged to keep up a large army for a great many years at least. And that is just where we in Britain will enjoy a very considerable advantage. For with no continental military operations now to worry about, we shall be free to devote the energy and resources otherwise expended on that extremely costly and exhausting form of warfare to the strengthening of our fleet and Air Force; and since we possess unrivalled shipbuilding resources, and since our aircraft factories are now in reasonably full production, we ought to have no difficulty in maintaining adequate strength in these two directions.

We can draw encouragement in the naval direction from the Napoleonic parallel. If there be anything in this argument of a dominant Germany outbuilding and defeating us at sea, it must apply equally to the dominant France of the early nineteenth century. If Hitler could outbuild us, why, we may reasonably ask, did not Napoleon do so? For seven years, from 1805 to 1812, he was virtually master of Europe, and therefore had ample time to make a serious attempt to outrival the British fleet and so defeat us on our own element. Yet he never did so. True, the Franco-Russian Treaty of Tilsit did envisage a naval combination against Britain. But the intention does not seem to have been a very hearty one, for it did not survive the first British countermeasure. A combined naval and military expedition was sent from this country to Copenhagen to compel the surrender of the Danish fleet, in order to forestall its use by Napoleon as part of his

Tilsit scheme. And that seems to have been the end of the Napoleonic bid for naval supremacy. There was no further attempt either to combine against or to outbuild the British battlefleet, which thereafter was tacitly left in control of the maritime situation, while Napoleon turned to his grand project of conquering the sea by the land through the medium of his continental system.

Why did Napoleon thus abandon the only certain method of bringing Britain to defeat? And why, too, did Hitler agree in 1935 to a German naval inferiority to Britain by accepting the one-third ratio for the German fleet as compared to the British? If the overthrow of the British Empire has from the first been his main object, as we have been assured was the case, why was he thus content to forgo the most promising means of bringing it about? May it not be that both he and Napoleon, in their respective periods, felt in their bones that to wrest the trident from Britain's hand was a task beyond the power of the continental nation whose destinies each directed. For, after all, nothing is more striking during the last three or four hundred years than the indication, repeated time after time, that the prowess on land and prowess on the sea not only do not go hand in hand but seem actually to run counter to each other. The great military power never seems able to do well on the water. The French who were the mightiest military nation in the world in the eighteenth century showed a persistent weakness as naval strategists in their wars with us. Particularly emphatic was the contrast between French land and sea power at the turn of the century, when the former was at its height. While the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic armies were sweeping victoriously over Europe, the

French line-of-battleships lay miserably in their harbours, inert and effortless, for years on end. It was a failure that Napoleon could never understand. There were he and his Grand Army carrying all before them on land. Yet all that those incomprehensible admirals of his would do was to make excuses for not going to sea; and if he insisted on their going, they invariably got beaten. He could never fathom it.

The explanation may be that Fortune, in distributing her favours, takes care not to endow any one nation with both the sea sense and the land sense simultaneously. It is certainly a remarkable fact that island nations have commonly manifested a quite different attitude towards naval strategy and fighting to that of countries who have also been great land powers. At the time of the Armada, the Spanish soldiery was acknowledged to be the finest in the world. Yet, when it came to sea-fighting, it was the Spaniards who did the trembling, the name El Draco being a symbol of fear throughout the length and breadth of the Spanish trade routes. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the Spaniards' prowess on land was a part of the cause of their failure at sea. The Spanish tactical conception was predominantly a military one. The Spanish galleons were filled with Spanish men-at-arms and relied chiefly on running alongside their adversaries in order to throw their powerful boarding parties on board. The tactical idea was that of military warfare at sea, rather than of the true naval warfare, of which the English fleet was to give them such a disconcerting object lesson. For the islanders had already grasped the central idea that naval warfare demanded a special technique of its own. Drake and his captains did not rely on hand-to-hand fighting on the

ships' decks with sword and boarding pike, but on the comparatively novel weapon of long-range artillery, whereby the crowded Spanish soldiers were left the helpless victims of the superior British seamanship and manœuvrability.

Marked differences of method and outlook also distinguished the Anglo-French naval conflicts of the eighteenth century. As a general rule, the French seemed to accept as a matter of course a position of naval inferiority to the British. Time after time, they were content to submit passively to long years of blockade in their harbours, with British squadrons sailing tauntingly to and fro outside inviting them to battle. Such a position would have been intolerable to British seamen, and that the French, while invariably being valiant enough fighters when put to the test, could tolerate so humiliating a role in one war after another serves to indicate the extreme differences in professional instinct that separated the personnel of the two fleets.

No less conspicuous were the contrasts in the general conduct of operations at sea by the two navies. The British consistently made the opposing warships their objective. They realized that to sink the ships of the enemy was the surest way to achieve their maritime purpose, whatever it might be; and the capture or destruction of the enemy's fighting vessels was their regular and principal aim. The French saw things in a different light. The destruction of the enemy's fleet never seemed to appeal to them. With a very few exceptions, their admirals preferred the accomplishment of the particular task on which they happened to be engaged, such as the safe protection of a convoy or the relief of an overseas fortress.

To achieve these ulterior ends they would not hesitate to neglect promising opportunities for bringing enemy ships to action under advantageous circumstances. These wide divergences between the British and French basic strategical conceptions were strikingly illustrated by the customary tactical habits of the two fleets when action was joined. The British fired at the hulls of their opponents with a view to sinking them. The French, on the other hand, fired at the masts and rigging, in order to immobilize their enemy to prevent his pursuing them.

This neglect of battle as an instrument of strategy lost the French Navy many excellent chances, of which the war of American Independence provides two particularly notable examples. The British fleet at that time was in a bad state. Political corruption and mismanagement had left it in a poor and weak condition. In 1779 a Franco-Spanish fleet of nearly 70 sail-of-the-line entered the Channel at a time when only 35 British battleships could be mustered to oppose them. The opportunity before the French admiralissimo was a golden one. If he could destroy this British fleet of only half his size, he would be administering to Britain a blow from which she might not have been able to recover. It was an opportunity such as no British admiral could conceivably have failed to embrace with both arms. Yet D'Orvilliers did nothing with it. He sailed up, looked, and sailed away again. Two years later, the French were given another chance. A Franco-Spanish fleet of 50 sail under the French Admiral de Guichen came up with a British fleet of 30 sail, which fell back on Torbay. Once more, there was an opening for a crushing victory over the British, but once more it was not taken.

A few years more and Nelson was to bring home to those same French and Spanish allies what wonderful chances they had missed. That they did not take them must assuredly be ascribed to their national lack of a true instinct for sea warfare. 'When the initial difficulty of combining their forces was overcome . . . the allies had the choice open to them where, when and how to strike with their superior numbers. How did they avail themselves of this recognized enormous advantage? By nibbling at the outskirts of the British Empire, and knocking their heads against the Rock of Gibraltar . . . In the West Indies, one petty island after another was reduced, generally in the absence of the English fleet, with an ease that showed how completely the whole question could have been solved by a decisive victory over that fleet . . . In Europe, the plan adopted by the English Government left its naval forces hopelessly inferior in numbers year after year; yet the operations planned by the allies seem in no case seriously to have contemplated the destruction of that force . . . The national bias of the French, which found expression in the line of action here criticized, appears to have been shared by both the Government and the naval officers of the day. It is the key to the course of the French Navy, and, in the opinion of the author, to its failure to achieve more substantial results for France.'[1]

As with ourselves, so also with other nations who have enjoyed a more bountiful heritage of sea sense than their opponents. In the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, the Japanese islanders gave a remarkable exhibition of their superior nautical ability by destroying two separate Russian fleets, each approximately equal to the whole of

[1] *Influence of Sea Power on History* – MAHAN.

their own. Conversely, the Russian Port Arthur fleet showed a patent deficiency of genuine maritime feeling by preferring to be destroyed in its base by land guns rather than to face the hazard of battle with the enemy fleet. This preference for an ignominious death in harbour, besides being a decision abhorrent to true seamenlike sentiment, was particularly bad strategy. The Baltic fleet was just beginning its voyage out to the Far East, where it was eventually to meet and be annihiliated by the Japanese under Admiral Togo. If the Port Arthur fleet could not survive until the Baltic fleet arrived to join forces with it, its undoubted duty was to seek decisive action with the Japanese ships, with a view to taking as many of them as possible to the bottom with it, and thus improve the chances of the Baltic fleet in the final battle. But the Port Arthur fleet was looking shoreward instead of seaward. It landed many of its guns and sent many of its seamen to the trenches to aid in the defence of the fortress, and in the end perished miserably at its anchorage under General Nogi's howitzer fire, in preference to going down fighting on the high sea.

It is impossible to think that the Japanese could have behaved in such a pusillanimous way, not because they were braver — the defence of Port Arthur and the battles in Manchuria showed that the Russians could be grim and desperate enough fighters on land — but because their conduct of the naval war was of a higher standard than the Russian throughout the war. Like the British against the French in the eighteenth century, they displayed a natural offensive spirit at sea which refused to be quenched by misfortunes comparable to those which sufficed to throw the Russians into a state of fatal despondency. At

the opening of hostilities, the Russian Port Arthur fleet was actually in a superiority of 7 to 6 over the Japanese. The latter, however, by a surprise destroyer attack at the outset of the war managed to damage three Russian battleships by torpedo. The damaged ships were taken into harbour for repairs, but until they were ready the previous Russian superiority of 7 to 6 was converted into an inferiority of 4 to 6. The change in numerical ratio was accompanied by a significant lowering of the Russian morale. Pending the completion of the torpedoed ships, the Port Arthur fleet surrendered the initiative to the Japanese and left them virtually unhindered to utilize the neighbouring seas as they wished. A month or two later, the wheel of fortune took a turn in the opposite direction. Two Japanese battleships were mined and sunk not far from Port Arthur. Though they managed to conceal the loss of one of these ships, this disaster nevertheless reduced the Japanese to a bare equality with the effective Russian battleships, with the extremely disagreeable prospect of an inferiority of 4 to 7 when the three torpedoed Russian ships should rejoin, to say nothing of the entirely fresh Russian fleet in Europe that was preparing to commence its voyage to the eastern seat of war. The Japanese sailors did not, however, allow themselves to be daunted. They continued their blockade of Port Arthur with all their previous vigour and proceeded as before to pass their military transports through the adjacent waters as though they possessed the acknowledged naval superiority.

Our own naval history entitles us also to claim that the action of the Russian Port Arthur fleet would have been foreign to our maritime nature. We can indeed point to

two well-known episodes where we evinced a directly contrary spirit in more or less similar circumstances. One is the case of Duncan's blockade of the Dutch fleet in 1797, when mutiny suddenly deprived him of the bulk of his blockading force. Left alone with only his flagship and one frigate to deal with the whole Dutch fleet, he had no thought of retreat. Instead, he is said to have declared that he had taken careful soundings and had found to his satisfaction that when his solitary battleship was sunk his flag at the masthead would still be flying above water. The other occasion was when Nelson found himself having to envisage a meeting in 1805 between Villeneuve's fleet and a British detached squadron too weak legitimately to hope for victory, and therefore very much in the position that the Russian naval Commander of the Port Arthur fleet evidently thought himself to be almost exactly 100 years later. Nelson's maritime instinct caused him to react to the adverse possibility very differently to the Russian Admiral. Not even the prospect of defeat would he allow to deprive him of his habitual sense of initiative in sea matters. 'By the time the enemy has beat our fleet soundly,' he said, 'he will do us no more harm this year.' That British battleships might be overwhelmed and destroyed in action was beyond the contemplation neithe of Nelson nor Duncan. But that they should be destro uselessly never assuredly crossed their minds.

As between ourselves and the Germans, not c differences in naval outlook are observable as between us and the French. Both the last wa have shown the Germans to be individually b resolute at sea, as on land and in the air, and to be ful and pertinacious commerce raiders, just as the

were before them. But in their major naval strategy, in the last war at all events, it cannot honestly be said that their performance was very inspiring, whatever their future showing in this. They committed, for instance, exactly the same fundamental error as the French of old of imagining that the *guerre de course* could bring us to defeat; and this in spite of the very clear warning against that very assumption contained in Mahan's books, which the Kaiser had taken care they all should read. In the present war, there are again certain symptoms, among them the *Graf Spee* episode, which suggest that the German's genius for maritime warfare is not the equal of his corresponding skill on land.

It cannot seriously be doubted that some nations are more plentifully endowed with the sea sense than others; and that this superior endowment is no mere matter of academic interest but a factor of considerable material and strategical importance. And if we happen to be one of the fortunate races in this respect, can we make the same claim in regard to military talent on land? There is no proper evidence that we can, and a good deal that we cannot. Our military record in competition with the principal European nations is not particularly felicitous. It is true that we have produced a Marlborough and a Wellington, and that at Waterloo our army played a large part in overthrowing atest soldier of all time. But these, it has to be l, were exceptions. Not that there has ever been of valour in our land forces. Quite the contrary. oldiers have invariably acquitted themselves in ner usual to men of our race on whatever element y be fighting. Indeed, the heroism of the regimental r and man has not infrequently been the means of

snatching victory from unpromising circumstances. But on the plane of the higher direction, whether political or professional, of military operations, we have not shown ourselves to be outstanding among the great Powers. However good our record may be in colonial warfare, the tale of our participation in European fighting is a distinctly dubious one. We have, of course, naturally done our patriotic best to overlook this inconvenient truth by concentrating our gaze as much as possible on the lustre of such occasions as the battle of Waterloo. Nevertheless, a wider and at the same time candid survey must reveal a less fortunate general history. So that the evidence adduced here may be as free as possible from the accusation of prejudice, it will be taken mostly from the works of the chief historian of the British Army,[1] a witness who cannot be regarded as unsympathetic.

The Duke of Marlborough ranks as one of the great Captains of history. Of those who followed him, the Duke of Cumberland may first demand our attention as the British Commander in Germany during the war of the Austrian succession.[2] Of his battle of Fontenoy, Fortescue remarks that the Duke 'stumbled on to a brilliant feat of arms by mistake, and, though seconded by his troops with a bravery equal to his own, was not a General of sufficient capacity to turn his success to account'.

