BRITAIN'S WAR 1942-1947

A NEW
WORLD

DANIEL TODMAN

DANIEL TODMAN Britain's War A New World, 1942–1947



2020

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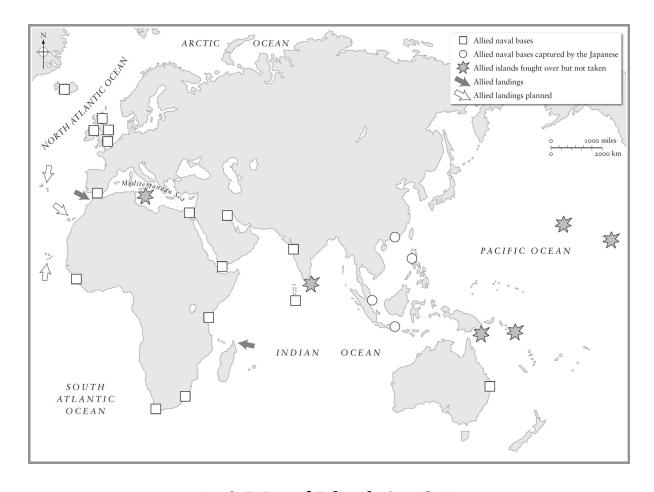
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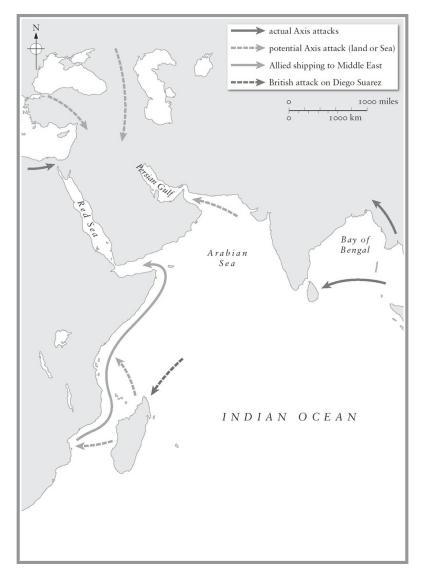
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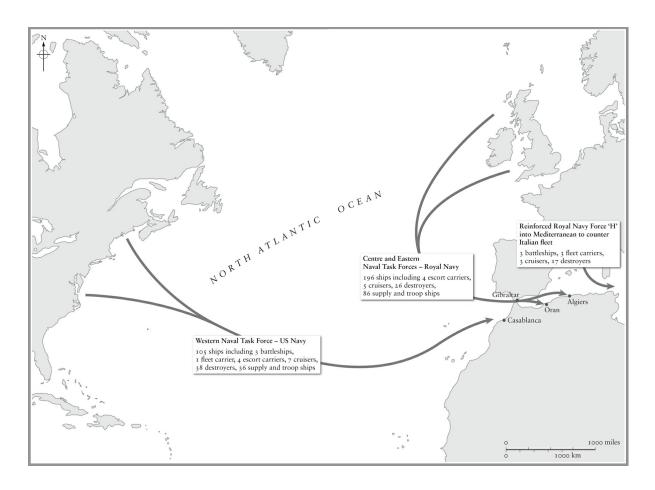
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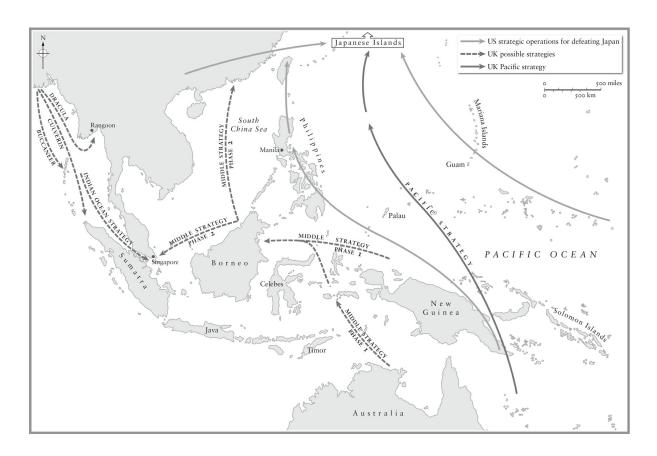
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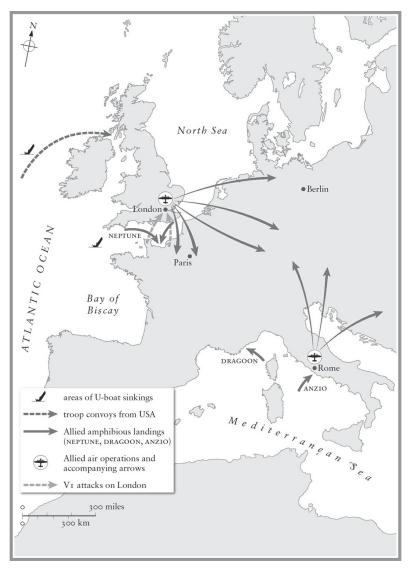
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Introduction

This is a book about how Britain fought, endured and won a total war, what it cost (and to whom), and how the country emerged into a much changed world a very different place. It covers the period from the fall of Singapore in 1942 until the first negotiations over Marshall Aid in 1947. Like the previous book in this duet, *Into Battle*, this one combines military, political, economic and social history to help explain not only why events took the course they did, but how they were represented and understood at the time. They are the first books to offer the 'total' history that the war, and its continuing place in the national discourse, deserves.

Like its predecessor, this book takes an essentially chronological approach to the war. This is not simply a narrative device, but a means to convey a fundamental point. Wars have their own dynamic, and they change as they go on. Britain's Second World War changed more than most. This was obviously true strategically, as the European conflict that began in 1939 merged with its Asian counterpart and became a truly global war from December 1941. It was true in terms of weaponry, with the final campaigns fought with a new generation of munitions brought into being during the war, including, crucially, the atomic bomb. But it was also true in terms of attitudes and experiences. Responses to military conscription, for example, the extent of rationing on the British home front and the way in which the war was reported on the radio, all changed between 1939 and 1945. The way the conflict itself was understood was reconfigured during its last year, thanks to the rapid increase in British military casualties, the liberation of the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen, and a growing sense of resentment at the rise of American power.

'Wartime' was not, therefore, an invariant condition. Understanding that helps us to appreciate the contingency of events that, in retrospect, seem so inevitable that they often determine how the history of the war is told. One obvious example is the general election of 1945, knowledge of the outcome of which has traditionally structured much of the political history of Britain during the war. Another one, even more important, was the question of when exactly the wars against Germany and Japan would

end. Significantly, the end result of the conflict was known from a comparatively early stage. In this war, as in the previous one, the overwhelming majority of British people always expected they were going to win – a crucial but often overlooked element in maintaining morale. In notable contrast to 1917–18, however, from the end of 1942 (and arguably earlier) there was no real sense of national jeopardy among leaders or populace that the enemy might stage a last-minute comeback. It was what would come next that was the problem. Determined to preserve as much national power as possible but looking forward with apprehension to what they knew would be a very difficult period after the war, British leaders tried to judge the moment and extent of maximum mobilization and the timing of the reconversion to a civilian economy. The unexpectedly drawn out defence of Germany after September 1944 posed some problems for this process, but not as many as the unexpectedly rapid defeat of Japan in summer 1945.

A history of the war that ended with VJ Day would be incomplete. Most of the significant consequences of the war for the UK were resolved only after August 1945, and the conflict itself endured – in the absence of still-to-be demobilized soldiers, in the violence arcing across Southeast Asia and the movement of displaced persons throughout Europe, and in the rationed austerity that continued to define British civilian life. To understand what had happened, we need to look forward to the point where the confusion had begun to clear, and the new Britain that would emerge from the conflict had become apparent.

As that suggests, this book's structure is determined in part by its arguments. It is divided into four parts, each focused on a different period of the war. Part One, 'Nadir', examines the disastrous period following Japan's attack on the Western colonial powers, and the ways in which these military defeats intersected with the political concerns produced by two years of European war to produce a volatile mood on the British home front during 1942. Simultaneously, the 'new world' of the post-war era, including the end of empire and the reconfiguration of relations between citizen and state, swung more fully into view. It was also, however, a decisive period in determining how the rest of the war would be fought. Following Churchill's interest, in his History of the Second World War, in the construction of Anglo-American strategy, accounts of this period often concentrate on the decision-making around the launching or delay of a second front in Europe. In this version, I give more attention to the imperial nature of British strategy-making at this point, and, in particular, the focus on the security of the Indian Ocean and Middle East. This was a much more immediate and concrete concern that had to be balanced against the alliance shadow play of potential cross-Channel operations. Bearing in mind how early ideas about post-war reconstruction took root in Britain, and how much contemporaries wanted a positive vision of what they were fighting for, I argue that Churchill missed an important trick in the summer of 1942. His unwillingness to engage with the political difficulties of the post-war world meant that he did not take the opportunity to seize control of the narrative around reconstruction, with long-term consequences for his party. It is impossible to imagine David Lloyd George, his First World War predecessor, committing the same error.

Part Two, 'Peak', starts by telling the story of 1942 in a different way, by situating Britain's place within an international industrial escalation as combatants on all sides realized that they would have to step up their war efforts if they were to survive. Explaining the UK's relationship to imperial, Commonwealth and Allied finance and production, it shows how this was the year in which the foundations for the fighting at the end of the war were laid down. Alongside the inflow of US-built weapons, the extraordinary mobilization of resources that Britain had already undertaken meant that in the year from the autumn of 1942 it was able to play an important role in turning the tide of the war against Germany. The focus here is less on El Alamein, the traditional turning point, and more on the successes in the spring and summer of 1943 in Tunisia, in the Atlantic and in the skies over Italy and Germany. These are juxtaposed with the inefficacy of the British Indian army in the struggle against Japan. The successes culminated with the surrender of Italy, the imperial enemy in the Mediterranean since 1940, but the period of recovery and achievement was also one of grand strategic failure. British forces were not able to win victories that were quick or decisive enough to maintain its leadership of the Grand Alliance. This was less of a calamity than it felt to some British leaders at the time, but it was symptomatic of a relative decline, particularly compared to the surging strength of the United States. With Italy out of the war, this part concludes with three chapters examining the British experience of the middle of the war, concentrating on four great changes – the move into military uniform, the expansion of industrial employment and the restriction of civilian consumption, and the presence of servicemen from overseas. These chapters emphasize the consequences of these changes for the lives of British women in particular.

Part Three, 'Victory', analyses the final years of the war in Europe and Southeast Asia. Here too, imperial strategy – and particularly the ferocious

rows between Churchill and his chiefs of staff over future plans for the war against Japan – is given more than usual weight. I then turn to the climactic campaign in Northwest Europe in 1944, arguing that, contrary to the usual focus on ground operations in Normandy, the significance of this phase of the war needs to be seen in terms of a much longer air, land and sea struggle that reached across the Atlantic, over Germany and down to Italy, as well as raging across the Channel, as the Allies launched their amphibious assault and the Germans shot flying bombs at London. With victory in Normandy achieved, this period culminated with the 'Octagon' conference at Quebec in September 1944: a multifaceted meeting in which long-running themes of Anglo-American rivalry, reconstruction and strategy all came together. Hopes of a speedy end to the war with Germany were, however, disappointed. In subsequent chapters I explain the brutal struggle to finish the conflict in Europe, and the ways in which attempts to secure a post-war order embroiled the British in further violence and bloodshed.

The awful nature of the final months of the war, and its effect on Britons' attitudes and experiences even when the blood cost that they paid was relatively light, deserves much more attention than it usually gets. That theme bridges Part Three and Part Four, 'Resolutions', which explains the end of the wars with Germany and Japan and analyses the reasons for Labour's victory in the 1945 election, before turning in a final chapter to the years that followed the war. These saw the world conceived in the rupture of 1942 brought fully into being, in a period of profound anxiety and continued austerity. This was also, however, the period in which the British managed to come to terms, quite quickly, with what the war had meant, not least by developing a set of national mythologies some of which still have remarkable resonance in the present. Taken as a whole, this volume will, I hope, help readers to reverse engineer the simplifications inherent in those myths and to think in new ways about the complex events on which they were based.

PART ONE

Nadir

December 1941–September 1942

'We're not going to be too miserable'

December 1941

The third Christmas of the conflict was on its way, and investigators from the social research organization Mass-Observation had set out to record what was happening on the streets of London. The queues outside the food shops, they noted, were longer than normal, and in the department stores, more people were looking than buying. In Woolworths, a young woman behind a cosmetics counter explained what the war had done: 'Everybody seems to have plenty of money to spend but they grumble because we haven't got the stuff they want. They want perfumes and make-up and powder of all sorts, but we haven't got any. The small supplies we get are snapped up at once.' Another assistant, snapping at a customer, expressed concisely the moral mood: 'I should think you ought to know by now that you can't just have whatever you want.' Disapproval was one thing that wasn't in short supply. This woman had obviously tutted right the way through her own shopping: 'I have been absolutely sickened this Xmas . . . all those crowds of people . . . just wasting their time and money on ridiculously dear articles . . . We'll never have this war over while people try to kid themselves that there is no war on.'3

Few of those to whom the observers spoke seemed to imagine they'd be having a normal Christmas. A forty-five-year-old woman explained: 'Well, you can't do it the same what with coupons and prices. To say nothing of the scarcity of so many things you used to give, like cigarettes. It certainly won't be quite like old times but we're not going to be too miserable.' According to another woman: 'My poor kids have already written to Father Christmas, but I don't know what he'll bring them I'm sure, with sixpenny toys up to half a crown and 3/6. It does seem a shame.' 5

The cheapest option was some out-of-date stock. On a shelf in Woolworths' toy department sat, rather forlornly, the *Maginot Line Cut Out*

Book, filled with card models of gun batteries and French officers preparing to defeat the Germans. It was ninepence. Better, if you could afford it, to shell out a bit more on one of the seemingly less outdated volumes – *Spitfire the Dragon, Life in a Submarine, Every Girl's Story Book* or *Our Wonderful Empire*.⁶

'EVERYONE HAD HAD AMPLE ENOUGH TO EAT'

In England and Wales, Christmas Day was when the main celebration happened. In Scotland, there were presents for the children then, but the revelry would wait until Hogmanay.⁷ People tried to make the best of things. Since nearly everyone was in work, most families could afford a joint to roast – providing that they blew their weekly meat ration in one go. The allowances of fat, sugar and butter, all temporarily increased for the season, had been carefully husbanded. In Liverpool, a thirty-five-year-old shorthand typist elicited from her acquaintances 'the fact that everyone had had ample enough to eat – and all commented on the fact that it really was amazing what could be done . . .' There were, she noted, 'quite a few turkeys and chickens' (a sign of middle-class status in the 1930s rather than a Christmas staple), but 'the main thing missing was the fruit'.⁸

The better off - like this upper-middle-class family - could still keep up most of their traditions:

Punctually at one o'clock, the gong was rung, and we proceeded into the dining room to have our dinner . . . We had a turkey with bread sauce, gravy, roast potatoes, carrots and cabbage. And afterwards the traditional Christmas pudding with brandy sauce. But for the first time I can remember no brandy was poured over the Xmas pudding . . . the cook being unable to get brandy this year. We also had a bottle of Graves with our dinner, and two glasses were sent into the kitchen for the maids. ⁹

Truly, it was a people's war.

In the Far East, Hong Kong was about to surrender. After a month of heavy fighting in Libya, British troops were pursuing Axis troops across the Western Desert. For the overwhelming majority of service personnel who were still in the UK, however, Christmas meant a break from the monotony of maintenance and drill: plentiful food, copious booze, and the strictly temporary bacchanal of officers and NCOs waiting on the other ranks. At the Royal Army Ordnance Corps depot in Donnington, for example, soldiers got coffee, bread, marmalade and butter, and eggs and bacon for breakfast, then a lunch of turkey, roast potatoes and Brussels

sprouts, and Christmas pudding with custard, all washed down with as much beer as they could drink. 'Everybody goes mad', recorded a soldier, 'beer flows in the oddest places. Those who earlier in the morning had been a bit browned off by nothing to do are the merriest and happiest.' ¹⁰ They all agreed that it was much better than anything they would have got at home.

In the West Country, a nineteen-year-old surveyor's assistant was keeping a diary for Mass-Observation. Christmas Day was a chance for dinner with his family: goose, sprouts and turnips, with tart and custard to finish off. It was 'just as jolly as ever and perhaps more so than usual. "No Presents" pacts were "signed" a week or two ago, but everyone has broken them and given presents — even those things which need coupons (I had a tie and a handkerchief).' The night before, he'd been disturbed by the soldiers from the local army camp, who seemed 'to be enjoying themselves as well':

several hundred went back to barracks singing and shouting and nearly getting knocked down in the middle of the road. This morning, eight soldiers and two A[uxiliary] T[erritoral] S[ervice] girls went down the centre of the street and met two other fellows, who came along and kissed the two girls. The remainder of the men all followed on of course, only they kissed each other as well, adopting a very suggestive attitude while so doing. And they weren't tight either! It makes you wish you were in the army as well to be able to adopt that carefree feeling and not care what you do! 11

All too soon, it was time to get back to work. Or not. In one factory in Coventry, the timing of the Christmas break had brought tensions to a head between skilled workers, keen to protect their custom and practice, and bosses, striving to meet government contracts, maximize profits and fight back against increasing labour militancy. Eager to complete their shopping, some of the men had demanded the right to leave early on Christmas Eve. Refused, they went anyway, and were fired. The Ministry of Labour, eager to avoid a strike, insisted they be reinstated. In the meantime, however, all their machines had been moved out to a new factory set up to make use of cheap female workers, and the men were let go again shortly afterwards. Both sides accused the other of putting self-interest ahead of increased war production. It didn't help that the factory was owned by the local Conservative MP.¹²

Antagonism over production reflected a political mood reshaped by a war that, for all the patriotic unity it inspired, had not removed the separations of class. An assistant manager at another factory recorded his Boxing Day for Mass-Observation. His company, with its contract books full of government orders and overtime deductible against tax, had decided

to cut the usual two-day Christmas holiday in half, so he spent the day

at work – or rather, *at the Works*. All those who are now receiving much higher wages than formerly (they get another 3s. a week rise this week – the third increase since the war) are today receiving double normal pay and doing half their normal work. Those who, like myself, do not get the increments but yet have to meet the colossal taxation of today, receive no extra pay for being here on Boxing Day.

So few of his office colleagues had turned up, however, that all his meetings were cancelled, so he spent the morning writing his diary and a letter to his father, stayed 'for lunch at the canteen, as we have my mother-in-law at home and are short of food', and then went home.¹³

TO ABSENT FRIENDS

By 1941, radio was the great form of domestic mass entertainment. Nine out of ten households had a wireless, though replacement batteries and spare parts were in short supply. With its two national networks – the more serious Home Service and the lighter Forces Programme – the BBC was a reference point at moments of crisis, a means of cultural improvement, and the background to daily work and chores. The wartime BBC was subject to a variety of conflicting pressures: its effective place as part of the state propaganda machine, the need to retain listeners who might otherwise tune in to the enemy, and the acute desire of its mandarins both to give the audience what they thought it needed and to avoid political or moral controversy. If it didn't reflect the whole of popular culture, it was certainly an accurate barometer of the wider atmosphere.¹⁴

On Sunday 21 December 1941, the start of Christmas week, the BBC broadcast two very different programmes. As part of its weekly *Children's Hour*, there was the first episode of *The Man Born to be King*: a cycle of plays on the life of Christ by the novelist Dorothy L. Sayers. Like other Christian thinkers, Sayers believed that spiritual revival was vital to the outcome of a war against evil. Specially commissioned by the BBC's Director of Religious Broadcasting to write a programme to capture the attention of the five million children who listened to *Children's Hour*, she abandoned the archaic text of the Authorized Bible, wrote the dialogue in vernacular English and depicted Christ as a character: the first time this had been done in a publicly performed drama since the Middle Ages, and a violation of centuries-old censorship laws that required special clearance from the Lord Chamberlain. When advance publicity revealed that the disciple Matthew would speak with a cockney accent littered with

Americanisms, there was a flurry in the press and a storm of complaints from Protestant fundamentalists. The panel of Christian worthies assembled by the BBC to review the scripts, however, enthusiastically approved the evangelical opportunity. In fact, the play cycle proved very popular not just with children but with adults. Just as Sayers had intended, they were moved by hearing their faith retold in language they could understand. *The Man Born to Be King* would be a staple of the BBC's religious broadcasting for years to come.¹⁵

Later on the same evening, the Home Service aired a tribute to another great historical figure. *Greetings to Joseph Stalin* celebrated the Soviet dictator's birthday with a performance of music by Shostakovich and Prokofiev by the BBC Chorus and Symphony Orchestra. Two years before, in the aftermath of the Nazi–Soviet pact and the Soviet invasion of Finland, such a gesture would have been unimaginable. In a sign of the times, it now aroused far less discussion than the theological niceties of an audible Christ.

Since the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union that June, Britain had been swept by a wave of Russophilia – a mixture of gratitude that someone else was bearing the brunt of the war, admiration for Soviet resilience, and a state-sponsored effort to convince doubting Conservatives and steal the Communists' thunder with moderate celebrations of Britain's new ally. Anglo-Soviet Friendship Weeks were held in towns and cities across the country. Those worried that British women weren't working hard enough for the war effort held up the example of the sacrifices being made by their Soviet sisters. The prime minister's wife, Clementine Churchill, led a Red Cross campaign to raise funds to send medical supplies to the beleaguered Russians. At the war's end, Stalin would award her the Order of the Red Banner of Labour. 17

There was a strong element of class feeling in the readiness with which many British workers took up the Soviet cause. Encouraged by Communist shop stewards, in the midst of a life-or-death struggle against one tyrannical mass murderer, they adopted another – 'Uncle Joe' Stalin – as a heroic mascot. 'Give Joe a break', shouted workers in the tank factories when they saw their colleagues slacking. 'Tankquickski for Joeski', they chalked on the side of the completed vehicles. As Mrs Churchill's enthusiasm indicated, however, Britons of all classes looked to an imagined version of Russia for what they wanted their own country to be: a more equal, efficient, patriotic nation, guided by ideals beyond mere personal greed. As a letter written from Kettering to a recipient in Northern Ireland, highlighted by Postal Censorship in its report on home

morale for December 1941, put it: 'No, I'm not a Communist and I don't imagine Russia is perfect, but I do think they have made the greatest experiment in communal unselfishness the world has yet seen, and my, can't they fight when they have a land <u>worth</u> fighting for.'²⁰

On Christmas Day itself, the BBC had its usual fare of religious services, news bulletins, and the popular tunes of *Music While You Work* – a useful aid for all those housewives who would spend the holiday slaving over the Christmas dinner. That afternoon, the Forces Programme had *Any Christmas Questions*: a pre-recorded festive edition of a new series that was already turning into one of the biggest hits of the war. Members of the public sent in questions ('What are the seven wonders of the world?', 'What is hate?'), which chairman Donald McCullough put to a panel of commentators – the moral philosopher 'Professor' C. E. M. Joad, the evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley and the publisher and raconteur Commander A. B. Campbell. McCullough called the panel 'The Brains Trust', the title under which the programme would start its second series in 1942.²¹

Whatever it was called, the programme caught the public mood. More than a quarter of the listening audience tuned in each week. They liked the interplay between Huxley, the serious scientist, Joad, the squeaky barrackroom lawyer ('It all depends what you mean by . . . ', he'd begin) and Campbell, who'd bluffly undercut the other two with a far-fetched anecdote about his time at sea. The fact that Huxley and Joad were both socialists caused some concern to the BBC, which was being criticized by Conservative MPs for the number of left-wing speakers on the airwaves. The show's producer carefully removed 'political' letters from the mailbag, but that didn't stop their opinions leaking through. What the show's fans really appreciated, however, was the way it allowed them to situate themselves: curious, sceptical, and able to put a poser to a 'Brain'. The format was easy to replicate, and it soon became a staple of church-hall welfare fundraisers and troopship concert nights.

After *Any Christmas Questions* came *To Absent Friends*, a specially prepared broadcast that went out on the Home Service and the Forces Programme at the same time. Designed to showcase the breadth of Britain's allies in a global war, *To Absent Friends* began with messages from overseas troops serving in the UK: Canadians, Australians, South Africans, New Zealanders, West Indians, Indians and Poles. Then the programme toured round seven British families with members away at the war – on ships in the Atlantic, in North Africa and the Far East, and on distant airbases and munitions factories in the UK. As the programme

explained, the last family's son would not be returning. He had been killed in action.²²

Nearly a third of adult listeners heard *To Absent Friends*. Twice as many tuned in for the next programme, the Christmas message from King George VI. Two weeks before, the Commons had approved legislation allowing the conscription of young women for industrial and military service. The king went out of his way to praise 'women and girls as well as men, who at the call of duty have left their homes to join the Services or to work in factory, hospital, or field'.²³ Even by his standards, it was an awkward broadcast, in which he struggled badly with his speech impediment. As usual, everyone loyally appreciated the effort. According to the Home Intelligence department of the Ministry of Information, listeners remarked on the speech's 'simplicity' and 'dignity', but above all its 'spiritual quality'.²⁴

THE CHANGING WAR

Here they were then, Britons in the middle of the greatest war in history, grumbling their way towards an austere victory, one tea-urn queue at a time. Internationalist patriots. Royalist socialists. Conservative reformers. Freedom-loving imperialists. Bloodied by the Blitz, but untouched by occupation, genocide or famine. Certain they'd win, but unsure how they'd do it. Segregated by class and politics, but united by a common cause. 'We aren't so very brave and courageous', in the words of another letter picked up by Postal Censorship, this time from someone in Grimsby to a friend in Canada, 'but old Hitler has got us so mad I think we would do anything to beat him . . . we have our children to think of and God forbid that they should ever have to live under those devils.' ²⁵

Since 3 September 1939, approximately 45,000 British civilians, 57,000 servicemen and 15,000 merchant seamen had been killed by enemy action. A year's worth of German air attacks had damaged at least 2 million homes, of which about 200,000 were temporarily uninhabitable, and destroyed another 175,000. The centre of cities including Hull, Portsmouth, Plymouth and Coventry, as well as the East End and City of London, would never look the same again. A million people, about 400,000 of them children, remained away from home under the official evacuation scheme. Sovernment departments and headquarters staff had commandeered resort towns and stately homes. The army at home was

busy overhauling its defensive schemes: the risk of invasion remained a physical presence in barbed wire, pillboxes and troop encampments across the land.

Three and a half million men and 216,000 women were now serving in the military, about ten times more than there had been two and a half years before. Another 3.5 million were turning out part time to serve the nation as members of the Home Guard, Civil Defence or the Women's Voluntary Service. All adults not engaged in other essential work were legally obliged to take a monthly turn as Fire Guards: first responders in the event of an incendiary bombing attack.²⁹

War industry had boomed. By December 1941, the 'Class I' industries most directly related to the war effort employed 4.26 million people. A million and a half people had joined this workforce since the start of the war, about 900,000 of them women. More workers, longer hours and the import of machine tools from the United States meant that since 1939, GDP had risen in real terms by about a fifth. Across industrial sectors, government orders dominated production. About a third of Britain's remaining textile workers were making supplies for the armed services: the war machine proving nearly as hungry for sandbags and underpants as it was for guns and shells. 31

The basic rate of income tax was 50 per cent, twice what it had been in 1938. And the number of individuals liable to pay income tax had almost tripled, to more than 10 million people, since 1938–39. Businesses had to hand over any increase on their pre-war profits to the state, with the promise of a 20 per cent rebate after victory had been achieved. The tax-take had tripled since 1938. It funded about half the £4.2 billion the government spent at home in 1941, roughly six times its expenditure – with pre-war rearmament already well under way – in 1938.³²

Petrol, sugar, meat, cheese and fats had all been rationed on a flat per person allowance for two years or more. During 1941, points rationing – which allowed more discretion to the consumer – had been introduced for clothes and tinned goods as well. With so much work around, there was plenty of money to be made – at least for those who weren't stuck on the low rates of pay in the armed services. By the start of 1942, average weekly earnings for civilian men in manufacturing industries were 46 per cent higher than in 1938. Young men below the age of conscription were earning 63 per cent more than they had done before the war. With imports controlled and supplies of raw materials to civilian industries increasingly restricted, however, there was less on which to spend it – even for those willing to resort to a burgeoning black market.³³

Political changes were no less striking. The Chamberlain government had been replaced by an all-party coalition under Winston Churchill. His career revived by the approach of war, Churchill was widely credited with the leadership that had saved Britain in 1940. He had brought with him into office a coterie of allies, advisors and hangers-on, all very different from the moderate, 'responsible' Conservatives who had dominated the politics of the 1930s and still made up most of the Conservative majority in the Commons. The approach of war had strengthened the position of Labour and the trade unions, whose public support was vital to industrial mobilization. Their reluctance to enter an administration headed by Chamberlain had doomed his premiership. Labour's parliamentary leaders had now seized the opportunity to recast themselves as responsible patriots. The shock of defeat, the prospect of a long war against a German empire in Europe, and the problems created by the pell-mell pace of economic mobilization all encouraged complaints about the failure of the pre-war order. Many saw a national overhaul as the only means by which victory could be won.

Now the war that had produced all these changes was itself being transformed. With the defeat of the German drive on Moscow, the Japanese assault on the Western empires in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, and Hitler's declaration of war on the United States, the European and Asian struggles that had been raging since the late 1930s had joined into one. In the short term, this much larger global conflict severely overstretched British resources, resulting in a series of defeats that had profound consequences for the Empire. In the only slightly longer term, however, the entry of the United States into the war meant that victory in both hemispheres would be achieved much more quickly than would otherwise have been the case. Notwithstanding the crises that would threaten the Allied war effort throughout 1942, the real question was now when, rather than if, the Axis powers could be defeated. How long it would take to win had crucial implications for the cost Britain would have to pay in terms of blood, treasure and global power, for the experience of British service personnel and civilians, and for the fractious politics of strategy and reconstruction in Whitehall and Westminster.

As the global war intensified in 1941–2, the action moved further away from the UK. In summer 1940, the attention of the world had been on key battles being fought over and around Britain, as the population prepared for invasion and the Germans sought to secure control of the air and to cut off overseas supplies. Now, though the UK remained a vital base for air and sea operations and the training of a newly raised army, the key battles

were being fought outside Moscow, on Pacific islands, in Malaya, in the Mediterranean, or off the American east coast. In December 1940, nearly 9,000 British civilians had been killed or seriously injured by German air raids. In December 1941, the equivalent figures were thirty-seven people killed and fifty-three injured.³⁴

Already, minds were turning to the future. That winter, Mass-Observation was engaged in its largest study project of the war, investigating the attitudes of workers and management in Britain's war factories. Everywhere, they found people on the move – into new jobs, to new towns and into new accommodation. Few doubted Britain would win, but most were worried about what would come next. 'We are told that everything is planned now to prevent unemployment', said a thirty-year-old riveter, but the terrible slump that had followed 1918 was inscribed in personal experience and family folklore. What would life be like after the war? Mass-Observation enquired:

'Pretty rotten for most people unless they've had a posh education and lots of influence.' (M25, Plater) . . .

'Very hard. It will probably be worse for men coming out of the Forces than for men in war jobs.' (F30, Typist) . . .

'Very bad unemployment . . .' (M50, Retort setter at gas works) . . .

'Rotten. If it's anything like the last war.' (F40, Munitions) . . .

'I reckon there'll be an open revolution, the way it's going on now – everybody's crying out against it.' (M50, Builder's handyman).³⁵

'We are all in the same boat now'

September 1939–December 1941

The first Japanese troops splashed ashore on beaches in northern Malaya shortly after 8.30 in the morning of 8 December 1941. Several hours later, on the other side of the international dateline, Japanese aircraft attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor. The attack took everyone by surprise. Speaking on the transatlantic radio-telephone, Churchill asked the US president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, 'Is it true?' 'It's quite true', came the reply. 'We are all in the same boat now.' It was the third great transformation of Britain's war.

THE FALL OF FRANCE AND THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

The first had come in May and June 1940, with the extraordinary success of Germany's first major offensive on the Western Front. France had been knocked out of the war in six weeks, and the British forced back onto their home islands. Dominant in Europe, Germany had access to greatly expanded resources and new bases from which to attack the UK and its maritime trade. The loss of France forced the British into two desperate defensive battles – to maintain control of the airspace over the UK, which they could do in daylight but not at night, and to protect merchant shipping from German attacks. The British army at home, meanwhile, replete with new recruits but short of equipment, had to prepare for another defensive struggle: a German invasion that never came. Deprived of the French army, but committed to continuing the struggle, British strategists hoped to wear down German strength with bombing, continued blockade and support for European resistance movements. Above all, they depended on the provision of American aid.

A superior ability to access the industrial resources of America had always been the Franco-British trump card. Though the idea of entering another European conflict remained deeply unpopular in the United States, from the late 1930s Roosevelt provided as much support to the democracies as he thought his electorate would allow. This, however, did not include amending legislation to allow the Allies to borrow from American banks. Whereas the British paid for most of their other wartime imports by building up debts in sterling, they had to pay for US supplies up front with a substantial, but limited, 'war chest' of gold and dollars. By the start of 1940 it had already become clear that they could not expand exports to replenish these reserves while also increasing the production of military materiel. The subsequent strategic crisis forced an acceleration of dollar expenditure: partly to buy machine tools, raw materials and food that would be shipped across the Atlantic, partly for enormous pre-paid munitions contracts, which funded American businesses to build arms factories so that the British could benefit from their production in the future. In Washington, the fear that Britain would go under kindled grave concerns about the security of the Atlantic. The US government initiated its own massive programme of rearmament in response, and gave the UK access to additional supplies of weapons. These made little difference in practical terms to Britain's ability to defend itself in 1940, but they showed clearly on which side of the fight the president was placing the United States.

In a signal deal in the summer of 1940, the British traded basing rights on islands in the western Atlantic for clapped out American destroyers for the Royal Navy. The strongly transactional element in the provision of US support was a product not just of public suspicion of the perfidious British, but also of the determination within the Roosevelt administration to see an end to British imperialism as well as German Fascism. Between January and March 1941, with Britain's ready dollar assets close to exhaustion, Roosevelt pushed through Lend-Lease legislation that allowed the US to supply the UK without requiring cash payment. Lend-Lease enabled the Americans to fund the continued expansion of their own arms industry, the crucial material factor in Allied survival and victory. It was without doubt the most important economic mechanism of the war.

Churchill talked a lot about shared Anglo-Saxon values, but he understood that the developing US–UK relationship was built on a much harder-nosed set of mutual interests. Alongside growing British economic dependence on the United States came increasing strategic co-operation based on their shared naval concerns – above all, preventing German

domination of the Atlantic. In the autumn of 1940, threatened by German warships and aircraft as well as submarines, the British deployed a large portion of their naval and aerial resources around this vital theatre. These included not only an expanding fleet of escorts and the patrol aircraft of Coastal Command, but also the battleships, aircraft carriers and cruisers of the Home Fleet and 'Force H', a fast carrier task force based at Gibraltar. The struggle in the Atlantic also absorbed substantial intelligence capabilities, including the majority of Britain's photo-reconnaissance sorties, and bombing sorties to lay sea mines and attack German vessels in French ports.

German successes in 1940 concentrated US strategists' attention on the western hemisphere. Secret Anglo-American naval discussions had begun even before the outbreak of war, but between January and March 1941, another round of secret talks indicated the extent to which the two countries' strategies were becoming aligned. Convinced that British survival was a prerequisite to US national security, the Americans agreed to prioritize RAF aircraft deliveries; confirmed that, were they to be drawn into a global war, they would put the defeat of Germany first; and accepted a British request to start transferring naval ships from the Pacific to the Atlantic before any fighting broke out. British warnings of the German threat were, if anything, too effective: fearing a British defeat, the Americans moved across more of their capital ships than the British had wanted.

After devastating merchant shipping losses in the first half of 1941, that summer the British started to gain the upper hand in the Atlantic – sinking the German battleship *Bismarck*, improving convoying, escort forces and air patrols, and using signals intelligence to route shipping around German submarines. That autumn, the Americans increasingly took on the work of anti-submarine patrols and convoy escorts in the western half of the ocean. In the second half of 1941, the number of sinkings on the North Atlantic run plummeted.

Meanwhile, the impact of the fall of France had also resounded through the Mediterranean. As France went under, Italy was emboldened to seize its opportunities around the Mediterranean and declared war on Britain on 10 June 1940. Over the next year, the fighting spread over a huge new theatre that stretched west—east from Gibraltar to Iran and north—south from Greece to Italian Somaliland.

This struggle was always more than a simple Anglo-Italian fight for a Mediterranean empire. Italian belligerence closed the route through the Suez Canal to merchant shipping, but the Middle East could still be

supplied via the long route around the Cape of Good Hope. It remained a crucial nodal point for the assembly of British imperial forces. The region also contained key resources, including the oilfields of Iraq and Iran, which both sustained Britain's wider war effort and needed to be denied to the enemy. To the west, the intersection between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic formed another vital node. Significantly, both British and American planners feared that the Germans might work with General Franco's Spain to seize air and sea bases including Gibraltar, the Canaries or the Azores. British contingency plans to pre-empt such a scenario absorbed significant quantities of troops and shipping through to the end of 1942. This threat to the West encouraged an active defence of the Mediterranean: if Britain withdrew into the Middle East, its enemies might seize control of the Atlantic outposts and cut the shipping route around the Cape.

Managing the Mediterranean meant balancing relations with hostile non-belligerents. The rump French state set up at Vichy retained control of most of France's colonies, as well as what was left of the French fleet after the Royal Navy tried to prevent it from German capture by impounding or sinking its ships in July 1940. After that, Anglo-Vichy relations mixed antagonism, pragmatism and uncertainty. Vichy leaders accommodated themselves to German power but hedged their bets by staying out of the war. London imposed a rather leaky blockade and supported the self-appointed leader of France-in-exile, Charles de Gaulle, but hoped that French colonial governments might still be won back to the Allied cause.

Both sides in the Mediterranean depended on the supply lines linking them to industrial production in Europe and North America. Axis forces had to ship reinforcements and supplies in across the Mediterranean – a short run, but one liable to air and sea attack while the British held the island of Malta. As the Axis effort stepped up, major naval operations were required to ship supplies and reinforcements into the island. Malta was also a vital stopping-off point through which to fly long-range aircraft into the Middle East. Tanks, trucks and guns, however, had to be shipped around the Cape, while planes could be landed at Takoradi on the Gold Coast, then flown across Africa. Such distant warfare required the construction of a huge base area around the Suez Canal, filled with warehouses, supply dumps and workshops, to hold operational reserves for the front line and repair damaged equipment that could not be returned to the UK.²

These were nonetheless very imperial campaigns – fought predominantly by colonial empires, and reliant on extra-European

resources. Much of the 'British' war effort in the Middle East consisted of men, fuel and food shipped in from the Commonwealth and Empire: servicemen from South Africa and the African colonies, India, Australia and New Zealand; coal and textiles from India; and petrol and oil from the Persian Gulf. Together with troop ships and supply vessels from the northern hemisphere travelling around Africa via the Cape, all of these had to be shipped in via the Indian Ocean.

Britain's war after June 1940 might therefore best be visualized as two gigantic ocean spheres — one in the Atlantic, one in the Indian Ocean, connected via the Cape — through which resources were being poured into two crucial base areas. One, in the UK, was a major location of industrial production. The other, around the Middle East, was an imperial storage house, repair centre and site of raw material production — above all, oil — that also had to be denied to the Axis forces. Whereas the Atlantic was a battle zone in its own right, at this point the Indian Ocean was largely peaceful. These great spheres gave the British Empire a lot of strength and strategic flexibility, but they also consumed effort — above all in the construction, protection and maintenance of merchant shipping — and time — particularly after the Mediterranean was closed.

The Italian armed forces fought at times with much more bravery and competence than the conventional picture of military fragility allows. Yet they were hamstrung by poor leadership, botched economic mobilization and the Italian empire's vulnerability to blockade. Over the winter of 1940–41, they suffered a series of defeats. Attempted invasions of Egypt and Greece turned into costly fiascos, the Royal Navy cowed the Italian fleet, and Commonwealth and Indian troops smashed back through Libya and into Italian East Africa. At the start of 1941, the British committed an expeditionary force consisting largely of Australian and New Zealand soldiers to Greece. They hoped to bring Turkey into the war and pose a direct threat to enemy resources, especially Romanian oil.

Instead, Hitler shored up his stumbling ally. Greece was rapidly overwhelmed, and the British Commonwealth expeditionary force there compelled to withdraw and await evacuation. In the Western Desert, German units under General Erwin Rommel spearheaded a counterattack that routed over-extended British units and cut off and besieged the fortified port of Tobruk. In Iraq, a nationalist government sought to throw off British colonial control, backed by German aircraft flown in through Vichy French bases in the Levant. German parachute units mounted a costly invasion of Crete.

These defeats showed up the weakness of British air power in the

Middle East. With its aircraft concentrated in the UK, the RAF was strong enough to take on the Axis challenge in Iraq, the Levant and East Africa, but it was badly outnumbered. When the Luftwaffe became involved, it could not intervene decisively on or behind the battlefield in North Africa, or project power to the far side of the Mediterranean. The Royal Navy, forced to extract the army from Greece and Crete, suffered heavy losses, particularly to its modern destroyers, from enemy air attack.

During summer 1941, hasty Commonwealth counter-attacks failed to budge Rommel. Italian and German bombers assailed Malta. The British feared German offensives looping round both ends of the Mediterranean – through Spain to capture Gibraltar, and via Turkey into the Middle East. Here too, however, the crisis passed. Hitler never grasped the strategic importance of the Mediterranean. Far to the south, Commonwealth forces seized control of the coastline of Italian East Africa, allowing Roosevelt to declare the Red Sea a combat-free zone through which US ships could sail with munitions and supplies. British, Indian and Arab troops swiftly quashed the Iraqi revolt, and Commonwealth and Free French forces occupied the Levant. The danger of an Axis pincer movement, however, remained, and another dramatic change in the war was about to confirm to the British that they had to contest both ends of the Mediterranean if they wanted to hold the Middle East.

The events of 1940 had also had important implications further east. Since the start of the 1930s, extreme nationalists in the army and government of Japan had pursued imperial expansion in East and Southeast Asia. In 1937, Japanese aggression resulted in a war with China. Despite capturing huge swathes of territory, over the following three years the Japanese failed to force peace on the Nationalist regime of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek. To the north, renewed Japanese—Soviet tensions resulted in a brief, undeclared war in autumn 1939. This ended with a heavy Japanese defeat. The Japanese also threatened Western commercial interests in China, heightening the risk of a clash of arms between imperial interests in East Asia. Eager to keep the Japanese occupied, after Chiang's forces withdrew into the centre of China, the British and Americans provided equipment to Nationalist forces via long overland routes from ports in British-controlled Burma and French Indochina.

In summer 1940, the European collapse encouraged the Japanese to take direct action against these supply routes. They occupied the northern half of Indochina and forced the British temporarily to shut the Burma Road. Together with new advances in southern China, the occupation of

Indochina gave the Japanese new air and sea bases on the South China Sea. Japanese strategists began to debate whether to seize control of other Western colonies, including Malaya and the East Indies, with their crucial sources of oil, tin, rubber and bauxite. Such supplies only looked more crucial after the Americans imposed economic sanctions on Japan. During 1941, as the bloody stalemate in China continued, Japanese planners began detailed preparations for a future war.

Since the 1920s, the Admiralty in London had focused on Japan as the principal threat to imperial security. As part of its rearmament programmes, the UK had built, at great expense, a new base at Singapore designed to support a major fleet, which would be sent eastwards in the event of hostilities. The base was intended both to reassure the governments of Australia and New Zealand that the UK was committed to their protection, and to deter Japan. It was meant to underpin an offensive strategy that included not only a fleet-to-fleet confrontation, but also the development of advanced positions around the Chinese coast from which to operate a blockade against Japan — the best way, the British were convinced, to defeat another maritime nation.³

From the late 1930s, rising tensions in Europe forced the Royal Navy to contemplate fighting three enemies at once. British naval strategists developed a more flexible plan, based on sending enough strength eastwards to defend the Indian Ocean and Australia until such time as a larger fleet could arrive. Simultaneously, new plans were put in place to defend Singapore. When the fleet base had been planned, the main threat to its security was seen as a direct attack from the sea that could be countered by naval units and shore batteries. During the inter-war period, however, Malaya had been transformed as international businesses and colonial governments sought to exploit its natural resources. By 1941, it produced 75 per cent of the world's supply of natural rubber and 66 per cent of its tin, and its transport network had dramatically improved.⁴ That raised the possibility of an enemy landing further up the peninsula and attacking south to Singapore before a fleet arrived to secure the surrounding seas. Responsibility for stopping such an attack was given to the RAF, which would use its planes to spot and sink any amphibious attack. To maximize aircraft range, airfields were built throughout Malaya, including in the far north, close to the land border with Thailand. As the UK moved towards war with Germany in 1939, and its airmen focused on defending the UK, the new Malayan airfields were left without either sufficient planes or the trained aircrew to man them.

While Germany's victory over France forced a still-greater

concentration of British resources in the west, the Japanese advance into southern China and northern Indochina posed new threats to Singapore: an overland attack through Thailand; short-range amphibious landings along the Malayan coast; and an invasion of the East Indies, from where Japanese planes and ships would be able to cut the British base off from reinforcements and supply. Defensive plans developed to counter a seaborne expedition operating at great distance from Japan were now confronted with an air, land and sea threat across the South China Sea. Successfully meeting this challenge would have required a major combined arms campaign, integrating several different nationalities and co-ordinated across an enormous area. This was something Commonwealth commanders had not yet managed in the Mediterranean and Middle East, and they would prove no more effective in Southeast Asia. Though Malaya was reinforced with infantry divisions from India and Australia, pilots from across the Commonwealth and aircraft from America, these were never sufficient against the rising danger.

Churchill believed the Japanese would recognize that striking at the British or Dutch empires meant war with the United States. Incorrectly, he also believed this would deter any attack. Given that only weak forces could be committed to Malaya, he wanted them positioned for the immediate defence of Singapore. Since the military called the island a 'fortress', he presumed its landward approaches were densely fortified and that it could hold out for months against a close siege. He had not grasped that, since the naval base would be useless once the enemy had airfields on the mainland, no such defences had been built. Only too late would he discover that 'fortress' was in this instance a purely administrative term.⁵

Getting these judgements wrong made it easier for Churchill to get a bigger grand strategic decision right: that at this moment in a global war for survival, the best way for Britain to seek victory was to concentrate its resources on securing the Middle rather than the Far East. This attitude did not find favour either with his chiefs of staff or the Australian government. Between April and June 1941, a combination of Australian pressure and defeats around the Mediterranean had sparked a furious row about priorities between Churchill and the chief of the imperial general staff, General Sir John Dill. Outraged to discover plans to evacuate Egypt in the event of another reverse in the Western Desert, the prime minister insisted that an aggressive offensive was vital to holding the Mediterranean and Middle East. This required urgent reinforcements of modern aircraft that would preclude any additional strengthening of Singapore. The chiefs wanted the planes to be sent to Malaya first, and Dill reminded Churchill

that pre-war policy had put Singapore second only to the UK on the list of Britain's strategic priorities. The loss of Singapore, the chiefs warned the prime minister, would cut Britain's communications with Australia and New Zealand and 'vitally affect our ability to win the war'. In contrast, Churchill believed that only the loss of the Middle East would stretch out the ordeal before the ultimate and inevitable Anglo-American victory.

Since Churchill prevailed, Britain responded to German intervention in the Mediterranean with a rapid programme of reinforcement. Between May and July 1941, more than 800 aircraft arrived in the Middle East, doubling the RAF's strength in the region. The disagreement between British strategists about the relative importance of different theatres was only resolved, however, by the Axis invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. This was the second great transformation of Britain's war.

THE AXIS ATTACK ON THE SOVIET UNION

For all the fighting, the year after the fall of France was defined by a strategic stalemate. Neither the UK nor Germany had the military power quickly to crush the other, nor the resources under their control quickly to build up decisive strength. The British solved this problem by cutting a deal with the Americans. Hitler solved it by starting a new war with the Soviet Union. As well as his conviction that Germany must win a racial and ideological conflict against its Bolshevik, Slavic and Jewish enemies to the east, he also hoped to secure the materials for victory in a future transatlantic air war against the Anglo-American bloc to the west.

Most British ministers and officials hated Communism. Their antipathy had only been increased by anger at the Nazi–Soviet pact in 1939 and Stalin's subsequent campaigns of conquest in eastern Poland, the Baltic States and Finland, and his seizure of the Romanian province of Bessarabia. Nonetheless, the British had long recognized the geo-strategic advantages of making Germany fight on two fronts, and, behind the scenes, their diplomats had been working hard to bring about a rapprochement. Forewarned by signals intelligence of the coming invasion, Churchill had sought fruitlessly to alert Stalin. As soon as it began, he declared that Britain would fight alongside the Soviet Union.

To begin with, it was not clear that Hitler's turn to the east would offer Britain anything more than temporary respite. Axis forces advanced rapidly and took huge numbers of prisoners, raising the prospect of a rapid Soviet collapse and a compromise peace that would leave a strengthened

Germany free to complete its triumph in the west. After a pause in the headlong advance to complete the capture of the Ukraine, at the end of September 1941 the Germans resumed their drive towards Moscow. A fortnight of fighting brought them within 90 miles of the Soviet capital.

From the moment the Axis invasion began, the Soviets had begged for direct military assistance from their new ally that the British were unable or unwilling to provide – including a cross-Channel attack against the distracted Germans or the despatch of a British expeditionary force to the Eastern Front. Since both Churchill and Roosevelt recognized the importance of keeping the USSR in the war for as long as possible, they promised munitions, raw materials and machinery instead.

To begin with, most of this support would be provided by the British and Canadians, either out of their own output, or with equipment already paid for in America or allocated to them under Lend-Lease. Getting it to the Soviets required a further expansion of the oceanic wars. Initially, the most important route by which aid could reach the Soviets was by sea from the Atlantic, on convoys that formed up off Iceland or northern Scotland before sailing north and east through the Arctic. To begin with, the biggest danger to these convoys was appalling weather: freezing fog, high seas and terrifying ice. After the Germans responded by moving aircraft, ships and submarines further north in occupied Norway, the convoys were also assailed by enemy attacks.

A safer route lay northwards from the Indian Ocean, by rail through Iran, over the Caucasus into the southern USSR. In summer 1941, however, the capacity of this route was severely limited. The British and Soviets were also concerned at the pro-German attitude of the Iranian monarch, Reza Shah. To safeguard the supply route, and to protect the vital British-owned oil refinery at Abadan, they jointly invaded Iran in August 1941. Having occupied the country and divided its administration between them, the British and Soviets set about improving the rail and road links north. It contributed little during 1941, but the trans-Caucasus route would become increasingly important during 1942, not least as a route for the high-octane fuel required by the Anglo-American aircraft supplied to the Soviet Union. It also depended on the security of the Indian Ocean. During 1942, the Soviets and Americans would open up a third supply route, across the Pacific and into Vladivostok. This would ultimately become the principal means of delivering materiel from the United States. In autumn 1941, however, it was British deliveries of tanks and planes through the Arctic that played the most important part in helping to maintain Soviet resistance as the Germans renewed their drive on Moscow.

What other help could the British Empire provide? The invasion of the Soviet Union coincided with a growing recognition in London of the ineffectiveness of the offensive strategies Britain had pursued since 1940. European resisters had proved startlingly thin on the ground while the Nazis were in the ascendant. The economic blockade of Germany could not secure quick results. The bombing campaign was weak and inaccurate, bomber crews struggling to hit a city, let alone a specific munitions plant. Despite Stalin's pleas, the British army in the UK was in no position to take advantage of German distraction by launching a cross-Channel attack. Still focused on the dangers of an enemy invasion, it was as yet neither equipped nor trained for amphibious operations. All its most modern equipment was despatched to the Middle East. Worried as they were about a swift Axis victory, the British were not about to leave themselves vulnerable if the Germans next turned back to the West. Yet their pre-war rearmament programmes, their rapid economic mobilization since 1939 and the provision of Lend-Lease all meant that Britain's armed forces were in important ways stronger than they had been a year before, and that they could look forward to growing still stronger in the months and years to come.

One significant British military response was to escalate the aerial offensive in Western Europe, striking back against targets on the French coast in daylight in an effort to influence the fight in the Atlantic and to force the Germans to commit aircraft from the Eastern Front. From that summer, as the ineffectiveness of attacks on specific industrial plants in Germany became apparent, Bomber Command began to adopt a new strategy, attempting to destroy German cities, kill civilians and destroy the morale of industrial workers. In September 1941, Churchill and the chiefs agreed a massive expansion of the aircraft-building programme. Focused on a huge increase in the output of heavy bombers, this decision spurred on the extension of conscription to older men and young women in an effort to ward off a looming manpower crisis. US-built fighters were starting to be delivered in larger numbers. Since, however, they were at this point out-performed by the latest RAF and Luftwaffe planes, the British preferred to send them on to Russia, Malaya, or the Middle East.

There, the invasion of the Soviet Union had created a new strategic moment, increasing the pressure for the British to act, but raising the prospect of a future German thrust through Turkey or the Caucasus if the Soviets collapsed. During July 1941, earlier disputes between Churchill and the chiefs about priorities bore fruit in a coherent, clearly articulated

Middle Eastern strategy. Shaped by the prime minister's vision, processed through the rigour of military leaders and staff officers, and tested on the doubting Americans, this insisted on the need to influence the whole region by holding advanced positions and attacking where possible, rather than retreating onto the Persian Gulf. It also emphasized the importance of the Mediterranean as a location where British aerial strength could be used to draw Axis airpower away from the Soviets and onto a broad southern front.

From summer 1941, preparations began for a new Libyan offensive. In September, the Royal Navy staged a major operation from Gibraltar, codenamed 'Halberd', to resupply Malta. Combining battleships and cruisers bristling with anti-aircraft guns, an aircraft carrier with defensive fighters and ground-based aircraft, the 'Halberd' escort was able both to intimidate the Italian fleet and hold off enemy air attacks. It demonstrated how much the Royal Navy had learned since the start of the war. Meanwhile, supplies and reinforcements poured through the Red Sea into the Middle East, including US-built tanks and planes and imperial personnel.

Table 1. The British Commonwealth and Empire's growing strength and changing deployment, September 1940/September 1941

September 1940

Theatre	Army divisions (a)	Total air squadrons under UK control	RAF aircraft strength (b)	Battleships and Battlecruisers + Fleet Aircraft Carriers (c)	Corvettes (d)
UK and surrounding area, North Atlantic (e)	2 armoured + 25 infantry, of which 2 Canadian divisions, 1 NZ and 1 Polish Brigade	137 of which Fighter Command: 66 Bomber Command: 38 Coastal Command: 20	7,557 of which 2,365 modern fighters and 1,144 medium bombers	6+1, plus one battleship rebuilding and another about to be commissioned	32
Dakar Raid (including Force H) (f)				4 + 1	
Middle East and Mediterranean	1 armoured, 1 cavalry, 6 infantry, of which 2 Indian, 1 Aus, 1 NZ, 1 SA (g)	36	702 (40/4)	3+1	

India and Indian Ocean	8	,	0 (1 battleship repair)	
Far East		57 (0/0)	0	

September 1941

Theatre	Army divisions	Total air squadrons under UK control	RAF aircraft strength	Battleships and Battlecruisers + Fleet Aircraft	Corvettes (d)
UK and surrounding area, North Atlantic	8 armoured + 28 infantry, of which 2 Canadian, 1 Polish division	190 of which Fighter Command: 79 Bomber Command: 55 Coastal Command: 40	10,407 of which 5,714 modern fighters, 1,891 medium bombers and 145 heavy bombers	2+1, plus 4 battleships and 2 aircraft carriers refitting in US and UK yards, and another carrier about to be commissioned	154 (of which 50 Canadian)
Middle East and Mediterranean (including Force H into Med on 'Halberd') (f)	5 armoured + 12 infantry of which 4 Indian, 3 Aus, 2 SA, 1 NZ	66	1,737 (679/129/0)	6+2	
India and Indian Ocean Far East	5 of which 3 Indian, 1 Burmese, 1 Aus	14	144 (0/0/0) 351 (167/0/0) (h)	0	

Notes:

- (a) The army deployed independent brigades of infantry and tanks as well fully formed division. As a simplification, here 1 brigade is counted as 1/3 of a division and numbers are rounded to the nearest whole.
- (b) Numbers of aircraft available did not match those with squadrons or serviceable. This is a global figure excluding training aircraft but including transport and army cooperation planes. 'Modern' fighters here excludes biplanes.
 - (c) Used as a proxy for naval deployment excludes the large number of heavy and light cruisers, destroyers and submarines that accompanied these capital ships, as well as smaller, older aircraft carriers.
 - (d) Used as a proxy for convoy escort forces the focus for RN's construction programme 1939-40 and an importance of the Battle of the Atlantic.
 - (e) 'North Atlantic here stretches right across to Canada.

- (f) The comparison shows the value of Gibraltar as a launch pad for operations in the Western Mediterranean, the Central Atlantic and West Africa.
 - (g) At this point in the war, a quarter of the battalions in each Indian infantry division were British.
- (h) Brewster Buffaloes are counted here as 'modern' fighters though badly outclassed by Japanese fighters in December 1941, they were capable of taking on Japanese bombers.

Two-thirds of the fighting troops involved in the upcoming attack would be from India or the southern Dominions. Codenamed 'Crusader', the offensive was meant to relieve Tobruk and drive Rommel back across the Libyan province of Cyrenaica. If it succeeded, a follow-up offensive would complete the capture of Libya, while an expeditionary force landed in French North Africa (with the agreement, still to be secured, of the French authorities), to complete the clearance of the southern Mediterranean littoral. If the Soviets survived, this might form the basis for a further advance across the islands of the Mediterranean. Having cleared the western threat to the Middle East, the British would then be able to re-concentrate their forces against any new German thrust from the north.

Long-term British and Soviet success was now dependent on American munitions production. Such aid, however, remained limited while the US remained officially at peace. During the summer of 1941, Roosevelt ordered the US military to prepare plans for the defeat of Germany. Faced with a powerful isolationist bloc in Congress, however, he hung back from leading America into the war. In August 1941, he met with Churchill at Placentia Bay, off Newfoundland. In another powerful demonstration of the direction in which he was taking his country, the president proposed the drawing up of some joint principles – a statement of shared dedication to freedom and rights known as the Atlantic Charter, into which the Americans injected a distinctly anti-imperial slant. It publicly envisioned the eventual defeat of Nazism.

To Churchill's disappointment, their meeting was not the prelude to a declaration of war. During the autumn, the United States extended the provision of Lend-Lease to the Soviet Union and China, and sent mechanics to the Middle East to help maintain the aircraft supplied to the British. US escorts, guarding the shipping routes between Canada and Iceland in the Western Atlantic, clashed with German submarines and American servicemen were killed. Yet none of these incidents was deemed

a *casus belli*. Roosevelt, it seemed, was content with an arms-length, undeclared war, with the US providing materiel for its allies, but never fully joining the fight.

Simultaneously, British and American planners put the finishing touches to a grand combined production plan. Discussions of these plans in autumn 1941 revealed the flaw in any hope that a peaceful America could become the arsenal of democracy. Minus the stimulus of a national emergency, US munitions output remained too low to meet the demands of all its proxies and America's own rearmament programme. It showed no sign of accelerating to the required level without the implementation of wartime economic controls. British ministers and officials had lobbied hard and spent a lot to get American weapons. As deliveries fell short again, their great expectations started to waver. Churchill was not downhearted. Problems of production and alliance strategy would, he assured his colleagues, be resolved before long. The prime minister looked to the grey waves of the Atlantic to produce the sort of shocking maritime incident that would, just as in the last war, force the world's greatest democracy to arms. He did not expect that the crucial events would instead take place in the warm blue waters round Hawaii.

After a series of disastrous raids in worsening weather, on 10 November 1941 the War Cabinet accepted that Bomber Command ought to suspend its attacks against economic targets in Germany. The results had been meagre; the losses severe. Five days later, the Germans began their final offensive towards Moscow. For the next two weeks, in sub-zero temperatures, they battered their way forward. At the end of November, with the Soviet capital just visible in the distance, the German advance ground to a halt in the snow. On 18 November, the British launched Operation 'Crusader': the biggest Commonwealth ground offensive of the war thus far. Three weeks of confused desert fighting later, Axis forces were finally driven back from Tobruk. On 5 December, the Red Army began its counter-offensive outside Moscow, hurling the Germans back in disarray. Unbeknown to London, Washington, Moscow, Berlin or Rome, the Japanese carrier fleet was already en route across the Pacific.

THE ROAD TO WAR IN THE FAR EAST

Since 1940, the British had expected the US Pacific Fleet to deter Japanese aggression. They even hoped that the Americans might be persuaded to base units at Singapore. Though a poor place from which to protect the US

west coast, it was a much better location than Hawaii from which to resist a Japanese drive south towards the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies and Malaya. In the secret negotiations over strategy in spring 1941, it became clear that this was not a commitment that the US Navy was willing to make. Protecting the British Empire would be politically unpopular in the United States, but American sailors were also more clear-eyed than the British about the difficulty of maintaining Singapore if the Japanese attacked. In any case, their increasing concentration on the Atlantic meant they were less concerned with fighting a war in the South China Sea than in holding any Japanese attack in the mid-Pacific. This fitted well with what British strategists wanted for the war against Germany, but badly with their wish for Far East deterrence.

By moving ships to the Atlantic, however, the Americans could release Royal Navy ships for duties elsewhere. From the spring of 1941, therefore, the Admiralty began to contemplate a return to its pre-1940 strategy of securing vital imperial communications in the Indian Ocean with an Eastern Fleet. British plans to concentrate this force in the Indian Ocean, far to the west, horrified the Americans, who refused to engage in defence planning for the curving line of Western colonies from Malaya to the Philippines, the so-called 'Malay Barrier', until the British took on a more substantial role in the South China Sea.

The German invasion of the Soviet Union took the Japanese by surprise. For some Japanese army officers, it offered a tempting opportunity to strike northwards while the Soviets were occupied in the west. Signals intelligence of the resulting discussions with Tokyo led the British and Americans to believe that a southern offensive might still be avoided. The opening of the Eastern Front, however, also encouraged them to see the European and Asian conflicts as interconnected. Japanese attacks on either the Soviet Union or the British Empire would damage the Allies' ability to defeat Germany. In fact, the Japanese were not diverted. Their negotiations with the government of the Dutch East Indies about oil supplies broke down in mid-June. In July 1941, the Japanese occupied southern Indochina. They still hoped to secure the resources of the Western colonial empires without recourse to war, but if they could not, they had now acquired the bases from which to launch a military assault.

The Americans responded with a new round of sanctions. The British followed suit. These created an increasingly desperate mood in Tokyo that accelerated the drive to war. Still believing that Japan could be deterred, the Americans and British began to strengthen their defences. In both cases, they thought they had time to build up their forces: they looked to

dissuade the Japanese from starting a war in mid-1942, not late 1941.

The Japanese occupation of southern Indochina did not result in a major strategic survey of the sort that the British had just undertaken for the Middle East. The chiefs had accepted that the defence of Malaya and Singapore no longer took priority. The decision to send aircraft to the Middle East and to the Soviet Union meant that the gaps that had opened up in the Far East because of Australian and American production shortfalls would not be made good. The Admiralty did, however, start to assemble an Eastern Fleet. This would take time, not least because of a shortage, thanks to losses in the Mediterranean, of the destroyers required to shepherd the larger ships. The first vessels released by the American moves to the Atlantic were four 'R'-class battleships. Slow, under-gunned and unable to take on more modern opponents, they had been relegated to convoy escort duties but would now form the basis of the Eastern Fleet. Over the next six months, they would assemble at Ceylon (modern-day Sri Lanka). They might be capable of protecting trade in the Indian Ocean, but they would not be capable of hunting down Japanese surface raiders. To manage this threat, Churchill wanted one of Britain's latest generation of King George V-class battleships to be despatched to the East with an aircraft carrier. This force might be based at Singapore to demonstrate that Britain was serious about defending its Empire, but its operational focus would be westwards, safeguarding imperial communications in the Indian Ocean.6

During September 1941, the Admiralty's strategy changed. US transfers to the Atlantic allowed a faster build-up to be planned. New talks with the Americans re-emphasized the importance of a British commitment to defending the Malay Barrier. The US army initiated a massive programme of aerial reinforcement for the Philippines, aiming to create a heavy bomber force that would threaten any Japanese attack. Admiralty planners adopted a more offensive posture, in which a British fleet would operate northwards from Singapore and Manila, under an American air umbrella, to take on the Japanese in the South China Sea. As they completed refits, the R-class battleships and the battlecruiser HMS *Repulse* were ordered eastwards, with the fleet expected to assemble at Singapore at the start of 1942.

These plans reflected what the Royal Navy had always wanted to do in the Far East, and they had a deterrent logic, in that they confronted the Japanese with a British fleet to the south as well as a US fleet in the Pacific. They were also desperately unrealistic. The British knew that the Japanese had moved a large number of aircraft into Indochina (though they badly under-estimated just how much the Imperial Japanese Navy's air arm had improved over the previous year). Nonetheless, and despite the experience built up in the Mediterranean, they did not plan to include a modern aircraft carrier in the Eastern Fleet. This was not something they would have tried at this stage of the war against the Italians, the enemy against whom they usually judged the Japanese before December 1941. Instead, the British planned to rely heavily on American air cover from the Philippines. There was, however, no serious analysis of whether American aircraft could provide that anticipated support.

On 16 October 1941, Japanese premier Konoe Fumimaro resigned and was replaced by General Tojo. It was a step closer to war. In response, Churchill and his ministers pressed for the despatch of a modern battleship to the Indian Ocean. They wanted publicly to demonstrate Britain's commitment to defend its eastern empire and meet the prime minister's concerns about Japanese surface raiders if a war broke out. Admiral Pound, the man in overall charge of the navy, wanted to keep his most powerful warships with the Home Fleet, but was overruled by the politicians. Their decision meant, however, that the Admiralty would be able to use the new battleship as the basis for its Eastern Fleet. Only one of the *King George V* class was available, HMS *Prince of Wales*. Together with *Repulse*, she made up 'Force Z', which was despatched to Singapore. Unrecognized by Churchill, a gap had opened up between his desire for deterrence and defence of the Indian Ocean, and the Admiralty's much more ambitious new strategy in the Far East.⁷

On 5 November 1941, a Japanese Imperial Conference decided on war. The plan was for a lightning-quick campaign that would seize control of Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands, seize the raw materials they needed to sustain their economy and establish a defensive position that would be too costly for their opponents to retake. Through the second half of November, British and American intelligence picked up signs of imminent hostilities. These included the assembly of a Japanese naval task force ready for operations in the South China Sea. On 28 November, Malaya Command was put on war alert. Four days later, Force Z arrived in Singapore. Its commander, Admiral Sir Tom Phillips, set off for Manila to co-ordinate defence plans with the Americans. At the last minute, it looked as if the British, Dutch and Americans might get their act together. On the same day, the Japanese task force was spotted off Malaya. Wary of a provocation, the British did not launch their pre-emptive plan to seize and block the narrow land route into Malaya from Thailand. War broke out two days later.

The Japanese had decided to deal with the US Pacific Fleet with a long-distance carrier strike against the base at Pearl Harbor. This caught their opponents by surprise. Four out of seven US battleships in the base were sunk, and the other three badly damaged. US aircraft carriers, out on manoeuvres, escaped the destruction purely by chance. In Malaya, Japanese troops landing at Khota Bharu suffered heavy casualties to defending Indian infantrymen and Australian airmen, but quickly established themselves ashore and overran the nearby airfields. Other airfields in northern Malaya were devastated by Japanese air attacks. The main Japanese landing, at Singora in Thailand, thrust forward over the Malayan border before the British could react. Phillips, having returned to Singapore, led Force Z out in an attempt to attack the troop convoys. Though he did not appreciate the expertise and range of the Japanese navy's land-based torpedo bombers, Phillips was aware that this was a dangerous mission. Given the stakes, he had no choice but to undertake it in any case. Anxious not to assist the searching Japanese, when his ships were spotted by enemy reconnaissance aircraft at 10.15 a.m. on 10 December 1941, he maintained radio silence rather than calling for air support from the hard-pressed RAF. Forty-five minutes later, Japanese planes began to attack with bombs and torpedoes. Two hours and twenty minutes after that, the Prince of Wales and Repulse had both been sunk. Phillips went down with his ship.

Back in London, Churchill had got what he wanted — American belligerence — but not in the manner he had anticipated. His prediction that Japanese aggression would bring the United States into the war had proved correct, but in the least helpful way possible, with a surprise attack that enraged the American public against the Japanese rather than the Germans. Immediately, he sought to get himself to Washington, not just to organize Allied strategy, but to make sure the Americans prioritized the right fight. As he told Roosevelt on 10 December 1941, after the president tried to put off his visit, there would be 'great danger in our not having a full discussion on the highest level about the extreme gravity of the naval position, as well as upon all the production and allocation issues involved.'⁸

The next day, to Churchill's delight, Hitler declared war on America. Taken by surprise by the Japanese attack, he hoped to take advantage of US preoccupation in the Pacific to wreck Britain's Atlantic supply lines. Now the British Empire and the United States really were in the same boat. On 13 December, Churchill boarded the battleship HMS *Duke of York* at Gourock on the Clyde. The ship steamed off, through heavy seas, carrying

the prime minister to a crucial meeting that would shape the rest of the war.

'The superiority of the United Nations . . . must be overwhelming'

December 1941-January 1942

As Churchill embarked, the British foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, arrived in Moscow. His mission to improve Anglo-Soviet relations had been arranged before the Japanese attack, and up until Pearl Harbor, it had looked like it would be the key diplomatic event of December 1941. When he heard about the prime minister's plans to go to Washington, Eden worried that they shouldn't both be out of the country at the same time. Churchill insisted that both visits should go ahead. Both men therefore spent most of the pivotal month of December 1941 abroad, building alliances and preparing for the future. Their location demonstrated a pragmatic response to the ways the conflict had changed, and a recognition that the route to victory lay in Britain's ability to manage an international alliance.

'THE TURNING POINT'

Eden is probably the most significant but most overlooked of Britain's wartime politicians, his importance sidelined by historians' obsession with Churchill and Attlee. Young, glamorous and centrist, in the 1930s Eden had been marked out as the man most likely to succeed Neville Chamberlain as Conservative leader and prime minister. Then the approach and onset of war had allowed Churchill a route to power. Under the new prime minister, Eden had served as secretary of state for war before becoming foreign secretary – for the second time, at the age of forty-three – in December 1940. Churchill aside, he was by a distance the most widely recognized and popular politician in the government. With the 'Guilty Men' of the previous decade dead or despatched, he was the only

plausible candidate to replace the older man. Both of them knew it.

Churchill's determination personally to control the central issues of wartime foreign policy – above all the Anglo-American alliance – left little room for the ambitious Eden, who considered himself a master of diplomacy, to make his mark. Yet Churchill carefully secured the foreign secretary's loyalty. He protected Eden from the blame despite his key role in the disastrous expedition to Greece, and manipulated the foreign secretary's vanity and desperate desire to live up to his reputation as an international statesman. Though frequently angry with the prime minister, Eden was also rather in awe of the great man. He would eventually marry Churchill's niece, Clarissa.

Eden's visit to Moscow reflected a disagreement within the British government about the best way to respond to the Axis attack on the Soviet Union. London's inability to provide direct military assistance had encouraged an increasingly heated dispute between Churchill and the British ambassador in Moscow, Sir Stafford Cripps. A brilliant barrister with an immutable belief in his own abilities, in the 1930s Cripps, with his plentiful wealth and newfound enthusiasm for Marx, had been the organizing force behind the radical left of the Labour Party. His talk of class war infuriated his more moderate colleagues, and he had been expelled from Labour in the spring of 1939 after campaigning for a united front with Communism against Fascism. In 1940, however, he had accepted the role first of envoy, then of ambassador to Moscow.

Cripps took on the post because he believed it was in the national interest. It was not a job to which he was temperamentally suited. He wanted a free-ranging, internationalist role, journeying round the world to mobilize the enemies of Fascism, not sticking to a line decided in London. Observing the political turmoil at Westminster, Cripps became increasingly desperate to return to the UK, where he thought there was a chance to build a new, more progressive, government. Churchill and Attlee were very happy for him to remain in his post. They ignored his insistence that, if Britain could not send troops to aid the Soviets, it ought at least to offer a diplomatic deal, including recognition of their territorial seizures since 1939, that would reassure Stalin that his survival was being taken seriously.

Quite aside from their visceral dislike of Communism, Churchill and his Labour colleagues in government were unwilling to legitimize the totalitarian aggression that Britain was meant to be fighting against. Polish independence had been the *casus belli* with Germany in September 1939; Stalin's seizures of territory went against the letter of the Atlantic Charter;

and Eastern European self-determination aroused deep feelings among vocal communities in the United States.

Eden, however, shared Cripps' belief in building better relations with Moscow even at the cost of conceding Soviet control over Eastern Europe. Both men recognized that the Soviet Union was not just an essential ally for the war. Assuming Germany could be defeated, the Soviets would also have to be included in the peace. Somehow, the UK and the USSR would have to agree the means by which post-war Europe would work. Churchill preferred to put off such awkward issues for the future; Eden believed that work on such a settlement needed to start straight away. Despite his reputation as an internationalist, this vision of great powers carving up Europe to their mutual satisfaction embodied a very traditional version of diplomacy. As the dispute between Cripps and Churchill escalated – with the ambassador threatening to return home and make things difficult for the government, and the prime minister responding that Cripps would be blamed for leaving his post – Eden secured the War Cabinet's agreement that he should travel out himself to smooth matters over in Moscow.

It was an uncomfortable visit. Eden spent a grim voyage through the Arctic stricken with gastric flu. In Moscow, his hosts gave him some light relief with a day trip to the front line, where they got him to pose for photographs next to piles of frozen German corpses.¹ As always, the culmination of the summit was a drunken banquet at the Kremlin. Surrounded by comatose Red Army officers, Stalin asked Eden if British generals also held their liquor so badly. Quick as a flash, the foreign secretary replied that they might 'have a better capacity for drink, but they have not the same ability for winning battles'.² At least, that was how he remembered it for his colleagues when he returned home.

For all the repartee, the negotiations had not gone as Eden had expected.³ Since the War Cabinet had given him strict instructions not to talk about Eastern Europe, Eden had hoped that Stalin, desperate for aid, would accept the excuse of American sensitivity and agree an uncontroversial declaration that neither of their countries would make a separate peace with Germany. Instead, Stalin told him that 'the turning point' in the war had been reached. He was about to order a general offensive that he thought would end with the Red Army victorious. Bullishly, he offered Eden a full military alliance and a secret deal to divide the continent. The Soviets would get everything they had seized since 1939; Germany would be broken up; and Britain could build military bases in France, Holland and Scandinavia. When Eden tried to dodge the offer, Stalin showered him with abuse, then allowed that Poland's fate

could be left open provided that the rest of his conquests were recognized.

Eden returned from Moscow convinced that this would be a fair price to pay for an Anglo-Soviet treaty. Back in London, he cast himself as the pragmatic bearer of hard truths. If the Soviets went out of the war, the question of borders would be irrelevant. If they beat the Germans, Britain would not be able to force them to abandon what they had taken. By working on that basis now, the British could at least hope to improve Anglo-Soviet relations and plot a path to a peaceful future. If that meant sacrificing the post-Versailles framework in Eastern Europe, then at least Stalin, unlike Hitler, was someone with whom Britain could do business.

SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS

While Eden headed back to London, Churchill's party was arriving in the United States. What followed was a multi-layered conference, codenamed 'Arcadia', which ran from 22 December 1941 to 14 January 1942. At three weeks, it was the longest of the Anglo-American summits that would shape the next four years. At its heart was the encounter between Roosevelt and Churchill, not just formally and publicly, but also privately in the White House, where the prime minister stayed while he was in Washington.

In some ways, the two men were strikingly similar: creative thinkers of patrician self-confidence and vaulting ambition who readily mixed the personal and the political. Churchill's resilience, despite colossal strain and an unhealthy lifestyle (he had his first heart attack of the war late on Christmas Eve 1941), was outdone by Roosevelt's determination to surmount the crippling effects of polio and hide his reliance on his wheelchair from the American public. Both relied on friends and cronies to do the business of government, and both had married strong, clever women who played an important role in their careers. FDR's infidelity had already fractured the Roosevelts' marriage, but it survived as a political alliance in which Eleanor carved out her own place as a progressive campaigner. Not least because of her work bearing the emotional burdens of her husband and children, Clementine Churchill had less room to establish an independent public role.⁴

Used as they were to getting their own way, both Roosevelt and Churchill could be stunningly careless of those on whom they relied. Whereas the prime minister tended to outbursts of fury, the president was given to greater calculation before he twisted the knife.⁵ As that suggests,

their personalities were fundamentally unalike. Churchill alternated an essential optimism with bouts of deep pessimism that reflected not only the problems facing his country, but also a recognition of the evil lurking in every human soul. Whereas Churchill's war aims were conservative, Roosevelt saw the conflict as an opportunity to reform the world. His belief that the New Deal had worked at home encouraged a faith that problems abroad could be solved by giving everyone else the chance to act like an American. Like many of his compatriots, he saw the international breakdown of the 1930s as proof of European failure and believed that formal empires were themselves a cause of war.

As head of a coalition government containing all the major parties, Churchill could make strategy with relatively little care for public opinion. Roosevelt had to grapple with the global crisis *and* the US political cycle. Combined with his own innate duplicity, his wooing of the electorate resulted in a multifaceted, indirect approach to getting things done. The president kept his subordinates separate and his options open, wrote little down, and got others to float ideas with the public before adopting them as his own. He excelled in the false bonhomie that was a key attribute of the political classes in Britain and America. Visitors to the White House usually left feeling that he agreed with them. They were usually wrong.

Like Churchill, Roosevelt took a direct interest in strategy and did not believe that war could safely be left to the generals. He did not, however, share the prime minister's fascination with military minutiae, and he did not meet regularly with the US chiefs of staff. In strategic matters, Roosevelt relied on his friend Harry Hopkins. A high-powered social reformer and key implementer of the New Deal, Hopkins had drawn close to Roosevelt in the late 1930s, when the president's family looked after his daughter following the death of Hopkins' second wife. Afflicted by a digestive complaint that badly reduced his ability to absorb nutrients from his food, Hopkins was frequently sick and permanently cadaverous.

In May 1940, Hopkins moved into the White House. After the fall of France, he turned himself from an isolationist welfare expert into a prototypical national security advisor. His trips to London and Moscow proved crucial in persuading Roosevelt that the British and Soviets would make good use of American support. Forewarned about Hopkins' influential position within the administration, Churchill made a big effort to bring him into his inner circle. Hopkins subsequently played a major role in organizing the implementation of Lend-Lease.⁹

Appreciating the importance of the Anglo-American alliance, Hopkins established himself as an interlocutor. The fact that he, rather than

Roosevelt, wrote a large proportion of the president's correspondence with the prime minister in 1940–41 only strengthened his place as the vital transatlantic coupling. Critically, he reinforced both leaders' appreciation that alliance politics required concession and compromise. After the outbreak of war with Japan, he quickly grasped the importance of keeping up supplies to the UK and USSR, and pressed for discussions with the British on co-ordinating raw material deliveries across the Atlantic.

The British knew that Roosevelt was a tricky customer who should not be bothered with the day-to-day business of fighting the war. Instead, they cultivated Hopkins. He could deal with matters personally, or pick the right time to take them to the president. Roosevelt was, in turn, well aware of this connection. While Hopkins was more convinced than most Americans that the British would make good use of US munitions, he shared the president's views on empires and international reform, not just out of loyalty, but also from conviction. As so often in the wartime Anglo-American alliance, it was not quite clear who was outmanoeuvring whom.¹⁰

Lord Beaverbrook, the British minister of supply, had accompanied the prime minister to Washington. A Canadian press baron and compulsive political mischief-maker, Beaverbrook's association with Churchill went back to the last war. Churchill had brought him into his new administration in May 1940 partly for emotional support – Beaverbrook knew the right thing to say to jolly the prime minister out of his intermittent gloom – but also because he thought his friend was a business-minded strongman who could get results. In fact, 'The Beaver' was too obsessed with short-term gains to make a good job of managing industrial mobilization, but he had played an important role in discussions with Roosevelt's emissaries. He feted Hopkins and worked with him to secure arms and industrial supplies. Like Eden and Cripps – men who otherwise regarded him with disdain – Beaverbrook recognized the importance of keeping the Soviets going, and fought hard to secure weapons for the Red Army. Not least as a result, he had also become a leading advocate for the opening of a 'second front' in Northwest Europe. 11

An opportunist to his marrow, Beaverbrook had cut his political teeth on the intrigues surrounding the fall of Prime Minister Herbert Asquith at the height of the First World War. Convinced, erroneously, that he had played a decisive role in this episode, he believed himself a master manipulator. In the autumn of 1941, egged on by his Conservative junior minister, a power-hungry schemer called Harold Macmillan, Beaverbrook had tried to take charge of the whole war economy. This had renewed a

longstanding conflict with the minister of labour, the trade union boss Ernest Bevin. Simultaneously, and probably not coincidentally, Churchill floated the idea of Beaverbrook exercising his unique skills on the far side of the Atlantic. With US rearmament slowly taking off, the twin issues of stimulating further American effort and co-ordinating British, Canadian and American output were becoming critical. The two men were discussing a new post as Britain's production representative in Washington when the Japanese attacked.

With Churchill and Beaverbrook travelled the British chiefs of staff – Dill. Pound and Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal. Dill was about to turn sixty, the official age of military retirement. Insisting that Dill was worn out, the sixty-seven-year-old Churchill had just taken the opportunity to promote him to field marshal and replace him as chief of the imperial general staff with the commander of Home Forces, Lieutenant General Sir Alan Brooke. If Dill was exhausted, it was not surprising, bearing in mind that since 1940 he had borne the strain not only of Churchill's fits of latenight strategic creativity, but also of months spent nursing his wife, Maud, through her terminal illness – a sad end to a miserable marriage. In fact, Dill's departure reflected less any personal incapacity than the deterioration of his relationship with the prime minister. Dill was consistent, steady and liked to put down his arguments on paper. Churchill preferred discussion to be more combustible. Dill had already unofficially handed over to Brooke, prior to a planned departure for imperial obscurity as governor of Bengal. When the Japanese attacked, however, the new CIGS was left behind in London, while his more experienced predecessor travelled to Washington. Recently and joyfully remarried (Churchill had refused to let him take a week's leave for the honeymoon), Dill was going to come to occupy a key place in the new alliance. 12

'ARCADIA'

Churchill, Roosevelt and Hopkins lunched or dined together almost every day the prime minister was in Washington. Separately and together, they also met with Beaverbrook, the chiefs, and other ministers and officials, including Cordell Hull, the US secretary of state, Lord Halifax, the British ambassador, Maxim Litvinov, his Soviet counterpart, and the Canadian prime minister, Mackenzie King. Meanwhile, the British and American chiefs of staff and the members of the British Joint Staff Mission met to discuss future plans, Allied command and how to put the military

decisions reached by their political masters into effect.

The focus of the conference was on strategy and supply, but at American instigation, the principals also agreed a statement of shared principles and commitment to victory, to be signed by all the countries fighting the Axis powers. Churchill vigorously opposed attempts by Roosevelt and Hull to raise other post-war issues, including Indian independence and the 'consideration' for Lend-Lease. To his annoyance, he also had to deal with a diplomatic crisis after Free French forces outraged Hull by liberating from Vichy control the tiny North Atlantic islands of St Pierre and Miquelon.

On the voyage across the Atlantic, the British delegates had prepared an outline of future strategy into which to bind the Americans. It combined accurate suggestions of effective strategy with great over-optimism about how easily victory could be achieved. Recognizing that Soviet survival would place the German army under unprecedented pressure, the paper looked forward to holding and tightening the ring around the European Axis in 1942, ahead of decisive Allied offensives in 1943. Only 'the minimum of force necessary for safeguarding of vital interests in other theatres' would 'be diverted from operations against Germany'.¹³

With the US Navy shifting its weight to the Pacific after Pearl Harbor, plans to establish an American task force at Gibraltar were abandoned. Instead, the British would secure the eastern side of the Atlantic and move aircraft carriers to reinforce the Indian Ocean while the Americans concentrated in the Pacific. US army and air units would move across to Northern Ireland to complete their training, releasing further British divisions for shipment to the Middle East. From there, American units would sail on an Allied expedition to French North Africa, with the aim of clearing the southern edge of the Mediterranean, reopening the shipping route through the Suez Canal and putting pressure on Italy. US bombers would join a renewed British offensive against Germany. After bombing, blockade and the Red Army had worn down the Germans, during 1943, Britain and America would land fast-moving mechanized armies around the edge of Occupied Europe, sweep inland and support vast popular uprisings against German rule.

Simultaneously, the British, Americans, Australians and Dutch would hold the Japanese along the Malay Barrier and preserve their supply lines to Australia. Hong Kong was doomed but Singapore would hold out for the next six months, while reinforcements were rushed in. By autumn 1942, new ship launches would allow the Allies to regain their naval superiority. Seaborne airpower would then be crucial as they fought their

way back through the Pacific and attacked the Japanese home islands.

As Churchill intended, much of this appealed to Roosevelt. The president told the first big staff meeting of the conference that, 'he considered it very important to morale, to give this country a feeling that they are in the war, to give the Germans the reverse effect, to have American troops somewhere in active fighting across the Atlantic'. After amending the British proposals to place still more emphasis on defending specific sea lanes and air transport routes, the US chiefs accepted them as a statement of 'American British Grand Strategy' (otherwise known as 'WW1'), on 31 December 1941.

Though it often preferred ugly compromises over hard choices, the British Chiefs of Staff Committee – with Churchill sitting in as minister of defence to co-ordinate with high policy, and a team of planners drawing up potential strategies for their superiors – was quite an effective mechanism for military co-ordination. The Americans lacked a similar mechanism for manufacturing consensus. Only during 1942, in reaction to contact with the British, would the US joint chiefs evolve a staff infrastructure that allowed them to function as a national high command. 15 They did so in a mood of bitter inter-service antagonism, heightened by the navy's desire to fight an aggressive campaign in the Pacific and the army's determination to get into action in Europe. Though the joint chiefs did not agree with British plans, they could offer no coherent alternative. The result was that 'WW1' reflected less a grand strategic agreement than continuing differences, both between the British and Americans and within the American high command. These would influence Allied strategy for years to come.

An emphasis on strategic divisions should not obscure the strong commonalities of approach. The UK and the USA were industrially developed, technologically advanced democracies, which depended on maritime communications not just to supply their war economies and to reinforce their Soviet ally, but also to get the bulk of their forces into combat. Inherent in the geography of the United States and the British Empire, the similarity was reinforced by Britain's expulsion from mainland Europe and the closure of the Mediterranean. Where German and Soviet troops normally travelled to battle by railway, for much of the war the servicemen of the British Empire, like those of the United States, got into action only after spending weeks on a boat. ¹⁶

Sustaining campaigns across the sea required enormous efforts to build and protect ships, construct port facilities and pre-plan the shipment of reinforcements. Loading, transporting and disembarking soldiers and supplies ate up time. Only some ships — for example, Britain's great prewar passenger liners or the 'reefers' (the vessels constructed specifically to carry refrigerated meat) — were suitable for the fast movement of troops. Planes and pilots might be moved quickly, flying direct or carried part of the way on an aircraft carrier, but they could only function with the support of groundcrew, spares and equipment that took much longer to arrive. The resources absorbed in maritime transport were one reason why the British were so keen to clear the southern shore of the Mediterranean, because to do so would score a shipping windfall in decreased journey times around the Cape.

As soon as staff officers tried to plan the operations approved by the political leaders, it became apparent that there were far too few troop and supply ships. Shortages of suitable shipping would be particularly acute in 1942, as the US shipbuilding industry scaled up its efforts to the demands of the war, but as the Western Allies' commitments and ambitions expanded, the constraint would persist throughout the war. That forced them to make difficult choices, but also encouraged them to fight in similar ways. Even as they argued about the balance of strategy, they would spend much of 1942 trying to control islands and shipping lanes, and building up operating bases for the next stage of the war (see Map 1).

As events continued to unfold rapidly around them, the participants in the 'Arcadia' conference also brought into being the structures of inter-Allied co-operation. Thanks largely to the insistence of the US chief of the general staff, General George Marshall, the British and Americans agreed to put all the air, land and sea forces between Burma and the East Indies – a theatre termed 'ABDA' because it included American, British, Dutch and Australian units – under a single supreme commander, the British Field Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell. They agreed to formalize the management of alliance strategy, with the establishment of a combined chiefs of staff (CCS) to oversee the military efforts of the United States, the British Empire and Commonwealth, and their smaller allies. Supported by its own planning, intelligence and shipping committees, the CCS would come into full session when the British and American chiefs of staff sat together in conference. In the meantime, it would meet weekly in Washington, with the British chiefs represented by the Joint Staff Mission, to deal with the day-to-day business thrown up when two great powers tried to connect their war machines. The British and American chiefs would continue to operate separately, but in combination establish a common policy to present to their political masters. Once Roosevelt and Churchill agreed strategy, orders from the combined chiefs would carry

the authority of both governments, allowing national contingents to remain constitutionally separate while serving under allied command.

By setting strategic priorities across the alliance, the combined chiefs were also meant to play a vital role in the material war, laying out requirements that would set production targets and determine the allocation of supplies. The British pushed through an agreement that combined war production would be treated as a common pool from which assignments could be made to any of the Allied armed services 'in accordance with strategical needs'. Decisions on these allocations would be made by two Munitions Assignment Boards, one in London, for military supplies made in the UK and Commonwealth, and one in Washington, for those made in America. They would be chaired respectively by Beaverbrook and Hopkins and operate under the authority of the combined chiefs. Similar Boards for Raw Materials, Shipping and Food were subsequently established in Washington to co-ordinate economic resources. There was at this stage no similar body to align the two allies' programmes of military production.

The combined chiefs' arrangement was unparalleled between any other two major combatants. As the Allied war efforts became increasingly intertwined, the CCS would become essential to the balancing of scarce resources between competing strategic demands. For the British, it would turn out to be particularly important, because the system inscribed their part in strategy-making into the alliance. As the war went on, and the balance of future power shifted to the United States, the combined chiefs continued to incorporate Britain's right to be heard. From 1944, the British would press for it to be preserved after the war.¹⁸

At the start of 1942, however, nothing was so clear — including whether the system would survive at all. Though often summarized as if settled at 'Arcadia', in fact it took months of wrangling and uncertainty before the new structures were established. Bitter experience of Washington's capacity to swallow bureaucratic initiatives led some to believe that the combined system would be still-born.

The ABDA command did not have months. Hurriedly conceived to address a problem Britain, America and the Netherlands had failed to solve in peace, it was already in danger of being torn apart. The British had not wanted Burma included in ABDA's responsibilities, because they saw it as part of the defence of India; the Americans insisted it must be because they wanted to keep open the supply line to Chiang Kai-shek. Such differences in perspective would dog alliance strategy in the Far East for the rest of the war. The British feared that the Americans were setting Wavell up as the

'fall guy' for an inevitable defeat. 19

As that indicated, suspicions and national rivalries abounded. British officers, schooled in partnerships with the Dominions, France and other European states, expected to be the dominant force in any alliance. When Brooke, back in London, found out that the combined chiefs were to be based only in Washington, he complained that his colleagues had 'sold our birthright for a plate of porridge' (a not untypical near-homophone for a man originally brought up in France). Brooke didn't believe the Americans should get a controlling voice in running the war before they had shown they could fight. Keen as they were to keep personal control of alliance politics, moreover, neither Roosevelt nor Churchill was willing to channel their interventions solely through the new system. During 1942, both men would work outside the new structures, sending their own missions to each other's capitals to argue about future strategy. ²¹

That the combined system prospered nonetheless owed a great deal to the personalities involved on each side. At their first meeting at Placentia Bay in August 1941, Dill and Marshall had struck up a rapport. They were kindred spirits: by-the-book managers who had made their names as junior staff officers in the last war, and spent the decades since training up the field commanders who would fight the second round.²² During the 'Arcadia' conference, Marshall organized a party to celebrate Dill's birthday.²³ His liking for the British field marshal helped ensure that Dill remained behind after the rest of the delegation departed, as head of the Joint Staff Mission and the effective representative not only of all three British chiefs of staff, but also of Churchill as minister of defence.

The creation of such a powerful post aroused anxieties not just from the US chiefs, but also from the prime minister. Yet Dill proved the perfect man for the job, not least because the breakdown in his personal relationship with Churchill gave more authority to his efforts to interpret British strategy to the Americans. Hopkins and Roosevelt both trusted him. Dill and Marshall shared with each other the information they were getting from their own side and drafted the messages they would each send to their colleagues explaining their ally's position.²⁴

'THE MOST POWERFUL ARMED AND ECONOMIC BLOC THE WORLD HAS EVER SEEN'

Publicly, the climax of the Washington conference came in the first few

days of the new year. On 1 January 1942, the president, the prime minister, and the Soviet and Chinese foreign secretaries signed a declaration founding the wartime United Nations. Committing themselves to the principles of the Atlantic Charter, they promised to 'defend life, liberty, independence and religious freedom, and to preserve human rights and justice in their own lands as well as in other lands', and pledged to put all their efforts into 'a complete victory' over the Axis powers with which they were already at war. Immediately afterwards, the representatives of another twenty-two countries — the Dominions of the British Commonwealth, the free governments of Occupied Europe, and those Central and South American countries that wanted to stay on good terms with the US — also signed the document.²⁵

For the rest of the conflict, 'United Nations' was used interchangeably with 'Allies' in British war reporting. For progressive Britons in particular, it summed up the sense that they were fighting as part of a global coalition for a moral cause. The declaration did sit oddly with the USSR's handling of dissidents and ethnic minorities, American racial segregation and the British Empire's treatment of its colonial subjects. But it also summed up the essential difference that now divided the world. Germany, Italy and Japan had been taken over by mystic blood-and-soil nationalisms that drove them into desperate and ill-coordinated wars accepting that the price of failure should be immolation. On one side lay at least the possibility of compromise. On the other, the certainty of unending war.

Five days later, Roosevelt gave his State of the Union address, which was recorded and then re-broadcast in the UK. 'Only total victory', he promised, 'can reward the champions of tolerance, and decency, and freedom, and faith.' To that end, he believed, 'The superiority of the United Nations in munitions and ships must be overwhelming — so overwhelming that the Axis Nations can never hope to catch up with it.' With that he announced new production targets, much influenced by Beaverbrook.

If there was one thing at which the minister of supply excelled, it was talking big. When he saw plans for US output in 1942, he had immediately declared them insufficient. Drawing on calculations by the British Supply Council in Washington, he told Roosevelt's production officials that, in order to supply everything needed by America and its allies, they would have to up their targets by 50 per cent. So Roosevelt announced colossal targets for 1942 – 60,000 planes, including 45,000 combat aircraft; 45,000 tanks; and 6 million deadweight tons of shipping. In 1943, Roosevelt looked forward to US output attaining the demands required of victory –

125,000 planes (100,000 of them combat aircraft); 75,000 tanks; and 10 million tons of merchant shipping.²⁶

These numbers symbolized the vast resources America could bring to the war, but they were not based on any practical assessment of industrial capacity or military strategy. As a point of comparison, in 1941 America had made 18,466 military aircraft (half of them training aeroplanes), 4,000 tanks and a million deadweight tons of merchant ships – in each case, much more than had been made by Italy, Germany or Japan that year, but rather less than had been made by the UK.²⁷ As Brigadier Vivian Dykes, the staff officer who as secretary to the British Joint Staff Mission would do much to ensure the smooth functioning of the CCS organization, remarked to his diary, though it was 'a very fine fighting speech', 'the figures are impossible of fulfilment and there will be some priority clashes'. 28 He was mostly right: with the very significant exception of merchant shipping, the targets would come nowhere close to being met in 1942 or 1943. As Beaverbrook understood, however, the task of those directing war production was to weave stories that would mobilize not just factories, but also hearts, minds and political power.

Watching Churchill listen to the American commitments, his doctor, Lord Moran, thought that, more 'than anyone else', the prime minister could visualize 'in detail what this programme means to the actual conduct of the war. He is drunk with the figures.'²⁹ He was also reeling with fatigue. On 5 January 1942, he set off for five days of rest and recuperation in Florida. Catching up on the cable traffic from London, he swatted down Eden's suggestion that Britain should recognize as legitimate the USSR's occupation of the Baltic States. Churchill told the foreign secretary he was being too pessimistic. When the fighting finished, he predicted, 'the United States and the British Empire, far from being exhausted, will be the most powerful armed and economic bloc the world has ever seen, and . . . the Soviet Union will need our aid for reconstruction far more than we shall need theirs.'³⁰

On the same trip, Churchill wrote a new review of the war for the president and the Defence Committee of the War Cabinet. A great European offensive, he argued, would not be possible until America could bring its strength into battle. A lack of shipping meant this would be impossible before 1943. Since this would be apparent to Hitler as well, Churchill predicted that the greatest dangers lay in the Germans seizing their last opportunity to march on the Middle East. In the Far East, he anticipated an active defence of Singapore, Sumatra and Burma holding out for 'as long as possible' — a figure he still thought could be counted in

months.³¹ Back in Washington, Dykes and Ian Jacob, the assistant military secretary to the War Cabinet, went 'through it paragraph by paragraph scoring as in boxing rounds (WSC vs. Hard Facts). He won heavily on points but was nearly KO about the 12th round.'³² Since Churchill's delegation had set out from the UK, the military situation had darkened. By the time he arrived back in Britain, on 17 January 1942, it looked even worse.

'The social, economic and political problems of the day'

January-June 1942

The year 1942 would be one of the most remarkable in modern British history. It saw terrible defeats and the laying of the foundations of victory; dramatic political ascents and rapid declines; diplomatic and strategic manoeuvring; and a rapid acceleration of the end of the British Empire in Asia. It was also a year of crucial developments in the campaigns for domestic and international reconstruction, during which the post-war world came much more clearly into view. To understand how these different issues intersected, we need to consider how things stood as 1942 began, starting with the two most pressing political points of the day: the organization of British production and the future of India.

'PRODUCTION AND ORGANIZATION OF RESOURCES'

At the start of 1942, younger single women were called up for the first time to work in the factories or serve in the auxiliary forces. At the same time, the system of reserving men from conscription tightened, releasing more workers for the munitions industries and the military. Civilian men were also compelled to join the (previously all-volunteer) Home Guard. That set the tone: in the coming year, everyone would be doing more to help win the war, whether they liked it or not.

The minister of labour, Ernest Bevin, had fought shy of conscripting women until the public were well behind the policy. A patriotic trade union boss who had played a key role in getting Labour into government in 1940, Bevin's mighty physical bulk seemed to embody the revival of the fortunes of the industrial working class thanks to the threat from

totalitarianism. Determined that Fascism must be defeated, and that workers should not pay disproportionately for the privilege, Bevin also had a clear understanding of what was politically possible within the trade union movement. That underpinned his caution on conscription and refusal, despite wartime inflation, to accept any central restraint on wages. He and Beaverbrook had fought a long battle over the direction of industrial labour. They hated each other.

Backbench Conservative MPs shared Beaverbrook's suspicion that Bevin was more interested in improving workers' conditions than in winning the war. When he finally introduced greater compulsion on the home front, however, he sparked a serious Labour rebellion – the first since the start of the war. The left of the Labour Party never trusted their leaders not to be seduced by high office. They wanted stronger socialist policies, including the immediate nationalization of the means of production. When Bevin tried to conscript more people, they revolted. On 4 December 1941, thirty-five Labour MPs, about 20 per cent of the parliamentary party, voted against the government. The legislation passed, but the sight of Labour MPs reasserting their party interest helped to provoke Conservatives to a rebellion of their own.

The Bevin–Beaverbrook quarrel was part of a much wider debate about production that had gathered pace during 1941. At its core lay the belief that Britain wasn't winning because it couldn't turn out enough good weapons. The daily grind of delays and stoppages seemed to bear out the point. Mass production was certainly hindered by the mix of hectic mobilization, scarce skilled labour and inexperience in military manufacturing, but Britain was not in this regard any more inefficient than other combatant nations. In the mood of radical patriotism unleashed in 1940, however, production became a political battleground.

Frustrated workers in the factories, gazing enviously at the USSR, suspected that the problem was bosses pursuing profits. The Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), which had stagnated in 1939 under the burden of Moscow's insistence that it oppose an imperialist war, enjoyed a membership surge in the engineering factories. Its appeal was unique: for the workers, production and Stalin; against Hitler and the bosses. Increased wartime wages meant more people could afford the CPGB's high subscription fees. With street protests, discussion groups and factory meetings, it was an exciting time to be a Communist. Between June 1941 and December 1942, the number of party members in the UK rose from 15,000 to 56,000 people – an all-time high.²

Rather than urging strikes or revolution that might disrupt the flow of

arms to Russia, Communist shop stewards called for better industrial planning, built up dossiers of management inefficiencies and demanded that workers be given more control. Simultaneously, managers and technical experts moaned about poor co-ordination between government ministries. Companies trying to break into the booming munitions sector complained that officials always gave contracts to the same few arms firms. Newspapers ran stories about official idiocy, greedy owners and lazy workers.³

Soon everyone had an opinion about production. Nearly all of them thought that the state ought to be doing more to sort things out. In December 1941, the British Institute for Public Opinion – the UK branch of the Gallup polling organization – asked people what they thought was the most important war problem for the government to solve 'during the next few months'. Seventy per cent of the 1,960 people asked said either 'production and organization of resources' or 'organize our manpower'. In comparison, less than 6 per cent said 'Far Eastern situation', and less than 5 per cent suggested 'invading [the] continent'. In leader columns and in Parliament, critics of the government demanded Churchill appoint a minister of production – a single supremo who would oversee all war industry. Reluctant to see anyone else build up a power base from which to challenge his leadership, the prime minister rejected these demands. ⁵

By the winter of 1941, the shop stewards' campaign for control of the factories looked like it might lead to a major industrial confrontation in the West Midlands. Typically, Beaverbrook sought to control it for his own ends, putting his newspapers behind the shop stewards to discomfit Bevin and secure more aid for the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, animosity bubbled on at Westminster.

The wartime Commons had a strange complexion. Many of the best and brightest MPs were busy in the government, in the forces, administering industry or managing the home front. Those MPs who remained at Westminster returned instinctively to the party struggle.

The Conservatives who spent the war on the backbenches were not a particularly impressive bunch. Two very successful general elections, in 1931 and 1935, had left the party holding two-thirds of parliamentary seats, but also resulted in a lot of second-rate candidates becoming MPs. By 1942 this chaff was disproportionately represented in the Commons. The Conservatives often felt they were getting a raw deal from the Coalition. Their relationship with Churchill was uneasy. He had become party leader in October 1940 less because he wanted the job than because he feared someone else using it against him. A lot of Conservative MPs

had got used to leaders who were like themselves: responsible, efficient businessmen who kept the party together and drove it forward. Churchill did not fit this mould. It wasn't just his taste for appointing cronies rather than party men, for fine living, eccentric dress and bizarre working hours, but also his apparent lack of interest in the party. Busy with the war, Churchill seldom interacted with Conservative MPs, many of whom he disliked because they had sided against him in the 1930s. He made no effort to get on with the Tory whips, party chairmen or the backbench 1922 Committee, or to propose future policy – beyond continued participation in a post-war Coalition with himself at the head. Remembering his Liberal past, Tories frequently asked themselves if he was a 'real' Conservative at all.⁶

By 1941, very few Conservatives were still so furious over Chamberlain's defenestration that they wanted to give his successor the same treatment. Even if they had doubts about his direction of the war, the majority of Tory MPs recognized Churchill's drive, respected the resolve he had displayed in 1940, and craved leadership. Churchill was well aware that, with no general election in sight, Conservative MPs were the only people who could get rid of him. Like Chamberlain, he would not have to lose his majority, just forfeit enough support that a replacement could claim more authority. Yet he could seldom restrain his instinctually combative response to any criticism: a tendency that often ended up sparking stronger opposition. Poor party management made a rod for Churchill's back. It was fortunate for him that Eden, the only real alternative, also aroused Conservative suspicions of inauthenticity. The prime minister and his closest circle manoeuvred carefully to make sure that the foreign secretary had neither the time nor impetus to organize a leadership threat.

Over the winter of 1941–2, with Churchill away in Washington, backbench restlessness increased. After the Labour rebellion over the conscription of women, the Tories became convinced they must fight back. On 18 December 1941, with Attlee leading for the government, the Commons went into secret (i.e. unreported) session to debate the war situation. After the Labour rebel Manny Shinwell and the chairman of the Conservative 1922 Committee, Alexander Erskine-Hill, worked together to force an early return from the Christmas recess, the Labour junior education secretary, James Chuter Ede, complained to his diary that 'scalphunting' Tories were 'determined to belittle and besmirch the Labour Ministers and that about a quarter of the Labour Party are only too happy to join in . . .' The Labour minister for economic warfare, Hugh Dalton,

an assiduous though not always perceptive collector of Westminster gossip, thought 'that the old gang of Chamberlainites are fanning up each other's animosities against the Churchill Government. If only they had a leader, they would put the Government in danger.'8

When the Commons reconvened in the new year, the atmosphere had deteriorated still further. In the debate on the war situation on 8 January 1942, several Conservative speakers strongly criticized the prime minister. That evening, according to Conservative MP Henry 'Chips' Channon:

Seventeen MPs dined at the Dorchester, collected by Erskine-Hill . . . Anthony Eden was present, and seemed upset when every MP . . . told him that the Government was doomed. It was no use, they said, the PM coming back and making one of his magical speeches. This time, it would serve no purpose. The Government must be reformed, and that soon. ⁹

Churchill's solution to this rising challenge from the right would have important implications for the way Britain addressed the suddenly urgent question of Indian independence.

'WE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM'

In 1935, the National Government had introduced major constitutional reforms for India, including the devolution of extensive powers to elected regional governments and a planned federal assembly that would receive Dominion status. These reforms were intended to counter the growing power of the Indian National Congress — the major nationalist party, dominated by Hindus, which demanded an independent, united, secular India. When the first elections held under the new system took place in 1937, however, Congress won votes across the country, and was able to form governments in seven out of the eleven provinces of British India. This unexpected success broke the power balance the British had tried to gerrymander and doomed the planned federal assembly. It also stimulated a revival of the Muslim League under Mohammad Ali Jinnah, which claimed an exclusive right to represent all Indian Muslims.

Most informed opinion in Britain still expected that India would continue the move towards greater independence within the Commonwealth. Labour backed Indian independence as a matter of policy. Labour's leaders got on well with their Congress counterpart, Jawaharlal Nehru: like many of them, he was a former public schoolboy who wanted to turn his country into a strong socialist state. Conservative MPs might

not have shared Labour's faith in international fraternity, but (with the exception of a diehard minority on the right) most had accepted the terms of the 1935 settlement – Indian self-government in a form that preserved the rights of religious minorities and Britain's say over the future of the Raj. In contrast, Churchill's refusal to accept any reforms had helped to keep him out of office during the 1930s. Seeing Congress as a party of corrupt Hindus seizing power at the expense of honourable Sikhs and Muslims, Churchill forecast bloodshed and the end of India's imperial military contribution in the event of independence.

The war had driven all sides in the Indian debate further apart. The British viceroy, Lord Linlithgow – a stolid, unyielding figure, left literally stiff necked by a childhood bout of polio – had declared war on India's behalf in 1939 without consulting any Indian leaders. Constitutionally correct but politically maladroit, this gave nationalists a golden opportunity to demonstrate their dissent. Meanwhile Churchill, back in office in London, blocked any further proposal for reform.

Congress's spiritual leader, Mahatma Gandhi, wanted to offer nonviolent support to Britain, but opposed any involvement in the fighting. Nehru had always disliked the new constitution's co-option of provincial Indian leaders, and when the British rejected calls for a new commitment on independence, he ordered Congress members out of the regional governments. Abandoning reforms for the duration, Linlithgow concentrated on the war effort and Jinnah took the opportunity to advance the position of the Muslim League. In March 1940, he announced it would seek the formation of a separate Muslim state, Pakistan. Congress was unwilling to accept any such division.

Unlike Nehru and Gandhi, the right-wing Congress leader Chakravarti Rajagopalachari was willing to barter wartime participation for constitutional concessions. At his instigation, in the summer of 1940 the Congress broached new negotiations with London. At the same moment, Leo Amery, the secretary of state for India, proposed reforms that would bring the nationalists into government and so enable the maximum mobilization of the Indian war economy. A passionate believer in the continued strength of the British Empire, Amery grew increasingly frustrated both with Indian intransigence and with Labour ministers' failure to back him against the prime minister. ¹⁰

Furious that Amery and Linlithgow had discussed reforms behind his back, Churchill intervened to restrict the terms of the 'August Offer'. Increased Indian involvement in the viceroy's advisory and executive councils, and the achievement of Dominion status at a point yet to be

determined, were not sufficient to win over Congress. Divisively, but much to Jinnah's delight, Amery also included a commitment not to contemplate 'any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life'. Desperate to keep Congress together but concerned not to provoke a showdown with the British, Gandhi responded with a campaign of non-violent resistance. His followers spoke out publicly against the war and were arrested in their thousands – but they failed seriously to inconvenience the government of the Raj. Following the proclamation of the Atlantic Charter, Labour and Conservative MPs pressed Amery to speed up Indian reforms, but the chance of real constitutional change in wartime seemed to have gone. Though Linlithgow appointed more Indian ministers, both Congress and the Muslim League refused to enter office. Then the Japanese attacked.

The new war created new possibilities. Nehru had long backed the Chinese against the Japanese. Like many on the far left of British politics, his perspective shifted after Hitler attacked the Soviet Union. He now accepted that India might have to fight Japanese, Nazi and British imperialism at the same time. At the end of December 1941, the Congress Working Committee agreed to adapt the party's policy. With Churchill safely on the other side of the Atlantic, Bevin and Attlee pressed ministers for a fresh discussion of Indian reforms. Two days into the new year, a group of liberal Indian politicians wrote to the prime minister proposing 'a bold stroke' of 'far-sighted statesmanship': the immediate award of Dominion status and the formation of an all-India national government. To the Americans – interested in India as a route to Nationalist China – independence seemed a natural way to energize the Indian war effort on the Allied side. When Roosevelt raised the issue with Churchill at the Washington Conference, he got a sharp response, but the president kept up the pressure for change throughout the spring of 1942.

In January 1942, the BIPO asked respondents their thoughts on Indian independence for the first time since the war began – in itself, a reflection of the way the Japanese attack had put the subject into the news. Giving explanations such as 'Will make them fight better with us' and 'We are supposed to be fighting for freedom', 32 per cent of those who answered thought India should be granted self-government immediately. Forty-one per cent approved of changes but thought they should wait until peace, with most wanting firm promises of further reform. Only about 6 per cent said something like 'They should not have self-government'. ¹²

Had he bothered with opinion polls, Churchill would have counted himself among the last number. Suspecting that his colleagues would

circumvent him in his absence, he wrote from Florida to warn Attlee against the

danger of raising constitutional issue, still more of making constitutional changes, in India at a moment when the enemy is upon the frontier . . . The Indian troops are fighting splendidly, but it must be remembered that their allegiance is to the King Emperor, and that the rule of the Congress and Hindoo Priesthood machine would never be tolerated by a fighting race . . . 13

Amery and Linlithgow agreed that nothing could be done. According to the viceroy, India was 'hopelessly, and I suspect irremediably, split by racial and religious divisions which we cannot bridge, and which become more acute as any real transfer of power by us draws nearer.' In any case, both men assumed that Churchill's stubborn reaction would firmly block any change of policy on India.

THE ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF THE WAR

Production and the defence of the Empire were critical, immediate issues that would define what happened at home and abroad during 1942. Simultaneously, however, deeper trends, international and domestic, were coming to a head in ways that would determine the drawn out endgame of the war. A key figure in these discussions was the extraordinary economist John Maynard Keynes. A Cambridge don and public intellectual of global standing, Keynes was famous both for his condemnation of the Versailles settlement, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, and for his advocacy of counter-cyclical public investment, which had influenced progressive politicians on both sides of the Atlantic in the wake of the great inter-war slump. Keynes believed that the salvation of capitalism lay in state intervention to manage the economy for beneficent ends. This meant not central planning or nationalization, neither of which could control unruly markets, but rather the measured use of public spending to smooth out natural peaks and troughs in the economic cycle.

This view put Keynes outside the academic mainstream in 1930s Britain, but the force of his ideas in wartime meant that he was able to force his way into the Treasury in 1940. The Conservative chancellor of the exchequer, Kingsley Wood, licensed Keynes to rove across financial policy. Having overseen the design of an anti-inflationary budget based, revolutionarily, on the analysis of national income, from the spring of 1941, Keynes became the British lead in financial negotiations with the

Americans. Starting with the continuing payment of dollars for cash contracts left over from the early years of the war, these would come to focus on the nature of the post-war international economy and the price the British would have to pay for Lend-Lease.

Britain operated two forms of economic protectionism. Since 1932, 'imperial preference' had allowed free trade within the Commonwealth and Empire but imposed tariffs on external imports. These relatively mild duties had been introduced to support UK and Commonwealth producers as trade collapsed after the Great Depression and tariff barriers went up across the world – including around the United States. The UK was also at the centre of a global currency system known as the Sterling Area. With the exceptions of Canada, Newfoundland and Hong Kong, the Commonwealth and Empire either used sterling or pegged their currency to it. So did countries which were under informal British control, such as Egypt and Iraq, and those which traded extensively with Britain, such as Portugal, Norway and Denmark. Members enjoyed relative currency stability and the wide acceptability of sterling in overseas trade, and they could borrow easily on the British capital market. Members pooled their non-sterling reserves in London.

For most of the 1930s, Britain's trade deficit with the USA had been balanced by invisible earnings from finance, investment and shipping. Even before the war, however, rearmament expenditure pushed the dollar deficit into the red. In September 1939, Britain instituted controls on sterling designed to maintain its ability to import from the US. The sterling–dollar exchange rate was fixed for the duration at \$4.03 to the pound. Currency conversion was suspended, and all but essential dollar purchases prohibited. Sterling Area countries largely agreed to abide by similar restrictions, ensuring that their pooled dollars would be spent on the British war effort and limiting consumer imports from America. Goods and services provided to the British by members of the Sterling Area were not paid for immediately but credited to their sterling balances in London – locked debts, controlled by the British, in a currency that could only be used to make purchases from elsewhere in the Area.

The conflict transformed Britain's financial relationship with these countries from lender to debtor: but since the debts took the form of interest-free loans, repaid at British whim, at a time of very high inflation, the effect was to get the Empire to subsidize Britain's war. The mechanisms of exploitation were so effective that after 1940, Nazi economists sought to emulate them when establishing their own 'New Economic Order' in Europe. The British always insisted that they intended

eventually to repay the debts. They regarded this pledge as fundamental to the continued legitimacy of the Sterling Area. Other members of the Area, however, found their commitment to its continuation undermined by disgruntlement at British self-interest.

In 1941, after the Sterling Area's resources proved unequal to British dollar purchasing needs, London was forced to fall back on American largesse in the form of Lend-Lease. Because it greatly reduced the need to earn dollars, Lend-Lease allowed the British to convert still more of their efforts from exports to war production – and made any post-war recovery more difficult. Suspicious of British perfidy and determined that London should not rebuild its dollar reserves, the US Treasury insisted that pre-Lend-Lease contracts be paid off and scrutinized UK exports to make sure US materials were not used for commercial gain.

Lend-Lease was provided on condition that the British provided a postwar 'consideration'. It was soon apparent that this would mean concessions to the free trade agenda being pursued by progressives in the US government, and that the outcome would be shaped not just by transatlantic diplomacy but by political struggles in Washington. Roosevelt gave responsibility for negotiating a formal agreement on the reciprocal terms of Lend-Lease, the so-called Mutual Aid Agreement, to the US State Department. The US secretary of state, Cordell Hull, believed that the protectionist blocs of the 1930s had caused the war. Dissolving them was a moral good: it was purely coincidental that removing them would also allow American businessmen free rein to exploit consumer markets around the world. Hull's rival, Under-Secretary Sumner Welles, who enjoyed greater influence with Roosevelt, saw the organization of multilateral free trade in geo-strategic terms, as a necessary part of the construction of a stable post-war international order. As Welles' subordinate, Assistant Secretary of State Dean Acheson, recognized, the degree of Anglo-American co-operation this required would only be politically acceptable in Washington if the British could be persuaded to lower trade barriers. The State Department's first draft of the Mutual Aid Agreement, presented to Keynes in summer 1941, therefore included as Article VII a formal commitment that both countries would 'provide against discrimination . . . against the importation of any product originating in the other' after the war. As Acheson confirmed to Keynes, that was intended to mean the end of both imperial preference and of the currency controls around the Sterling Area. 16

Keynes responded angrily, lecturing his host about the stupidity of the State Department's attempting to impose free trade on the British Empire via Article VII at the same time as the US Treasury held down the dollar reserves required for the Sterling Area to engage in international commerce. Keynes' criticisms went down predictably well with the Americans, but he had a point. As things stood, at the end of the war the United States would hold the majority of the world's stocks of gold and capital and would dominate production of finished goods and some raw materials. Saddled with wartime debts, the cost of physical reconstruction and the time lag required to reconvert industry to export production, Britain and the advanced economies of Western Europe would be in no position to rebuild their currency reserves. Without those, however, they would be unable to balance out the fluctuations in trade that were an inevitable part of a freely operating system. They would either have to keep trade and currency barriers, or become colonies of an American economic empire.¹⁷

This helps to explain why Keynes initially presumed that Sterling Area controls would have to remain in perpetuity after the war, as part of a world divided between protectionist blocs. He did not find this an appealing vision of the future, partly because he was by nature an optimistic internationalist, and partly because he came to see that an imperial siege economy was not viable in the long term. Aside from the economic arguments against bilateralism, Britain could not rely on the Sterling Area to provide all its trade. London's financial credibility depended on voluntary action by sterling creditors who were unlikely to refuse the possibilities of American investment if London could no longer act as a source of international capital, or to continue to sacrifice their dollar spending power once victory had been achieved. Most importantly, Keynes recognized that a retreat into protectionism would not engage the Americans in the international rebalancing that was the only means to restore trade and growth, improve living standards and preserve British economic independence in an era of burgeoning US power. Returning from America at the end of August 1941, Keynes decided he must devise a plan that would provide greater currency stability, give developed economies access to the reserves they needed to participate in multilateral free trade and encourage the Americans to provide the capital required for post-war reconstruction. It was a creative task to challenge even his mighty brain.

'AMERICAN AMBITIONS TO MAKE THE BRITISH EMPIRE A LEBENSRAUM FOR THEIR EXPORTS'

The State Department's Article VII proposals had, meanwhile, provoked controversy in Whitehall. Some ministers and officials supported liberal economic policies. Sir Richard Hopkins, the permanent secretary at the Treasury from 1942, believed that multilateral trade was the only realistic means of post-war national revival. Several of the expert economists brought into the wartime civil service were ardent liberals, including Lionel Robbins and James Meade, the successive heads of the War Cabinet Economic Section. Eden, Halifax and the rest of the Foreign Office all saw a free trade deal as part of alliance diplomacy – though they also hoped that going along with American plans now would enable the British to sidestep any more grievous commitments in the future. Most importantly, and with hopes of forming a powerful US–UK bloc, the prime minister's scientific advisor, Professor Frederick Lindemann, pushed his boss to acquiesce to American economic demands. An émigré German physicist who excelled at digesting complex data in a form Churchill could use, 'the Prof' had become a powerful figure in wartime Whitehall, influencing everything from weapons procurement and ship-loading to Coalition strategy. Like Keynes, he not only had an opinion about everything, but was persistently willing to challenge the conventional wisdom of party politicians and civil servants. This infuriated lots of his colleagues but made him very useful to the prime minister. Unlike Beaverbrook, Lindemann was also completely loyal to Churchill, as well as a keen and very successful investor, who had helped Churchill with his own money. Ennobled as Lord Cherwell in 1941, he did much to shape the prime minister's view of economic negotiations with the Americans, arguing that a negotiated acceptance of Article VII would be crucial to securing post-war material aid. 18

It was by no means clear that this argument would triumph. The war encouraged imperialist and nationalist moods that left British politicians more attached to tariffs and controls. It also resulted in a well-founded sense of economic vulnerability. The chancellor, Kingsley Wood, warned Churchill about the dangers of any too rapid derestriction. Demobilization would take time, and if Britain were to benefit from issuing sterling debt, it would need to keep currency controls in place for years after the fighting was done. Wood's views echoed those of the Bank of England and of another academic economist installed in the Treasury, Hubert Henderson. Pessimistic about the possibility of any global recovery from the ravages of the war, Henderson argued – as Keynes had done until the summer of 1941 – that the Sterling Area would have to reject multilateralism and remain behind protectionist walls for ever.

The high imperialist wing of the Conservative Party, backed by Lord Beaverbrook and led by Leo Amery, agreed with the prescription. Inspired by successful wartime mobilization, they argued that the accumulation of sterling debt would bind the Empire together by forcing it to buy British. Refusing to abandon the measures that had saved the Empire from the consequences of American fecklessness and the Gold Standard in the 1930s – and expose the country to a repeat performance of US boom and bust after this war – they argued that economic liberalization was not a universal good. So far from being a means to preserve British power, appeasing what Amery referred to in his diary as 'American ambitions to make the British empire a lebensraum for their exports' would be the path to a calamitous decline. This sort of social Darwinist view was something that Amery, Beaverbrook, Churchill and Cherwell had in common. Significantly, it was one that Keynes rejected.¹⁹

Conservative opponents of Article VII found Cabinet allies in Labour enthusiasts for state trading, including Arthur Greenwood, the Labour deputy leader, minister without portfolio and chair of the Cabinet Committee on Reconstruction. Ernest Bevin, though he liked the idea of international economic co-operation to improve the common lot, feared any system set up to benefit US capital would end up raising food prices for British workers.²⁰ American behaviour made this seem a sensible apprehension. Even while it pushed the first draft of Article VII in autumn 1941, the State Department proposed a new international agreement to fix high prices for wheat – great for Midwestern farmers but threatening grave costs to food-importing Britain. The proposals fell through, but the episode had a lasting effect. Not for the last time, perceptions of American hypocrisy further stimulated British nationalism.²¹

Faced with such a complex issue, ministerial disagreements and Conservative divisions, Churchill relied on Cherwell and Wood to brief him on Article VII. In a reflection of their views, he favoured free trade, but not yet. Churchill's instinct was to put off any commitment in the hope that the deepening Anglo-American bond would lessen demands to extract a 'consideration'. The danger was that this approach would empower American isolationists to disengage their country completely from the task of international reconstruction.²²

In December 1941, the State Department produced a revised version of Article VII. Though still committing both sides to reduce trade barriers, this allowed them, in so doing, to take account of the need to reconvert their war economies and maintain high levels of employment. While Churchill was in Washington for the 'Arcadia' conference, the British

ambassador, the former foreign secretary Lord Halifax, pressed him to sign up. Cordell Hull, however, then brought up an explicit quid pro quo between the grant of Lend-Lease aid and the abolition of imperial preference. Churchill furiously rejected the idea. Optimistic that the American entry into the war would change the rules of the game, he left Washington convinced that he could safely delay a decision on the 'consideration'.

The clock, however, was now ticking, driven by the annual March deadline for Congress to renew its approval of Lend-Lease, the State Department's frustrated determination to pin down the British, and by the war itself. Defeats in the Far East increased British dependence on the US and made Australia and New Zealand eager to settle the Mutual Aid Agreement so that they could provision American garrisons against the onrushing Japanese. At the State Department's behest, Roosevelt warned London that intransigence risked reopening the whole question of Lend-Lease, with tougher demands having to be imposed before the flow of supplies could be resumed.

Nonetheless, the Cabinet remained divided. Eden pushed for a quick agreement, but most ministers were reluctant to concede anything before negotiations had begun. Churchill asked for Roosevelt's help to break the logjam. Responding personally to the prime minister, the president clarified that, while Article VII committed Britain to liberalizing trade, it did not, in his view, entail an advance commitment to surrender imperial preference. This gave the British more room to manoeuvre than the State Department had intended, but it allowed Churchill to secure Cabinet approval for the signature of the Mutual Aid Agreement on 23 February 1942. This was a very significant moment for Anglo-American relations over the next few years. Roosevelt's deliberate fudging of the issue and Churchill's optimism about the president's goodwill, however, allowed considerable confusion about the future economic relationship that was becoming entangled in the wartime alliance.

'ONLY THE UNITED STATES DOLLAR HAS ANY CHANCE OF SERVING THAT CAPACITY NOW'

Keynes always worked best with a clean sheet of paper. At the start of September 1941, he had come up with a solution to the technically complex question of how to rebalance the post-war international economy. The first requirement was an agreement on fixed currency values, to avoid

the devaluations and tariff-raising that had contributed to economic instability between the wars. The second was to provide the reserves that would allow the war-wracked Europeans to take their place in the free-trading, prosperous world envisaged by American multilateralists. Finally, there must be means and incentive for surplus US capital to be reinvested, either overseas to accelerate the post-war recovery, or domestically to avert an American slump.²³

Keynes proposed to address all these problems with the formation of a new International Clearing Bank, with its own currency, 'bancor'. All member countries would have an account, into which they could pay and draw out in their own currency, pegged against bancor at a fixed rate, and an overdraft facility, its size determined by the scale of their pre-war trade. International transactions would be carried out between bancor accounts. Countries that persistently ran overdrafts would have to devalue their currencies, and those that maintained surpluses to revalue. This would encourage everybody to balance their accounts over time. Since bancor could not be exchanged for anything other than your own currency, there was no point in hoarding it (as the Americans had done with gold between the wars). Funds from surplus balances would pay for a wider international organization that would assist worldwide economic recovery: a relief and reconstruction fund, a world police force, and buffer stocks to smooth out fluctuations in the price of key commodities.²⁴

Over the winter of 1941, Keynes promoted his plan within Whitehall. As he did so, he adapted it to secure support, allowing more protective practices to be retained, weakening the penalties on debtors and creditors, and increasing the overdraft facilities. The 'Bank' became instead a 'Union'. At the end of January 1942, his plan was inserted into the Treasury's 'Memorandum on Post-War Economic Policy', which was put before the War Cabinet Committee on Reconstruction Problems on 31 March 1942.²⁵

Keynes' plan was typically imaginative. It also offered a remarkably good deal for Britain. Much like the Sterling Area, the International Clearing Union would address Britain's short-term balance of payments problems by allowing it to run a massive overdraft at minimal cost.²⁶ The creation of bancor and the calculation from pre-war trade levels both circumvented the extent to which the United States and the dollar had already replaced Britain and the pound as the dominant power within the global economy. Not unreasonably, Keynes' critics doubted whether the combination of this sleight of hand with an expectation that the US would fund international economic reconstruction would prove politically viable

in Washington. Typically tricksily, he defended it to Harry Siepmann, a Treasury advisor to the Bank of England, as 'primarily a contribution to the tactics of diplomacy in Whitehall and Washington', that would cater 'for the professed devotion of Americans to progressive . . . internationalism, and so divert discussion from their own (entirely selfregarding) concrete demands . . . The principles of the sterling area, offensive to America in an Imperial context, become acceptable, if they are universalised.'27 In fact, the importance of Keynes' plan lay less in its practicability than in the possibility it raised of conditional accession to the Article VII agenda. A successful free trade system would require a mechanism to manage its consequences. By tracing a utopian scheme that might be within reach, Keynes opened up room for negotiation. He also aroused strident opposition from Beaverbrook, Amery and Bevin, for whom his plan smacked exactly of the prioritization of currency stabilization over trading interest that had led to Britain's disastrous return to the Gold Standard a decade and a half before.

Simultaneously, an outline for a post-war economic system was also taking shape within the US Treasury. The treasury secretary, Henry Morgenthau, enjoyed a much closer relationship to Roosevelt than did Cordell Hull. He had been disappointed to see the State Department given charge of the Article VII negotiations. Morgenthau's admiring support for Britain's stand against Hitler did not quite exceed his loathing for British imperialism, let alone his absolute determination that the US Treasury should prevail over the glossy diplomats at the State Department and take the principal role in reshaping the world. Morgenthau had big ideas but little knowledge of economics; for that, he relied on his grand vizier at the Treasury, Harry Dexter White. At the end of 1941 Morgenthau instructed White to draw up plans for an international currency.

A former social worker, an academic economist and devotee of Keynes' vision of counter-cyclical intervention by the state, White combined a brutal personal manner with an idealistic belief in peace and social justice. Like many American progressives, he looked forward to a future in which the British Empire was consigned to the dustbin of history, and the USA worked with the USSR to construct a better, more equal world. In years to come, White's contacts with Soviet handlers would lead to allegations that he had been, during the war, a Communist spy. These under-estimated his colossal sense of personal agency: when he gave information or assistance to the Soviets, he thought he was engaged in a mission of personal diplomacy to establish world peace, not in espionage for a foreign power.²⁸

Rather than invent a new international currency, White told Morgenthau, he could rely on the one existing unit that could still be counted to hold a stable value when freely convertible against gold. 'For many decades', that had been 'the British pound sterling', but no longer: 'Only the United States dollar has any chance of serving that capacity now.' Instead, White offered his own plan for supranational structures to manage the world's economy. Initially these were based on a US-funded Bank of Reconstruction, intended to speed post-war rebuilding and to ward off any future economic crisis that might threaten global stability. Fierce resistance from officials in Washington and bankers in New York soon led this part of his plan to be relegated relative to White's proposal to address the problems of foreign exchange, payment imbalances and competitive devaluation through an International Stabilization Fund.³⁰

White's Fund would provide loans to member countries to cover emergency balance of payments deficits. Membership was open to any country that agreed to cut tariffs, to keep up payments on foreign debts and to make their currency fully convertible within a year of the end of the war, with fixed exchange rates set against gold. Each member would pay in a levy of gold, its own currency and international securities, which would determine how large a loan it could access and its influence over the Fund. This levy would be calculated largely on how much gold each country currently held — of a planned \$5 billion fund, the USA would contribute \$3.2 billion, the British \$635 million.

White's scheme involved means that were very different from those that Keynes was promoting in London. Keynes' Union was a new mechanism for all international payments, its wheels greased by constant movements of 'bancor' between accounts. White's plan relied on most payments continuing as before, with the Fund ensuring everyone stuck to the same exchange rates and making loans only as a last resort. The \$5 billion that White proposed to make available for these loans was five times less than the stock of 'bancor' that Keynes wanted to fund overdrafts. With levy and loans calculated from current holdings of gold, rather than pre-war trade, Britain's influence within the Fund would be much less than in the Union, as would the size of the loan that it would be able to access. Since 'bancor' was useless outside the Union, and persistent creditors would be penalized as much as debtors, Keynes' plan put the burden of making economic and currency adjustments on countries running a big balance of payments surplus. In White's plan, the responsibility for change lay wholly with those running deficits: before any loan was issued, they would have to take steps to rebalance their

economies and bring their currencies back into line.

These different approaches therefore reflected the different personal, political, national and international perspectives of their originators. Nonetheless, Keynes and White were mapping out visions of the future that overlapped: a centrally co-ordinated system with fixed exchange rates, designed to get away from the disorder of the 1930s and restart the motor of economic growth. Their struggles to achieve this goal – often in violent opposition to each other – would absorb much energy over the next two and a half years. Neither man's dreams of a better post-war world would be realized, but their failures would shape the structures within which the global economy operated for decades afterwards – and ultimately end the financial structures that underpinned the British Empire.

Having drawn up their plans, both Keynes and White wanted to share them with their counterparts on the other side of the Atlantic. Until the summer of 1942, however, any progress was blocked by a bureaucratic turf war in Washington as the State Department tried and failed to stop the US Treasury taking over post-war economic planning. For all that Keynes' proposals remained controversial in London, the British were eager to start discussions, but they had to wait. British participation was essential if Morgenthau and White were to secure the multilateral system they desired, but the timing of negotiations, like their outcome, was now in American hands.³¹

'SOCIAL INSURANCE AND ALLIED SERVICES'

Keynes never developed a similar plan for Britain's domestic economy. Here too, however, Whitehall had by the end of 1941 begun to grapple with future problems, above all the feared return of the mass unemployment that had blighted Britain after the last war.³² From the War Cabinet Economic Section, the economist James Meade argued for a Keynesian commitment to counter-cyclical state investment. This view was not endorsed by the Treasury, where Hubert Henderson pointed out that unemployment was concentrated in traditional export industries whose decline was unlikely to be solved by higher domestic spending. The debate about whether the state could secure full employment in times of peace would continue for much of the rest of the war.

Keynes' own influence on these arguments was sporadic in nature but optimistic in tone. He looked to a middle way: an ethical capitalism, in which the state played a larger role but preserved individual freedom while 'seeking equality of contentment amongst all'.³³ Keynes anticipated the continued growth of public corporations that would act responsibly for the common good. In the short term, he presumed a period of tight controls while Britain moved out of the pumped-up, heavily mortgaged economy that had been built up during the war. When controls were loosened, the state would have to intervene to iron out boom and bust. If, however, it could create the confidence that underpinned steady consumption, such drastic interventions could cease, and the path opened to a bright and prosperous future. The same approach conditioned Keynes' response to Sir William Beveridge's proposals about the reform of social welfare.

A pioneering civil servant, then a renowned academic and expert commentator, Beveridge had expected to be given an important government job in September 1939.³⁴ Throughout his career, Beveridge had wanted to overhaul old-fashioned systems of administration and install a technocratic bureaucracy – staffed by expert 'social doctors' – better suited to the modern, efficient country he thought Britain ought to become.³⁵ By 1940, he was certain that only state socialism could mobilize the effort needed for victory, and convinced that extensive economic controls would have to persist into the peace.

Eventually, Beveridge was appointed under-secretary of state at the Ministry of Labour, where he pushed Bevin to accelerate the conscription of industrial workers. The two had clashed over the same issue during the last war, and Beveridge would have liked to be minister of labour himself. Bevin soon found him intolerable. When Arthur Greenwood set up committees to look into key reconstruction issues in spring 1941, Bevin seized the chance to foist Beveridge with the dull task of unravelling the knots of the pre-war welfare system. Appointed to chair a committee of inquiry into social insurance and allied services, Beveridge wept with frustration. This was not the powerful post he thought he deserved.

He was already well occupied with other work, investigating the armed forces' use of skilled manpower. This was a subject of crucial relevance to the war effort, and of extensive public complaint from new conscripts. He was assisted by the secretary of the Ministry of Labour's Manpower Committee, Harold Wilson, a twenty-six-year-old Oxford economist (and Beveridge's own former research student). Wilson hated Beveridge's brutal arrogance but shared his love for a good statistical table. Though his civil service colleagues smirked at his lack of expertise, Wilson impressed all the ministers for whom he worked with his sense of the politically possible. He would emerge from the war on a new course, a technocrat par excellence and soon-to-be Labour MP.³⁶

The manpower inquiry dragged on through 1941. The armed forces were full of men who, like Beveridge, thought they'd not been given jobs commensurate with their skills. In many cases they were right. In particular, the army divvied up recruits between its regiments early in their military careers, and as a result was unable to direct skilled workers to the places they were most needed. Beveridge's strongly critical report was published in February 1942. His recommendation, quickly accepted – a new scheme of general enlistment for the army, so that recruits could be assessed before allocation to their corps of service – was probably his most significant contribution to the fighting of the war.

Simultaneously, the committee on social insurance had held its first meetings with Beveridge. To the younger man's subsequent chagrin, Wilson did not accompany his boss on this new inquiry. Apart from Beveridge, the committee comprised middle-ranking civil servants. They were mostly able, politically progressive and very busy. Beveridge therefore had room to drive the investigation wherever he chose. Like many British social reformers in the first half of the twentieth century, he believed that it was important to address family poverty in order to tackle perceived population decline from falling birth rates. He also thought that a solid commitment to reconstruction was the rallying cry the wartime nation needed. He was eager to force the government into action.

The current system was a mess. Some forms of welfare – health, unemployment and old-age pensions insurance – were funded by contributions from employees, employers and the state. Others – war and non-contributory old-age pensions and the unemployment and public assistance schemes for those without insurance – were paid for by general taxation or local authority rates. Most health insurance was provided through separate bodies, the approved societies, which did not all pay for the same level of care. Some people were entitled to multiple benefits; others, including children and the elderly, excluded altogether. Three-quarters of working-class families paid into the most frequently held form of personal insurance, the death benefits schemes provided by life assurance companies. Meant to provide the means for a decent burial, they were a national scandal: mis-selling was widespread, and two-fifths of the premiums were eaten up in management fees.³⁷

During the 1930s, pressure had grown for an overhaul, but none of the officials on the Beveridge Committee were prepared for his decision to reassess social policy as a whole and design a new system for the future. Typically, Beveridge did not wait to gather evidence before setting out what needed to be done. He completed his paper, 'Basic Problems of

Social Security with Heads of a Scheme', before his committee had interviewed any witnesses, two weeks before Christmas 1941.

What was radical about Beveridge's proposals was the preconditions of state activity he laid down to enable a system of social security: a national health service; child allowances to reverse the declining birth rate; and the use of 'full powers' to minimize unemployment. The last point was key actuarially, but also morally. Beveridge presumed that an ablebodied citizen of working age needed not a welfare handout but a job.

When it came to social insurance, Beveridge proposed a single government board to replace the approved societies. It would administer a lifetime insurance scheme, including benefits to cover sickness, injury and disability and unemployment; a range of married women's allowances for home-making, motherhood, widowhood and separation, with a dependent's allowance if their husband (and presumed breadwinner and national insurance contributor) was unemployed or sick; old age pensions paid on condition of retirement from the labour force; and funeral expenses. Crucially, and in a striking departure from previous practice and towards social citizenship, both contributions and benefits would be universal.

Significantly, however, Beveridge also retained much of the existing welfare system. Rather than being funded entirely from taxation, his scheme would rely on contributory insurance, paid equally by the employer, the employee and the state. Contributions and benefits were to be set at a flat rate, with the latter at subsistence level to encourage private thrift. The new scheme kept means-tested public assistance – the net to catch those who did not have, or had used up, their insurance entitlement – though the costs were transferred from local authorities to the Exchequer. Personal responsibility and permanent economic intervention were central to Beveridge's conception of modern social welfare. What he was creating, he insisted, was not a 'welfare', but a 'service' state.³⁸

Such ambition aroused whinnies of fear in Whitehall. Rather than the report being signed by the whole committee, which might risk committing the government to its proposals, Beveridge was told that he would be the only member to put his name to it. He feared this would reduce his report's political impact.

Beveridge's committee heard evidence during the first half of 1942. Most of it backed up the conclusions to which its chairman had already come. The committee also sorted out important details, including the level at which subsistence benefit was set and the provision for adult women in a scheme designed around male wage earners. Much time was spent

discussing how to support women who spent their lives in unpaid caring for others. The technical and moral issues involved in implicating the state so fully in the lives of its female citizens proved more than Beveridge could manage. They would have to rely on the safety net of public assistance instead.

Beveridge had deliberately ignored financial constraints to design what he regarded as an ideal system, but the biggest question about his scheme was always what it would cost. In spring 1942, the Treasury estimated that the cost of the first year of the social insurance scheme alone would be about £700 million, with about £300 million borne by the Exchequer. This was three times more than the government spent on the current system, at a time of very low unemployment, in 1941. Officials expressed particular alarm at the long-term financial commitment to old age pensions, a commitment that would rise rapidly as the population aged, and annoyance at Beveridge's determination to force promises from the government.

Seeking an advocate, Beveridge shared his plans with his old acquaintance Keynes. The economist lauded the 'vast constructive reform of real importance', but suggested ways to limit the immediate costs. Grudgingly, over the summer of 1942, Beveridge agreed to slash back his scheme, reducing the projected annual cost to £450 million, with the sum borne by the Exchequer down to £100 million in each of the first five years of the scheme's operation. The rest of his programme would be brought in as and when it could be afforded.

The main casualty of this cut were old age pensions. These were currently so low that even bringing them up to subsistence level would mean paying out twice as much. As Keynes warned Beveridge, however, a massive expansion of pension provision now would not allow sufficient funds to cover future expenditure. That did not mean it would never be possible, particularly if you took an optimistic view of the long-term prospects for international growth. Beveridge agreed to phase in pension changes, with rates not increasing at all over the first five years. In the meantime, old people without savings would also have to rely on public assistance. As the Beveridge Report moved to publication in the autumn of 1942, Keynes told his Treasury colleagues not to worry about the scheme: it was hardly the biggest threat to Britain's post-war economic well-being.³⁹

'PLANNING FOR FREEDOM'

Keynes also had an important influence on the Conservative MP and president of the Board of Education, 'Rab' Butler. A junior minister at the India and Foreign Office during the 1930s, Butler had favoured appeasement, but he was well-liked enough to survive the post-Chamberlain purge. He had always hated the Foreign Office and jumped at the move to Education in summer 1941. Butler was looking for a chance to restore his political reputation and secure party advantage. He recognized that the crisis of 1940 required a new policy platform for Conservatism, and education was one area in which there was already wide-ranging consensus on the need for reform. When Butler took the post, however, Churchill told him that he should not expect to introduce any major change before the end of the war.

Shortly after moving to the Board of Education, Butler was appointed chairman of the Conservatives' new Post-War Problems Consultative Committee. He quickly set up a range of sub-committees to address reconstruction issues. In practice, however, it was extremely difficult to get Conservatives to agree on reconstruction, primarily because their visions of an ideal future were so different.

The reputational disaster of 1940 notwithstanding, the war was an invigorating time for Conservative thinkers. Stimulated by the crises of 1940–42, they also felt liberated from the stultifying, electorally successful compromises engineered by Baldwin and Chamberlain in the 1930s. In public, Labour's entry into government and the political demands of the war encouraged Conservatives to place a new emphasis on equality (of opportunity, if not of outcome) and fairness, but these overlay more traditional concerns – faith, Empire, economic liberalism and the dangers of democracy. Conservatives differed fiercely in both their diagnoses of the problems afflicting the country and how they ought to be solved.⁴⁰

Butler represented part of one of the strongest strands of Conservative thought about how Britain ought to be rebuilt: Christian, cautiously progressive in the inter-war tradition championed by Neville Chamberlain, and eager to ward off the materialist horrors of totalitarianism and renew the leadership of the nation by establishing a new reciprocal bond of service and opportunity between the citizen and the state. Like others in his circle, Butler was influenced by Karl Mannheim, a Hungarian-born former professor of sociology at the University of Frankfurt who had fled Nazi persecution in 1933 and become a British citizen in 1940. Mannheim argued that the insights of the social sciences and of Christian theology could be used to build a society that combined hierarchy and democracy to meet the challenges of modernity. He talked about 'planning for freedom',

based on a remodelled state — more powerful, still democratically controlled, but involving itself in all aspects of society. It would promote individual choice and shared values, above all the need to contribute to the common good. The state would be legitimized by its pursuit of 'democratic' social policies over private profit, including the right to work, free medical care and economic security in old age.⁴¹

Yet the war also encouraged other Conservative traditions that did not easily align with Butler's ambitions. A group of high imperialists led by Leo Amery, for example, saw in the war both a vindication of, and the last opportunity for, a campaign reaching back to the start of the century that focused on uniting and strengthening the British Empire. The legacy here was more Joseph than Neville Chamberlain, and it matched domestic policy to Amery's belief in the autarchic possibilities of a highly organized and protected imperial economy. Imperialists such as Amery were highly in favour of improved social welfare provision at home – providing it did not dissuade Britons from emigrating to the colonies – as a means of bolstering the national stock. Such reforms, and the economic integration of the Empire, would also depend on much more powerful state planning, but the emphasis was imperial defence, not renewing the social contract. ⁴²

In contrast, however, a small but increasingly vocal group of Conservatives not only opposed the expansion of the state on which progressive and imperialist visions of the future relied, but proposed that intervention and provision ought to be rolled back to where they had been before the Great War. Reaching back to an older liberal tradition, Conservatives such as Sir Ernest Benn believed that international free trade and a reliance on private social provision were the only ways to unleash the economic power of capitalism and make sure that everyone took responsibility for themselves. Benn's aggressively laissez-faire individualism antagonized Tories who saw themselves as more progressive or more in tune with the wartime collective mood, but some of its elements – frustration at the spread of state control, regulation and taxation; a belief in personal liberty, responsibly enjoyed; and direct opposition to creeping socialism – struck deep chords not just with Conservatives, but also with that part of Liberal sentiment that Baldwin had rallied so successfully behind his 'National' coalition in the 1930s.⁴³

Forging any sort of political compromise between these differing versions of a Conservative future became even more difficult during the war. This was not just because in 1940 the party settled on a leader who lacked both the skill and the inclination to go digging in the long grass of Conservatism, but also because the war simultaneously removed the

disciplining effect of regular general elections and raised the stakes of any dispute into a Manichaean struggle with totalitarianism.

The problems experienced by Conservatives when they tried to construct a policy on reconstruction — and the effect this could have on which policies were carried forward — was apparent in Butler's developing plans for education. Among the numerous Conservative sub-committees on reconstruction topics that he initiated was one on education. Chaired by the poet, publisher and historian Geoffrey Faber (a fellow of All Souls, Oxford and a close friend of T. S. Eliot, who was married to Butler's cousin), the sub-committee also included Professor Fred Clarke, the director of the Institute of Education, and Walter Oakeshott, the High Master of St Paul's School (one of the country's most prestigious public schools). Rather like Beveridge, the three men soon expanded their remit, to consider the 'crisis of culture' into which they thought the country had plunged.

For two decades, inquiries had criticized the backwardness of an educational system in which most children in England and Wales were taught in free elementary schools that had a leaving age of fourteen. Only a tiny minority continued their education to the age of sixteen at selective, fee-paying grammar schools, leaving a large number of very able children unable to realize their potential. An increase in the school-leaving age to fifteen, required by the 1936 Education Act, had not been achieved by 1939. With a grammar-school education the passport to a middle-class job, the less prestigious public schools declined. The mass evacuation of children away from cities had highlighted the poor quality of many rural schools, and concern about the effects of wartime disruption on young Britons had heightened a desire for change.⁴⁴

Faber's education sub-committee proposed an ambitious overhaul, including the reorganization of secondary education and a state takeover of public schools, which would be opened to the ablest children from all backgrounds in order to rejuvenate the British elite. Technical education would be massively expanded to prepare for the post-war economic recovery. Doctrinal teaching would embed Christian values of service and self-sacrifice, and young people would be required to undertake part-time voluntary social work as part of a 'Federation of Youth', which would train them in citizenship and equip them to participate fully in the life of the community. Like William Beveridge's report, the Faber Committee's recommendations would be complete by the autumn of 1942. Thanks not least to the divisions between Conservatives, however, they would get a much less enthusiastic reception.