Regarding the Seven Years' War which followed, Fortescue's general opinion on the bearing of the British forces fighting on the Continent under Ferdinand in this war is summed up as follows: '. . . his [Ferdinand's] force

[1] *History of the British Army* – THE HON. SIR J. W. FORTESCUE.
[2] After the King's departure.

was compounded of several different elements, British, Hanoverians, Hessians, Brunswickers and Bückeburgers, who were divided by not a little jealousy as to their respective precedence, privileges and superiority. Of all of these, the British gave him the most trouble. Their insular contempt for all foreigners was heightened by the knowledge that their comrades were mercenaries paid by their own nation; and they claimed the best quarters, the post of danger and the post of honour on all occasions. In one respect perhaps did they show superiority to the rest of the Army, namely when actually on the field of battle; for beyond all doubt theirs is the chief credit for the success at Minden, at Warburg, at Emsdorff, at Wilhelmsthal, and in a lesser degree at Vellinghansen. In every action they did well, and at Minden and Emsdorff they accomplished what probably no other troops in the Army would have attempted. But there were scores of minor actions fought during these campaigns by German troops only, which could be matched against any other of their achievements; and there were grave defects which marred not a little the general efficiency of the British. In the first place, there was a large number of British officers of all ranks from the general to the ensign who, though brave enough, knew nothing of their duty. In the second, as Turenne had noticed a century earlier in Flanders, they were extremely negligent in the matter of outposts, patrols, and guards, owing partly to inexperience, partly to their more luxurious life at home, and partly to the contempt of danger and the spirit of gambling which is so strong in the race.[1] This judgment, of course, refers only to the conditions of nearly two hundred years ago.

[1] *History of the British Army*, vol. II.

Nor could it necessarily be applied to the overseas operations of the same war, notably those culminating in the conquest of Canada. It refers only to the Continental warfare; but that is what we are concerned with here.

After the Seven Years' War came the war of American Independence. It was a colonial conflict, with no continental component. We may therefore go on to a consideration of the French Revolutionary War which began in 1793 and lasted till 1801. During that time, there were two major attempts to engage in warfare in the main European theatre of war, besides a number of minor expeditions, though there were long periods when the British Army was playing no part on the Continent at all. The first of the two major campaigns was the expedition to the Netherlands from 1794 to 1795, the British Commander during the greater part of the time being the Duke of York. Of the result of the operations, Fortescue indulges in plain enough speaking — 'Thus disgracefully ended the first expedition of Pitt and Dundas to the Low Countries.' The Duke, Fortescue admits, 'did not shine in the field'. It is interesting, however, to note that Fortescue inclines to put far more blame on the ignorant interference in military operations of the Civilian ministers at home. He speaks, indeed, of Dundas, the War Minister, in remarkably scathing terms. Regarding a certain censorious letter written by Dundas to one of the general officers serving under the Duke in Flanders, Fortescue delivers himself of the following biting passage: 'Apart from the fact that such language, especially when addressed to a subordinate concerning his chief, was utterly unbecoming a Minister and a gentleman, it was not obvious why an Army should be starved, whether in the

matter of empty ranks or empty stomachs, simply because it happened to be commanded by a Prince of the blood. If its presence in Flanders were an embarrassment to the Government, the simple remedy was to withdraw it altogether, rather than leave it so weak as to be in peril of destruction; for there was no lack of employment for it elsewhere. The charitable explanation of this amazing outburst would, therefore, be that Dundas was drunk when he penned it; but this is no solitary instance of Dundas' bad taste, much less a unique example of his incapacity; and, if drunkenness be accepted in excuse of his innumerable foolish actions, the conclusion must inevitably follow that he was very rarely sober.'[1]

The other continental venture on a considerable scale was the expedition to the Helder in North Holland in 1799. It was a joint Anglo-Russian affair, and the British troops, which numbered about 35,000 men, were once again commanded, subsequent to the first landing under Abercromby, by the Duke of York. Unfortunately he was no more successful than he had been five years earlier; though Fortescue, in discussing the causes of the failure, once again lays a greater responsibility on the politicians than on the Generals. 'But . . . the fact remains that he [Pitt] did send a powerful force to the Helder for no sound military object, and that it was forced to withdraw with disgrace. That there were grave military blunders committed by the Commanders-in-Chief both of the British and of the Russians is unquestionable; but, in the opinion of the best judges, the difficulties of the country were so enormous that a successful invasion of Holland from the Helder was practically impossible. The brunt of

[1] FORTESCUE, vol. IV, Pt. I, page 146.

the blame for the mishap, therefore, must lie with the Ministers who persisted in pursuing their own design despite the emphatic and repeated protests of their best military adviser.'[1]

To this same primary cause of ministerial incompetence in matters of military strategy, Fortescue also ascribes the complete ineffectiveness of the expedition to North Germany under Lord Cathcart late in 1805. The British force was about 25,000 strong, including the usual contingent of mercenary German troops, and was to act in co-operation with the Russians, the Swedes and possibly the Prussians, in driving the French out of Hanover and Holland. The whole scheme was, however, barren of results, and Cathcart's army returned to England having accomplished nothing. 'Such', comments Fortescue, 'was the end of the expedition to the Weser, not a small expedition measured by the standard of that day, and not destined, as was thought, to play an unimportant part. It proved to be an egregious farce. . . .'

Yet, though he concedes that the 'general idea of operating upon Napoleon's flank and rear was no doubt sound', Fortescue nevertheless endeavours to make the Prime Minister chiefly answerable for the failure. Commenting on the whole series of attempts at British military intervention on the Continent in the thirteen years between 1793 and 1806, attempts which he himself stigmatizes as a succession of 'ignominious failures', Fortescue passes the severe judgment on Pitt that he 'again and again sent generals to different quarters of Europe with vague orders to do something, no great matter what, but at any rate something, which would show

[1] FORTESCUE, vol. iv, Pt. II, page 709.

that England was an active ally. Such was the purport of the instructions which Abercromby carried to Holland in 1799, Craig to the Mediterranean, and Cathcart to North Germany in 1805, with results that are too well known to us.'

While Fortescue's strictures on the part played by Ministers in these unsuccessful operations are no doubt far from unmerited, it can hardly be thought the blunderings of amateur strategists were the only causes of failure. Indeed, it is plain that there were contributing factors more closely concerning the Army itself. Fortescue's own description of the abortive expedition to the Helder in 1799 shows that the military organization and administration of the British force were so defective as clearly to jeopardize on their own account the success of the operations. 'The Duke had now some forty-eight thousand men under his command, of whom three-fourths were British; but the first sight of many of them filled him with dismay. In the haste to despatch the troops from Deal and the scarcity of tonnage, many necessary articles had been left behind. Some of the men were almost naked; two whole brigades did not possess a great coat among them; and the result, in a season of incessant wind and rain, was that seventeen hundred of Abercromby's force [the first contingent] were already in hospital . . . To add to these difficulties, not a single sutler had joined the Army, and there was consequently not a drop of spirits to be obtained for the men. Fuel was wanting and was only supplied, pending the despatch of coal from England, by breaking up some of the captured Dutch ships. There were no store-houses for the housing of the supplies accumulated at the Helder, and it was necessary to sub-

stitute store-ships for them. Again, the Treasury had contrived to reduce itself to hopeless confusion over the provision of bread for the army. On September 9th, there was but six days' supply in store, and the Chief Commissary could think of no better remedy than to write a long and solemn letter to Abercromby explaining why his forces must starve. Lastly, the medical arrangements were absolutely chaotic.'[1]

This is hardly an inspiring picture of military efficiency, and certainly does not indicate a state of affairs auguring well for the success of the operations in which the force was about to take part. It may be true, as Fortescue points out, that the civil supply departments were among the chief delinquents. When, however, it is remembered that these confusions did not result from the strains imposed by a recent outbreak of hostilities, but that the war had actually been in progress for six years, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the whole military machine, whether on its professional or its civil side, was not exhibiting a high degree of excellence.

This conclusion is not refuted by a comparison with the contemporary state of the Navy. That service was also to a great extent dependent on the ministrations of civilian departments. It, too, was subject to official slackness, mismanagement, and peculation, as the collapse of the rotten timbers of the *Royal George* at the end of the previous war and the much more recent mutinies in the fleet had made evident. Nor was the Navy by any means a stranger to incompetence and blunder. Yet, its transition from peace-time neglect to the attainment of war-time efficiency had invariably been rapid. By the time the

[1] FORTESCUE, vol. IV, Pt. II, page 666.

military expedition to Holland was assembling under the sorry conditions described above, the Navy had already gained a brilliant series of victories over the fleets of three other nations; more brilliant perhaps than it had ever achieved before in a like period of time. In 1794, Howe had beaten the French at the battle of the Glorious First of June. In 1797, Sir John Jervis had attacked 27 Spanish line-of-battleships with 15 British and had taken 4 of them; while in the same year, Duncan had administered a decisive beating to the Dutch at Camperdown. And then, in 1798, Nelson at the battle of the Nile had electrified the whole of Europe with one of the most complete and shattering naval victories on record. Moreover, a year before seventeen hundred men out of Abercromby's thirteen thousand had been laid up in hospital, the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean fleet could make the proud boast that not a dozen men were sick in the whole of his fleet.

These are very significant contrasts. Taking on the record to the beginning of 1806, so as to include, on the one hand, the battle of Trafalgar, and, on the other, Cathcart's abortive expedition to North Germany, we find, in the twelve years after the opening of the war against Revolutionary France in 1793, the Navy giving a shining account of itself in victory after victory, each more dazzling than the last; while the Army's continental operations can only show one depressing failure after another.

How are we to account for these conspicuous differences in achievement between the Army and the Navy over this long period? The same breed of men were doing the fighting in each case, the same sort of families pro-

vided the officers, the civil business of supply and administration was managed or mismanaged by exactly similar clerks in the London offices, while one and the same set of politicians made the superior decisions regarding either one or the other. Such being the case, what satisfactory explanation of these significant divergences in performance can there be except on the basis that the British people as a race have a much better innate talent for the sea and sea warfare than for warfare by land? It is indeed the only reasonable theory which fits the evidence.

To say this is not to belittle the Army. Of valour and courage, the chief ingredients of military honour, the officers and men on many a European battlefield have given abundant proof. But these qualities, admirable and weighty as they are, do not of themselves betoken military genius; and it can be no reproach to any group of men to suggest that they do not possess pre-eminent natural endowments for their task. It would, indeed, be strange were it otherwise. It is a matter of everyday knowledge that no individual is equally gifted in every direction, and that each one is invariably more inherently suited to one form of activity than another. It is therefore only reasonable to think that the same must apply to nations; as, in fact, it fairly obviously does.

Indeed, our own national attitude to the services makes a very noticeable distinction between the land and the sea. The Briton thinks instinctively of his Navy as an attacking force. It was natural for Nelson with 27 ships to attack the French and Spanish with 33, and for St. Vincent with 15 to attack the Spanish with 27. If an inferior force of British destroyers found itself outside Narvik with a superior force of Germans inside, it was again natural for

the British force to go in. Who in England would have expected it to do otherwise? The public feeling towards the Army is not the same. Inexplicably but unmistakably, the military role which seems to make the most appeal to the Englishman is a defensive one. The defence of Lucknow, of Ladysmith, of Ypres, these are the type of operations which seem to invoke the readiest response from British hearts. Haig's 'backs to the wall' order is remembered with special pride by many in this country who take little interest in the breaking of the Hindenburg Line. By such indefinable differences do variations in the national genius manifest themselves.

There can be nothing derogatory to the national character in our concluding that we have a greater natural talent for one form of warfare than another, and it would be extremely foolish to ignore, from false feelings of pride, the evidence that points towards that conclusion. The eighteenth-century wars against the French that we have been examining in this chapter indicate quite clearly that we possessed a natural advantage over our continental enemy at sea but no such advantage on land. In the nineteenth century, the Crimean War, every aspect of which, except the courage of the troops, has since become a byword of military mismanagement, lends further support to the theory. In the Great War, when we again entered the continental lists, it is generally agreed that it was in the bravery of the rank and file instead of in the higher strategical direction that our chief source of satisfaction is to be found.

Reverting for a moment to the Napoleonic wars, it is noteworthy that during the eleven years of actual warfare (1793-1801 and 1803 to 1806) in which we intermittently

sought to intervene in the main European theatre of war, we were continuously and painfully unsuccessful. But when, having been compelled by the overthrow of Austria at Austerlitz, Prussia at Jena, and Russia at Friedland to abandon such continental attempts, we transferred our military effort to the indirect and more amphibious approach in the Spanish Peninsula, fortune began to smile upon us. It is true that Waterloo seems a glaring example to the contrary, and has often been cited by the continental school in support of a policy of seeking the decisive European theatre at once. But it is most necessary to recognize Waterloo for what it was and what it was not. It was not, as in 1914, the marshalling of the embattled strength of the warring nations in full and enthusiastic array. Rather was it the final push that overset an already tottering man. In 1815, Napoleon's fortunes were obviously on the decline. The Russian campaign had been a disaster. Returning with only a fragment of his Grand Army, he had been badly beaten at the battle of Leipzig, in which no British troops had taken part, and had struggled with difficulty back to France and abdication. Returning, after a year's exile, with the myth of his invincibility already shattered, the omens for his success were the reverse of propitious and the task before the allied armies was obviously a good deal less formidable than it would have been ten years, or even five years earlier. It was not until it was facing this half-beaten man, with only a hesitant country behind him, that the British Army's intervention in the main European theatre met with success; and this final achievement, coming as it did after 22 years of nearly continuous warfare with only a short break, ought not

to obscure the many failures in the same direction that had gone before.

We are, therefore, clearly entitled to arrive at two conclusions: one, that we have a natural talent for sea warfare that continental nations do not possess; and the second that, in regard to land warfare, the advantage, if it does not actually lie the other way, certainly does not belong to us. It is in the highest degree important to recognize and appraise these inherent psychological factors at their proper value. Not to realize our special aptitude in maritime matters is to disregard a national asset of incalculable worth; an asset which, as the Napoleonic parallel plainly indicates, should by itself go a long way towards invalidating the faint-hearted prophecy that a Germany dominant on the Continent could easily outbuild and defeat us at sea. On the contrary, it would be far from easy. Napoleon, indeed, found it so difficult that he never seriously tried.