At the Board of Education, meanwhile, civil servants had already drawn up reconstruction plans based on the Spens Report of 1938. Sir William Spens had proposed free secondary schooling for all up to the age of sixteen, based on a tripartite system of grammar, secondary and technical schools, which would educate children to different syllabi depending on their aptitudes and probable future careers.

As it stood in the 'Green Book' promulgated by the Board of Education, such a change would have important implications for the Church of England. As a result of the way the schools' system had grown since the nineteenth century, England and Wales had a 'dual system' in which some schools were funded by local authorities, and others by voluntary groups, predominantly the Churches, financially assisted by the state. Unlike local-authority-run institutions, church schools could teach a specific Christian doctrine. In many rural areas of England, Church of England-aided schools were all there was, but declining funds meant they were often under-resourced and dilapidated – which was why educational provision in the countryside was so poor. Most educational experts presumed that these schools would eventually have to be taken over by the state. The need to build extra classrooms to teach children up to sixteen threatened to accelerate that process, since the Church would simply be unable to keep up with the pace of change. Any solution seemed likely to stir up controversy, either with Anglicans and Catholics, if church schools came under the purview of local authorities, or with Nonconformists if church schools were funded by taxation. Churchill worried that any change would spark the sort of bitter battles that had arisen over the 1902 Education Act, which was why he was reluctant to countenance reform.

In fact, the prime minister's fears were probably misplaced, since denominational divides no longer stirred the political passions they had four decades before. One plausible route to reconstruction, favoured by many education professionals, would therefore simply have been a wholesale takeover and secularization by the state. This was not an approach that Butler favoured, not just because he was an Anglican himself but because religion was key to his vision of a stable society. Instead, with typical cunning, he reframed the whole complex issue of school reform around the need to negotiate a religious settlement that would require the involvement of the Church of England. He would be much helped by William Temple, the new archbishop of Canterbury.

'A TRITON AMONG MINNOWS'

On 24 December 1941, Temple, then still archbishop of York, delivered a typical message to his congregation:

Christmas in war-time is not less but more like the first Christmas in its contrast between the divine gift and the world on which it was bestowed . . . For Herod read Hitler, for the keeper of the inn where there was no room for Christ read a commerce and industry which in our own country and in good times, left a million able-bodied workers unemployed and you see how little changed in essence the human problem is. 45

Son of a former archbishop of Canterbury, Temple espoused a very midtwentieth-century version of Anglicanism: ecumenical and patriotic, socially concerned and moderately left-of-centre. He was a former Labour Party member and current president of the Workers' Education Association. At the start of 1941, he had convened the Malvern conference, a meeting to consider how the Church should respond to wartime changes, which had made headlines when the radical Liberal MP Sir Richard Acland used it as a platform to proclaim that the storing up of private wealth should be regarded as a sin.

Temple's combination of Christianity, socialism and charisma made him extremely popular both with his fellow churchmen and in the country at large. His fat, amiable exterior belied a relentless capacity for work. He was also a very subtle and socially conservative operator, deeply conscious of the dangers posed to the Church by an expansionist state and the pervasive immorality of modern life. When Cosmo Lang, the then archbishop of Canterbury, announced unexpectedly in January 1942 that he was going to retire, no other possible replacement had Temple's authority. Churchill would have preferred a more fire-eating cleric, but religious appointments bored him rigid. Heavily influenced by his acolyte Brendan Bracken, he recommended Temple to the king.

'Of course the man is among the other Bishops a triton among minnows', moaned the perpetually grumpy Conservative MP Cuthbert Headlam to his diary, but 'his open adherence to the Socialist, or Christian Socialist, programme is all wrong for an Archbishop.'⁴⁶ In fact, the new incumbent was a very safe pair of hands. Devoted to his country and the defeat of Nazism, he accepted that, in a just war, Christians had a moral obligation to fight as effectively as possible. Trusting that this was what the government was doing, he gently squashed those Anglicans who spoke out against strategic bombing – unlike Lang, who had publicly expressed doubts about the ethics of RAF strategy.⁴⁷

Over the winter of 1941–2 Temple completed his thirty-third book, *Christianity and the Social Order*, which laid out a short philosophical and religious argument about the sort of country Britain ought to become.

Temple wanted a state built on 'freedom', 'fellowship' and 'service': a democracy that would protect civil rights and safeguard the welfare of its citizens, and thus allow them to do their Christian duty of helping others. Keynes and Temple had known each other since they were undergraduates. The economist commented on drafts of Christianity and the Social Order, and persuaded Temple to add an appendix of practical steps to put his principles into effect.⁴⁸ These included minimum standards of income, accommodation and education to allow every family to maintain a household of 'decency and dignity', giving workers a say in how businesses were run, and nationalizing the Bank of England, the joint stock banks and land development rights.⁴⁹ The state would also guarantee a five-day working week and holidays with pay – a much more restful, complete existence than Temple, who would work himself to death, ever allowed himself. As he insisted, his single greatest object was that 'the welfare of the human person shall be the primary consideration of national policy'. This would be a 'revolutionary' step in British life.⁵⁰

Released as a Penguin Special in mid-1942, *Christianity and the Social Order* sold almost 140,000 copies in its first edition. The book was all the more attractive because its starting point was moral and religious rather than politically partisan. In the recollection of one devoted reader, a twenty-six-year-old Royal Artillery officer and former president of the Oxford Union called Edward Heath – then commanding a troop of antiaircraft gunners in Liverpool and, in the evenings, playing piano for the regimental dance band – it seemed as if *Christianity and the Social Order* 'embraced the whole spectrum of those who were seriously concerned with the social, economic and political problems of the day'. 52

'THE GOVERNMENT CARES ABOUT THE CULTURAL LIFE OF THE COUNTRY'

It was entirely typical of Keynes that in December 1941, as well as working long hours at the Treasury, editing the *Economic Journal*, commenting on *Christianity and the Social Order*, helping to manage Eton, King's College and the Arts Theatre in Cambridge, and trying to increase agricultural production on his farm at Tilton, he also accepted Butler's proposal to become chairman of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA).⁵³ CEMA had been set up in January 1940 by Butler's predecessor to help artists, beleaguered by

wartime entertainment, carry the 'solace' of the arts to the public, and demonstrate that 'the Government cares about the cultural life of the country'. At the start of 1942 it became wholly government-funded. By then, it had already organized 8,000 concerts, put on art exhibitions visited by 600,000 people and sponsored plays seen by 1.5 million more.⁵⁴

Under the missionary enthusiasm of the Pilgrim Trust, CEMA funded provincial amateur dramatists, folk singers and choral groups, and considered increased participation more important than high artistic standards. Attempts to bring the arts into the workplace had led to boundary clashes with the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA), which put on shows for the troops and soon extended its remit into the munitions factories. Both organizations attracted large audiences to some performances, but the caricature was that CEMA shows were too highbrow or too folksy, while ENSA's roster of clapped-out music hall acts aimed at the lowest common denominator. Speaking to the journalist James Lansdale Hodson in 1942, shop stewards in the Royal Ordnance Factory at Chorley complained that the ENSA concerts were so bad that the mere name put people off. When some 'fine Welsh singers' had come to entertain the night shift, however, which sounds very like the sort of thing that CEMA liked to put on, the audience had got bored and wandered out. Neither could compete with the consistent popularity of the factory's weekly film show.⁵⁵

It is hard to know which of these Keynes would have hated most ('Death to Hollywood', he declared, not entirely in jest, in his final broadcast as CEMA chairman). As an elitist Bloomsbury Grouper, he was not one to compromise on artistic quality. He and Samuel Courtauld, chairman of the giant rayon manufacturer and a famous patron of the arts (as well as being Butler's father-in-law), had pressed on Butler the importance of high culture to the fulfilment of the human spirit. Though it never abandoned its programme of outreach, under his direction CEMA became more rigorous in its administration, more committed to backing performances of the highest professional standards — including in opera and ballet, funded for the first time after he took over — and interested in constructing the infrastructure of excellence in London and the provincial cities.

Believing that the British people deserved the very best, Keynes envisioned an arts centre in every town. In London, a huge new entertainment complex would be built at Crystal Palace. These plans were scotched by lack of funds and time, but Keynes did oversee CEMA's lease and restoration of the bombed-out Theatre Royal in Bristol and secured

national opera and ballet companies a home in Covent Garden. These would have been substantial achievements for someone who wasn't also busy trying to stabilize the global economy.

Before the war, state finance of the arts was regarded in Britain as the sort of thing unpleasant foreign regimes did to promote totalitarian propaganda. CEMA had sprung up as a response to a national emergency, but, as Butler wrote to Keynes, there was now the chance for it to develop 'a more permanent place in our social organisation'. Under Keynes' chairmanship CEMA flourished, becoming the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1946. Both functioned as independent public bodies, distributing money without interference from the government. Elitist and self-interested though they often were, they also supported a national culture of high artistic quality without putting it under the control of the state. Here too, Keynes promoted a middle way that marked a departure from the world before the war.

For all that Keynes disliked economic planners, his vision of civic cultural improvement grew out of the same optimistic impulses that inspired those thinking about how physically to build a better Britain out of the war, particularly when it came to reconstructing the blitzed cities. The damage done to the centre of many British towns during the bombing of 1940–41 created not only an urgent need to rebuild shops and housing, but also an opportunity to rethink how the urban landscape was laid out. This was strongly encouraged by the minister of works and building, Lord Reith, a glowering Presbyterian former director general of the BBC, and ardent devotee of a planned future. Drawing on pre-war concerns about disorganized development and poor living conditions in large British towns (as expressed in the 1940 report of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population, chaired by Sir Anderson Barlow), in 1941 Reith set up official committees to report on land use in rural areas (under Lord Justice Scott) and compensation and betterment (under Justice Augustus Uthwatt).⁵⁹

Uthwatt, an expert in property law, was asked to recommend legislative changes that would let councils carry out comprehensive programmes of post-Blitz development without being blocked by intransigent property owners or held to ransom by land speculators. His committee quickly made its initial recommendations, which would give local authorities powers to buy up blitzed land by compulsory purchase at pre-war prices. If put into law, and backed up with sufficient funds, these would permit the sort of planned, ambitious urban reconstruction that Reith wanted. They would also represent a significant blow at individual

property rights in favour of the interests of the community.

Reith also toured some of Britain's worst-blitzed cities, encouraging local authorities to 'plan boldly' for their rebuilding. By the end of 1941, this process was well under way. Some city councils, most notably those of Coventry and Plymouth, appointed dynamic young urban planners or brought in external consultants to draw up reconstruction schemes. Though some designs were more piecemeal and conservative, the most radical involved the wholesale redesign of city centres, including new ring roads and broad thoroughfares, shopping and cultural precincts, open spaces, community centres, and improved housing both within and beyond existing urban boundaries. From an early stage, these aroused controversy, both from local traders worried they would lose out and from councillors concerned about the cost. They had little effect on what most people wanted, which was a house of their own as quickly as possible Yet they also generated considerable enthusiasm, with the more ambitious schemes championed by local leaders not just because they promised civic improvement, but because they offered hope of a better future to rebuild the morale of cities still marked by the terror of bombing, and where dayto-day life remained very hard.⁶⁰

THE OLD WORLD AND THE NEW SOCIETY

Looking at the changes in domestic British politics – the fall of Chamberlain and Labour's entry into government; the growing power of the unions; the rise of collectivism; the disunity among Conservatives – it would be natural to think of the whole war as a period of Labour triumph. For many of the party's supporters, however, these were years characterized by disappointment. Convinced that they were in a moment of epochal change, they thought their leaders should have wrung much more from 1940. Better rationing and minimal improvements in wartime welfare seemed scant rewards for their dedication to the war effort.

As Labour ministers emphasized their 'responsible' role within the Coalition, other figures gained ground by attacking such moderation. Among them were the rebellious left-wing MPs Emanuel 'Manny' Shinwell and Aneurin Bevan, and the Labour intellectual Harold Laski. The son of a Manchester cotton merchant, a prolific author on political theory and an LSE academic, Laski's fantasies about his contacts with the great and the good evolved into a really important position within the Labour Party. A high- profile public commentator, he reached a wide audience

through his newspaper columns and radio broadcasts. Never shy of predicting a revolution, he was very popular with the Labour rank-and-file. Constituency associations regularly returned him top of their ballot for the powerful National Executive Committee (NEC), which determined official Labour policy.⁶¹

Laski had always doubted Clement Attlee's fitness to be party leader. This was not an unusual opinion. Curt of speech and clerkish in demeanour, Attlee was easily dismissed as a man out of his depth, but that missed both his skill at manipulating administrative structures and his inner steel. Attlee found Laski a particularly irritating critic. Unusually difficult to discipline because of his status in the party, he was one of the few people who could make the Labour leader really angry.⁶²

At the end of 1940, Laski had attacked Labour's failure to secure a 'serious change in the distribution of economic power'. ⁶³ In June 1941, he declared that at the top of the party, 'pygmies have taken the place of giants'. ⁶⁴ He proposed a new party committee to determine reconstruction policy and force a more radical agenda onto Labour ministers. Wise in the ways of political jujitsu, the leadership spent a long time passing this suggestion back and forth between different sub-committees for consideration. Just when it looked like it might be permanently buried, Laski got support from Herbert Morrison – the Labour home secretary and Attlee's great rival for the party leadership. ⁶⁵

Having made his name as Labour's London boss in the 1930s, Morrison had been appointed home secretary by Churchill at the height of the Blitz. He did that difficult job well, but his success had not won him friends within his party. Morrison had led the hunt for Communist fellow-travellers in the 1930s and had a reputation as a political enforcer. At the start of 1941, he offended Labour's civil rights lobby by suppressing the Communist newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, for subverting the war effort – a ban that remained until the summer of 1942.⁶⁶

In practice, Morrison's approach to the Coalition differed little from Attlee's, but he would repeatedly champion more radical reforms in order to improve his position within the Labour Party. In autumn 1941, he got the NEC to agree to set up a reconstruction committee, with Shinwell as its chairman and Laski its secretary, which gave Laski an even better position from which to needle Attlee. It was a major defeat for the Labour leader. Down but not out, Attlee responded by cramming new members onto the committee to slow its operations as much as possible.⁶⁷

In December 1941, Laski drafted an 'interim report' from the

committee, a pamphlet entitled *The Old World and the New Society*. Rather than a detailed set of policy proposals, it told a version of the war that the party leaders could approve and on which the whole party could agree. The 'old world' of appeasement and inequality had resulted inevitably in war, but the conflict had shown the 'imperative to plan the national life and to subordinate private interests' so that resources could be mobilized 'fairly' for victory. Only these new means would be fit to manage the economic crisis that would inevitably accompany peace. Before the war finished, Britain must prepare to provide full employment, universal social services, and the 'fundamental economic and social transformation' of nationalization and 'planned production for community consumption'. Thus might its people achieve 'the full possibilities of democratic life'.⁶⁸

The Old World and the New Society demonstrated two of Labour's political advantages. First, providing it did not tear apart the Coalition, the tension between grumbling party members and ministers forced discussions that allowed Labour to affirm its 'responsible' status at the same time as playing to its radical roots. Secondly, for all these disagreements, Labour had a simple diagnosis that made sense of the last two decades. An old way of doing things had failed: only socialist planning could give the nation the reforms it deserved as recompense for its wartime sacrifices. ⁶⁹

Neither of these guaranteed success at the ballot box. Churchill needed Labour's support to mobilize industrial workers, but if the party forced its ministers to break the Coalition and the prime minister went to the country while the war was still on, voters would surely punish its unpatriotic irresponsibility. During the 1930s, moreover, the Conservatives had proved adept at colonizing the political middle ground. For all the uncertainties created by 1940, it seemed likely that something similar would happen again before any post-war contest. This was the counterpoint both to talk of Labour's inevitable rise and growing irritation from Tory backbenchers: a habituation to Conservative electoral dominance, Tory control of the political process, and an expectation from Labour Party members that their leaders ought to be making more of an opportunity that would last only as long as the war.

'Disgraced in the eyes of the world'

November 1941–February 1942

Shortly after three o'clock in the afternoon of Sunday, 15 February 1942, British officers hoisted two large flags at the top of the Cathay Building in the middle of Singapore. One was white. The other bore the rising sun of the Imperial Japanese Army. They were a signal to the Japanese troops besieging the city that the general officer commanding Malaya, Lieutenant General Arthur Percival, was ready to discuss surrender.

North of the city, the Sembawang naval base had been abandoned a fortnight before. Its massive oil dumps were alight, and acrid black clouds drifted across the city. Victims of air raids lay where they had fallen. British, Indian and Australian soldiers — stragglers from the fighting, desperate deserters and furious drunks — roamed the streets. Once the surrender flags were seen, civilian looters emerged, breaking into empty houses and shops and descending on the warehouse where the authorities stored the officially made opium on which the colony's finances had depended.

On the northwest outskirts, Percival's party crossed the front line and approached the Ford car-assembly plant which had become the headquarters of the Japanese commander, Lieutenant General Yamashita Tomoyuki. Images of the British officers, walking uphill towards the factory with a white flag and a Union Jack, made the first of a series of great propaganda photos for waiting Japanese reporters. Pictures of the humiliation of the British Empire flashed around the world. The ceasefire was set for half past eight that evening. News of Singapore's capitulation reached Japanese soldiers just as they were moving up to the front line for a final attack. Some sang or shouted in triumph. Others sank to the ground, too tired to raise a cheer.¹

In the space of eight weeks and at a cost of 9,600 killed or wounded, Japanese forces with a front-line strength of about 35,000 men had advanced 680 miles, conquered Britain's most valuable colony and

destroyed an army that outnumbered them in fighting soldiers about two-to-one. Of the approximately 139,000 Commonwealth and Empire personnel involved in the defence of Malaya, about 130,000 became prisoners, 100,000 at the fall of Singapore. Only 27 per cent of those killed or taken prisoner were British; 13 per cent were Australian, 11 per cent members of the Malayan armed forces and 49 per cent Indian. It was a very imperial calamity, and it was not done yet.²

The speed of the defeat was disorientating. Arriving in Singapore after weeks spent retreating, George Harrison, a British gunner, had expected a prolonged siege. The next thing he knew, his unit was being ordered to cease fire. 'We felt ruddy awful', Harrison would later recall, 'the chaps were still in pretty good fettle, and it just didn't seem true.'3 Muhammad Ismail Khan, an Indian officer with the 2nd Battalion of the Baluch Regiment, remembered his British commanding officer coming back from a staff conference on 15 February with tears running down his cheeks. ' "Well," he said, "the fate that is going to be ours is absolutely bloody. We will surrender today and God knows what will happen." '4 Once the firing stopped, he ordered everyone to put on any clean clothes they had and get their hair cut, so that, even in defeat, they should not lose their military bearing. That evening, Khan sat with a group of dejected British officers. Some of the younger ones got drunk and started singing rude songs. Khan just felt like he was going to cry.⁵ On the other side of the city, Adrian Curlewis, an Australian staff officer, listened to the firing die out:

All that we had trained for, all that we had endured in Malaya was finished. The thing that couldn't, *had* occurred. We were disgraced in the eyes of the world. I suppose all these thoughts went through my mind. I can only admit to remembering Relief, with a capital R. Perhaps our sense were numbed; there seemed to be nothing to say. Just a feeling of, 'Well, that's that.'6

The fall of Singapore was, according to Churchill, 'the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history', and it soon became both a paradigm of military incompetence and a synecdoche of imperial decline.⁷ To understand its immediate strategic and political significance, however, we need to place it within the wider context of victory and defeat that characterized the start of the newly expanded war.

THE GREMLIN AND THE OLD MAN OF THE SEA

While the Japanese were capturing Hong Kong and driving British and

Indian troops down the Malayan peninsula, Commonwealth forces had won a hard-fought battle in the desert. This was Operation 'Crusader', the forgotten victory of Britain's Mediterranean war. Even as British commanders struggled to reinforce their exhausted units, however, the German General Erwin Rommel was readying a counter-attack. The incomplete success of 'Crusader' would quickly be reversed.

Naval and air operations had determined the outcome of the battle. Since summer 1941, the British and Italian fleets in the Mediterranean had both been wary of a clash. Fuel shortages and earlier defeats had made Italian admirals cautious of committing their battleships to combat. Past British losses in destroyers and cruisers meant the Royal Navy's Mediterranean Fleet also lacked the strength to seek a decisive action. Instead, Admiral Andrew Cunningham, the Fleet's combative commander, escalated his offensive against Axis merchant shipping.⁸

The British had entered the war reluctant to risk censure by attacking neutral vessels. By the middle of 1941, however, the whole of the central Mediterranean had become a free-fire zone in which British units could engage any merchant ship on sight. The redeployment of German air units for 'Barbarossa' released the pressure on Malta. With stocks replenished, and aircraft squadrons and submarine flotillas reinforced, the island became an effective base for reconnaissance and strike operations. From June 1941, when British cryptologists broke 38M, the Italian machine cypher that gave details of convoy sailings, British commanders were forewarned about every major Italian merchant ship movement in the Mediterranean. At the end of October, a surface group of two cruisers and two destroyers, 'Force K', arrived in Malta. Alerted by decrypts and guided to its targets at night by radar sets aboard ship and on aircraft, its presence marked a further intensification of the shipping battle.

On 9 November 1941, Force K intercepted a well-guarded convoy of seven merchant ships, whose 32,000 tons of supplies included more than 17,000 tons of fuel and 389 vehicles. The British sank all of them. The Germans and Italians reduced the size of their convoys, but the British sank further tankers on 24 November and 1 December 1941. When the Italians switched to carrying fuel in light cruisers, they too were intercepted and set ablaze. In the first half of 1941, 94 per cent of the Axis material shipped to Libya had been delivered. In November, less than half of it arrived.⁹

Simultaneously, RAF Middle East (RAFME) fought to gain control of the desert skies. In May 1941, Churchill had removed the air commander in the Middle East, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore, and replaced him with his deputy, Arthur Tedder. Small and elfin-featured ('Gremlin' was one of his less-flattering nicknames), Tedder had almost become a history don before embarking on a career as a colonial official. The First World War pitched him into the Royal Flying Corps. Marked out as a coming man in the RAF during the 1930s, he had fallen out badly with Beaverbrook in 1940, but been saved thanks to support from Portal and the vice chief of the air staff, Sir Wilfrid Freeman.¹⁰

Clever, calculating and self-contained, Tedder took over a sound strategy with inadequate resources. Since the start of the war with Italy, RAF commanders in the Mediterranean had focused on winning local air superiority – concentrating their outnumbered planes on attacking enemy aircraft, airfields and supply lines rather than patrolling over the battlefield. Over the winter of 1940, this approach had worked well against the Italians in the Western Desert. During 1941, however, the high tempo of operations had worn squadrons down, reducing their effectiveness. Just as after the French campaign of 1940, the army had blamed the RAF's invisibility for defeat.¹¹

With Portal's encouragement, Tedder gave the generals what they wanted for the 'Battleaxe' offensive of June 1941 – a fighter umbrella over their forward units – in the certainty that it wouldn't work. When the offensive failed, the airmen avoided the blame, and won the point about who should be in charge. A July 1941 memorandum from Churchill on air support encapsulated the result:

Nevermore must the ground troops expect, as a matter of course, to be protected against the air by aircraft . . . the idea of keeping standing patrols of aircraft over moving columns should be abandoned. It is unsound to distribute aircraft in this way, and no air superiority will stand any large application of this mischievous practice.

In the six months to November 1941, aircraft poured into the Middle East, raising RAFME's strength from forty-four and a half to sixty-five and a half squadrons, a total of about eight hundred planes. 12 The reinforcements included long-range Beaufighter heavy fighters, but – to Tedder's frustration - not the most modern marks of Spitfire or fourengined heavy bombers that were allocated to squadrons in the UK. Instead, the Middle East had to make do with older Hurricanes and Wellingtons, supplemented with Baltimore bombers, reconnaissance aircraft and Tomahawk fighters from the USA. To make up for a lack of light bombers, fighters were fitted with bomb racks to allow them to attack ground targets. Such 'fighter-bombers' would become iconic Anglo-American weapons in the second half of the war.

In October 1941, US-manufactured aircraft made up 23 per cent of the RAF's operational strength in the Middle East. Having lobbied hard to get American planes, the British found the build quality and performance of US-made fighters worse than their own aircraft, and they were unwilling to use them to defend the UK. Some were despatched to the Soviets. The others were concentrated in the Middle East, where combat was generally at lower altitudes and they could outperform Italian machines, though not the latest German models. US-made light bombers, in contrast, were better than the available British equivalents, but frustratingly slow to arrive, in part because of diversions to the Soviet Union. In all cases, US aircraft deliveries were well behind the production plans agreed over the previous year.¹³

Despite RAFME receiving reinforcements from the UK and USA, the Axis air forces around the Mediterranean continued to outnumber those available to it. The Luftwaffe's Me-109F, which appeared in action in the Mediterranean from the summer of 1941, was superior to any of Tedder's fighters. German aircrew were, at this stage of the war, also often better trained and more experienced than their Commonwealth counterparts. Axis air strategy, however, was poorer, with about half of the available planes deployed in the Eastern Mediterranean to guard the Germans' southern flank, and others committed to a range of tasks from escorting convoys and attacking Tobruk to occasional raids on the Suez Canal. German and Italian planes were never concentrated on a sustained attempt to knock out RAFME via attacks on airfields or the supply routes into the Middle East. 14

RAFME meanwhile grew more able to sustain its increasing strength. With the help of veteran pilots posted from the UK, tactics and training improved. Air Vice Marshal Grahame Dawson, a Beaverbrook favourite, came out to improve the Takoradi air supply route and stayed as Tedder's chief maintenance officer. He overhauled repair and salvage units, building a network of thirty-three major depots across the Middle East. Expert mechanics from the UK oversaw teams of locally recruited workers, rebuilding engines and propellers and developing new technical innovations to meet the challenges of desert flying. This maintenance system gave the RAF a significant advantage over the Germans, who had too few depots and spare parts, and had to send badly damaged components back to Europe for repair. In the run up to 'Crusader', it helped to ensure that, though the RAF had fewer aircraft in the theatre than their opponents, they could put a much higher percentage of them into the air. ¹⁵

In the month before the ground battle began on 18 November 1941, Tedder concentrated on winning air superiority by day and attacking Axis lines of supply by night. With the German and Italian air forces dispersed on different tasks, RAF planes operated freely. Outnumbered Axis aircraft avoided combat, leaving Commonwealth squadrons free to attack their bases. When they chose to fight, the Me-109Fs inflicted heavy losses, but not enough to bring the RAF offensive to a halt. Then the weather intervened. As the date for the ground attack approached, heavy rains lashed the desert, turning the softer soil on which Axis airfields were built to mud. When 'Crusader' began, the RAF had the upper hand for the first time since the Germans had entered the campaign.

In the autumn of 1941, RAFME was reorganized, with the Western Desert Air Force (WDAF) fighting the tactical battles around the front line, No. 205 Group flying longer-range bombing missions and No. 201 Group concentrating on maritime aviation. To command the WDAF, Tedder appointed Air Vice Marshal Arthur 'Mary' Coningham, a strapping New Zealander (his nickname was a corruption of 'Maori') and famous long-distance aviator, who immediately collocated his headquarters with that of the Eighth Army in the desert. This was part of a plan to improve co-operation, which included the first British use in action of combined army—RAF control teams, attached to forward units, who could call in air support from the ground. It still took hours, however, for any request to be met. Aircrew often found it difficult to distinguish friend from foe in a fast-moving and confused desert battle. The British were still a long way from achieving a really effective combination of arms. ¹⁶

Unlike the army, the Royal Navy had since 1936 had its own air force – the Fleet Air Arm (FAA). Longmore and Cunningham had happily swapped RAF and FAA squadrons between duties over the Mediterranean and the Western Desert. When Tedder proved less willing to co-operate, Cunningham called for RAF planes to be put under the operational control of the navy – as had happened with Coastal Command at home. Tedder refused. Nicknaming Cunningham 'the Old Man of the Sea', he claimed the admiral would just tie down valuable aircraft. Though he created a new group allocated to naval duties, Tedder kept its RAF squadrons under his own control, and frequently directed them to missions over Libya rather than the Mediterranean.

Cunningham had a point. Locating and attacking targets at sea required specific equipment and practice. Tedder's desire to focus his effort, however, was also sound – unless the RAF helped the army capture the Cyrenaican airfields, land-based aircraft couldn't cover the convoys

required to supply Malta. Not for the last time, limited resources forced choices between options that were both important for the outcome of a campaign.¹⁹ Importantly, however, such tensions did not prevent the navy and the air force shaping the land battle. The Eighth Army would attack an opponent short on fuel and without control of the air. A lot would depend on how quickly the soldiers could capitalize.

'CRUSADER'

On 17 November 1941, just before the ground offensive was about to begin, the British launched a series of special forces raids. These daring, imaginative attempts to use elite soldiers to disrupt enemy resistance included 'Flipper', a commando assault on what was mistakenly believed to be Rommel's headquarters, and 'Squatter', an attack on Axis airfields (and the first operation by a newly formed unit called the Special Air Service (SAS)). Both were ignominious failures.

The SAS had been conceived as a unit that would arrive by parachute. Despite poor weather, its commander, Major David Sterling, was determined to go ahead with the night-time drop into the desert. It left most of his men injured or unable to locate their equipment. The operation was abandoned, with more than half the troops killed or captured for absolutely no result.²⁰ Fighting their way into what they thought was the German headquarters, meanwhile, both officers leading the commando raid were accidentally shot by their own men. One, Lieutenant Colonel Geoffrey Keyes, the son of the director of Combined Operations, died. Unable to re-board the submarine that had delivered them to the raid, almost all the rest were captured. In fact, Rommel's HQ had vacated the area long before – and he was in Rome at the time of the attack. Keyes was posthumously awarded the VC.²¹

A mismatch between ambition and ability also characterized the anxious plans laid by the Eighth Army's commander, Lieutenant General Alan Cunningham, younger brother of the admiral. Cunningham expected the 7th Armoured Division to take on the Axis tanks in a swirling, clanking fight in the open desert on his left, while Commonwealth infantry divisions attacked through the Axis defences on the Libyan–Egyptian frontier to his right. The British tanks would then swing round to link up with a breakout from the besieged enclave of Tobruk.²²

In practice, though the British had assembled a great mass of armour,

they proved incapable of using it to generate operational momentum. The opening engagement took the Germans and Italians by surprise, but the component brigades of 7th Armoured Division became separated. Hindered by inadequate communications (radios were notoriously unreliable in the desert), British commanders were unable to reconcentrate their forces. Axis troops made effective use of armoured vehicles and anti-tank guns, working in combination, to inflict heavy losses. The 2-pounder gun with which most British tanks were equipped lacked a high-explosive round, leaving crews ill-placed to knock out the anti-tank guns that caused most of their battle casualties. A high rate of mechanical failures resulted in many vehicles being abandoned. Four days after 'Crusader' began, the armoured division had been defeated in detail and dispersed. The infantry offensive, however, had gone better than expected, though here too the supporting tank brigades had suffered extensive losses to anti-tank guns and mines.

With reports suggesting he might be down to just 44 working tanks against 120 remaining Axis vehicles, Cunningham called for the commander of the Middle East theatre, General Claude Auchinleck, to visit him in person and proposed breaking off the offensive. Auchinleck, informed by signals decrypts about the poor state of Axis supplies, was appalled. Convinced his subordinate had suffered a nervous breakdown, he insisted 'Crusader' must continue, then took command himself, dismissed Cunningham and replaced him with his deputy chief of the general staff, Major General Neil Ritchie.

While the armoured brigades attempted to regroup, the weight of the Eighth Army's effort shifted to the infantry divisions in the north. Rather than complete the destruction of the British armour, Rommel led his tanks in a dash towards the Egyptian frontier, hoping to relieve the Axis troops there and drive the Eighth Army into retreat. Rommel's advance sparked panic, but it also gave the British time to recover and used up most of the Germans' remaining fuel without halting the push towards Tobruk. With the opportunity for manoeuvre exhausted, the battle descended into stalemate, into which the Eighth Army continued to feed reinforcements against the exhausted *Panzerarmee Afrika*. On 7 December, Rommel withdrew, abandoning the siege of Tobruk. Three days later, he was all but surrounded at Gazala. Ritchie, however, was unable to complete the encirclement, and the Axis forces escaped across Cyrenaica, hotly pursued by the RAF.²⁴

By the middle of January 1942, more than a third of the 119,000 Axis soldiers who had started the campaign had become casualties - most of

them taken prisoner after the isolated garrisons left behind at Bardia and Sollum surrendered to Commonwealth troops. Almost eight hundred Axis aircraft had been destroyed or captured. Among these were about fifty planes wrecked by the SAS, who were now being transported to their objectives by the reconnaissance vehicles of the Long Range Desert Group. Commonwealth losses included about 17,700 casualties, 300 aircraft and about 800 tanks – although by the middle of December more than 450 of these tanks had been recovered from the battlefield, and 230 repaired for a return to action. 27

The winter at least reduced the burning heat, but the desert remained a miserable place to fight. The sand, in a veteran's recollection, 'entered every nook and cranny including every human orifice', rubbing soldiers raw and wearing down machinery and weapons.²⁸ In one sample by censors of letters from Eighth Army soldiers, 80 per cent mentioned the author's thirst.²⁹ Just functioning in this environment was an effort of endurance. The additional burden of the most intense combat fell disproportionately on the minority of soldiers in the front line. Of the 118,000 Eighth Army soldiers who took part in 'Crusader', only about 7,000 were in rifle companies that closed with the enemy. Of them, about a third were killed, wounded or taken prisoner. As many as 40 per cent of tank crews involved in the offensive suffered casualties on more than one occasion, usually returning to battle in a new vehicle if their previous one had been knocked out.³⁰

Even as 'Crusader' began, the balance in the Mediterranean was starting to shift back towards the Axis powers. In September 1941, Hitler had ordered the German navy to intervene, and, by November, ten U-boats had passed through the Straits of Gibraltar in search of targets. On 13 November 1941, U-81 sank Force H's aircraft carrier, HMS Ark Royal. Twelve days later, as the capital ships of the Mediterranean Fleet sallied northwards to cover another attack on an Italian convoy, U-331 sank the battleship HMS Barham. Meanwhile Hitler had despatched Field Marshal Albert Kesselring to take charge as commander-in-chief south. 'Smiling Albert' couldn't sort out the confused mess of overlapping commands and divergent national interests that bedevilled the German-Italian alliance, but he was a much more serious strategist than Rommel. Straight away, he grasped the relationship between Malta and the supply route to North Africa. On 2 December Hitler took advantage of what he thought was a pause for bad weather on the Eastern Front to send a Luftwaffe air fleet from Russia to the Mediterranean.³¹ Commonwealth successes were

forcing an Axis reallocation of strength; during 1942, this would result in German air power being divided more or less equally between east and west, significantly reducing Axis combat effectiveness on the Eastern Front.³²

While the planes were in transit, and with Kesselring bashing heads together in Rome, the Italians used their battle fleet to push through a convoy to North Africa. On 17 December 1941, this coincided with a British attempt to ship fuel into Malta. The two escorts brushed against each other, with the Italian battleships and heavy cruisers forcing the British off. In the early hours of 19 December, as Force K rushed to intercept the Italian merchant ships lying offshore, the British ships ran into a minefield. A destroyer and a light cruiser were sunk, and another two damaged. Malta's surface strike force was now reduced to escorting ships in and out of Valletta, while an entire Axis supply convoy had arrived safely.³³

On the same night, Italian frogmen riding manned torpedoes breached the defences of Alexandria and laid charges on the battleships HMS *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant*. Rocked by explosions, both settled on the harbour floor. They would require months of repair. In the space of a month, all three of the Mediterranean Fleet's battleships had been put out of action, a loss more severe in its immediate effect than the better-known sinking of HMS *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, and which had severe implications for the force the British could deploy not just in the Mediterranean, but also through the Suez Canal to the Indian Ocean.³⁴

From the end of December, the Germans began a new air assault on Malta, resulting in serious damage to the island's airfields, fighters and reconnaissance aircraft. That allowed two more of their convoys to North Africa to arrive unmolested during January. As Rommel retreated through Libya he got closer to supply ports, while the Eighth Army's logistics elongated. The Germans rushed reinforcements and equipment, including more Me-109F fighters, across the Mediterranean. British commanders had anticipated that they would have time to gather their strength before launching a spring offensive into the northwest Libyan province of Tripolitania. Instead, their recovery slowed as the crisis in the Far East forced the redirection of men and aircraft to Burma and India. Axis forces rebuilt themselves much more quickly than anticipated, and used their new aircraft to seize back air superiority over the front line.

On 21 January 1942, a German counter-attack smashed aside the British 1st Armoured Division and broke out across Cyrenaica. The speed of the advance caught Commonwealth forces by surprise. On the 29th,

Rommel recaptured Benghazi. A week after that, the Eighth Army had been driven back to a defensive line just west of Tobruk, and the RAF had lost the crucial Cyrenaican airfields. Axis air attacks on Malta stepped up and Kesselring pushed forward plans for an airborne invasion. Shipping shortages had already wrecked Roosevelt and Churchill's plans for an early invasion of northwest Africa. Now, the Axis resurgence put Britain's Middle Eastern position back in peril – just as a new threat emerged thanks to the stunning victories won by Japan.

'SLIM JANNIE'

In the Middle East, Britain led a multinational coalition, including units of exiles from across Europe and from around the British Commonwealth and Empire. For 'Crusader', these included Poles and Czechs, Britons, Australians, Rhodesians, New Zealanders, Indians and South Africans. The last made up about a quarter of the ground and air units that took part in the offensive. This represented a significant triumph for the South African premier, Jan Christian Smuts, then one of the most celebrated statesmen of the Commonwealth.

Having led a commando unit against British forces during the Second Boer War, Smuts had spent the subsequent decades trying to unify South Africa's minority white communities. During the First World War, he had put down an Afrikaner rebellion, fought the Germans in East Africa and come to London to become part of Lloyd George's Imperial War Cabinet. Opposition to the British Empire remained central to Afrikaner nationalism and, in September 1939, South Africa's whites-only parliament had voted only narrowly in favour of joining the war. Smuts became prime minister and war leader: King George VI promoted him to field marshal in May 1941.³⁵

Smuts' South African critics saw him as an unscrupulous chancer. They called him 'Slim Jannie': Afrikaans for 'Slippery Jannie'. He certainly needed a lot of political skill to manage Afrikaner unwillingness to fight for the Empire with his own desire to play a full role in victory. Smuts appealed personally for volunteers, and pressed for South African forces to serve throughout Africa and even across the Mediterranean. Afrikaans-speakers made up approximately half the white South Africans who served during the war.³⁶

Churchill counted Smuts as a trusted advisor and the South African usually makes it into British histories of the war as a sidekick to the prime

minister. That underplays not only his influence but also his fame. Smuts' ascetic lifestyle left him fit and sharp as he entered his ninth decade, and his political longevity, bald head and van Dyke beard meant he had a strong public image. Senior British officers regarded him with awe. Tedder idolized the 'grand old man', whom he thought could deliver the 'spiritual' inspiration that victory would require.³⁷ He had the sort of status in 1940s Britain that would be enjoyed at the end of the twentieth century by another great South African, Nelson Mandela.³⁸

Smuts had his own faith system, 'holism', based on the principle that individuals and societies should develop their maximum potential to meet a moral purpose laid down by a higher power. He promoted the Commonwealth as a global community in which individual national identities could flourish and defend civilized values against the 'materialistic' ideologies of Communism and National Socialism. Racial discrimination was part of this cosmic order. Though more liberal than Afrikaner nationalists, Smuts opposed any improvement in the status of his country's Indian population, and rejected wartime appeals by the African National Congress for representation under the terms of the Atlantic Charter.³⁹ He did not wish to yield political rights to those he believed unequipped by nature to use them.⁴⁰ Despite the difficulties of recruiting, South Africa's defence forces remained racially segregated throughout the war, with only white troops allowed to bear arms in combat. Faced with a threat of Japanese invasion in spring 1942, Smuts considered removing the restriction, but backed down at the howls of Afrikaner outrage.⁴¹

Alongside Rhodesia (modern-day Zimbabwe), South Africa stood out for the extremity of its segregationist policies, but all the armed forces of the Commonwealth and Empire organized themselves in part around conceptions of racial difference, including in the Indian army, in which each infantry battalion comprised companies raised from different communities, and each brigade contained Indian, Gurkha and British battalions. Despite a very gradual pre-war policy of 'Indianizing' the officer corps, the majority of officers were white.⁴² Not least as a result, the war in the Middle East looked a lot like Smuts' vision of the Commonwealth: nationally distinct contingents, dominated by white men, working together to defend Western liberal values against the menace of totalitarianism. If this was a high moral purpose, it was also one built on assumptions of racial superiority and the continuation of colonial power.

'AS FAR REMOVED ... FROM THE CUT-TO-THE-BONE LIFE OF BRITAIN AS THE SUN IS FROM THE EARTH'

The Egyptian capital, Cairo, was the centre of the imperial war effort in the Middle East. Egypt had been nominally independent since 1922, but the city was dotted with the institutions of continuing British power: the embassy, with its immaculate green lawn on the bank of the Nile, the huge army barracks at the Mohammed Ali Citadel, and the exclusive luxury of the Turf and Gezira Clubs and the infamous Shepheard's Hotel, a temple to plentiful hedonism in the East. The war brought a rapid expansion of the British official presence, including General Headquarters Middle East, which occupied an entire barbed-wired block of the Garden City suburb. Staff officers proliferated. For those with money and rank, it was easy to keep up the privileges of pre-war colonial life. Passing through the city in the spring of 1942, the journalist James Lansdale Hodson noted:

Life in Cairo is too luxurious, enjoyment too plentiful . . . This is fine for officers and men back on leave from the desert; not so fine for the remainder, and the remainder are numerous. Cairo has its social round, GHQ has a good many pretty women, many officers have their wives or mistresses . . . The whole atmosphere is as far removed . . . from the cut-to-the-bone life of Britain as the sun is from the earth. 43

This was not the experience of most enlisted men. Over the winter of 1941, about a sixth of all Auchinleck's troops were stationed in and around Cairo, most in giant tented encampments. For the second time in a generation, a place where being British normally meant wealth and status was suddenly filled with working-class white men. Sunburnt, streaked with sweat, prohibited from the posh clubs and hotels even if they could afford them, the Other Ranks crowded the city's thoroughfares. Out of camp on a pass, men sought out the exotic and the familiar: camels, palm trees and pyramids, beer, egg and chips, a trip to the flicks, maybe a fuck and a fight. In January 1942, the army estimated that 45,000 men (about one in three of those stationed in the immediate environs) were visiting Cairo brothels every month. For many men, military service provided both sexual education and opportunity.⁴⁴

Local entrepreneurs soon adapted to the commercial opportunity. By Egyptian standards, all Commonwealth servicemen had plenty of money – even more if they were just back from the desert, where spending opportunities were strictly limited. As they spent their way through the cafés, cinemas and brothels, they were tempting targets for beggars and

hawkers. For Britons abroad, the pervasive poverty, lack of sanitation and threat of disease confirmed preconceptions about dirty, lazy, dark-skinned 'wogs' who would sell their own sisters and steal anything that wasn't nailed down, and could in turn be mocked, robbed or beaten up more or less with impunity. From 1942, Britons would complain a lot about the behaviour of American GIs in the UK. They should have tried spending a week as an Egyptian in Cairo.⁴⁵

None of it really alleviated the boredom. The seemingly endless cycle of military routine, the lack of leisure opportunities within camp, and the gap between officers and other ranks all made it hard even for ardent servicemen not to get 'browned off'. As usual, the army's solution was plenty of sport: football, hockey, cricket, athletics meets and boxing matches. Mechanics customized motorcycles for trials races across the desert. Well-meaning wives of senior officers organized concert parties and welfare clubs, where men could get a cup of tea, a bun, or writing paper for a letter home.

Servicemen were often desperate for news of their families. Whatever they were up to in Cairo brothels, they expected their wives and girlfriends to be waiting chastely at home. Fears of infidelity ran rife. Before the war it had taken just two days for a letter posted first class in London to reach Cairo. By the spring of 1941, however, mailbags redirected around the Cape took six to eight weeks to reach Egypt – if they arrived at all. In May 1941, a new 'Airgraph' had been introduced – a single-sheet letter that was photographed, reduced to a microfilm dot for air carriage, then blown back up for delivery. In the space of four days in the run up to Christmas 1941, about 781,500 Airgraph letters were sent from the Middle East to the UK, and about 490,000 Airgraph letters and 237,200 air postcards sent out the other way.

An absence of communication had threatened morale, but letters brought news of marriages in trouble, fractious in-laws, or wives and mothers struggling to get by and running into debt. In Britain, under the aegis of an enlightened adjutant-general, Sir Ronald Adam, concerns about military morale had already led to the introduction of new welfare and education schemes. These included discussions of current affairs and assistance with family problems. As yet, however, very few of these reforms had percolated to the Middle East. Information even about the wider war was sparse – and still sparser for those 'in the blue' up in the desert.⁴⁸

Since 1940, the BBC had attempted to provide some connection to home through the Empire Entertainment Unit – with musical request

programmes recorded in London and broadcast to the Mediterranean and Middle East from a transmitter at Gibraltar. Overseen by the brilliant producer Cecil Madden, these programmes included messages from families in the UK, but in order to appeal to servicemen they also foregrounded female announcers and singers, including Vera Lynn and Anne Shelton. Carefully presented as wholesome, kind 'radio girl friends', their repeated reassurances that everyone in Blighty was thinking of their menfolk and couldn't wait for them to return, went down very well with the troops. Yet these half-hour programmes, spread through the week, were often difficult to find because competing demands on transmitters led to frequent changes of wavelength. In contrast, Nazi propaganda broadcasts from Radio Belgrade came through loud and clear. The song that closed their nightly programme for German troops in North Africa, Lale Andersen's rendition of 'Lili Marleen', became a smash hit with soldiers on both sides of the front line. Compared to Vera and Anne, Lili was not only more exotic but also literally easier to pick up.⁴⁹

THE BOY AND THE BUFFALO

The disruptive impact of the war sparked a dramatic intervention in Egyptian politics. Before the war, British policy had been based on playing off the Wafd – the large nationalist party which dominated Egypt's elected assembly – against King Farouk, who appointed the Egyptian government, and his court. The British ambassador, Sir Miles Lampson, had known the king since he was a child and treated him like a petulant teenager. Farouk, who hated Lampson, did a lot to justify the ambassador's attitude. Lampson called him 'Boy' to his face. Farouk called Lampson 'the Buffalo' behind his back. Despite its nationalist stance, what the Wafd wanted was power, but it was already being outflanked by more radical groups, including the religious zealots of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Fascists of 'Young Egypt' and ultra-nationalists within the Egyptian officer corps.

Despite pressure from Britain, Egypt did not declare war on Germany or Italy. The king kept a coterie of Italian staff and sought to maintain friendly relations with Axis governments. In 1940, Lampson made Farouk remove Prime Minister Ali Maher, a court favourite who was seen to favour the Italians. The Wafd leader, and former prime minister, Nahas Pasha, had already made it clear that, for all his anti-British rhetoric, he would offer more active support to the Allied cause. Wary of destabilizing

a political system that the British had used to their advantage, however, Lampson did not force the king to install Nahas in Maher's stead.

During 1940–41, Britain's expanding war effort in the region had significant economic consequences for the whole Middle East. There were new jobs building camps, cleaning and cooking, and manufacturing and repairing equipment. Out of camp, troops spent money hand over fist. Quartermasters paid high prices for local labour, food and materials, all of it totted up to the rapidly accumulating sterling balances. Wartime trade disruption and the concentration of shipping on military deliveries meant civilian imports shrank. By 1941, the tonnage of Egyptian imports was a third of what it had been before the war, and the tonnage of vital imported nitrate fertilizer only a sixth. Grain yields fell, prices rose and food shortages started to appear. ⁵⁰

Much of Egypt's political elite got their money from overseas sales of the cotton crop. Since the war prevented them exporting, the British guaranteed to purchase the cotton instead. Certain of a good return, no one wanted to turn over cotton fields to grain production. When the British negotiated a lower than expected cotton price, the Egyptian government promised to make up the difference. Its opponents, including Nahas Pasha, blamed the British for putting the burden of the war on the Egyptian economy. The 1941 harvest failed across much of the Middle East, and inflation soared. By the end of the year, the cost of basic foodstuffs in Egypt had gone up 94 per cent since 1939. In price-controlled Britain, the official equivalent was 22 per cent. There were food riots in Cairo, Teheran, Beirut and Damascus. To avert disorder, government grain stores had to be released. The spectre of mass famine loomed.⁵¹

Simultaneously, the British faced a different crisis as the scale of military deliveries to the Middle East overwhelmed the transport infrastructure around the Red Sea. Supplies backed up on the docks. The military's habit of packing fully assembled vehicles made matters worse, but at least British logisticians, well aware of the need to maintain imports to the region, packed any available surrounding space with essential civilian supplies. They were outraged to find US vessels delivering Lend-Lease goods filled up with luxury items that American exporters were selling to rich consumers in the Middle East.⁵²

In June 1941, in an effort to address the mass of civil problems in the region, Churchill had appointed his old family friend Oliver Lyttelton to be minister resident in the Middle East. A wealthy City investor with a speculator's eye for the main chance, Lyttelton was also a good manager, happy to cut through bureaucracy to get results. Like many of the prime

minister's cronies, he was someone Churchill felt he could trust to get a job done. In December 1941, Lyttelton appointed a talented young Australian officer, Commander Robert Jackson, to run the Middle East Supply Centre (MESC), a body set up by the Ministry of War Transport to arrange more efficient use of shipping. As Jackson quickly realized, his control over imports gave him immense power to negotiate with politicians and senior officers, and to reorganize the region's economy.⁵³

In Egypt, the deteriorating domestic situation further undermined the authority of the government. Crisis struck at the start of 1942, after the British pressed the Egyptians to break off relations with Vichy France. With the Eighth Army retreating towards Gazala, and the mood of imperial crisis heightened by the collapse of Commonwealth resistance in Malaya and Burma, student demonstrators in Cairo yelled support for Farouk and Rommel. On 4 February, Lampson told the king to invite Nahas Pasha to form a government or face the consequences. With Eden and Lyttelton's support, he was ready to use force - much to the discomfort of the overstretched generals, who feared a general uprising. When Farouk prevaricated, British soldiers and armoured vehicles surrounded the Abdin Palace and broke down the gates. Lampson swept in with the paperwork for the abdication. Farouk backed down, and the ambassador allowed him to remain monarch. The episode was hushed up, but its details soon became widely known. Farouk was humiliated, but so was everyone else who opposed foreign intervention in Egyptian politics, including the army and the Muslim Brotherhood. Nahas Pasha formed a government and called an election, from which the other parties withdrew. The Wafd won an overwhelming majority, but lost popularity because it had been put in power by the British. Its politicians turned to more extreme nationalism to woo their supporters back. Lampson's belated intervention had bought some very short-term stability – but only at the cost of stirring up still greater opposition to British control.

'THE DRIVING CHARGE'

A comparison to the Middle East makes it plain why defeat in Malaya was inevitable. Though all the plans for defending the peninsula were based on the needs of the Royal Navy and the RAF, when the time came the British lacked the resources to fight a combined arms campaign. In December 1941, Japanese squadrons in the theatre numbered nearly six hundred aircraft, outnumbering their Commonwealth opponents more than three-to-

one. Flown by well-trained and experienced aircrew, the Japanese planes were technically superior to the tubby Brewster Buffalo fighters and lumbering Vickers Vildebeest torpedo-bombers allocated to RAF Far East. Nobody would have dreamed of deploying such planes in the Western Desert or from the UK, but they were now expected to hold the line against the Japanese. Without the complex early warning and fighter control systems that had benefitted Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain, the airmen were unable even to make the best use of their limited numbers. Within days, half the Commonwealth aircraft had been lost, in the air or on the ground, and the RAF withdrew to concentrate on the defence of Singapore. 55

Following the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, the Royal Navy abandoned its plans for assembling a fleet at Singapore. Instead, it planned to concentrate the largest possible force in the Indian Ocean to secure the key imperial shipping routes against Japanese incursion. While the British could continue to ship soldiers and supplies into Singapore, they could not control the surrounding seas. Percival wanted to hold the Japanese to the north, to keep his Singapore base free from air attack, but the lack of naval support meant that he also had to defend against an outflanking Japanese landing further south. ⁵⁶

Percival's army was, in any case, poorly prepared for war. Pre-war British intelligence reports correctly identified Japanese army weaknesses – including officers who paid too little attention to logistics and relied on shock tactics to intimidate their opponents – but over-estimated how easy these would be to exploit. This was partly because they racially stereotyped the Japanese as physically puny and technologically maladept, and partly because they misjudged their own competence. The Japanese had been unable completely to defeat the Chinese and had been beaten by the Soviets: they were not expected to make quick headway against well-disciplined and copiously equipped Commonwealth troops.⁵⁷

In fact, most of Percival's troops were inferior to the Chinese and Soviet units that had bested the Japanese. With the exception of some senior officers, most lacked combat experience. The Indian units had been repeatedly 'milked' of their best men to provide reinforcements for the Middle East. They had no armoured units, and many of the Indian soldiers had never seen, let alone practised fighting with, a tank. Most soldiers spent the months before December 1941 building fortifications rather than training; when they did get the chance to practise, they were drilled for the highly structured infantry and artillery battles that had characterized the Western Front in 1917. This training was poorly suited to the tactical

conditions that prevailed in northern Malaya, where troops were less densely concentrated and the jungle terrain encouraged outflanking and infiltration. In the campaign that followed, Indian and British troops often fought hard from behind prepared defences. As soon as the front line broke down, however, they were thrown into disarray.⁵⁸

Percival was scapegoated for the defeat, but training was one of the things that had improved after he took command. Like the commander-inchief Far East at the start of the conflict, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, Percival had a good track record as an administrator and organizer. He had impressed Dill with his talents as an instructor. Granted more time, he would have prepared a good army for someone else to lead. He lacked, however, that precious ability to read a developing battle and work out what his opponent was going to do next. He was also undermined by constant bickering from his subordinates, Lieutenant General Sir Lewis 'Piggy' Heath (III Indian Corps) and Major General Gordon Bennett (8th Australian Division). Heath, who had more recent combat experience against the Italians, thought he should have been in Percival's place; Bennett thought that the Australians had to teach everyone else in the Empire how to make war.⁵⁹

Arriving in Malaya in summer 1941, Percival had found the mood strangely unreal. British officials and settlers were keen to do their bit, but the conflict in Europe seemed far away and military preparations lacked urgency. Determined to maximize the production of tin and rubber for the war effort, the authorities were terrified of showing weakness or disturbing the balance between Malay, Indian and Chinese communities on which colonial rule relied. Layers of bureaucracy and politics impeded speedy action. To try to address the problem, Churchill appointed his friend Alfred Duff Cooper minister resident in the Far East. Duff Cooper too complained about lethargy, but the resentment he aroused from old colonial hands only added to the problems of preparing Malaya for total war.⁶⁰

Malayan society was built on class and ethnic divisions, with wealthy white settlers, Malayan monarchs and Straits Chinese businessmen at the top and hundreds of thousands of indentured Indian and Chinese labourers at the bottom. British by birth, the Straits Chinese sent their children to be educated in the UK and celebrated their loyalty to the British king. Singapore, meanwhile, was an international entrepôt, where narcocapitalism and ruthless raw material extraction had built a successful, brightly lit, modern multi-ethnic city, whose consumerist attractions distracted from the gap separating the elite from everyone else.

As in the more old-world setting of Cairo, this world had already been profoundly destabilized by a global war. Since the late 1930s, Chinese Nationalists had sought support for the fight against Japan. Japanese businessmen doubled as spies. Traditional categories of race and class were undermined by the influx of tens of thousands of white servicemen from the UK and Australia. Indian officers and other ranks were shocked by the feudal conditions endured by their compatriots and demoralized by the fierceness of the Malayan colour bar. As the danger of a Japanese attack grew, official anxieties about the fragility of colonial control precluded any effective co-operation with the Chinese Nationalists or Communists, or the organization within the non-white population of the sort of stay-behind parties or 'scorched earth' destruction that had become de rigueur in 1940 in the UK.⁶¹

The pace of the Japanese advance pushed open existing fractures. Forced rapidly to abandon the Straits Settlement of Penang, the British arranged for the evacuation of European civilians, but left the Asian inhabitants to their fate. As rumours of the retreat spread, Duff Cooper gave a radio broadcast asserting that 'everyone' had been got out. Belatedly, the colonial authorities started to insist that any official evacuation must be racially blind. That meant there was none at all. While younger European men volunteered with the defence forces, however, Malaya's white settlers were often able to get their families out on their own, to a warm welcome elsewhere in the Empire. The same was not true of the non-white communities. Of the 10,000 women and children evacuated from Malaya before the fall of Singapore, 7,174 were European, 2,305 Indian and just 1,250 Chinese.⁶²

What really turned the defeat into the disaster, however, was simply the aggressive superiority of the 25th Japanese Army. Though no more practised in jungle fighting than most Commonwealth troops, Japanese soldiers were the products of a brutally intense training regime, and many had extensive combat experience in China. They were supported by 200 light tanks, and an excellent intelligence network. In contrast to the wishful thinking that characterized British planning, Yamashita's staff took a calculated risk, abandoning a methodical advance for a 'driving charge' that put the maintenance of momentum above the certainty of resupply. Knocked off balance by the first assault, the British never recovered their footing. This was true tactically, as the Japanese bundled the defenders out of one position after another, but also strategically, with British attempts to erect a scratch defence repeatedly caught out by the pace of the Japanese charge.⁶³

Churchill and the chiefs had hoped to complete operations in North Africa before moving reinforcements to the Far East. On 12 December 1941, Japanese successes forced a change in priorities. Army and air force units were despatched to Malaya instead; among these were the 18th British Infantry Division, then on its way to Egypt, more than two hundred more modern fighters and bombers from the Middle East, and two infantry brigades from India. All of them arrived in the second half of January, but the combat power of these reinforcements was less impressive than their numbers might suggest. The troops were inexperienced, and they needed time to organize and acclimatize. Much hope was placed in the ability of Hurricane fighters to turn the tide in the air but, thrown into action piecemeal against Japanese aircraft that already enjoyed air superiority, they were quickly shot down or destroyed on the ground.⁶⁴

At the end of December 1941, the revision of naval plans opened the possibility of a strategic overhaul. Churchill favoured a speedy retreat to Johore. This would yield the central Malayan airfields to the Japanese and render the Singapore naval base unusable, but would at least allow Commonwealth troops to regroup and concentrate their strength ahead of the Japanese charge. The chief of the general staff, General Brooke, had understood an earlier request from Percival and Brooke-Popham for confirmation that they must keep the base open as a statement of conviction rather than a request for guidance. He persuaded the prime minister to trust the men on the spot. They kept doing what they thought London wanted. It probably wasn't a missed opportunity. As Percival well knew, neither in Johore nor on Singapore had fortifications been prepared capable of withstanding a long siege. Once the Japanese got air superiority over the port, he would be cut off from reinforcements and supplies. 65

'THE ALMOST NAKED ISLAND'

Early in the morning of 7 January 1942, a Japanese attack smashed into the 11th Indian Infantry Division's positions on the River Slim. A flurry of mortar bombs preceded a charge by about thirty Japanese tanks, accompanied by infantry and engineers. Exhausted after weeks of retreat, the defenders were unprepared for the pace and violence of the assault. Breaking through roadblocks, or circling round them on forest tracks, the Japanese tanks plunged deep into their position, shooting up battalions of infantry marching to the front, limbered guns and ambulance units. Indian, Gurkha and British soldiers scattered into the surrounding rubber

plantations. Within a few hours, it was all over. Having lost control of the main road, British commanders had to order a retreat through the jungle. Heavy weapons and vehicles were abandoned, and more than 3,000 lost and terrified troops left behind to be captured by the Japanese.⁶⁶

The next day, Field Marshal Wavell, newly appointed ABDA commander, arrived in Singapore. He travelled north to visit the front line. One look at the shattered officers and men convinced him that the battle for central Malaya and its airfields was indeed lost, and he ordered an immediate retreat. Kuala Lumpur fell without a fight on 11 January 1942. The Japanese also captured crucial airfields, bringing their aircraft in range of Singapore, and stockpiles of supplies (which they called 'Churchill rations') with which to sustain their advance. As Commonwealth troops raced southwards, the BBC described the withdrawal, to hoots of derision from the press, as 'one of the most magnificent transport feats in the history of this campaign'. ⁶⁷

A crisis had arisen in Commonwealth relations. The Australian government was deeply worried that they would be invaded by the Japanese. Churchill and the chiefs of staff were convinced this was a logistical impossibility, which made it easy for them to promise that, in the event of such an invasion, they would abandon the Middle East and rush everything they could to the Dominion's aid. As the year ended, Australia's newly elected Labour government went public with its anxieties. On 27 December 1941, the premier, John Curtin, gave a widely reported speech in which he declared that his country would look to America for help, 'free of any pangs as to our traditional ties or kinship with the United Kingdom'. 68 The challenge to British capacity made it even harder to act as if Singapore was doomed. Instead, on 6 January 1942 the British proposed withdrawing two veteran Australian divisions from the Middle East and sending them to Malaya with a British tank brigade. These were serious reinforcements, but they could not arrive before the end of February 1942.⁶⁹

In ordering the retreat to Johore, Wavell hoped to win time to get these new troops ashore and have them lead a counter-offensive against the over-extended Japanese. He had lost faith in Percival, so he handed control of the defensive battle around the Muar river to Bennett, who lacked both the ability and the trained staff to command such a crucial action. Percival, convinced that Wavell's plan was flawed, was already preparing to withdraw. A week after the Slim river debacle, the Japanese attacked Bennett's 8th Australian Division. The Australians fought as hard as anyone in Malaya, but Commonwealth dispositions were poor. By 20

January 1942, the defences had disintegrated. The survivors of Malaya Command fell back in haste on Singapore, the last British troops crossing the causeway onto the island on the 31st.

Just as the fighting started at the Muar river, Churchill checked with Wavell that everything was ready for a long siege of Singapore. On 19 January 1942, he received a reply from the ABDA commander explaining that there were effectively no defences on the island's northern shore. Since military planning in Malaya had for years been based on ensuring that Singapore would not be subjected to a close siege, this should not have come as a surprise. To Churchill, it was a revelation. Suddenly, he later wrote, 'the hideous spectacle' was revealed, not the fortifications of his imagination, but 'the almost naked island and . . . the wearied, if not exhausted, troops retreating upon it'. Furious, he made sure that he got the fact that no one had corrected his error down on paper as quickly as possible. He wasn't going to bear the blame alone for what was going to happen to Singapore. ⁷⁰

The prime minister's hope that the 'fortress' would hold out for months now looked very mistaken. Instead, he began to insist on a fight to the finish in the ruins of the city, and started to reshuffle his government to maintain his grip on power. With Singapore certain to fall, Wavell redirected the Australian divisions about to leave the Middle East to the Dutch East Indies. Neither he, nor the chiefs of staff, did anything to halt the arrival of another 25,000 British, Indian and Australian reinforcements already en route to Singapore. Reports that the British might be considering a wholesale evacuation had led to a combative telegram from the Australian government, insisting that any withdrawal from 'this central fortress in the system of the Empire' would 'be regarded here and elsewhere as an inexcusable betrayal'. Churchill plainly regarded this message as a pretty inexcusable betrayal in itself. London could not, however, be seen publicly to have forsaken Singapore. The servicemen sailing there would pay the price. The servicemen sailing there would pay the price.

On 8 February 1942, the Japanese launched their assault across the Johore Strait. Quickly ashore, they pushed towards Singapore, capturing its vital reservoirs. Churchill talked of a blaze of bloody glory. He told Wavell to have 'no thought of saving the troops or sparing the population . . . The honour of the British Empire and the British Army . . . the whole reputation of our country and our race is at stake.' Wavell passed on the instructions as an order of the day. Appeals to racial pride did little to convince British and Australian soldiers, let alone their Indian or Malayan comrades, to sell their lives in a forlorn hope. 'Wavell made a helluva

speech', as one British gunner noted, 'last round, last man stuff. He wants to try it some time.' A last ditch stand might have taxed Yamashita's exhausted troops to the limit, and perhaps forced him to call for reinforcements, but it wouldn't have affected the outcome of the campaign. For all his bluster, Churchill allowed Brooke to convince him that there was no point ordering a fight to the death. Just as Percival accepted that he would have to give up anyway, he received Wavell's authorization to surrender.

'WE FELT AS IF THAT WAS THE END OF THE WORLD'

A futile battle in the centre of Singapore was avoided, but the city's ordeal was not yet over. On 16–17 February, British and Australian prisoners of war and European civilians were paraded, past stunned crowds, to the barracks at Changi and an internment camp on Joo Chiat Road. For the marchers, it marked the start of more than three years of boredom, brutality and deprivation as prisoners of the Japanese. Then the Japanese staged a victory parade. Watching the march past, Elizabeth Choy, a Chinese schoolteacher, was filled with dread: 'We felt as if that was the end of the world', she would later recall. 'We didn't know what to do.'⁷⁵

Her fears were well-justified. No sooner was the victory march completed than the screenings, arrests and executions began. The Japanese blamed the 'Overseas Chinese' for sustaining the Nationalist government in China. They had been shocked by the desperate resistance of Chinese volunteers, belatedly armed by the British, during the final fighting in Singapore. Yamashita decided to purge the city of any potential insurgent threat before his troops moved on. The unofficial Japanese wartime estimate was that something close to 25,000 people were killed during this *sook ching* ('purification by elimination'). Singapore's Chinese community thought the number might be as high as 50,000.⁷⁶

On 17 February the Indian prisoners of war, separated from their British officers, were marched to the sports stadium at Farrer Park. Since the Japanese insisted that the British should not retain command of Indian prisoners, a British officer, Lieutenant Colonel Patrick Hunt, formally transferred responsibility for their welfare to their captors. He gave a short speech announcing the handover before walking out. For some of his audience, it looked less like an administrative duty than the British

rendering up men who had given them their loyalty, 'like cattle', to the Japanese. The prisoners were addressed by a Japanese intelligence officer, Major Fujiwara Iwaichi, who declared that the British were being driven out of Asia. The Japanese would help them form a new Indian National Army (INA), led by a Sikh officer called Mohan Singh, to fight for independence. Singh promised that the soldiers would march to India's deliverance, and called on them all to join the INA.⁷⁷

Some cheered. Others cried. Indian soldiers remained suspicious of the Japanese and Mohan Singh, and only a few enlisted straight away. The rest were shepherded into separate camps and mistreated unless they agreed to volunteer, while Mohan Singh successfully courted the Indian community in Malaya. Hopeful of improved conditions and the chance to go home, by the summer of 1942 40,000 out of the 55,000 Indian servicemen captured in Malaya had signed up to serve in the INA. Many of the minority who refused were shipped to Papua New Guinea as forced labourers. The emaciated survivors would be some of the first Commonwealth prisoners liberated from the Japanese. Starving, sick and with their uniforms in rags, almost as soon as they were freed they started acting out the rituals of military routine: mounting guard with bamboo sticks and picking out their unit insignia in rocks outside their huts. Like those who joined the Indian National Army, they remained, above all, soldiers. The supplies of t

By the time Percival surrendered, ABDA was already unravelling. The Japanese had already forced the British out of Sarawak, captured Moulmein in Burma and conquered most of the Philippines, where US-Filipino forces under General Douglas MacArthur withdrew onto the Bataan peninsula and the fortified island of Corregidor. On 16 February, the Japanese invaded Sumatra, and Java two weeks later, destroying a combined Dutch-British-Australian-American fleet at the Battle of the Java Sea. On 9 March, the garrison of the Dutch East Indies surrendered. The previous day, the British had evacuated Rangoon. In the space of three months, a revolutionary upheaval had swept through Southeast Asia. As Churchill was acutely aware, the nature of the Malayan defeat diminished British national power and status. Competent, mobilized military power was vital to Britain's claim to a deciding role in Allied strategy, but the nature of the defeat confirmed American prejudices. Decades of imperial mismanagement had led to disaster in Singapore. 81

The loss of the 'Malay Barrier' turned the Indian Ocean into a theatre of combat. The British, Indian and African experience of the war against Japan bifurcated from that of Australia. Australian personnel continued to serve in the West – for a while in North Africa, and until the end of the

war in the RAF – but the country's main effort now focused northwards, under US command, against the Japanese advance through the islands of the southwest Pacific. To the west, the threat of Japanese naval raiding or invasion was suddenly felt everywhere from South Africa and the Persian Gulf to Calcutta and Ceylon. Civilian trade around the great imperial arc was badly disrupted. The simultaneous reverses in the Western Desert and the renewal of the air threat to Malta left the British attempting to manage a vast and dangerous balancing act as they tried to protect the Indian Ocean supply lines, keep open the vital air bridge through Malta to the Middle East and India, and guard against a Japanese advance across the Bay of Bengal. Forced to prioritize, the British began to move the bulk of the Royal Navy's available capital ships to the Indian Ocean, rather than using them to push supplies through to Malta, and relied on a ground offensive and aircraft reinforcements to try to rescue their position in the Mediterranean.⁸²

In Singapore, the security and prosperity from which British rule derived legitimacy went up in flames. For Asians caught up in this maelstrom, it was a moment of possibility, confusion and danger. In the process, they established new means of survival, including their own tales of colonial collapse. Interviewed years later, Robert Chong, an air-raid warden in Singapore before the occupation, set forth what had changed. Before 1942, the British 'were more or less the overlords or the masters'. 'Common talk after the surrender', however, 'was ang mor peng buay sio pak (British soldiers don't know how to fight).'83 The British might return, but their position would never fully recover. To that extent, Churchill's talk of reputation and honour was right, and he knew it. According to his doctor, even though the prime minister's 'mind had been gradually prepared for its fall', he was 'stunned' by Singapore's surrender: 'He felt it was a disgrace. It left a scar on his mind. One evening, months later, when he was sitting in his bathroom enveloped in a towel, he stopped drying himself and gloomily surveyed the floor: "I cannot get over Singapore," he said sadly.'84

'DRUMROLL'

Even while 'Crusader' was unravelling and the defence of Malaya disintegrating, the British were struck by a third defeat, this time entirely beyond their control, as the Germans began a new submarine offensive in the western Atlantic. Beginning with an operation codenamed 'Drum-roll', it would take a terrible, and almost wholly avoidable, toll of Allied shipping during the first half of 1942.

In the final months of 1941, it had looked as if the British had the German blockade under control. Improved convoying, stronger escorts and the re-routing made possible by the breaking of the Enigma encryption settings used by U-boat fleets had all made the German submarines much less productive, forcing them to spend more time at sea looking unsuccessfully for ships and less time attacking. Coastal Command had started the war very poorly equipped, but was now in the midst of a crash programme of improvements and had provided enough short-range air cover to force the U-boats away from the British coast. Though still short of planes, particularly long-range aircraft, and hampered by inadequate use of air-to-surface radar, Coastal Command had 'killed' its first submarines in August 1941. The following month, the first British escort carrier – HMS *Audacity*, a captured and converted German liner – accompanied her first convoy. For the next four months, Audacity's planes protected convoys on the Gibraltar run from submarine and air attack, particularly during the portion of the voyage that was out of range of British landbased aircraft. During December 1941, an escort including Audacity sank five U-boats and shot down two Focke-Wulf Condor bombers as they tried to attack Convoy HG76, for the loss of two merchant ships and the carrier herself, so dangerous that she had become a primary target for the German submarines.

In September 1941, Hitler, seeing the decline in the U-boats' effectiveness in the Atlantic, had ordered submarines into Mediterranean. The combination of tides and defences through the Straits of Gibraltar meant that this was a one-way trip. Following the sinking of the Bismarck in May 1941, Hitler also refused to countenance another foray into the Atlantic by German capital ships, though the British remained very wary of another such sortie and the havoc it might wreak on the convoy cycle. At the end of the year, Hitler ordered the battleships Scharnhorst and Gneisenau and the heavy cruiser Prinz Eugen to return to Germany from the French port of Brest, where they had been holed up, under bombardment from the RAF, since their Atlantic cruises in the spring. Thence they would travel north to join Germany's newest battleship, Tirpitz, threatening the Arctic convoys and defending Norway against what Hitler had decided was an imminent British invasion. (Churchill, another man who liked to make big plans on small maps, had in fact floated the prospect of an amphibious operation against Norway as a means to secure the sea route to the Soviet Union: a cigar-dream firmly opposed by General Brooke.)