Conversely, to embrace a 'continental' strategy is to give points to the enemy by meeting him on ground where he is more at home than we are. It cannot therefore be sound policy to follow that course unless imperative reasons demand that we should, or unless conditions are so specially inviting as to counteract the inevitable handicap. To do so lightly and without due cause is to make wanton sacrifice of our maritime advantage. With a strange perversity, we have usually endeavoured to make that sacrifice. In the Napoleonic period that we have been specially examining, we tried time after time to exchange our maritime ascendancy for a continental mediocrity, and were only dissuaded by the compulsion of adverse events. It was because our allies were one after another

defeated and overthrown that we were unwillingly but luckily forced back on our own unfailing sea power, and so to the eccentric sea-based attack through the Spanish Peninsula that was so much better suited to our character and geography than our previous ambitions to cut a principal figure on the continental battlegrounds. We were not, however, to learn from that experience. When a major conflict broke out a century later, the continental magnet again drew us over into the main land battle. Since then, apologists of the 'continental' school have been busy advancing arguments why we were bound to go; arguments, as we have seen in the early chapters of this book, which cannot be substantiated. The same endeavour has been in progress regarding our further adoption of a continental strategy in this war, with the slogan 'our turn next' as its spearhead. We have studied two of those points in this chapter, those of naval outbuilding and the long-range run, and have seen that they do not constitute anything like the vital threats represented. The third point is the air menace, and we will now go on to examine that.

CHAPTER VIII

AIR POWER AND SEA POWER

Of all the aspects of our national strategy, none calls for more circumspect but at the same time resolute handling than the air question. It is the one above all others about which emotions are most easily aroused, and concerning which the accusation of 'bow and arrow mentality' is thrown most readily and most hotly into argument. And where emotions are strongest, there it is that error finds its most fruitful soil.

It is because the air weapon is such a newcomer that the atmosphere surrounding it is so polemical. Mankind is, and always has been, fearful of the unknown and has greeted new dangers with alarms and agitations which it does not evidence towards those with which it is better acquainted and whose nature it therefore better understands. In the years before the present war, sensational pictures of the terrible devastation that air bombardment would cause on any future occasion found a ready hearing. Everyone, or almost everyone, accepted them at their face value. Lord Baldwin said that 'the bomber would always get through', and hinted gloomily of the slaughter it would cause when it did. Mr. Chamberlain's Government made arrangements to deal with 50,000 air raid casualties a day. Popular writers improved the occasion with lurid imaginings and did their best to curdle our blood. Only very, very rarely was a voice raised to say that the menace was being exaggerated, and its owner would be immediately assailed as a crank.

The public nervousness on the subject of air attack, natural in any case, was still further excited by the extreme claims put out on behalf of the Royal Air Force. That service was a young one, and had only come into independent existence by shaking itself free, at the end of the last war, of the possessive grasps of the two older services. With the exuberance of youthful vitality, and beset at the same time with anxieties that its separate status was none too secure, the R.A.F. was not given to understatement. It advertised its own merits and aspirations with considerable freedom, and not always with a full regard for strict probabilities. It was the weapon of the future. The battleship was a poor obsolete thing, and there was very little that the fleet could do that the Air Force could not do better. So insistent was this claim, and so widely publicized, that the Sea Lords had to work quite hard to convince the politicians that there was any further need for a Navy at all. As for air bombing, said the airmen, well the country would see what it would see if the time ever came.

One outcome of this harrowing propaganda with which the British public was plentifully assailed was an instinctive desire to keep the danger as far away as possible. If air bombing from Germany was bad enough in any case, it would be a great deal worse if the hostile airfields were brought closer to Britain; into Belgium and Northern France. Enemy air bases on the other side of the English Channel were too alarming to think of. They would shorten the distance that the enemy bombers had to travel to reach England, and would probably enable them to make two or perhaps three of their death-dealing trips a day, instead of only one. It was therefore

of vital importance to prevent the Germans gaining such advanced positions for their aircraft. They must at all costs be stopped from over-running France and the Low Countries. Once again, Lord Baldwin voiced the popular feeling when he said that 'our frontier is now on the Rhine'.

This new doctrine, if it were true, as most people in Britain unhesitatingly took it to be, carried the obvious implication of a 'continental' strategy for this country. If the Rhine were really the strategic frontier of Britain, and if in fact it were vitally necessary for the Germans to be confined within their then existing borders, a British Army on the Continent would have to keep them there. There was no other way of doing it. The air had radically, even fundamentally, altered our strategic position and problems. It had destroyed our ancient insularity, laid us open to invasion, and had thus translated us into an integral strategic part of the European Continent. And so, it was said, and particularly by the Continentalists, the British Army must always in future line up in Europe to protect, or at least help to protect, the new strategic frontier that changing weapons and modern inventions had forced upon us.

When war came at last, and all the claims, theories, and forebodings about air attack were put to the test, the results of the bombing of open towns were not, as the few had predicted, nearly as serious as had been foretold. After the collapse of France, a savage campaign was launched against the British civil population and the centres of production. The assaults were conducted with ruthless ferocity, including the employment of land mines and every other sort of devilish contrivance.

Much cruel loss of life ensued, but only a small fraction of what had been prophesied. More important still was the fact that the people refused to be terrorized. They stood up to the bombing with exemplary bravery and fortitude, and it seemed if anything to stiffen rather than to weaken their resolution.

Again, the destruction of productive capacity was always surprisingly small. The bombing made a most unpleasant mess. Factory walls collapsed in piles of bricks, roofs fell in, and windows were shattered far and wide. The after-raid debris invariably gave the impression of desolation and destruction beyond repair, as the first damage reports would indicate. Yet as the rubble was cleared away and the factory machinery began to emerge from under the wreckage, the management was nearly always able to send an amending report to the effect that 'the damage is much less than was originally feared'. In spite of casualties and of much distress caused by the destruction of the people's homes, it was in most cases quite remarkable how quickly blitzed factories were got back into production. In France, the air attack on Paris had had a considerable effect in the overcoming of the French resistance. In Holland, the shattering of Rotterdam dealt the country a paralysing blow. In both these cases, the defending countries were also subject to a military invasion. In Britain, unsupported air attack against the civil objective, whether human or productive, has so far failed, after a year's endeavour.

On the other hand, the achievements of air power when employed in conjunction with the other arms in operations against the opposing armed forces have been extremely impressive. The co-operation between the German air

and ground forces in Poland, Norway, Holland, France, Greece and Crete gave in each case a striking object lesson to the world of the tremendous results that such co-operation could achieve. On our side, the co-operation between the air and sea forces played a decisive part in the destruction of the *Bismarck*.

Yet there was no real excuse for astonishment, either at the comparative failure of air attack when used by itself or its startling success when employed in combination with the land or sea services. These conditions had been plainly foreshadowed in the Spanish and Chinese wars. There, too, air bombing of the civil populations did not have the destructive or demoralizing effect that most people had previously expected. Both those wars, moreover, gave a clear indication of the value of air participation in military and naval operations. The latter lesson has recently been very forcibly brought to our notice in the case of the Cretan affair; so much so as to cause danger of public opinion swinging too far in that direction. The disappointment and consternation caused by the enemy's capture of Crete gave rise to sweeping assertions that neither armies nor navies 'can operate without air support'.

But do the facts really support that view? First of all as regards sea power; what is the evidence? In the first month or two of the war, strong air attacks were made on the fleet in Rosyth and Scapa, but with practically no results.[1] Neither these nor subsequent attacks on ships at sea prevented units of the fleet from operating in the

[1] Nor can our own oft-repeated bombing attacks on Kiel, Wilhelmshaven and Brest be said to provide very conclusive indications of the ability of aircraft to destroy ships in their harbours.

North Sea when they wished to do so. The Navy escorted, and in some cases transported, the expeditionary force that went to Norway in April 1940, and later brought it back again; in both cases with success and with practically no loss to the transports, and with very little loss and damage to itself.

A month later, there was another and much more striking contest between sea and air power. The British Expeditionary Force to France had been almost surrounded and was trying to escape by sea to England. The evacuating fleet consisted of the smaller warships; destroyers, sloops, minesweepers, trawlers and drifters, assisted by as many civilian craft as could be collected in the time; cross-channel steamers, tugs, barges, yachts, fishing smacks, down to small boats of all kinds. Against them was the Luftwaffe. Valiant work was done by the R.A.F., which fought a desperate delaying battle with the German Air Force behind the coastline, and did a great deal of execution. But it was heavily outnumbered, and it could not prevent large numbers of German bombers breaking through to challenge the embarkation. The naval targets for these enemy bombers were very nearly ideal; for in order to take the Army on board, the ships had to remain stopped off the beaches while the troops clambered or were ferried on board, while those which went alongside in the narrow harbour of Dunkirk were fixed and sitting shots for the bombers which came roaring over to attack them.

Out of this trial of strength between air and sea power, the latter emerged successfully. The sea forces had incurred losses and damage. Six destroyers had been sunk and, as the First Lord of the Admiralty recently

divulged, more than three score received varying degrees of hurt, the civilian craft suffering correspondingly. But the damage was by no means one-sided. The warships shot down many of the hostile bombers which had eluded the attentions of our own aircraft. And the main thing was that, in spite of losses, the job was done. A third of a million British and French troops were brought across the water to safety. Sea power remained in operation despite all the efforts of the German Air Force.

Still, one must not omit to allow for the counter-offensive of the British Air Force, fighting so hard some distance inland. It was arguable that this air battle was what turned the scale in favour of sea power, which would otherwise have been driven off the field. This doubtful point was, however, resolved during the Cretan episode. On that occasion, the British air contingent was withdrawn from the battle at an early stage, thus leaving both Army and Navy to fend for themselves. The absence of air support affected the two services very differently. The Army was unable to hold its own against air-borne invasion coupled with dive-bombing attacks and was driven out of the island. The Navy, despite the fiercest onslaughts of the German bombers, was still able to perform its function of preventing sea-borne invasion. This invasion was attempted, but was either broken up or put to flight by our men-of-war, and it has been estimated that 5000 German soldiers were drowned in the process. Moreover, the repulse was decisive. Though small-scale landings may have been effected in the latter stages of the battle after the loss of the island had become more or less certain, no further major attempt was made to send troops by sea.

It is, of course, possible to contend that since the German air invasion was succeeding, the enemy may have seen no particular point in again trying the hazard of sending an invading force by water. This must, however, be a matter of conjecture; and even if it were true that the success of the air-borne assault rendered the passage of German troops by sea unnecessary, there is no knowing that further essays at sea-borne invasion would have met any better fate than the actual ones. What can legitimately be said is that, with a monopoly of air power, the Germans found air-borne so much safer than sea-borne invasion that they preferred, after the first reverses, to drop the sea-borne invasion altogether.

This is clearly a point of cardinal importance. For it means that if the fleet can frustrate a sea-borne invasion when it has no air support whatever, the position is doubly secure in circumstances when air support can be confidently relied upon. It is true that the Mediterranean fleet suffered uncomfortable losses on this occasion, and that those losses if continued on the same scale must eventually have compelled its removal from the decisive area; thus leaving the sea approaches to Crete clear for German transports.[1] The fact remains that the way was not left clear. Nor should it be overlooked that the losses in the battle between aircraft and ships were not confined to the ships.

The naval losses will repay a little analysis. In the battle for the retention of the island, as distinct from the evacuation of the retreating garrison, two cruisers and four destroyers were sunk. Taken together, these figures of sinkings may not appear to contain any special lessons.

[1] Except for the attentions of our submarines, not to be treated lightly.

But taken separately, they are rather more interesting. The tonnage of the two cruisers lost amounts to 17,300 tons; that of the destroyers to 6420 tons. Over two and a half times as much cruiser tonnage was therefore sunk by air attack as destroyer tonnage. This much greater loss of cruiser tonnage acquires added significance when the undoubted disparity in the respective numbers of the two classes of ship is taken into account. Without any knowledge of the present composition of the Mediterranean Fleet, the almost invariable modern practice in this respect makes it virtually certain that there were many more destroyers than cruisers taking part in the operations round Crete. In August 1939, for instance, the Mediterranean Fleet contained, as the Navy List shows, 6 cruisers and 36 destroyers. On this pre-war basis, the proportion of cruiser losses from air attack off Crete is one third, while that of destroyers is only one ninth. Thus both by actual tonnage and also in relation to total numbers, the loss of cruisers was relatively about three times as heavy than that of destroyers, though it must be re-emphasized that the numerical comparison is based on pre-war figures.

What conclusions are we to draw from this? Presumably, that a smaller vessel is disproportionately more difficult to hit from the air than a larger one. This is entirely in accord with other experience regarding attack from the air, about which it has become the generally accepted principle that dispersion, by multiplying the numbers of targets and reducing their individual size, confuses and embarrasses the attack and thus gives added protection. The moral is that the most suitable naval vessels to deal with sea-borne invasion under

cover of air attack are small craft in large numbers; and it is no secret that there are many more of the smaller war vessels available in the United Kingdom than were at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief of the Mediterranean Fleet.

Crete did not show, as has been claimed, that air power is superior to sea power. It showed that it is unpleasant for a fleet to have to operate under unhampered enemy air attack, just as it would be unpleasant, rather more unpleasant, for it to have to do so within range of the enemy's heavy coastal artillery. It showed that, provided they were prepared to endure losses, ships could continue to dominate the surface situation for a considerable length of time.

Air-Commodore L. E. O. Charlton has stated in a recent book[1] that 'air power rides supreme in modern war'. No sensible person would attempt to deny that air power is a very powerful factor in modern war. But is it an all-powerful one? Or is the Air-Commodore overstating his case? However sympathetic one might feel towards his claim, it would in any event have to be qualified with the words, 'except on dark nights, in fog, in bad weather, and (at present) in the open oceans': under all of which conditions the Navy can and does keep the seas, and in all except dense fog continues to function.

It is also a common statement that the Royal Air Force saved the country from invasion by worsting the German air force in the Battle of Britain. The last thing the writer wishes to do is to minimize the achievement of the R.A.F. in that glorious period, regarding which he naturally feels the same admiration for our fighter pilots

[1] *Our War in the Air*.

as the rest of his fellow countrymen. Accuracy, however, requires it to be said that our airmen were only able to save the country from decisive air attack because our seamen were at the same time saving it from invasion by sea. If the fleet had not been there, the real Battle of Britain would not have been fought in the air, but between the rival armies on the ground. The air and the sea should be regarded, not as rivals, but as partners in the task of national defence. Given the requisite fighter protection, the power of the Navy to guard these shores against invasion can be as dependable as ever. Given the requisite naval protection, the R.A.F. should be capable of dealing with air-borne attack.

What, however, the Cretan affair has done is to put into many people's minds the anxious doubt lest this necessary fighter protection might not be forthcoming. The use of air-borne troops to capture our airfields in Crete has raised lively apprehension as to whether the same thing could not happen here in England; whether we shall not wake up one fine morning to find half our southern airfields in German hands and another air 'ferry service' in operation, pouring German troops into inland Britain over the heads of the fleet. After the many unpleasant surprises we have experienced in the last two years, there is a natural tendency to concede the possibility of all such untoward contingencies. Nevertheless, it will be well to inquire whether the circumstances and events of the Cretan affair were such as to induce an expectation of corresponding occurrences in Britain. First of all, it seems to be agreed that the enemy's parachute troops were generally failures. Except for a small number who managed to establish themselves in

one area, they were quickly rounded up and captured. The real danger began with the arrival of troop-carrying aircraft supported by dive-bombers, the latter distracting the airfield defenders while the troop carriers made their landings and disgorged their contents. There were other devices employed as well, such as gliders and crash landings of obsolete troop-carrying aircraft on any likely pieces of ground. But it was the ferry-service on to prepared airfields, coupled with dive-bombing support, that was the decisive feature of the attack.

And the ferry-service depended absolutely on the dive-bombers. Without their support in keeping the defenders' heads down, the air-borne troops would have been shot to pieces as they landed on their airfield. But dive-bombers themselves are extremely vulnerable things and could not have operated in sufficient strength against our ground defences if they had been subject to adequate fighter opposition, which unquestionably would have played havoc with them. Fighter opposition had, however, already been withdrawn.

Fighter defence was, in fact, the key to the military tenure of the island; and the fact that it was missing when desperately needed was due in great measure to the paucity of our airfields in Crete. There were only three; and three is an agreeably small number for an enemy to have to deal with, especially when they are spread out roughly at right angles to his line of approach. In this country, the situation is quite different. Our home airfields are very much more numerous, and, as many commentators have pointed out, are here disposed in depth. There ought, if we play our cards properly, to be no question of our ability to keep our fighters up in such force as to be

capable of shattering any attempt to repeat in this country the dive-bomber *cum* troop-carrier tactics that succeeded in Crete. But it is important that our cards *should* be properly played; for although it may well be true that our general strategic position in Crete, especially in regard to equipment, anti-aircraft weapons, numbers of airfields, and initial air strength, was so weak that we were almost bound to be defeated, there are nevertheless strong rumours that the co-operation between our air and land forces was far from good.

With the precise responsibility for any lack of co-operation that may have existed the author is not concerned so much as with its anterior origins. And these latter are likely to be found in certain pre-war influences to which all three of the services were subject; and more especially in the high degree with which each was preoccupied with the offensive aspect of its own particular problems, to the neglect of the defensive. Short as the Navy was in every class of ship when war broke out, it was shortest of all in those escort classes which form the backbone of the defence of trade against submarine attack, with far-reaching results of which we are all well aware. The army was almost equally deficient on the defensive side of its organization, the anti-aircraft defences of London being very nearly non-existent as late as the Munich crisis of 1938.

The service authorities were by no means solely responsible for this state of affairs. Their troubles were in great measure due to the country's initial insistance on unilateral disarmament and its subsequent refusal to vote enough money for replacements. Presented with niggardly Treasury grants which were quite insufficient

to provide for both offensive and defensive equipment, the service departments very understandably if ill-advisedly plumped for offence. In doing so, they endeavoured with comfortable words to convince themselves that they were acting rightly. Sir Samuel Hoare, who had shortly before been First Lord of the Admiralty, declared in 1938 that 'the submarine was no longer a menace to the British Empire'. The Army at the same time was busy heaving bricks at Captain Liddell Hart who, with perfect correctness, was insisting that a primary consideration in all strategy is the security of the base.

The Air Force was going even further than the Army and the Navy. Its authorities were not merely concerned with making the most of meagre resources. With them, the self-deceptive fictions of the other two services had become enshrined as official doctrine. The Royal Air Force had put its shirt on aerial offence; and, as a consequence, had shown but a tepid interest in the development of the Coastal Command, the Fleet Air Arm (until the transfer to the Navy), and Army Co-operation Squadrons. Largely under the Trenchard influence, it had been developed mainly as a bomber force, on the theory that air bombing was bound to have decisive results. The school of thought supporting this 'bomber' policy was active in condemning the fighter machine on the ground that it represented a defensive and therefore a retrograde attitude of mind. As it happened, this particular line of criticism very nearly brought the nation to ruin in the first year and a half of the war. For though we may have had a powerful and high-sounding 'Air Striking Force' of bombers in France, they were of no use in defending our own country against the Luftwaffe

in the Battle of Britain during the autumn of 1940; and it is an admitted fact that our fighter force during that critical time was so slender that it only just lasted out, and was almost on the point of falling out of the battle through sheer exhaustion.

The general public still sets the services no good example in this matter. It so often indulges in roseate but premature visions of ultimate victory without troubling itself to ascertain whether the essential preliminary foundations of victory have been laid. For instance, it was not everyone who found it reassuring to read in *The Times* of last June a discussion as to whether the war would be won by a large British Army invading the Continent, or by our accumulating an overwhelming air force to bomb the Germans into submission. These were interesting enough alternatives to be debated at a seasonable moment, but coming so soon after the Cretan business they seemed to strike as untimely a note as the public subscription lists opened about the same time in certain areas to provide for the eventual victory celebrations.

Moreover, was *The Times* postulate of victory by superior air power a feasible one? The evidence of the Battle of Britain was not conducive to the idea. For the natural deduction from our own air successes in that battle was that, in aerial warfare, the defence is a good many times stronger than the attack. If at that time the Germans could not, with their admittedly great air superiority, drive our squadrons out of the skies, why should we be able to do it to them when the tables of relative strength are turned in our favour? On the face of it, it does not seem a likelihood that we ought to count on too readily.

Perhaps, however, the above-stated deduction from the Battle of Britain is a false one, and our victory was instead due in large measure to the individual ascendancy of our airmen and the superior quality of their machines, both of which were undoubted facts.[1] The striking successes in our air offensive in the west which began soon after the outbreak of the Russo-German hostilities seem to support that latter view. On the other hand, it cannot be ignored that our victorious sweeps over enemy territory may have been greatly facilitated by the removal of the bulk of the German air force and its most skilful personnel to the Russian theatre of war. On the whole, it would seem prudent to suspend judgment on this point pending further evidence.

In theory, it is clearly not impossible for us to build up an air force of sufficient superiority to gain undisputed mastery of the air *over Germany*, the essential prerequisite to victory by air action by itself. But whether the nature of air warfare allows such a degree of air superiority to be gained in practice, when unaccompanied by military invasion, still remains to be proved. Victory by air power alone has not yet been achieved; either in Spain, in China, in Europe, or over Britain.

But the very fact that there is some uncertainty attaching to the prospect of victory by air power serves to give added assurance against defeat by air power. If we are unlikely to win by that means, so are the Germans. It cuts both ways. Moreover, since the German Luftwaffe was unable to bomb Britain into defeat in 1940, there is no particular reason to suppose it could do so in 1941 or

[1] Though it would be unsafe to rely on our continuing indefinitely to enjoy material superiority in design.

1942, and several reasons why it could not. We are relatively much stronger now than we were a year ago. Our fighter force is larger, our equipment is better, and our civil organization, defective as it still remains in some respects, has gained much from experience. It may, of course, be said that in 1940 Germany's air superiority over us was reduced by the necessity for holding back a proportion of her strength as an insurance against a Russian attack from the rear, and that she is now in the process of eliminating that handicap. But it is surely not being over-optimistic to suggest that any advantage which the Germans might gain by a release of their Eastern Air Force through the defeat of Russia will be swallowed up in the aerial losses they are suffering in bringing that defeat about.

Again, our Navy and our Army are both far more amply provided than they were a year ago for dealing with their side of a combined attack. There is, however, the supremely important question of co-operation between the services, the high value of which this war has already demonstrated so clearly. Indeed, one of its most emphatic lessons so far is the immense worth of such co-operation. When we have achieved it, as notably in the Libyan campaign against the Italians, we have been gloriously successful. When we have not, as in Crete, we have failed. While, on the German side, the rapid and in many ways astonishing capture of Crete was due in very great measure to the marvellously complete inter-working between their ground and air forces.

Is that same interworking now as satisfactory as it should be in the case of our own home defence? The man in the street is not in a position to know; but he can hardly

regard the recent open competition between the R.A.F. and the Army in the matter of airfield defence as a very encouraging sign. At the same time, it is difficult to think that the Government, despite any preoccupation with future offensives, can have failed to ensure that this all-important co-operation was being perfected as rapidly as possible. Perhaps it is already as perfect as it can be made. If or when it is, our island fortress ought to be proof against the enemy's fiercest onslaughts — if he cares to make them. We repulsed his attack a year ago when our defences were woefully meagre. To-day, with a far stronger naval, military and air garrison, our immunity ought to be beyond question.

But the English are constitutionally reluctant to believe in their own good fortune, and it is by no means uncommon to read at this time, the late summer of 1941, that if the Germans can manage to beat the Russians they will then be able to throw the whole weight of their undivided strength against this country, the implication being that it would probably bowl us over. But what does this undivided strength of theirs amount to? Their Navy we should have no difficulty in dealing with. Their Air Force we have already once smacked heavily in the face and sent reeling backwards. As for the German Army, it can be as strong as it likes. It can assemble in the European coastal districts in packed and clanking legions of tanks, guns and infantry battalions. If our countermeasures have been planned with reasonable intelligence, and in view of our present day strength, it should not be able to get at us.

The night bomber, it is true, may continue to knock us about. But let us be clear as to how much may be

expected of it. It can bomb our cities. That is admitted. We, however, can return the compliment; for at present the night air is more or less free to all. Britain and Germany can therefore go on spreading death and destruction in each other's lands. But is a decision likely by this means? There is a reason for answering no: and that reason is this. Night bombing is essentially a strategy of evasion. It is an attack made directly against the civil objective, without first disposing of the enemy's armed forces by fighting. The cover of darkness is in fact deliberately made use of in order, as far as possible, to avoid having to fight them. And of necessity; for the Battle of Britain showed that daylight bombers would be shot to pieces by the defence.

Now history can show no case of such attempts at victory by evasion having been finally decisive. Unless, therefore, the whole record of the past is to be falsified in this respect, night bombing by itself will not suffice to bring victory to either side. It may do grievous damage. It may bring a nation very near to defeat. But unless the ancient rules are to be confounded, that defeat will nevertheless not come by evasionary tactics alone.

The parallel with the case of the submarine is very close. That weapon of war has also sought to take advantage of invisibility in order to develop its attack against its merchant ship objective without having to fight its way there. It has so far failed to be decisive, just as every other similar attempt, as we noticed in Chapter III, has failed before it. Sooner or later, the appropriate counter has been devised, and then the attempt to win without fighting has petered out in failure.

In time, if we try hard enough, the true antidote to the

night bomber will be found. It is said that the immense difficulty of the task is to be measured by the fact that all the best scientific brains of the world have been searching for the solution without success. This may be too sombre a view. It may be that our back-room experts are already within reach of the answer. But if not, I venture the timid suggestion that their brains may be uniformly too good or perhaps too exclusively scientific. Twenty-four years ago, the best scientific brains were also mobilized on the submarine problem. Much good work was done. The then back-room men laboured very hard on the obvious necessity of producing some efficient under-water detecting apparatus, and in the end discovered one, though too late to affect the issue during the war. It was not in fact the scientists at all who provided the true solution at that time. The really decisive contribution, the introduction of which spelt the ultimate failure of the submarine campaign, was a simple idea, within reach of and actually occurring to quite ordinary minds, and consisted of nothing more abstruse than the putting of trade into convoy — with its corollary of adequate escort.

It is remarkable how much opposition was evinced, not merely to the adoption of this winning suggestion, but to even giving it a trial. Every possible objection was raised against it. This or that or the other element of it, said its opponents, could not possibly work. Yet the moment the thing was tried, nine out of every ten of these objections vanished into thin air. Moreover, the convoy system, when a going concern, was found to have very important advantages which not even its own most devoted advocates had foreseen. The obvious moral, in

relation to the problem of the night bomber, is the value of a readiness to experiment, allied to a firm and constant regard for broad strategical principle. We may be sure that the counter to the night bomber is not far round the corner, if we will search diligently enough for it. The means of defence always tend to catch up or nearly catch up with a new means of attack. Armour versus shells, bulges versus torpedoes, degaussing versus magnetic mines, convoy versus submarines; each menace has produced its remedy, thus restoring a balance which left fighting power once more the final deciding factor.

The Continentalists' pre-war contention that the acquisition by the enemy of Low Country and French territory adjoining the North Sea and the Channel must prove fatal to us has not yet been realized, in spite of the fact that a whole year has elapsed since this allegedly vital territory passed into German hands. It is true that we have suffered extremely heavy shipping losses during that year. They have been partly caused by the great assistance afforded to the enemy's submarines by his air reconnaissance from Western France in discovering and reporting the positions of our convoys. But that has been chiefly dangerous owing to the very great shortage of convoy escorts with which we entered the war. They have also been partly due to a lack of anti-aircraft armament of our merchant ships, which has allowed the Focke-Wulfs to come down to a few hundred feet and plant their bombs with unmissing precision; and to an inadequacy of coastal aircraft for the aerial protection of our ships at sea.

It is also true that the country has suffered considerably under air bombardment, especially night bombardment.

But it is important to remember that this must sooner or later have happened to us whether the Germans had conquered the Low Countries and France or not. The steadily increasing range of bombers had even by 1939 invalidated the 'Rhine our frontier' argument. Within a month or two of the outbreak of war German aircraft flying from Germany had raided Scapa Flow. That being so, they could equally have reached any part of Britain while still taking off from inside the pre-war German frontier. Since then, aircraft range has become even greater, and it is now reported from America that 7000 mile bombers are to be built. With that, the question of Calais or Cologne as aerial starting points against Britain can be said to fade into insignificance.