With the US Navy and the American aviation and shipbuilding industries all set to make a rising contribution during 1942, the British seemed a long way from the crisis that had threatened to engulf them over the previous winter. Pearl Harbor, however, dramatically widened the field of battle in the Atlantic, and created new opportunities for the German navy. The eastern seaboard of North America was a vital maritime route, busy with merchant ships transporting supplies for US war industries and travelling to and from the forming-up point for transatlantic convoys off Halifax, Nova Scotia. Raw materials and refined oil from the Caribbean passed right the way up the coast, before heading across the ocean to the UK. Previously, German submariners had been forbidden from operating in US coastal waters in case they provided a pretext for American belligerence. There, merchant ships sailed independently rather than in convoy, with minimal protection from air or sea patrols.

On the day that Hitler declared war on the United States, Admiral Karl Dönitz, the head of the Kriegsmarine, immediately despatched his few long-range U-boats to the far side of the Atlantic. Arriving from the middle of January and operating between the Gulf of St Lawrence and Cape Hatteras in North Carolina, they found abundant targets and minimal risks.

Among the early casualties was the British merchantman SS *Dayrose*, struck by a torpedo from U-552 as it steamed south from Newfoundland to Nova Scotia just before twenty to two in the morning on 15 January 1942. *Dayrose*'s chief officer, Edgar Bushen, described what happened next:

We lowered the port jolly boat but the confused sea turned it over and several men were drowned. There were about 18 men amidships when the boat turned over . . . We cleared everybody in sight off the fore part of the ship, but Captain Newman would not leave . . . Neither would the Second Wireless Operator leave as he refused to jump into the water, and realising that there was no time to argue with him, I jumped overboard and decided to swim to one of the rafts. I scrambled aboard and found that three men had already reached it. Forty minutes after the ship sank our raft turned over and we all managed to struggle back to it. About an hour later the raft turned over again and this time we lost three of them. The rest of us managed to scramble back. It was bitterly cold . . . One of the men was very weak and ill; I tried to keep him warm with my coat but was unsuccessful. The raft again turned over and we lost this man as he was too weak to get back. Another of the men died soon after daylight and shortly afterwards yet another. There now remained only two men alive — an Ordinary Seaman and myself. One of the bodies slipped off, but the other remained jammed on the raft. We had this man's body with us throughout the day.

After twenty hours on the raft, Bushen and the other remaining seaman, Kenneth Holmes, both badly frost-bitten, were rescued by the destroyer USS *Stack*. Bushen was subsequently awarded the MBE for his bravery. Ten months later he was killed when his new ship, the *Empire Sky*, was torpedoed off Spitzbergen.⁸⁶

In the first fortnight of 'Drumroll' alone, thirteen merchant ships, totalling more than 100,000 tons, were sunk. Despite Hitler's insistence on deploying U-boats to defend Norway, Dönitz reinforced the offensive. During February 1942, the Germans extended their field of operations southwards, to Trinidad and Aruba in the Caribbean, torpedoing ships and shelling oil refineries. Unusually for this period, they also hit the transatlantic convoy ON67, sinking eight ships including six oil tankers. Over the course of the month, the submarines sank seventy-three ships in the North Atlantic, the highest monthly total of the war thus far. Of the ninety merchant ships sunk or severely damaged by U-boats everywhere in the world during March 1942, seventy were merchantmen travelling unescorted somewhere between the St Lawrence gulf and the southern edge of the Caribbean. More than half the merchant vessels sunk since the start of 1942 had been oil tankers. ⁸⁷

If such a one-sided contest can be called a battle, this was a multinational one, not only in its geographic span but also in the origin of the ships and crews involved. Of the ships lost in the western Atlantic during March 1942, thirty-one were registered in the United States, seven in Norway, four in Panama, and seventeen from the UK and Commonwealth. Reliant as they often were on the labour of merchant seamen of Indian, African, West Indian and Chinese origin, these British ships were a microcosm of the Empire. The first ship torpedoed during 'Drumroll', for example, the British-registered *Cyclops*, had aboard seventy-eight Chinese sailor-passengers, on their way to Halifax to crew up other British ships. Forty-six of them, along with forty-one of the crew, perished after the ship was hit by two torpedoes from U-123.

South of Canadian waters, the whole of the western Atlantic was under the command of the US Navy. Despite the havoc being wreaked on shipping, it did not immediately introduce a system of convoys. The rationale was that the Americans lacked sufficient escort vessels: in such predictably congested shipping lanes, they did not wish to group ships together without protection against the submarines. The reason that the Americans did not have escorts in the Atlantic was that the commander of the US Navy, Admiral Ernest King, had decided to keep them in the Pacific – where they had been moved to guard against a Japanese submarine campaign that never developed – rather than move back any to retrieve the situation in the Atlantic, which had been given priority over all

other theatres at the Washington Conference in December 1941.90

It was a characteristic act by King, who played a greater role than any other single Allied military commander in shaping the wars against Germany and Japan. 91 King's well-deserved reputation for meanness and aggression had encouraged Roosevelt, after the humiliation of Pearl Harbor, to make him both chief of naval operations and commander-inchief of the US Navy. The dual post gave King a very powerful position among the combined chiefs, not only responsible for formulating strategy but also in direct command of every US ship on the planet. Early 1942 saw him engaged in a particularly fierce round of a career-long fight to secure more resources for the US Navy, determined that his own service should restore its pride and status in the one campaign that was indubitably its own - across the Pacific against Japan. Never fully accepting the 'Germany First' approach agreed at Washington, King concentrated the overwhelming bulk of the US Navy in the Pacific, pressed Roosevelt to send troops and aircraft to defend Australia, and pushed for a more aggressive strategy than just holding the Japanese advance.

Though famously Anglophobic, King favoured even foreign admirals over American generals. He would establish a fairly good relationship with Dudley Pound. Having previously commanded the US Atlantic Fleet, he understood both anti-submarine tactics and why convoys worked. He decided, however, that if the US Navy was to manage the problem of the U-boats, it should do so through an expansion of its escort fleet rather than by any diminution of resources in the Pacific. To that end, he sought to avoid responsibility for the crisis off the east coast, getting Roosevelt to tell Churchill that RAF Bomber Command ought to be making more effort to bomb the submarines in French bases. 92

British strategists were frustrated by the Americans' apparent inability to learn from their experience. Damage to the US oil and munitions industries had a direct effect on the UK, and ships under British control that had been safely escorted across the Atlantic were being sunk after they reached the far shore. The loss of oil tankers was particularly serious. During the spring of 1942, to try to encourage the introduction of convoying, the British sent escort vessels and Coastal Command aircraft to reinforce the Americans on the east coast and asked Harry Hopkins to press the issue with Roosevelt. Limited convoys were introduced in May, but only in July did the president finally bow to complaints from London and Washington and order King to implement a comprehensive system between the Caribbean and Canada. As soon as he did so, the number of ships sunk in the western Atlantic plummeted.⁹³ The disruption of oil and

bauxite supplies, however, had already contributed to a major shortfall in US munitions output that would force a significant reconsideration of US production plans.⁹⁴

Robbed of their easy targets, the submarines headed back to the North Atlantic to renew their assault on the oceanic convoys. In September 1941, unbeknown to the British, the Germans had broken their convoy cipher. And in February 1942, when the Germans increased the complexity of the Enigma encryption in use aboard their submarines, the British lost their ability to read U-boat transmissions. The intelligence advantage now lay with the Kriegsmarine.

SHIPMATES ASHORE

The scale and duration of the destruction of shipping off the American east coast in the first half of 1942 made this one of the greatest Allied disasters of the war. In total, more than 500 ships, totalling more than 2.8 million deadweight tons, were sunk in the western Atlantic between January and June. In the same period, the Allies lost 152 tankers, totalling more than 1.1 million tons, to Axis submarines: the equivalent of 12 per cent of all their tanker tonnage at the start of 1942.

The slaughter in the western Atlantic was only one source of the attrition wearing away at the British merchant fleet. U-boats struck too off West Africa and as the Arctic convoys headed towards the USSR. In the Mediterranean, merchantmen heading for Malta and Tobruk were bombed, shot at and torpedoed. In the Far East, ships were caught up in the onrushing Japanese advance. During the first three months of 1942 alone, the British lost 757,000 gross weight tons of shipping, compared to US losses of 296,000 gross weight tons. This was about 4 per cent of their 1939 merchant fleet in each case. 97 Previous severe shipping losses had been made up by a combination of new construction in British yards, which made on average more than a million gross weight tons of new shipping a year throughout the war, and the one-off windfall of the merchant fleets of Occupied Europe. During 1941, the British started to benefit both from the wartime expansion of merchant shipbuilding in Canada, and from the fulfilment of orders for simple, quickly built ships placed with American companies – along with the investment required to build new shipyards – before the implementation of Lend-Lease. These 'Ocean' class ships became the basis for the 'Liberty' ships that the United States pumped out during the war. During the first quarter of 1942,

however, British-controlled losses outstripped the supply of new ships by over 200,000 tons. 98

Entailing as it did the loss of future capacity as well as current cargo, this was in itself a significant decline. It coincided, moreover, with a dramatic increase in short-notice military shipping requirements as the Allies struggled to catch up with the pace of the expanding war. Throughout the conflict, the burdens of moving and supplying far-flung armed forces had a more significant effect on shipping availability than did German attacks from above or below the water. Between December 1941 and March 1942, the quantity of shipping allocated to the armed services increased by almost a million deadweight tons.⁹⁹ Some of these ships could carry imports back to the UK from the Indian Ocean area after they had dropped off servicemen and equipment, but the round trip via the Cape reduced their efficiency simply by taking them off the much quicker passage back and forth across the Atlantic. With loading and waiting for convoys, the average round trip from the UK to North America took two months and twenty days; that from the UK to the Indian Ocean area, seven and a half months. 100 These rhythms dominated planning and the pace of

Simultaneously, the combination of the expansion of the military effort in the Far East and the need to make up for production and supplies lost to the Japanese imposed an additional burden. In the first half of 1942, the British needed two-thirds more tanker capacity to meet the needs of the remaining eastern empire than they had done on average over the previous year. And thanks to the destruction done in the Caribbean and Atlantic, this had to be met from a smaller Allied tanker fleet. ¹⁰¹

The combination of sinkings and the reallocation of shipping meant a sudden and rapid decline in predictions about the quantity of imports the UK could expect in 1942. The previous autumn, the Ministry of War Transport had thought that dry goods imports over the coming year would total 33 million tons. By April 1942, that estimate had fallen to 25 million tons, a sixth less than had arrived in 1941, the worst import year of the war so far, just as the British were readying themselves for the culmination of many of their rearmament programmes. Oil tanker capacity was hit not only by the loss of ships sunk or damaged, but because the British – ahead of American action – introduced emergency convoys for their ships in the west Atlantic, which took time to assemble. Between autumn 1941 and summer 1942, the round voyage time taken by tankers plying between the Caribbean oilfields and the UK increased from 63.5 to 80.5 days. From the summer of 1942, the Americans would assign large numbers of tankers to

help make up the tonnage of deliveries to the UK. Nonetheless, UK petroleum imports fell to 10.25 million tons in 1942, their lowest level of the war. ¹⁰³

In an indication of the extent to which the machinery of the British state had developed since 1939, it found means to manage this precipitous decline in the volume of imports. The need to economize on shipping drove a range of new policies during 1942. These included more ploughing up of pastureland to increase future arable production; an increase in the rate of wheat extraction to 85 per cent, resulting in a more wholemeal 'National' loaf that some blamed for an increase in wartime indigestion; the ending of the basic civilian petrol ration; cut-backs in Sunday bus services; and a major effort to encourage firms of all sizes to recycle industrial lubricating oils. All military vehicles, except those to be assault landed, were now required to be disassembled before loading – a crucial measure in saving hold space and moving more vehicles to the Middle East. Importantly, the statisticians serving the Lord President's Committee - the all-important group of Cabinet ministers, under the magisterial civil servant Sir John Anderson, who oversaw domestic mobilization – had a better sense than ever before of what was needed to keep the UK running. By drawing down its substantial stockpiles, they calculated, Britain could survive on 22.5 million tons of imports in 1942 without any damage to the war effort, providing that overseas supply levels were subsequently restored. 104

Severe though the depredations of early 1942 were, British ministers and officials thought that shipping would be a temporary problem. Everyone – including Dönitz – believed that as soon as American production got properly under way, US shipyards would do the same as they had in the last war and launch more vessels than the German submarines could sink. According to the agreements reached in Washington, new shipping, like other resources, was meant to be pooled for allocation according to need by a Combined Shipping Adjustment Board. Churchill, who had long looked to merchant shipbuilding as one of the quickest ways for the United States to aid the UK, hoped that US-made ships would be offered to make good the losses suffered by the British merchant fleet. When American reassurance was not forthcoming, Churchill tackled the issue directly with Roosevelt, writing at the start of March 1942 to ask for a guarantee that Britain would get 'very substantial additions' from future US ship construction. On this point, the president did not immediately respond. 105

By the middle of the war, merchant seamen were omnipresent in

British culture. The government used their sacrifices to sell the need for abstemiousness and rationing to civilians. Though shipping losses were not published, newspapers loved stories of shipwrecked sailors saving their friends or enduring epic voyages of survival in lifeboats. In 1941 the BBC launched The Blue Peter, a weekly programme intended both to laud the Merchant Navy and to give merchant seamen their own broadcast. Like many of the Corporation's attempts to represent working-class life at this point, it relied heavily on the imagination of middle-class writers and actors. Roundly criticized for its lack of realism and relevance, at the start of 1942 the programme was relaunched as *Shipmates Ashore*. Rebalanced, with information features mixed with songs from bands and visiting celebrities, including Vera Lynn, Shipmates Ashore was a popular success that ran for the next four years. Like its predecessor, it featured messages from seamen's wives and families (read out by an announcer rather than in person), but it also placed a lot of emphasis on the fact that it was set in a genuine seamen's club, where eligible sailors, home from the sea, were mingling with pretty girls who were attracted by their physical bravery. ¹⁰⁶

Despite worries from the Ministry of War Transport that the media's obsession with shipwrecks would demoralize sailors, merchant seamen were increasingly depicted as embodying 'ordinary' British values – restrained courage, good-humoured endurance and technical facility – in the same way as servicemen. The film *San Demetrio London*, for example, directed by Charles Frend for the Ealing producer Michael Balcon and released at the end of 1943, depicted a real-life incident from 1940 in which crewmen had bravely re-boarded a tanker stricken by a devastating attack from a German battleship and, despite the imminent peril of explosion, coaxed her all the way to the UK. By the time the film went into production, the real *San Demetrio* was on the ocean floor: on 17 March 1942, she was torpedoed and sunk by U-404 while sailing unescorted off Cape Charles, Virginia.

'MORE COMMENT THAN OVER PEARL HARBOUR AND PRINCE OF WALES'

On 12 February 1942, a naval defeat took place much closer to home, when the three German capital ships that had been docked at Brest broke north through the Channel and sailed back to Kiel, leaving the British floundering helplessly in their wake. In the days before, the British had

picked up indications that the Germans might be about to run the Channel. They thought that they would have plenty of warning of any escape attempt, because Brest was under close aerial and submarine observation, and that the Germans would undertake the most hazardous part of the voyage, through the Dover Straits, at night. An air-sea plan was drawn up for this eventuality. Motor boats and aircraft from Coastal Command and the Fleet Air Arm would try to halt the warships with torpedoes. With their speed reduced, they would be hit by Bomber Command, which from the start of the war had claimed primary responsibility for the destruction of enemy capital ships at sea. When it became clear that the Germans were clearing gaps in the North Sea minefields, the bombers laid magnetic mines into the newly swept lanes. Co-ordination between the separate elements of the British plan was poor, however, and there was no unified central command. ¹⁰⁷

The Germans left Brest late on 11 February. They had planned meticulously for a combined sea and air operation. A flotilla of motor torpedo and flak boats accompanied the heavily armed capital ships, and a shuttle service by 280 fighters provided them with continuous aerial cover throughout their voyage. Among them were Focke-WulfFW-190s – a new German fighter with better performance than the most advanced Spitfires then in operation with the RAF. The British missed the ships' departure, and foggy weather and faulty radar meant that they did not spot the Germans until the late morning on the 12th. By that time, the flotilla had been at sea for thirteen hours, and was already heading towards the narrows in daylight. Not for the first time that spring, the British were left scrambling against a problem that moved faster than their response.

By 1942, after a slow start, Coastal Command had finally started to transform itself into a serious anti-submarine force. Off the east coast of the UK, however, it lacked the aircraft and training to knock out enemy warships on the surface. It had never had the dive-bombers that other countries used for pinpoint attacks from above, and, while new torpedo bombers were finally being produced, only four squadrons were available for operations from the UK. Most of the new planes had been assigned to the Mediterranean to make up for the incapacity of the British fleet. Landbased Fleet Air Arm squadrons were equipped and trained to attack battleships with torpedoes, but with out-dated Fairey Swordfish aircraft. Slow, stable and well-suited for a night-time operation, they were very vulnerable to flak and fighters in daylight. The attacking aircraft would therefore depend on Fighter Command to protect them on the run-in to the target. RAF fighter aircrew, however, had done little to practise such

escort duties. As experience since the start of the war had made plain, moreover, Bomber Command was even worse at hitting enemy ships when they were at sea than when they were stationary in port.¹⁰⁸

With the Germans racing through the Channel, the British experienced fiasco after fiasco. In poor weather, attacks from aircraft, coastal guns, motor boats and destroyers all failed. Bomber squadrons and fighter escorts did not meet up, or wasted time circling round as each attempted to form up on the other. Engines didn't start, torpedoes were in the wrong place and orders failed to get through. The Germans easily shrugged off ill-coordinated torpedo bomber attacks. Most of the Bomber Command crews that took off were unable to find their target. The British lost forty-two aircraft, mostly to fighters or flak. The only things that slowed the Germans down were the mines set off by *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst*. By the morning of 13 February 1942, all three German ships had reached Kiel. The *Scharnhorst*, however, had suffered enough damage to keep her out of action for the next three months, and, two weeks after the 'Channel Dash', Bomber Command managed to hit *Gneisenau* in dry dock. She never saw action again.

Even without this denouement, the tactical success of the flight from Brest in practice embodied a strategic reverse for Germany, since moving capital ships away from the French Atlantic coast reduced the threat to Britain's convoy lifeline. The ineptitude that marred the immediate British reaction was embarrassing — as were the inevitable comparisons to the fate of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* — but the incident was of minor significance to the outcome of the conflict relative to what was happening in the Mediterranean and the Far East.

The popular reaction, however, was ferocious. Notwithstanding Churchill's prolonged optimism, Singapore's surrender had been increasingly widely expected by a public well-schooled in official euphemisms for defeat. According to Home Intelligence, there was both 'the gravest anxiety' and 'anger at our unpreparedness', but the outcome seemed such a 'foregone conclusion' that, when the city fell, people seemed to be 'resigned' even if they were not 'reconciled'. In contrast, Rommel's resurgence in the desert produced a more 'definite shock'. Coming as it did just before Percival finally surrendered, however, the 'Channel Dash' seemed like proof that the incompetence that was losing the Empire had not only survived at, but was seriously endangering the security of, home. It was, Home Intelligence's informants reported, 'the most bitter failure of the whole war':

. . . 'the blackest week since Dunkirk' . . . The desire to criticise is widespread, and although the Service Chiefs are greatly blamed, the main weight of public criticism seems to be directed against the government, and no longer excludes the Prime Minister. 110

In a butcher's shop in Dewsbury, a thirty-six-year-old shop assistant recorded her customers' reactions for Mass-Observation:

Great indignation among customers at escape of German battleships. More comment than over Pearl Harbour and Prince of Wales. Customers voluntarily speak of it without my prompting, a sure sign they are disturbed. The first we knew about it was when Mr B said 'What have they been doing to let them ships escape? They've made fools of us, haven't they?' Old Mrs Mac — 'its been a black week and night. As if t'Japs weren't a sore point with many, that it happened under our noses.' Another man, 'By gosh, its time we bucked up, what with one thing and another — there's only the Russians doing owt. They wouldn't have let them slip, you can bet.' 111

'This Empire has never been in such a precarious position . . . !'

February-April 1942

The effects of the fall of Singapore on the British home front could be measured in absences. With 38,000 British personnel posted as missing, the number of casualties sustained during the Malayan campaign was roughly the same as those suffered by the British army in all the fighting in the Middle East and Mediterranean since June 1940. It was about 1 per cent of the entire strength of the British armed forces in early 1942. As Japanese lack of concern for those who had allowed themselves to be captured exacerbated the inevitable confusion of a mass surrender, family and friends elsewhere in the Empire were left with no way of knowing what had happened to those taken prisoner, interned or killed. The capture en masse of approximately 15,000 men of the 18th Infantry Division, a Territorial formation raised primarily in Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, meant the effects of the resultant separation and bereavement were concentrated disproportionately in the east of England.

Awful though the worry was for prisoners' families, most Britons did not lose a friend or close relative to the disaster. The physical consequences of the loss of Malaya, however, soon became apparent to everyone. During 1942, consumer goods containing tin or rubber disappeared from the shops.

There were also some significant absences from the airwaves, as the BBC tried to cut down on 'sloppy' songs in favour of more upbeat, 'virile' numbers that would rouse Britons to arms. Ironically, given her status as the 'forces' sweetheart', much of the criticism crystallized around the flagship broadcast *Sincerely Yours – Vera Lynn*, then in the middle of its second series on the Forces Programme. Protected both by her popularity with audiences and by her clearly 'English' style, Lynn was not banned, but *Sincerely Yours* was 'rested' and for eighteen months she did not

present another programme.

The sentimentality that made Lynn such a hit was just the sort of thing that culturally conservative critics fretted was undermining morale. They sought to promote a diet of more traditionally martial classical music, marching bands and patriotic choral airs. Their ire was concentrated on the 'soft-voiced' style of 'unmanly' 'crooners', including the Grenadian singer Leslie 'Hutch' Hutchinson, whose emotional approach and romantic appeal divided listeners. In the summer of 1942, a new BBC Dance Music Policy Committee was set up to vet songs and vocalists for treatments that were 'anaemic', 'insincere' or 'slushy'. Like Lynn, 'Hutch' was too popular to ban, but more than forty other singers, particularly British performers who affected American accents, were proscribed temporarily or permanently. Given the importance of radio airtime for record sales, the new policy was intended to shift the balance not just of what was broadcast, but of what record companies produced, at a time of severely restricted supplies and a global shortage of shellac (another effect of the Japanese onslaught in the Far East).⁴

Radio airplay might seem an esoteric subject, but this attempt to impose greater emotional resolution spoke to a specific mid-war mood. Discussions of defeats that were essentially the result of geo-strategic overstretch quickly turned inwards to critiques of British society and culture. Attacks on Britain's political, industrial and military leadership gathered force from their moral tone. The sense that the country needed to toughen up – to make more and fight harder – pervaded. Eighteen months before, defeat in France had spurred calls for a radically patriotic reformation of national life. Now imperial calamities were understood through the same lens: an old, unequal, inefficient order failing to withstand the brutal efficiency of the totalitarian regimes.

'CITY OF BLIMPS'

As Percival's troops retreated down the Malayan peninsula, the British press seized on the weakness of colonial society. Like every new arrival in Malaya, journalists were struck by the apparently luxurious lives and lack of warlike preparation among the Malayan plantocracy. American reporters, primed to the iniquities of British imperialism, were also quick to the attack. On 14 January 1942, the *Daily Express* led with a report by the American journalist Cecil Brown, headlined 'city of blimps' (a reference to Colonel Blimp, the famously ruddy-faced reactionary created

by the cartoonist David Low for Beaverbrook's *Evening Standard* in 1934). Brown attacked white settlers' 'apathy in all affairs except making tin and rubber and money, having stengahs (whiskies) between five and eight o'clock of an evening, keeping fit, being known as a "good chap" and getting thoroughly "plastered" on Saturday night'. Now, he claimed, 'a civil administration marked by inactivity' was 'reaping bitter and terrifying fruits. Singapore . . . represents the pinnacle of examples of countries which are physically and mentally unprepared for war.' This vision of warmth and luxury grated particularly in the UK of winter 1942. As public comments in that week's Home Intelligence report concluded: 'It looks as if our people in the Far East . . . have been living in a fool's paradise . . . '6

Whether or not the presumption of internal weakness provided adequate explanations of defeat, it fed off a strengthening tension between liberal critiques of empire in general and a widespread acceptance of British exceptionalism in particular. It was not the Empire, but those charged with implementing it, which had failed. As a member of Mass-Observation's 'national panel' of diarists put it in response to a query on 'Feelings about the British Empire' in spring 1942: 'one's pride is hurt at being forced into the position of "letting down" the colonies . . . [But one] feels that the Empire has been maintained for the benefit of vested interest and that there is justice in the present disgorgement . . . '8

In two famous articles in *The Times* in March 1942, the Oxford don Margery Perham used the loss of Malaya to argue the case for reform. A historian with a passion for Africa, Perham was an expert on imperial government who taught several generations of colonial administrators. Placed under great psychological stress by the war, Perham was experiencing a dramatic revival of her Christian faith, occasioned in part by listening to the BBC radio series *The Man Born to be King*. This too encouraged a revision of her previous views on colonial rule rooted in the tradition of 'trusteeship', which often served as a euphemism for exploitation and neglect.⁹

In her *Times* articles, Perham accused her compatriots of complacency. Their inability to rouse the peoples of Malaya against the Japanese showed the gap between those running the Empire and those they ruled. She urged a new policy of 'partnership'. Regional planning and state investment would spread economic improvement, while British officials reached across racial divides to work with local politicians who would soon be ruling themselves. In an unmistakable echo of Kipling's response to the Boer War, Perham declared that 'Events such as we have known in the last

few weeks are rough teachers, but our survival as a great power may depend on our being able to learn their lesson.'10

Not least to ward off American demands that all colonies should be put under international control, 'partnership' would become a central plank of Colonial Office policy. Though the war encouraged an emphasis on welfare and development that had started to emerge in the 1930s, such concerns were only really prioritized where they began to threaten military security. The loss of the Southeast Asian empire gave a new prominence to food and raw material production in the African colonies, as a means to support the imperial war effort. In East and West Africa, as in the Middle East, colonies were incorporated into regional planning blocs. Yet resources rapidly to make up for a lack of pre-war investment in the colonial empire were sparse, and the effects of the wartime economic boom often operated against an agenda of welfare and political development.

In an effort to increase Nigerian tin production, to make up for Malaya's lost output, for example, the British authorities instituted a forced labour scheme in 1942 that led to the conscription of 118,000 men from rural areas to work in miserable, underpaid conditions in the newly expanded mines. With modern mining equipment in short supply, this in fact did little to increase production, so the UK was nonetheless forced into greater reliance on Bolivian tin provided by Lend-Lease from the United States. 11 In Rhodesia, Africans were also conscripted to work in copper mines and on cattle ranches. When efforts to produce more beef for the imperial armed forces resulted in food shortages, the colonial government went after African cattle holders, rather than forcing white settlers to farm more efficiently. Forced to sell up at below market prices to the big ranches, African farmers were made to bear the brunt of food shortages. 12 In Kenya, meanwhile, wartime demand for agricultural production enriched and empowered both white settlers and African commercial farmers – compelling the Colonial Office to incorporate both into its political plans and laying the ground for confrontations in the future. Military service, migrant labour and new commercial opportunities brought new wealth to many Kenyan communities - while at the same time a combination of crop failures and compulsory sales to the state created famine in some rural areas. 13 Very little of this resembled the shiny new spirit of partnership and development.

Back in Britain, concerns that the collapse of 1942 reflected flagging popular commitment to the Empire resulted in new attempts by the Colonial Office and the BBC to re-enthuse the public with a sense of

imperial mission. The resulting outpouring of programmes included not only high-minded talks on *Health in the Colonies* and *West Africa's Industrial Revolution*, but also the deliberately more populist *Brush Up Your Empire* – a *Brains Trust*-style show in which questions sent in by 'listeners' (or, on at least one occasion, written by the India Office) were put to a panel of experts. These programmes emphasized a progressive vision of Empire: internationalist, egalitarian, scientific and explicitly contrasted with the arrogance of America's emergence as a global power. Deliberately targeted at working-class listeners, these programmes were meant to inculcate an understanding of the material benefits and moral duties of an Empire the audience would otherwise presume was run by and for the British ruling class.¹⁴

Brush Up Your Empire was a hit with listeners, but there were always doubts within the BBC about how much imperial enthusiasm it really inspired. Such domestic propaganda not only helped to publicize colonial contributions, however, but also reinforced the popular assumption that the Empire was essentially morally sound.¹⁵

The fall of Singapore would subsequently become famous as the death knell of the British Empire. It unleashed a series of further defeats that fractured Britain's ability to control the pace of change in South and Southeast Asia. Yet for all the mood of crisis in early 1942, British assumptions of superiority were too well engrained to be overturned immediately by a distant disaster. Defeat was not seen to preclude imperial recovery and reform. As *The Times* correspondent Ian Morrison put it in his 1942 book *Malayan Postscript*: all 'those who had been residing' in Malaya, 'and making profits out of it, and those others who had been responsible for the formulation of its policies and the ensuring of its defence', had been found 'wanting in vigour, in ruthlessness, in aggressiveness. They had allowed themselves to go soft.' Yet:

Those necessary qualities of greatness are not lost. I get the impression (from the other side of the world) that there is a new upsurge of them amongst the people of Great Britain. We must incorporate them into our national life if we are to maintain our greatness as a nation and reassert our power in the East. 16

'WE HAVEN'T ATTAINED THAT TOTAL EFFORT'

Churchill returned from Washington on 17 January 1942 to a rising tide of press and parliamentary criticism. These focused first on the need for a production supremo to direct every aspect of war industry, then on

allegations that the prime minister's obsessive control of strategy was responsible for failures in the Far East. Churchill responded by going on the attack, announcing a three-day Commons debate on the war situation that would culminate, if necessary, in the government moving a motion of confidence. Antagonized by this sledgehammer approach, the backbench 1922 Committee sent a delegation to Downing Street to warn that Conservatives might abstain from expressing their support for the government. Trying to face down Churchill was never a good idea. Pausing only to lament to Eden how tired he was and how much he looked forward to handing over to a younger man, the prime minister, 'foaming with rage', reprimanded Erskine-Hill, the chairman of the 1922. Churchill insisted that he was the only thing standing between appeasing Tories and electoral annihilation. ¹⁸

By this point, Churchill had received the revelatory news from Wavell about Singapore's lack of shoreward defences. Simultaneously, therefore, he took reluctant steps towards a reshuffle. As a concession to his critics, this would include the appointment of Beaverbrook as minister of production and the recruitment of Sir Stafford Cripps.¹⁹

Cripps arrived back in London from Moscow on 23 January 1942, with his stature greatly increased by his time away from Britain. He benefitted by association with all the supposed virtues of the Soviet Union: hard work, efficiency and unconquerable resistance. Some credited him, inaccurately, with having brought the Soviets into the war. Importantly, he was still an MP (sufficiently wealthy to decline the payment of an ambassadorial salary from the Crown, he had not had to resign his seat in the Commons) but an MP without a party, since he had not sought readmission to Labour. That only broadened his political appeal.²⁰

In the run up to his return from Moscow, Cripps' wife, Isobel, lobbied hard on his behalf. After years of being left alone while her husband concentrated on his work, she was coming into her own as a political partner. Together with a cohort of young male advisors, the Crippses ran a very modern political operation, which paid a lot of attention to poll findings about Stafford's popularity and the image of him projected in the media.²¹

Journalists had plenty to work with. In his wire-framed glasses (usually surmounted by a Russian fur hat), Cripps looked like a man with 'brains'. It was an accurate impression. He had a forensic mind of scalpel-like precision, honed by a chemistry degree and a brilliantly successful legal career. Cripps was also astonishingly driven. Plagued by colitis and compulsively inclined to over-work, he coped by sticking to a strict daily

routine, becoming a vegetarian and adopting (at Isobel's instigation) the Alexander technique. Dismayed by the boozy culture of the Commons, he had also forsworn alcohol, though he continued to smoke. At the start of the war, he had given up his legal practice and moved out of his country house, which was now a hostel for the Women's Land Army. The conflict had also kindled a revival of his Anglican faith. If he had not quite abandoned the class struggle, the means by which he now sought to improve the lot of the workers — victory over Hitler first, then the construction of a genuinely democratic society, invigorated by Christian ideals of social duty — put him squarely in the middle of a reforming wartime consensus.²²

That Cripps was already being talked about as a potential challenger for the premiership indicated the way in which both he and British politics more generally had been transformed. A centre ground defined by demands for equality of sacrifice and modern organization was easily occupied by a man of faith and reason who, setting aside personal pleasure and partisan divides, said that he'd put winning the war first.

It was no surprise that Cripps was championed by the *Daily Mirror*. One of the great newspaper success stories of the war, by the end of 1941 the *Mirror* was being read by about one in four of the adult population, and about one in three of those in the forces. It took a strong and radical political line: aggressively anti-Tory, but also critical of the party system as a whole; supportive of Churchill, but insistent on Cabinet reform.²³ That Cripps had the backing of *The Times* was equally predictable. Since 1940, its editorials had been espousing democratic reform and economic planning as key elements of national reconstruction, and Cripps made an effort to court the paper's new editor, Robin Barrington-Ward. Strikingly, however, even the reliably Conservative *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* identified Cripps as the man of the moment. The only two daily papers that held aloof were Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* and the *Daily Herald* – the house organ of the Labour movement.²⁴

Impressed with Cripps' work in Moscow, Eden got Churchill to offer him a new job as minister of supply. This was a position of great responsibility (it included the manufacture of weapons and equipment for the army, ammunition for all three armed services, and controls over raw material imports and allocations), but little power. Eden also suggested getting rid of the chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Kingsley Wood, who was blocking Eden's attempts to secure acceptance of Article VII. Churchill replied that he would 'rather have a Cabinet of obedient mugwumps than of awkward freaks!'.²⁵

Cripps might have been more the latter than the former, but he was very useful to Churchill nonetheless. Quite aside from the chance to sidestep his Conservative critics, the prime minister too was frustrated by the failure of British arms and ready to make new appointments to revitalize the war effort. If Cripps' capacity for logical analysis was unrivalled, Churchill far surpassed him in the creative contradictions required to assemble a ministry, including the temporary embrace of an outsider with a track record of political naivety.

At the very least, Churchill could guard against Cripps attacking him during the imminent debate on the war situation. Over lunch on 25 January, Churchill offered him the Ministry of Supply. Outlining the opportunities of office, he mentioned nationalizing industry if it would increase output, and even 'a new gesture on India'. Cripps was interested by the offer but loath to work with Beaverbrook, whom he regarded as a national menace. He left promising to consider his decision.

Two days later, Churchill opened the Commons debate by announcing a vote of confidence. Two days after that, he closed the debate by refuting the charge that he had been responsible for the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and Repulse and making clear he would appoint a minister of production. A bitter slanging match broke out when Churchill's son Randolph, the Tory MP for Preston, attacked his father's Conservative critics. Outside the Chamber, the prime minister shook his fist in the face of the Chamberlain loyalist Sir Archibald Southby, yelling: 'You called my son a coward. You are my enemy. Do not speak to me!'²⁷ Yet so keen were MPs to demonstrate national unity that the House only divided because the Independent Labour Party (a tiny group to the left of Labour) pressed for a vote. In the 'no' lobby, two ILP tellers quickly counted their one other MP, the sole vote against the government. Four hundred and sixty-four MPs crowded into the 'aye' lobby. This might have looked like a resounding victory, but the nature of the challenge raised uncomfortable questions for the government. As the Conservative MP Cuthbert Headlam put it in his diary: 'a few more votes of confidence such as today's, unless he can show some successes and a greater efficiency, will be the end of Winston.'28

On 29 January, Cripps declined Churchill's Ministry of Supply offer. Beaverbrook, meanwhile, responded to Cripps' sudden celebrity by upping the ante with his colleagues. He told ministers that if they wouldn't agree to recognize Stalin's territorial seizures in Eastern Europe, he ought to be allowed to take the issue to the country through his newspapers. Even more provocatively, he insisted that to do the production job properly, he would have to control the supply of manpower. This was something that

Bevin, the minister of labour, would never accept. Co-ordinating all the while with Cripps, Bevin told Churchill, via Attlee, that he would resign if the prime minister caved in to Beaverbrook's demands. Even as his new appointment as production supremo was announced on 4 February 1942, therefore, Beaverbrook was over-reaching himself. Churchill hoped that he might stay without all the powers he had claimed. Beaverbrook threatened resignation. As the American Lend-Lease co-ordinator Averell Harriman reported to Roosevelt, Churchill was furious with his friend for being so 'unjust and disloyal' as to choose 'this moment of all moments to make an issue'.²⁹

Meanwhile, Cripps' popularity only increased as he told Britons that they needed not just to support the Russians, but to emulate their sacrifices. Speaking to an audience in his Bristol constituency on 8 February, he explained that the Soviets had no 'compunctions in getting rid of inefficient or older people who are not fitted to the new problems of modern warfare':

It's impossible to have regard for the private interests of individuals and groups and classes and at the same time make our effort all-inclusive. And we haven't attained that total effort just because so many people are still keeping in mind what their position is likely to be after the war \dots 30

That evening, he gave a famous broadcast in the *Postcript* series after the 9 p.m. BBC radio news. About half the adult population was listening. Cripps explained that he felt 'a lack of urgency . . . in the atmosphere in contrast to what I felt in Russia'. Only by offering 'unstinted sacrifice' could Britons survive 'this ghastly war . . . the brutal negation of every teaching of our Christian civilisation'.³¹

In contrast to his pre-war revolutionary rhetoric, Cripps spoke to his audience's patriotism, faith and frustration. The enthusiasm with which this call was received is put into perspective by an almost simultaneous BIPO survey that asked respondents whether they personally could 'make greater sacrifices than at present' in order to help the war effort. Thirty-six per cent of respondents said 'yes', but 57 per cent 'no'. The same survey asked whether respondents were satisfied with the personnel of the current Cabinet. Only 32 per cent were, compared with 40 per cent who were not. The most popular suggestions for those who ought to go included 'Men of Munich, Appeasers' and 'Kingsley Wood'. Also on the list of names mentioned by the public, however, were 'Clement Attlee' and 'Herbert Morrison'.³²

'HE ROARS ALL RIGHT IN HIS TIME, BUT HE'S OUTLIVED IT'

In a radio broadcast on 15 February 1942, the prime minister announced the fall of Singapore. Reminding his listeners that the Soviet people had not turned on Stalin when Russia's war went badly, he tried to end with a rousing call to arms:

This . . . is one of those moments when the British race and nation can show their quality and their genius. This is one of those moments when it can draw from the heart of misfortune the vital impulses of victory . . . Here is another occasion to show – as so often in our long story – that we can meet reverses with dignity and with renewed accessions of strength. 33

On an RAF base at Digby in Lincolnshire, WAAF Nina Masel, formerly a paid Mass-Observer, recorded a new note in her colleagues' conversations: 'Up to now, the government has been criticised often, but always with the reservation "Churchill's all right". But now Churchill is condemned with the rest.' According to one of them: 'He roars all right in his time, but he's outlived it.'³⁴

Initially, Churchill hoped to avoid giving the Commons any chance to debate the fall of Singapore. His colleagues persuaded him this was a terrible idea.³⁵ On 17 February 1942, a spectacularly ill-tempered prime minister moved for a debate a week hence on the war situation. The Soviet ambassador, Ivan Maisky, watching from the gallery, recorded: 'He did not look well, was irritated, easily offended and obstinate. The MPs were caustic and sniffy. They gave Churchill a bad reception and a bad send-off. I've never seen anything like it.'³⁶

The newspaper pressure on Churchill intensified. Articles called for the creation of a smaller War Cabinet without departmental responsibilities to handle the war effort, or suggested he should choose between being prime minister and being minister of defence. To his fury, he was attacked directly by the *Daily Mail*. At Westminster, the Watching Committee, a Conservative 'ginger' group of MPs and peers set up to pressure Chamberlain, was restive. Churchill now prepared for a much more substantial reshuffle. As he did so, he came up with a new offer: Cripps would be made lord privy seal and leader of the house (strictly, replacing Churchill, but in fact taking on the parliamentary work usually done by Attlee in his absence), and a place in the War Cabinet, where room would be made by removing the ineffectual Greenwood.³⁷ Cripps would not be burdened by departmental work, but he would have to use his lawyerly

skills and press popularity to defend the government in the House. Attlee became secretary of state for the Dominions. He was compensated for the rise of Cripps and the departure of Greenwood by being appointed deputy prime minister: a significant mark both of the role he was playing within the Cabinet and of Labour's place within the Coalition.³⁸

Eden fretted that Cripps was establishing a claim on the premiership.³⁹ Playing the foreign secretary with his customary skill, Churchill assured Eden that all the moves were 'eyewash' to let him stay as minister of defence.⁴⁰ Eden's friends lamented, as usual, that 'he hadn't pressed himself hard enough', but if he underplayed his hand, Beaverbrook overplayed his.⁴¹ Unwilling to accept Cripps' entry into the government, the press baron spread the story that his rival was being vetoed by Attlee.⁴² The Cabinet secretary overheard Beaverbrook and Churchill arguing 'like fishwives'.⁴³ By his own account, Beaverbrook was telling Churchill they wouldn't have to bring Cripps in if Attlee had kept control of the Commons. Why should he be rewarded by being made deputy prime minister?⁴⁴

Beaverbrook forced Churchill to choose between his troublesome friend and Cripps, Attlee and Bevin. On 18 February 1942, a carefully orchestrated confrontation between Beaverbrook and Attlee was watched by Churchill, Eden, Brendan Bracken and James Stuart, the Conservative chief whip. Beaverbrook yelled that he couldn't serve a government in which Attlee was deputy PM and stalked out. Private threats of resignation were one thing: a declaration of departure in front of hostile witnesses another.⁴⁵

The prime minister complained to the journalist William ('W. P.') Crozier: 'He needn't have gone. He could have had any one of three or four offices if he had liked to stop . . . I didn't want him to go. He was good for me!'⁴⁶ He also worried that Beaverbrook would set his newspapers on the government. In a perceptive letter, Clementine Churchill counselled him 'to leave Lord B entirely out of your Reconstruction':

It is true that if you do he may (& will) work against you . . . But is not hostility without, better than intrigue & treachery & rattledom within? You should have peace inside your Government . . . & you must have that with what you have to face and do for us all . . . The temper & behaviour you describe (in Lord B) is caused I think by the prospect of a new personality equal perhaps in power to him & certainly in intellect . . . You will miss his drive and genius, but in Cripps you may have a new accession of strength. 47

Beaverbrook's formal resignation reached Churchill a week later.

His departure cleared the way for a full reshuffle before the debate on Singapore. Oliver Lyttelton was brought back from Cairo to be minister of production. He was already being spoken about as a future Conservative leader – a threat to Eden that would allow Churchill to manage the young pretender for years to come. Lyttelton and Cripps joined Churchill, Attlee, Eden, Bevin and Sir John Anderson in the War Cabinet. Kingsley Wood lost his place, but remained chancellor. Greenwood was moved to the backbenches. Hugh Dalton, who as minister for economic warfare had warred with Eden over the control of subversive activities directed at Occupied Europe, was moved to the Board of Trade. David Margesson was made to carry the can for the Far Eastern disasters and lost his job as war secretary. To his disgust, he was replaced by his senior civil servant, P. J. Grigg: a legendarily tough career bureaucrat who had previously served under Churchill at the Treasury. Like Sir John Anderson, Grigg could be relied upon not to turn a potentially powerful post into a political threat to the prime minister.⁴⁸

The new version of the Churchill Coalition looked very different to that formed in May 1940. Chamberlainite Conservatives overshadowed. New technocrats and non-party men were in. With Dalton at the Board of Trade, Labour had strengthened its position on the home front. Cripps – as yet still outside the Labour Party – had undergone an astonishingly rapid ascent. In November 1941, when asked who should succeed Churchill if anything happened to him, 38 per cent of those questioned by the BIPO named Eden, and only 1 per cent Cripps. When the same question was put in April 1942, Eden's support remained the same, but Cripps got 34 per cent. Attlee and Bevin got 2 per cent each.⁴⁹ Dalton comforted himself that, 'if things go badly for a few months', Cripps' 'stock, now heavily inflated', would 'fall heavily, and he will have to bear a large part of the responsibility'.⁵⁰

Neither Churchill nor Attlee, however, had any intention of giving Cripps significant power. Despite his seat in the War Cabinet, he was not put on the Lord President's Committee, where key decisions on the home front were made. Nor was he a member of the Defence Committee, where ministers other than Churchill were allowed to comment on strategy, but which was in any case sitting less and less frequently as the prime minister cloistered himself with the chiefs of staff. As he laughed with Churchill about the positive press reception for the reshuffle, however, Cripps was a man on the up and eager to get down to business. ⁵¹

The reshuffle didn't stop attacks on the government in the Singapore debate of 24–25 February, but it drew enough of the fire to safeguard the

prime minister's position. Closing the debate, Cripps told MPs he was going to investigate and improve the direction of the war effort, then preached again from the Book of Austerity:

Personal extravagance must be eliminated, together with every other form of wastage, small or large, and all unnecessary expenditure. In the realm of the war effort itself no person can be allowed to stand in the way of efficiency or swiftness of production \dots 52

He was foretelling a future in which the war was going to get harder for everybody.

The reshuffle also marked a victory for Bevin in his battle with Beaver-brook over the control of industrial relations. While debates over production went on, Bevin worked during 1942 to help set up better regional systems to co-ordinate production between neighbouring factories. He also pushed the introduction of Joint Production Committees, on which management and workers sat side-by-side to discuss how to increase output. Forcing bosses to recognize the importance of labour welfare and binding both sides into their shared responsibilities, while minimizing any compulsion from the state, was very much how Bevin thought industrial democracy ought to work.⁵³

Despite Beaverbrook's departure, the effect of the changes was further to stir up party feeling. Conservatives had disdained Wood and Margesson because of their support for Churchill in 1940, but now they lamented their demotion. There was, Tory backbenchers complained, no 'orthodox Conservative' in the War Cabinet. Labour MPs were just as angry about the dismissal of Arthur Greenwood, who was universally liked, even if he was seldom sober. Attlee tried to persuade them it was 'a sad necessity . . . We had to try to steady the country.' They were not persuaded.

'HOW GRAVELY OUR BRITISH AFFAIRS HAVE DETERIORATED BY WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE DECEMBER 7'

Churchill confided to Roosevelt in a telegram at the start of March, 'When I reflect how I have longed and prayed for the entry of the United States into the war, I find it difficult to realise how gravely our British affairs have deteriorated by what has happened since December 7.'55 Thanks to their dramatic early successes, and with American military-industrial strength yet to be mobilized, the initiative still lay with the Axis powers.

As the Russian winter offensive faltered and Western empires crumpled before the Japanese onslaught, both sides puzzled over the next move in what would clearly be a decisive period.

From the British point of view, the resultant struggle involved not only battles on the front line and arguments over strategy and production, but also diplomatic and political manoeuvres, including an attempt at a new constitutional settlement in India and the negotiation of a treaty with the Soviet Union. As the course, though not the outcome, of the conflict hung in the balance, the pressure to reach a decision resulted in a major reworking of Anglo-American plans over the summer of 1942 that determined the direction of much of the rest of the war.

The failure before Moscow in December 1941 caused a crisis of confidence among Germany's generals and led Hitler to take direct command of the army. His insistence that German troops would be able to hold out against the Soviet onslaught proved correct when, at the start of 1942, Stalin ordered the Red Army onto the offensive right along the front line. This general attack dissipated Soviet strength sufficiently for the Axis forces to recover. By March the Soviet attack had ground to a halt as the snow thawed.⁵⁶

German strategists debated what to do next. Hitler's supreme command group, the OKW (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*) argued that the expansion of the war had bought Germany time. The Japanese would keep the United States busy while the Germans launched another great summer offensive into the Soviet Union, defeating the Red Army and capturing the crucial oilfields of the Caucasus. These would fuel the defence of Europe in a coming air war against the Anglo-American bloc – and form a launch pad for a future attack that might carry German troops all the way to the Persian Gulf.⁵⁷

German generals seized on the Caucasus plan because it offered a means of survival, but their armies found it hard to look beyond the desperate struggle on the Eastern Front. The German navy proposed a much more dramatic initiative, in which the drive south towards the Caucasus would be matched with a new offensive into Egypt and attacks on Allied supply lines from Japanese submarines based in Vichy Frenchruled Madagascar, in a combined operation that would break the back of the British Empire. The Americans, set on holding the line in the Pacific, would not, it was argued, come to their ally's assistance.

These schemes correctly identified that the best Axis hope was to coordinate their efforts to exploit Allied vulnerability around the Indian Ocean, and matched very closely the anxieties that beset British strategists

during 1942 (see Map 2). Yet they were fantasies that paid little attention to the limits of Axis industrial power, the difficulties of timing, terrain and logistics, or to the lack of any effective military machinery for coordinating the Axis alliance. Even with months more preparation before December 1941, the resource challenges they posed would have been insurmountable. A massive multidirectional, multinational offensive from opposite ends of a great ocean simply could not be improvised at short notice.

Hitler was never really taken by the Kriegsmarine's plans. Determined to secure the resources to fight off American bombers, he wanted to concentrate on defeating Russia. He fought shy of helping Indian nationalists lest he put Britain off the idea of abandoning Europe to its fate and retreating onto the Empire. When Churchill's government failed to fall after Singapore, the Führer turned his attention wholly back to the Eastern Front.

Despite the failure of their offensive, Soviet leaders remained optimistic that the war would be decided in their favour during 1942, provided that they could withstand the forthcoming German attack. Like Hitler, Stalin suspected that the British might abandon the war in Europe in order to defend their Asian empire – which helps to explain why the Soviets were so keen to secure both an Anglo-American commitment to maintain the flow of essential supplies *and* a treaty with the British in spring 1942. One way to pursue these objectives was to complain about the paucity of Allied efforts in the West, but in practice both Stalin and his foreign minister Molotov seem to have understood that Japanese successes made any cross-Channel invasion in 1942 very unlikely. That only made them keener to screw as many supplies as they could out of the British and Americans.⁵⁹

Since the Soviets did not share information about military operations, the best source that the British had for what was happening on the Eastern Front was the signals intelligence derived from their breaking of the standard Luftwaffe key for the Enigma encryption machine. By the start of 1942, the Government Code and Cipher School (GCCS) at Bletchley Park was decrypting about 1,300 Enigma messages a day, about 26 times more than had been read in 1940.⁶⁰ The breaking of encrypted enemy signals (eventually including not only different versions of Enigma, but also the German 'Lorenz' stream cipher teleprinter and the Italian C-38 and the Japanese Type-B cipher machines) provided British intelligence officers, military commanders and the prime minister with important insights into specific operations and overall dispositions. These were so valuable – and

so liable to disappear if the enemy became aware of them – that they were allocated a new designation above 'Top Secret': 'Ultra'. Knowledge of the Ultra secret was kept tightly restricted, but as the British developed the systems to operationalize the intelligence it provided, it became a source of major tactical and strategic advantage during the second half of the war.

Thanks in part to the intercepted communications from Luftwaffe units in the East, during March 1942 the Joint Intelligence Committee reported to the chiefs of staff that the Red Army was in serious trouble, that the Germans would be able to manage only one major summer offensive, and that this would drive towards the Caucasus and, if it were successful, right through to the Middle East. The looming spectre of Soviet defeat created a pressure for action that only grew as the start of the summer offensive approached. Simultaneously, however, British strategists also had to address Japanese successes in the Far East, including the threat now posed to Australia, New Zealand and, above all and most clearly, to India, as well as their effect on the United States. When it came to Japan, however, the intelligence picture was much more clouded — not least because the Japanese were themselves for so long unsure about exactly what they were going to do next.

Having secured all the objectives of their initial offensive against the Western powers much more cheaply than expected, Japanese strategists were over-confident, aware that their triumph was incomplete, and still divided over the purpose of their southern advance. For the Japanese army, the goal had been to secure a defensible position that would free their hands for action to the north against China and, ultimately, against the Soviet Union. The Japanese navy, in contrast, sought a decisive action to eliminate its opponents' fleets. This division was not resolved by the astonishing run of Japanese victories during the first months of the war. With the German invasion still occupying the Soviets, in spring 1942 the Japanese hoped to secure their new conquests by cutting Britain off from Australasia and completing the destruction of the US Pacific Fleet.⁶¹ The high command considered four ways to achieve these objectives. The first two involved a drive further southwards, seizing islands in the southwest and south Pacific, and perhaps going further by invading Australia. The third was a strike eastwards across the Pacific Ocean to force the US fleet into a decisive battle, and the fourth an attack westwards into the Indian Ocean to knock out the Royal Navy's Eastern Fleet, capture Ceylon and capitalize on British weakness in India.

In fact, Japan lacked the strength – in particular, the cargo shipping – to turn any of these options into a winning strategy.⁶² Symptomatic,

however, of the 'victory disease' with which they were now afflicted, during March 1942 Japanese commanders tried to do them all. While Japanese troops pressed on through Burma, a carrier task force would move into the Indian Ocean with the aim of inflicting a Pearl Harbor-style raid on the Royal Navy, but there would be no invasion of Ceylon. Instead, the main line of advance would be southeast, against Port Moresby in New Guinea and through the Solomon Islands. While these landings were being planned, Japan's senior admiral, Yamamoto Isoroku, pressed for an attack on the Aleutian Islands and Midway atoll with the aim of sparking a final confrontation with the US Navy.

Following a rushed relocation from Singapore to Colombo, the GCCS's eastern outpost, the Far Eastern Combined Board (FECB), concentrated primarily on naval intelligence. Thanks to the increase in Japanese signals traffic after the outbreak of war, it made good progress in cracking the Japanese naval cipher, JN-25. The Americans were now pouring immense resources into their intelligence effort in the Pacific, but while the cryptographers themselves sometimes co-operated, the British and American intelligence bureaucracies remained mutually suspicious. There was at this stage no pooling of their work. Instead, analysts in Colombo and Hawaii – and in Melbourne, where the Australians were pursuing their own cryptanalysis – raced simultaneously to give Allied commanders insights into Japanese intentions. ⁶³

Though British planners doubted that the Japanese could launch a successful invasion of Australia, the Dominion was an important war base, and they emphasized the importance of holding the 'outer ring' of India, Ceylon, Australia and Fiji.⁶⁴ At the start of March 1942, Churchill asked Roosevelt to send US troops to defend Australia and New Zealand. This would allow the Dominion governments to leave their remaining infantry divisions in the Middle East. He also asked the president to commit American shipping so that Britain could send additional reinforcement convoys around the Cape. Both men accepted that this would mean they had to cancel the planned invasion of French North Africa. The combined chiefs of staff, who had already decided such an operation was impossible because of shipping shortages, breathed a collective sigh of relief.

At the same time, the British and Americans agreed Roosevelt's suggestion of a new division of responsibilities. ABDA was dissolved at the end of February. The president proposed that the Americans should now take charge of the whole war east of Singapore, including the defence of Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific islands. The British would command in the Middle East and the Indian Ocean, while the Atlantic and

European theatres remained a joint responsibility. New Pacific Commands were set up under US officers answerable to the joint chiefs, and the Pacific War Council, a newly established body intended to give the appearance of Antipodean involvement in strategy-making, was shifted from London to Washington (where the Americans proceeded to ignore it as fully as had the British).

London's acceptance of these changes marked both a recognition of the strategic reality created by Japanese successes and the effective end of British involvement in the war in the Pacific until almost the very end. Though Commonwealth ties remained strong, and Australian and New Zealand personnel continued to play a vital role in the European war, the fight to halt the Japanese southern advance would be conducted by Australian, New Zealand and American forces under the command of US General MacArthur. Having escaped the Philippines well before his surviving troops surrendered, MacArthur had been turned into a hero by the US media. Marshall had him made supreme commander of the Southwest Pacific Area, which included Australia and New Guinea, partly to keep him as far away from Washington and the War Department as possible. At first, MacArthur was appalled by the paucity of forces under his new command, but his fame allowed him to exert considerable influence in the USA and in Australia. As the Allies shifted back to the attack, MacArthur's determination to fulfil his promise to return to the Philippines would have significant consequences for Allied strategy in the war against Japan.

British attention meanwhile focused on the Indian Ocean. With the imperial war effort concentrated in the Middle East, naval vessels, fighters, bombers and reconnaissance aircraft, armoured vehicles, artillery and trained troops were all in desperately short supply. Moving them took time: the Empire strained at least as much against the clock as it did against the map. Advised that an invasion of Ceylon was well within Japanese capabilities, from March 1942 the chiefs of staff prioritized the defence of the naval base. At the same time, Japanese forces advanced into Burma. An important regional source of oil, timber and rice, the colony was also a bulwark for India – all of whose own defensive preparations had been based against the threat of a Soviet incursion from the north. As the remaining overland route by which British and American supplies could reach the Nationalist forces locking down the Japanese army in China, Burma had also become a site of international strategic interest and a vital piece of the jigsaw puzzle of a global war.

'FOR THIS KIND OF JOB, YOU BRITISH ARE INCOMPETENT . . .'

On 18 February 1942, Asia's two leading anti-imperialists, Mahatma Gandhi and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, met at Santiniketan, near Calcutta. Chiang was accompanied by his wife, Soong Mei-ling, who acted as his translator. The Chiangs tried to persuade Gandhi to support the war effort of the British Empire. Gandhi sat in his *dhoti*, working the spinning wheel in whose homespun cloth he saw an alternative to Western materialism. He explained that while he would not impede the passage of aid to China, he could only countenance non-violent resistance. Chiang pointed out that the Japanese were unlikely to be swayed by civil disobedience. Gandhi summed up the Chinese leader's argument: 'Help the British anyhow. They are better than the others and will improve further hereafter.' Unimpressed, he turned back to his spinning.⁶⁵

The meeting summed up the questions of the hour. Would Asian nationalists give priority to the defeat of Japanese or of British imperialism? How would they organize their resistance? Could the British continue to control the pace of events? If British rule was doomed, what would come in its place?

Just as the fall of Singapore forced the reconstruction of the Cabinet, it also compelled Churchill to start to give ground on India. Within Whitehall, the pressure for a new policy increased as the scale of the Malayan disaster became clear. Attlee took the lead in attacking Viceroy Linlithgow's determination to treat the Raj as 'conquered' territory. Insisting that 'To mark time is to lose India', Attlee told the War Cabinet that a belief in 'justice and liberty' instilled by years of British rule meant the Indian political elite could be persuaded to join the fight, provided 'we . . . make them sharers in the things for which they and we were fighting'. Attlee wanted Linlithgow replaced with a 'special envoy' who would save the eastern empire. 66 It was, of course, the perfect job for Stafford Cripps, given his experience of legal negotiations and the interest he had already displayed in Indian affairs, including his friendship with Nehru and a trip round the subcontinent, guided by Congress members, in 1939. It would also keep him occupied with a task of Gordian complexity a long way from home.

When the War Cabinet discussed Attlee's paper on 5 February 1942, Leo Amery noticed that Churchill was in an odd mood. He kept teasing the Labour ministers and winking at the secretary of state for India.⁶⁷ Then he

revealed that he had come up with his own plan for Indian reform: an expansion of the Viceroy's Defence Council to a hundred members, drawn from the provincial assemblies and the representatives of the Indian princes. It would be allowed oversight of India's war effort and, once peace had been achieved, draw up a new constitution. Amery, Attlee and Anderson would decide the details, then Churchill would fly out to India and announce it in a radio broadcast, appealing to the people over the heads of Congress and the Muslim League. On his way back, the prime minister would drop into the Middle East and sort the problems there out too.⁶⁸

This was a dramatic departure from the position Churchill had adopted a month before. That his colleagues initially took it seriously was a sign of just how gobsmacked they were. Tellingly, however, when Amery suggested the danger that the declaration would worsen the intransigence of the Indian political parties, Churchill reassured the secretary of state that this was not a problem, since in that case 'not he but the unreasonableness of Indians would be blamed'. ⁶⁹ Preparations for his speech, however, were repeatedly postponed as the prime minister dealt with the aftermath of Singapore.

Whether or not Churchill expected his gambit to be received positively in India, there were clearly other advantages. As well as deflecting American pressure, the concession helped to prove Churchill's bona fides with Cripps – who was invited to a Downing Street meeting to discuss the proposal on 11 February 1942, before he formally joined the government. Yet the most important driver was in the Far East, where Japanese actions left the defences of the whole Indian Ocean area horribly exposed.

As soon as the new war broke out, Chiang had been eager to prove his worth to his new allies – and secure his flow of supplies – by helping to defend Burma. He offered 80,000 of his best-equipped troops to Wavell. The British were sceptical of the military value of Chiang's forces, scandalized by the corruption that beset the Chinese government, and worried by the effect on Burmese nationalists of the arrival of too many Chinese troops. When Wavell told Chiang that a single Nationalist division would suffice, Chiang was furious. 'Resisting the Japanese is not like suppressing colonial rebellions', he warned the British general. 'For this kind of job, you British are incompetent . . . '⁷¹

As the military situation deteriorated, Wavell came round to thinking that more Chinese help might be needed after all. As Chinese troops moved into northern Burma, Roosevelt secured Chiang's appointment as supreme commander in China. The US General Joseph Stilwell was appointed his chief of staff, commander of American forces in China, Burma and India, and supervisor of Lend-Lease deliveries to China.

Recognizing the importance of India to the Allied war effort in the theatre, at the end of January 1942 Chiang planned a visit. Meeting the viceroy, Nehru and Gandhi, he would call on Indians to follow his lead and put aside the struggle against British rule until the Japanese had been defeated. Linlithgow was all in favour of Chiang's intervention, but Churchill bitterly opposed the idea of Chiang treating the Congress leaders as a government of India in waiting.

Chiang's suspicion that supplies for Nationalist China might soon have to start coming north over the Himalayas from India, rather than through Burma, was confirmed on 4 February, when he stopped off at the town of Lashio, the starting point for the Burma Road. He met the commander of British forces in Burma, Lieutenant General Thomas Hutton, who told him that the defence of the country was already on the point of disaster. Reaching New Delhi on 8 February, Chiang was shocked at Nehru's adamant refusal to compromise with the British for the sake of defeating the Japanese. Despite Churchill's best efforts to forestall the Chiangs – the only Asian nationalist leaders who were doing their best to help the British Empire – they met Gandhi as well.

On their return to China, Chiang wrote to Roosevelt to warn that the situation in India was critical. If the British held back on further reforms, the Raj might crumble to a Japanese attack. The same message reached Sir Stafford Cripps via the Chinese ambassador in London.⁷² Roosevelt needed little prompting. Shocked by the fall of Singapore, the Americans had decided that the best way to stabilize India would be to grant its independence, and politicians and journalists had opened a general assault on British rule. Roosevelt was also emotionally committed to the idea of Indian independence. As he repeatedly made clear, he thought that Britain ought to follow America's example in the Philippines – a suggestion that showed little understanding not only of the complexities of Indian politics (as Churchill would angrily point out), but also of the similarities between the neo-colonial regime in the Philippines and the means of imperial control that Britain had pursued in the 1920s and 1930s. Importantly for what would follow, however, the president's desire for Indian reform was tempered by his determination to keep the alliance together. He would push the British on India – but only so far. ⁷³

Roosevelt got his representatives in London - John Winant, the US ambassador, and Averell Harriman, the Lend-Lease administrator - to ask

Churchill about British plans for India. Thanks to his 5 February U-turn, the prime minister could reply that a new policy was under consideration. In fact, Linlithgow had already comprehensively erupted against the proposals. Arguing that wrapping up the defence of India and the post-war constitution in the same body would pitch communal tensions into the heart of the war effort, the viceroy condemned Churchill's 'complete failure to comprehend the true nature of our difficulties in India'. The collapse of his scheme did not, however, kill the momentum for reform. Instead, the War Cabinet agreed to Attlee's suggestion of a new committee on India, consisting of himself, Cripps, Amery, Anderson, Grigg and the Liberal peer Viscount Simon. Churchill occasionally sat in. As they began their discussions, the British prepared to evacuate Rangoon.

'A VIRTUOUS MAIDEN SELLING HERSELF FOR REALLY HANDY READY MONEY . . .'

The defence of Burma suffered from many of the same flaws evident in Malaya — complacency, poorly trained and overstretched units, and a commander, Hutton, who lacked big battle experience. The fact that Burmese nationalism was much stronger only compounded the problem. The Burmese prime minister, U Saw, was arrested in January 1942 and charged with consorting with the enemy. The Japanese were helped by Thakin nationalists, who led a Burmese Independence Army across the border from Thailand. It was greeted with enthusiasm by Burmese who had longed for freedom from British rule. Burmese and Indian troops distrusted each other. As the front line disintegrated before another ruthless Japanese advance, Burmese soldiers deserted in droves.⁷⁴

Fighters flown by the RAF and the American Volunteer Group – an arm's length US air mission to China that was being trained up in Burma – provided much tougher resistance than the Japanese had faced in Malaya. On the ground, however, the defenders fell back in disarray. Following a disastrous battle at the Sittang river, Wavell sacked Hutton, but Rangoon was doomed. The reinforcements rushed to Burma – this time including an experienced armoured brigade – were unable to match the speed and skill of the Japanese.

As they evacuated Rangoon, the British fired the oil installations and supply dumps around the city. Amid the 'vast and sinister quietness' brooding 'over the city in the hot sun', the journalist James Lansdale

Hodson came across 'the terrible sight'

of acres of land covered with Lend-Lease motorcars, trucks and lorries, which were set on fire several days ago to prevent their falling into Japanese hands . . . sometimes piled one on top of the other, three or five deep, burnt, blistered, crumpled, mottled and bearing the very hues of death – straight from the American workshops to the incinerator . . . 75

The British abandoned the Burmese capital on 7 March 1942, and the Japanese marched in the following day. The defenders escaped to central Burma, where, with Chinese help, they would try again to stop the Japanese advance.

While the defence of southern Burma collapsed, the British sought desperately to reinforce Ceylon, bringing in new fighter, light bomber and maritime reconnaissance squadrons, as well as the 6th Australian Division, on its way back home from the Middle East. It was a transformational moment for the island. Hitherto a backwater, it would become a vital fortress in the new war. More than 20,000 Australian, British and Indian troops were moved rapidly to defend the island at the start of 1942. By the end of the year, 35,000 East African soldiers had arrived to replace and reinforce this garrison. Fear of a potential Japanese invasion led more than 200,000 Indians to leave Ceylon for India, while European women and children were evacuated to South Africa. ⁷⁶

By March 1942 the Eastern Fleet, with five battleships, three aircraft carriers and seven cruisers, was the largest assembly of British capital ships in one location since the beginning of the war. It would have been much larger had Force Z remained in the Indian Ocean, or the Italian raid on Alexandria had failed. In fact, these numbers concealed significant weaknesses. Four of the battleships were the slow and inadequate 'R' class, with HMS Warspite the only really powerful modernized vessel. The two modern aircraft carriers, HMS Formidable and Indomitable were, like other British fleet carriers at this time, relatively heavily armoured, but carried a smaller complement of aircraft than their Japanese or American equivalents. The fleet's aircraft consisted of fifty-seven Fairey Albacore and Swordfish torpedo bombers (the Albacore was essentially a Swordfish with an enclosed cockpit) and thirty-seven fighters. Some of the Albacores and the capital ships were equipped with advanced radar, allowing them to operate at night, but the aircrew were inexperienced and the whole fleet lacked practice in working together. 77

Ceylon could not act as a fleet base. The island's ports, Colombo and Trincomalee, were too small to allow maintenance work to be carried out on battleships or aircraft carriers (for which the nearest facilities were on

the other side of the Indian Ocean, at Durban), and its air defences too limited to protect docked ships from a Pearl Harbor-style attack. Instead, the Eastern Fleet would operate from a secret refuelling base known as 'Port T', which the Admiralty had just constructed at Addu Atoll in the Maldives. It had an anchorage sufficient for resupply, but lacked defences against a carrier attack if the Japanese learned of its existence.⁷⁸

The admiral posted to command this large but ramshackle force was Sir James Somerville. An expert on radar and an advocate for naval air power, Somerville had been forced into retirement with suspected TB in 1939 but staged a swift recovery and returned to the Royal Navy after the outbreak of war. As commander of Force H, he had played an important role in the attempted destruction of the French fleet at Mers-el-Kébir (after which Churchill had criticized him for insufficient ruthlessness), as well as the sinking of the *Bismarck* and the early battles to fight convoys through to Malta. Somerville was an inspiring leader who understood the importance of being seen to do right by his men. He cultivated a blunt turn-of-phrase. Joining his new command on 30 March 1942, he signalled to all ships: 'So this is the Eastern Fleet. Never mind. There's many a good tune played on an old fiddle.'⁷⁹

Somerville faced a daunting challenge. As the joint planners in London recognized, if the Japanese navy launched a major operation into the Indian Ocean, it would easily outnumber and outclass the available British forces. The destruction of the Eastern Fleet would expose the whole of the Indian Ocean to subsequent Japanese attack. Admiral Pound therefore ordered Somerville to operate as a 'fleet in being' – protecting Allied supply routes, but avoiding a high-risk encounter against a superior Japanese force. This would deter enemy raiders and make any maritime operation in the Indian Ocean – including a Ceylon invasion – much more difficult. As the year went on, the British planned to reinforce Somerville's fleet with newly commissioned and repaired battleships and aircraft carriers, but, in the short term, he faced the difficulty not only of judging whether to face battle, but also that while he avoided combat the Japanese might wreck his forward bases – including Port T, if he let them find it – making it still harder to protect the centre of balance of the British Empire.80

On the other side of the Indian Ocean, the British nervously eyed Madagascar (see Map 2). At its northern tip, the fortified port of Diego Suarez was perfectly positioned for attacks on shipping moving along the East African shore. Given Vichy collaboration with the Germans in Syria and Indochina, since December 1941 the British had worried that they

might open Diego Suarez to the Japanese. Plans had been drawn up for an amphibious attack, codenamed 'Ironclad', to seize the port (though not the rest of the island). Churchill wanted to launch the attack despite fears of Vichy reprisals. Wavell, concerned to secure all the reinforcements he could for India, was completely opposed. Then the Americans passed on intercepts from the Japanese diplomatic cipher, showing the Germans had suggested Japan occupy Madagascar and cut the Middle Eastern supply line before Rommel's next attack in the Western Desert. On 12 March 1942 the War Cabinet decided that 'Ironclad' should go ahead.⁸¹

The nature of the Burmese collapse threatened a crisis still worse than the fall of Singapore. Not only had the Japanese advance increased the external threat to India, but fears grew of internal subversion if Indian nationalists seized the opportunity to throw over British rule. While the British could hope to resist either a Japanese thrust into the Indian Ocean or an uprising in India, the simultaneous combination of the two might prove disastrous. Together with his weakened position at home, Britain's inability fully to guarantee India's security forced Churchill to give constitutional ground, at least until Anglo-American industrial superiority reasserted itself. This was a grudging process, from which the prime minister repeatedly sought to draw back. The momentum for change, however, was kept up by the combined pressure from the Indians, Americans, Labour and the Japanese. 82

Attlee, a connoisseur of the machinery of government, thought the new India Committee 'pretty good', with one notable exception. According to Amery, at the new committee's first meeting on 26 February 1942, Churchill was

quite incapable of listening or taking in even the simplest point but goes off at a tangent on a word and then rambles on inconsecutively . . . a complete outsider . . . knowing nothing of his reputation would have thought him a rather amusing but quite gaga old gentleman who could not understand what people were talking about. ⁸³

Whether this was really a sign, as Amery thought, of Churchill 'losing his grip altogether', of an internal clash between pragmatism and prejudice, or simply of him being deliberately difficult, the India Committee made serious progress only when he wasn't there.⁸⁴ It swiftly devised a plan based on proposals Cripps had put forward after his Indian visit in 1939: a promise of post-war independence as a Dominion, with Indians free to choose if they left the Commonwealth. Self-government would be enacted by a constituent assembly to which any province would have the right not to accede, which meant neither the Princely States nor the Muslim

majority provinces would have to join a united India, and the Muslim League could pursue its goal of Pakistan. In the meantime, India's leaders would be asked to involve themselves in 'the counsels of their nation' during the war. Cripps thought this meant a fully Indian Viceroy's Council, assembled from the major parties and acting as an equivalent of the British War Cabinet. Amery did not.⁸⁵

Churchill accepted this draft with ill grace at the start of March 1942 ('undergoing', as Amery joked to the king, 'all the emotions of a virtuous maiden selling herself for really handy ready money . . . ').⁸⁶ Faced with protests from Conservative ministers outside the War Cabinet, the Tory backbenches, Wavell and Linlithgow, however, by 7 March the prime minister was arguing that it might be best to put the plans into 'cold storage for two or three months' until the military crisis was past.⁸⁷

Cripps would not let progress stall. Instead, he volunteered to travel to India, consult the party leaders and promulgate the new proposals there, rather than announcing them first in London. On 9 March 1942 the War Cabinet agreed to send him to New Delhi. By the time Churchill announced the mission to the Commons two days later, Cripps was already on his way.

Cripps had the self-belief to think he could solve the knotty problems of Indian politics, but he recognized the probability of failure. The rewards were so great, however, that he thought he ought to try. What else could a man committed to self-sacrifice for the greater good do?⁸⁸ Roosevelt too hoped to drive the process forward. On 9 March, the Americans announced the despatch of an advisory mission to India, under the president's special representative, Colonel Louis Johnson. Ostensibly supporting the expansion of India's war effort, Johnson would assert an American interest in the future of the Raj.