We may not yet be entirely out of the wood. Nothing is more difficult than to make good serious shortages in warlike equipment after hostilities have commenced, for the reason that the wastage of war is operating against such recovery. But progress is being made, and if open country has not actually been reached, it can at least be said that the paths we are following towards it are the right ones. The submarine menace is being met by more ships. The air menace by more aircraft. The guns on the French side of the Dover Strait have already been noted in the last chapter as inconsiderable menaces. And in view of the oft-repeated pre-war assertions of the continentalists that air power had destroyed our insularity and laid us open to invasion, it may be useful to point out that the fact that we have not yet been invaded in the military sense of the word is due simply and solely to the existence of twenty miles of salt water between us and the Continent.

We have successfully defended ourselves by ourselves for a year, notwithstanding a serious shortage in certain classes of ship and a just as serious inferiority in the air. These deficiencies and the fact that we have so far survived them show how unwise was the strategy that we followed in the opening stages of the war; for the deficiencies in question were a direct consequence of that strategy, through effort being diverted from the more essential services. The naval aspect of the argument has been discussed in earlier chapters and need not be gone into again. The air side of the case will be found no less striking.

The 1939 service estimates show the Army as costing £81,923,000 for 185,000 men, or £440 per man. The cost of a division of, say, 20,000 men was therefore £8,800,000. The cost of the Royal Air Force was £66,551,000 for 118,000 men, or £564 per man. Although the number of first-line machines was not officially published, it is generally understood that it takes about 50 R.A.F. men of all descriptions to keep one aircraft in the air. Taking this figure as a rough approximation, we find that the cost of maintaining one first-line machine in 1939 was (in round figures) £30,000. It follows that the financial equivalent of an Army Division (of 20,000 men) in 1939 was 300 first-line aircraft. For the 400,000 soldiers, therefore, that we sent to France at the beginning of the war, the air equivalent would therefore be 6000 aircraft.

An additional 6000 first-line aircraft available at or soon after the outbreak of war might not have given us air superiority over the Germans. There is no doubt, however, that it would have transformed the air situa-

tion in our favour. With them, there could never have been any question of our suffering defeat in the air, and the nation would in consequence have been spared the wracking anxiety to which that at one time indubitable possibility gave rise.

It is now being said in some quarters that such calculations of alternative defence are no longer applicable. For instance in a recent article[1] criticizing the first edition of this book Mr. Paul Einzig said, 'T124 does not appear to realize that at present naval expansion is proceeding to the utmost limit of the capacity of the dockyards and that financial considerations no longer affect the extent and pace of naval expansion. Even if Army Expenditure were to be stopped altogether it would not result in the production of a single additional warship. After all, the Birmingham Small Arms Company can hardly be converted to the production of battleships. It is time everybody who speaks or writes on the subject of armament realized that peace-time considerations of limiting budgetary expenditure on the armed forces no longer operate. Both Army and Navy can now spend as much as they like'.

It happens that Mr. Einzig is almost entirely wrong. While I agree that purely financial considerations have very largely lost all meaning in regard to the national war effort, the suggestion in Mr. Einzig's last sentence that there is now no longer any limit at all to war development, and that the Navy, Army, and Air Force can simultaneously expand to any extent desired is, of course, wholly inaccurate. If financial limitations have been removed, man-power production limitations have

[1] In *Time and Tide* for June 14th, 1941.

taken their place. There are only available a certain number of men and women to work in the factories, they cannot work more than a certain number of hours per week, and the machine tools that they operate cannot produce more than a certain volume of finished articles during that time. It is therefore an elementary proposition that the war output of the factories is strictly limited. It follows that factory output devoted to one form of war effort, whether naval, military or air, is so much the less for one or both of the others.

It is, however, Mr. Einzig's contention that the different services do not, because they cannot, compete with each other for factory products, and he advances the cases of the Army and Navy as examples of this non-competition. 'Even if Army expenditure were to be stopped altogether', he declared, 'it would not result in the production of a single additional warship'. He is quite mistaken. If Army expenditure were stopped altogether, it would release large numbers of skilled and semi-skilled workmen for naval (or air) production. Their transference to factories on naval (or air) work would speed up production in those factories by permitting the use of extra shifts; while the raw materials previously allocated to Army work would then become available for these other purposes. But such transfers would seldom be necessary, because much of the machine tool equipment of all armament factories is interchangeable. Many of the lathes, the boring, drilling and shearing machines, the forging and foundry equipment are identical, even where different sorts of work are being turned out; and if a special set of jigs is in use to suit particular requirements, the construction of a different

set to meet a change of work should not take long. A great many armament factories can therefore be switched with little difficulty from one type of work to another.

Mr. Einzig is no nearer the mark when he says that the Birmingham Small Arms Company can hardly be converted to the production of battleships. The implication is that the whole process of battleship building takes place at the dockyards. This is a long way from being the case. In reality, the latter are not much more than the assembly points of materials which are produced in factories and workshops elsewhere. The decentralization in the building of warship parts is very considerable indeed. The gun mountings will be made here, the torpedo tubes there, the fire control instruments somewhere else, the engines and other machinery by the engine building firms, all the many thousands of valves, the electrical wiring, the wireless gear, the boats, the cabin furniture, the linoleum for the decks, and so on and so on will each be made by a firm that specializes in such articles. Taking all the component parts of a battleship in the aggregate, it would be found that the construction of such a ship affects hundreds of firms in scores of different towns spread all over the Kingdom; including, as likely as not, the Birmingham Small Arms Company which Mr. Einzig specifically mentions. The stoppage of all work on Army production would unquestionably permit the more rapid building of warships (or aircraft), and therefore of a greater number of them in a given time. Mr. Einzig was arguing from inaccurate premises.

CHAPTER IX

THE ECONOMIC FACTOR

So far, the dangers that we have been considering have been mainly physical ones. There is, however, the economic side of the case that still remains to be examined. Is it possible that a Germany dominant on the Continent could bring us to ruin by economic pressure, even if she could not do so by military action. There are some people who think that she could. For instance, Mr. Josiah Wedgwood, M.P., writing in the *Daily Telegraph* of September 28th, 1938, declared that 'Napoleon's continental system will be worked more efficiently from Berlin and used against the hated democracies. France first, and then this country, will be strangled not by arms but by poverty'.

But is it really true that we are more exposed to a 'continental system' now than we were in Napoleon's time? An exact and detailed comparison would demand very much more space than it can be given here. Presumably, however, a fairly reliable general test will be found in our relative dependence on European, as opposed to extra-European, trade in the two periods. For the purpose of such a comparison, the years 1936, 1913, and those immediately preceding the outbreak of the French Revolutionary war have been selected as representing fairly normal peace-time conditions. The figures for these years, for which I am indebted to the Statistical Department of the Board of Trade, are as follows:

	Percentage of British Imports from and Exports to			
	European countries		*Non-European countries*	
	Imports per cent	*Exports per cent*	*Imports per cent*	*Exports per cent*
1784 — 1792 (annual average) 'official values'*	38	51	62	49
1913	40	38	60	62
1936†	32	33	68	67

* 'Official values' were based upon the old rates or valuation of goods as laid down in the Books of Rates issued during the reigns of Charles II and George I. They give no correct idea of the value of the trade in each year at the current prices of the year. In the matter of percentages, they should, however, be not far out.

† Trade with Eire is not included with that of Europe.

It will be seen from the above table that our present day exports to Europe are 18 per cent less and our imports from Europe 6 per cent less than they were just before the French Revolution. Taking an average of imports and exports, it can be said that our economic dependence on the Continent of Europe is just about 12 per cent less than it was at the end of the eighteenth century, while in the matter of exports, a full two-thirds are now with non-European countries. It seems inevitably to follow that, modern Britain's dependence on European trade being less than it was before, her vulnerability to the pressure of a new continental system would also be less to a corresponding degree. The figures, in fact, are against Mr. Wedgwood.

Nor is this statistical indication belied by a general survey of the world conditions. Economically, one of

the most notable features of world development since Napoleon's time has been the immense expansion of the overseas markets due to the filling up of the North American Continent, the development of the South American States, the partitioning of Africa, and the commercial opening up of China and Japan. On the face of it, it would be surprising if the non-European commercial opportunities were not now greater than they had been a century and a half ago.

Since, therefore, we've managed to weather Napoleon's economic campaign without disaster, we ought proportionately to be the better able to survive another one now. And the more favourable trade statistics are not the full measure of our improved security. Our economic and commercial organization is now vastly better than in the early and palmy days of *laisser-faire*. There is a better general appreciation of the many ramifications of trade now than there was then, the possibility of rapidly transferring commercial activity from one market to another is better understood, while a far closer degree of Government control, backed by an adequate official machinery, enables that understanding to be brought to use with greatly increased speed and efficiency. We should therefore be able to take full advantage of the fact that the application against us of a German-inspired 'continental system' would necessarily involve all Germany's and most other European countries' transoceanic markets falling vacant, and thus becoming available for another customer.

It may be, too, that centuries of good living promoted by our insular security combined with a foremost position as a trading nation, have made us fatly inclined to a too-

ready consternation at the prospect of any reduction of our wonted standards. When we reflect that Italy was able successfully to defy for many months a League application of Sanctions which reduced her external trade to one-third of its peace-time proportions, the fact that almost two-thirds of our own total trade are with non-European countries and therefore beyond the reach of any European embargo should presumably be a source of no little comfort to us.

It is possible, however, that it is not only the deliberate menace of a modern continental system aiming at our economic collapse that causes concern in economic circles in this country. There is reason to think that fears are entertained in certain quarters that the domination of Germany in Europe would in some way result in the undermining of our peace-time commercial and financial position in the world, even without the application of direct economic hostilities by means of latter-day Berlin decrees.

To take a gloomy view about such an indefinite contingency is comparatively easy. It is probably true that individual financial interests would suffer. Somebody's shares are bound to be detrimentally affected by any change, no matter where. But individual and national interests are not necessarily synonymous. Not that the general British trading position might not be adversely affected by an undisputed German hegemony in Europe. No doubt it would. But the question is how serious this injury would prove to be after balancing up all the various factors, favourable and unfavourable. For one thing, our world trading position is not likely at the best to be an improving asset. A general world movement towards

self-sufficiency has been in operation for some time, which, if and as it grows, cannot fail to have an increasingly detrimental effect on our trading returns.

To a great extent we must regard this movement as a natural process. Though Britain had been first in the industrial field and had reaped a golden harvest from her pioneering primacy, she could not expect to be left in continual enjoyment of what was at first her almost monopolistic position. Other nations were bound to follow her example, and enter into competition with her for the glittering spoils of commercial and industrial enterprise.

A new impetus was given to this competition during the war of 1914-18, and for it Britain herself was chiefly responsible. The impressive lesson which she gave the world of the power of the naval blockade opened the eyes of the lesser naval powers to the extreme danger of a dependence on sea-borne trade in the matter of vital commodities, and set many of them seeking how they might lessen that fatal dependence.

Curiously enough, Britain was quite prepared to help them on their quest for autarky. British engineers were only too ready to draw a fee for assisting foreign countries in the erection of factories, for which British firms were equally eager to supply the machinery, for turning out goods that would inevitably supplant the products hitherto supplied by British business houses. One set of Britons was thus busily engaged in emptying the tank which another set was trying to fill; and the emptiers were gaining on the fillers. No doubt there is this to be said for the emptiers: that if they had not been prepared to handle the bucket, the engineers and machinery makers of

foreign countries would have done it for them. Nevertheless, the process, by whomsoever conducted, was permanently damaging to British trade. Though we try very hard to shut our eyes to it, the unquestionable fact remains that many of our former markets are gone for ever. For instance, the great harnessing of water power that has gone on in Italy in recent years must mean, not a temporary dislocation, but a final, irrevocable loss to the British coal trade with that country. Nothing but harm can come from a refusal to face the unpleasant fact that British trade can never regain much of the custom that industrial development in other lands has taken from it. If we fancy that energetic 'trade drives' are going to give us back our former privileged commercial position, we shall be deceiving ourselves with vain dreams of the golden but vanished past. We may not like the movement towards autarky, but we can neither ignore it nor can we ascribe it wholly to the wicked designs of the Germans. In a greater or a lesser measure, it was coming anyway.

No doubt a German domination of Europe would hasten its approach and spread its influence, to the disadvantage of those like ourselves adhering to older economic doctrines. Just how serious that disadvantage would be must be a matter of opinion. It would, however, be wise to treat alarmist predictions with cautious reserve. The prophecies of economists, professional and amateur, are usually distinguished both by their pessimism and their inaccuracy. The pre-1914 suggestion that financial dislocation would bring modern war to a stop within a few months was completely falsified. In the post-war years, predictions were regularly being made that Japan with her immense defence expenditure, and totalitarian Italy for

much the same reason, and Nazi Germany on account of her unorthodox finance must infallibly fall into economic ruin within a very short period. They could not, it was said in respect of each of those countries in turn, last out much longer. They must crash by the autumn; or if not then, by the following spring; or at least by the winter after that. At the very latest, they could not possibly go on beyond the succeeding summer. But, nevertheless, year after year went by and still these doomed countries managed somehow to keep their financial heads above water. The experts had overdone their gloomy prognostications.

They made the same mistake of over-blackening the outlook in our own case. When faced with the economic crisis of 1931, the possibility of our being driven off the gold standard was adjudged so alarming that the most desperate efforts were made to avoid it. Yet, when the worst had occurred, the expected catastrophe turned out to be nc such thing, but a blessing in disguise. So far from the financial heavens falling, as the economists had declared must happen, the sky began to clear and the sun to shine for the first time for months.