Churchill was if anything relieved by Cripps' mission. If the British were going to have to leave India, he had no great interest in grappling with the complex issues of how it would be done. He was happy enough to see someone else try to deal with it – and preferably fail in the process – so he could get on with thinking about the war. Over lunch with the Soviet ambassador Ivan Maisky on 16 March 1942, the prime minister explained that, if it weren't for the internecine slaughter that would surely follow Britain's departure, he wouldn't worry about India's future: 'We won't be living there in any case.' As for his new colleague: 'Cripps won't be able to do anything . . . The Indians won't agree between themselves . . . From the military point of view it is not so important . . . the Caspian-Levantine front is far more important than India. Politics and emotion are another

matter. We shall see.' Struck by Churchill's 'twilight mood', Maisky concluded that he had 'an acute sense of being on the wane and is harnessing his remaining strength and energy in pursuit of one fundamental and all-exclusive goal – to win the war. He looks and thinks no further than that.'89

'FAILURE MUST CLEARLY BE PLACED UPON THE INDIAN PEOPLE AND NOT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT'

Cripps arrived in Delhi on 23 March 1942.⁹⁰ Reports of a fresh Japanese offensive in Burma would compete for front-page space with news of his discussions with Indian political leaders. The mood was simultaneously gloomy and tense.

Linlithgow had offered to resign when he first heard of Cripps' mission, but soon changed his mind when he realized that so doing would leave the emissary with a free hand. For his part, Cripps saw the viceroy as an obstacle to any settlement and kept him at arm's length. From the start, he sought to present himself differently from the stately but dull Linlithgow: joking easily with reporters and staying in a modest bungalow rather than the imposing Viceroy's House. Yet he never established a popular following in India in the way he had done in the UK. In the end, he was still just a representative of British power. ⁹¹

Cripps planned to carry out a series of individual meetings, seeking responses to the draft declaration he had brought from London, which would then be revised for public announcement. From the start, the sticking point with the Congress leaders was clear. Rather to Cripps' surprise, they wanted to talk not about the terms of future independence, but about the interim government to be formed during the war. Cripps' instructions from London were to reserve some powers – the selection of ministers and control of the Indian armed forces – in the hands of the viceroy and British officials. Congress wanted a national government composed wholly of Indians, with the viceroy a solely titular head of state. Cripps thought this was an achievable goal – but not as a first step. By accepting the British deal and entering government, he argued, the Indians would build such momentum that London would be unable to refuse them more and more power over time. Congress leaders, accustomed to British divide-and-rule tactics, were unwilling to split their movement over a

promise of future concessions and doubted that a government without full authority over Indian affairs could mobilize popular support for the war.

Since Gandhi was as committed to Congress unity as to non-violence, he sought straight away to dissociate himself from the negotiations. He told Cripps that, if the draft declaration was the best the British could do, he might as well go home. Cripps told him it was the only deal on the table. Famously, Gandhi then termed the offer of post-war independence 'a post-dated cheque' ('drawn on a failing bank', added an American journalist). Because it left open the possibility of an independent Pakistan, he said, it would result in the 'vivisection' of India. ⁹² This was just why Jinnah was willing to agree to the British proposals. That left open the chance of a settlement, despite Gandhi's opposition, if Cripps could secure Nehru's support.

Cripps tried to get this by conceding a split between British control of the military, and Indian control of the home front. Linlithgow was increasingly nervous that Cripps was exceeding his authority, but nevertheless agreed to the change so he wouldn't be blamed for any breakdown in negotiations. The amended declaration was announced to the world at a press conference on 29 March 1942. In his report, the *Daily Express* correspondent Alan Moorehead conveyed what an accomplished and modern figure Cripps struck

in a white suit . . . with the snap and sparkle of an auctioneer selling a particularly good lot to an eager market. For 20 minutes he wisecracked at the rate of about ten wisecracks a minute, squeezing in here and there a gobbet of hard, vital fact. The Indians heckled him freely. Here is a sample: 'Have you a political party backing you?' Cripps: 'I've got a party of one, which has the advantage of always voting the same way.' I never saw a press conference conducted so well as this, despite the laughter and noise. ⁹³

The British press celebrated the offer as a triumph of liberal traditions and the 'greatest achievement' of the 'democratic way of life'. But the newspapers also made clear to readers that the responsibility for success now lay with one Indian in particular. As the *Express* explained: 'Nehru may decide it'.

Cripps had met with his friend for the first time on the morning of the press conference. A gulf, unappreciated by either, had opened between them, however. Cripps was now set on prioritizing the defeat of Fascism; Nehru could not bring himself to collaborate with the British. His opposition doomed any chance of a final settlement.

Cripps stayed on in India, hoping he could find a temporary compromise that would allow Congress to participate in a reconstructed government. For the first ten days of April, Cripps, Congress

representatives and the American envoy Louis Johnson engaged in tortuous negotiations around the division of responsibilities between a British commander-in-chief and a future Indian war minister. Cripps and Johnson thought they were close to an agreement, but Congress leaders still had no reason to trust Cripps' argument that accepting office would give them leverage over Linlithgow and London.

Meanwhile, the viceroy and Amery had recognized that Cripps was over-stepping his brief by trying to trade a wartime transfer of power for Congress collaboration.⁹⁴ From 9 April, a series of fierce rebukes passed back and forth between Churchill and Cripps. Ironically, it was in fact the latter's unwillingness to exceed his mandate that convinced the Congress Working Committee finally to reject Cripps' proposals the following day. Cripps told the prime minister he was coming home.

Churchill bore this news, as he put it, 'with philosophy'. 95 Johnson, however, had wrongly informed Roosevelt that the prime minister had sabotaged the negotiations. Harry Hopkins, in London to discuss European strategy, delivered a message from the president warning of the adverse effect on US public opinion, and insisting Churchill make sure not only that 'a real . . . and fair offer' had been made, but also that blame for its 'failure must clearly be placed upon the Indian people and not the British Government'. 96 According to Hopkins, the prime minister's response was 'a string of cuss words' that 'lasted for two hours in the middle of the night'. 97 The reply he sent to Roosevelt, however, regretted that Cripps had already started his journey home before the War Cabinet could be assembled to approve another round of talks.

Nonetheless, the British took the warning seriously. The Washington embassy had already begun a propaganda campaign to persuade Americans that the failure of Cripps' mission was all the Indian National Congress's fault. Whether or not this convinced the American people, Roosevelt accepted Hopkins' judgement that the British effort had been genuine. Once made, Cripps' offer could not be unmade; whatever happened next, the moment of Britain's departure from India had just grown appreciably nearer. Indian nationalists, meanwhile, grew more dissatisfied and frustrated, even as the threat from the Japanese increased.

'DAMN AND *BLAST* IT LOOKS AS IF I'VE BEEN HAD'

While Cripps had been talking to the Indians, the Japanese were on the

march. On 19 March 1942, they restarted their Burma offensive, attacking Chinese troops around the town of Toungoo and destroying the airbase at Magwe, thus securing air superiority for the rest of the campaign. With Toungoo nearly surrounded, Chiang told his troops to retreat, horrifying Stilwell, who was nominally in charge of Chinese forces in Burma. Their withdrawal unhinged I Burma Corps — a mixture of Indian, British and Burmese soldiers under Lieutenant General Sir William Slim. They retreated northwards to the oilfields round Yenanyaung, only to be surrounded by the Japanese. Only the intervention of the Chinese allowed them to escape. Deciding that any further attempt to halt the enemy was fruitless, the British commander of Burma, General Sir Harold Alexander, ordered Slim's men to retreat again, over the Irrawaddy and Chindwin rivers. They were chased all the way by the Japanese.

The last of Slim's troops crossed into India at the start of May 1942, just as the monsoon descended and the campaign came to a stop. Thirteen thousand Commonwealth troops had been killed or wounded for the loss of less than 4,000 Japanese. The 900-mile path of the retreat was dotted with graves and abandoned vehicles and guns. The Chinese, poorly commanded by Stilwell and Chiang, had fared even worse. About 25,000 were killed, wounded, went missing or died of disease as they trudged out of Burma. Ten thousand made it to India, where they were housed in a huge camp at Ramgarh. 99

The military defeat soon turned into a humanitarian disaster. Terrified of the Japanese and attacked by Burmese nationalists, about 600,000 Indians, Anglo-Indians and Anglo-Burmese fled for India. Some got out by sea; most struggled overland. In both cases, white refugees got precedence. As the refugees picked their ways over muddy tracks or sheltered from the monsoon in makeshift camps, they were ravaged by disease and starvation. There was no assistance from the authorities. They died, untallied but in huge numbers. As the survivors reached India, they told stories not just of Japanese invincibility and British incapacity, but of a catastrophic failure of colonial governance. Still more ominously, the loss of Burma cut off India from the paddy fields that had supplied 15 per cent of its rice. In an India already ravaged by unchecked wartime inflation, that shortfall would have terrible consequences. 101

On the same day that Cripps announced his Indian offer to the press, Admiral Somerville wrote to the Admiralty that FECB decrypts of JN-25 had revealed a Japanese task force of two carriers and four cruisers was on its way to raid Ceylon. Forewarned that this attack was planned for 1 April 1942, Somerville prepared an ambush, organizing aerial reconnaissance

sweeps by RAF Catalina flying boats to locate the Japanese ships and sailing the Eastern Fleet south of Ceylon.¹⁰² Given the relative weakness of his forces, he intended to take advantage of British radar to stay out of the way of daytime reconnaissance flights from the enemy carriers, before moving in to hit them with a night-time torpedo attack.¹⁰³

Bearing in mind his inexperienced fleet, the small numbers of flying boats available, and the difficulty of precisely locating the Japanese fleet, this was an ambitious plan that placed a lot of reliance on superior technology. It would have been better suited to the very highly trained units with which Somerville had worked in Force H. After two days of finding nothing, the 'R'-class battleships were running low on fuel and Somerville started to wonder whether his intelligence had been wrong. The two heavy cruisers, HMS *Cornwall* and *Devonshire*, and the older light aircraft carrier, HMS *Hermes*, were due to depart to other stations, and Somerville detached them to Colombo and Trincomalee respectively. The Eastern Fleet returned to Port T to refuel on 4 April; at which point a report came in from a Catalina that had spotted the Japanese fleet and got off a message about its location before it was shot down. ¹⁰⁴ 'Damn and *blast* it looks as if I've been had' wrote Somerville to his wife. He ordered his fleet straight back out. ¹⁰⁵

In fact, the signals intelligence *had* been wrong about two things. The first was the date of the attack, which the Japanese had scheduled for 5 April 1942. Japanese ships had taken a circuitous route to the point where they would launch their aircraft against Ceylon. Had their strike taken place on the date the British expected, the Japanese ships would have passed right next to the area where the Eastern Fleet was waiting before they got any advance warning from the Catalinas. This would have been particularly bad news because the second thing the decrypted signals got wrong was the scale of the Japanese force. It comprised five carriers with about 275 aircraft aboard, and four fast modern battlecruisers: a much more formidable opponent than Somerville anticipated. The Catalina that spotted the Japanese on 4 April was shot down before it could report on the size of the fleet, but there was enough other intelligence about the number of available Japanese ships that Somerville might have been more cautious about rushing to engage the enemy.

On the morning of 5 April, as the Eastern Fleet hurried back towards Ceylon, the Japanese raided Colombo. Unlike at Pearl Harbor, they were met by readied anti-aircraft guns and an air defence system equipped with modern fighters. Nonetheless, they shot down nineteen British aircraft for the loss of just seven of their own. *Cornwall* and *Devonshire* had left the

port in anticipation of the attack but were located by Japanese reconnaissance aircraft and sunk by a further carrier strike just before two o'clock that afternoon. Since the Japanese carriers did not launch any further reconnaissance flights, however — even after their fighters shot down one of Somerville's searching Albacores — they remained unaware of the approaching Eastern Fleet. Somerville, following the arrival of new signals intelligence from Colombo, had realized how large the Japanese task force was, but still hoped to launch a night attack. Against the odds, this might have worked: the Japanese were well trained to fight ship-to-ship encounters at night but had no preparations against night-time air attacks. Having sunk a couple of enemy carriers, Somerville's fleet would almost certainly have escaped in the confusion. It would have been the first successful carrier-on-carrier attack in history. ¹⁰⁶

In fact, errors in location reports meant that the British were unable to find the Japanese, and Somerville withdrew towards Port T. On 9 April, the Japanese launched another air strike, on Trincomalee. They shot down another five British aircraft, bombed the town and sank HMS *Hermes* – though they nearly suffered a loss of their own when they failed to detect an incoming raid by RAF Blenheims against a Japanese carrier. Meanwhile, a smaller Japanese task force had been attacking merchant shipping in the Bay of Bengal, sinking 20 ships totalling 93,000 tons, and Japanese aircraft had bombed the Indian city of Vizagapatam.

Fortunately for the British, this was not the prelude to an invasion of Ceylon. In common with every other combatant at this point in the war, the Japanese could not sustain prolonged naval air operations at a great distance from their bases, and three of their carriers now had to return to Japan to refit. As soon as the raid on Trincomalee had finished, they turned eastwards – leaving both fleets powering away from Ceylon as quickly as possible. But for some bad luck, the British might have scored a major naval victory. On the other hand, some more misfortune might have seen the Eastern Fleet destroyed, and, as Pound had done his best to drum into Somerville, Britain did not need to try a reckless win over the Japanese in the Indian Ocean in spring 1942 as much as it needed to avoid another disaster.¹⁰⁷

As it was, the loss of two cruisers and an aircraft carrier, followed by a retreat, represented a significant defeat. Consoling initial reports overestimated Japanese aircraft losses, but it was plain that the British could not expect the Eastern Fleet in its current state to prevail against Japanese naval air superiority. Somerville was told to withdraw to Kilindini on the Kenyan coast, from where he could cover the convoy

route up the East African coast and keep his 'fleet in being'. Though his carriers returned to Indian waters, the British were well aware that they would be unable to stop the Japanese if they made another foray. Somerville wrote to his wife on 10 April 1942: 'Japs can walk in any time they like.' A week before, Pound had written to Admiral King to ask for diversionary action in the Pacific to release the pressure on the Indian Ocean. King replied that such an operation was about to take place. This was the 'Doolittle Raid' of 18 April 1942, in which B25 bombers flown off US carriers hit Tokyo for the first time in the war. The resulting Japanese determination to knock out the American carrier fleet confirmed the already-taken decision to attack the island of Midway in the Central Pacific. There, many of the Japanese shortcomings apparent during the Indian Ocean raid – an inability to adapt to changing circumstances, poor aerial reconnaissance drills and the lack of radar early warning for carriers under air attack – would be fully exposed by the US Navy. 110

Japan's inability simultaneously to finish off the Royal Navy in the Indian Ocean and the US Navy in the Pacific demonstrated that its initial victories had not solved the essential strategic problems that had driven it to war in the first place. British weakness notwithstanding, capturing and holding Ceylon would, in retrospect, have been very difficult for an empire already suffering from a crippling shortage of shipping. In the immediate aftermath of the Indian Ocean raid and the failure of the Cripps mission, however, the whole theatre looked terribly vulnerable. Wavell insisted that without reinforcements he could not hold the Raj. 111 Cripps told his colleagues it was time to choose between bombing Germany and saving India. 'I suppose', General Brooke confided to his diary, 'this Empire has never been in such a precarious position throughout its history!' 112

'The only way in our power of helping Russia'

February–June 1942

Even as the British scrabbled to hold their position around the Indian Ocean, their European strategy was also brought into question. American belligerence created the possibility of a large-scale invasion of Northwest Europe and coincided with new demands from the Soviets – and their friends in the West – for the opening of a second front. This was the context for a bout of diplomatic and strategic manoeuvring during the spring and early summer of 1942, as Allied political and military leaders tried to gain control of planning the rest of the war. Bomber Command was the subject of rising criticism, both publicly in Parliament and the press and privately within Whitehall, not just for its inaccuracy and inefficacy, but also because of the resources it was diverting from other fronts of the war. As a result, much attention would focus on Bomber Command's fight for survival and Anglo-American arguments about whether a cross-Channel invasion could take place in 1942.

'BREAD, NOT GEORGE CROSS'

During the first months of 1942, the Axis air offensive against Malta intensified. The Italian air force was joined by Luftwaffe Air Fleet II, transferred from the Eastern Front. In order that it should return to support the summer offensive against the Red Army, the bombing of Malta would have to peak in April. Meanwhile the Italians planned an amphibious invasion that, awkwardly, could not take place until months after the culmination of the aerial attack.¹

Already, the Maltese blockade was having an effect. A British attempt to run three merchant ships to the island from Alexandria on 12–13

February 1942 was comprehensively defeated, with two sunk and the third forced into shelter at Tobruk.² At the end of February, the island's commander, General Dobbie, reported that, without further deliveries of food, supplies would be exhausted by the end of June.

That increased the pressure for an early offensive in the Western Desert. Auchinleck, however, wanted to wait until he had addressed the problems that had become evident during 'Crusader'. That meant building up a significant superiority in armoured vehicles, establishing proper maintenance facilities and training up newly arrived troops. When the chiefs told him they wanted control of the Cyrenaican airfields by the middle of April, so that the RAF could cover convoys into Malta, Auchinleck responded that he couldn't countenance an offensive until the start of June. Churchill was incandescent.³

Brooke was caught between his determination to protect Auchinleck from prime ministerial interference and his belief that he really ought to organize a more immediate attack. The CIGS was a legendarily strong personality, given to explosive expostulation, quickfire delivery and absolute refusals to give ground in debate, particularly with politicians pretending to be military strategists. He relieved the frustration by indulging his intense fascination with birds, photographing them from the hide he had constructed in his garden or shooting vast numbers of grouse on visits to country estates. During a brief, precious moment of respite on a birdwatching trip to the Farne Islands in June 1942, a dinghy overturned and all Brooke's precious camera equipment became soaked with seawater. This calamity depressed him almost as much as the lack of command talent available to Britain's army.⁴

Like many of his military colleagues, Brooke was susceptible to Churchill's charm, and his self-evident love of a fight. That helped him put up with the prime minister dragging him over the coals in front of the War Cabinet ('Have you not got a single general in that army who can win battles, have none of them any ideas, must we continually lose battles in this way?'). During his first months as CIGS, Brooke was impressed by Churchill's resilience in the face of the disasters in the Far East; less so by his tantrums if he didn't get his sleep in the afternoon. Getting a handle on how the prime minister worked, Brooke adapted his schedule, taking time away from the office after lunch to poke around London's un-blitzed shops in search of bird books, recovering his equilibrium ahead of the night-time battles to come.

What Churchill made of his twitching CIGS is less clear. He excluded

Brooke almost completely from his own account of the Second World War, an omission that infuriated the general. Brooke believed, correctly, that this reflected a reluctance to let anyone else share the credit for victory – but it also demonstrated how Churchill understood their relationship. 'Brookie' was a valued professional advisor, not a comrade-in-arms. If Brooke was no more personally congenial than General Dill, however, he did at least argue back to (and in) Churchill's face. This allowed the prime minister the satisfaction of feeling that he was testing military plans to their limits.

At the start of March 1942, in response to demands from Cripps that he overhaul the strategic direction of the war, Churchill asked Brooke to replace Admiral Pound as chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee – breaking the precedent that the next incumbent should have been an airman. Pound's character was much more to Churchill's liking, but he had been worn down by years of wartime strain and the pain of a degenerative condition in his hip, and now dozed his way through a lot of meetings. He may also have been suffering from the – as yet undiagnosed – brain tumour that would kill him eighteen months later. In one of several diary entries that he would regret when Pound's illness came to light, Brooke described him as looking like 'an old parrot asleep on his perch!'.⁸ Together with the positively aquiline Air Chief Marshal Portal, they made a fine set of avian specimens, since Brooke himself had the appearance of a wide awake and extremely angry owl, a suitably nocturnal bird for one who had to spend so much time at Churchill's beck and call.

During March, London and Cairo argued about the relative tank strengths of Axis and Commonwealth forces in the Western Desert. Auchinleck dodged a Churchillian browbeating by refusing to come to London for discussions. Instead, Churchill decided that the vice chief of the imperial general staff, Lieutenant General Sir Archibald Nye, and Cripps – then on his way out to India – should examine matters for themselves in Cairo. To Churchill's frustration, they supported Auchinleck. Cripps might have been ready to shake up strategy, but he recognized an expert when he saw one, and he concluded that Auchinleck was correct: as yet, the Eighth Army was simply not ready to attack.⁹

The aerial bombardment of Malta reached its peak during March and April. In these two months, the Germans flew more than 12,000 aircraft sorties against the tiny island (measuring just thirteen miles by seven), dropping more than 6,000 tons of bombs. Malta's defences – 230 anti-aircraft guns and 80 fighter aircraft – could not shield the island from this scale of attack, and it was bombed with a greater intensity and regularity

than anything experienced in Britain.¹⁰ Though Malta's airfields remained in use as a night-time refuelling stop for British bombers flying out to the Middle East, the frequency of the daytime attacks destroyed aircraft in the sky and on the ground, threatened to put airbases out of action and forced the RAF commanders on the island to concentrate on their force's survival.

To counter these attacks, the defenders desperately needed the newest Mark V version of the Spitfire, which could take on the advanced Messerschmitt Bf109F. Belatedly provided from the UK, these aircraft were concentrated on Malta, leaving the Western Desert Air Force without a fighter that could take on the best German plane on equal terms. Though the WDAF had recovered from its low point after 'Crusader', Tedder was desperate for more aircraft, including photo reconnaissance planes and four-engined heavy bombers as well as Spitfires. Cripps agreed with him – and reported back to Churchill that transfers to the Far East had to stop while the RAF in the Middle East rebuilt its strength. ¹¹

Because the Spitfire had a relatively short range, the only way for reinforcements to reach Malta was to be fitted with external fuel tanks, loaded aboard aircraft carriers in Gibraltar, borne into the Mediterranean and then flown off to the island – an operation the British nicknamed the 'Club Run'. After a series of delays, the first Spitfire Vs flew into Malta from the elderly carriers HMS *Eagle* and *Argus* on 6 March 1942. With the Germans and Italians dominating the skies above the island, however, the newly arrived aircraft were soon either shot down, destroyed or damaged on the ground.

Between 20 and 23 March another attempt to run a convoy from Alexandria to Malta ran into combined air and sea attacks from Axis forces. The presence of the Italian fleet forced the British to manoeuvre, slowing the passage and giving more time for German and Italian aircraft to attack. Three out of the four merchant ships reached Malta, but preparations for their unloading were desperately inadequate – a sign perhaps of the exhausted state of the island's command – and before they could be unloaded, all three were attacked from the air, set alight and sunk. Of the 30,000 tons of supplies despatched from Egypt, only 800 tons had been unloaded before the ships went down. A further 5,000 tons may have been salvaged from the wrecks over the coming weeks. Simultaneously, another 'Club Run' of Spitfire reinforcements had to be aborted after faults were discovered in the feed lines from the additional fuel tanks. Another sally a week later successfully despatched the aircraft.

Despite the intense and prolonged bombardment – in April, there were an average of nine air-raid alerts a day – life in Malta carried on.¹⁴ In

Valletta, the docks were a shambles, the harbour was filled with sunken ships and familiar landmarks lay in ruins, but many women and children had long been evacuated into the Maltese countryside. The caves and deep cellars carved into the island's rock provided good air-raid protection, supplemented by spring 1942 by a government programme of shelter construction that provided space for almost the entire population.

Nonetheless, the British worried about a collapse of Maltese morale. As in London during the Blitz, the island's inhabitants soon habituated themselves to the daily cycle of air raids. The Axis blockade, however, rendered supplies of food increasingly scarce. Rationing was tightened, and communal feeding from official 'Victory Kitchens' became a fact of civilian life. On 15 April 1942, the king awarded the whole island the George Cross – the medal instituted during the Blitz to mark civilian bravery – a unique instance of the decoration being given to an entire community. Soon afterwards, graffiti appeared reading: 'Hobz, mux George Cross' – 'Bread, not George Cross'. Royal gestures would count for little if the British could not bring in the resources required for survival. Reports that the strain was beginning to tell on Dobbie led Brooke to press for his replacement by Field Marshal 'Tiger' Gort.

To enable more Spitfire reinforcements to be flown in, the Americans agreed to send the US carrier *Wasp*, with its big flight deck, into the Mediterranean on a 'Club Run'. Forty-six new Spitfires reached Malta in this way on 20 April 1942, but insufficient preparations had been made for the Axis response. Within two hours of their arrival, German bombing knocked out thirty of the Spitfires on the ground.

During March and April, Axis air power neutralized Malta as an offensive base — reconnaissance planes and bombers were shot down, airfields wrecked and submarines in harbour forced to stay submerged. As a result, Axis supply runs to North Africa could proceed almost uninterrupted. More than 150,000 tons of materiel arrived during April 1942, by a distance the maximum monthly total to this point in the war. As that demonstrated, dealing with Malta was crucial to Axis success in North Africa. Like the Japanese at Ceylon, however, the Germans and Italians failed to capitalize on their moment of opportunity.

None of the preparations for an invasion of the island were ready before Luftwaffe Air Fleet II began to depart for the East. German officers tried to speed things up by offering to undertake their own airborne assault, but Hitler was never keen. Averse to such operations after the heavy losses incurred during the invasion of Crete, he suspected that the Italians were drawing up grandiose schemes as a reason for sitting tight in North Africa and letting everyone else get on with the war. Planning for an invasion proceeded, but Hitler gave precedence to Rommel's demand for a new offensive in the Western Desert, which aimed to improve his supply lines by capturing Tobruk. With that operation complete, it was agreed, Rommel would pause while German and Italian forces seized Malta, before commencing an advance on Egypt. Kesselring and the Italian general staff planned the attack on Malta, Operation 'Hercules', in great detail. It would never go ahead.¹⁷

With the British badly overstretched in both the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, an invasion of Malta in April 1942 stood a good chance of success. Unlike the Japanese, the problem for the European Axis powers was not a lack of capability – despite a shortage of airfields on Sicily, the logistical challenge of taking Malta was much less than that of seizing and holding Ceylon – but a failure of strategic focus and alliance management. Given the limited window before the Anglo-American navies recovered from the opening of the new war in the Far East, putting off the capture of a maritime outpost was not a good idea.

During May and June, the air balance over Malta shifted. Luftwaffe serviceability rates declined, weakening the force that could be sent over the island just as the defenders grew stronger. ¹⁸ German squadrons moved from Sicily to Libya to support Rommel's advance. At the start of May, Enigma decrypts revealed that many of the aircraft that had been bombarding Malta would shortly leave for the Eastern Front. ¹⁹ On 9 May 1942, USS *Wasp* and HMS *Eagle* flew in another sixty-four Spitfires. Over the next month, a further three 'Club Runs' by *Eagle* resulted in another seventy-six fighters reaching Malta. This time, better preparations on the Maltese airfields meant they got into action before they were destroyed on the ground. The fast minelayer HMS *Welshman* ran the gauntlet into Valletta, bringing ammunition for the anti-aircraft guns. German aircraft strength in Sicily fell from 154 to 91 aircraft during the last three weeks of May, and the British were able to restore air superiority over the island. ²⁰

For Commonwealth pilots, outnumbered in the skies and bombed and strafed on the ground, and for German and Italian aircrew confronting the densest anti-aircraft fire seen in the war to that point, air combat over Malta was astonishingly intense. RAF flyers used to the comparative order of fighter sweeps over France were taken aback at the chaos of the fighting. Yet the desperate straits to which the defence was pushed by the Axis offensive masked the serious problem that the British aerial commitment to the Mediterranean posed to the German air force.

Sustained combat over the Mediterranean Sea and in North Africa meant that during the first half of 1942, the Luftwaffe would lose more aircraft on this southern front than over Western Europe. Together, the two campaigns accounted for 46 per cent of German aircraft losses between January and August 1942. With Anglo-American expansion plans far from fully realized, and the US Army Air Forces (USAAF) not yet committed to the fight, the war against the air forces of the British Commonwealth was already costing the Germans almost as many planes – and more of its highest performance aircraft – as the struggle against the Soviet Union. The pressure thus exerted was far from conclusive – not least because the Western Allies lacked for the moment both the ability and the strategy to bring the German air force itself under sustained attack – but the result was that the Luftwaffe could not concentrate its strength. Judged in terms of machinery rather than ground troops, the Mediterranean was a relatively very costly battlefield for the Axis powers. Far from a sideshow, it was a genuine front on which Anglo-American mechanical advantage could be brought effectively to bear.²¹

Though the aerial pressure on Malta diminished after May 1942, the Axis blockade and the danger that the island would simply be starved into submission remained. In response, the British planned a double relief expedition for the middle of June. Heavily escorted convoys would be sent from Gibraltar and Alexandria, timed to arrive in Malta on successive nights. The naval effort involved stretched across two oceans, with cruisers and destroyers from the Home and Eastern Fleets joining the task forces assembling at each end of the Mediterranean. Without their supplies, the British could not guarantee they would be able to hold the island, let alone turn it back into a base from which to sally out against Axis shipping and turn the tide in North Africa.

The worsening state of supplies on Malta, meanwhile, drove demands that Auchinleck get on with an offensive in the Western Desert. Grappling with the huge problems of defending the whole of the Middle East, and unwilling to pile defeat on defeat, Auchinleck refused to budge. He now suggested it might be August before he had the two-to-one superiority in tanks deemed necessary for a successful advance. On 10 May 1942, Churchill told him to attack or resign. Nine days later, Auchinleck replied that he would launch an offensive to coincide with the Malta convoys during the darkest period of June. By this point, it was already apparent that Rommel would attack first. Auchinleck had held out long enough to ensure that the Eighth Army would fight its next action on the defensive. Given the balance of forces, and the strength of the position that the Eighth

Army had constructed along the Gazala line, this was a battle he was much more willing to accept.²²

'OUR ONLY DEFINITELY OFFENSIVE WEAPON AT THIS TIME'

On 27 January 1942, Lord Cranborne, the Dominions secretary, defended the government's blockade policy in the House of Lords. Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede and George Bell, the bishop of Chichester, were calling for relief programmes to help those on whom famine conditions had been imposed by the British embargo on shipments to Occupied Europe. 'Bobbety' Cranborne, the nephew of the minister for the blockade in the Great War, was already a Tory grandee. Ponsonby, an absolutist pacifist, had opposed the last war and in 1928 published *The Lie About the War*, a key text in convincing many Britons that domestic propaganda about German atrocities had been false. In 1940, he had resigned the Labour whip in the Lords in protest when the party joined the Churchill Coalition.

Ponsonby and Bell complained that the effect of the blockade was 'to condemn thousands, chiefly children, to death'. Cranborne responded:

Of course the blockade is an odious weapon – everybody thinks that. But it is one of our strongest weapons, and it is almost our only definitely offensive weapon at this time. Even if it is imperfect in its effects . . . it has already . . . had a very material and, possibly, a profound effect upon the Germans. 23

It had been generally accepted between the wars that Germany had collapsed in 1918 because its home front had been put under intolerable strain, not just by the shortages created by the Allied economic blockade but also by the resultant collapse of domestic morale as Germans realized the war would never be won. The belief that the same sort of defeat could be imposed on their enemy this time around was fundamental to the way the British state fought the Second World War.

In 1939, even as the government accepted a very substantial expansion of the army and the associated munitions industries in order to reassure the French and prepare for a final decisive land offensive in a long war, the British hoped to avoid the heavy casualties of 1916–18. After June 1940, when the Empire was left to fight alone, doubts about *British* morale in the event of such a bloodletting were compounded by the simple impossibility of finding the manpower to sustain both a prolonged high-intensity ground war and the manufacturing base necessary to supply a multidimensional

global conflict, while maintaining basic living standards at home.

Seeking the means of victory over the desperate year that followed, British planners fell back on assumptions about their enemy's vulnerability to attacks on materiel supplies and morale. Significantly, they expected to win, not with a fight to the death amid the burning rubble of Berlin and Rome, but with Hitler and Mussolini's regimes tumbling to internal coups and replaced by successor governments willing to discuss peace on British terms. The enemy's ability to fight on would be targeted through the economic blockade and bombing attacks on key industries, but also through two combined subversion campaigns — one aimed at demoralizing Germans and Italians; the other at persuading the people of Occupied Europe to resist Axis domination and, ultimately, to participate directly in the destruction of the occupying armies.

It was no accident that from the summer of 1940, subversive as well as blockade activities both came under the remit of the Ministry of Economic Warfare (MEW). Hugh Dalton, the Labour politician who took over the ministry in Churchill's first coalition, wanted to pursue an all-out economic war. Like many on the left, he distrusted the military establishment and was convinced that Europeans (including any 'good' Germans) were inherently liberal and democratic and would eventually rise up from under the Fascist yoke. This spontaneous revolt, led by trade unionists and socialist politicians, would see victory won by the people in arms. He therefore seized the opportunity to take charge of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), the organization created in 1940 to conduct subversion overseas and mirror the fifth-column activities that had supposedly resulted in Germany's astonishingly rapid run of victories in the west.

Dalton was tall, ambitious and a bit of a bore. He knew he needed Churchill's approval, but the prime minister, disliking Dalton's booming voice and staring eyes, did his best to avoid him. Typically, Dalton put this down to the machinations of Churchill's advisors, particularly Brendan Bracken, rather than to any personal flaw. Bracken certainly loathed 'the biggest, bloodiest shit I've ever met', as he called Dalton, much to Churchill's amusement. Recognizing his vulnerability, Dalton relied on the Labour Party to keep him in the government, while simultaneously badmouthing Attlee and plotting to replace him as the Labour leader.²⁴

The pressure of his work at MEW compounded the lack of care Dalton had long demonstrated for his wife, Ruth, resulting in their separation in October 1940. He sought relaxation by testing much younger male aides over long, fast run-walks around his home on the Wiltshire downs, the

pace unrelieved by ferocious political arguments.²⁵ Dalton's subordinates at MEW called him 'Dr Dynamo', and his conviction in the potential of economic warfare provided a vital motive force for the ministry. It also worsened the bitter turf wars that had broken out as the upstart ministry challenged established elements of the Whitehall war machine. These frictions were eased, though not removed, when Churchill shifted Dalton to the Board of Trade after the fall of Singapore. Dalton's replacement at MEW, the diehard Conservative Lord Selborne, took over just as the United States' entry into the war lent fresh impetus to the blockade.²⁶

There were two strands to Britain's economic warfare. One was the identification and targeting of scarce resources and choke points in an effort to disrupt the enemy's fighting ability. In spring 1941, for example, the British tried, unsuccessfully, to attack Axis oil supplies by bombing German synthetic oil plants and sabotaging tanker traffic on the Danube. The other was the blockade – conducted through a complex system of shipping certification, naval interception and financial restrictions – on seaborne imports into territory under enemy control. Hunger was meant to play a significant role in this strategy: it would force the Axis powers to commit resources to growing food rather than fighting, and Allied promises of full bellies would encourage popular revolt.

Until the final years of the war, it was the blockade part of this strategy that — as Cranborne argued — had the most profound effects, without ever pushing Germany and Italy to the point where defeat seemed imminent. Until quite late in the war, RAF bombers lacked the operational ability repeatedly to hit and knock out German oil installations; amateurish attempts to organize sabotage did not disrupt the crucial flow of Romanian oil, and European neutrals and non-belligerents refused to cut off raw material supplies while Nazism's star was in the ascendant. In contrast, by limiting imports of fuel, fertilizer and food, the blockade did impose severe restrictions on how far European resources could be turned into Axis military power.

Alongside and intertwined with ideological convictions, acute German awareness of their resource vulnerability played an important role in strategic decisions, including a determination to defend the Balkans, the attack on the Soviet Union and the summer 1942 offensive towards the oilfields of the Caucasus. Importantly, however, just like the British, the German and Italian governments were always willing to export shortages to areas they controlled in order to maintain production and morale at home. The worst consequences of this strategy were felt on the east and southeastern peripheries of the new Axis empires, in areas without

industry that they needed to exploit and on populations that the Nazis considered racially inferior.

British ethical opponents of economic warfare concentrated their critique on what was happening to Greece. The Greek economy collapsed after the German invasion in spring 1941. Pillaged and divided by Axis occupiers, the country's internal trade broke down, while the blockade severed both grain imports from America, which had supplied about a third of food needs before the war, and the exports that had paid for them. The merchant navy that had sustained the Greek islands sailed into exile. Agricultural production plummeted, and inflation ran riot. Refugees crammed into Greek cities, and famine conditions developed. By January 1942, Greeks were dying from starvation at the rate of 2,000 a day. The 1942 harvest was half what it had averaged before the war.²⁷

Greek representatives appealed for aid from April 1941 onwards, but the British government held fast against any easing of the blockade to allow emergency supplies into Occupied Europe. To do so would relieve the Axis powers from their responsibility to feed the civilian populations of conquered territories and free up resources that could be used to prolong the war. Under increasing pressure from the Red Cross, American and British relief organizations and the minister of state for the Middle East, however, in January 1942 London relented. On the same day that Cranborne defended the blockade in the Lords, Dalton announced to the Commons that shipments of Canadian grain would be sent to Greece under the auspices of the Red Cross. Shortly afterwards, the US government followed suit. By the end of 1942, the Allies were despatching 15,000 tons of wheat, 3,000 tons of dried vegetables and 300 tins of milk to Greece every month. This was enough to ease conditions for some Greeks, but not enough to compensate for the devastation of the Greek economy and the loss of an estimated 183 billion calories to Axis occupation forces in the two and a half years from September 1942. By the end of the war, half a million Greeks had died from starvation and related illnesses.²⁸

Newspaper reports of continued Greek suffering aroused a strong public response in Britain.²⁹ Groups such as the Famine Relief Committee, which was chaired by Bishop Bell, campaigned to send aid for starving Greeks but also against the blockade as an inhumane means of making war (MEW objected to the word 'famine' on the basis that there was enough food in Europe if only the Nazis chose properly to distribute it). As Bell's participation demonstrated, there was a strong and unsurprising crossover between those concerned about the targeting of civilians with hunger and those opposed to their targeting by strategic bombers. Unlike bombing,

however, reactions against the consequences of the blockade inspired visions of activism and hope. Voluntary groups raised funds to buy food aid – the Famine Relief Committee's Oxford offshoot, which particularly distinguished itself in this regard, later became the basis for Oxfam – but they also looked forward to participation in great international relief schemes that would rehabilitate a shattered Europe after the war. Britons might not be able to force the government to abandon its strategy, but they could commit themselves to a better future still to come.³⁰

Outside the area of direct Axis control, meanwhile, another economic campaign was being waged to persuade neutrals and non-belligerents to cut deliveries of vital raw materials and finished munitions to Germany and Italy. Here, too, Britain retained sufficient control of international trade to try to negotiate an advantageous position, but its ability to achieve decisive results was limited both by competing military and diplomatic demands, and by the economic strength of the Third Reich.

On the Iberian Peninsula, for example, Spain and Portugal both provided Germany with crucial supplies of the rare high-density metal tungsten. They also occupied potentially critical strategic positions for the campaigns in the Atlantic and Mediterranean. Unable to risk pushing them into the German camp, the British resorted to pre-emptive purchasing rather than economic coercion. The Spanish agreed only on the basis that the British provided them with much-needed rubber and oil. That became increasingly difficult after the Japanese and Americans joined the war, not just because these commodities became scarcer, but also because – in a direct reversal of British policies – US economic warfare organizations wanted to impose a much stricter embargo on Spain, and a much looser one on Vichy France. Nonetheless, the British managed to drive up the price of tungsten massively, from £675 a ton in February 1941 to £4,063 a ton in March 1942. This made Germany's war more expensive, but the main consequence was greatly to increase Spanish production. In the first ten months of 1942, the British bought 470 tons of Spanish tungsten, but increased output allowed the Spanish to sell Germans and neutral intermediaries another 358 tons – about twelve times total Spanish exports to Germany in 1940, and about 40 per cent more than the annual total production of Axis-controlled Europe.³¹

Though the British and Americans often disagreed about the conduct of the economic campaign, the United States assisted the British in running the blockade before it entered the war. After December 1941, the combined power of the Anglo-American alliance made economic warfare more effective. Once the American system recovered from the shock of

Pearl Harbor, the United States' ability to control resource flows — and its willingness to play hardball with Europeans with whom it did not expect to have to co-operate — meant that it was able to coerce neutrals and non-belligerents to an extent that had been beyond Britain alone. At almost the same moment that these policies started to come into effect in the final period of the European war, American manufacturing and strategy allowed Allied air power to develop an unprecedented capacity to hit the German war economy. This would prove crucial in determining the speed with which defeat overtook Germany in 1944—5. In spring 1942, however, all that lay ahead. The blockade was, at best, a very long-term weapon for a country that badly wanted a quick win.

DALTON AND 'DETONATOR'

At its creation, SOE was divided into two sections: SO1, which dealt with political propaganda to Europe; and SO2, which ran sabotage and subversion. Responsibility for the creation, approval and dissemination of propaganda against enemy states had previously been messily diffused between 'EH', a secret unit set up just before the start of the war, the Foreign Office's Political Intelligence Department, the Ministry of Information's Enemy and Enemy-Occupied Divisions, and the BBC. SO1 took over only 'EH' and some personnel from the Political Intelligence Department, leaving the situation just as confused as before and laying the basis for a year of struggles over control of the propaganda machinery. In May 1941, Sir John Anderson, brought in to arbitrate, settled that responsibility must be shared, with the foreign secretary, minister for economic warfare and minister of information sitting together on a propaganda committee.

This set the ground for a bitter fight between Dalton and Brendan Bracken after the latter became minister of information in July 1941. Determined to get control of propaganda, Bracken comprehensively outmanoeuvred his rival. By arguing for the importance of a unified message, he secured the creation of a new body, the Political Warfare Executive (PWE), which was meant to bring together all the still-disparate elements of the propaganda machinery. Too late, Dalton realized that this was, in fact, a mechanism to remove SO1 from his control, leaving him with distant oversight only from a committee he was unable to dominate. Bracken had him pinned. The minister of information could call on Churchill's support, and enlisted Eden to his cause (bored by propaganda,

Eden was happy to see it hived off to a separate body), but he was also viciously adept at needling Dalton: 'Alice in Blunderland', he called SOE's attempts to push pro-British propaganda in the US and South America, sending Dalton 'white to the top of his bald head with rage'. Such provocations brought out Dalton's insecure inability to keep his counsel and made it even harder for him to build the alliances he needed to do his job. Forced back on appeals to Attlee, Dalton toyed with the idea of an explosive resignation, before Bracken and Eden administered the *coup de grâce*, persuading Churchill to move him to the Board of Trade. Humiliating though the defeat was, it brought him new political opportunities. The promotion gave Dalton a say in domestic policy. 33

Dalton's departure also reflected his failure to secure SO2's strategic role. It had been set up under the Executive directorship of Sir Frank Nelson, a businessman and former Conservative MP who had already attempted to organize subversive activities against Germany while he was a British consular official in Switzerland. He was aided by Major Colin Gubbins, a regular soldier but a strong advocate of irregular warfare. Gubbins had been in charge of setting up the Auxiliary Units in Britain ahead of a possible German invasion. These units comprised diehard resisters who, in the event of an enemy occupation, would have launched a campaign of sabotage and assassination from their secret hideouts against enemy troops and British collaborators.³⁴

SO2 had to expand rapidly but securely at a point when many trained personnel had already been absorbed by the war effort. As a result, it initially recruited its officers through an old-boy network of military adventurers, colonial administrators and City of London financiers. If many of them shared Dalton's elevated social background, their worldview reflected more Nelson and Gubbins' natural milieu than Dalton's vision of the organized proletariat in arms.³⁵

Between 1940 and 1941, Gubbins did a lot to shape SO2's approach, shifting it away from Dalton's passionately held but poorly worked-out belief in inevitable popular resistance. Liaising with the Polish, Czech and Norwegian governments-in-exile, the major was impressed both by their extensive intelligence networks and by their claims to have control of well-organized resistance groups who would rise up as one at their instruction. This model of 'secret armies', operating under Allied control, was more appealing to military minds in Britain than the chaos of uncontrolled popular revolt. It was even more appealing as SO2 faced up to the difficulty of working with exiled governments to get agents into Europe.

Gubbins and Dalton fought to install the so- called 'Detonator' concept – a series of revolts by well-equipped secret armies, backed up by airdropped units of exiled troops, that would wear down demoralized German troops before the British landed to mop up their already defeated enemy – within British grand strategy. Devoid of alternative routes to victory, the planners for the chiefs of staff had written 'Detonator' into their scheme of future operations just before the Axis invasion of the Soviet Union, but senior officers always regarded the proposal with suspicion. Until the moment came, no one could be certain whether the underground armies would actually spring into action – scarcely the basis on which to plan the return of British forces to mainland Europe. Dropping arms to European resistance movements on the scale SOE wanted would have drained aircraft strength from the bombing offensive. There was also a political problem: how should the British organize resistance in countries where the anti-Axis forces were already divided among themselves?³⁶

The German attack on the Soviet Union had significant consequences for SOE. Soviet participation in the war opened new alliances with highly disciplined and motivated Communist resistance groups, but thereby also increased the difficulties of working with conservative governments-in-exile in London. As the battle lines moved east, the British abandoned plans for uprisings by secret armies in Poland and Czechoslovakia and concentrated on longer-term plans to build up resistance movements in Eastern and Southern Europe.

From August 1941 the chiefs of staff moved away from 'Detonator' in favour of more conventional operations. American reactions to the reliance on European uprisings, first at the Atlantic Conference, then in Washington in December 1941, confirmed that shift. Churchill, who despite an emotional attachment to the ideal of a guerrilla warrior was never that interested in SOE, did not oppose the change. A May 1942 rewriting of SOE's charter spelled out that in Western Europe subversion and sabotage were ways to wear down the Germans and lay the groundwork for the invasion yet to come, not a solution in themselves to the problem of how to force the enemy from the field.³⁷

Even as SOE's strategic role diminished, however, effective resistance movements did begin to emerge for the first time outside Eastern Europe. In France, four significant resistance groups became established. In September 1941, the heroic left-winger Jean Moulin smuggled himself to London to talk to de Gaulle. The Free French leader appointed him head of the resistance in France: Moulin returned home on 1 January 1942 with the aim of unifying the disparate resistance groups into a single national

organization. From Yugoslavia, meanwhile, had come news of a serious guerrilla campaign being waged from the mountains against the Axis occupiers. Though the British were soon aware that most of the fighting was being done by Communist partisans led by Josip Broz (better known as Marshal Tito), they championed the royalist Serbian general Draža Mihailović and his Chetniks as potential leaders of a Yugoslavian united front. This met with the approval of the exiled Yugoslavian government, but since the Chetniks were not only less active in attacking Axis forces, but were themselves fighting the partisans, British promotion of Mihailović stored up trouble for the future.³⁸ Simultaneously with this emergence of popular resistance movements, European resisters became highly visible on the British home front, celebrated in a string of films in 1942, including *One of Our Aircraft is Missing, Secret Mission, Uncensored, Tomorrow We Live* and *The Day Will Dawn*.

During the first months of 1942, as governments-in-exile attacked SOE's control over communications with their compatriots, Churchill, the chiefs of staff and the Foreign Office debated whether it ought to be broken up. No one else, however, really wanted to take responsibility for managing the complex politics of resistance.³⁹ Selborne undertook an overhaul at the top, retiring an exhausted Nelson in favour of the merchant banker and railway company chairman Sir Charles Hambro. Picked from the Ministry of Economic Warfare for SOE by Dalton, Hambro was appointed by Selborne on the basis that 'a man who could run the Great Western Railway could run anything'.⁴⁰ Under him, SOE continued its plans to prepare resistance groups for a future invasion, but its activities were now subordinated to more traditional diplomatic and military objectives.

'CIVILIAN BOMBING IS MEANINGLESS UNLESS IT IS WORKED OUT IN RELATION TO POLITICAL WARFARE'

Much the same thing happened to the Political Warfare Executive. Over the first years of the war, British propagandists had built up a range of means to inform and persuade people in the Axis countries and Occupied Europe. These included both the provision of factually accurate news, in order to establish British authority in contrast to Nazi deceit, and the use of elaborate deceptions, aimed particularly at German troops and civilians, which falsified both origin and content. The main formats were airdropped 'leaflets' — a term that included a wide variety of paper-based propaganda, from single cartoons to ostensibly locally produced newspapers — and radio programmes. These included the BBC's European services and the 'research units' of SO2 and the PWE, which broadcast from facilities set up at Woburn Abbey in Bedfordshire, but which masqueraded as stations operating from within Germany. Among these was 'Gustav Siegfried Eins', a supposedly secret German military network, created by the former *Daily Express* journalist Sefton Delmer, on which a shadowy figure called 'Der Chef', ostensibly supportive of the war, railed salaciously against the iniquities of the Nazi leadership.⁴¹ These broadcasts were occasionally overheard by listeners tuning their wirelesses in Bed-fordshire, disconcerting the few who understood German with their lurid descriptions of orgies among the enemy high command.⁴²

Organizationally, propaganda was always a battleground. Ministers' struggle for control over a new but ill-defined weapon was matched only by the enthusiasm with which bright sparks within the various enterprises struck out with their own initiatives in an effort to win the war. By emphasizing factual accuracy, the BBC European services had established a large listenership, which they had used to encourage participation in a 'V campaign' – the letter chalked, carved or tapped out in Morse code to antagonize the Germans. They strongly resisted any subordination to the PWE, however, on the grounds of maintaining editorial independence. Broadcasts to Germany proved still more controversial, raising as they did the question of whether appeals should be made to supposedly 'good' Germans, or whether the only option was to intimidate an entirely evil people into capitulation.⁴³

The formation of the PWE did not solve these problems. As its director, the former spy (and another gossip-hungry diarist) Robert Bruce Lockhart noted after the war, the organization of overseas propaganda 'was defective from the start and it was certainly never perfected'. Even by the standards of wartime Whitehall, an extraordinary amount of Bruce Lockhart's time was spent on interdepartmental squabbles or ministerial meddling. The resultant strain exacerbated his heavy drinking and ultimately forced him to take long periods of sick leave with debilitating psoriasis. Nonetheless, under his direction, between 1941 and 1942 British propaganda became much more coherently organized and coordinated with military strategy – well before events on the battlefield produced the good news on which Bruce Lockhart believed that a

successful attack on enemy morale would depend.⁴⁶

A key figure in this improvement was Ritchie Calder. Like Bruce Lockhart, Calder was Scottish, although unlike his conservative boss he was an ardent left-winger. As a journalist for the *Daily Herald* in the 1930s, Calder had been a great popularizer of modern science, and his reporting on the Blitz in 1940–41 had done much to embed the myth that the British were being bombed into democratic socialism. In July 1941, aged just thirty-five, he was whipped away from the *Herald* to take up a new secret job with the PWE, where he developed a strategy to convince the people of Europe that an Allied victory was inevitable. In March 1942, Calder represented the British in political warfare discussions with the Americans, and in August 1942 Bruce Lockhart had him appointed director of plans.⁴⁷

Calder had already played a key role in aligning the PWE's activities with military planning. Partly because of the RAF's determination to maintain an independent air offensive, British bombing strategy had long been defined in terms of an attack directly on Germany's ability to fight the war, rather than as part of a Europe-wide campaign to defeat the German air force. At the start of the war, political and practical constraints had pushed Bomber Command towards night-time leafleting raids. After the gloves came off in 1940, RAF bombers had attempted to hit specific industrial targets. When that failed, the Air Ministry turned during 1941 towards a much broader attack on German cities, which aimed to erode industrial workers' morale by destroying homes and communities and killing civilians. This shift reflected the operational reality that most bombing was highly inaccurate and that, so far from being able to hit particular factories, the best the bombers could aim to achieve was the destruction of an urban area. Having learned from the bombing of the UK, the RAF argued that it would soon be able to unleash greater destruction than the Luftwaffe - and that the Germans, unlike the British, would ultimately crumble under the strain. Wary of international and domestic reaction, the Air Ministry was careful to emphasize publicly that the target of bombing remained 'industrial areas', but by the end of 1941 its strategy was already directed against enemy morale.⁴⁸

Calder would later portray himself as an opponent of this 'area' bombing, but at the time he believed that bombing and propaganda could only work in symbiosis.⁴⁹ As he insisted: 'Civilian bombing is meaningless unless it is worked out in relation to Political Warfare.'⁵⁰ The physical presence of bombing could be used to demonstrate Allied power and the inevitability of Axis defeat, not just to enemy service personnel

and civilians, but also to the inhabitants of Occupied Europe. The morale damage done by the bombs would be widened by the psychological warfare of propaganda. Given that broadcasts from Britain were frequently jammed, the bombers were also an essential means of distribution: with packets of leaflets thrown out by trainee crews undertaking their first nervous sorties over enemy-controlled territory.⁵¹

Previously, the RAF had been reluctant to undertake such operations. Crews seldom saw the point of them, the quality of the propaganda material was often poor, and in the absence of a functioning leaflet bomb, throwing out leaflets was dangerously distracting for men who needed all their wits about them. By the end of 1940, so many leaflets had piled up at bomber stations that they had had to be taken away and pulped. The shift towards an attack on morale encouraged a more co-operative attitude. Crews were instructed in the value of their task and the number of training flights that undertook leafleting increased. During 1942, more than 314 million leaflets were dropped on Europe from the UK, an almost fourfold increase on the figure for 1941. Of these, 146 million were dropped on Germany, but 155 million on France: a useful indication of the extent to which British strategy in 1942 involved not only fighting Vichy French forces – in Madagascar and North Africa – but also convincing the French population that this was in their best interests. Sa

In retrospect, the expectation that German morale could be undermined sufficiently to precipitate a wholesale national collapse plainly overestimated the power of bombing and under-estimated the tenacious grip of the Nazi regime. Yet the hope that the enemy might be pushed over the edge before British forces had to cross the Channel remained an important tenet of strategy-making in London. As well as offering the prime means to achieve this objective, Bomber Command also provided vital evidence that Britain could hit back directly at Germany. This gave it an important part in the political calculations of Allied, as well as enemy morale, as was well understood by its new commander, Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris.

'WE HAVE GOT TO KILL A LOT OF BOCHE BEFORE WE WIN THIS WAR'

Harris was a product of a militarized British Empire. Having emigrated to Rhodesia as a young man, he had served as an infantryman in Africa at the start of the First World War before coming back to Britain to join the Royal Flying Corps. He became a fighter ace and chose to remain in the post-war RAF. He had led air policing operations in the Middle East, and served on the air staff. Since 1939, he had commanded the light bombers of 5 Group, then served as deputy to Portal before being posted to America to organize British orders from US aircraft plants. He had a reputation as an aggressive leader who got things done, which was exactly why he was selected to lead the bomber offensive out of the doldrums. Harris believed absolutely that bombing by itself could deliver victory. He was in no way mealy-mouthed about the implications. As he wrote to a colleague in April 1942: 'We have got to kill a lot of Boche before we win this war.'⁵⁴

For most of Harris's first year in charge, however, Bomber Command was too busy re-equipping itself to do much killing. As new heavy bombers – Short Stirlings, Handley Page Halifaxes and Avro Manchesters – came off the production lines in larger numbers, squadrons had to be retrained and bases rebuilt to handle the bigger aircraft. Conversion sidelined between a tenth and a quarter of Bomber Command's squadrons every month of 1942. A new navigation aid, Gee, was also coming into use. Using radio pulses transmitted from UK stations to allow aircrew to check their position, Gee' allowed Bomber Command to concentrate its aircraft more closely into dense streams of bombers that were meant to overwhelm defences and ignite unstoppable fires below. It too, however, required time to fit and to train up crews. That helps to explain Harris's ferocious reaction to any demand to divert planes and aircrew to other theatres or against targets other than German cities.

Since the new planes all suffered technical problems, Bomber Command remained for the moment reliant on the medium Vickers Wellington aircraft with which it had started the war. Replacements for these aircraft had also been meant to come – in huge numbers – from the United States. During the spring of 1942, however, the British began to accept that they would never get the planes they wanted from the Americans. In truth, they had always doubted whether the US would be able to meet the fantastic requirements to win the war by bombing alone laid down in autumn 1941, but they had hoped that their demands would push heavy bombers up the list of US manufacturing priorities. This approach failed both quantitatively and qualitatively: not only did the Americans make far fewer heavy bombers than planned, but the aircraft that were produced, without shielded exhausts or self-sealing fuel tanks, were much inferior to British models for night-time operations. Not least because they had not been eagerly seized on by the British, once America joined the war, the USAAF increasingly took these scarce bombers for itself, leaving the RAF reliant on UK production to equip Bomber Command.⁵⁶

By the time Harris took up his new appointment on 23 February 1942, the bombing offensive was being criticized as never before. After eighteen months of press accolades, its failure to win the war was getting difficult to ignore. Home Intelligence reported growing public scepticism after the 'Channel Dash': 'Our whole bombing policy is now called in question, and people are beginning to ask "How effective has the bombing of German industries been?".'⁵⁷ Among the scientifically interested elite, the fact that bombing was grotesquely inaccurate had become quite well known, and some were willing to implicate the waste of resources in a campaign with which Churchill had closely associated himself in the litany of defeats that struck the Empire at the start of 1942. In the debate on the war that followed the post-Singapore reshuffle, the independent MP for Cambridge University, Keynes' brother-in-law, A. V. Hill, attacked 'the idea of bombing a well-defended enemy into submission or seriously affecting his morale' as an 'illusion':

The disaster of this policy is not only that it is futile but that it is extremely wasteful \dots An enormous effort has been put into it already, and in consequence there has been failure to provide the aircraft required to make land and sea operations a success, or even to save them from disaster. 58

When the journalist W. P. Crozier interviewed Churchill just after the reshuffle, the prime minister lauded the accuracy of British bombing. Cripps, in attendance, guffawed.⁵⁹

In this atmosphere, the other two services mounted a serious challenge to the primacy of the independent air campaign. The most serious and prolonged sally came from the Admiralty, which called for the Air Ministry to double the number of aircraft allocated to maritime duties, with a sixfold increase in the number of long-range aircraft (the equivalent of three times the number of Harris's heavy bombers in March 1942). This would allow Coastal Command to step up its attacks on U-boats on their way across the Bay of Biscay, and the RAF to protect vulnerable merchant shipping in the Indian Ocean. Though Portal recognized the importance of maritime operations, he would not shut down Bomber Command's expansion to meet the Admiralty's demands. The chiefs of staff were unable to reach an agreement.

Leo Amery was present when the subject came up at the Defence Committee on 18 March 1942. The meeting started at ten in the evening with Attlee in the chair: Churchill did not turn up till after midnight, and . . . for two hours Attlee vainly tried to pin the discussion down to a definite point. The subject was apparently brought before the Defence Committee without having been thrashed out by the Chiefs of Staff . . . and we discovered presently that they could not even agree as to the distance which each type of aeroplane could fly.

Then, just as it was all turning into 'the most futile and time wasting discussion I have ever listened to', the prime minister arrived. For once, Amery welcomed his contribution:

he told the Admiralty that it was silly to try and divert bombers which might do real damage to Germany in the next few weeks to mapping out the Bay of Biscay in order to hunt for submarines which it was the business of the Americans to catch on the other side. 60

The Air Ministry's solution was to promise Pound the planes from future increases in British and American production – which they were already doubtful would be achieved.

One way in which the British could employ US heavy bombers that were inadequate for night-time operations over Germany was to convert them for use by Coastal Command. The knock-on effect, however, was a further decrease in US deliveries. The chief of the USAAF, General 'Hap' Arnold, was on a drive to build up his own heavy bomber force. Certain that their planes and aircrew would be capable of hitting heavily defended targets in Europe, the Americans were infuriated to see bombers sent to Britain stand idle while they were converted for maritime work. Arnold therefore revised the agreements reached at Washington, reducing still further the number of aircraft being despatched. Shortfalls in US production meant even fewer American-built bombers reached the RAF. Meanwhile, what Pound called the 'Battle of the Air' raged on.⁶¹

Simultaneously, Harris staged attacks to demonstrate what Bomber Command could do. On the night of 28–29 March 1942, the RAF raided Lübeck with 234 aircraft. Beyond 'Gee' range but on the coast and therefore easy to locate, the port had a wooden medieval heart that was particularly flammable. British incendiaries started a fire that damaged about 60 per cent of the city's buildings and killed 312 people. Between 23 and 27 April, the British conducted a similar attack against the city of Rostock. More than two hundred people were killed. Neither Lübeck nor Rostock was a major industrial centre, but the raids had demonstrated the bombers' potential. 62

These were the heaviest British raids of the war so far and they greatly angered Hitler, who ordered retaliation against historic British cities. The so-called 'Baedecker' raids, after the guidebook from which the targets were supposedly selected, hit Exeter, Bath, Norwich, York and Canterbury

between 23 April and 30 May 1942.

By the spring of 1942, Churchill had in fact lost much of the enthusiasm he had shown for bombing when it appeared to be the only way for Britain to win the war. He recognized, however, the cost of giving up on a campaign in which so much practical effort as well as political capital had been invested. The fixed infrastructure that sustained the bombers – factories, airfields, oil and ammunition dumps – could not quickly be relocated. Faced with complaints from Wavell and the Australian government about the relative paucity of air resources for the war against Japan, he explained to Attlee on 16 April:

Everybody would like to send Bomber Command to India and the Middle East. However, it is not possible to make any decisive change. All that is possible is being done . . . It is no use flying out squadrons which sit helpless and useless when they arrive. We have built up a great plant here for bombing Germany, which is the only way in our power of helping Russia. From every side people want to break it up. One has to be sure that we do not ruin our punch here without getting any proportionate advantage elsewhere. 63

Even if he no longer believed that bombing would win the war by itself, in this instance the prime minister did grasp the material constraints established by previous strategic decisions.⁶⁴

To defend the bombers, Churchill's pet scientist, Lord Cherwell, wrote a famous memorandum on 30 March 1942 advising the prime minister that, with enough planes, Bomber Command could 'de-house' a third of Germany's urban population by mid-1943 and break the enemy's will to resist. Churchill promptly circulated it to the rest of the War Cabinet. This was a political document rather than a decision over strategy. What Cherwell was describing, in dramatic terms, was the change in bombing policy already adopted by the air staff.⁶⁵ During April, at the request of the chiefs of staff, Churchill authorized a secret inquiry, under Justice Sir John Singleton, to provide an impartial assessment of the effectiveness of bombing. Like most of those new to the subject, Singleton was shocked at how inaccurate British bombers were. Three-quarters of the bomb-release photographs taken during the Rostock raid, for example, did not even show the town. When Singleton reported, on 20 May 1942, he concluded that given Bomber Command's current state, it would be unable to achieve 'great results' before the end of the year. Bombing would never be 'of itself sufficient to win the war or to produce decisive results; the area is too vast for the effort we can put forth.' But, 'if Germany does not achieve great success on land before the winter it may well turn out to have a decisive effect, and in the meantime, if carried out on the lines suggested, it must impede Germany and help Russia.'66 This was Churchill's view

too, and it would prove a pretty accurate assessment of Bomber Command's contribution to the second half of the war.

'A MORE DEFINITE PLAN FOR JOINT ATTACK IN EUROPE'

On 6 March 1942, while Harris tried to reignite the bombing offensive, Churchill sought to invigorate preparations for amphibious landings by appointing Lord Louis Mountbatten chief of Combined Operations, and giving him a place on the Chiefs of Staff Committee. 'Dickie' Mountbatten was a naval officer, second cousin to the king; he was brave, hardworking and popular with his men, and fascinated with science and technology. He was also ruthlessly ambitious and constantly ready to embroider his own reputation. At the start of the Great War, his father, Prince Louis of Battenberg, had been hounded from the Admiralty because he was German. The desire to abjure this slight drove Mountbatten's determined self-elevation. Churchill, who had been first lord of the Admiralty at the time, felt guilty enough to help.⁶⁷

In the 1930s, Mountbatten had been part of the louche aristocratic set around the prince of Wales. His wife, Edwina, a spectacularly wealthy heiress, bored of family life, diverted herself with a series of affairs. Like many members of the British and American social elites, including the Edens and Roosevelts, they had an open marriage. Both Mountbattens regarded their relationship as entirely normal and natural, but their celebrity made them a source of scandal for the gossip columns. Having shed some of his playboy image to fit George VI's staider version of royalty, Mountbatten was transformed by the war. As a dashing destroyer captain, he played out his dreams of naval heroism and built a gallant public image. Despite the loss of his destroyer off Crete in May 1941, he was promoted to command the aircraft carrier HMS *Illustrious*, then under repair in a US dockyard. His matinee-idol looks, battle experience and easy manner made him a big hit when he toured the US fleet. So did his friendship with bona fide Hollywood stars, including Douglas Fairbanks Jr.

Churchill liked Mountbatten's bravery and aristocratic pedigree, and had already tried to make him vice chief of the naval staff. In October 1941, he appointed him to replace Sir Roger Keyes as director of Combined Operations, the organization created to undertake raids on the

enemy coastline and develop new weapons and techniques of amphibious warfare. He expected Mountbatten to lead an aggressive policy and charm the Americans. Mountbatten soon built up a substantial organization at Combined Operations Headquarters. It was packed with his friends and cronies (the so-called 'Dickie Birds'), tough commandos and pet scientists, as well as a very extensive publicity department. Compared to most of the wartime military, it was also a very exciting place to work. Mountbatten was easily dismissed as a dilettante, but he was good at licensing unorthodox, often very talented people to do original things.

Shortly after Mountbatten took over, Combined Operations launched its most significant raids so far — a parachute attack to steal pieces of a German radar station at Bruneval in northern France on 27 February 1942, and, on 28 March, an amphibious assault to wreck the massive dry dock in the French port of St Nazaire, so it could not be used by the *Tirpitz* if it broke out of Norwegian waters into the Atlantic. The losses at St Nazaire were high — 169 killed, almost one in four of those who took part, and more than 200 taken prisoner — but the raid did succeed and generated morale-boosting publicity at a time when good news stories were scarce. Five Victoria Crosses were awarded for acts of outstanding bravery during the raid: more than for any other single action of the Second World War.

Mountbatten spent the weekends of spring 1942 viewing the rushes of In Which We Serve, a cinematic tribute to the Royal Navy, starring his friend Noël Coward as a thinly disguised version of himself. He had worked very hard to make sure the film got made, standing by Coward when he was prosecuted for breaking currency regulations. In Which We Serve's all-in-it-together ethos – everyone doing their bit, the social hierarchy undisturbed, gallant officers looking out for and beloved by the lower ranks – fitted well with how the vaguely left-leaning Mountbatten thought the world ought to work. Sensitive to the wartime mood, he advised Coward to make his Dickie-esque hero, Captain Kinross, less aristocratic and more middle class. On its release in September 1942, In Which We Serve struck a deep chord with audiences and became one of the most popular British films of the war. Though far from radical, it celebrated key wartime virtues: un-bombastic patriotic unity and emotionally restrained resilience. For many Britons, as for Mountbatten, it called to mind a better version of themselves.⁶⁸

Edwina Mountbatten also found a calling in the war. Joining the St John Ambulance Brigade, she spent long nights touring air-raid shelters and campaigning for better welfare provision for those bombed out of their homes. Mirroring as it did Mountbatten's dedication to the Royal Navy, her single-minded devotion to this task at last provided a point of unity in their marriage. Enthused by the wartime spirit of political radicalism, she talked ardently of socialism and anti-colonialism. This aroused derision from her social circle: it was 'too ridiculous', sniped a terribly jealous 'Chips' Channon, 'for anybody in the position of a millionairess, a semi-royalty and a famous fashionable figure'. Mean comments such as this misunderstood something fundamental about the modernity of the Mountbattens: vain and ambitious people to be sure, but also celebrities attuned to the popular mood in a way that their critics could not comprehend. On

To demonstrate his tri-service status, on his elevation to the status of a chief of staff, Mountbatten was simultaneously promoted to vice admiral, lieutenant general and air marshal. His new colleagues were not pleased. Pound feared Churchill was lining up Mountbatten to take his job. Brooke, gazing at Mountbatten across a generational and cultural divide, thought him a vainglorious lightweight. As so often, the prime minister had acted impulsively but not without reason. Amphibious operations had taken on a new significance because an early Anglo-American invasion of Europe was under discussion as never before.

'EVEN IF FULL SUCCESS IS NOT ATTAINED, THE **BIG** OBJECTIVE WILL BE'

The extraordinary success of the first Japanese offensives sucked in Allied resources. In Washington, this aroused a strong reaction from Marshall, the chief of the general staff, and his protégé, General Dwight Eisenhower. Eisenhower's Operational Planning Department argued that the only route to victory was to build a massive army and get it into a decisive battle against the German Wehrmacht as quickly as possible. Sending planes and soldiers to fight the Japanese, or pursue a minor campaign in North Africa, might give the Germans time to triumph on the Eastern Front. And if the Soviet Union was forced out of the war, the Western Allies might never return to the European mainland at all. Marshall and Eisenhower wanted, if possible, to launch a cross-Channel invasion in the summer of 1942. Even if that could not be done, they wanted to act as if it could, to stop diversions of US troops, shipping and equipment that would otherwise delay a decisive European campaign until 1944.⁷¹

Roosevelt, though, could not ignore American public fury with Japan.

Instinctively, he found the idea of a big American army fighting a bloody land war distasteful. Yet he also accepted that Germany was the most dangerous foe. Recognizing the importance of the Soviet Union to eventual victory, Roosevelt sought to strengthen the new alliance, but he was also developing a vision of post-war internationalism in which both America and the USSR would play a larger part. The US army's desire to open a second front came at an opportune moment for this grander diplomatic project.⁷²

Anthony Eden had, meanwhile, been pressing his colleagues to concede Stalin's territorial seizures as a precursor to an Anglo-Soviet treaty. Churchill was loath to reward Stalin's 'shameful collusion with Hitler', but rumours that a new Axis offensive might force the Soviets to make a separate peace brought him round. The problem was how to square the Americans. When Lord Halifax raised the issue with Sumner Welles, the US under-secretary of state, he was told that it smacked of the spirit of Munich – a less than diplomatic putdown for a man whose political career had been ruined by appeasement.

On 7 March 1942, Churchill wrote to Roosevelt: 'Everything portends an immense renewal of the German invasion of Russia in the spring and there is very little we can do to help the only country that is heavily engaged with the German armies.' He hoped the president would 'give us a free hand to sign the treaty which Stalin desires'. Roosevelt did not immediately reply. On the 12th, in a private meeting with the Soviet ambassador to Washington, Maxim Litvinov, he explained that, while he had no personal objection to the restoration of the 1941 borders, it would be too controversial with the American public. He would not discuss it, and nor would he back any secret Anglo-Soviet deal. As Roosevelt subsequently explained to Churchill, he thought it would be better to cut out both the Foreign Office and the State Department and open his own personal connection to Stalin – who could then, presumably, be subjected to the president's usual brand of creative ambiguity.

Eden, furious at Roosevelt's 'very unpleasant statement', plotted with the Soviet ambassador in London, Ivan Maisky, to co-ordinate messages from the Russians and the British, telling Roosevelt that he did not need to involve himself in their treaty negotiations. The foreign secretary was 'dumbfounded' at Soviet confidence when Maisky told him that his government would simply ignore Roosevelt's invitation to treat and press on with discussions with London. At the end of March, the War Cabinet gave Eden permission formally to open negotiations. However, Roosevelt already had something else to offer the Russians. As he told Churchill on

18 March, he expected 'to send you in a few days a more definite plan for joint attack in Europe'. ⁷⁶

Knowing Roosevelt's desire for a major operation against Germany, Harry Hopkins and Harold Stimson, the US war secretary, backed a USAAF proposal for a summer air offensive across the Channel. This would include an amphibious landing to force the Luftwaffe out to fight. Dill and the British Staff Mission opposed a scheme they thought doomed to failure. Dill favoured a defensive strategy – protecting the UK, the USA and the Middle East, sending supplies to Russia – until the crisis caused by Japan's entry into the war had passed. Churchill criticized the Staff Mission for being too negative, and proposed a list of 'essential' attacks: a US naval offensive in the Pacific, a continued air campaign against Germany, and the restoration of 'British mastery of the Indian Ocean'. Notably, this did not include a major landing in Europe.

Fears of a Russian collapse, however, led the British to revisit the question of an emergency invasion in 1942, an operation codenamed 'Sledgehammer'. Detailed study revealed obvious problems. Getting ashore would be relatively easy, but a lack of landing craft and German air superiority over France would make it very difficult to build up a force strong enough to repel the inevitable counter-attack. Given the lack of time and shipping to get US units across the Atlantic, almost all the soldiers lost in this forlorn endeavour would be British or Canadian. As Dill told Churchill, while 'the German fighting machine is still intact and . . . we are short of shipping in general and landing craft in particular', there was no chance of 'any useful landing being undertaken'.⁷⁷

Dill shared British plans with General Marshall and tried to persuade him of the importance of holding on to the Middle East. On 24 March 1942 the combined chiefs agreed to have their planners examine a European invasion. This would provide the basis for a long-term agreement on joint strategy, but it would also take time. Dill's delaying tactics, however, were not wholly successful. The next day, Marshall, presenting a paper to Roosevelt, Hopkins and Stimson over lunch at the White House, argued for concentrating all Anglo-American efforts on an invasion in 1942 or 1943. The earlier operation would probably fail, but it would only be launched if the Russians were on the point of collapse. If the British would not commit themselves to help, the Americans should shift the bulk of their effort to the war in the Pacific, where they could at least keep the Japanese sufficiently occupied to ensure that they did not launch an attack through Siberia against a tottering USSR. 78

Roosevelt approved Marshall's scheme. Hopkins suggested that the

two of them ought to take the proposals direct to Churchill in London. Over the weekend, US army planners drew up outlines of two different invasions: a 1942 attack by British troops as a last-ditch attempt to keep a beaten Russia in the war; and a much larger invasion, to be launched at any point after 1 April 1943. For this, a million troops and 3,250 combat aircraft would need to be moved to the UK over the next twelve months. Marshall passed on the plans – and the threat of US efforts being diverted to the Pacific – to Dill, who in turn informed his colleagues in London. On 1 April 1942, Roosevelt wrote to Churchill to let him know Marshall and Hopkins were on their way over. Hopkins bore a personal message for the prime minister from the president:

Your people and mine demand the establishment of a front to draw off pressure from the Russians, and these peoples are wise enough to see that the Russians are today killing more Germans and destroying more equipment than you and I put together. Even if full success is not attained, the *big* objective will be. ⁷⁹

The Americans arrived on 8 April, in between the two Japanese carrier attacks on Ceylon.

Their proposals put the British chiefs in a difficult position. The British had no intention of launching a doomed attack against an unbroken enemy across the Channel in 1942: given the lack of preparation, it would simply weaken the defences of the UK without any effect on the German offensives into the Soviet Union or against the Middle East. Since the British would contribute almost all the forces for 'Sledgehammer', they always held the whip hand over whether it would go ahead. Like Marshall, the British chiefs thought it was more realistic to prepare for a full-scale, properly organized invasion in 1943, an operation codenamed 'Roundup'. Even if such an attack could not eventually go ahead, the huge preparatory build-up of troops and equipment (codenamed 'Bolero') would ensure that powerful American forces were based in the UK, to protect it in the event that the Soviets collapsed and the Nazis turned their full weight back to the west.

The British also wanted the US to concentrate on defeating Germany before Japan, and, thanks to Dill, they were aware of the risk of an American turn to the Pacific even before Hopkins reiterated the point to Churchill. More significantly, however, they were also still genuinely worried about another major Japanese offensive into the Indian Ocean; this seemed to them a far more pressing problem for the Allied war effort than American dreams of heading across the Channel that summer. The British badly wanted US help to strengthen their defences in the Indian Ocean

before their own reinforcements reached the theatre.⁸⁰ Finding a response to the US proposals was therefore a matter not just of strategic dispute, but of alliance diplomacy.

The London talks were Brooke and Marshall's first meeting, and neither was very impressed. Like most Americans, Marshall took Brooke's reserve as coldness. Brooke was struck, like everyone else who met him, by Marshall's noble charm, but concluded that he was not 'a great man'. '[A] good general at raising armies and providing the necessary links between the military and political worlds,' Brooke concluded, 'but his strategic ability does not impress me at all!!' Since Marshall insisted that the Allies could quickly solve the intractable problems of shipping and air superiority if they just tried harder, this seemed a reasonable assessment.

The British chiefs gave Marshall's plans a frosty reception. Churchill, a better host, was much more enthusiastic, and lauded American ambition. This was despite his fear, confided to Eden, that his own chiefs of staff would approve the scheme, then use it as an excuse to avoid any sort of offensive action in the Middle East. On 14 April, the Defence Committee met with Marshall and Hopkins. In a careful choreography, ministers lined up to emphasize how much they'd like to pursue a 1942 invasion, provided it proved practical and they got some help in the Indian Ocean. Brooke explained:

If the Japanese obtained control of the Indian Ocean, not only would the Middle East be gravely threatened, but we should lose the oil supplies from the Persian Gulf. The results of this would be that Germany would get all the oil she required, the southern route to Russia would be cut, Turkey would be isolated and defenceless, the Germans would obtain ready access to the Black Sea, and Germany and Japan would be able to interchange the goods of which they stood in so much need. These considerations led the Chiefs of Staff to the view that, while they welcomed the idea of an offensive in Europe, it was absolutely necessary to take measures to prevent a collapse in the Indian Ocean. For this purpose, United States assistance would be required. 82

The Committee approved Marshall's plans, subject to scrutiny by British staff officers. When Churchill finally confirmed the decision to Roosevelt, however, he committed Britain only to 'a crescendo of activity on the continent, starting with an ever increasing air offensive both by night and day, and more frequent and larger scale raids, in which United States troops would take part'. By the end of April, having re-examined the plan for a 1942 invasion the British had re-concluded that it was impossible.

Churchillian prestidigitation notwithstanding, Marshall and Hopkins had sat in enough committee meetings to recognize what the British were up to. Nonetheless, they had secured the commitment they needed to fight back against the draw of the Pacific in Washington. Though Marshall promised to secure assistance for the Indian Ocean area, there was little available. To Chiang Kai-shek's horror, he put the 10th US Army Air Force, then being set up to ferry supplies to China, under British control in the event of a Japanese attack on India. Admiral King agreed to strengthen the US task force at Scapa Flow, releasing British warships to sail East, but he would not send his own scarce ships to serve under Royal Navy command in the Indian Ocean.⁸⁴ US intelligence believed, correctly, that the Japanese were not about to mount an invasion of Ceylon but would head southeastwards towards New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, a verdict confirmed by decrypts by American and British code-breakers between 9 and 15 April 1942.

Together with the Doolittle Raid of 18 April, this information eased the sense of crisis in London. It also allowed the temporary reallocation of destroyers and cruisers from the Eastern Fleet, through the Suez Canal, to support another attempt to run a convoy to Malta. Churchill, with a characteristic mix of resurgent optimism and sensitivity to strategic timing, became much more positive about the Indian Ocean. This mood underpinned his powerful defence of the government's war record in the secret session of the Commons on 23 April 1942.⁸⁵

The attack on Madagascar's Diego Suarez, Operation 'Ironclad', was now imminent, but as air reinforcements arrived in Ceylon, the Admiralty decided it might not need to capture the French-controlled port after all. ⁸⁶ On 18 April 1942, German pressure resulted in the reinstatement of Nazi collaborator Pierre Laval as head of the Vichy government and minister of foreign affairs. That seemed to make a hostile response to British actions more likely. Churchill debated with the chiefs about whether the attack should go ahead, but the invasion fleet was steaming into position, and General Smuts was egging on the prime minister, who had already expended considerable effort trying to secure Roosevelt's support. The momentum was unstoppable.

On 5 May 1942, the British therefore launched their first amphibious expedition of the summer, against not the Germans across the Channel, but the mixture of French sailors, Malagasies and African colonial troops holding Diego Suarez. The last time they had tried this sort of operation, against the West African port of Dakar in September 1940, it had been a debacle. This time, things went much better. It helped that the British had left de Gaulle's Free French forces out of the planning and conduct of the attack, thus increasing security and eliminating a layer of diplomatic complexity. In contrast to Dakar, the British not only managed a night

beach landing, but struck French airfields with planes from the carriers HMS *Indomitable* and *Illustrious*, taking advantage of surprise to secure control of the air.⁸⁷ After the troops got ashore, an unsuspected line of French fortifications threatened to hold up the advance, but Diego Suarez surrendered, after another night attack, on 7 May. Short of supplies and fuel, the other French colonies around the Indian Ocean were unable to retaliate.

Operations on Madagascar were then meant to come to a halt, and most of the troops and ships involved moved on to other duties. In the meantime, however, five large Japanese submarines had arrived off the island to attack the shipping route along the East African coast. A midget submarine, launched from one of these larger boats, got into Diego Suarez harbour on 30 May, sinking an oil tanker and badly damaging the battleship HMS Ramillies. For the next six weeks, just as a new battle in the Western Desert reached its peak, the larger submarines struck at ships in the crowded channel between Madagascar and Mozambique, sinking 21 ships totalling more than 90,000 gross weight tons. Suspicions that they were being assisted by the Vichy French helped Smuts and de Gaulle press for a new campaign to clear the rest of Madagascar. This dragged on until November 1942. Though the Japanese attacks showed the vulnerability of Allied supply lines, they proved not to be the start of a sustained antishipping campaign on the western edge of the Indian Ocean. At the start of July, the submarines returned to the Malayan port of Penang; by then, the balance of the naval war in the Pacific had swung against the Japanese.

On the same day that Diego Suarez fell, the main fighting began in the Battle of the Coral Sea, a confused action in which a combined US and Australian fleet succeeded in preventing a Japanese attack on Port Moresby on New Guinea. The damage suffered by Japanese carriers reduced the force available for their next operation, against Midway, which commenced at the end of May. Forewarned by signals intelligence, the Americans rushed to ambush the approaching Japanese fleet. In another example of their ready interaction, King asked Pound whether the British could contribute an aircraft carrier from the Indian Ocean. With the Eastern Fleet's destroyers and cruisers heading into the Mediterranean, the Admiralty was unable to oblige.⁸⁸

Off Midway, the good luck that had allowed the Japanese to escape the consequences of their tactical and technological deficiencies off Ceylon – poor aerial reconnaissance drills, the concentration of carriers despite the lack of shipborne radar to provide early warning of incoming air attack, the congestion that occurred when changing weapons systems on strike

aircraft – ran out. With the good fortune that had eluded Somerville, US aircraft caught the Japanese fleet carriers on the morning of 4 June 1942.⁸⁹ By the end of the day, all four had been sunk, and the US carriers were retreating under the cover of dark. Deprived of air cover, the rest of the Japanese fleet had to retreat.

The battle determined the timing, rather than the outcome, of the confrontation in the Pacific: even in the event of a Japanese victory at Midway, America's industrial superiority would have prevailed. Though the Japanese continued their offensive in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, their war effort never really recovered from the loss of the carriers and their highly skilled aircrew. For all that the Royal Navy was absent, this made it a crucial battle for Britain's war too, dramatically easing the threat in the Indian Ocean. Simultaneously, however, the Middle East came under new danger from Axis advances in North Africa and the Caucasus.

'Real Equality of Sacrifice'

March-June 1942

It was a sign of the strain that Churchill was under that he chose this moment to pick a fight with the press. The spark was a cartoon by the artist Philip Zec in the *Daily Mirror* of 6 March 1942, depicting a shipwrecked sailor clinging to a piece of wreckage in a darkening sea. In line with the mood of increasing austerity, Zec intended to remind his readers of the price being paid for precious imports, with the caption 'Petrol is Dearer Now'. His colleague William Connor, the *Mirror*'s 'Cassandra' columnist, thought this too soft. Connor was a good hater, many of whose columns were directed against the idle rich, war profiteers and anyone else supposedly failing the nation. Adopting the style of a wartime news bulletin, he gave the image a more bitter caption: '"The price of petrol has been increased by one penny" – Official'.¹

Since 1940, Churchill had developed a strong dislike for the *Mirror* and its sister paper, the *Sunday Pictorial*. He believed their constant carping a threat to morale. The fact that the Mirror Group was not owned by a single press baron made it harder to have a word in the right ear and aroused his darkest suspicions. In 1940, he had insisted the Home Office investigate a (false) rumour that the isolationist US newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst was using the *Mirror* to prepare the ground for a negotiated peace. In October 1941, after the *Pictorial* published an editorial proposing he should send half his ministers on a 'permanent rest cure', Churchill tried unsuccessfully to persuade the War Cabinet that both papers ought to be suppressed.² After 'The Price of Petrol', he returned to the attack.

Churchill thought the cartoon implied that seamen's lives were being sacrificed to increase private profits. Publicizing this view as tanker losses hit a critical point in the Atlantic would indeed have been to do the work of enemy propagandists. Everyone associated with the *Mirror* always maintained that this was simply an incorrect reading. 'Cassandra' was an

unpleasant man, irresponsible and vicious, but he was never defeatist.

Churchill wanted the *Mirror* banned. Bevin, the minister responsible for labour, worried about Merchant Navy recruitment, supported him. Though not as keen on proscription, other ministers were happy to fire a shot across the bows of the troublesome press. Home Secretary Herbert Morrison argued for restraint; on 19 March 1942 he told the *Mirror*'s editor and managing director that if they didn't limit their attacks on the government, he would shut the paper down under Defence Regulation 2D, for systematically publishing 'matter calculated to foment opposition to the prosecution of the war'. This warning then became the news. Other papers railed against the suppression of free speech, and the Labour left laid into ministers again for ignoring civil liberties. Once more, Morrison's role as enforcer brought him into conflict with the party membership.

On 26 March, when the Commons debated the topic, the Welsh Labour MP Nye Bevan attacked the home secretary. An oratorically brilliant former miner and editor of *Tribune*, Bevan had been hounded out of the party before the war – alongside Cripps – because of his willingness to ally with Communists to make a Popular Front against Fascism. Allowed back in after he recanted in 1939, Bevan built his profile as a thorn in the side of the wartime government.³ The right-wing Labour MP Frederick Bellenger, a soldier and a *Sunday Pictorial* columnist, joined in the attack. He read out articles Morrison had written to dissuade men from enlisting during the Great War – when the home secretary had been a conscientious objector.⁴ Like Bevan, Bellenger accused Morrison of trying to put the frighteners on Fleet Street. The gossip there was that the real target was not the *Mirror*, but the Beaverbrook newspapers that might be about to turn against the government.⁵

For all the opprobrium, Morrison's strategy worked. The *Mirror* got a publicity boost, but its editors toned down its anti-government copy. Connor, feeling defeated, volunteered for military service ahead of his call-up. Having cheated his way through the necessary tests, he became an officer in an anti-aircraft battery, where, by his own account, he nearly managed to shoot down the gasworks in Deal. He was then posted overseas. 7

According to Home Intelligence, public responses to the *Mirror* furore were characterized less by sympathy for the newspaper than bafflement at the government's reaction. 'Most people' thought journalists who made capital out of national peril deserved everything they got, but 'Petrol wastage is thought to be a much greater crime than any committed by the *Mirror*, and few people appear to have interpreted the cartoon as the Home

Secretary [or, more accurately, as Churchill] did.' With gloom abounding about industrial and military failures, the same report suggested, 'the possibility of defeat' was being 'openly discussed in some quarters, coupled with the question: "Do we deserve to win?".' There was a yearning for 'concrete evidence that we are really tackling war production', 'successful British military action' and 'strong, active and inspired Government leadership'. 9

'INDEPENDENT YET CHURCHILLIAN'

The major parties had agreed that they would not challenge the incumbent party's candidate for any parliamentary seats that fell vacant during the war, before a post-war election. This left the field open for independent and fringe-party candidates. The first five by-elections of 1942 had all taken place in solidly Labour constituencies, with the party's chosen representative returned unopposed in each case. Even as Morrison's warning to the *Mirror* was being debated in the Commons, however, news came in of the Conservatives' first by-election defeat of the war, in the Lin-colnshire town of Grantham. This was one of six by-elections in seats previously held by Conservatives between March and April 1942. Independents won three of them.

In Grantham, the Conservative candidate, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore, recently retired by Churchill from command of the RAF in the Middle East, was defeated by Denis Kendall, the director of a local munitions factory. Kendall fought a populist campaign based on his personal dynamism. 'Denis Kendall is another Stafford Cripps', declared one of his leaflets, 'Independent yet Churchillian'. ¹⁰ A former member of his local Labour Party, he was privately closely linked to associates of the Fascist leader Oswald Mosley. He took the seat with a 9 per cent swing away from the Conservatives. ¹¹

A month later, independents scored further successes in by-elections in Rugby and Wallasey. In Wallasey, local Conservatives split over the potential imposition of an outside candidate, with some backing the independent local councillor George Reakes, who won by a landslide, reducing the Tory share of the vote by 38 per cent. Reakes called it 'a victory for Churchill . . . and our enemies will now know that Wallasey wants a vigorous prosecution of the war with a fight to a finish. The voters are dissatisfied with party politics.' ¹² In Rugby, meanwhile, the

independent W. J. Brown defeated a pillar of the local establishment on a 13 per cent swing away from the Conservatives. General secretary of the civil service clerical association, a former Labour MP and adherent of Mosley's New Party, Brown was a rabid anti-Communist and fierce defender of individual liberty who promised 'Total efficiency in total war effort', the 'Reconstitution of the Government on a non-party basis' and 'Real equality of sacrifice'. He was also an associate of Beaverbrook's, and an advocate of a second front.¹³

Coming as they did after a series of military failures and alongside the elevation of Cripps, these by-elections were seen by some at the time as part of a radical new moment in politics. ¹⁴ Tom Harrisson, the maverick co-founder of Mass-Observation, presented them as evidence of the public's rejection of the old parties and their stale policies. The writer and journalist George Orwell was far from alone on the British left in believing that, in the aftermath of Singapore, Churchill was finished and the country on the verge of a socialist revolution. These were views he would later revise. ¹⁵

In retrospect, such interpretations were wishful thinking. The war badly affected established political parties, moving people away from their normal addresses (which were the basis of membership and canvassing) and putting a halt to the general electoral contests that were their life's blood. Memberships of traditional parties plummeted. The Conservatives may – as their own mythology had it – have been worse affected by this because their party workers were disproportionately likely to volunteer for the armed services, but by the end of 1941 constituency associations from all major parties felt they were in trouble. Labour activists were particularly worried by the contrast between their own falling rolls and the rising strength of the Communists. It was the Conservatives, however, who suffered by-electorally, at the hands of independent candidates speaking the language of an attack on privilege, shared sacrifice and national revival. In early 1942 these winners were most easily located politically not on the left but on the populist right. Subsequently, their successes were seen to demonstrate how badly the Conservative brand had been damaged by the events of 1940. At the time, however, many Tories understood them as a specific response to military calamity, and therefore under-estimated the post-war challenge they would face. 16

The party system was not, however, under serious threat. The Labour and Conservative parties were very effective mass-membership organizations, and they did not disintegrate or lose the loyalty of their supporters overnight. Voters who were not members often identified

themselves strongly in party terms and, though their ability to cast a vote was affected by the conflict, their dormant allegiances would be revived when normal political service resumed. For all the grumbling, in the UK the defeats of early 1942 caused nothing like the cataclysmic breakdown that would have been required to start a revolution of the sort envisaged by Orwell. On the home front, at least, the radicalism unleashed by the war would be contained.

For the Coalition, attacks from within the party system posed a much greater danger. The post-Singapore reshuffle did not address the major criticism of Churchill – that he had too much influence over strategy. As British military fortunes failed to revive during the first half of 1942, denunciations of his leadership revived. One focus of dissent was the former strategic impresario Lord Hankey. As secretary to the Cabinet and the Committee of Imperial Defence, Hankey had been a Whitehall fixture for nearly four decades, and he knew where the bodies were buried. During the 1930s, he had pressed hard for the prioritization of naval rearmament in order to safeguard the Empire. Chamberlain had given him office as minister without portfolio, but Churchill sidelined him from power. Hankey hated the irregular way in which Churchill intervened in military operations, and in 1941 he had sought to start a whispering campaign against the prime minister. Churchill sacked him at the start of March 1942, which freed the peer to make his criticisms public.¹⁷

When the House of Lords debated the Malayan debacle on 25 March, Hankey laid out a list of suggested improvements designed to counter bad habits that were notoriously Churchillian, including:

concentration of supreme control, military as well as civil, in the War Cabinet . . . the tacit dropping of the Defence Committee and of the title of Minister of Defence. Late night meetings to be reserved for emergencies. All communications to Commanders-in-Chief through the established channels. 18

Ignoring the importance of the wartime Coalition, Hankey condemned ministerial appointments settled by 'party place seeking' as 'a dreadful commentary on all the appeals that have been made to our people to make continuous sacrifices'.¹⁹

Another challenge came from the Conservative MP Oliver Stanley, second son of the Earl of Derby. Though sometimes spoken of as a future party leader in the 1930s, Stanley had made a mess of most of the ministerial positions he held. Neville Chamberlain had appointed him secretary of state for war in January 1940. Churchill and Stanley's father, however, had a bitter and long-running feud, and, when Churchill became

prime minister, he tried to demote Stanley to the Dominions Office. Stanley resigned: the only member of the previous administration to reject a call to stay on in the new administration. Instead, Stanley took up a post as an officer in the Joint Planning Section, assessing future strategy for the chiefs of staff. Stanley was socially awkward and subject to bouts of depression, but his staff job gave him a better sense of the military situation than most MPs.²⁰

He put this authority to good use when he returned to the Commons in the late spring of 1942. Positioning himself as a sensible expert, he condemned those who wanted to make 'popular clamour' the basis for national strategy; refused to attack Churchill personally, but suggested changes to the machinery of government that would closely have limited the prime minister's power. Speaking in the parliamentary debate on the war situation on 19 May 1942, Stanley proposed the expansion of the Chiefs of Staff Committee and argued that the whole War Cabinet should decide on the most important strategic issues. It seems unlikely that either of these would have fulfilled his stated goal of improving the speed and consistency of decision-making. Like Hankey, Stanley openly criticized the offhand way in which the prime minister used the military bureaucracy:

This machinery is devised to work from the bottom upwards, to have questions, demands for information, and for plans, drawn to it in broad terms, and then \dots to produce it [strategy] and have it criticised. It is not to have decisions taken on the job and then to be asked either to approve or to criticise it afterwards. 22

Stanley posed a more serious threat than the gang of misfits who habitually opposed the government in the Commons, not least because his criticisms echoed the frustrations voiced by Eden and Cripps. As Eden complained to the Foreign Office minister Richard Law, Churchill's determination to 'move all the pieces himself' meant there was 'no day to day direction of the war except by Chiefs of Staff and Winston'.²³

Churchill maintained that responsibility for deciding and implementing strategy must reside in the same individual, hence the requirement that he be minister of defence. Yet his grip on the fighting of the war was also an essential tool in maintaining his hold on power. It was very hard for any challenger to emerge while the prime minister remained in such close control over the central issue of the day, and Churchill was often able to win over the Commons by deploying military news to undermine opposition. During the secret session of 23 April 1942, for example, Churchill revealed for the first time to shocked MPs the damage done to

British battleships the previous December at Alexandria, and read out a telegram from Roosevelt enthusiastically endorsing preparations for a cross-Channel invasion.²⁴ Filled with a new sense that they understood the war, backbenchers seemed to have been won over.²⁵ Rejuvenated by a long sleep, the prime minister then fobbed off another demand by Eden that he bring the War Cabinet more fully into strategic planning.²⁶

Conservative by-election defeats caused more problems for Attlee than for Churchill. The success of independent candidates heightened Labour members' belief that ministers ought to be demanding more for participating in the government.²⁷ In the spring of 1942, Harold Laski recommenced his attacks on Attlee, charging that he was 'being dragged along at the tail of the Conservative Party' and insisting that Labour should threaten to leave office in order to secure a fully socialist programme. Attlee responded that Labour would be annihilated at the ballot box if it abandoned the responsibility of government in the middle of a war. It was wrong, he said, to argue 'that Labour was doing all the "giving" and the Tories all the "taking".' 'The Tories', he insisted, held 'the other point of view.'²⁸

'SOME MUST LOSE LIVES AND LIMBS; OTHERS ONLY THE TURN-UPS ON THEIR TROUSERS'

While the upheaval and inflation of the first years of the war had seen the greatest disruption to domestic supplies, 1942 was the year when the regulations of austerity really began to bite. They would characterize British life for the next decade.

The loss of Far Eastern supplies, the effort to concentrate resources, including labour, on military production, and the necessity of saving shipping space all drove on the imposition of further controls. In February 1942, soap was rationed. A month later petrol, rationed since the start of the war, was removed altogether from sale for private use, with a small supply available only to those who needed to travel for business. The points rationing system for food was extended – to cover pulses, tapioca, rice and dried fruit in January, condensed milk and breakfast cereals in April, treacle, syrup and biscuits in July and August, and oats in December. A separate points scheme, introduced in July, covered sweets and chocolate. In March, the government responded to the clamour of disapproval about 'luxury feeding' by introducing a recommended

maximum charge of 5 shillings for restaurant meals.²⁹ There was six times more canned meat and twice the amount of margarine per head of population in Britain than before the war, but a third less fresh meat and sugar and less than a fifth the supply of oranges and lemons.³⁰

In the spring of 1942, the clothing ration was cut by a quarter. The Board of Trade issued control orders restricting the design and manufacture of clothes, pottery, furniture, pencils and cigarette lighters. 'Utility' schemes were introduced, with standard designs to ensure that much-reduced industries could produce as many items of reasonable quality from their limited supplies as possible. During that summer, bans were placed on the production of toys involving metal, plastics, rubber and cork, ornamental glassware and jewellery (with the exception of an officially specified range of wartime wedding rings), and 'luxury' decorations on clothing, including trouser turn-ups, double cuffs, lacework and multiple pleats or pockets.

Civilian consumption was restricted in other ways. Before the war, an average of 360,000 new houses a year had been built in the UK. In 1942, only 6,000 new houses were erected for civilian use.³¹ Two and a half million families were living in bombed houses that had only received temporary repairs.³² The rail network was wheezing under the combined effects of increased wartime traffic and reduced output of engines and rolling stock as factories were turned over to tank production. There was no respite for passengers on the roads: the production of new civilian buses was also hit by the demands of the services, as well as the shortages of metal, rubber and fuel. If, thanks to rising working-class incomes and increasing government regulation, life had got a bit more equal than before the war, it had also got leakier, creakier and increasingly threadbare.

As president of the Board of Trade, Hugh Dalton was at the forefront of a lot of austerity policies. An advocate of economic planning, he enjoyed the chance to practise physically controlling the economy. His public pronouncements seemed designed to wind up Conservative backbenchers who regarded Dalton, the Eton-schooled son of a royal chaplain, as a class traitor. Banning wasteful clothing designs, he told journalists: 'There can be no equality of sacrifice in this war. Some must lose lives and limbs; others only the turn-ups on their trousers.' This was not the sort of thing about which you were meant to joke in Britain in 1942.

Since 1939, there had been tension in Whitehall between those who saw rationing as a means of maintaining civilian morale, and those – including Churchill – who worried it aroused resentment and fears of

scarcity. As the prime minister reminded his colleagues, they lived in 'a modern community at war' that had expectations about what it could expect in the shops. The British people could not be expected to live like 'Hottentots or Esquimaux'. As animosities rose at Westminster, austerity also became a matter of party politics. Conservative backbenchers accepted economic controls as part of the war effort, but suspected – with good reason – that Labour ministers were using the emergency to push the country towards socialism.

'THERE IS BLOOD ON THE COAL'

Coal was an essential part of British life. A major pre-war export industry and the principal source of domestic power, it was vital to electricity generation, coke production and steel smelting, and also fuelled the railways. Deep coal could only be extracted via the physical labour of skilled miners: even with increasing mechanization, it was brutally hard work that could not be learned overnight. Coalmining, like shipbuilding, had a legacy of economic difficulties, poor industrial relations and prolonged unemployment. Battle lines had been drawn that could not be erased even in the midst of a total war.

In 1940, Britain lost its European coal markets (which in turn caused problems for those occupied countries). While domestic demand for coal greatly increased, however, coal production steadily declined. Falling output in older fields in South Wales, Durham and Scotland overwhelmed increasing productivity in newer fields around Nottingham and Derby, which were suited for greater mechanization. Average weekly production decreased from 4.65 million tons in 1939, to 4.1 million tons in 1941, and 4.02 million tons in 1942. Signs of a shortfall between demand and supply began to trouble Whitehall in the summer of 1941 and grew more ominous during the third abnormally cold winter of the war. By the spring of 1942, ministers and officials worried that a major coal shortage might threaten the whole war economy.

The key factor in falling production was the size and condition of the mining workforce. Coalmining was unpleasant and dangerous, and pay rates had declined relative to other jobs between the wars. Mining communities were often close-knit, but the presumption that sons would follow their fathers down the pit had weakened, and the workforce had been declining and ageing before 1939.³⁷ This trend was temporarily

interrupted, then exacerbated, by the war. After the outbreak of hostilities unemployment vanished as mine owners prepared for big contracts to supply French war industries. In June 1940, the number of wage earners registered at collieries reached its wartime peak, at 767,000 miners. Following the fall of France, however, and before the introduction of controls on industrial manpower, large numbers of miners were laid off.³⁸ Almost 80,000 miners joined the armed forces between 1939 and 1941. At least another 7,000 left for better paid, less hazardous jobs in munitions factories.³⁹ By June 1941, when an Essential Work Order was placed on the industry, only 691,000 miners remained in their jobs.⁴⁰

Declining numbers hit productivity as well as output. Certain jobs above ground and between the surface and coalface had to be filled so that a pit could run. One of the first places hit by labour shortages was the number of miners actually digging the coal. Since younger men were more eager to leave the coalfields, the workforce continued to age. By 1942, 40 per cent of coal workers were aged forty or above.⁴¹ Older miners could not maintain the relentless physical graft. Sending those who had gone into the forces or the factories back to the coalfields was not enough to make up for the heavy natural wastage caused by the failure to attract new workers into the industry before the war. Non-miners took years to develop the honed skills and iron muscles needed to hew tons of coal. Despite additional supplements, rationed foodstuffs never seemed to provide enough fuel for men who spent their days down the pit. As mine owners tried to meet demand, the average number of shifts available per collier increased steadily, but the average number of shifts worked lagged. As an ageing workforce was driven harder, seemingly without just reward, health and morale deteriorated, and absenteeism rose.⁴²

That inflamed already bitter industrial relations. Miners, such as this forty-year-old Welshman interviewed by a Mass-Observer, were deeply conscious of the disparity between their own wages and those now being earned by people from the same communities who had gone to work in munitions:

We're getting nothing like we should have. Look now, what the munition workers get. Much more than we do. And I'll tell you what it is, see. It's the men from here on munition work that never worked before at all. People that's never earned nothing, getting £5 a week or more. There's one I would tell you. He never would work. Last week he showed me his note for over £8. "Keep it dark", he said. But it showed it to everyone [sic]. And I'd got £4 that week. Not fair is it? 43

Not only were miners unable to leave their jobs, they were also subject to increasingly tight discipline at work, and fines and prison sentences if they

went absent without good reason.

The mine owners had a reputation for not wanting to invest in their pits. They were certainly unwilling to consider pay rises because the price of coal was controlled. They were also anxious to protect themselves from government intervention, which they feared would lead to nationalization – another reason not to invest in new plant. For many miners, on the other hand, public ownership of the mines had become the prerequisite of any greater endeavour. As the miner-writer Bert Coombes explained: 'There is blood on the coal, there will always be blood on the coal, but we feel that blood should be shed for the masses who are our kin, not for the enrichment of a few who have battened on our pain in the past.'44 Such grievances created difficulties for trade union leaders, including the Communist Arthur Horner, who were committed to keeping up production for the sake of the war effort, and their members, who believed that the war had created a moment for decisive change. In the South Wales, Scottish and Cumberland coalfields, that created room for the Independent Labour Party to campaign for increased militancy in pursuit of a more socialist Britain.⁴⁵

Though strikes and lockouts were officially outlawed, coal mining remained one of the most strike-prone industries during the war. At the start of 1942, miners at the Betteshanger Colliery in Kent struck over the rate of pay for working difficult seams. For the first time, Bevin responded by prosecuting more than a thousand miners. Three local union officials were imprisoned, and the rest of the miners fined. They stayed out on strike, then returned to the pit but refused to pay their fines. Mass-Observation collected some of their reactions: 'What are we fighting for, to help Russia win the war or keep the bloody owners rich?' 'Call this a democracy? This war's no good to the working man: there's plenty of rich folk making money out of it.'⁴⁶ Bevin decided that the Betteshanger miners should not be pursued for payment: the main thing was that they were back at work.

With the coal industry apparently incapable of meeting the demands placed on it by the war, the government had to act. Mines fell under the Board of Trade's portmanteau portfolio, so Dalton took the lead. One way to increase production was to get more coalface workers back from the army, but this would have meant dissolving two whole infantry divisions. Churchill refused. Another was to cut consumption by extending rationing. Since 1941, consumer purchases had been limited to a maximum of one ton a month. This had privileged those with large cellars who could stock up over the summer. Any fair rationing system would also have to include

other forms of power that drew on coal. Dalton called on William Beveridge, his old boss from the London School of Economics, to devise a rationing scheme. Beveridge drew up a complex points system for fuel, in which the consumer would receive a ration based on the number of rooms in their house, which they could then deploy on coal, gas or electricity or a mixture of the three. Dalton was convinced that this was the right way forward, and, in March 1942, he announced that the government would introduce a comprehensive rationing scheme. A third way of addressing the coal shortage, however, was for the government to try to deal with the more fundamental problems in the pits. In April 1942, the War Cabinet agreed to form a sub-committee, chaired by Sir John Anderson, that would consider a wholesale reorganization of the industry.

Conservative backbenchers believed that Dalton was using fuel rationing as a prelude to a wider-ranging state takeover. After the February 1942 reshuffle, they were determined to resist. The new president of the Board of Trade, just as conscious that this was a test of party strength, was reluctant to back down. At the start of May 1942, Tory MPs harried the government into postponing the rationing scheme and agreeing to the publication of a White Paper on the coal industry. Meanwhile, the rate of industrial disputes continued to rise. In the first three weeks of May alone, 86 short strikes across the coalfields involved 58,000 men.⁴⁷ Dalton tried to push through rationing as part of a wider restructuring of the coal industry. Churchill, faced with a concerted Conservative rebellion, blocked the plans. Appeals for voluntary restraint, he had decided, would be enough. A frustrated Dalton pondered resignation, but decided not to play off the chance of strengthening his position within the Labour Party against the loss 'of having anything serious to do with the Settlement at the end of the War'. 48

When the White Paper was published in June 1942, compulsory fuel rationing was indefinitely postponed. Calls for greater state intervention, however, were answered with a system of 'dual-control'. A new Ministry of Fuel and Power was set up, under the Liberal MP Gwilym Lloyd George (the son of the former prime minister), to take operational direction of the pits through a system of regional controllers. Possession and financial responsibility for the mines, however, remained in the current owners' hands. This fell short of the outright requisition that had been hoped for by the Labour left, and by many of the miners themselves, but as Dalton judged, it was a major step towards eventual nationalization.⁴⁹

The White Paper also contained proposals put forward by Bevin to involve miners in a National Coal Board, set up an inquiry into miners'

pay and put into place a new national conciliation system for pay demands. Within weeks, the inquiry had awarded mineworkers a national minimum wage (something they had been demanding for two decades), and a significant pay increase. An adult miner's average weekly wage went up from £4 11s in March 1942 to £5 at the start of 1943. This quelled the unrest and established the basis for further wage rises that moved the miners up the pay scales relative to other workers. That did not solve the problems of falling productivity or industrial unrest, but it did ensure that subsequent problems were not much worse. Meanwhile, the government called on people to do their bit by economizing on fuel: keeping lids on cooking pans, only boiling as much water as they needed, and – for those with baths – only filling them five inches deep. A series of milder winters meant that Churchill's guess that the shortage of coal would not turn into a national crisis was proved correct. ⁵⁰

During the second half of the war, the Ministry of Fuel and Power tried to drive up production by increasing opencast mining, concentrating effort on the most productive pits and funding increased mechanization. None of this really worked. The easiest-to-reach coal had been mined years before, and American-supplied mining machinery proved ill-suited to deeper-lying seams of British coal. The percentage of coal cut and recovered by mechanical means increased by about 10 per cent, to around three-quarters of total output, but much greater reorganization of work above ground would have been necessary to reap the benefits in terms of increased overall production. Antagonism between miners and owners remained as fierce as ever. Strikes broke out again in 1943 and escalated still further in 1944.⁵¹

Deteriorating industrial relations were one reason why, although the colliery workforce remained roughly the same after 1942, productivity continued to decline. The established body of miners continued to age, and the measures that were taken to replace them did not produce workers of equal efficiency. From September 1942, men were allowed to choose service in the mines when they were conscripted. This was the start of the so-called Bevin Boys' scheme, in which tens of thousands of young men who had not previously been miners undertook national service in the pits. Of the 13,000 who came forward over the following year, however, only 3,500 could be found work. From the end of 1943, nevertheless, a portion of each new draft of conscripts would be compelled to work in the mines. This was such an unappealing alternative that the ballot for selection for mining was conducted in strict secrecy at the Ministry of Labour, for fear that the staff involved would be victimized by angry conscripts or their

parents.⁵³

Coal production declined from 205 million tons in 1942 to 193 million tons in 1944. Yet this made no discernible difference to the business of fighting the war. At no point were Britain's armaments plants limited by a national shortage of coal, fuel or power. A stricter, comprehensive scheme of fuel rationing might have been more socially just, but in physical terms it was not necessary for victory. In large part this was due to the buffer created by the loss of so many European markets. The control of supplies meant that domestic and industrial consumption of coal, even in the crucial engineering sector, went down during the second half of the war. Instead, coal went in massively increased quantities to gas and electricity stations, so that power was generated more centrally. In 1943, Britain generated almost 35 terawatts of electricity, about half as much power again as it had produced in 1938. The electricity industry's consumption of coal increased in proportion: it burned 7 million tons more in 1943 than in 1938.

What the war had done was to affect attitudes to the future of the coal industry. In March 1944, when the BIPO asked respondents whether the mines ought to be nationalized, 60 per cent said 'yes' and less than 16 per cent 'no'. Falling coal production was perceived not just as an economic failure, but one that the majority of people thought that state ownership could put right.

At the height of the dispute over rationing in 1942, however, the Conservatives' ability to block more significant reforms heightened tensions, not only between the parties but also between Labour and its leaders. Under pressure to let Labour candidates fight by-elections in Conservative-held seats, Attlee responded by changing the rules of the game, pushing through measures that ensured the incumbent party – even the Tories – automatically got official Labour endorsement and support. At Labour's annual conference in May 1942, he told delegates that the time was not ripe for a 'return to party strife'. Morrison assailed Labour members who failed to understand that only by serving in government could the party secure the reputation that would be crucial in any general election to come. As he explained to W. P. Crozier:

Most of the Labour people are for the war effort and the Coalition all right, but the trouble is that they won't face the consequences of their acts. They are for the party truce until they find that they don't like its consequences, and then they want to run away from them - in short, to have things both ways. They're suffering from too much soft leadership in the past. 56

The home secretary had his own ideas about how to solve that.

'If Rommel intends to take the Delta, now is the time'

May-July 1942

The phase of Britain's war that had opened with German failure to take Moscow and the sinking of Force Z reached its culmination at the start of July 1942. As demands for a 'Second Front Now' escalated, new disasters in the Western Desert brought political tensions at Westminster to a peak. Churchill managed nonetheless not only to survive politically, but also to maintain his influence over Anglo-American strategy, not least by promising a future cross-Channel invasion to the USSR.

'STRIKE EVEN RECKLESSLY'

Since March, public demands for a second front had broken forth with new force. Communists chalked the slogan 'second front now' on walls across the country, and organized protest meetings, including a 43, 000-strong rally on 29 March in Trafalgar Square. *Tribune* and the *News Chronicle* took up the same campaign. When the BIPO asked respondents in April to identify the best thing Britain could do to beat Germany that year, 51 per cent answered 'Open another front', or 'Help the Soviet Union in every way we can'. Only 13 per cent suggested escalating the bombing offensive against Germany.¹ On the outside wall of the mess at RAF Oakington, a bomber station just outside Cambridge, a graffiti artist made the same point in blunter terms: 'RUSSIA STARVES WHILE BRITAIN BULLSHITS'.²

Production, patriotism and a desire to help the Russians overlapped. Speaking to a huge audience in the Plaza Cinema in Govan at the end of April, the Communist leader Harry Pollitt explained:

Not one of us has the right to cheer when a Second Front is called for unless we are prepared to face all the obstacles that are at present impeding production in the shipyards,

the mines and the factories \dots The working class of Britain are made of the same mettle as their Russian comrades and only yearn for the opportunity to prove it in deeds.

Lord Beaverbrook hoped to take advantage of this mood from outside the government. After leaving office, Beaverbrook went to America. Churchill thought he might fulfil a personal go-between role like Harry Hopkins, but as Beaverbrook told the prime minister, as 'an outsider' he could do anything he liked to promote his own policies. He grabbed at the chance to harness American interest in a second front and the enthusiasm of the British left. Learning from Hopkins that the British had agreed to Marshall's plans, he decided to mount his own crusade for a second front.⁴

On 23 April 1942, with Roosevelt's approval, Beaverbrook spoke at a journalists' dinner in New York, his words broadcast across the United States and repeated by the newspapers (especially his own) back home:

Strike out to help Russia. Strike out violently. Strike even recklessly. How admirably Britain is equipped in weapons of war for directing an attack on Germany I well know. Britain should imitate Russia's spirit of attack by establishing somewhere along the two thousand miles of occupied coastline a Second Front.⁵

Churchill tried to tempt Beaverbrook with the suggestion that he might replace Halifax as ambassador in Washington, a proposal that horrified both the Foreign Office and the White House. Beaverbrook held out for a firm commitment to a second front. Failing to get it, he returned to London and mobilized his newspapers, and a front organization called the 'British Centre of Public Opinion', to agitate for his cause. The BCPO organized meetings across the country which were addressed by left-wing speakers supported by Beaverbrook, including Nye Bevan and Michael Foot. Another Trafalgar Square rally in May attracted 50,000 people.⁶

Open as ever to the thrill of intrigue, Beaverbrook was happy to give the impression he might be organizing a challenge to Churchill – just like that other emissary from Moscow, Stafford Cripps. He also, however, enjoyed the idea that he was a tribune of the people, giving voice to an upsurge of popular opinion that agreed with him on a crucial issue of the war.⁷

Since April, Eden and Ivan Maisky had been drafting an Anglo-Soviet treaty. Eden offered recognition of the Soviet Union's 1941 borders, in return for guarantees that Moscow would implement the terms of the Atlantic Charter. The Russians countered with a proposal that the British accept – in advance – any agreement they drew up with the Poles and their right to construct military bases in Finland and Romania. Just as negotiations were about to break down, a message arrived from Roosevelt,

inviting Stalin to send an envoy to discuss a second front. Stalin replied that the Soviet foreign minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, would come to Washington via London. Roosevelt proposed that Molotov stop off in London on the way back as well, bearing the president's support for a second front.⁸

Eden fretted about how to conciliate Stalin without raising opposition from his colleagues. Sir Alexander Cadogan, the permanent undersecretary at the Foreign Office, proposed a new strategy. An aristocratic old Etonian and former ambassador to China, Cadogan was another of those professional servants of the state who did a lot to shape Britain's war. Like Alan Brooke, he had a ferocious temper and was frequently contemptuous of the politicians with whom he worked, though compared to the general he usually did a much better job of concealing how he felt. Where Brooke found release birdwatching, Cadogan found it in his garden, manuring his delphiniums to restore the energies expended dealing with political prima donnas. He'd later call the first nine months of 1942 the hardest of his life. PReluctant to 'crawl to the Russians over the dead bodies of all our principles', Cadogan was tactically disinclined to yield too soon. 10 With British intelligence forecasting an imminent German offensive on the Eastern Front, he proposed dragging out the discussions to allow the pressure on the Soviets to increase. 11

Molotov arrived at RAF Tealing, outside Dundee, early on 20 May 1942, after a high-altitude flight over the Baltic. Having disembarked, he was offered a sandwich buffet and a cup of coffee-substitute so awful that he presumed they were meant to show the terrible sacrifices the British were making for the war. The food and drink improved as he got closer to the prime minister, but Molotov was still complaining about the reception when he returned to Moscow a month later. Stalin called it a 'cheap show of democracy'. Churchill, he assured Molotov, hadn't got his figure from a diet of sandwiches.¹²

Molotov told the prime minister that he wanted to discuss the second front as a 'political matter' – in other words, what the Soviets might do if the British didn't launch a cross-Channel invasion. In his diary, Cadogan called this 'Blackmail'. Churchill responded that no one wanted an 'operation which ended in disaster and gave the enemy an opportunity for glorification at our discomfiture'. Molotov asked him what proportion of the British army was actually in contact with the enemy. All this was by way of securing tougher terms for the treaty. When Molotov demanded British recognition of the Soviet conquests in Poland, Cadogan put forward an alternative: set aside all territorial issues and agree a military

alliance that would bind both countries not to make a separate peace with Germany. A twenty-year declaration of mutual assistance would demonstrate their determination to build the peace together.

Molotov advised Stalin not to accept this offer, but the Soviet dictator had other ideas. A huge battle was raging around Kharkov, where the Red Army had launched a spoiling attack on preparations for the Axis summer offensive. On the day Molotov reported back from London, twin German counter-attacks met up, leaving a quarter of a million Soviet troops surrounded and forced to surrender. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow. A dreadful start to a critical summer, it shifted priorities in Moscow.

'GIVING EVERY THING THE RUSSIANS ASK'

Treaty and supply negotiations overlapped. At this stage of the war, aid from the British Commonwealth – including tanks, planes, aluminium and tea – played a significant role in sustaining the Soviet war effort. Between June 1941 and June 1942, with the route through Iran still being developed, 90 per cent of these supplies came via the Arctic convoys. During 1942, 1.35 million tons of war material were despatched on this perilous journey. They had to be shipped through appalling sea conditions, including icebergs, freezing fogs and towering storms, as well as through attacks by German submarines, surface vessels and aircraft. Though the winter of 1941–2 was the most severe for fifteen years, during the summer clear skies and perpetual daylight left ships vulnerable to air attack round the clock. ¹⁶

Though the weather was very different, the Arctic campaign was closer in character to the battle to supply Malta than it was to the conveyor belt of convoys across the Atlantic. Arctic convoys were smaller than those across the Atlantic (they averaged twenty ships) and in more danger. During 1942, 29 per cent of merchant ships sailing through the Arctic were sunk, with another 11 per cent forced to turn back without completing their voyage. In comparison, the average loss rate for Atlantic convoys in 1942–

3 was 1.4 per cent. 17

Organizing an Arctic convoy took time. In spring 1942, the Admiralty planned on running about one a month – alternating, because of the escort strength required, with attempts to relieve Malta. This was not enough to carry all the materiel that the British and Americans had made available to the Soviets. Supplies piled up in Iceland. At the same time, however, sea ice left over from the bitter winter forced convoys south of Bear Island, closer to the German bases in Norway, even as the hours of daylight increased. With Allied air cover able to operate only as far as Bergen in southern Norway, the convoys were left reliant on their anti-aircraft guns and a few one-use fighters, catapult-launched from the merchantmen. Losses mounted. Convoy PQ13, which sailed from Reykjavik on 20 March 1942, lost five out of nineteen ships. QP10, heading in the other direction, lost four out of sixteen. After PQ14 left Reykjavik on 8 April 1942, it met a brutal storm. Sixteen out of the twenty-four merchantmen had to turn back. ¹⁸

Stalin complained bitterly about the failure of British efforts, and he and Roosevelt nagged Churchill to increase the frequency of the convoys. Simultaneously, the Admiralty and the War Office begged him to slow the cycle down. The British chiefs of staff recognized the need to keep the Soviets supplied, though they resented, as Brooke put it to Cadogan at the start of April, 'our attitude of giving *everything* the Russians ask and getting *nothing* in return'. With the Royal Navy overstretched around the globe, Admiral Pound wanted to adapt the convoy schedule to the conditions, delaying shipments until the summer. In the meantime, the British could find plenty of better uses for supplies that would otherwise sit idle in Reykjavik. With the German summer offensive approaching, however, this was no time to be seen to back out of promises made to the USSR. Churchill insisted that the convoys must go ahead as planned, but appealed to Stalin for more help to get them through. 20

With thirty-five ships, PQ16, which left Reykjavik on 21 May 1942, was the largest Russia-bound convoy yet assembled. Like most Arctic convoys, it was a multinational effort: mostly American merchant ships, with a mixture of British, Soviet and Panamanian-registered vessels, carrying tanks, planes and trucks made in the UK, Canada and the United States. It was heavily protected — another similarity with the Malta convoys — with a close escort of a minesweeper, four trawlers, four corvettes, an anti-aircraft ship and five destroyers. Among these was ORP *Garland*, handed over by the British to the Polish navy in 1940, whose crew included men only recently released from Soviet labour camps after

being taken prisoner in 1939. The irony of fighting their way back eastwards in order to keep the Soviets supplied was not altogether lost on the Poles.²¹ Further off, a cover force of four Royal Navy cruisers stood ready to provide additional support in the event of German surface ships attacking the convoy. In case the *Tirpitz* ventured out, a distant covering force consisted of one British and one American battleship, the aircraft carrier HMS *Victorious*, two cruisers and thirteen destroyers. Like the deployment of USS *Wasp* to ferry Spitfires in the Mediterranean, it was a good demonstration of naval co-operation at the core of the Anglo-American alliance.

Aboard one of the British merchant ships, SS Empire Baffin, was the British journalist Alexander Werth. The son of a Russian banker whose family had fled St Petersburg after the Revolution, Werth was on his way to take up a post as the BBC's man in Moscow. He would shortly produce a famous account of the struggles of the Red Army as it fought its way to victory. Aboard ship, he found that what little room remained after the cargo had been packed aboard was crammed with passengers and crew. A party of RAF airmen were on their way to man a squadron that would cover the convoys as they approached the Soviet Union. A team of naval gunners included a bearded man with a cut-glass Oxford accent who said he had been a bank clerk before the war. The ship's captain was Welsh, and most of his seamen came from the maritime communities around the Tyne, but among the stokers and deckhands were men from the Gold Coast and the Caribbean. They fascinated Werth: a Jamaican who had spent twenty-three years in Aberdeen and had a Scottish accent and a Scottish wife; a sailor in a 'green celluloid shade' who had studied in Moscow before the war; and an eighteen-year-old from British Guyana who was earning £20 a month (about the same as a factory hand in Britain at this point) and spending it all on clothes.²²

On 25 May, German planes started to attack. Tracer bullets and antiaircraft shells flew everywhere. A catapult-launched Hurricane was sent up to take on the Germans. A gunner on one of the American merchantmen shot it down. After two days of incessant raiding, the Germans broke through and ships started to be hit. Damaged by a bomb, the SS *Empire Lawrence*, *Empire Baffin*'s sister ship, was being abandoned by her crew when another attack swept in:

I don't think there was even a moment of suspense: there was an explosion that did not sound very loud, and a flash which, in the sun, was not very bright, and like a vomiting volcano a huge pillar of fire, smoke and wreckage — planks, pieces of wood, and then, perhaps five seconds later, the black triangle of the bows, detached from the rest of the

Altogether, German aircraft sank six merchant ships. Two more were lost to a U-boat and a mine. This time, however, the Soviets had provided more help, bombing German airbases, and sending out destroyers to bring the remaining ships into the Kola Inlet. In total, twenty-seven merchant ships, and about two-thirds of the arms and equipment, had got through. All the escorts survived (though *Garland* was badly damaged by a near miss that left eighty-eight Polish sailors killed or injured).²⁴ Yet success brought no respite. With the situation worsening on the Eastern Front, the next convoy, PQ17, would also have to go ahead as planned.

'OUR ONLY OFFENSIVE ACTION YET PRESSED HOME DIRECTLY AGAINST GERMANY'

On 30 May 1942, 1,047 British bombers set off for the German port city of Cologne; 868 subsequently claimed to have released their bombs over the main target. It was the largest air raid of the war so far, a deliberately dramatic blow intended to show the Soviets that Britain was the only country that could strike direct at Germany and further to restore Bomber Command's prestige.

If it grabbed headlines, the employment of a thousand bombers also testified to Bomber Command's continuing weakness – the relatively low bombload of the aircraft at Harris's disposal required a lot of them to be put over a target if significant damage was to be done. Assembling so many aircraft entailed an extraordinary effort, including the use of aircraft and crews from training units. Heavy casualties would have long-lasting consequences on Bomber Command's strength.

Over Cologne, the gamble paid off. Guided by 'Gee', the bombing was quite closely concentrated. Eight hundred tons of bombs destroyed 3,000 buildings and damaged nearly 8,000 more; 486 people were killed and 5,000 injured, and about 60,000 temporarily forced to evacuate. This was the most destruction done by any British raid to this point, but it came nowhere close to wrecking the city. Shocking though such a large attack was, in Germany as in Britain, urban life proved remarkably resilient under bombardment.²⁵

The British press loved the news that the Germans were being paid back in their own coin. The *News Chronicle* welcomed the enemy being 'made to feel in their bricks and bones the mad meanings of their rulers'

creed of cruelty and destruction'. The *Daily Express* made the point more simply in its headline: 'THE VENGEANCE BEGINS!' Harris wanted to keep thousand-bomber raids going for as long as possible. Over Essen on 1 June and Bremen on 25 June, however, bad weather, poor visibility and improved defences foiled his plans: despite the great effort that went into putting up the enormous air fleets, these two huge raids killed just a hundred Germans.

The endeavour was unsustainable. Over the three 'thousand' attacks, 123 bombers had been lost and morale in the training squadrons was plummeting.²⁷ In terms of the damage done to German morale or industrial production, British bombing remained very ineffective. The use of 'Gee' increased the proportion of bombers dropping their loads within five miles of the target from a quarter to two-fifths, but the majority of British crews were still nowhere near the aiming point when they released their bombs. The raids were discontinued. It would be 1944 before so many British aircraft took part in a single attack again. At the end of June 1942, however, in a typically hyperbolic minute, Harris reminded the prime minister that 'Bomber Command provides our only offensive action yet pressed home directly against Germany'. Politically, if not strategically, the thousand-bomber raids had made a powerful statement.

They also provided a powerful warning to the Germans. The raids therefore spurred new defensive efforts, including greater use of radar to control searchlights, anti-aircraft guns and night-fighters. The number of anti-aircraft guns in operation with German forces increased from 21,271 to 27,462 between June and December 1942, but the percentage of them deployed to the Eastern Front fell from 24 to 20 per cent. The heaviest anti-aircraft guns, largest searchlights and most complex fire-control machinery were all overwhelmingly already positioned in the West. From August, in another swing of the technological pendulum, the Germans began to block 'Gee' transmissions. The bomber offensive was not breaking German morale, nor imposing any significant damage on the German war economy. Already, however, it was forcing a diversion of resources that could have been used on other fronts. Sorties over Germany became still more difficult and dangerous.

'INVASION POSSIBILITIES'

Writing to Roosevelt about his second-front discussions with Molotov,

Churchill warned again of the difficulties with a landing in 1942, and speculated that the forces allocated to the invasion might be used in a different way. Several alternatives were already in play. Since the spring, Combined Operations had been working on a plan for its biggest raid yet. Codenamed 'Rutter', it would involve a whole division with tanks and paratroopers landing temporarily to seize the French port of Dieppe. It was meant to be a symbolic blow that would show what Combined Operations could do and force the Luftwaffe into a big air battle with the RAF. The Chiefs of Staff Committee approved Mountbatten's outline plan on 13 May 1942.

Ten days later, Churchill let his imagination run wild over 'invasion possibilities' during a long lunch with Mountbatten and Brooke. 'He was carried away with optimism at times', Brooke recorded, 'and establishing lodgements all round the coast from Calais to Bordeaux, with little regard to strengths and landing facilities.' Mountbatten did nothing to restrain these fancies, so Brooke had to talk Churchill down. For all his opposition to a premature invasion, however, Brooke also favoured 'Rutter'. Contrary to American prejudices, once the circumstances were right, the CIGS badly wanted another crack at the German army. 'Rutter' would demonstrate Britain's commitment to hitting back, and help work out the mechanics of a larger assault landing in the future. ³¹

Churchill, his mind ranging further afield, tried to revive the idea of a landing in Norway (codenamed 'Jupiter') to obtain airbases from which to protect the Arctic convoys. Again, the chiefs of staff pointed out the insuperable obstacles of terrain, climate and logistics in the face of German air power. Churchill didn't overrule them, but he didn't abandon the scheme. To Roosevelt, he raised another possibility – the renewal of Operation 'Gymnast', the Anglo-American landings in French North Africa that had been put off two months before. If Churchill couldn't have Norway, 'Gymnast' was his preferred alternative.³²

Roosevelt told Molotov when they met that he was all in favour of a cross-Channel invasion in 1942, even if it meant the sacrifice of '100,000 to 120,000' (presumably British) lives. The president agreed a public announcement that he and Molotov had reached a 'full understanding' about 'the urgent tasks of creating a Second Front in 1942'. The Soviet foreign minister headed back to London to press Churchill to accept Roosevelt's commitment.³³

Caught by American promises, Churchill did not refuse outright. On 10 June 1942, he gave Molotov a confidential and evasive aide memoire, drafted by the chiefs of staff. It promised that preparations were under way

for a landing in mainland Europe in August or September 1942, but did not pledge it would be carried out.³⁴ In fact, Churchill had already accepted the advice of the chiefs that 'Sledgehammer' would be a disaster. He would not, he told them, give way to the 'popular clamour' for a second front.³⁵

Whatever the British were willing to promise, however, the Americans and the Russians had engineered a situation in which they were publicly committed to action before the end of 1942. Molotov returned to Moscow with an Anglo-Soviet treaty in one pocket, and a promise of a second front and a new supply protocol from the Americans in the other. He had strengthened the alliance and clarified Soviet post-war demands. The Soviet people, in the midst of their greatest test, could be reassured they were not fighting alone. Neither Molotov nor Stalin was disappointed at these results. There was great excitement in Britain and in the Soviet Union when the Anglo-Soviet Treaty and the Roosevelt-Molotov communiqué were made public on 11 June. The British press were almost as enthusiastic as their Soviet counterparts. Trade unions and workers' councils exchanged messages of fraternal thanks. European governmentsin-exile celebrated Britain's determination to build a stable post-war system. Even the Poles thought better Anglo-Soviet relations were a good thing.³⁶

Meanwhile, Churchill had sent Mountbatten to Washington to explain to Roosevelt why the British weren't going to invade Europe that summer. He was the ideal envoy, unburdened by the anti-American prejudice that impeded many senior British officers. Mountbatten's reputation with the Americans was already high. Newly arrived in London to take up command of US forces in the European theatre, Eisenhower supposedly named him to the British chiefs of staff as the perfect leader for the invasion force. After an awkward silence, Brooke explained that Mountbatten was sitting in front of Eisenhower. Mountbatten was, unsurprisingly, smitten.³⁷

On this occasion, however, he went to let the Americans down. Meeting alone with Roosevelt on 9 June 1942, he made clear that the Allies could not land enough troops in France to release any pressure on the Eastern Front. The president replied that he would not send US soldiers to kick their heels in the UK in the hope of action in 1943. For that reason, he was interested in Churchill's mention of 'Gymnast'. Debriefing Mountbatten straight off his overnight flight, the prime minister decided to undertake another trip to Washington. After two and a half months of manoeuvring, the Allies had still not managed to agree the global strategy

without which they could not make critical decisions on production and shipping. On 17 June 1942, Churchill and Brooke boarded a flying boat off Stranraer in Scotland. Twenty-six and a half hours of continuous flying later, they touched down on the Potomac.³⁹

'RUTTER'

In his efforts to talk down 'Sledgehammer', Mountbatten had talked up the 'Rutter' raid, giving it the status of a diplomatic offering to the Grand Alliance. The operation had also become a matter of Commonwealth military relations. Since 1940, Canadian troops in the UK had been sitting idle, but their reputation from the Great War meant they were widely expected to play the leading role in any future Allied invasion of Europe. Canadian generals were desperate to get their men into action, and the 2nd Canadian Division had been made the principal formation for 'Rutter'. The momentum behind the operation became increasingly irreversible.⁴⁰

The development of the raid became, however, a case study in how a set of sensible interventions could produce an unworkable plan. Organizing such a large landing was difficult enough, but the preparations were characterized by poor intelligence about the defenders and the obstacles the attackers would face once they hit the beach. Over-ambitious staff officers crammed in more objectives, on a tighter timescale, with less room for anything to go wrong.

The number of soldiers involved meant that the whole operation was subject to approval by the lieutenant general in charge of the army's South-Eastern Command, Bernard Montgomery. Already established as an outstanding trainer of troops, Montgomery had distinguished himself commanding a division in Brooke's II Corps in the British Expeditionary Force in France in 1940. At South-Eastern Command, he was preparing the soldiers who would be in the front line in the event of a German invasion or of an eventual Allied return to the Continent. Diminutive, wiry and famously outspoken, Montgomery couldn't resist the chance to teach the creative types at Combined Operations headquarters how to fight. Recognizing a mismatch between their plan to encircle Dieppe from the beaches either side and the time available to capture the port, he insisted on a frontal attack straight into the town.⁴¹

That made a heavy preliminary bombardment from bombers and warships – already central to Mountbatten's initial concept – even more

crucial. Churchill grudgingly permitted another exception to the usual rule limiting bombing raids over France. The air commander for the operation, however, Air Vice Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory, the chief of 11 Group Fighter Command, doubted that Bomber Command would be able to clear the path for the attacking troops. A bullish leader who had championed the 'big wing' during the Battle of Britain, Leigh-Mallory was easily caricatured as an unsophisticated hearty who just wanted a scrap with the Luftwaffe. He also, however, had a well-developed interest in air support, and he correctly appreciated that British bombers could not be relied upon to hit enemy defences. When the planners decided not to use the bombers, Montgomery raised no objection. Combined Operations still hoped for a decisive bombardment from the Royal Navy, but Admiral Pound was unsurprisingly – unwilling to let a capital ship sit off Dieppe while German aircrew used it for target practice. The lack of sufficient fire support was a critical flaw, but far from the only one. While Mountbatten was in America, the first dress-rehearsal for 'Rutter', at Studland Bay in Dorset, descended into chaos before the perturbed eyes of the prime minister. Hundreds of boats milled round in the darkness. Seasick soldiers stumbled ashore in the wrong place. The tanks that were meant to support the initial attack arrived an hour late.

This was the moment when the whole operation might have been called off – perhaps by Mountbatten, who could have claimed that his initial plan had been too badly eviscerated to succeed. Yet he was too far invested, both in the raid and in his own reputation, to back down. Nor was he the only one who wanted to press on. When a jittery Churchill suggested this was not the moment to be 'taught by adversity', Brooke told him off for wavering. No general, he said, would think about a proper invasion without a trial run first. The raid was scheduled for the first week of July.⁴²

Then bad weather caused a postponement, and the Germans spotted and bombed the waiting assault force. The damage was insignificant, but the risk that the enemy had been alerted to the raid was too great. The whole operation was called off. Montgomery, having recognized the flaws that had developed in the plan, was delighted; Mountbatten was frustrated. With no alternative raid planned, if 'Rutter' was cancelled Combined Operations would remain inactive for the rest of 1942. Almost immediately, he called for the raid to be put back on. His mix of passion, charm and ruthless manipulation of the wheels of power did the trick. Recodenamed 'Jubilee', the Dieppe operation was rescheduled for the middle of August. By then Montgomery – the one other commander who might

'DEFEAT IS ONE THING; DISGRACE IS ANOTHER'

Rommel launched his attack on 26 May 1942. Against him, the Eighth Army was under the command of Lieutenant General Neil Ritchie. A capable officer, who had done a brilliant job as Auchinleck's chief of general staff, Ritchie lacked experience of operational command and authority over his more practised subordinates. They understood all too well that Auchinleck had appointed Ritchie because he didn't trust any of them. Auchinleck's headquarters subjected Ritchie to a stream of helpful advice that did nothing to improve his standing.

Eighth Army's defensive position was meant to blunt the onrushing attack that had become Rommel's trademark. It resembled a triangle, with its broad base on the coast between Gazala and Tobruk and its apex at Bir Hacheim – a fortified Italian post now held by the Free French. On the western side ran a line of infantry 'boxes', fortified for all-round defence and protected by vast 'mine marshes' intended to constrain any Axis assault. With Rommel trapped by the mines and 'boxes', British armour would launch its counter-attack.

The winter losses had been made good. The Eighth Army had 100,000 troops – including new reinforcements but also many desert veterans – to pit against 90,000 Germans and Italians, and 849 cruiser and infantry tanks, with another 145 en route to Alexandria, compared to 282 German and 228 Italian equivalents. More than 240 of the British tanks were new US-built Grants, with heavy armour and a 75mm sponson-mounted main gun that fired armour-piercing and high-explosive shells. It was a better, more reliable weapon than anything British crews had had before.⁴³ Though a few of its anti-tank batteries had been re-armed with a new 6pounder gun, however, most of the Eighth Army continued to rely on the older 2-pounder. This was now being outclassed by more heavily armoured German tanks, including the latest Panzer III model, which also had a long-barrelled 50mm gun. 44 The Germans also used a towed version of this extremely good anti-tank gun, alongside the most dangerous tankkiller of them all: the dual-purpose 88mm anti-aircraft/anti-tank gun. In order to make up for the deficiencies of the 2-pounder, Eighth Army's infantry formations deployed their 25-pounder field guns against tanks. This made it much more difficult for them to produce very concentrated indirect fire.⁴⁵ More serious than these technological shortcomings, however, was the continuing inability of Eighth Army's senior officers to match the speed of German decision-making. As another battle drifted out of their hands, defeat would expose the fragility of Eighth Army's morale – and threaten a still-greater disaster in the desert.

In the air, the Germans also seemed to have the upper hand. Tedder could now deploy a single flight of Spitfires to the Western Desert, and the first RAF heavy bomber squadrons in the Middle East were about to come into operation, but the Luftwaffe still benefitted from the technological superiority of the Me109F. Diversions of aircraft to the Far East meant that RAF rates of serviceability and reserve levels had both fallen since 'Crusader'. The Western Desert Air Force and the Eighth Army were still working to improve air–ground co-operation. While Tedder pursued air superiority as a means to enable other aerial activities, however, the Axis air forces were increasingly compelled to subordinate themselves to ground commanders. That meant they concentrated on close aerial support at the expense of a more coherent air campaign. This would prove a crucial distinction.⁴⁶

Rommel used an Italian attack to pin the Eighth Army to the front while his German divisions launched an outflanking swoop to the south. ⁴⁷ Despite copious warnings, this caught the British 7th Armoured Division spread out and unawares. Two days of fighting took the Germans deep into the Eighth Army's position and into serious trouble. The frontal attack failed; about a third of Rommel's tanks were put out of action, and his panzers were trapped between the British and the minefields, cut off from their supplies, in an area that became known as the 'Cauldron'. The Germans threw up a screen of anti-tank guns and tried desperately to cut their way back to the west. A concentrated Eighth Army attack would have crushed them.

Ritchie, however, took too long to organize his response. The Axis gun line easily repelled piecemeal sallies by British armour, and Rommel was left free to secure his supply line, then batter Bir Hacheim into submission and restart his advance. On 5 June, a disastrously mal-coordinated attack against the Cauldron by British tanks and Indian infantry fell to pieces. After a confused encounter between British and German armour on 12 and 13 June, the Eighth Army was left with just seventy tanks. Hundreds of broken down or damaged vehicles littered the battlefield. Ritchie withdrew to a new defensive position at Mersa Matruh.

In the air, the outcome was much less clear-cut. German and Italian aircraft slowed the Eighth Army's counter-attacks, but Rommel then

insisted that they concentrate on knocking out the ground defences at Bir Hacheim. These proved very costly, not just because WDAF's fighters were able to intercept and shoot down German dive-bombers, but also because German fighters deployed on escort duties could not be used elsewhere on the front. Worse, Rommel failed to organize immediate follow-up attacks on the ground, meaning that air raids had to be repeated again and again, eating up resources that could have been used to take the fight to the RAF. Meanwhile, WDAF bombers attacked Axis airstrips, at the same time as the SAS launched its most effective operations so far – wrecking aircraft on the ground and setting light to fuel trucks in a series of raids. As the Eighth Army swung into retreat, WDAF aircraft held up the pursuing enemy with air strikes on troop concentrations and road columns, before evacuating to new airfields further down the coast. ⁴⁸

They had a relatively free hand to do this because the Axis air forces were concentrating on Malta and Tobruk. From 12 June 1942, the Royal Navy launched Operations 'Vigorous' and 'Harpoon', which were meant to rush a total of seventeen merchant ships into Malta from both ends of the Mediterranean. 'Vigorous', the Alexandria convoy, was escorted by thirty-two light cruisers and destroyers, which put up a colossal antiaircraft barrage as Axis aircraft began to launch attacks on 14 June. Once more, the threat of the Italian battle fleet forced the British to manoeuvre and exposed them to greater air and motor torpedo boat attack. With two merchant ships sunk and ammunition running low, the 'Vigorous' convoy had to turn back.⁴⁹

From the other end of the Mediterranean, the 'Harpoon' convoy got to the Sicilian Narrows overnight on the 14th, before the escort became involved in a running fight with Italian destroyers and cruisers. Of the six merchant ships that set out from Gibraltar, four were sunk but two got through, with 15,000 tons of stores. Given the number of merchantmen assembled, the paucity of what actually arrived on Malta represented another serious defeat for the Royal Navy and a victory for the Italians, who despite fuel shortages were using their 'fleet in being' to keep up the blockade. The shipments provided enough supplies to keep Malta going on starvation rations until August, supplemented by vital aviation fuel deliveries by submarines, which allowed defending aircraft to take to the skies. The Admiralty was already organizing another convoy. Since Auchinleck had failed to gain control of Cyrenaica, this would require a still greater commitment of naval strength if it were to be forced through. ⁵⁰

Worse was to follow. Ritchie's retreat left Tobruk isolated. He and Auchinleck had initially agreed that if they had to retreat, they would

abandon the wreckage-filled port. The British could not afford to sustain a second besieged garrison in the Mediterranean for so small a prize. Churchill, however, reminded Auchinleck that its previous endurance had given Tobruk a symbolic value higher than its strategic worth; Auchinleck told Ritchie it had to be held.⁵¹

Tobruk's fortifications, however, had been allowed to deteriorate. Its new defenders – British and Indian battalions, and an under-strength South African infantry division – lacked anti-tank weapons and strong mobile reserves, and the retreat down the coast had left Tobruk out of range of the WDAF's protection. On 20 June, a powerful German attack, supported by intense bombing, punched straight through the defences from the southeast. The next morning, General Hendrik Klopper, the South African commander, surrendered. Thirty-three thousand men, including five generals, were captured, along with two thousand vehicles, two and a half million gallons of petrol, a quarter of a million rounds of ammunition and three million ration packs. ⁵²

The loss of Tobruk was another imperial calamity. In Britain, it took people much more by surprise than the disaster in the Far East. Churchill's later epitaph reflected his own shock: 'Defeat is one thing; disgrace is another.' Fierce criticism in London would lead to a parliamentary vote of no confidence that represented a serious challenge to the government. The loss of so many South African troops put General Smuts in a difficult position with his Nationalist critics at home, while rumours of fifth-column activity among the South Africans briefly threatened a rift between London and Pretoria – a wound that Churchill and Smuts both did their best to heal.⁵⁴

Rommel thought himself on the verge of a still more astonishing victory. Thanks to Italian military intelligence, he was reading the reports being sent to Washington by the US military attaché in Cairo, Colonel Bonner F. Fellers. These included detailed listings of British losses and available units, as well as Fellers' own diagnosis of the military situation in the desert:

1. The army has been defeated primarily because of the incompetency of its leaders; 2. If Rommel intends to take the Delta, now is the time; 3. The British must make haste to offer at least a respectable resistance to the forces of the Axis; 4. To hold the Middle East the British must be supplied immediately, in order of importance, with a large number of bombers, tanks, artillery. 56

When the British worked out what was happening – from information derived from their own Enigma decrypts – they quickly told the

Americans, who changed their cipher and called Fellers home at the end of July. In late June, however, Rommel thought he had a clear picture of a moment of opportunity. Abandoning plans to pause while Malta was captured, he pushed his exhausted troops on towards the Nile. Hitler, never keen on the Malta invasion, readily approved.

As long columns of British trucks roared eastwards along the desert highway, the retreat seemed to be turning into a rout. On 25 June 1942, Auchinleck dismissed Ritchie and took direct command. Two days later, Rommel's forces pushed the last of the Eighth Army's troops out of Mersa Matruh. It seemed they might sweep the British out of Egypt. The Mediterranean Fleet left Alexandria. In Cairo, staff officers and embassy officials started to burn confidential documents. On 30 June, the *Panzerarmee Afrika* reached the makeshift defence line, running south from the station of El Alamein, on to which Auchinleck had withdrawn his battered formations. Exhausted Luftwaffe squadrons were unable to keep up.⁵⁷ Alexandria was less than a hundred miles away. Between the end of May and late July, the Eighth Army lost 1,700 men killed and 6,000 wounded but 57,000 'missing', mostly prisoners of war.⁵⁸

'I HAVE LOST WHAT FAITH I EVER HAD IN OUR LEADERS'

On the first day of Rommel's attack on the Gazala defences, Bombardier Graham Watson was on board a truck with his sergeant major. As they bumped across the desert, they spotted a battery of what they thought were Free French gunners about five hundred yards to their left. A staff car drove out towards them. Thinking that the French wanted to check on their position, the British party stopped their truck while the car swerved to a halt across their front. Out stepped the passengers. In a letter to his sister a few months later, Watson reported what happened next:

We smiled a welcome. 'You are my prisoners' said one of them, poking a rifle menacingly at our stomachs . . . At last the horrible truth dawned on us. This was no Free French, they were Germans. At last our Sergeant Major found his tongue. 'Bugger off man, for Christ's sake', he said. 'NO, no, you are my prisoners' said the German and waved his rifle about. 'Listen c—', said the Sergeant Major, 'I said F—off, and I meant F—off. F—off can't you?'. I listened to this dialogue in some anxiety.