The fact was that there were redeeming elements in the situation which no one had foreseen, but which nevertheless transformed a situation that had previously been anticipated with the most anguished forebodings. And if so, the same may be true of other future economic possibilities which may seem fraught with peril. Perhaps they, too, are not so serious as they portend. If Germany were able to dominate Europe, the economic harm she could do us might after all be a good deal less than some of us fancy. From the economic point of view, therefore,

it seems useful to ask whether it is worth while incurring indisputably severe disadvantages in order to forestall dangers which may be only hypothetical. We cannot tell with any approach to certainty what, if any, would be the adverse economic effects of a German domination of Europe. We can, however, make a fairly good estimate of the damaging consequences of war to prevent that domination. The last war increased the national debt by £6,400,000,000 from £650,000,000 in 1914 to the neighbourhood of £7,000,000,000 by the armistice; an increase of over ten times. In 1939 the interest charges which the country had to pay on that debt amounted to £200,000,000 more than in 1913. There was in addition an expenditure of about £40,000,000 on war pensions, which have been in annual payment ever since the war. Altogether, therefore, there has ever since 1918 been an annual levy on the country of approximately £240,000,000 in respect of the last war. This is about 16 per cent of the total trade of the country, an increase of 15 per cent over the ratio of the 1913 debt charges to present day trade. The last war, therefore, represents a 15 per cent tax which trade has had to support ever since the armistice.[1]

The present war is obviously destined to make a handsome addition to that burden. It has started off costing very nearly the same amount as the last war did at its close, and if it lasts only the same four years (many people think it will go on longer), it may well add another 15 to 20 per cent to the millstone round the neck of post-war industry and commerce. From a purely business point of view, therefore, it is worthy of consideration whether it would be better to ensure the economic *status*

[1] *Whitaker's Almanack* gives our total trade for 1937 as £1,625,825,667.

quo (or as much of it as possible) by smashing Germany, at the cost of a further heavy weight of debt which cannot fail to hamper our post-war commercial position; or to risk the possibility (but not the certainty) of a slightly worsened trading position due to the unsympathetic economic attitude of a triumphant Germany, but escape the indebtedness and perhaps save hundreds of thousands of lives into the bargain. To some extent the question may be regarded as an academic one, since the war is already under way and Germany has already gone a long way towards dominating the Continent. But were its indefinite continuance to be demanded for the purpose of removing all danger of German economic rivalry, this aspect of the matter would again be deserving of thought.

On the more immediate question, however, of an attempt at a continental system during hostilities, we are surely on reasonably safe ground in feeling no great cause for alarm. Our vulnerability to it is less than in Napoleon's time, our organization against it is better, while its boomerang quality may be no less potent than before.

CHAPTER X

OUR FUTURE STRATEGY

THE continental strategy with which we entered the war fell to ruins in a matter of months. Our armies went to the Continent and there suffered a disastrous series of reverses, being compelled to make one forced evacuation after another, among them the astonishing evacuation from Dunkirk, by which a British Army of more than a third of a million men was snatched by superior sea power from what the whole world had thought to be certain destruction or capture.

The strategy of sending a British Army to take part in the continental fighting was a complete failure. It did not prevent the enemy from gaining the Channel ports and flooding into territory adjacent to the coasts of England from which to launch an attack upon us. What it did do was to deprive us of adequate means of meeting the attack. The middle of June 1940 found us with an Army without weapons, which it had been obliged to leave on the Continent, an Air Force decimated by its attempt to bolster up the wretched inadequacy of the French squadrons, and a Navy with over half a hundred of its ships sunk or temporarily out of action in evacuating the retreating army.

The strategical error that has led to this precarious state of affairs is the well-known one of trying to be strong everywhere, leading as it nearly always does to being strong nowhere. The endeavour to be superior at sea,

strong in the air, and at the same time to build up an army of continental size has produced a situation in which, of the vital services, the Navy, though superior, is not even yet by any means as strong as it ought to be, while the Air Force, gallant and skilful as it is, is only now beginning to recover from the position of grave inferiority it was in last summer. As in the last war, when we were pouring men into France at a time when the shortage of destroyers was very nearly losing us the war against the submarines, we had neglected to ensure the safety of the home base before indulging in military adventures abroad. Given enough ships and aircraft, we could now be snapping our fingers at Germany and her mighty armies. But we began this war by looking all ways at once, out to sea, up in the air, and landwards towards the Continent, where, in the vain endeavour to satisfy allies who could think only in terms of army divisions, we became more and more involved in the continental military toils.

Unsound strategy, however, is nearly always the offspring of unsound policy; and it is clear that the present instance is no exception. After the last war this country became intoxicated by the slogan 'Collective security'. It was to be the cure for all future threats to peace and was to secure the continued existence of the British Empire indefinitely. The reciprocal implications of this comfortable doctrine led its British enthusiasts to contemplate the armed support of other League members with equal delight. Everyone else's quarrel became Britain's quarrel too; and if Abyssinia, or China, or Czecho-Slovakia were to be threatened with attack, then it was Britain's duty to go to their support, a duty in

which the national honour was always declared to be automatically involved.

The ardent disciples of this new faith would listen to no limitations to the workings of their golden system. Britain must always march shoulder to shoulder with the 'peace-loving nations' against the evil-doer and the aggressor, and must do so with all her forces. It happened, however, that most of the nations who were labelled as peace-lovers were also continental nations, with continental ideas about strategy. It followed as a matter of course that all the many British collective securityites acquired a landward bias to their outlook in warlike policy.

All this was extremely unfortunate, because if anything can be said to have proved a ghastly failure in practice it is collective security. Nations simply will not combine to fight in their mutual defence. They will combine readily enough to talk, but not to fight. At its first and most promising test case of Abyssinia, collective security proved a broken reed. Fifty-odd nations were ready to apply economic pressure, but they were not prepared to go beyond that to actual armed compulsion. When Italy made it clear that oil sanctions would mean war, the fifty-odd nations but one also made it clear that if Britain went to war with Italy on behalf of Geneva she would fight alone.

The subsequent history of collective security has been equally miserable, the reluctance of nations to combine for common safety being a most striking feature of the last year. Sweden and Norway forebore to help Finland in her struggle against Russia. Neither Holland nor Belgium made the least effort to aid Denmark. What was even more disconcerting, our own endeavours to play the

part of universal fairy godmother did not seem to receive the enthusiasm that might reasonably have been expected. Both Norway and Sweden made it clear that Anglo-French help to Finland would not be allowed to pass through their countries; while the Dutch Prime Minister declared just before the invasion of his country that Holland would resist with arms any attempt to provide 'protective help' by either side. A little earlier, just before the war, the Prime Minister of one of the Baltic States — I think it was Lithuania — even went so far as to declare that the bestowal of a British guarantee on his country would be regarded as an act of aggression.

These refusals to accept British aid against attack came as a painful shock to British public opinion. But they were as nothing to the shocks it received in the cases where British help was accepted. The Belgians not only accepted British aid, but went out of their way to ask for it. And when it was given, they then proceeded to leave their deliverers in the lurch (as was thought at the time) by suddenly laying down their arms. As for the French, they were our trusted Allies, trusted to the point of putting nearly half a million British soldiers under French command. They had made various solemn promises to us regarding our joint war effort; but when the time came to honour them, they betrayed us as deliberately as they had betrayed their Czech allies in 1938. Arguing in favour of a continental policy for this country, an important British General had told a pre-war audience that 'it would obviously be a delusion to suppose that other countries would fight to maintain the British Empire, unless the British Empire were going to render them a similar service'. It is now plain for all to see that other countries

had never intended to fight to maintain the British Empire in any circumstances.

The policy of continental military alliances has once more played us false, as it always does. Against the French Revolution these alliances collapsed in hopeless discord and mutual recriminations, and they have done so again. Even in the last war, when the alliances held together, they were far more of a liability than an asset. We were constantly having to expend blood and treasure in order to get one or other of our Allies out of a tight corner. As early as 1915, one of the reasons that took us to Gallipoli was to relieve the pressure on the Russians. Then there were the Italians who had to be propped up with a number of British divisions in order to prevent their disintegration. And we know the fearful British losses that were incurred in offensives on the Western Front designed to draw the enemy's attention away from the tottering French Armies, following the bloody failure of Nivelle's offensive.

Three-quarters of a million British and Dominion lives were lost in the continental fighting, and the result was a bankrupt victory which found the British nation in a state of grave physical and moral exhaustion, which had the most serious after effects. Financially, the country was heavily mortgaged to the United States of America and was thereby forced into a long subservience to the tortuous eccentricities of American politics, to the great detriment of distinctively British interests. Even more detrimental was the loss of life. The war had taken toll of British manhood on a huge scale unprecedented in British history. The ensuing reaction was violent and prolonged. To its influence must undoubtedly be ascribed

the wave of pacifism and unpractical idealism that swept over the country in the post-war years. So far from the shattered warriors of the recent fighting being regarded as the saviours of their country, it was the conscientious objectors of the war period who became the heroes of the peace. And under their irresponsible and sentimental inspiration, the country made haste to throw away its arms and demolish its defences, so that when a foreign menace sharply challenged it again twenty years later, it found itself woefully unprepared and scandalously weak. Moreover, the fearful butchery of the war had of itself rendered the British people additionally ill equipped to combat the moral anæmia which followed. For great numbers of the best men of a whole generation had been killed off on the battlefields, and the country was disproportionately under the control of the less good material that had remained behind.

The adverse effects of the terrific effort we made on that occasion, alike at sea, on land, and in the air, is not yet sufficiently appreciated. In fact we overtaxed our strength to a most dangerous degree, a degree which future historians may agree to have caused grave harm to our position in the world. The attempt to fight a first-class war on land and sea at the same time does not have a good history. The Dutch tried to do it in the seventeenth century and the endeavour led to their eclipse as a great power. 'Still less was it to the interest of Holland to prolong the war, after Louis showed a wish for peace. A continental war could at best be but a necessary evil, and source of weakness to her. The money she spent on her own and the allied armies was lost to her Navy, and the sources of her prosperity at sea were being exhausted.

How far the Prince of Orange was justified, by the aims of Louis XIV, in that unyielding attitude of opposition which he always maintained may be uncertain, and there is here no need to decide the question; but there can be no doubt that the strife sacrificed the sea power of Holland through sheer exhaustion, and with it destroyed her position among the nations of the world.'[1] It is highly significant that the continental strife of 1914-1918 was the immediate prelude to our abandonment of our centuries-old position of naval supremacy by the acceptance of parity with the United States.

Moreover, the very fact that we had gone to the Continent to the support of the Belgians and the French induced in the public mind a feeling that, somehow or other, we were bound to go. Our British intellectuals, Collective Security enthusiasts to a man, proceeded to exploit this feeling by propounding the doctrine that Britain had a positive duty to hurry to the support of any country attacked by another one. These clamorous people decided that Britain had acquired unlimited obligations to all other nations, especially the smaller ones. If foreign lives could be saved or a foreign land shielded from aggression by the dispatch of British armed forces, it did not seem to matter a jot to them how many sons of British mothers were to be slaughtered in the process. The Bloomsbury mind appeared unconscious of the possibility that the British Government might have a duty to the British people, and especially the youth of military age, not to squander their lives unnecessarily; or that there might be something, after all, to be said for the attitude of Sir Robert Walpole who, in conversation

[1] *Influence of Sea Power upon History* - MAHAN.

with Queen Caroline in 1734 regarding his refusal to commit Britain to participation in the war of the Polish Succession, took credit for the fact that 'there are 30,000 men killed in Europe this year, and not one single Englishman'.

The persistent post-war propaganda that British honour was only to be measured in terms of foreigners had a considerable success. Coupled with our national tendency to self-criticism, it gained a remarkable hold over the public mind. In the last year or two before the present war, Britain was indulging in an orgy of self-denunciation. Accusations of British dishonour, disgrace, and humiliation were crowding into the columns of the Press and travelling hotly across the floor of the House of Commons. So desperately intent were we on our own defamation that we had eyes and ears for nothing but evidence of British turpitude. If the French said (as they did) that we were cravenly sheltering behind the Maginot Line, and evidently bent on behaving once more with our traditional perfidy, we received these taunts with an eager humility. When the Americans lashed us with verbal scorpions for betraying democracy by not immediately making war on Hitler, we would redden with shame and dutifully send off a stiff Note to Germany. We accepted all abuse (except German) with meekness, and felt sure that every anti-British reproach from any direction (except German) was automatically justified. The more scornful the tone, the more respect we gave to its user. Madame Tabouis became a British national heroine.

The extent to which the doctrine of Britain's primary duty towards the foreigner had permeated even respon-

sible circles may be judged from this extract from an article by a *Times* Special Correspondent, written as late as April of this year. Referring to the recent German occupation of Denmark, it said:

> . . . it must be assumed that they [the Danes] will be told by every means of which we dispose that we fully understand the hopelessness of their position, and that we should not have wished them to oppose vain and suicidal resistance to an enemy who could have attacked them from every side . . . and finally that we will not abandon them after the war.
>
> . . . he [the Danish farmer] must not be left to believe that Britain, having arranged alternative sources of foodstuffs, will not lift a finger after the war to restore the production of Danish bacon and butter.

And why all this tenderness for the Danes, who, incidentally, had not lifted a finger to resist the invader? Our dependence on Danish foodstuffs which can be cut off at the pleasure of a continental invader is a very obvious strategical weakness to ourselves, as the German invasion makes abundantly clear. Why, then, having received this forcible object lesson of the disadvantage of such dependence on continental food supplies, why should we deliberately jettison our alternative and safer war-time sources just to please the Danish farmer, to whom we are under no obligation whatever? Not a word of concern, be it noted, for the British farmer. No suggestion that the disconcerting failure of Danish supplies in the middle of a war provides an excellent reason and opportunity for doing something for our own agriculture and ensuring

an absolutely secure source of production at one and the same time. No thought of that. *The Times* Special Correspondent was most anxious that we should not abandon the Danish farmers. It evidently worried him not the least that in doing so we must abandon our own.