The German got very excited. 'Follow me,' he said, 'You are my prisoners'. 'All right, blast you, we'll follow' said the Sergeant Major. He leant down and whispered to the driver, 'get cracking like a dose of salts as soon as we start', he said. The German waved to us to follow and we started up. As soon as we got moving the driver turned away, put his

Notwithstanding the ferocity of combat in the Western Desert, the campaign was, by the standards of the Second World War, relatively low on hatred. Neither side was fighting on their home soil, nor felt much attachment to the nomadic Arabs who populated the desert, or to the few inhabitants who remained in battered cities like Benghazi or Tobruk. Behaviour on both sides sometimes breached the laws of war – at Gazala, the Germans captured 4th Armoured Brigade's orders to deny prisoners food and water until they were interrogated – but, out of battle, a tit-for-tat pattern of escalating violence never got a grip. Given the hostility of the environment and the twists of military fortune, there was a strong incentive for soldiers to allow each other to surrender – or even, as Graham Watson discovered, simply to escape. Those captured uninjured usually survived. 60

It was all very different to the Eastern Front, but also from the treatment that the Jewish inhabitants of Egypt and Palestine could have expected if the Axis armies had successfully invaded. It was no accident that the Allied troops who fought hardest in the Gazala defeat were General Koenig's French Foreign Legionnaires at Bir Hacheim. German, Austrian, Spanish and Polish émigrés, the Legionnaires had a good sense of who they were fighting and their probable fate if they surrendered. In fact, Rommel's headquarters ignored Hitler's order that such prisoners were to be shot out of hand.⁶¹

Fighting in the desert in summer was even more miserable than in winter. The Eighth Army's morale, already brittle, crumbled further during a chaotic military defeat. Rates of sickness and 'battle exhaustion'—both taken at the time as indicators of low morale — shot up. The censors reported soldiers' complaints that 'Jerry has worked one on us again . . . give us tanks, Winston', ⁶² and concluded that 'the withdrawal into Egypt has provoked expressions of very bitter disappointment from all ranks of the Eighth Army, accompanied by weariness and fatigue.' ⁶³ Writing to his sister in the middle of July, Bombardier Watson summed up his own experiences:

I have gradually begun to wonder whether it was all worth anything. I have lost what faith I ever had in our leaders . . . I have lost any faith I had in the General Staff . . . I've lost all faith in our officers who share one redeeming quality, courage. Otherwise they mostly regard the war as a sporting contest in which the ranks play the part of 'beaters'. I have lost all faith in the upper classes who are not, from what I can judge, pulling their weight in England . . . I believe utterly in the ordinary decent Englishman and it is for him I am willing to go on fighting. But as they all say: what have we to lose from the war, or gain by winning it? 64

Appalled at the apparent disintegration of his army, and convinced that some of his men had left their posts too fast, Auchinleck petitioned to reintroduce the death penalty for desertion. He would not be the last British general in this war to suggest that shooting a few of the worst offenders might be a good way to improve the army's morale. Officers in London took these requests seriously, but Auchinleck never convinced them that the rate of desertion warranted such a desperate step. Even if Labour ministers could have been persuaded, publicizing the return of the firing squad – the only way for the death penalty to work as a deterrent – would have handed a propaganda triumph to the enemy. Nor would it necessarily have solved the problem. Telling an army of citizen soldiers that their generals did not trust them to fight would have been one more blow to their morale.⁶⁵

Whether it was the cause or a consequence of defeat, the disaster at Gazala confirmed to British generals that their army was fragile. Instead of shooting soldiers, the army took further steps to improve welfare provision. The retreat made this easier by bringing units closer to the base area in Egypt. Yet the effects of such improvements were slow compared to the fast pace of combat in the Western Desert. What the soldiers needed were some victories. ⁶⁶

'THE PRINCIPAL REACTION ... IS NOW ANGER'

While the battle in the Western Desert raged, Churchill and General Brooke were talking in Washington. Brooke met the combined chiefs and they confirmed the decisions reached in London that April: to press on with the US build-up in Britain for a 1943 invasion across the Channel. Meanwhile, Churchill and Roosevelt had talked over the issue between themselves, and on 21 June 1942 they told their strategists to find another solution. They needed to get US soldiers into action with a landing somewhere in Europe in 1942. If such a landing couldn't be across the Channel, it must be on the coast of French North Africa instead. This was the one thing all the chiefs had agreed they did *not* want – the British because they were already overburdened defending the Empire, Marshall because he hoped to keep open the possibility of a cross-Channel attack, and Admiral King because he wanted ships and planes free to send to the Pacific. Nonetheless, they were sent back to reconsider their plans. The choice with which they had been presented by the politicians was stark. If

'Sledgehammer' couldn't work, it would have to be 'Gymnast'.⁶⁷

On the same day, news arrived of Tobruk's fall. Subsequently, Churchill and Brooke remembered it as a key moment for the alliance. Roosevelt immediately offered any assistance he could give, and Marshall proposed despatching an American armoured division to the Middle East. In fact, neither Brooke nor Marshall wanted US troops there. Instead, newly issued tanks and self-propelled guns were taken away from US soldiers and sent to the British in Egypt. With no final agreement reached on Allied strategy, the British party returned to London. As they left, American newspapers were reporting the 'imminent fall' of Churchill's government. 68

Paradoxically, however, the loss of Tobruk ended one political challenge. On the same day the port surrendered, Lord Beaverbrook addressed a 30,000-strong crowd in Birmingham:

Some people in high places have stood firmly against the Second Front. We must let them go on their way . . . the British army . . . will win this war if properly supported by bombers and fighting aircraft and if driven with urgency, speed and with courage . . .

The British Army wants the Second Front to show that Britain can fight in Europe and to avenge Dunkirk. ⁶⁹

The crowd gave three cheers and sang the 'Internationale'. Yet Beaver-brook knew that the disaster in the desert, and the consequent concentration on defending the Middle East, would doom his calls for a cross-Channel invasion. Shortly afterwards, he stopped calling for a second front. Before long, he would be defending the government in the Lords and restoring his friendship with Churchill.

The wave of patriotic frustration that Beaverbrook had hoped to ride, however, was still reaching its peak. According to the War Office's Morale Committee, among units in Home Forces: 'The setback at Tobruk struck the average soldier more vividly than the loss of Singapore, probably because the place is nearer home and recent events have made it more familiar to him.'⁷⁰ Soldiers, it continued, had however taken the news more stoically than civilians, who had been really depressed by yet another defeat. The newspapers were outraged. In the last week of June, according to Home Intelligence:

the shock of the fall of Tobruk has worn off, and the principal reaction, reported from ten regions, is now anger. This anger is directed at many targets, our tanks and guns, and those responsible for supplying them, our tactics and strategy, our generals and 'the central direction of the war', and particularly those responsible for official pronouncements and communiqués. 71

Between 16 June and 20 July 1942, the proportion of those surveyed by the BIPO who professed themselves 'dissatisfied' with the government's conduct of the war grew from 26 to 42 per cent. Churchill's approval rating had fallen too – though it remained at 78 per cent. On 25 June, the Conservatives lost another by-election, in Maldon, Essex, to the 'Independent Labour' candidate Tom Driberg, a former Communist who wrote as 'William Hickey' for Beaverbrook's *Daily Express*. At Westminster, Tobruk's surrender brought simmering dissatisfaction back to the boil. Sir John Wardlaw-Milne, the Conservative chair of the Select Committee on National Expenditure, announced he would move a motion of no-confidence in the government. 'Chips' Channon described the atmosphere in his diary: 'The Lobbies soon hummed, and everyone I saw was suddenly as excited as an aged virgin being led to her seducer's bed.'⁷³

The government took the threat seriously, but the party machinery remained behind the Coalition. The Conservative whips kept a close grip on their MPs, and the 1922 Committee condemned the vote as 'untimely'.⁷⁴ Before the debate began, Bevin warned Labour MPs that Wardlaw-Milne's motion was a Tory plot to put Labour ministers out of office.⁷⁵

It proved a colossal anti-climax. Opening his attack, Wardlaw-Milne argued for the separation of the duties of prime minister and minister of defence. Ad-libbing, he proposed the duke of Gloucester, a well-liked but not very bright member of the royal family, to lead the army. Churchill's supporters, seeing their opportunity, roared with laughter. Wardlaw-Milne filled the rest of his speech with criticism of production failures and demands for better use of scientific research, but never regained the attention of the House. He was followed by Sir Roger Keyes, the former director of Combined Operations. He was meant to be supporting the motion but argued the opposite to Wardlaw-Milne, saying that Churchill should play a more active role in making strategy.

Oliver Lyttelton led the government's defence. In a poor speech (Lyttelton said he had made 'a proper balls' of it), the production minister tried to blame supply problems on the Chamberlain administration.⁷⁷ This argument was wearing thin, and MPs gave him a rough reception.⁷⁸ The government's usual critics attacked shortcomings in strategic planning and munitions production. Winding up, Churchill condemned his opponents for damaging Britain's reputation, and emphasized the huge quantities of equipment being sent to the Soviet Union and the Middle East. Just 25

MPs voted for the motion, 475 against.

The Soviet ambassador, Ivan Maisky, thought Churchill had won 'a brilliant victory in Parliament', even if the prime minister's position remained insecure: 'the overwhelming majority in the House is in a very anxious and critical mood, blaming the Government for the long chain of military defeats that has ended, for now, in Libya. This feeling is yet stronger among the masses.' The *Daily Mirror* executive Cecil King was furious that the House of Commons had handed 'one more meaningless parliamentary victory' to Churchill. In his diary, he lamented:

Meanwhile the Germans claim the capture of El Alamein – the last fortified post in the desert – and say they are pursuing our forces towards the Nile Valley. It is clearly these events in Egypt and not processions of turnip-headed MPs into the Government lobby that are going to decide the political future of this country. 80

He was right, but not in the way he expected. Churchill remained vulnerable, but if MPs weren't going to topple him after Singapore or Tobruk, perhaps nothing would have convinced them to plunge into the unknown. The prime minister's all-or-nothing approach to strategic control raised the bar for any challenger: if he was to go, it would be after a big confrontation, not a succession of compromises. Further defeats might well have sparked such a fight, but potential rivals bided their time until military circumstances made his position untenable. When Attlee, in Churchill's absence, invited his War Cabinet colleagues to attend the Defence Committee, Bevin spent the meeting bellowing: 'We must have a victory. What the British public wants is a victory!'⁸¹ For all their dissatisfaction, none of his colleagues seemed to have a better idea of how to achieve one.

Eden remained the one really plausible alternative. Before Churchill flew to Washington, he told the king that the foreign secretary should replace him in the event of his death. He made sure Eden knew that he had formalized his position as his political heir. This not only secured Eden's loyalty, but also encouraged his natural preference to wait Churchill out rather than challenge his hold on power. He did not know just how long he would spend warming the substitute's bench.⁸²

Stafford Cripps, meanwhile, was becoming increasingly frustrated. His hopes of forming a partnership with Churchill had been dashed, and he was discouraged by Beaverbrook's return to the prime minister's circle. Like the rest of the War Cabinet, Cripps was subject to Churchillian manoeuvring over strategy: asked to approve choices that had already been made as the alternatives to the prime minister's preferred policy were shut

down. He also, however, came to realize just how limited Britain's options were, coming round to supporting strategic bombing and accepting the impossibility of an early second front. Instead, his criticisms focused on the process of strategy-making and, particularly, Churchill's high level of personal control. He advocated the interposition of a War Planning Directorate: experts would co-ordinate and select military options for the chiefs to implement. Churchill dismissed the proposal as a 'planner's dream' that would divorce those responsible for designing strategy from those responsible for putting it into effect. As Cripps surely recognized, it also represented a challenge to his personal authority that Churchill was bound to reject.⁸³

Unlike the prime minister, Cripps paid a lot of attention to the measurement of public opinion. He commissioned Mass-Observation polls on how he was perceived by the public. All the evidence told him the same thing. Notwithstanding seven months of defeats, most people still approved of Churchill as prime minister, and, if anyone was going to replace him, they preferred Eden by a country mile. Cripps lagged a poor but impressive third. Nor did he stand much chance of securing the support of Conservatives in the Commons. At a dinner designed to introduce him to Conservative ministers, including 'Rab' Butler and Churchill's parliamentary private secretary, George Harvie-Watt, on 17 June 1942, Cripps proposed a political alliance based on 'curing unemployment and the establishment of better housing' and floated the idea of 'a joint Government consisting of O[liver] L[vttelton], Eden and himself. He implied that in due course WSC would be pushed aside, because he did not understand the home front. He did not deny that Churchill was the best for the strategic war period.' To the delight of Butler, who had elicited this sally, the Conservatives present reacted by insisting that they must keep their party united and independent, 'reconciling' it with Churchill.⁸⁴ Given all this, Cripps seems to have concluded that he could not himself displace the prime minister, though he would certainly support Eden if he made a bid for the premiership. In the meantime, he would press for reform and serve the cause of victory by keeping Beaverbrook out of office. For the moment, that meant keeping his place in the War Cabinet.⁸⁵

'THE TRUE SECOND FRONT OF 1942'

When the British delegation got back from Washington, Churchill wrote to

Roosevelt to explain that 'No responsible British general, admiral or air marshal is prepared to recommend "Sledgehammer" as a practicable operation in 1942.' Instead they would undertake a North African invasion: this would be 'the true Second Front of 1942'.⁸⁶ The US joint chiefs of staff were furious with Churchill's deviousness. Marshall and King told Roosevelt that, since a decisive confrontation in Europe would be set back until 1944, America ought to concentrate its current effort against Japan. They were not bluffing, but the president acted as if they were. Telling them Europe remained the priority, he sent them to London to get a final agreement on strategy.⁸⁷

On 28 June 1942, Axis forces opened their summer offensive on the Eastern Front, driving southwards fast towards the oilfields of the Caucasus. With the Red Army in full retreat, Hitler was convinced that the Soviets were about to crack. Unsettled by the publication of the Allied communiqué on the second front, and unaware the British were scotching plans for an early invasion, he feared that a Soviet collapse would force the Allies into a desperate cross-Channel attack. As his armies plunged south, he ordered three elite divisions to France and issued instructions for the construction of the 'Atlantic Wall' – coastal fortifications that would hold off any Allied invasion until Moscow had capitulated.⁸⁸

No sooner had the danger from the Japanese receded than British strategists had to face a new threat to the Middle East — not just from Rommel's advance into Egypt, but also from the north, if the triumphant Axis armies surged across the Caucasus, through Iran and towards the vital refinery complex at Abadan. It provided three-quarters of the oil needs of the Middle East, and two-thirds of that of the eastern Empire. In the summer of 1942, it was estimated that the loss of Abadan would reduce the war effort of the British Empire and Commonwealth by about 25 per cent. ⁸⁹ Churchill was more sanguine about the threat than Smuts or Brooke ('The year is advancing and the Germans have a long way to go'), but the extraordinary pace of the German advance in July stoked fears that they might get into Iran. ⁹⁰

Simultaneously, reports of Axis successes pushed public pressure for a second front to a climax. Beaverbrook's retreat notwithstanding, his newspapers and an array of ardent left-wingers kept up the campaign. In July, the BIPO asked: 'Do you think the Allies should or should not try to invade Europe this year?' Sixty-two per cent of those who responded said yes.⁹¹

Even the amount of aid Britain was already providing to the Soviet

Union, however, was about to decrease. The next Arctic convoy, PQ17, left Iceland on 27 June 1942. For the first time that year, the ice had receded far enough for it to run north of Bear Island, putting ships further from the Luftwaffe's bases. German planes that did attack were met with concentrated and accurate fire that convinced the convoy commander that 'provided the ammunition lasted, PQ17 could get anywhere'. 93

Hitler refused to allow *Tirpitz* to attack the convoy until the British fleet was known to be too far away to intervene. In the meantime, however, German warships moved to forward bases, ready to move into action when the Führer's approval had been secured. Their disappearance from harbour convinced the Admiralty that the ships were on their way to attack PQ17. In that case, the convoy was meant to scatter – forcing the Germans to spend longer tracking down individual ships while the Home Fleet raced to chase them back to port. Since the merchant ships were so slow, they had to be dispersed well before *Tirpitz* appeared. On 5 July, Pound issued the scatter order. It was a terrible mistake. Deterred by the Anglo-American covering fleet, German surface ships put to sea but did not attack. Deprived of the protection of the convoy, however, the merchantmen were hunted down by aircraft and submarines. Of the thirtyone ships in PQ17 when it scattered, only eleven arrived in Soviet ports. Then westbound Convoy QP13 accidentally ran into a British minefield off Iceland and another four ships were sunk. In a week, 400,000 tons of shipping had been lost – as well as the 205 tanks and 112 aircraft aboard the ships that went down. With the Royal Navy mustering its strength for another attempt to relieve Malta, the Defence Committee reluctantly agreed that Arctic convoys should be halted until the perpetual daylight of summer had come to an end. Stalin, furious, told Churchill he was deserting the Russians in their hour of greatest need.

On 18 July 1942, King and Marshall arrived in London. Field Marshal Dill had warned Churchill and the chiefs that the Americans meant their threat of committing everything to the war against Japan, but that they did not have the support of the president. After the British dismissed Marshall's plans to sustain a bridgehead in France while the US transferred forces across the Atlantic, he and King grudgingly agreed to 'Gymnast', now re-codenamed 'Torch'. In return, they demanded the British accept that, since the shipping demands of a North African expedition made a 1943 invasion impossible, Allied strategy in Europe had become essentially defensive. Instead, the Americans would move men, ships and planes into the Pacific to support the counter-offensive against the Japanese in the Solomon Islands, which was now building towards a

titanic battle for the island of Guadalcanal.

The British chiefs of staff disagreed about the offensive possibilities of 'Torch' – a crucial factor in planning the operation – but thought they had pushed the Americans as far as they could. Agreeing the proposals, on the evening of 24 July they took them to the War Cabinet for approval. Cripps and Eden 'thought they saw a flaw' – a vagueness of wording leaving open the possibility that there would be no offensive action at all. With Churchill's support, Brooke argued them down. Typical, thought the CIGS, of politicians trying to interfere in military matters: always ready 'to argue about things they do not understand'. ⁹⁴

Reviewing the strategic situation for the War Cabinet on 21 July, Churchill had suggested that everything might depend on 'whether Hitler's U- boat attack on Allied tonnage, or the increase and application of Allied air power, reach their full fruition first'. The enormous potential of US shipyards would give the Allies the advantage, but Britain must secure a 'solemn compact, almost a treaty' about the quantity of newly built American shipping tonnage that would be transferred to the UK. In the meantime, Bomber Command would keep up its assault on Germany. With Russia and America in the war, Britain could look forward to a mass invasion of the Continent by liberating armies, and a general revolt of the populations against the Hitler tyranny. All the same, it would be a mistake to cast aside

our original thought, which, it may be mentioned, is also strong in American minds, namely that the severe, ruthless bombing of Germany on an ever increasing scale will not only cripple her war effort, including U-boat and aircraft production, but will also create conditions intolerable to the mass of the German population.

Bombing must be 'second only to the largest military operation which can be conducted on the Continent'.⁹⁵

Despite all the disasters of early 1942, Churchill had managed to exert Anglo-American significant control over strategy, albeit while strengthening the sense of mistrust on the other side of the Atlantic. Nonetheless, the decision on 'Torch' confirmed the divide between Britain's and America's wars. In Washington, Roosevelt had just appointed his friend Admiral William Leahy as his chief of staff. Quiet and clever, Leahy had great power as the junction between the joint chiefs and the president. Like Roosevelt, he believed that China was key to the future of the world, and therefore wanted to prioritize beating Japan. During the autumn, as the fighting on Guadalcanal intensified, Admiral King insisted on a major redeployment of army and USAAF units to the Pacific. Angry that the British had foiled his plans, Marshall also funnelled

more resources to the war in the Far East. 'Hap' Arnold resisted the drift away from Europe, but could not refuse calls to send his planes to the bitter battles raging against the Japanese. The result was that, even after 'Torch' had been launched, the Americans ended 1942 with more combat units deployed to the Pacific theatre of war than to Europe, North Africa and the Atlantic. ⁹⁶

In contrast, the destruction of Japanese naval power at Midway and in the Solomon Islands allowed London to cut back its commitment to the Indian Ocean. Only one of the battleship reinforcements promised to Admiral Somerville in the spring of 1942 actually arrived, and two of his aircraft carriers were soon redeployed – first to support the Malta relief convoys, then to cover the 'Torch' landings. The two modern battleships and one carrier that remained in August 1942 were all withdrawn to European waters over the winter of 1942–3. This reflected the flexibility of naval power, but it also indicated the extent to which Britain's priorities lay in the West rather than the East.⁹⁷ Only after Germany's defeat had been assured would British strategists be able to begin major offensive operations against Japan.

10

Pivot

August-September 1942

If the climax to the previous phase of the war came at the start of July 1942, the next two months were the pivot. This was the period in which, in retrospect, the conclusion of the North African campaign came into view, the Anglo-Soviet relationship shifted into a new gear, and the consequences of Cripps' failure to secure change at the top of Britain's war effort became apparent. Simultaneously, the register on the home front started to shift, as public discussion of the post-war world increased and politicians began to manoeuvre around the issue of reconstruction.

'A GREAT BLUE BOTTLE BUZZING OVER A COLOSSAL COW PAT'

The defensive position at El Alamein, to which the Eighth Army had retreated, sat at the narrow end of a funnel formed by the coast and the impassable wastes of the Qattara Depression. Unable to outflank it, from 30 June 1942 Rommel tried to punch through it instead. Indian and New Zealand troops, assisted by heavy bombing from the RAF, fought off the attack. On 3 July, his over-extended armoured divisions worn down to a shadow, Rommel abandoned his assault.

The stand marked a change in the desert war. For the first time, Enigma decrypts reached British headquarters in time to have an effect on a battle as it was being fought. Rommel's signals intelligence unit was captured, depriving him of information and revealing to the British how much their own transmissions had given away. At the end of long supply lines, Rommel's forces had run out of momentum and needed to regather their strength for another major offensive. During July, Auchinleck launched repeated counter- attacks at the Italian divisions of the

Panzerarmee Afrika. Rommel fought them off, but it was clear that the advance into Egypt had been stopped in its tracks. In the heat of the desert summer, the two sides, like exhausted prize-fighters, lolled against the ropes.

Churchill and Brooke decided to assess the situation at first hand. Eden persuaded Churchill to delay until the fighting had died down — as the prime minister put it, not to act 'like a great blue bottle buzzing over a colossal cow pat'. Churchill, however, also needed to visit Stalin to deliver the bad news about a second front. A visit to Egypt and a short-notice trip to Moscow were arranged. Cadogan, involved in the talks with Moscow as a senior Foreign Office official, accompanied Churchill and Brooke.

Churchill intended to find a new commander for the Eighth Army, so that Auchinleck could concentrate on the whole of his embattled Middle Eastern theatre, including the developing threat across the Caucasus. Following his arrival in Cairo on 4 August 1942, however, he became convinced that the general must go. Rather than disposing of him completely, however, Churchill proposed splitting the Middle East theatre in two, giving Auchinleck command of Iran and Iraq. Back in London, the War Cabinet rebelled against a new job being created for a general who had failed.² Auchinleck solved the problem by refusing the offer. Instead, General Henry 'Jumbo' Wilson took his place in charge of the eastern half of the theatre.

Churchill wanted Brooke to take charge of the rest of the Middle East. It was an exciting offer, but the CIGS turned it down. Instead, Churchill chose General Alexander, who had recently overseen the retreat from Burma. To take charge of the Eighth Army, the prime minister wanted Lieutenant General William 'Strafer' Gott, a commander who had distinguished and exhausted himself in the Western Desert. Brooke sought to promote his protégé Montgomery instead. On 7 August, Gott was killed when a stray German fighter shot down his plane. Alexander and Montgomery were rushed to the Middle East; another Axis attack was expected before the end of August, and Churchill wanted them to organize their own offensive as quickly as they could.

From Cairo, the prime minister's party, accompanied by Wavell – a Russian speaker – and Tedder, proceeded to Moscow. After a stopover in Teheran, engine trouble forced the plane with Cadogan and the military officers to turn back. Churchill, in a separate aircraft with the American Lend-Lease facilitator Averell Harriman, flew on to Moscow. They arrived on 12 August. That evening Churchill went to the Kremlin to meet Stalin

for the first time. He laid out Britain and America's strategy: no cross-Channel invasion in 1942, but all preparations for one in 1943. Stalin, disappointed but knowing what was coming, barely reacted. Things warmed up when Churchill turned to the bombing offensive. As the British minutes explained:

The Prime Minister said that we hoped to shatter twenty German cities as we had shattered Cologne, Lübeck, Düsseldorf and so on. More and more aeroplanes and bigger and bigger bombs . . . If need be, as the war went on, we hoped to shatter almost every dwelling in almost every German city.

In response, 'M. Stalin smiled and said that would not be bad.' His attitude softening, he admitted the advantages of a North African landing. Churchill left believing that they had 'parted in an atmosphere of goodwill'.

The next day, the rest of the party arrived. As they swooped low over the Volga Delta, Brooke had looked for the Soviet defences between the Caucasus and the Caspian. All he could spot (besides some white egrets) was a half-completed anti-tank ditch.⁴ When they got to Moscow, Marshal Shaposhnikov, the people's commissar for defence, and until his recent retirement, Stalin's chief of staff, was there to meet them. The seriously ill Shaposhnikov stood around while the British generals fussed over their baggage. Eventually, the British ambassador, Archibald Clark Kerr, had to tell Wavell to speak to their host. The Soviets took good note of this rudeness.⁵ The new arrivals dined with Churchill. When he spoke of Stalin as a 'peasant whom he could handle', an appalled Tedder, certain the room was bugged, tried to quieten the prime minister and got a deathly stare for his trouble.⁶

That evening, Churchill went to the Kremlin again. To his bafflement, the meeting did not go so well. Denouncing the broken promises over the second front, Stalin told the prime minister that the British should try actually fighting the Germans. It was not so bad, he said, once you got used to it. At a painful official dinner the next night, Stalin wandered around, toasting his way through his generals, while Churchill sat alone on the top table. This was not the sort of party that he liked. Cadogan had to talk him out of leaving Moscow immediately.

The next day, while senior Soviet officers boasted to their British counterparts about the strength of their defences in the Caucasus, Churchill endured a desultory meeting with Stalin. Then the dictator invited the prime minister for a drink in his private rooms. Over the next seven hours they enjoyed a prodigious quantity of alcohol and food, served by Stalin's

daughter, Svetlana. Called to support the prime minister well after midnight, Cadogan found the party just getting started.

This was the sort of hospitality Churchill had extended to American envoys such as Harriman and Harry Hopkins when they visited London. It put him in a much better mood, but he had not forgotten Stalin's earlier needling. How bad had the war been for Russia? he asked at one point. How did it compare, say, to the collectivization of agriculture? 'What had happened to all those . . .' He struggled to remember the word: Cadogan helped him. 'Kulaks'? Oh that, Stalin recalled, had been *really* hard. Did Churchill know that some of those wealthy peasants hadn't got on at all well with their new neighbours in Siberia, who had ended up killing them? Churchill listened to this with a straight face.

Now that they'd got on better terms by teasing each other about the deportation and death of millions of people, Churchill felt able to reemphasize his belief in a second front in 1943. To the prime minister's delight, Stalin said that he thought a winter landing in Norway would be an excellent idea. Having agreed a communiqué about the 'cordiality' of their discussions, the party disbanded, and a hungover Churchill just had time for a bath before joining the rest of the British delegation on their way to the airport.

Harriman and Cadogan advised the prime minister that Stalin had played the same three-card trick used on Eden in 1941 – a good meeting, a very bad meeting, then a resolution. Churchill came away convinced that he had got to know the real Stalin, who was a man with whom some sort of deal was possible. This perception was to be highly influential in their future dealings. In one respect at least, it was correct. Stalin needed British and American help, but he was also a very cautious geo-strategist who was not looking for global domination. Churchill was right to think they could work together: provided the British gave the Soviet leader what he wanted.⁷

'A LESSON TO THE PEOPLE WHO ARE CLAMOURING FOR THE INVASION OF FRANCE'

While Churchill was in Moscow, two very different battles took place on the periphery of Europe. First, the British pushed a supply convoy from Gibraltar to Malta in Operation 'Pedestal'. Fourteen merchant ships were guarded by two battleships, HMS *Rodney* and *Nelson*, the aircraft carriers HMS *Victorious*, *Indomitable* and *Eagle*, seven cruisers, eight submarines and twenty-four destroyers. The carriers had seventy-two fighters on board, and another aircraft carrier, HMS *Furious*, launched Spitfire reinforcements into Malta while 'Pedestal' was under way.

While these planes were taking off, a gap opened in the destroyer screen, through which a German U-boat snuck and sank Eagle. Nonetheless, the escort was able to withstand repeated Axis air attacks on 12 August 1942. Over the course of three big raids, about two hundred German and Italian bombers attacked, protected by about a hundred escorting fighters, including the excellent Me109Fs, which outclassed the Fleet Air Arm's Sea Hurricanes, Fulmars and Martlets. The British aircraft, however, proved tactically superior – guided by fighter controllers on the carriers who tracked the incoming enemy strikes on radar, coordinated the response across multiple flight decks, put up aircraft to break up the attacking formations and guided them onto their target by VHF radio. The use of several carriers to support 'Pedestal', unlike previous Malta convoys, added to the complexity of what was now the most advanced carrier defensive system in the world. It allowed the outnumbered Fleet Air Arm fighters to hold off even large and wellcoordinated raids before they reached the merchant ships. In a sign of its effectiveness, the third raid concentrated on the escort force. German bombs hit Victorious and Indomitable, putting the latter's flight deck out of action, but their thick top layer of armour allowed both ships to survive.⁸ Having guided the convoy to the narrow choke point of the Skerki Channel between Tunis and Sicily, the main escort turned back, according to plan. By that point, enemy aircraft had sunk just one merchant ship and one destroyer, and, even accounting for the loss of *Eagle*, 'Pedestal' looked like a success.

A smaller force of cruisers and destroyers was meant to shepherd the convoy all the way to Malta. It would be guarded by long-range Beaufighters, operating from the island, controlled by two cruisers equipped to operate as fighter-direction ships. As the convoy changed direction to negotiate the narrow channel swept through an Italian minefield, both cruisers were torpedoed by an Italian submarine. One sank and the other was forced to withdraw, leaving the convoy without any properly coordinated fighter protection. Another torpedo hit the US tanker *Ohio*, loaded with fuel for Malta's planes. Throughout the night and day that followed, Italian torpedo boats and aircraft assailed the convoy, sinking seven merchant ships and another two cruisers. Eventually, only five cargo ships reached Malta, including the *Ohio*, towed into Valletta

with its back broken and water almost lapping over the decks. Things would have been even worse if the Italians had sent in the squadrons of cruisers and destroyers they had despatched to intercept the convoy on the final run into Malta.

'Pedestal' raises interesting questions about victory and defeat. The losses inflicted on the convoy and its escort indicated a great Axis triumph – much of it down to the oft-derided Italian navy. Rommel's headlong charge into Egypt, however, had raised the stakes to the point that success could only be achieved if *no* supplies got through. Instead, the ships that did reach the island landed 47,000 tons of supplies, including 15,000 tons of aircraft fuel. The Maltese remained on starvation rations, but the island had enough food to hold out until the end of 1942. The cost was very high, but despite the scale of opposition and the disastrous loss of the fighter-direction cruisers, the British had been able to force their way in.⁹

If the heavy losses of 'Pedestal' were perhaps worth it, the same could not be said for Operation 'Jubilee', the raid on Dieppe, which took place on 19 August 1942. Despite a disastrous chance encounter with a German convoy in the Channel, army commandos managed to take or suppress the enemy gun positions on both flanks of the main landing by the 2nd Canadian Division. Nonetheless, the principal operation quickly turned into a catastrophe. Navigation errors left landing craft blundering around off the beaches while the Germans readied themselves for the attack. Stronger than expected defences were not neutralized by the weak preliminary bombardment. Only a few of the tanks that landed were able to get off the beach: most stuck in the shingle, their huddled crews unable to help the screaming infantrymen outside. Communications broke down, and reinforcements were sent ashore onto beaches already blocked with the dead and wounded. The evacuation was just as chaotic. Crammed with panicked soldiers as they sought to extricate the raiders, landing craft capsized in the swell.¹⁰ Out of the more than 6,000 Allied servicemen who had taken part in the landings – including a few US Rangers, in action for the first time - 3,367 were killed, wounded or taken prisoner. The Germans suffered about 600 casualties in total. Sixty-eight per cent of all the Canadian personnel involved became casualties: of one battalion of the Essex Scottish Regiment who landed on Red Beach, only fifty-two made it back to Britain. 11

The RAF had meanwhile put up sixty-six squadrons in the hope of forcing a confrontation with the Luftwaffe. They temporarily secured the skies over the landing area – the majority of the forty-eight German aircraft lost were bombers trying to attack the flotilla – but suffered heavy

casualties in the process. Eighty-eight RAF fighters and eight bombers were shot down, with the fighters out-matched by the first mass deployment of German squadrons equipped with the Focke-Wulf FW-190. As usual, RAF pilots thought they had shot down many more of the enemy than they actually had.¹²

News of the disaster reached Churchill on his way back through Cairo. After Singapore and Tobruk, another appalling loss of Commonwealth troops was not what he needed. Focused on the vulnerability of the Middle East, he wanted the best made of a bad job, and played up the mistaken RAF reports about an aerial success. Brooke's eyes were on the Western Desert and the Caucasus. According to Churchill's doctor, the CIGS muttered that Dieppe would teach 'a lesson to the people who are clamouring for the invasion of France'. After he returned to London, Brooke did start to press for answers about what had gone wrong, not least as a means to counter Mountbatten's apparently irresistible rise. The chief of Combined Operations, however, defended himself skilfully. He told Churchill that if Brooke were allowed to go hunting for who had been to blame, he would resign so that a full inquiry could take place. No one wanted that sort of publicity. 16

Instead, Combined Operations insisted that failure had been the army's fault, and claimed that valuable lessons had been learned for a future invasion of Europe. This line subsequently proved remarkably persistent, but the key technological and tactical improvements that would help Allied forces ashore in Normandy in June 1944 were either already under way when the raid was launched or came about because of subsequent experience in the Mediterranean. Dieppe's only real use was simply to show just how badly things could go wrong.¹⁷

As Brooke had suggested, the key lesson was delivered not to Combined Operations but to those who had been clamouring for an early full-scale invasion. After months of 'Second Front Now' propaganda, people initially disbelieved official announcements that the Dieppe attack was just a raid. Combined Operations' public relations efforts were apparent in the very positive first reports: 'These Canadians fight as the Russians fight', 'Navy and RAF make it all-English Channel'. As the Germans trumpeted their victory, however, it didn't take long for the story of the disaster to leak. Rumours spread not just of very heavy casualties, but that the attack had been betrayed by German spies. The rhetoric of gallant sacrifice and learning for the future was widely accepted, but the growing realization that Dieppe had been a costly failure extinguished

calls for an immediate second front.¹⁸ October's BIPO poll found respondents more likely to disapprove than approve of public discussion of an invasion. Home Intelligence concluded that as a political issue, it had 'ceased to count'.¹⁹

'QUIT INDIA'

In India, meanwhile, the upheavals caused by the war with Japan sparked an explosion. Following the failure of the Cripps mission, the authorities had continued to mobilize the Indian war effort, and many Indians were willing to co-operate with them. Traditional military and religious loyalties, sympathy for China and hatred of Fascism all played their part. Just as in Britain, there were also more prosaic reasons. Government contracts and investment attracted Indian businessmen eager for a profit. Unemployment and rising food prices left poorer Indians with no alternative to military enlistment. During 1942, the all-volunteer Indian army doubled in size, to almost a million men. Between 1943 and 1945 it would grow by another half million. Indian munitions production also expanded dramatically: it would ultimately include 2.5 million filled 25-pounder shells, nearly 700,000 rifles and more than 800 million rounds of .303 small arms ammunition. ²¹

That did not still the mood of impending crisis. The flow of refugees and invasion rumours from Burma, as well as the economic strains imposed by the war, undermined the authority of the imperial state. Militarist sentiment and fears of impending strife infected Indian communal life.²² After Cripps departed, anger at another British betrayal isolated moderates within the Congress Party. More radical nationalists planned a campaign of civil disobedience for the summer of 1942. Gandhi – loathing the war, believing that India would shortly fall to the Japanese and convinced that Indians must find a means to protect themselves – talked of some 'form of conflict' being required 'to bring home the truth to the British mind'.²³

Events quickly ran out of his control. The authorities were already preparing themselves for the fight. On 9 August 1942, they arrested the Congress leaders. Most of them were locked up in the Ahmednagar Fort in Central India for the rest of the war; Gandhi was confined in the Aga Khan Palace in Poona. The arrests sparked mass protests. When they were broken up by the police, things turned violent. 'Quit India' became a

popular resistance movement that attacked the nervous system of British rule: police stations, post offices, government buildings, railway lines and stations and telegraph wires.

'Quit India' was concentrated regionally and among those who were already Congress supporters. Resistance was most violent in Bengal, Assam, Bombay, United Provinces and Bihar. These were all areas that were vital to the war effort, but crucially they were not the whole of India. In places, the government lost control for weeks at a time, but it never really came close to being overwhelmed.²⁴ Notwithstanding the defeat of British arms in Southeast Asia, the war was a terribly bad time to challenge the Raj since both the military forces commanded by the imperial state and the means available to them were much stronger than in peacetime.

Ever since 1857, the British had dreaded an uprising in India. Viceroy Linlithgow responded in traditional style. British, Indian and Gurkha soldiers opened fire on demonstrators, air patrols machine-gunned suspected railway saboteurs, and beatings, whippings, collective fines and the destruction of property were all used to put down the rebellion. Critically, the Indian army stayed loyal to the British throughout. ²⁵ By the middle of September 1942, the revolt was over. While repressive violence halted the short-term crisis, however, it only worsened the loss of government legitimacy and the expectation of imminent disintegration that posed the medium-term threats to British rule.

During the course of the 'Quit India' campaign, the authorities imprisoned 66,000 people. Another 2,500 were shot dead. That meant that during August and September 1942, forces under British control killed more civilians in India than Germans in the Western Desert. In the UK, reports of this severe reaction worried Labour and Liberal MPs. With Churchill absent in Moscow, Attlee chaired the War Cabinets that approved the plans for the movement's suppression. Cripps and Attlee protested against the use of whipping, but in the end accepted, as Bevin put it, that 'once the fight is joined it is no use looking back'. 27

Churchill, on his return, insisted to his colleagues that the Indian National Congress had failed to rally the 'masses' to its cause. When he spoke about events in India to the Commons on 10 September, he called it an unrepresentative 'revolutionary movement' that had perpetrated 'revolting atrocities' and which had probably been aided by Japanese fifth columnists. Thankfully, he noted, the 'martial races' had not been influenced, and there were plenty of 'white soldiers' now in India who would keep down any trouble.²⁸

This sort of rhetoric caused a lot of offence in India and America. At Westminster, it got cheers from a few Conservative diehards, but upset a lot of moderate MPs on both sides of the House. At the same time as condemning Congress, however, Churchill restated the Cripps offer of post-war independence. If, as that suggested, he recognized that concessions given could not be withdrawn, it helps to explain his increasingly aggressive tone when it came to India.

'Quit India' evoked the clearest expression of Churchill's prejudices: 'I hate Indians. They are a beastly people with a beastly religion.'²⁹ For all his misplaced faith in the 'martial races', he never really gave the Indian army the credit it deserved for coming back from the debacle of 1942. From this point on, mention of India in Cabinet was guaranteed to bring forth a tirade. He became even more incensed than before about India's accumulation of sterling balances: 'Are we to incur hundreds of millions of debt for defending India in order to be kicked out by the Indians afterwards?'³⁰ Leo Amery, secretary of state for India, could never quite get him to understand that since India paid for its defence within its borders, the rising balances showed not Indian greed but rather just how much it was contributing to the imperial war effort.

On occasion, Churchill seemed to accept that the Raj was doomed. At other times – like other British statesmen – he held out hope of holding on, perhaps as the federal force keeping the balance between Hindu and Muslim polities and the Princely States. It was hard to tell blustering intransigence from the hope that it could all just be put off until after the war. With Linlithgow due to retire, in autumn 1942 the search began for a new viceroy. According to Brendan Bracken, Churchill wanted a '"tidy administration" in India and not to be bothered'. To ministers, he insisted that the British should not 'chatter ourselves out'.³¹

For the young Indian students who spearheaded the 'Quit India' movement, it had been a heroic battle for liberty.³² The British public, however, tended to see Indian freedom fighters as people who wanted to aid the enemy. At the start of August, the government leaked Congress's plans for a civil disobedience campaign, ensuring that it seemed like a bit of calculated treachery. As Home Intelligence reported:

Hostility to Gandhi – who is variously described as 'India's Quisling No.1', 'the supreme blackguard of the British Empire' and 'a thorough twister' – seems to be quite widespread; it ranges from 'dislike' to assertions that 'he ought to be shot or strung up' . . . The minority who question the Government's action do so on the ground that Home Rule for India is long overdue, and that if India were 'allowed to rule herself, there would be an overnight transformation in India's disloyalty to the British crown'. ³³

The popular view of Gandhi did not improve when, in February 1943, he went on a twenty-one-day hunger strike to protest against the Indian government's failure to accept responsibility for the violence that had accompanied 'Quit India'. Hoping to force moderate Indian politicians to take a tougher nationalist line, Gandhi fasted 'to capacity' – only taking what fluid and sugared fruit juice he needed to survive – rather than to death. By this point, fasting was deeply embedded as part of Gandhi's political and spiritual practice, serving as a means for him both to demonstrate the self-control he enjoined on others and to embody the sufferings of his fellow Indians. On this occasion, unusually, it was covered in some detail by the British press. The colonial authorities not only monitored Gandhi's condition closely, but also carefully released to journalists details of his plush prison accommodation in the Aga Khan Palace and the nature of his limited nutritional intake. As a result, rather than depicting Gandhi as a suffering mystic, or attempting to understand the appeal he was trying to make to his followers, most British newspapers - with the significant exception of the more sympathetic *Daily Herald* portrayed him sceptically, as a politician performing austerity in luxurious surroundings in an attempt to undermine the war effort.³⁴ As the *Daily Mail* proclaimed: 'The nation which refused to be intimidated by HITLER, MUSSOLINI and TOJO was never likely to surrender to GANDHI. The days of appeasement are over . . . the dark days of struggle for existence have shown us who are our true friends and who the false.'35

'THE BAD OLD DAYS ARE OVER . . . A NEW ERA HAS DAWNED'

According to Home Intelligence, however, public discussion of Indian affairs was always 'limited . . . by the apparent remoteness of India and by the public's lack of knowledge on the subject'. In contrast, in the summer of 1942 their attention was gripped by events on the Eastern Front, where Hitler had split the Axis summer offensive between a thrust southwards to the Caucasus oilfields and another eastwards towards the city of Stalingrad. Reporting on domestic morale to the War Cabinet at the end of August 1942, Brendan Bracken opened by noting the 'continuing and increasing disquiet about the Russian position. Although sympathy and admiration for the Russian people remain great, the possibilities of a Russian collapse are now very much in people's minds.' ³⁶ By then, heavy

fighting was under way amid Stalingrad's factories and residential blocks. As the battle raged on during September, the city became the focus of intense public interest in the UK. With the headlines charting the German drive to pinch out the Soviet bridgehead on the western side of the Volga, '[a]dmiration for its "heroic defenders" 'became, according to Home Intelligence, 'almost an obsession'. The Edinburgh Postal Censor recorded that 'Praise of the Russians' was 'in every letter'.³⁷

In the Western Desert, meanwhile, Rommel was preparing to complete his drive on Egypt. Assisted by newly arrived American bombers, the RAF stepped up its offensive against Axis supply lines. Flying out of Malta and from Egyptian airfields close to the front line, the specialist No. 201 Group focused its attacks on merchant ships on their way to North Africa. By the end of August 1942, almost all of Italy's large merchant ships had either been sunk or put out of action. As the toll on Axis convoys rose, so the Luftwaffe had to put more effort into escorting ships or carrying supplies by air. During the first three weeks of August, Axis forces in North Africa received 23,500 tons of supplies. At the same point, the British were moving 400,000 tons a month through the Suez Canal.³⁸

The newly arrived Montgomery believed that he had to revive the Eighth Army's morale. Some units had been fighting for months through the heat of the summer. Worn down by casualties, they'd been re-formed into composite battalions under strange officers, switched between formations and made to fight alongside outfits with whom they'd never trained, or reinforced by new arrivals from the UK, fresh-faced, white-kneed and innocent in the ways of the desert. That most soldiers could only blame a vaguely defined 'higher command' for their woes just showed how poorly they had been led.³⁹

Not least to rebuild Eighth Army's confidence, Montgomery was determined not to push it beyond its limited capabilities: he wanted to fight a battle on his own terms, rather than trying to match Rommel's game. Unlike the more reserved Auchinleck, Montgomery understood that the commander of a citizen army needed to make himself persistently visible to his men, promoting his authority to bolster their faith that they were not fighting in vain. To some cynical soldiers, his attempts to strike a chord – adopting an Australian slouch hat or the beret of the Royal Armoured Corps, both festooned with the cap badges of the units under his command – looked a bit too deliberately eccentric. Montgomery did, however, have a rare capacity to make his presence felt across a whole army – physically, through an unremitting round of tours and visits, and psychically, via his pressure on senior officers to make sure his message got through.⁴⁰

A carefully constructed myth was part of what made Montgomery a successful leader. He told a simple story. Nothing had gone right before his arrival, everything would be different now. One officer recalled his first encounter:

About one hundred and fifty officers of Lt Colonel's rank and above were told to sit down on the sand, while this unknown individual began to address us in short high-pitched staccato sentences. 'You have been fighting the war by out-of-date methods . . . you are badly trained compared with the enemy . . . I am going to create a new atmosphere . . . the bad old days are over . . . a new era has dawned . . . and finally, if we cannot stay here alive, then let us stay here dead!'

Auchinleck had ordered contingency plans to be prepared for the Eighth Army to fall back to a new defensive position in the Nile Delta. When this scheme became common knowledge, it further undermined morale. On 13 August 1942, Montgomery announced to his headquarters that the plans were to be burned and a 'no retreat' order was issued to the whole army. Since Auchinleck hadn't intended to withdraw, and the Eighth Army wasn't going to fight to the last man for Montgomery any more than for his predecessor, this was not in fact a big change. The sudden certainty that the next battle mattered, however, helped to transmit Montgomery's purpose across the army. After months of confusion, telling soldiers they faced a struggle to the death actually improved their morale.⁴²

Montgomery had inherited a stronger position than he made out. Eighth Army was standing on a well-fortified line, and Auchinleck and his corps commanders had drawn up detailed plans for its defence. During July, British cryptographers had broken the Enigma key used by Luftwaffe liaison officers with the *Panzerarmee Afrika*. These decrypts provided advance warning that Rommel was about to make another attack. Increasingly desperate about his dwindling supplies, the German general pinned his hopes on an offensive.

When Axis forces moved up to the attack on 30 August, they were hammered by RAF Middle East. As the Commonwealth squadrons had fallen back on their main base, supply and maintenance had become much easier, and RAF planes outnumbered those of the Luftwaffe by more than five to one. Lack of fuel kept Axis aircraft on their airfields and limited the mobility of their ground units. German and Italian troops attacked in the south, an area deliberately left lightly held, then cut back north to try to encircle the Eighth Army. British troops delayed the German armoured units as they picked their way through the defensive minefields, then hit them with fire from tanks and anti-tank guns dug into the Alam Halfa ridge. With their fuel running out, the Germans were unable to manoeuvre

around the defences. The Western Desert Air Force bombed and strafed the bogged-down attack, and on 3 September Rommel ordered a retreat. Rather than risk a reverse, Montgomery held his troops where they were while the Allied air forces pounded the retreat. That didn't matter to the soldiers of the Eighth Army: Montgomery's promise that they'd win the next battle had been fulfilled.⁴³

The defenders forewarned, the Allied air forces dominant, the improvisational mobility that the Wehrmacht prized met with material superiority and better combined arms co-ordination, and disappearing in a cloud of bombs and shellfire: Alam Halfa was a foretaste of what would happen to most Axis ground offensives in the West for the rest of the war. It also provided a pause in which Montgomery could prepare his own attack. While Rommel's troops dug themselves in, Montgomery insisted that he must build up his army's strength before he could launch an offensive of his own. As reinforcements and supplies poured into Egypt, it remained to be seen whether the resultant material advantage would make any more difference than it had done for his predecessor.

north, the diversion of strength towards Stalingrad notwithstanding, advanced German units had pushed up to the slopes of the Caucasus Mountains. British intelligence assessed that this was the limit of their range during 1942. The danger of an attack towards the Middle East from this 'Northern Front', however, continued to weigh heavily on General Brooke. While the Eighth Army rebuilt its strength in Egypt, in Palestine, Iraq and Iran new (and subsequently much less wellknown) Ninth and Tenth Armies prepared to fight off any Axis move south. Relative to the forces sent to the Western Desert, they were short of armour, equipment and experience. By autumn 1942, the Eighth Army was made up of the equivalent of ten divisions of fighting troops. Forces amounting to approximately another eleven divisions were garrisoning the Middle East: a striking commitment of manpower against a potential threat.44

As well as Indian and British troops, these included three divisions of exiled Poles under General Wladysław Anders. They had endured one of the more remarkable forced movements of people in the twentieth century. Following the Soviet invasion of eastern Poland in September 1939, about 190,000 Polish soldiers had been taken prisoner. Approximately another half million Polish civilians were deported, most of them ending up, like the POWs, in labour camps in Siberia or Kazakhstan. Following a British-brokered agreement after the Axis invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, some of those who had survived the brutal interim were released to

form a new Polish army. News of this release prompted a Polish exodus from the USSR as soldiers and civilians sought security. Sent to form up in Uzbekistan, however, the Poles were left short of enough food to sustain their soldiers, let alone the tens of thousands of civilians who had followed them. They lacked, as well, officers (because so many had been murdered by the Soviets after their capture), weapons and equipment. In March and July 1942, Stalin agreed to mass evacuations of Polish soldiers and civilians, across the Caspian Sea and over the Caucasus to Iran, where they would come under British command and travel on through Iraq to Palestine. More than 70,000 soldiers and about 35,000 civilians escaped: many of them were very sick, malnourished and dying. About 18,000 of the military personnel were shipped to the UK to reinforce exiled Polish units there. Kitted out wholly with British equipment and arms, the rest were formed into what eventually became a Polish II Corps, which would fight with the Eighth Army during the final years of the war. 45

While reinforcements shored up the defences of the Middle East, the Empire started to solve the food crisis that had threatened to engulf the area at the start of 1942. Following Lyttelton's recall to London in February 1942, he was replaced as minister of state in the Middle East by another proconsular strongman, the Australian Richard Casey. Robert Jackson, the Australian director-general of the Middle East Supply Centre (MESC), used the interregnum to assert organizational supremacy, travelling round the theatre to persuade politicians and officials that, if they wanted their allocation of imports, they would have to submit to central economic co-ordination.

By the summer, MESC was planning production and distribution across the whole region. Grain was compulsorily purchased and redirected, narrowly averting the famine that had seemed inevitable a few months before. The same buying schemes were then applied to other foodstuffs. New wartime standards set patterns of consumption – and reliance on regional and international trade – that endured for decades to come. As the US became increasingly involved in the Middle East, MESC became another combined body, which used its authority over imports to force through development programmes. Outside the USSR, the Middle East constituted the largest centrally planned economy on the planet. As in the UK, the combination of massive military spending and increased state control reduced poverty: in Egypt, Palestine and Cyprus, infant mortality fell during the war.

MESC's success demonstrated that, given the right combination of strategic need, bureaucratic control and political ambition, the British were capable of mitigating the humanitarian consequences of the war. MESC became a model for a new sort of state-run imperial project: a colonial reconstruction that, it was hoped, would redress the moral collapse endured in the Far East. Such dreams, however, never escaped the acceptance of racial hierarchy that underpinned the Empire. For all the talk of improved standards, for example, in Palestine both official levels of consumption and investigations about whether they were being met were conditioned by the expectation that Jews and Arabs had different calorific needs. In fact, for all its celebration of improved living standards, it is not clear that MESC ever had a clear idea of how much Palestinian Arabs were actually getting to eat.⁴⁶

Not least because of the activities of MESC, Britain's position in the Middle East became much more secure during the summer of 1942, but Montgomery was not the only one engaged in an operational pause. Delays in decisions about the second front had limited the build-up of USAAF squadrons in Britain. They would not undertake a bombing raid on Germany before the end of 1942. The thousand-bomber raids having shot their bolt, RAF Bomber Command could not escalate its effort while it reequipped with the latest heavy aircraft. During the long pause in operations, Churchill asked the RAF to raid Berlin to make good on his discussions with Stalin, but Harris was unable to comply.⁴⁷ Planning for 'Torch' – the invasion of Vichy French North Africa – proceeded, but remained bound by uncertainties: disagreements between the British and Americans about how far the landings should reach into the Mediterranean, concerns that the invasion would spark a German intervention through Spain against Gibraltar, and doubts about whether or not the French would fight back. The very size of the operation required to intimidate the defenders into acquiescence raised doubts that the impending attack could be concealed from Axis intelligence and the Uboat wolf packs in the Atlantic.

As far as the British public were concerned, however, 'Torch' still remained a secret. Though the war was approaching a turning point, Anglo-American offensive efforts seemed to have stalled. As the Ministry of Labour summed up at the start of October 1942 in a paper for the Lord President's Committee on 'Industrial Morale':

in the absence of military operations close to this country there is no fiery enthusiasm or sense of urgency among workers collectively. The hard fighting in Libya does not carry a sense of reality except to persons who are immediately affected through relatives engaged with HM Forces. The possibility of defeat has not entered the heads of most workers with the result that they are carrying on quietly rather than urgently, more interested and concerned with their personal interests, their pay packets, their trade union activities,

politics after the war, their food and their minor comforts. They are anxious for victory, but do not see the war as a major issue in their individual lives . . .

Lack of enthusiasm and a sense of urgency is accompanied by feelings of frustration and disappointment. This results largely from setbacks to the Armed Forces . . . from doubts expressed by critics – presumably responsible – as to the efficiency of our planning and our war weapons, and from the absence of any clear indication of the social order which may be expected to follow the war. 48

'THIS IS A PEOPLE'S WAR: IT MUST LEAD TO A PEOPLE'S PEACE'

Since spring 1942, William Beveridge's Committee on Social Insurance had interviewed 127 witnesses, representing a wide range of institutional interests. As Beveridge liked to point out, almost all of them agreed with him that the war must lead to profound change and the introduction of a universal system of social welfare. By the autumn of that year, it was clear that the Beveridge committee's report would be an important document, not least because of the extraordinary publicity efforts he had already made on its behalf. He had written articles for the *News Chronicle* and *The Times*, been profiled in *Picture Post* and made guest appearances on the *Brains Trust*, all building anticipation for what was to come. From the start of October, when Beveridge submitted his report to the government, parliamentary questions about when it would be published were asked every week. As Bracken warned Churchill, Beveridge's allies were getting set to make 'an immense amount of ballyhoo about the importance of implementing the recommendations without delay'.

By then, the tide of reconstruction was already sweeping in. In February 1942, Churchill had dismissed Lord Reith, whom he disliked, from the Ministry of Works and replaced him with his friend, Lord Portal (Wyndham Portal, not to be confused with Charles Portal, the chief of the air staff). Portal was chairman of the world's largest manufacturer of banknote paper. In the 1930s, he had advised the National government about industry in the distressed areas of the country, but he was much more interested in the practicalities of reconstruction than in promoting a radical planning agenda, which was another reason that he was preferred by the prime minister.⁵¹

For those who hoped to redesign British towns on revolutionary new lines, Reith's departure was therefore a significant setback. Yet the committees Reith had appointed continued their work. By the summer of 1942, they were ready to give their verdicts.

The majority report of the Scott Committee on Land Utilization in Rural Areas was published on 15 August 1942. It called for both a massive improvement of Britain's ramshackle rural housing stock, including provision of running water and electricity to the poorest households, and a strict system of controls on industrial development, including green belts and national parks, to protect the unspoilt tranquillity of the countryside. Wartime propaganda often emphasized a heightened version of idyllic rural life as part of British national identity, and the press applauded Scott's desire to resist commercial exploitation. As the *Daily Express* put it: 'Ideal village will bar noise and roadhouses but have mod. con.'⁵²

The second reconstruction report, produced by the Uthwatt Committee on 'Compensation and Betterment' in land development, was published at the start of September. It advocated the creation of a central Ministry of Planning, the nationalization of development rights in rural areas, and the institution of tougher controls and compulsory purchase powers for urban councils. In contrast to the preliminary report Uthwatt had produced eighteen months before, however, it used the valuation of property in 1939 as the standard from which compensation for compulsory purchase should be calculated, rather than the absolute maximum of what would be paid. This reflected the opposition that had already arisen from landowners, and it meant that physical reconstruction looked much more expensive to concerned councillors.⁵³ As the planners grappling with the problems of how to rebuild blitzed city centres began to prepare detailed schemes, they were increasingly keen to know what powers and resources would be at their disposal. They waited for Uthwatt's recommendations to be turned into legislation.

Reporting on the Uthwatt report and its implications for urban reconstruction, the *Daily Mirror* reminded its readers that the war had to 'be won before "betterment" begins'. ⁵⁴ For Ernest Bevin, the two had never really been separable: he had made improving union rights, pay and factory conditions essential parts of mobilizing manpower for the war. He too, however, wanted to make progress on deciding what would come next. As he explained in April 1942: 'This is a people's war: it must lead to a people's peace.' As well as giving organized labour a stronger say in industrial management, Bevin believed that this must include not only greater state economic intervention to maintain employment and social security at home, but also global reconstruction. Future peace and prosperity depended on improving the lot of workers around the world. Though often brutal with political opponents, Bevin had a strongly humane side when it came to issues such as factory welfare or the

rehabilitation of disabled servicemen. He was quite clear that the period of recovery from the war would be very difficult. Speaking to the Joint Industrial Council for the Ophthalmic Optical Industry on 1 July 1942, for example, he explained that:⁵⁵

People have been taken out of their normal run of life, they will come back with great expectations. At the same time they will come back to an impoverished country . . . We must remember that . . . our foreign investments are gone. This time we have to maintain this country not by living on investments abroad but by selling goods abroad and taking in return their products. 56

Bevin's pragmatism brought him into conflict with the parliamentary Labour Party. Later in July, the government began to legislate to increase the old age pension, for the first time in the war, by 2s 6d a week. When Labour MPs complained at this paltry response to the increase in the wartime cost of living, Bevin defended the policy, promising that it was only an interim measure until Beveridge published his report. Accusations that he was doing too little to protect 'his people' made him furious and the debate became very acrimonious. Sixty-three Labour MPs then voted for an amendment calling for greater increases, the largest vote against the Coalition government since its formation.

Bevin was already preparing legislation that would make him just as unpopular on the other side of the House: a bill to set pay and conditions across the whole catering sector. He secured acceptance from the Lord President's Committee and the War Cabinet, but the proposals aroused fierce opposition from employers and Tory MPs triumphant after their defeat of Hugh Dalton's coal-rationing scheme. They denounced the measure as a socialist power grab by an incipient economic dictator. By November 1942, two hundred Conservative backbenchers had signed up to a group pledging to oppose any legislation on catering wages.

Though their worldviews were in other ways very different, 'Rab' Butler shared with Bevin a belief that education was vital to Britain's postwar economic recovery. Oppressed by a realization of imperial decline, Butler had been stricken with grief by news of the fall of Singapore. The disasters in the Far East, however, had lent new impetus to his desire to provide the well-educated, technically proficient workforce that Britain would need to remake its place in the post-war world. Lacking Bevin's power, Butler had to find more subtle means to achieve this.

The Conservative reconstruction committee on education that Butler had set up under Geoffrey Faber delivered its interim reports during September 1942. They proposed the effective nationalization of the public schools, major investment in technical instruction, compulsory youth training and a curriculum based on teaching children to strive against hardship for Christ and the common good.⁵⁷ When the reports were launched, at the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations conference in London on 1 October 1942, they were greeted with hostility. Faber's insistence on the need to remodel Britons' relationship with the state not only had unpleasant connotations of totalitarianism, it also brought out the differences within the wartime Conservative Party. Conservatives condemned them as 'Christian fascism', 'a slander on youth' and a 'brass bound sausage machine' that would 'turn out thousands of loathsome young prigs all classed in the same category'.⁵⁸ Butler quickly distanced himself from the proposals.⁵⁹

In the meantime, however, he had sought to advance the Board of Education's plans for reform in English and Welsh schools. Since the start of 1942, Butler had defined the major obstacle to these plans to his colleagues in terms of finding a religious settlement that would secure Anglican, Nonconformist and Catholic co-operation on the future of the voluntary aided schools. This was a very significant choice in itself, since it represented a desire to keep Christianity at the heart of the system, rather than simply make all schools fully funded by, and accountable to, the state.

Butler found a very effective ally in Archbishop Temple. At a stuffy meeting at the Board of Education on 1 May 1942, Temple listened as Butler set out his proposals. As a 'concession' to religious opinion, non-denominational religious education and an act of Christian worship would be made compulsory for *all* schools. Existing church schools would be able to choose either to become 'controlled' by the local educational authority – confining their religious teaching to a non-denominational 'agreed syllabus' but guaranteeing full funding from the rates – or to remain 'aided', keeping the church's place in governance and curriculum, but being eligible for the payment of just half the school's running costs. ⁶⁰

Temple quickly grasped the opportunity. Rather than being forced out of an expanding education system, the Church of England would be able to hand over its most dilapidated schools to the local authorities but maintain the rest with more generous public funding. The requirement for religious teaching in all schools and the hiking of the leaving age to sixteen would instruct a much larger proportion of the population in the Christian faith. For both Temple and Butler, this would be a fundamental underpinning of post-war society. Privately, both men presumed there would be large numbers of 'aided' schools, but Butler's public insistence that the overwhelming majority would move into the 'controlled' sector helped to defuse Nonconformist opposition. Having solved the problem which he

had himself framed so carefully, Butler used the success to manoeuvre for his colleagues' approval.

Stafford Cripps had also been pressing Churchill to accelerate the pace of planning for reconstruction. Finding his position as leader of the House increasingly difficult, Cripps antagonized MPs by ticking them off for leaving the Chamber to get their lunch in the middle of a debate on the war situation on 8 September 1942. Two days later, he had to defend the government after Churchill gave his inflammatory verdict on 'Quit India'. Still filled with austere zeal, Cripps told the prime minister that the only way to revitalize national morale was 'to give the people some more definite prospect for the future', ⁶¹ and that the 'reward should be what we are fighting for and not what people can get *now*'. ⁶²

On 26 September, Cripps spoke at 'The Church Looks Forward', a packed mass meeting at the Albert Hall in London. It was the first of a series of big public events on reconstruction set up by Temple under the auspices of the Industrial Christian Fellowship. Temple called for public control over land and money lending; Cyril Forster Garbett, the archbishop of York, demanded a national housing programme; and Cripps spoke of the importance of Christianity in public life. Sitting in the audience, the *Daily Mirror* executive Cecil King noted that most of the crowd were 'elderly and obviously churchy, with many nuns and scores of parsons'. When Temple told them that privately owned resources must be used for the public good, they broke into prolonged applause. While the two archbishops 'were emphatic that we must have planning, and that the interests of the community must come first', it was Cripps who gave the 'most specifically religious' speech, telling the audience that: 'We require more than ever today courageous Christians in our political life.'⁶³

Over the next two months, Temple toured the provinces. Outside the Guildhall in Birmingham, a huge crowd who had not been able to gain admittance waited around just to see him walk in. Speaking inside, he insisted that 'the primary consideration of national policy' in the future must be 'the welfare of the human person'. This would be a 'revolutionary' step in British life.⁶⁴ In the midst of these meetings, Mass-Observation, surveying its national panel of diarists, found just over half of respondents actively welcoming the Church's pronouncements on reconstruction. They regarded archbishops as much more trustworthy than any politician.⁶⁵

How far all these efforts to proselytize for reconstruction really connected with the public is open to question. When Home Intelligence collected evidence of public attitudes to reconstruction between August and October 1942, it found that only a 'thinking minority' (estimated with typical inexactitude at between 5 and 20 per cent) were pondering reconstruction at all. The terminology reflected the middle-class prejudices of those gathering the information, but they were probably right that in the midst of busy wartime lives most people had more immediate concerns than plans for the post-war world. It is important not to confuse this with an assumption that most people were not interested in the future. Discussions of reconstruction nonetheless created political momentum, and those who were willing to articulate their thoughts on the matter expressed a coherent set of priorities. 'Social security', 'commonly defined as "a decent minimum standard of living for all"', was 'generally accepted as an urgent post-war need'. 67

Five days before he spoke at the Albert Hall, Cripps had offered Churchill his resignation. The point of contention was not reconstruction, but the prime minister's refusal to consider Cripps' proposals for overhauling the machinery of strategic decision-making. The prime minister had developed a repertoire of jokes about the lord privy seal's austerity ('not a blade of grass, not a drop of water', he was meant to have told soldiers, surveying the sands of the Western Desert, 'how Cripps would love it'), but in fact Churchill was well able to get on with colleagues, such as Brooke and Attlee, who did not share his personal vices but who accepted his manner of working. Cripps' refusal so to do represented a fundamental challenge to the prime minister.

Talking with Stalin in Moscow, Churchill had remarked that Cripps' chest was 'a cage in which two squirrels are at war, his conscience and his career'. ⁶⁸ When he got Cripps' resignation letter, he thought the ambitious squirrel had won and squared up for a fight. This mistook a more oblique challenge: an attempt to carve out an individual moral path with potential future advantages rather than a direct assault. Cripps was well aware that he had neither the popular nor the political backing to claim the premiership as of right. He was reluctant to seek a confrontation that he would lose, and which would be damaging to the national cause at such a crucial juncture of the war. Yet he could not remain in the front rank of a government with whose approach he was so uncomfortable. When it became clear – after tense late-night discussions – that Cripps was willing to accept a ministerial post outside the War Cabinet and to delay any resignation until after the 'Torch' landing, a grateful Churchill applauded his public-spiritedness. If Cripps had intended to supplant the prime minister, this approach certainly demonstrated his naivety in the dark political arts (much to the confusion of later commentators).⁶⁹ On the assumption that Churchill could not be displaced and the war was now turning in the Allies' favour, however, it also contained a longer-term political calculation. As Butler wrote to Samuel Hoare, the British ambassador in Madrid, Cripps had managed to create 'the priceless opportunity of remaining in the Government, of appearing — like the munitions workers — to work very hard, and yet of saying that he is not associated with high policy or with the day-to-day actions of a Government with which he does not absolutely agree.'⁷⁰

Like Cripps, Herbert Morrison hoped to surf the reconstruction wave. By late 1942, his star was in the ascendant. He had his job at the Home Office firmly under control and ministers and civil servants were impressed at his efficiency. He remained a very visible figure on the home front, making frequent speeches, including, to Churchill's delight, some tough defences of Britain against American criticism. Though resentment at the *Daily Mirror* episode persisted, Morrison won back friends on Labour's left wing when he saved Harold Laski, who had written a series of articles for *Reynolds News* demanding the break-up of the government, from being expelled from the party. Morrison knew what Labour wanted: in October 1942, he wrote to Churchill suggesting that it was time to rescind his ban on 'controversial' legislation.⁷¹

This was not a step that the prime minister was willing to take. With a new session of Parliament due to begin on 11 November 1942, Churchill drew up a King's Speech which described the 'start' that had 'been made in working out the measures that will be necessary when peace comes', including urban and rural development and, to Butler's joy, education.⁷² There was no mention, however, of the Beveridge Report, and no firm commitment to reform. Pressed by Attlee and Bevin to offer more concrete progress, Churchill insisted to the War Cabinet that reconstruction legislation could be put before Parliament only on those issues where 'a general measure of agreement' had been achieved. There was 'Nothing better than to reach concordat', for example on education, but 'We can't have 50/100 Conservatives or Labour Members steadily opposing the Bill.'⁷³ Chancellor Kingsley Wood, who backed the prime minister in these discussions, plainly hoped that this insistence on 'substantial agreement' would continue to give the Conservatives a veto. Labour MPs were all too aware of the block: as the junior education minister James Chuter Ede warned Butler, they sensed, 'a feeling among the Tories that we should be kept in the Govt. until victory was assured & then we should be pushed out & the world made safe for 1939 standards. There would therefore be a growing demand for something on account.'74

Given that he was currently engaged in some of the most consequent strategic decisions of the whole conflict, Churchill understandably regarded discussions of reconstruction as distractions from the key business of winning the war. In retrospect, however, he failed to grasp a moment of danger and of opportunity. As Wood understood, Churchill's refusal to consider 'controversial' legislation was hardly apolitical. Though he liked the idea of improving welfare for the working classes, he disliked reforms with a socialist flavour: he wanted to save the poor, not put everyone on an equal footing. He was irritated by Beveridge's publicity antics and worried about how much reconstruction would cost. Beyond this, however, he was temperamentally ill-suited to the challenge he now faced. He lacked Baldwin's twisting capacity to define the middle ground, or Lloyd George's ability to steer grand strategy and domestic politics at the same time – although the latter's failure to see through his wartime promises made the task of any successor much more difficult.⁷⁵ Churchill's mercurial sense of remaining time lent little impetus for early action. Either he would remain in charge of a post-war coalition that could turn its attention to matters of reconstruction after Hitler had been finished, or he would die before the end of the war, in which case this task, like Indian independence, could be left to younger and lesser men. His embrace post-war policy would have to significant consequences for himself, his party and his country.

PART TWO

Peak

September 1942–September 1943

11

'The tremendous increase in the volume of our war production'

December 1941–December 1942

The production of military hardware was both a key determinant of the outcome of the Second World War and a potent means to tell stories about the conflict at the time. Audiences for a May 1942 Gaumont British newsreel, for example, would have heard the announcer proudly enthusing, over footage of tanks rolling onto railcars:

We're often being told about the tremendous increase in the volume of our war production; this is the visible proof of it . . . Remember the days of Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain; remember how pitifully under-armed we were then; take a good look at this and see for yourself how much we have achieved. The tanks from the factories are ready for action — going out in a mass that seems to have no end.

Then, over scenes from US shipyards:

All these supplies raise the problem of shipping space \dots These pictures from America show how that great production land is fighting alongside the shippards of the British Empire to produce the ships we need. More ships and yet more; a ship a day to replace losses – to carry the columns of troops and tanks and planes and guns of the United Nations. 1

Images of the volume of Allied machinery proved that Britain was on the path to victory as part of a global alliance.

Across the world, 1942 saw a dramatic escalation of industrial effort as combatant nations on both sides sought the material superiority that would deliver success on the battlefield. Production decisions were intertwined with strategic choices. Together, they shaped the rest of the war.