We took a more matter of fact and less exalted view of our international liabilities in former times. In Napoleon's day, for instance, we do not seem to have been unduly conscience-stricken at seeing one European nation after another being overthrown by the French without any serious British attempt being made to help them. We allowed no unpleasant qualms about fighting to the last Austrian to disturb our equanimity; nor did we distress ourselves with fears that we were falling short of our honourable obligations in making the protection of British interests our chief concern. On the contrary, our forebears appear to have been mightily pleased with themselves over their naval and (at that time) non-continental method of conducting war. It was but a few days before Austria was disastrously defeated at Austerlitz that the Prime Minister declared before Parliament, in a famous phrase that was received with general applause by the House and has been constantly quoted with approval since, that 'England has saved herself by her exertions and will, I trust, save Europe *by her example*'.[1] Evidently, as we see from the words in italics, and from Britain's policy in the following years, British Ministers of that date thought it no part of their duty to hurry over the conscripted manhood of Britain to the help of any nation of Europe, whether Austrian, Prussian, Russian, Swedish, or Swiss, which was in danger of overthrow

[1] My italics.

by the French. It is instructive to recall the reply sent by Castlereagh to the appeal of the Tyrolese for British help against Napoleon's invasion of their country in 1809. 'We wish you well,' he said, 'but we cannot help you: we have ourselves to think of.'

Why then should we nowadays allow ourselves to take a more austere view of our international duty? Even after the staggering betrayals we have recently suffered at the hands of those for whom 600,000 British men gave their lives in the last war, there are still those in Britain who are unable to rid themselves of the dangerous slogans of the Geneva doctrinaires, and who can still speak of Britain fighting for the freedom of all nations. In fact, any obligation that Britain may ever have had to fight other people's battles for them was completely liquidated in 1940; and to go on talking about Britain fighting for the rights of other nations is nothing but a sign of blind adherence to a policy which has already once failed us so dismally. Britain fought for herself by herself through a whole year after the collapse of France without, for the first time for a generation, any Continental ties, and did so with a success that startled none more than herself. We should never again base our strategy on Continental collaboration, but should base it instead on what we can do ourselves, and in particular on what form of strategy will preserve our territory and our interests with the least expenditure of British lives. For the lives of British men represent British capital in its most precious form; and the unlimited squandering of this vital national asset that went on in the last war inflicted an injury on the whole nation from which it has not yet recovered, possibly will never quite recover.

We should seek the least bloody way of achieving our object. And I say 'achieving our object' deliberately, in preference to the words 'victory' or 'winning the war'. Those two latter terms are perhaps the most dangerous ones in the English language at the present time, inasmuch as they deceive many people into thinking that we cannot win until we have 'smashed the Germans' and that to smash the Germans we must have soldiers marching into Germany.

In truth, this conception of victory is very largely fallacious. It is quite possible that the present war may have to go on till the Germans have been smashed. It would, however, be wholly inaccurate to allege that victory in war necessarily involves the complete overthrow of the enemy. One has only to look at the war of the Spanish Armada to see that. No intelligent person would deny that that war was won by England. Yet the English made no attempt to smash their enemy. They contented themselves with repulsing his attacks. No army was sent to the Spanish Peninsula to bring the Spaniards to final and utter defeat; as indeed the English were quite incapable of doing. Yet the mere repulse of the Spanish offensive was not only decisive for the security of England but proved an event of cardinal importance also to Europe and the world.

> The first serious attempt of Spain to conquer England was also her last. The colossal effort put forth to build and equip the Armada, the child of such ardent prayers and expectations, could not, it was found, be effectively repeated, although henceforth Spain kept up a more formidable fighting fleet

> in the Atlantic than in the days when Drake first sailed to the Spanish Main. But the issue of the war had been decided at its outset by a single event which all Europe at once recognized as a turning point in history. The mighty power that seemed on the eve of universal overlordship over the white man and all his new dominions had put forth its full strength and failed.[1]

The lesson of the Spanish Armada is an important one. It is that non-success may be as lasting a deterrent as severe punishment. The sixteenth-century Spaniards were the terror of the western world. Their failure, however, to conquer England in 1588 convinced them that they could never do it; or, at all events, has sufficed to convince them for the last 352 years. Nor was it England alone that benefited. Spanish aggression has been removed from the list of continental dangers for an equally long period; and all because of a naval victory by which 'the haunting fear of Spanish tyranny passed out of Europe'.[2] And these significant results were not brought about by humbling the Spaniards to the dust in complete national overthrow, but by letting them see they could not win. It is instructive to notice that, by contrast, the policy of 'smashing the enemy' to pieces which was followed between 1914 and 1918 has not resulted in more than a 21 years' respite.

As a matter of fact, out of all the major wars in which we have engaged, we have only achieved the total subjugation of the enemy on two occasions: once against Napoleon, and once against the Germans of the last war. By far

[1] *History of England* – G. M. TREVELYAN.
[2] *History of Europe* – H. A. L. FISHER.

the largest number of our wars have ended with an agreed as opposed to a dictated peace. Every single one of our five wars against the French in the eighteenth century was terminated in such a fashion; including the Seven Years' War, which, after the Dutch wars, was the most important and decisive war we have fought, ensuring for the Anglo-Saxon race, as it did, the ultimate control of the North American Continent and the dominant position in India. The complete knock-out is, for us at least, a comparatively modern development. It was not until the nineteenth century that we came to participate in a final and absolute defeat administered to one of the Great Powers. The proposition that a war is not to be regarded as won until the enemy is completely, utterly, and hopelessly beaten does not, therefore, obtain the support of history.

Nor must we allow ourselves to be misled by popular catchphrases arising out of the collapse of France. It is now a favourite saying that the Maginot Line was what ruined the French Army, because it inculcated a spirit of tame defensive. The defensive is therefore now being decried, and the offensive extolled as the only true strategy. The latter, as it happened, was also the strategical doctrine in the French Army before 1914 under the influence of Foch, who could think of nothing but the word 'attaque'. Nevertheless this cult of the offensive very nearly broke the French Army in the first few weeks of the war. As a result, the offensive came under disfavour in post-war France, and the defensive, with the Maginot Line as its visible symbol, was installed in its place. Now it is the turn of the defensive to be abused.

The odium that now surrounds the Maginot Line

seems to have obscured the fact that the line itself was never broken. It was the unfortified northern extension of the line that gave way, and it is possible that even that might not have happened if the British and French Armies that were holding that line had not made haste to leave the earthworks they had prepared along this section of the front and race forward into unsurveyed Belgium.

If the Maginot Line was a mistake, why did the Germans build one too? And why was Wellington's Maginot line at Torres Vedras such a success? The same question may be asked about Britain's defensive against Napoleon between 1803 and 1805, and England's against Philip II in 1588. In 1587, Drake had sought out the Spanish fleet at its base and had destroyed it there. That did not prevent another Spanish fleet being built for another attempt in the following year. And this time, the British awaited its coming in the Channel, Drake's famous game of bowls on Plymouth Hoe being an example of the defensive pushed to its extreme limit.

Admiral Togo's conduct in 1905 again provides an example of a defensive attitude being adopted with complete success. He did not follow the offensive line of steaming to European waters to find and engage the Russian Baltic fleet. Instead he allowed it to come out to him. Fifteen thousand miles it steamed to meet him, and he, remaining in Japanese waters, was content to await its coming. Not even when it had entered the China seas did he go forth to seek it. He permitted it to come right up almost to within sight of the Japanese mainland before he brought it to action. But then he

destroyed it in one of the most decisive actions in naval history.

I am not decrying the offensive. Far from it. The old proverb that 'offence is the best means of defence' still holds good. But there has been a widespread tendency of the late years to misconstrue that proverb by overlooking the significance of its last word. Many of the continentalists have advanced this proverb as supporting their point of view, but in doing so it has been the offensive as a means of offence and not of defence that they really had in mind. There are in fact two aspects of offence and defence, political and military. The political aspect covers the main national object in waging war, which may be essentially offensive or essentially defensive, or even a mixture of the two. The German political object in this war is obviously offensive (or aggressive). So was our own against the Boers. Our present political object is as clearly defensive. We are concerned to hold what we have got and are not bent on seizing more territory from the enemy.

The military object is the actual warlike programme by which the political object is to be achieved. The two types of object will not necessarily coincide. A political offensive, indeed, necessarily implies a military offensive as well. But a political defensive is often best sustained by a military offensive. Excellent examples of this principle are to be found in the offensive blockades of the French squadrons at Brest, Toulon, Rochefort and elsewhere, as a means of defending Britain against French invasion.

But in pursuing a military offensive which serves a politically defensive object there is no absolute need to go beyond the enemy's means of offence. In Napoleon's day,

any attack on this country had to be water-borne. In defending Britain against such attack, it was therefore sufficient to pursue a maritime offensive designed to ensure that an invasionary force could not be carried over the water. It was not necessary to go beyond this and attack the enemy's armies on land. If they could not get across the Channel, it did not matter how numerous they were on the other side of it.

Similarly, at the present time, offensive measures undertaken in pursuit of the national defensive against the invasion of our island can be confined to the two elements of the sea and the air, by which alone the invasion can come. Overseas, where we have certain essential land areas to hold, we again have the choice of offensive or defensive tactics, always remembering that the strategy is defensive. It may frequently, moreover, be valuable to harry the enemy from the air or with raids on coastal or other exposed objectives; but none of this involves smashing their main forces to pieces in great offensive operations on land. The defence of Britain does not, in fact, imperatively demand the complete overthrow of Germany, any more than the defence of Britain against Napoleon imperatively required the complete overthrow of France. Had Napoleon, indeed, decided to abandon his continental system and the attempt to conquer the sea by the land, it is quite on the cards that he would not have been overthrown.

The offensive has its proper part to play in war, but so has the defensive; and the swordsman who was all slash and no parry would stand a very poor chance in a duel with a skilful antagonist. The modern tendency to pin exclusive faith to either one or the other displays an

extremely unscientific and inaccurate approach to the problem. In former times, we showed no slavish adherence to any 'cult' or 'school of thought' whether of offensive or defensive. For the three centuries that we are accustomed to regard as the most glorious and successful of our history, we followed an offensive or a defensive strategy as suited our immediate purpose. The two periods of greatest menace to Britain during those centuries were those of the Spanish Armada and the Napoleonic threat between 1803 and 1805; and in neither of them was there the immediate quest for totalitarian victory that has become the fashion in our time. On the contrary, the men of Elizabeth's and George III's reigns felt their way circumspectly from one strategical step to another, with a very clear regard for the principle that the security of the home base must precede offensive action on the Continent. Elizabeth's men were content, as a first measure, to beat off the Spanish attack; and when they found that that lesson sufficed and that further attempts were not likely to succeed, they agreed to a compromise peace.

George III's men followed the same initial process in first concentrating their energies on the foiling of Napoleon's invasion project. Once Trafalgar had put that out of court, there was a pause during which unofficial peace feelers were actually instituted by us in Paris in 1806. It was only when it became clear that Napoleon had not abandoned his schemes for bringing England down, if not by one means then by another, that it then became England's object to encompass Napoleon's downfall in turn. Even so, there was no question of a total war, a mobilization of the whole nation to put the

greatest possible armed strength into the field. Britain's policy was not an ending of the war by a quick victory in the field. Instead, it was that of wearing Napoleon down by gradual pressure, partly by economic blockade, and partly by using our sea and military power in conjunction with each other to harass him where he was weak and so to drain off his energies at relatively smaller cost to ourselves, while he further exhausted himself in conflict with other European nations.

Britain did not attempt to hack her way through to victory against the French Revolution and Napoleon, as she did against Wilhelm II. 'After our expulsion from the Netherlands in 1794, it is true that we stayed in the war when others submitted to France, but we kept our armies out of Europe for a dozen years together, safe behind the shield of the Navy. We took no serious part, except naval and financial, in the wars of the two coalitions that suffered defeat at Marengo and Austerlitz. Nor, until the Peninsular War in 1808, did we begin to fight on land as a principal, and even then with armies of not more than 30,000 British at a time. . . .'

'The Napoleonic struggle, though as dangerous at times to Britain as the Great War of our own day, affected the life of the community at fewer points. Above all, it made a much smaller drain on the manhood of the country. The total death-roll in the whole twenty-two years was probably about 100,000, nearly half lost in the West Indies in Pitt's time and 40,000 more in the six years' fighting in the Peninsula'.[1]

We are fond of paying lip service to the glorious days of Elizabeth and the valiant fight of England against

[1] *History of England* – G. M. TREVELYAN.

Napoleon, but we have not in recent years seemed to appreciate the key-notes of our strategy in those periods. They were economy of manhood and a reliance on sea power. Elizabeth was antagonistic to extensive military commitments in Europe. British successes against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France were due to the same policy. British failures were chiefly due to a disregard to them. The latter occasion bears, indeed, some very strong resemblances to the situation that now confronts us. Once more, Europe is in the grip of a fever, only this time it is the Germans and not the French who are affected. There is the same moral fervour for the new Nazi order of things, the same proselytizing zeal, and, be it admitted, the same infection of numbers of people in the surrounding countries with a secret enthusiasm for the new faith.

Common sense and history combine to suggest to us that if the cure for this abnormal condition of Germany is to be permanent it cannot be a hurried one. Fevers must run their course, and attempts to interfere with the natural course of the disease only make matters worse. The French fever ran its course during the twenty-six years between 1789 and 1815. It opened just as the German fever has done, with violent internal disorders accompanied by great cruelty, gave way to military activity for spreading the blessings of the new orders of things among the surrounding peoples, much as Germany is doing now, and finally worked itself out as a military dictatorship, supported by foreign conquest. By 1815, however, the fever had departed and though the effects of the visitation have permanently influenced French national life, the heart of the French nation was by that

time again beating normally, and has continued to beat more or less normally ever since.

The British policy towards the French neurosis was fortunately one mainly of watchful reserve. Not that we can claim for the British Ministers of that time, as we can for Elizabeth, that they showed a superlative insight in making a true diagnosis of the French case and of adopting a skilfully discreet attitude best calculated to preserve British interests while the agitation boiled itself out. Pitt and his colleagues, taking the short view, as British Ministers nearly always do in international affairs, would have rushed in at the beginning and dealt drastically with the French ailment, had not their endeavours to do so, even when in company with other nations, been consistently unsuccessful. It was Providence that thrust them into what was unquestionably the right strategy of a limited effort, based firmly on sea power, which, by preserving Britain from overstrain while the greater part of Europe was in violent upheaval, left her at the final peace conference in 1815 in a position to speak 'with a voice of unrivalled authority among the Emperors and Kings'.[1]

The striking resemblance between the condition of France in the early years of the French Revolution and that of Germany to-day suggests that we might well profit by our experiences on the former occasion. Having ensured our own security by a plentiful provision of ships and aircraft, we should again maintain a watching brief over the European turmoil, intervening when opportunity occurs for us to do so advantageously, but being careful not to rush prematurely into the main Euro-

[1] *History of England* – G. M. TREVELYAN.

pean dog-fight. Our principle should be to maintain ourselves as an outpost and rallying point of freedom and sanity, while the great German conflagration burns itself out.

It will be observed that this policy postulates a long war. I agree. We in Britain are always foolishly optimistic about the duration of wars. We thought the last one would be over in a few months. We began this war saying exactly the same thing. We might also remember that the younger Pitt kept assuring the country, year after year, that the French were on the point of collapse. Yet the war went on and on, and lasted indeed for a whole decade after his death. A short war is not necessarily a good thing. The longest way round is often the shortest way home, and even a four years' war like the last which leaves the embers of German ambition still a-kindle, may be a greater evil than a longer one which allows them to die right out. There is a significance in the Napoleonic period which has not yet received due recognition. For a century and a half, France had been toying with dreams of European domination by conquest. At last, in the early nineteenth century, that dream came true, and Napoleonic France found herself undisputed master of the Continent. But she could not keep her position. Europe rose and threw her off; and the experience seems to have cured her of such ambitions once and for all. She has certainly given Europe no anxiety of that kind ever since.[1] It is not impossible that if Germany is given time and plenty of rope she too will work unlimited ambition out of her system for good.

On the other hand, one must envisage the possibility that she might after all succeed where France failed in

[1] Her attempt to dominate Europe after 1918 was due to fear and not ambition.

forging a lasting European Empire, embodying many of the smaller European states, who might conceivably find the advantages of membership of that unified Europe to outweigh their loss of separate existence. To achieve that, however, Germany must treat them reasonably well and give them reasonable satisfaction. If she could succeed in doing so, we ought not to complain. The desirability of a unified or federated Europe has long received verbal tribute from many quarters, including those intellectual and pro-League of Nations sections of the community in Britain who are now among the most bitter opponents of German aggression. If a satisfactory and moderately contented federation of European States can be achieved by force, it ought not to matter a great deal that it was force that achieved it. If one comes to think of it, most examples of federation and unity in the world were originally achieved by forcible means. Italian unity, the unity of the United States of America, Indian unity, Russian unity, not to mention German unity, were all obtained by coercion. Even the unity in the island of Britain may be said to date from the battle of Culloden. If the Germans can bring about an equitable unity in central and eastern Europe, they will in fact be doing what many people in a number of countries have been advocating for years. If they were able to do this, there can be little doubt that they would be making a notable contribution to the cause of peace. The unity imparted to certain parts of Europe by Rome of old gave peace in the Roman-occupied region for hundreds of years. On the other hand, the Balkanized Europe of medieval and modern times has a more turbulent record than any other region in the world.

It might be objected that this European unity would condemn Britain to the maintenance of a 'perpetual war establishment'. Those who use this argument do not define a war establishment; and in that they are probably wise, for the term is not easy of definition. The point seems to invite much the same query as Mussolini posed at the time of the Geneva Conference when he asked at what point in its trajectory a shell ceased to be a defensive weapon and became an offensive one. Even one ship and one soldier would appear to constitute a 'war establishment', while the difficulty of speaking in terms of 'peace establishments' of armaments should be apparent from the recollection that a two-power naval standard which was taken as a matter of course in the pre-1914 days deteriorated into a one-power standard after the Washington Conference of 1922. The one principle that will stand up to all tests is that a scale of peace time armaments that renders the country fully prepared against foreign aggression is far cheaper than a lesser scale that invites it, and then results in a frantic endeavour to overtake arrears when war breaks out.

The whole question has for long been greatly confused by loose phrases, such as that old veteran about the 'crushing burden of armaments'. But is the burden really so crushing? In 1937, after rearmament was well under way, our total defence bill for the three services came to £197 millions; while at the same time the combination of the Civil Estimates and Local Government Expenditure came to over £1000 millions, or more than five times as much. Yet one never heard talk of the crushing burden of the Civil Service or of Civil Administration. The weight of armaments expenditure is, in

truth, not as onerous as it is commonly made out to be; and a much more imposing establishment could have been maintained in pre-War days without the country feeling any serious pinch, especially as a large increase in defence expenditure may (and actually did) result in a large fall in the unemployment vote. But the British have always been reluctant to spend money on their own defence; and it is to be feared that part at least of our one-time enthusiasm for Collective Security was due to the subconscious feeling by a mercantile community that it provided a wonderful opportunity for making the foreigner pay for the protection of the British Empire.

It is possible, I repeat, that Germany might be able to bring about this political unity of a large part of Europe. But, on the whole, it is unlikely. Germans are not tactful people and have an unfortunate tendency to be aggressive and overbearing masters, and even associates. Not that we need pay too much attention to those who declare that an extension of German influence in Europe would be to deliver over additional regions to Nazi tyranny and oppression. Nations, like business men (our own included), are apt not to be any too scrupulous or kindly while they are in the process of getting rich and prosperous. But when they have made their pile, when the heavy gold albert is securely stretched across the ample stomach in the one case, or fat lands gathered in to the national fold in the other, then it is that the predatory glance very often disappears to give place to an atmosphere of benevolent church-wardenship. The habits of a replete and satiated Germany can be calculated to improve.

It is much more doubtful whether they would improve

enough or sufficiently quickly to render her suzerainty tolerable to the non-Germans of her dominated or federated Empire. And if they did not, it would be only a matter of time before discontent and rebellion against her rule broke out. Then would be the British opportunity to put in train limited, eccentric, offensive operations, on the Peninsula model, designed to encourage revolt and resistance, and to open up 'bleeding points' on exposed enemy extremities.

One thing about which we can be reasonably certain is that there would be no real reason to fear that the establishment of a strong Central- and East-European German Empire would be the inevitable prelude to the defeat of our own country. The Napoleonic example gives a fair indication that such an attack would be the greatest blunder that the leaders of such a greater Germany could make. For the one thing above all else that inspired the national uprising against Napoleon in a great part of Europe was his attempt to turn the conquered countries into bases of attack against Britain by means of the continental system. There is good reason to think that the same would happen in Germany's case. The necessary condition of a contented, secure, and therefore strong German Empire in Europe is that it shall be no menace to maritime Britain. Disregard of that condition would spell ruin to Germany's Empire as surely as Napoleon's; and with the Napoleonic precedent before them, the German leaders might have the wisdom not to try. Nor should we forget that although Germany and Japan are now associates, the nearer the former's direct influence comes to the Pacific coast of Asia, the less the latter is bound to like it.

The cry so often raised, at all events up to June of this year, that we couldn't leave the European nations to their fate is very wide of the mark. The truth of the matter is that Europe must find its own salvation for itself. It had to do that against Napoleon. Though Britain lent her aid in such manner as she could without unduly exhausting herself, it was nevertheless the European peoples themselves who were the primary agents in Napoleon's overthrow. The battle of Leipzig, following on the disastrous retreat from Moscow, was the first really devastating reverse inflicted upon him, which shattered the tradition of his invincibility, and started him on the road to Elba. European freedom from domination, assuming it to be desirable, must be won by Europeans.

It is probable that not even the dumbfounding conduct of certain of our late Allies will have cured all our native idealists of their passion for regarding the British peoples at this juncture as 'God's Chivalry' with a divine mission to punish the sins of erring Germany and of upholding against all transgressors the ideals of justice, liberty, and international morality. Such persons will assuredly stigmatize the suggestion that we should look after ourselves and leave Europe to sort itself out by itself as selfish, un-Christian, and altogether shameful. Nevertheless, shameful or not, this was precisely how our forefathers used to act in parallel circumstances. It may, of course, be argued that those were the bad old days before the British had developed their true nobility of character. But if we do accept such a postulate of Britain's twentieth-century moral superiority, we must revise our customary estimate of our predecessors of by-gone centuries. We

must correct our view of the periods of English history which we habitually speak of as being specially lustrous in glorious achievement. No longer can we talk of the great Elizabethans or glory in our common nationality with Nelson, Wellington and their contemporaries. We must label them instead as the mean and unworthy progenitors of a happily more virtuous and deserving posterity. We cannot have it both ways.

If we follow the path of wisdom, we shall leave the Continent of Europe to look after itself and turn our attention in a maritime direction, where domestic problems of our own call for all the energy, initiative and enterprise that we possess. The British Empire is truly a magnificent heritage and a great and splendid experiment in social progress and inter-state tolerance and good-will, pregnant with hope and promise for the future of world relationships. As such, its summary extinction would be a catastrophe. It can hardly be doubted, however, that the recent trend of British policy has been endangering that experiment. We cannot face in two directions at once. We cannot turn our attention landwards towards the Continent and seawards towards the Protectorates, Crown Colonies and Dominions that form the Empire. If we commit ourselves to the punishment of Germany and the restitution of Poland, Czecho-Slovakia, Norway, the Netherlands, France, etc., and any other European country that may now or in the future suffer aggression from one of its neighbours, we shall inevitably find our attention dominated and our energies sapped by these continental tasks, to the unavoidable detriment of our own overseas duties and problems.

It is highly significant that during recent years, while

we have been busy with such European preoccupations as the Locarno Treaty, the Stresa agreement, the Rhineland occupation, the Austrian Anschluss, the Czech crisis, the Danzig question, and all the numerous guarantees and agreements that we concluded with Frenchmen, Poles, Rumanians, and Greeks, our reluctant notice has from time to time been forcibly drawn to the fact that conditions were far from satisfactory in Newfoundland, or Jamaica, or Trinidad, or Barbadoes, or Hong Kong, or some other part of the Empire. All is not as well as it might and ought to be in our British domains, including our own home circle of Britain itself, and we have much to do before we can set up it and the Empire as patterns of good government for the rest of mankind. Yet, if we are really intent on reforming the world, we are much more likely to do it by example than by coercion.

Moreover, there is, in my submission, a very great danger in our latter-day prepossession with the divisions or army corps or continental warfare. The British Empire is a maritime Empire, acquired through and dependent for its continuance on sea power.[1] Let that sea power but decline and the whole Imperial edifice will collapse. Yet while we were goading ourselves into a state of extreme agitation about the fate of Germany's European neighbours and asking ourselves reproachfully whether we had sent enough soldiers to help the French, Norwegians, Jugo-Slavs, Greeks, or someone else, we were entirely failing to appreciate the very serious aspect of our naval losses that were gradually mounting up. So much stress has been laid on our great naval superiority

[1] Including air power.

over Germany that the public has omitted to notice that Germany is not the only naval power in the world. By the regrettable alacrity with which we hurried into the naval disarmament agreements after the last war, we reduced ourselves to a condition of parity with the United States of America and only a meagre superiority over the Japanese. These agreements took no account of one-sided war losses. Such losses are nevertheless taking place; and of the three principal signatories of the Washington naval treaty, it is to ourselves only that the losses are occurring. The result may well be that the end of the war finds Britain no longer the foremost naval power that she has been for centuries, but the second naval power, or even the third. Such a possibility is far more alarming than anything that might happen in Europe. Sea Power is the factor in which we cannot afford to fall behind.

Let me pause for a moment here to say exactly what I mean by Sea Power. I do not mean, as some critics of the first edition have suggested, the power wielded by navies alone. I admit that that is the customary meaning given to the term. It is nevertheless an inaccurate one and ought to be revised. A better definition of Sea Power would be 'a primary reliance on the sea barriers in defence and a primary utilization of the sea ways and communications in offence'.

Such an interpretation of Sea Power implies much more than ships and seamen. It involves the co-operation of the army for the defence of the naval bases and any territories specially necessary for the exercise of naval power (such as canal zones and oil fields) and for taking a leading part in such offensive amphibious operations as

can be staged successfully. The Air Force comes in as an important partner in the defence of the ships and bases (including the Home base) against air attack, in reconnaissance over the sea and the enemy's naval ports, in participating in amphibious operations, and in offensive action against enemy ships and harbours; and, so far as circumstances may continue to permit, in extending the naval blockade inland by the bombing of suitable objectives.

The three prongs of the trident mounted on the shaft of Sea Power can thus be labelled Naval Power, Military Power, and Air Power. As long as these three stand staunchly and squarely alongside each other on that shaft, Britain will be able to guard herself most surely and to exert her strength in the most effective way. And if I claim for naval power the central position in that triunity, it is only because every orchestra must have a conductor and because sea communications are still the most important communications in the world. And if it be true that nations, like individuals, have their part to play in the world, it can hardly be doubted that, for Britain, this part is a maritime one. During the nineteenth century, we were universally recognized as the paramount naval power, with whom no one else till the very end of the century took the trouble seriously to compete. On the whole, we filled that position with dignity and success. The world, if it felt a certain envy of our undisputed maritime supremacy, was well enough content that we should hold it, for we used it wisely and with moderation.

But there was one condition attaching to that general acceptance of the British primacy in matters nautical. It was that the supreme British Navy should be accompanied

by only a small British Army. That condition we have now infringed by our entering of the continental lists in the last war and in this one as a first class military power. In so doing, we have courted the distrust and suspicion of the military nations, while at the same time we have done our best to encourage the ambitions of our naval rivals by our reckless reductions of our fleet. A more ominous combination for a nation whose strength and special genius are on and whose principal sources of wealth lie across the sea could hardly be devised.

> 'Come the three corners of the world in arms
> And we shall shock them;
> Nought shall make us rue
> If Britain to herself do rest but true.'

So sang the poet. What he meant by the last line is not now to be known with exactitude. But it is extremely difficult not to think that he meant 'if Britain will rest true to her maritime heritage; if she will stick firmly to the sea, where she is strong, and eschew the land, where she is weak'. This, at all events, is the inference to be drawn from another quotation from the same source

> 'Let us be backed with God, and with the seas
> Which he hath given for fence impregnable,
> And with these helps only defend ourselves,
> In them and in ourselves our safety lies.'
>
> (*Henry VI*)

The same belief was held by one who had perhaps more cause than any other man to appreciate the value of sea power as applied against himself. 'England', said Napoleon at St. Helena, when he no longer had any object

in not saying what was in his mind, 'can never be a continental power, and in the attempt she must be ruined. Let her stick to the sovereignty of the seas, and she may send her ambassadors to the courts of Europe and demand what she pleases.'