GLOBAL ESCALATION IN 1942

America's military-industrial power was the overwhelming fact of the

Second World War. With its immense natural resources, factories safe from air attack and extraordinary economies of scale, the United States hitched big business and government spending to submerge the Axis powers under a torrent of steel, aluminium and oil.² Yet 1942 saw the US in a production crisis. For the moment, US industry was unable to meet the enormous demands of the Grand Alliance. Armaments output fell well behind target. The United States had planned to spend almost \$42 billion on munitions in 1942; in practice, only \$9-billions-worth were produced.³ That summer, Roosevelt intervened with unusual directness as the Americans reworked their military programmes to bring them closer to their capabilities. Army programmes were slashed, aircraft targets maintained, and naval and merchant shipping programmes significantly expanded.⁴

Everyone had expected America to make a lot, to the extent that knowledge of its industrial base shaped the conflict even before it became a belligerent. In contrast, Japan was the surprise package of the war. Between 1937 and 1944, Japanese GDP doubled – a much more dramatic economic expansion than that achieved by the UK or Germany. From a relatively small pre-war industrial base, the Japanese manufactured many more planes and ships than anyone else had anticipated. This industrial success allowed the Japanese to sustain a high intensity oceanic war and forced the Americans to pour even greater resources into the Pacific. Indirectly, it therefore had a significant effect on the choices available to British strategists.⁵

Despite the key role it played in the imperial conflict across the Mediterranean, Italy is often left out of histories of the industrial struggle. This reflects both its relatively small productive capacity (about a fifth of Germany's) and its inability to escape the economic constraints imposed by the war. Heavily dependent on raw material imports, critically of iron, coal and oil, Italy was badly hit both by the British blockade and by Germany's absorption of resources from Occupied Europe. In contrast to every other major combatant, production fell after hostilities began. Bauxite, the one raw material the country had in abundance, could not be processed into aluminium because Italy could not generate sufficient electricity and lacked industrial plant. Oil shortages affected transport and limited military operations. The Germans did not act as an industrial base for their poorer ally as the Americans did for the British, and the relative quality of Italian equipment deteriorated over time. Given these limitations, the fact that Italian production of tanks, self-propelled guns

and aircraft between 1940 and 1942 was about a quarter that of Germany represented a significant achievement. Much of this output, including many modern anti-aircraft guns, went to the Italian army serving against the Soviets on the Eastern Front.⁸

It was there that the other essential dynamics in the war of materiel played out. While America got to terms with being at war, the USSR rebuilt its arms industry. The Soviet government ruthlessly concentrated everything on beating the invader. Unlike their allies, they did not construct a strategic bomber force, and they did not need an ocean-going navy. In ground munitions, however, they out-built everyone else. In 1942, Soviet production of armoured fighting vehicles, artillery and rifles was three to four times that of Germany in each case. Total munitions output increased by 24 per cent between 1942 and 1943.⁹

The Red Army's successful defence of Moscow at the end of 1941 bought time for this prodigious industrial effort to get under way. For Germany, meanwhile, the failure to achieve a quick victory over the Soviet Union spurred an extraordinary escalation that combined increased munitions production with mass murder. With a long war in prospect, Nazi leaders decided to accelerate plans to annihilate Europe's Jews. In the death camps set up to destroy the Jewish population of Poland, the killing reached its peak in the second half of 1942, while Jews from the rest of Occupied Europe were rounded up and deported eastwards. By mid-1943, most of the death camps were being shut down because their horrendous work was complete. The camp at Auschwitz remained open to kill those still arriving from the west. There alone, between 1.1 million and 1.5 million people would be murdered between 1942 and 1945: a fraction of the 6 million Jews killed by the Nazis during the war. 11

Simultaneously, the Germans began to grapple with the conundrum of fighting a manpower-intensive ground war in the East and a technology-intensive air and sea war against the British and Americans in the West. Thus far, German mass production had been hindered by over-engineering or multiplicity of designs. Now they had to make more at the same time as replenishing the missing ranks on the Eastern Front. During the spring of 1942, Hitler appointed new men to take charge of the war economy. True believers that Germany could win the battle of production, to achieve their goals they drained resources, including people, from the rest of Europe. In the eighteen months from the end of 1941, the number of forced labourers in Germany soared from 3 million to 6.5 million. They lived and worked in appalling conditions: by the middle of 1945, a million and a half of them had died. At the same time, the SS expanded its network of

concentration camps, from which Jewish and other minority groups were hired out to German industry and worked to death.¹²

The new minister for armaments, Albert Speer, sold himself as an apostle of mass production. The increase in German munitions output that took place during 1942, however, owed more to the resources he threw at the factories making weapons for the Eastern Front, above all, labour conscripted outside the Reich. German tank and artillery production almost doubled between 1941 and 1942. Shell output increased by almost three times. Simultaneously, German designers began to test new tanks, the Panzer V Panther and Panzer VI Tiger, with thicker armour and bigger guns, designed specifically to take on Soviet tanks. Unable to secure a similar increase in resources, Speer's Luftwaffe counterpart, Erhard Milch, sought to achieve higher numerical production by concentrating on manufacturing new variants of the Me109 fighter.¹³

Despite the high-profile part played by the Luftwaffe in the early victories in Europe, a lack of long-term planning had left the German air force unable to exert a decisive influence on the war. Hopes of developing the sort of heavy strategic bomber being built by the British and Americans were stymied by poor design and procurement, shortages of key resources, including high octane petrol, and Hitler's growing disillusionment with an arm that never gave him the miracle results he wanted. Amid the struggle for resources that characterized the ruling structures of the Third Reich, his disappointment allowed German generals to promote the long-range rocket programme they had fostered since the mid-1930s. The rockets were complex, experimental weapons, which required extremely costly investment of scientific and industrial resources.

Initially conceived as a form of battlefield artillery, during 1941 the rockets were sold to Hitler as a means of attacking British civilian morale. He became an enthusiastic supporter, and the army got the resources for a new rocket testing and production facility at Peenemünde on the Baltic. If the rockets worked, Hitler wanted hundreds of thousands to be made, but it was already clear to German planners that such large-scale manufacturing was impossible, and they quietly scaled back the targets. Test failures during 1942 encouraged Speer to give higher priority to rocket development, and a successful launch in October 1942 convinced Hitler, angered by the RAF's thousand-bomber raids and oblivious to the technical challenges, to order them into production. ¹⁶

Simultaneously, the Luftwaffe, fighting back against the army's intrusion into the air war, began its own programme of long-range

weapons development. This was based on a simpler jet-propelled missile, the flying bomb. The Germans had been the first of the combatants to test-fly a prototype turbojet fighter in July 1942, and Hitler believed that a jet fighter-bomber would counter a cross-Channel invasion. Reliable engine construction, however, was retarded by shortages of rare metals. In comparison, the pulse jet engine used on the flying bomb was easier to construct. Like the rocket, however, it was still a very expensive approach into which the Germans were forced by the extent to which they had already fallen behind the Western Allies in the war in the air. Having both invested in long-range weapons, the German army and air force tended to compromise on agreements that both the rocket and the flying bomb programmes should continue. Rational decisions about the allocation of resources became even harder.

Together, these three trends — increasing mass production, the brutal extraction of European resources, and a doomed search for high-technology salvation — would characterize the rest of Germany's war. None of them created the conditions necessary for victory, but they did ensure that the defeat of the Reich would be long and terrible.

'EVERYTHING FROM SHIPS TO RAZOR BLADES'

Germany's new armament drive meant that in 1942 it lagged less far behind Britain in terms of the value of its munitions output than it had done in 1941.

As public criticism of production failures peaked in mid-1942, Britain's output of armaments was in fact increasing at the fastest rate since 1940. The total volume of munitions produced that year was 65 per cent higher than it had been in 1941.¹⁷ This indicated the extent to which Britain had already mobilized its economy – a head start that is important to understanding both its military resilience and the decisions that would be taken about future escalation. It also reflected the fruition of long-term plans to fight an extended war, even though the conflict had changed out of all recognition to that envisaged in 1939.

Table 2. British and German production in 1942 compared

	Aircraft	Tanks and	Heavy guns	Artillery	Completed	Submarines	Completed
	(heavy	self-	(a)	filled	major		merchant
	bombers in	propelled		rounds	surface		ships, gross

	brackets)	guns		(million)	ships		thousand tons (d)
UK	23,672 (1,976)	8,600	6,086	59	81 (b)	33	1,268
Germany	15,556 (<i>c</i> . 100)	6,300	11,988	57	3 (c)	193	c. 22

Notes:

(a) anti-tank, tank, anti-aircraft, artillery, British figure includes naval armaments (b) two battleships, six cruisers, 73 destroyers, does not include frigates, corvettes or landing craft (c) all destroyers

(d) British ships and tankers over 1,600 gwt, German ships over 1,000 gwt

As new capacity came online and new workers entered war industries, systems for organizing production improved. The new Ministry of Production acted as a centre of co-ordination. A lot of its work was done in inter-departmental committees, the most important of which was the Joint War Production Staff (JWPS). Made up of senior military officers and civil servants from the supply ministries, headed by the economist Sir Walter Layton, the JWPS was meant to match production more fully with military strategy. At a more local level, the ministry took over the area boards set up by the Ministry of Supply to co-ordinate production between groups of factories. This regional organization became more active as the war went on, and it would play an important part in demobilization after the fighting finished.¹⁸

New plant, an expanding workforce, increased working hours and slight improvements in munitions productivity all meant economic growth. The gross domestic product of the UK was 24 per cent higher in 1942 than it had been in 1939. Over the same period, the share of that product devoted to civilian consumption had fallen by almost the same amount, while the proportion of GDP dedicated to fighting the war had increased from 15 to 54 per cent. ¹⁹ This was a comparable level of mobilization to that in Nazi Germany at the same stage of the war. ²⁰ Compared to the UK, however, Germany was able to put a smaller proportion of its workforce into military manufacturing. Even by 1943, only 14.2 per cent of the German working population was employed in the 'Class I' industries. The equivalent British figure was 23 per cent.²¹ This reflected the German army's desperate hunger for new replacement recruits, but also Germany's reliance on a very large and – compared to Britain – low productivity agricultural sector. In 1942, 31 per cent of the German labour force, about 11 million people, including half the foreign workers and prisoners of war employed by the Germans, were engaged in agricultural work.²² In Britain about 6 per cent of the workforce were employed in agriculture and fishing

– about a million people, plus a few thousand Italian prisoners.²³ The extensive involvement of rural German women in agricultural work was one reason that female employment rates in Germany were higher than in Britain before 1939, and remained so throughout the war.²⁴

The difference in agricultural employment illustrates Britain's ability to access a much richer international network. Crucially, thanks to Lend-Lease and the sterling balances, it could do this without paying for goods with exports at the time. The result was that, although Germany's total civilian working population in 1942 was about twice that of the UK, the total workforce in key sectors such as engineering was about the same size. Across manufacturing, a higher proportion of British workers were employed on government contracts. By the end of the war, this situation had reversed – Germany not only had more workers in engineering, but more of them were making munitions. This was not a reflection of military or economic success, but rather of the all-or-nothing effort into which it had been forced because it was losing the war.²⁶

By its nature, Britain's was an imperial war effort, which drove on the development of local munitions industries to supply its needs. When it came to making the weapons required for a modern war, however, the lack of previous investment was hard to overcome. Arsenals across the Empire turned out rifles, mortars and small arms ammunition, but whereas UK factories made only 57 per cent of the bullets produced in the British Empire and Commonwealth, they manufactured 93 per cent of the aircraft.²⁷

By 1942, Britain was part of an immensely powerful Atlantic industrial triangle, built on the United States and Canada. This was the production centre of the whole Grand Alliance, and the value of the weapons it supplied vastly exceeded that of those produced in the USSR or the rest of the British Empire. What made the North American connection so crucial was not just the munitions it supplied, but also the military manpower, food and raw materials that allowed Britain to concentrate on building weapons of war. Between 1941 and 1942, the volume of American military aid received by the British Commonwealth more than doubled. Two-thirds of these goods were provided under Lend-Lease, the rest under the contracts that the British had signed before March 1941. Among a lot else, the supplies included nearly 6,000 combat aircraft and another 1,600 training aeroplanes, almost 5,000 Merlin aircraft engines, 5,760 tanks and 7 escort carriers.²⁸

Concentrating purely on military supplies, however, understates British

reliance on America. Fifty-eight per cent of the Lend-Lease material that entered the UK in 1942 came in forms *other* than munitions.²⁹ By late 1942, the British depended on the USA providing about a third of their steel requirements, all their synthetic rubber and most of their oil.³⁰ Other Lend-Lease supplies in 1942 included 170,000 tons of canned meat (about 65 per cent of British consumption that year, taking into account corned beef), 215,000 tons of lard (87 per cent), and 224,000 tons of condensed and dried milk (80 per cent). About half the more than 180,000 tons of dried fruit eaten in the UK in 1942 were imported under Lend-Lease, Californian prunes hopefully unclogging the effect of the 57,000 tons of dried egg (142 per cent of consumption) that were also delivered from the United States.³¹

During 1942, Canadian war production took off as contracts placed at the start of the conflict started to be fulfilled. Munitions output was five times higher than it had been in 1940, including 11 corvettes, almost 2,000 tanks (Australia, the only other member of the Commonwealth to make tanks, turned out only 22 vehicles in 1942), 2,258 pieces of artillery, 230,000 rifles and sub-machine guns and just over a billion rounds of ammunition.³² During 1942, Canada provided slightly more of the munitions used by Commonwealth ground troops than did the United States.³³

Over the course of the war, Canada made 800,000 lorries, about a quarter more than were built in the UK.³⁴ In the Western Desert, Canadian Military Pattern (CMP) trucks, built to British specifications in the Ontario auto plants of Ford and General Motors, not only equipped the Eighth Army but also, after they were captured and pressed back into use, the Germans and Italians as well. Ironically, both sides depended on Canadian production for their mobility. The Canadians also provided large quantities of non-munition supplies to the UK, including wheat, bacon, cheese, wood, ores and refined metals. During 1942, US supplies of munitions to the UK (Lend-Lease and purchased) were worth about £650 million, more than three times the value of all the munitions supplied by Canada. Canadian food and raw material supplies were worth about £110 million, just over half the value of the equivalent supplies provided that year by the United States.³⁵

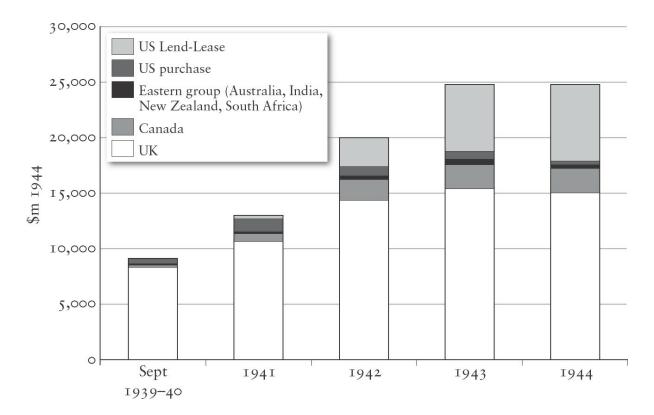
As Graph 1 shows, Britain always provided the majority of the munitions supplied to the armed forces of the Commonwealth -4.1 million British personnel, plus another 2.7 million in the forces of the Dominions, India and exiled Europe. In 1942, the armaments provided by

Canada and America equated to less than a third of the total volume of British munitions production.³⁶ That enormous military output, however, was only possible because of the quantity of non-munitions supplies that were arriving across the Atlantic Ocean.

Graph 2 shows by value the origin of the imports arriving at British ports during the war, excluding munitions. It shows the dramatic expansion of imports from North America. These allowed Britain to convert much more of its industry to making munitions. Since the journey across the Atlantic was relatively short, they also were an efficient use of scarce hold space.³⁷

By any measure, Britain got an astonishingly good deal from Lend-Lease. It allowed the country to keep its civilian population relatively well supplied, while building much stronger, more advanced armed forces. The result, however, was that even as Britain developed unprecedented military power, it also became more dependent on short- and long-term assistance from the United States. In Washington, the extent of British dependence was fully apparent to Field Marshal Dill. As he wrote to Wavell in November 1942, the British needed 'everything' from the United States, 'from ships to razor blades', but they had 'nothing but services to give in return – and many of the services are past services'. How much Britain could expect back would become a crucial question during the final years of the war.

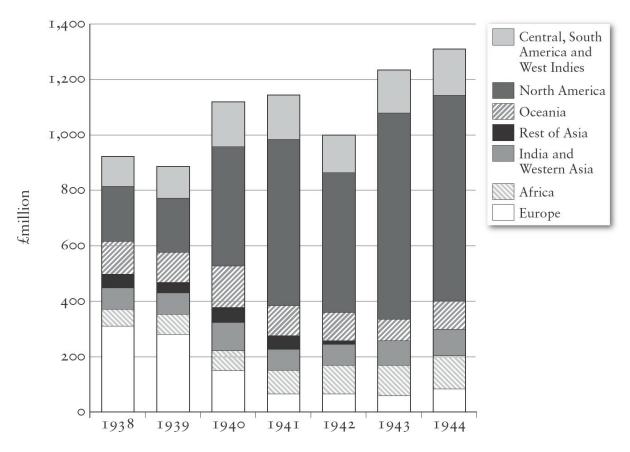
Graph I. Commonwealth munitions by value/source, I939–45



The flow of goods and services was not, however, simply one way. As part of the Lend-Lease arrangements, Britain (on behalf of the Empire), Australia and New Zealand all undertook to provide supplies, services and accommodation to US forces serving on their territory: a process known as Reciprocal Aid or Reverse Lend-Lease. This included munitions and military equipment, which made up about a third of the \$6.75 billion of Reciprocal Aid supplied by the British Empire during the war.

It also meant base facilities, construction supplies and food. The first American servicemen arrived in the UK at the end of January 1942. Much to their disgust, they were supplied with British military rations while the American logistics system caught up with their deployment.³⁹ Even once the US military took over, fresh produce, including vegetables, meat and bread (until 1944), were all provided from local sources. Initially, the British also provided the materials to build American bases. For ease of shipping and storage, petroleum supplies from the US were provided under Lend-Lease, then delivered by the British to American forces based in the UK and chalked up as Reciprocal Aid.

Graph 2. British imports by value/source, I938–44



Just as the Americans refused to include the contracts already placed by the British with US firms within Lend-Lease, so the British, desperate to restock their dollar reserves, excluded some items from Reciprocal Aid. These included raw materials supplied from the British Empire to the United States – such as West African cocoa and palm oil – for which the Americans paid dollars, which were pooled for British use in London and credited to the imperial producers' sterling balances. The US also provided all pay and allowances for its forces based in the British Empire and Commonwealth. So that American servicemen could spend their money off base, dollars were officially exchanged for pounds sterling. As the number of US troops on British territory increased, more had to be spent reciprocally to feed and house them – but in pounds, which weren't in short supply. Though the GIs' tendency to throw around their extravagant pay posed an inflationary threat, they also contributed to the UK's hard currency reserves. To this extent, the Americans being 'over-paid and over here' was potentially good for British finances (as was their being 'oversexed', provided they had to spend some money to get that way).⁴⁰

Initially, the British were reluctant to keep close track of Reciprocal Aid. It was hard to account for precisely, and they did not want to use precious manpower noting down every fence post, loaf and potato with which US troops were supplied. The Americans, ever conscious of the

need to report to Congress, were keener on an exact valuation. In fact, the numbers demonstrated the approximate equality of transatlantic effort. In 1942, US expenditure on Lend-Lease for Britain equated to 3.5 per cent of its national income. In the year from June 1942, Reciprocal Aid from the British Empire amounted to 2.9 per cent of the national income of the UK.⁴¹ In relative terms, the respective contributions were therefore effectively equal. The imbalance between the absolute figures, however, was immense, and the British were rightfully concerned that any discussion of them would encourage the American public's belief that they were simply loaning a vast sum to the UK, and fuel demands that it should be paid back.

Thanks to its proximity to America, Canada was not part of the sterling area, and the Canadian dollar was not tied to the pound.⁴² In 1940, Canadian ministers had agreed to fund the expansion of Canadian production by repatriating British investments in Canada and accumulating a sterling balance in London. They did not, however, wish to build up a large – and given their pre-war trade surplus with Britain, useless – sterling debt. Instead, they sought other means to contribute, buying up Canadian munitions factories whose construction had been funded by the British government, and offering to pay for the Royal Canadian Air Force squadrons operating with the RAF. In return, the British had to agree to purchase Canadian agricultural produce at a high-enough price for Ottawa to abandon farm subsidies.

The Canadian economy boomed, but by spring 1941 it too was confronted by a desperate shortage of US dollars. Though Lend-Lease aid was not extended to Canada, that April Roosevelt agreed with Prime Minister Mackenzie King that the American government would place the orders deriving from Lend-Lease in Canada as well as the US, and spend as many US dollars north of the border as the Canadians were spending south of it. As with Britain, the effect was to remove the restraints of exchange on Canadian war production.

The fear that the British might abandon their Canadian contracts now that they could get everything free from America pushed Ottawa towards a more generous settlement with the UK. Playing the biggest possible role in the war was popular with English-speaking Canadians, but an all-out commitment to the conflict attracted much less enthusiasm in French-speaking Quebec. King therefore initially blocked proposals to give the UK credits and dollar loans to encourage the continued placement of munitions orders. Over the winter of 1941–2, however, the shift to a global war sparked a change of policy. King supported a plan to gift the UK a

billion Canadian dollars' worth of munitions between the start of 1942 and the end of March 1943, as well as the conversion of the sterling balance to a loan of another CAN\$700 million, interest free while the war lasted. As King put it, even if this was 'the right thing to do' it was also 'an amazingly generous thing for so young a country. Certainly, Britain is receiving reward for what she has done to ensure freedom. Never were the fruits of responsible self-government made more evident.'⁴³

The 'Billion Dollar Gift' was criticized strongly in Quebec, where it became a target for a wider campaign against the introduction of conscription. The lack of public consensus made any repetition difficult, but so extensive were British orders that, even by April 1942, it was apparent that the billion dollars would not stretch for a whole year. At the start of 1943, the Canadian government adopted Mutual Aid – the same Lend-Lease provision of resources to the United Nations without expectation of cash repayment that was now being employed by the United States and the UK. In practice, that meant Canadians sent about another billion of their dollars' worth of supplies to the UK every year for the rest of the war.

King worried that Canada was being more generous than it could afford. As the strain of the war worsened, an even more bruising confrontation over conscription lay ahead. Nonetheless, Mutual Aid worked. Despite the initial cost of some overseas investments and long-term cheap debts, in the second half of the war the British got huge quantities of weapons and vehicles free of charge. The Canadians got the greatest economic growth in their history, plus the tax receipts to keep the whole thing turning. The British could hardly be dissatisfied with the results. On the contrary, mutual aid for shared benefit was how they thought that all Allied economic relations ought to be run.⁴⁴

'SUBSTANTIAL CUTS MUST BE MADE IN THE PRESENT PROGRAMMES OF THE FORCES'

Having mobilized itself so fully already, Britain had only limited capacity further to increase its endeavours. Spurred on by the opening of the conflict in the Far East, during the spring of 1942 the armed forces raised their plans for expansion well above those considered in 1939. By summer 1942, these were supposed to include the equipping of 97 British Commonwealth and Allied divisions, a 600-squadron RAF with more than

80,000 front-line aircraft, and the laying down of 6 new fleet aircraft carriers. Britain also had to complete a construction programme of new factories and airfields, and prepare the accommodation for the hundreds of thousands of American soldiers and airmen – and their aircraft – which were meant to arrive in the UK as part of the 'Bolero' build-up.

The government, however, now had to confront straightforward constraints of available manpower. As Bevin laid out to Churchill in May 1942, the great shifts of people within the economy had already taken place. Further extensions of conscription and contractions of civilian manufacturing might secure some more men and women, but not enough simultaneously to meet the personnel demands of the armed services and to supply them with equipment. In the battle for labour, Bevin explained, 'we have now deployed our main forces and drawn heavily on our reserves . . . Further demands for the Forces must in the main be met from production.'⁴⁶

Making decisions about the allocation of manpower was complicated by British uncertainty about access to American output. As US war production fell behind target, during 1942 the Combined Munitions Assignment Board in Washington allocated supplies from month-to-month based on immediate need. Since British Commonwealth forces were already in contact with the enemy, their most urgent requirements usually got high priority. From the middle of 1942, however, more US supplies and ships were sent to the Pacific. In May, after the Americans decided to concentrate on building their own force of heavy bombers, they announced that they were ending the agreement to supply these aircraft to the UK. Over the course of the whole year, the British got only half the US military equipment they had been scheduled to receive.

The British had long wanted a plan that would encompass all Allied production. At the start of June 1942, the formation of a new Combined Production and Resources Board (CPRB) made it look as if these hopes might be realized. After the decision not to launch a second front, however, American staff officers became less co-operative. The CPRB never operated as the British had hoped.⁴⁷ Simultaneously, the Americans began to reorganize their munitions programme. As the Joint War Production Staff in London pointed out, without certainty about what they'd get from the USA, the British could not plan the next step for their own economy:

Whether we should count upon the United States to provide for growing British forces or alternatively whether we are near the limit of the numbers we can raise, equip and maintain in the Services – these are matters which depend in the long run on American policy and

In October 1942, the Ministry of Labour produced its first comprehensive survey of manpower. Sir John Anderson summarized it for the War Cabinet. The service and supply departments wanted another 2.5 million people by December 1943. The most that could be found to meet these requirements was 1.6 million people, and even this would require more extensive measures of conscription, including a drastic 'comb-out' of fit men from essential industries, and the recruitment of a million married women as part-time workers. Civilian production would have to be cut to the bare minimum necessary to maintain domestic morale and allow postwar recovery.

Even so, shortfalls in US supply meant Britain could not produce the weapons to meet the armed forces' expansion schemes *and* conscript enough healthy young men to fill their ranks. The War Cabinet had to accept that Britain could not do everything. As Anderson put it: 'substantial cuts must be made in the present programmes of the Forces. Strategical considerations must determine where the reductions should be made.' Nobody disagreed. By the autumn of 1942, Churchill, guided by his scientific advisor Lord Cherwell, had already decided that the British home front was close to the limits of mobilization. It was time for other people to bear more of the strain.

At the start of November 1942, Oliver Lyttelton went to Washington to negotiate a new supply settlement. Since Churchill refused to allow him to discuss future strategy, the production minister could not get the Americans to treat Allied resources as a common pool. He did, however, secure important agreements on army munitions (the British, like the American army, had to accept a 25 per cent cut in their original combined programme), on the construction of escort vessels and on merchant shipbuilding. British needs remained built into US planning, but on terms decided in Washington rather than London. With these guarantees, the British were finally able to decide on their own programmes. In 1943, a quarter of all the munitions supplied to Commonwealth troops would be made in the United States, and deliveries from America added the equivalent of another 40 per cent of UK munitions supplies. Lyttelton estimated that this was the equivalent of another 1.5 million workers, or another entire supply ministry working for the United Kingdom. S1

The increase in British munitions output during 1942 resulted mainly from the completion of earlier rearmament programmes. New Royal Ordnance factories – the state-built, mass production munitions plants constructed from the late 1930s – came fully on line as new workers were trained up, and began to pump out guns, shells and bombs. When these factories had been ordered, British strategists had believed that the Anglo-French war effort would reach its culmination in 1942 – assuming the Germans held out that long – with a decisive offensive on the Western Front. The result was a filling programme that produced 23 million filled artillery shells in 1942, many more than the army, with so few divisions in contact with the enemy, could in fact use. Across the countryside, shells were left to rust in supply dumps.⁵²

As well as all those shells, in 1942 the UK also turned out almost 2.4 million short-range rockets.⁵³ In the 1930s, Churchill and Cherwell had advocated unguided rockets as an anti-aircraft weapon. On entering government in 1939, Churchill had driven on a new rocket programme. This included investing millions of pounds in production facilities, including a special factory to make the necessary propellant. After he became prime minister, Churchill put his son-in-law Duncan Sandys, a Tory MP and Royal Artillery officer, in charge of rocket development. By 1942, antiaircraft rockets were in use aboard Royal Navy and merchant ships, and multiple-launcher batteries (so-called 'Z-batteries') had been deployed across Britain. It was already apparent that they were almost entirely useless. From 1942, they were re-employed in new ways – fired from aircraft against tanks or set-off in massive pre-assault bombardments of enemy beach defences from specially prepared landing craft. Though these weapons were terrifying in appearance, they too were not in practice very effective.⁵⁴

During 1942 the British – like every other combatant – sought to bring into production the armaments with which they would fight the second half of the war. For the army, these included small arms such as the Sten sub-machine gun and PIAT infantry anti-tank launcher, larger weapons such as 6-pounder and 17-pounder anti-tank guns, as well as new marks of tank. The Sten and PIAT had an ungainly aesthetic that left infantry platoons looking like they had come to rod the drains, but simple designs enabled cheap mass production and easy despatch to resistance groups abroad. Having entered the war without a sub-machine gun, the British made more of them in 1942 than the Germans and Americans combined. Like many wartime rush jobs, the first versions were unreliable, but in the hands of conscript soldiers or part-time guerrillas, the Sten's high rate of

fire made it a much more dangerous close-range killer than the rifle, and it became a staple for section leaders, vehicle crews and freedom fighters – including those battling against British rule – for years to come.

In comparison, the 6-pounder anti-tank gun had undergone a longer and more traditional pre-war development process. It would have entered production in 1940 had the need to re-equip the army after Dunkirk not forced the British to stick with the older 2-pounder, which could be made in larger quantities. By 1942, British and Canadian factories had tooled up to make the 6-pounder in big numbers, and it would become the staple Allied anti-tank gun for the rest of the war. Simultaneously, production also began of the new 17-pounder – a very heavy weapon designed in 1941 to counter the more powerfully armoured German tanks that the British expected before the conflict was over. Rushed into service in early 1943 when the first German Tiger tanks appeared in North Africa, the 17pounder meant that the British finally had an equivalent to the fabled German 88-mm gun – albeit one that was slow to manoeuvre and laborious to dig in. British scientists were meanwhile at work to develop discardingsabot, tungsten dart-based ammunition – a French invention rescued from the wreckage of 1940 – that would greatly improve armour penetration and were finally (and lethally) deployed for 6- and 17-pounder guns from mid-1944.⁵⁵

As debates between London and Cairo had shown, the inadequacy of British armour was blamed for military deficiencies in the Western Desert. In fact, problems ran much deeper, to misconceptions of doctrine that hindered employment as well as design. British factories built an astonishing number of tanks in 1942 – 8,600 in total – none of which were able to give their forces a qualitative advantage when they came up against German armoured opposition. Two-thirds of them were 'infantry' tanks: slow moving, heavily armoured and intended to support a deliberate assault. Most of these were Matilda and Valentine marks that had performed well in North Africa earlier in the war but were now obsolescent. The tank that was meant to replace them, the Churchill, had been rushed into production in 1940. The resulting mechanical problems were still not fully addressed, but 1,700 nonetheless rolled off the production lines in 1942. The rest of the tanks Britain made were lighter, faster moving 'cruisers'. About a thousand of them were Covenanters – a tank so bad that it was used purely for training, although most of what its crews learned was how to recover their broken-down vehicles. More than 2,000 were Crusaders – a more successful design, but which also suffered from serious issues of reliability.⁵⁶

An inquiry into tank production chaired by Attlee in summer 1942 found serious problems with procurement and manufacturing. Privately, admitted that the infantry/cruiser divide had hindered development and they would prefer a universal tank design. They therefore placed increasing reliance on US models based on British experience, such as the Grant and Sherman. Though the Churchill was not the universal tank the army wanted, British factories had tooled up to make it in large numbers and production therefore continued. With thicker frontal armour even than its German opponents and well able to cross difficult terrain, later models, with most of their mechanical problems fixed, did guite well on the very different battlefields of the final years of the war. At the end of 1942, meanwhile, the British finally began production of a new cruiser, the Cromwell. Powered by an adapted aero-engine and with a dual-purpose gun, it was mechanically reliable and fast. It would have been an outstanding tank for the Western Desert in 1942, but it would not see action until British forces returned to Northwest Europe in the summer of 1944.⁵⁷

In 1942, for the first time in the war, however, more tanks were delivered to Commonwealth forces from North America than were made in the UK. US-built Grants and Shermans played a key role in improving the Eighth Army's fighting power in the Western Desert. Together, domestic and overseas production meant that Britain had three times more new tanks available to it during 1942 than did Germany – an astonishing ratio relative to the number of troops each country had in contact with the enemy. As the British were starting to recognize, however, one of the problems with their armoured divisions was that they were too tank heavy: they lacked enough infantry to function effectively in a battle of combined arms. That summer, British armoured divisions were reorganized with more infantrymen – though they still had a higher proportion of tanks than the Germans.⁵⁸

Until 1943, units fighting in, or preparing to depart for, North Africa got priority for the issue of new weapons, but during 1942 the fruits of the transatlantic industrial mobilization started to be felt by soldiers at home. If the guns and tanks they had were not the best available, they were good enough for training — which was what soldiers in the UK spent most of their time doing. Even as its materiel improved, however, the army struggled with a shortage of manpower. As the war expanded, the generals had to find troops to guard lines of imperial communication, to staff technical units supporting Commonwealth divisions, and to reinforce units already in the front line. For most of 1942, they met these needs by

milking Home Forces of soldiers. That required moving six divisions to a lower numerical establishment that made them unsuitable for service overseas. With these reserves exhausted, the army needed to increase its numbers of recruits just to maintain its front-line strength.⁵⁹

PLANES, ENGINES AND VALVES

In contrast to the ordnance factories, the aircraft industry was still expanding. Shifts in production towards larger, more powerful aircraft meant that the total structure weight of planes produced in the UK rose from 87 million to 133 million pounds between 1941 and 1942, while the total output of the aero-engines made in the UK nearly doubled. Heavy bomber output quadrupled to 1,976 aircraft, which meant that Britain made more such bombers in 1942 than the Germans did over the whole war. The total output of the aero-engines made in the UK almost doubled, to 59 million horsepower. ⁶⁰

This was much less than the Ministry of Aircraft Production had planned. By December 1942, total aircraft production was 17 per cent, and heavy bomber production 28 per cent, behind schedule. This shortfall reflected both the lingering effect of unrealistically high targets set by Beaverbrook during his time at MAP and a failure to cost into aircraft programmes the frequent halting of assembly lines to introduce modifications that improved aircraft performance. MAP tried to increase efficiency by concentrating production in groups of factories, sponsoring improvements in machinery and through a new Directorate of Statistics and Programmes. At the same time, it used the lag in aircraft output to justify its labour demands. An enormous new air expansion programme laid out in the summer of 1942 required another 603,000 new workers for MAP before the end of 1943. To fly and maintain the aircraft thus produced, the RAF would have to be given another half a million recruits over the same period.

By its nature, developing new aircraft was expensive and involved frequent failures. The Hawker Typhoon, which had been meant to become Britain's most modern fighter in 1941, entered production a year late, in part because of flaws in its new Sabre engine. New models of naval aircraft arrived late or performed poorly – a consequence of the lack of clarity over maritime aviation in the 1930s – leaving the British dependent on American deliveries to provide both fighter defence and maritime strike

aircraft to their carriers.

Progress on a British turbojet engine was also slow, partly because the Air Ministry gave too much power to the engine's inventor – RAF officer Frank Whittle – rather than the industry engineers with a good sense of how to move a prototype into mass production. At the end of 1942, MAP stepped in and transferred responsibility to Rolls-Royce, whose own version of the Whittle engine, the Welland, would power the Gloster Meteor, the Allies' first operational jet fighter. The Meteor entered service in July 1944 – but by the time it got into combat in Northwest Europe the Luftwaffe was already so depleted that no Meteor pilot shot down a manned German aircraft in flight before the war ended.⁶⁴

In contrast, the de Havilland Mosquito represented a more successful process of development. Twin-engined, highly aerodynamic and with a fuselage built largely from wood, the Mosquito was one of the best performing aircraft in the world in the mid-1940s. During the second half of the war, it would serve as a photo-reconnaissance plane, night-fighter and light bomber. It was ordered into mass production only in 1941, and by the end of 1942 just 447 had been made. More than 6,700 would be delivered by the end of the war.⁶⁵

Alongside developing new aircraft, the British did a good job of updating their most successful designs. The Spitfire fighter, for example, was repeatedly remodelled, going through twenty-two marks during the war. After the Typhoon failed to appear, during 1942 the Spitfire Mark IX was rushed into action to meet the threat from new German Focke-Wulf 190 fighters. Initially, US fighter squadrons sent to the UK had to be loaned Mark IXs in order that they could take on the Germans. Though the Typhoon never made a good fighter, however, it went on to have a very successful career as a ground-attack aircraft. ⁶⁶

What made the Spitfire IX better was a new two-stage supercharged Merlin engine that allowed it to fly faster and higher than its predecessors while carrying heavier weapons. Like aircraft, successful engines were repeatedly improved and redesigned. Allied access to high-octane fuel and rare metals allowed British and American engineers to push the technology of piston-driven aero-engines to its limits. This not only gave their aircrew a major advantage over their Axis counterparts, it also reduced the significance of an early shift towards jet engines in terms of improvements in performance. The Merlin was one of the great examples of the wartime spread of production across the UK and over the Atlantic. First made at Rolls-Royce's plant in Derby, then in shadow factories in Crewe and Glasgow, it was licensed in 1940 for manufacture by Ford UK at Trafford

Park in Manchester and by Packard in Detroit. The prototype of the Packard version, redesigned for mass production, was tested in August 1941 and the assembly lines started to roll in January 1942. The Rolls-Royce shadow factories and licensees concentrated on long runs of standard engines, while the Derby plant made advanced and specialized designs. Merlin production was eventually divided almost equally between Rolls-Royce, Ford and Packard.⁶⁷

The addition of a Merlin engine transformed the average-performing North American Mustang I fighter (manufactured for the RAF in the USA but relegated to ground attack because it was outmatched by the latest Luftwaffe fighters) into the Mustang X/P51B, one of the best fighters of the war. Modifications to engines and components also improved the performance of older aircraft such as the Wellington and Beaufighter allowing the former to succeed as an anti-shipping and anti-submarine platform, and as a bomber in the Mediterranean and the Far East, and giving the latter a new life as a radar-equipped night-fighter and a strike aircraft for Coastal Command.⁶⁸ The most successful redesign of the war, however, was the Avro Lancaster, a development of the under-powered Manchester, which replaced its two Vulture engines with four Merlins. The result was a reliable aircraft that could carry a very heavy bombload. It had only just entered production in 1942 but would go on to become the main weapon of Bomber Command. Almost 7,400 were manufactured before the end of the war.⁶⁹

As well as aircraft production, MAP also oversaw Britain's radio and radar programmes. The key component of the electronic war was the vacuum tube – or 'valve' as it was known at the time. Until 1942, the growing needs of the armed forces were met entirely by the British radio industry, including shadow factories that had been set up before the war. Valve production increased from 12 million to 24 million between 1939 and 1942. Yet demand rose just as sharply. At the end of 1941, valve requirements for 1943 had been estimated at 30 million. A year later, it was thought that 53 million valves would be needed. By this point, moreover, radar warfare had become a crucial part of the struggle, as bombers, night-fighters, anti-aircraft gunners and warships all sought to detect their opponents. British scientists had developed a particularly complex form of valve, the cavity magnetron, which formed the basis of short-wave (or centimetric) radar sets that allowed greater differentiation of the target. This gave the Allies a critical advantage, but throughout 1942, these radar sets were in relatively short supply. Bomber and Coastal Command and the Royal Navy competed fiercely to secure their share of production. Here too the British became increasingly reliant on US mass production. In 1944 alone, the Americans would supply 17.4 million valves to the British Commonwealth, as well as large numbers of complete radio and radar sets. In this way, as in many others, Lend-Lease allowed Britain to fight a much higher technology war.⁷⁰

BLOCKBUSTERS

The policy of city bombing required new munitions. The weight of explosive filled into aircraft bombs by the Ministry of Supply increased from 34,000 to 74,000 tons between 1941 and 1942, but the type of bombs also altered. The largest bomb normally dropped by the RAF up to 1940 had weighed 500lb. Research conducted during the Blitz encouraged the Air Ministry to order bigger bombs, designed to inflict major structural damage by blast. These 'High Capacity' bombs were brought into general service in 1942, and included the 4,000lb 'cookie', which was to become Bomber Command's basic weapon in the second half of the war. Nineteen thousand were made in 1942.⁷¹ This was the weapon that introduced the word 'blockbuster' into the English language: American journalists coined the phrase to describe a device that was meant to destroy an entire city block.⁷² By 1942, an 8,000lb bomb had been developed, and testing was under way of a 12,000lb High Capacity bomb that would be used in small numbers in 1944 and 1945.

At the start of the war the British had presumed that chemical warfare would consist of air-launched gas attacks against enemy troop concentrations or the home front. By early 1942, the Ministry of Supply had therefore produced large stocks of poison gas, ready to retaliate against any Axis gas attack. Not least because British bases in the Middle East and India were judged very vulnerable to chemical attack, the British chiefs of staff were reluctant to initiate gas warfare. They worried that if any evidence emerged of the Germans using chemical weapons, their allies might force them into a hasty counter-strike. Yet even the Russians and Germans were very cautious about accusing the other of using poison gas in combat. Isolated reports of the Wehrmacht using 'toxic smoke' during the fighting on the Black Sea in 1942 did not escalate into a full-blown chemical exchange.⁷³

Instead, the Blitz had pointed the way to the use of fire as a method of mass destruction. The blast bombs would open up the draught and fuel the

flames. To spark the conflagration, the British needed more incendiary bombs. The standard British incendiary was a small 4lb magnesium bomb filled with thermite pellets, dropped in huge numbers to swamp the civil defence network below. Even before the Blitz began, the British had laid plans to make about 9 million of these bombs a year by May 1942, although they only managed 2.25 million in 1941. To meet the shortage, they filled empty 30lb gas bombs with a mixture of phosphorous, Perspex and petrol: a mixture intended to stick as well as burn. During 1941, the government sponsored the construction of four new magnesium plants, and in 1942 British magnesium production was four times what it had been before the war. British factories turned out nearly 12 million incendiaries that year. In 1943, they produced 36 million more. By then, half of all the bomb weight filled in the UK consisted of incendiary devices. 74

Meanwhile the infrastructure of the air war was transformed. New squadrons, heavier planes and the newly arriving USAAF all needed airfields from which to fly. Older airfields had to be modified to accommodate larger aircraft. The US army built many of its own bases, and, though the British programme fell behind schedule because skilled workers were in short supply, airfields mushroomed across the country. In 1941, the RAF had 353 airfields in the UK. By 1943, the RAF and USAAF between them had 595. The total area tarmacked and concreted in the course of the airfield construction programme would have covered the whole of Birmingham. Rubble was trucked out from the blitzed cities to be used as hard core for the runways: the remnants of British civilians' lives thereby forming the foundation for a campaign aimed at killing their German counterparts.⁷⁵

SCIENCE AND OPERATIONAL RESEARCH

All this discovery, design, development and modification work was just part of a colossal scientific and technological endeavour. As this became increasingly well integrated with military operations from 1942, it provided not just new equipment, but also analysis and feedback. This made an important contribution to the increasing battlefield performance of British Empire and US forces during the second half of the war: it made the difference between just being able to make a lot of kit, and getter better weapons that were used more effectively.

Much of this scientific endeavour took place within well-funded establishments set up before the war, including both state research stations

and laboratories and design offices of giant industrial concerns such as Vickers and ICI. The research and development capacity of major firms such as GEC and Marconi, and of the civil state, including the universities, was also focused on military projects. ⁷⁶ The machinery used to decrypt 'Ultra'-level intercepts by the Government Code and Cypher School demonstrated this sort of intersection. The electro-mechanical 'bombes' that replicated the rotors on the Enigma machine were designed by the academic mathematicians and cryptographers Alan Turing and Gordon Welchman but built by the British Tabulating Machine Company (the British subsidiary of IBM). During their work on the 'bombe', Turing encountered Tommy Flowers, a research engineer at the Post Office Research Station at Dollis Hill, whom he subsequently recommended to assist with the analysis of the still-more-complicated 'Lorenz' cipher. It was Flowers, with the Research Station's support, who designed and built 'Colossus', the world's first electronic programmable computer, to process Lorenz intercepts. Operated by Wrens and depending on thousands of vacuum tubes, it became operational at the start of 1944, and immediately provided another stream of high-grade intelligence. By May 1945, ten 'Colossi' were decrypting intercepts at Bletchley Park.⁷⁷

From the outset of the war, scientists had been attached to military headquarters to conduct 'operational research', in which they studied the effectiveness of weapons and tactics and advised on improvements in performance. The idea of applying scientific method to the fighting of war appealed not just to senior officers with an interest in research and development, but to bureaucrats already embedded in the defence industrial establishment and to scientific commentators who had campaigned to have a say in public policy. As a result, operational research, initially the habitat of Civil Service scientists, was infiltrated by activist academics, whose specialist knowledge mattered less than their speed of thought and habits of mind.⁷⁸

The godfather of wartime operational research was Henry Tizard. A distinguished chemist, Tizard had been closely involved in state aeronautical research since the Great War. From 1934 he chaired the Air Ministry committee that considered how to protect the country in the event of a future war, where he clashed bitterly with Frederick Linde-mann, the future Lord Cherwell. When the war began, Tizard was appointed scientific advisor to the chief of the air staff, a post he resigned after Churchill became prime minister. Nevertheless, he led a scientific mission to the USA in summer 1940, advised MAP, and promoted the principle of operational research. Alongside Robert Watson-Watt (who did more than

anyone else to develop British radar) and A. V. Hill (a Nobel-winning biophysicist, anti-aircraft gunnery expert and 'independent Conservative' MP for Cambridge University), he advocated the employment of scientists not just to invent new weapons, but to improve the use of existing technology. Tizard insisted that scientists must subordinate themselves to military decision-makers. That might mean accepting sub-optimal solutions, but it would ensure that the scientists retained their credibility and were able to keep influencing the armed services.⁷⁹

Patrick Blackett did this very well. A junior naval officer in the previous war, Blackett became a very successful experimental physicist. Tizard had brought him into aeronautical research in the 1930s. In 1939, he joined the Royal Aircraft Establishment, where he played the principal role in designing the Mark XIV bombsight: an analogue computer that allowed aircrew to aim their bombs even in un-level flight. In August 1940, Blackett was posted to Anti-Aircraft Command, where his team of scientists conducted operational research into the use of radar predictors to help the gunners hit a higher percentage of targets. In March 1941, he became scientific advisor at RAF Coastal Command, where operational researchers were already investigating challenges including the radar detection of submarines. Blackett adopted a much broader approach, and his team grappled with problems including the most effective fuse timesetting for depth charges and the most efficient size of convoy. Its most significant intervention was to redesign the maintenance programme, maximizing the number of aircraft operational at any one time.⁸⁰

Unusually in a defence establishment dominated by conservatives, Blackett was on the political left. So was another influential operational researcher, the X-ray crystallographer Desmond 'Sage' Bernal. Bernal, who enjoyed a distinctly mid-century mix of libertine lifestyle and boundless admiration for the Soviet Union, had become determined to fight Fascism after the Spanish Civil War, then campaigned for improved air-raid shelters in the UK.⁸¹

Like Ritchie Calder and Patrick Blackett, Bernal was a member of the Tots and Quots, a dining club for socially engaged young scientists set up by his friend, the zoologist Solly Zuckerman. Born to Jewish parents in South Africa, an expert in primate reproductive physiology, Zuckerman was ambitious and adaptable, as at ease amid the literati in the dive-bars of Prohibition-era New York as at high table at Oxford (where he was on good terms with Lindemann). Compared to the 'Prof', he was much better at fitting in.⁸² The Tots and Quots made the case publicly that scientists could make more of a contribution to the war effort. By 1940, both Bernal

and Zuckerman were working for the Ministry of Home Security, the former modelling bomb blasts and the latter exploring their effects on biological organisms, in order to improve protection during air raids. Blowing apart anaesthetized rabbits and pieces of cadaver sourced from the nearest post-mortem laboratory, before moving on to blocks of gelatine, Zuckerman's team of researchers invented the modern science of wound ballistics.⁸³

The onset of the Blitz provided Bernal and Zuckerman with a unique opportunity to match their experimental findings against the reality of aerial bombardment. By the time they reported their findings, however, the period of sustained German bombing had come to an end. Instead, their research would be used to justify and inform the RAF's campaign of city bombing. It was cherry-picked by Cherwell to back up Churchill's support for Bomber Command. In fact, their findings suggested that urban areas were, for the most part, very resilient even under heavy attack.⁸⁴

By that point, considerable operational research had already been dedicated to making the bomber offensive more accurate and devastating. An Operational Research Section had been formed at Bomber Command in 1941 under Dr Basil Dickens, a scientist from the Royal Aircraft Establishment who had previously worked on radar interception at Fighter Command. Dickens was later accused of telling Sir Arthur Harris what he wanted to hear, but keeping the ear of senior officers was part of his job. By the summer of 1943, Dickens' team had grown to fifty-five scientists and twenty-two lab assistants and clerks. The concentration of researchers to combatants in Bomber Command was one of the highest in any part of the armed forces.⁸⁵

Operational researchers at Bomber Command analysed masses of data gathered from returning aircrew to plot what happened on a raid. Their findings underlined that only by concentrating aircraft in time and space over the target could bombing be made more destructive. From there, the operational researchers moved on to examine navigation issues, target marking, aircraft protection, and radar and radio equipment. Their analyses demonstrated that the cost in time and weight of aircraft modifications – such as equipment to pump inert gas into emptying fuel tanks to prevent the accumulation of combustible vapour – were worth the benefits of increased survival.

Bernal and Zuckerman had already moved on. The new chief of combined operations was predictably excited about scientific innovations for his amphibious endeavours against Occupied Europe. He had already recruited Geoffrey Pyke, a genuinely mad scientist, who bombarded Mountbatten with outlandish ideas. One of the most extraordinary – a scheme for massive aircraft carriers made out of reinforced ice – was pursued for some time as a serious project, thanks to Mountbatten's sponsorship, and absorbed significant scientific and industrial effort. At Tizard's urging, Mountbatten employed Bernal and Zuckerman too.⁸⁶

Bernal's brain was soon applied more fruitfully to the problems of seaborne assault. Fully involved in military planning by Mountbatten, he fitted Combined Operations' sense of itself as an innovative organization, unlike its hidebound military peers. After grimly surveying the damaged ships and bodies that made it back from the raid on Dieppe, Bernal spent the next eighteen months establishing the expertise in coastal geography that would allow the selection of the best beaches on which to land a massive armoured assault force that could batter its way into Fortress Europe. Zuckerman got on well with Mountbatten but was bored by being Bernal's subordinate. During 1943 he sought out more interesting projects assessing the effect of air attack in the Mediterranean, where he would become chief scientific advisor to Arthur Tedder.⁸⁷

Mountbatten's championing of scientists helped to spread the influence of operational research. Initially a feature primarily of the air war, from 1942 research teams proliferated in the other armed services and the Canadian and Australian militaries. By that point, it was difficult to locate enough qualified scientists to recruit. Overwhelmingly, the researchers were men with an existing expertise in physics, engineering or maths. A much smaller proportion were life scientists or statisticians. About 0.2 per cent were women. By 1945, more than a thousand scientific officers would be undertaking operational research with the British military. Influenced by the British experience, but with much greater scientific resources at their disposal, the US military started setting up their own operational research groups even before the United States entered the war. The interleaving of scientists and engineers would become a permanent feature of the American military-industrial machine. 90

'THE PIONEER WORK DONE IN THIS COUNTRY IS A DWINDLING ASSET'

There was a bomb too big for the British to build. When the discovery of the atomic fission of uranium was publicized at the start of 1939, scientists had pondered whether the huge amounts of energy thus released could be used in a 'super-bomb'. Most thought it would be decades before such a weapon became a reality, and British physicists became heavily involved in other military projects. In the spring of 1940, British interest was revived by the work of two émigré scientists, Otto Frisch from Austria and the German Rudolf Peierls, who theorized that a viable bomb could be built by extracting the more radioactive isotope U-235 from naturally occurring uranium, U-238. Interested by a memorandum on Frisch and Peierls' work, but doubtful whether anything would come of it before the end of the war, Tizard set up a top secret committee to investigate, innocuously titled 'MAUD', under the chairmanship of Sir George Paget Thomson, professor of physics at Imperial College, London. It was housed within the Ministry of Aircraft Production. During the following year, under the auspices of the MAUD Committee, intense research took place to work out how to separate U-235 and turn it into an atomic bomb.

Since U-235 made up less than 1 per cent of uranium, producing it in sufficient quantities posed an extraordinary engineering challenge. Again, German refugees from Nazism played an important role. By mid-1941, theoretical work was well advanced, but it was far from clear how long it would be before any bomb became operational. The more optimistic scientists thought that it might be ready before the end of 1943; the more pessimistic, that the war would be over before any progress could be made. 91

If the weapon worked, it would unleash immense and lasting destruction. The attraction to British policy-makers lay in the violence of the initial explosion, which was expected to wipe out a city, but they never altogether ignored the longer-term effects of radiation. At this point, it caused few moral qualms. The main concern was to make sure the British got a viable bomb before the Germans.

Before the German invasion of their country, French scientists had concentrated on a different means of exploiting uranium fission. This used natural uranium –U-238 – with heavy water (water processed to create a higher than usual concentration of the hydrogen isotope deuterium) employed to slow down the emitted neutrons so they could be caught by additional atoms of U-238. This did not produce a chain reaction quick enough for a weapon, but it would enable a nuclear reactor – what contemporaries called an 'engine' or a 'boiler' – that would produce enormous quantities of power and have obvious value in peace as well as war. In summer 1940 the French team escaped to the UK, where they continued their research. Their project received less attention than the pursuit of a fast-reaction bomb, but one consequence of the use of uranium

in the 'boiler' was the production of a new element, which would become known as plutonium.

That this could also be turned into an atomic bomb was far from clear when decisions about the future of both projects were taken in the summer of 1941. The two key questions were whether the British should continue to plough resources into atomic research, and how far they should collaborate further with the Americans. Research into atomic energy was much more advanced in the UK than in the US and American scientists were eager for a joint venture. The British had built up considerable momentum, but turning theoretical plans into physical realities would require a colossal diversion of raw materials and skilled labour from other aspects of the war effort. On the other hand, the British did not want to lose control of such potentially decisive technology.

The government's scientific advisors were clear that atomic power generation was a long-term project that could not take priority over the war effort. It should be pursued in combination with the American and Canadian governments, and the British hoped that the team researching 'boilers' could continue their work in the United States while remaining under UK control. In contrast, it was clear that Britain must continue its own pursuit of an atomic bomb. As Cherwell, who had kept himself fully apprised of the MAUD Committee's findings, advised Churchill at the end of August 1941:

People who are working on these problems consider the odds are 10 to 1 on success within two years. I would not bet more than 2 to 1 against or even money. But I am quite clear that we must go forward. It would be unforgivable if we let the Germans develop a process ahead of us by means of which they could defeat us in war or reverse the verdict after they had been defeated. 92

A uranium extraction plant would be a massive undertaking and would have to operate for long periods undisturbed by enemy action. There were therefore good reasons for basing it on the far side of the Atlantic, but British ministers did not want to hand over production completely. As Cherwell explained to Churchill:

However much I may trust my neighbour, and depend on him, I am very much averse to putting myself completely at his mercy and would therefore not press the Americans to undertake this work: I would just continue exchanging information and get into production over here without raising the question of whether they should do it or not. ⁹³

Since almost everyone under-estimated just how expensive extracting U-235 would be, it still seemed possible that the British might build their own plant in the UK. If that proved impracticable, they hoped to build one

in Canada, close to where the uranium was mined, well beyond air attack and with easy access to technologically advanced components that would have to be manufactured in the United States. In October 1941, at the suggestion of American scientists, Roosevelt proposed to Churchill a formal agreement on joint atomic energy research, with the US and the UK sharing equally in the results. The prime minister did not respond. News of British progress, however, spurred the Americans to reorganize their atomic research programme to allow their own 'all-out' effort on the bomb.⁹⁴

Aside from the scientists and engineers working on the project, only a very small number of people at the top of Britain's war machine knew anything about the atomic bomb. Churchill selected Sir John Anderson to oversee the venture. A scientist by education, Anderson understood what the project involved. As lord president, he also had the power to fit it into Britain's domestic war effort. With the newly appointed director of the bomb project, Wallace Akers (the research director of ICI), Anderson came up with 'Tube Alloys' as a title for the programme. It was meant to sound discouragingly dull.⁹⁵

During the first half of 1942, the British and Americans conducted their research in parallel, regularly exchanging ideas. Even by that spring, the Americans had four times more scientists working on atomic energy, and were beginning to overtake their ally's research. As the British grappled with the complex engineering involved in extracting U-235 through gaseous diffusion, they realized that they could not afford a full-scale plant in the UK. The Americans, meanwhile, took major steps towards producing plutonium. Their reactors – or 'piles', as they called them – used graphite rather than heavy water as a moderating agent. It now appeared that plutonium would be even more devastating than uranium as a fissile material. By April 1942, the Americans anticipated plutonium production coming on line by the end of the following year: that would give them the means to start making a real bomb. 97

British scientists returned from the United States in spring 1942 impressed by the scale of the American effort and wanting atomic collaboration of the sort Roosevelt had suggested the previous October. During a visit to the president's Hyde Park mansion while he was in the United States in June 1942, Churchill discussed progress on the atomic bomb informally with Roosevelt. Unaware of how far ahead the Americans were, Roosevelt nodded along as Churchill suggested that the two allies should work alongside each other on their two projects, sharing work and results as full partners. Since nothing was written down, both

men were free to interpret the conversation as they wished.⁹⁸

At the end of July 1942, the Tube Alloys Consultative Council agreed that there was no choice but to merge their research with the Americans'. As Anderson informed Churchill: 'We must face the fact that the pioneer work done in this country is a dwindling asset and that, unless we capitalise it quickly, we shall be rapidly outstripped.'99 He hoped that British scientists would work on the US project and return with precious knowledge for the future. When the lord president wrote to Dr Vannevar Bush, head of the US Office of Scientific Research and Development, to suggest that the Americans ought to add a British gaseous diffusion plant to their construction programme, however, he was met with silence. This time it was the Americans who would not commit.¹⁰⁰

Once they learned that the British were unable to turn their scientific research into technical progress, Bush and his fellow scientific administrators decided to stop acting as if the two countries were atomic equals. As the US project moved from theory to industrial engineering, it came under the purview of the US army. American generals were even more ill-disposed to Britain than normal in the summer of 1942, and they regarded the British and their émigré scientists as a security risk. By the end of the year, the Americans had decided that the only information that should be shared between the Allies was that which would contribute to the construction of an atomic weapon before the end of the war. This meant that the British should hand over anything that might help the Americans, but since they couldn't build their own bomb, they would not get anything in return. At Anderson's instigation, regaining full access to the US atomic programme became a significant objective of Churchill's transatlantic diplomacy for much of 1943. 101

'NO OCEAN PASSAGE WILL BE SAFE'

By late summer 1942, a coherent convoy system was at last coming into being along the whole American east coast. Simultaneously, however, the operational U-boat fleet expanded, growing from 91 boats in January 1942 to 196 that October. In August, for the first time since America entered the war, the number of ships sunk in convoy exceeded the number lost while sailing independently. Denied the easy prey of unescorted ships, Admiral Dönitz shifted his effort into the middle of the Atlantic, where Allied air cover was weakest. This would be the location for the climactic struggle of

the Atlantic campaign.

Notwithstanding the growth of the U-boat fleet, convoys remained difficult to locate. Between August and December 1942, the Germans intercepted only one in three convoys and attacked fewer than one in six. As Allied escort and aircraft numbers grew, so did the danger for the U-boats. Finding convoys and replacing submarines lost in action cost time, so even as Dönitz's fleet grew, its productivity – the tonnage sunk per day at sea – decreased. 103

While the Germans had been wreaking havoc on shipping in American waters, the Royal Navy's anti-submarine forces had become increasingly effective. More escort ships were fitted with high frequency direction-finding gear, which could detect submarine transmissions, and short-wave radar that could pick out a semi-submerged U-boat among the ocean waves. Escort vessels refuelled at sea from ships in the convoy, allowing them to remain with their charges right through the central ocean. Improved depth-charge launching systems and explosives meant escorts became better at killing dived submarines. Groups of British escorts were kept together and given extensive opportunities to train as a unit.

In the summer of 1942, the introduction of airborne radar and 'Leigh Lights' – searchlights suspended beneath aircraft to illuminate surfaced U-boats at night – had allowed RAF Coastal Command to accelerate its campaign against submarines crossing the Bay of Biscay. Between August and September, however, the Germans countered with a new radar early warning device, 'Metox', which allowed submarines to detect and evade the searching aircraft, and the despatch of long-range fighters which caused such heavy losses that Coastal Command's Bay campaign was temporarily shut down.

Thirty-five per cent of the escort forces in the mid-Atlantic in late 1942 belonged to the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN). Compared to their Royal Navy counterparts, the Canadian anti-submarine fleet had undergone an even greater expansion since the start of the war. The RCN, however, did not enjoy the same improvements in training and equipment, not least because its commitment to the Atlantic campaign allowed British crews the respite to practise their tactics. Canadian ships were older, with outdated longer wavelength radar sets, and they were usually assigned to protect slow convoys. ¹⁰⁴

Preparations for landings in North Africa forced a reordering of merchant routes around the Atlantic. More than 120 escort vessels were deployed to protect the invasion armada and support the landings (see Map 3).¹⁰⁵ That meant halting convoys sailing up the eastern side of the South

Atlantic. Instead, ships had to sail via South and North America and across the northern passage. From 29 October, Slow Convoy 107, sailing to the UK under the protection of a Canadian escort group, endured repeated heavy U-boat attacks. By 6 November it had lost fifteen ships – the worst casualties suffered by an Atlantic convoy since 1941. As the U-boats moved south in an unsuccessful attempt to catch the convoys supplying the Anglo-American expeditionary force, they fell on merchantmen sailing unescorted across the middle latitudes of the Atlantic. During November 1942, the submarines sank 119 ships, totalling 730,000 gross weight tons, the worst figures since the previous June and the third worst of the entire war. It was a sign of how things were going, however, that even the assault on SC107 cost Dönitz three submarines, all of them sunk from the air. 107

Between January and September 1942, the total tonnage of the British-controlled merchant fleet declined by 10 per cent, about 2 million gross weight tons. Over the same period, American merchant shipbuilding rapidly expanded, and in September the tonnage launched from the shipyards of the United Nations exceeded monthly losses for the first time in the war. The heavy losses being suffered by the British in the Atlantic were not, however, made up from fresh US production, which was wholly committed to the Pacific. American-built escorts had also failed to arrive. Shortages of steel plate in the United States meant that none of the 'destroyer escorts' — as the Americans called corvettes — that the Americans were building were completed during 1942. The British ended up supplying British- and Canadian-built corvettes to the US Navy instead.

Half the US servicemen and equipment involved in the first assault wave into North Africa were carried across the Atlantic in British ships. ¹⁰⁹ That affected what could be imported into the UK. At the end of October, the Shipping Committee warned the War Cabinet that, even if the British ran down their stocks in 1943, they would need another seven and a half million tons of cargo capacity just to maintain essential imports. ¹¹⁰ Meanwhile Admiral Pound told Churchill that he would resign if more resources were not allocated to the Atlantic campaign – the only time that a member of the Chiefs of Staff Committee used this threat on his own throughout the whole war. ¹¹¹

Churchill recognized the crucial importance of the Atlantic but believed that the solution lay in US shipyards. When Lyttelton went to Washington at the start of November, he carried a letter for Roosevelt in which Churchill painted a gloomy picture of 1943:

Next year there will be many U-boats and they will range far more widely. No ocean

passage will be safe. All focal points will be beset and will require long-range air protection. I expect all convoys will have to have anti-U-boat escorts, and often auxiliary aircraft carriers throughout the greater part of their journeys, and fast convoys will have to be arranged for the ships at present routed independently. How are we to find craft for this?

The answer was increased American shipbuilding. Churchill pleaded with Roosevelt to allocate US shipping in order to maintain British imports at 27 million tons for 1943. All that he was asking, the prime minister wrote, was that America should give Britain a 'fair share' of maritime production. He suggested assigning 2.5 million deadweight tons of US-built merchant ships under the British flag over the next year.¹¹³

Like Churchill, Roosevelt recognized the importance of the Atlantic lifeline. As part of his reordering of US production priorities, he had ordered more escort ships. Now he decided to scale up shipbuilding still further. He instructed his officials to build 330 escort vessels by the end of 1943. Another 458 escorts were planned for 1944. About two hundred ships from these programmes were to be handed over to the British. Merchant shipbuilding, originally projected to be 19 million deadweight tons across 1942 and 1943, was increased to 20 million tons in 1943 alone. This would allow America to allocate the UK the tonnage Churchill had requested.

On 30 November 1942, Roosevelt replied, promising that 'your requirements will be met'. He warned Churchill, however, that America's existing commitments meant that it would not be able to hand over many merchant ships in the first quarter of 1943. Characteristically, the president did not pass on his decision to his military logisticians — a failure of communication that was to cause significant problems. American escort production would also take time to come on line. The United States made only sixty-eight escort ships in the first half of 1943, nine of which were allocated to the British. 116

Meanwhile, the British and Canadians had increased their own escort production. At the end of 1941, with the initial corvette programme complete and large numbers of escorts anticipated from America, the Admiralty had planned to concentrate its efforts on bigger ships. Instead of battleships – the final two ships of the *King George V* class, HMS *Anson* and *Howe*, both launched in 1942, were the last British battleships to be completed during the war – the Royal Navy decided to build up its force of aircraft carriers. Two large fleet carriers were already under construction, and the naval programmes for 1942 and 1943 included plans to build another six. Yet only one was laid down. Instead, the Admiralty gave

priority to light fleet carriers, in the hope that they could be finished before the end of the war. Sixteen were ordered, of which ten were laid down by the end of 1942. They took up all the remaining space for large naval construction in the UK, but before long, the resources required to complete them were re-allocated. Only the two fleet carriers already being built would be finished before the end of the war.

There were smaller, 'escort' carriers that could be used to support the convoys. The British made five of these vessels from converted merchant ships between 1941 and 1943. In 1942 they also received five escort carriers from the United States. These ships were almost as big as a British light fleet carrier. In 1943 the Americans supplied the British with another twenty-seven escort carriers, which explains why the Admiralty didn't need to build any more for itself. 117

From the summer of 1942, the British prioritized building smaller ships. They managed to turn out 73 destroyers in 1942 – more than in any other year of the war – with another 107 still being built at the end of the year, but only 17 corvettes and 13 frigates (an updated escort vessel with two propellers that was quicker and more habitable than the Flower-class corvette). To meet the challenge in the Atlantic, the programme for future escort construction was massively increased. By the end of 1942, the British were aiming to build another 48 frigates and corvettes in 1943, and 138 in 1944. This would entail a cut in British merchant shipbuilding, which had reached its wartime peak of 1.29 million gross weight tons (1.81 million deadweight tons) that year. Increased escort construction was expected to cost Britain about a quarter of a million deadweight tons of merchant shipping between 1943 and 1944. With American merchant ships guaranteed to make up the numbers, this was a price that the British were willing to pay. ¹¹⁸

The new escort programme required the modernization of maritime construction. After an inquiry in summer 1942 concluded that delays in naval shipbuilding were due to out-dated plant, the Admiralty committed to improving equipment in the dockyards. During 1943, it approved capital investment of almost £7 million to purchase new tools and machinery. It sought to increase the use of welding, rather than riveting, as a quicker means of shipbuilding: by the summer of 1943, the number of welders in the main naval yards was 40 per cent higher than the year before. The Admiralty also pursued the use of prefabrication. New escort designs were broken down into sub-assemblies that could be built by engineering firms anywhere in the country, then transported to the shipyards for completion. No component could be bigger than twenty-nine feet long with an eight

and a half feet square cross section, so that it could make it through rail and road tunnels, or heavier than two and a half tons, so that it could be lifted into place in the yards. To meet the construction programme and man the new ships, the Admiralty wanted another half a million sailors and workers by the end of 1943.¹¹⁹

Including an ambitious Canadian programme, the Allies now planned to build another 482 escorts by the end of 1943, and 596 in the year after that – an extraordinary commitment of resources, forced on them by the U-boat threat. Since, at the start of 1943, only 515 ocean-going escort vessels were available to the Western Allies (just 65 of which were American), the new programmes were aiming to build an entire new escort fleet in each of the subsequent two years. The displacement tonnage of the ships to be launched in the British escort programme alone would have been the same as almost seven new *George V*-class battleships or ten new fleet aircraft carriers. The scale of the ambition was testimony to the astonishing building power of the Atlantic production nexus. As the Battle of the Atlantic moved into its decisive phase, however, the brunt of the fighting would be borne by the British and Canadian ships that were already there. 121

As the migration of the U-boats to the central ocean demonstrated, air cover was crucial to the protection of shipping. As the fighting moved, from the summer of 1942 the Admiralty started to pay more attention to the 'air gap' – the area in the middle of the Atlantic that could not be covered by most long-range shore-based aircraft. Despite worsening shipping losses, however, and in contrast to their dramatic plans to scale up escort production, the Allies were slow to focus air resources on protecting this critical supply line, even though they repeatedly agreed that it should be a priority. 122 The escort carriers provided by the Americans were the most obvious means to provide convoys with air cover. Their presence also side-stepped the difficulties encountered by shore-based aircraft in finding the convoys they were meant to be protecting. Although the first of these carriers had reached the UK in the spring of 1942, it took almost a year for them to be deployed on the Atlantic convoy routes. They were too useful; for Admiralty planners longing for the carriers yet to emerge from British yards, they offered a tempting means to provide air protection for amphibious landings. That meant, however, that the rather rough-and-ready vessels supplied by the US had to go into British docks for extensive refits, including the installation of operations rooms from which to direct a fighter battle. Those that emerged in autumn 1942 were despatched first to protect Arctic convoys, then to support the 'Torch'

landings. Not until shipping losses in the mid-Atlantic accelerated again in spring 1943 would the escort carriers be sent to do the work their American providers had intended.¹²³

Coastal Command, meanwhile, continued to concentrate on its campaign to intercept the U-boats on their journey from their French bases to the Atlantic. Even when pressure mounted from the Admiralty to try to cover the 'air gap', Coastal Command had very few very long-range (socalled 'VLR') planes that could reach the mid-Atlantic. The Mark I B-24 Consolidated Liberators, which the RAF had allocated to Coastal Command in early 1942, did have this range, partly because they lacked some of the features (including self-sealing fuel tanks) that the RAF knew from bitter experience were required to bomb Germany – which was why the British had sent them to Coastal Command in the first place. By summer 1942, however, only nine of these aircraft were still operational in the Atlantic. The subsequent marks of Liberator that were by then being supplied to the RAF had had more protective equipment fitted; as a result, their range was much reduced. Even when the Admiralty finally fixed on the importance of shore-based aircraft to addressing the 'air gap', they initially pinned their hopes on the British developing their own model of VLR aircraft, rather than relying on American supplies. 124

Both the USAAF, in its first raids over Europe, and Coastal Command, following the withdrawal from the Bay of Biscay, also tried to hit the Uboats in their bases with a series of attacks on French ports. Since 1941, however, the Germans had built massively thick concrete bunkers to protect the U-boat pens. These attacks therefore achieved very little. Arthur Harris, rightly convinced that bombing the bases was a waste of time, opposed American suggestions that Bomber Command ought to join in with these attacks. Intensified bombing of German port cities, he argued, was the best way to stop the shipyards building submarines. 125

At the start of November, Churchill, growing more concerned about shipping losses, convened a new Anti-U-boat Warfare Committee, made up of ministers, military commanders and scientists. The prime minister accepted that more of Britain's air effort would have to be devoted to fighting the submarines, but he told the committee that he did not want to weaken Bomber Command's offensive against Germany. After Admiral Pound stressed to Churchill, for the first time, the importance of addressing the 'air gap', the Anti-U-boat Warfare Committee quickly identified that the quickest way to do this would be to withdraw later model Liberators from trying to restart Coastal Command's Biscay offensive, and convert them into VLR aircraft that could operate from new

bases on the Canadian mainland and Newfoundland.

This was a solution that the prime minister happily accepted, since it would have no effect on Bomber Command. For all that he was sceptical about Harris's wilder claims – on 18 November he told the chiefs that the future of bombing lay not in 'megalomania', but rather in more realistic objectives that could actually be achieved – he remained determined that Britain's major offensive against Germany should be kept up. Though Churchill reserved the possibility of using Bomber Command to fight the Battle of the Atlantic if the shipping situation deteriorated further, he still believed that American production would be the best way to overcome the submarines. ¹²⁶

Deciding to convert Liberators for VLR work was one thing, but the operational appearance of the aircraft was quite another. In practice, the work of conversion, carried out by a single factory in Scotland, took much longer than expected. Though the Canadians were eager to assist by reequipping their own squadrons, both the Air Ministry in London and the US Navy and USAAF resisted the transfer of Liberators to the RCAF. Not until May 1943 would there be enough VLR aircraft in service to close the 'air gap'. Bearing in mind both the importance of the campaign and the scale of the naval production plans it inspired, the ability of competing bureaucracies to delay or avoid allocating the appropriate resources was extraordinary. The effect of this delay, however, was that many of the decisive factors in the defeat of the U-boats would appear almost simultaneously in the Atlantic in the spring of 1943. By then, the balance of the war had already shifted against the Axis powers. 127

12

'Perhaps, the end of the beginning'

October-December 1942

Just before twenty to ten on the evening of 23 October 1942, Eighth bombardment ahead artillerv opened the of Montgomery's offensive at El Alamein. The sky lit up as 882 shells were fired, at slightly different times depending on range, calibre and target, to land simultaneously on Axis positions. Overhead, RAF Wellingtons, fitted with radio-jamming gear, droned back and forth, blocking enemy communications. Beyond the front line, other bombers launched flare-lit attacks on supply dumps and concentration areas. At ten o'clock, Commonwealth infantry and engineers moved off to begin the assault and clear lanes through the thick defensive minefields. Behind them, the armoured regiments moved up, grinding the desert sand into a chalk-like dust that soon coated every combatant.¹

The attack was the culmination of a long period of preparation. Since the summer, reinforcements and equipment had poured into Egypt. They included enough 6-pounders to equip all of Eighth Army's anti-tank units, and more than three hundred new Sherman tanks and one hundred Priest 105mm self-propelled guns direct from the United States. Reliable, well-armoured and with a turret-mounted 75mm gun that could fire high explosive and armour-piercing shells, the Sherman was better than almost all the German and Italian tanks in the Western Desert.

The Eighth Army had been reorganized. Before he was removed from command, Auchinleck had recognized the problems caused by dispersing field guns across the army and ordered them to be re-concentrated in their regiments behind the front line. Working together, the gunners regained the ability to lay thick concentrations of shells onto priority targets. Close air support techniques had improved. During Operation 'Crusader', ground attacks had taken two or three hours to organize; now, aircraft sorties arrived within half an hour of being called up.² A new corps, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, had been created to take charge of

vehicle repairs and ensure that broken-down trucks and tanks returned to action. Better aerial reconnaissance, artillery surveys and signals monitoring all improved the intelligence available to Eighth Army's commanders: not just about the enemy but also about where their own troops were on the battlefield.

Montgomery and his team brought new briskness to the Eighth Army's staff work. Recognizing the importance of air—ground co-ordination, he moved his headquarters next door to that of the commander of the Western Desert Air Force, Arthur 'Mary' Coningham. When the battle got under way, Montgomery moved forward to an advanced headquarters closer to the fighting. Administrative work was handled by Montgomery's brilliant chief of staff, Freddie de Guingand, who spent a lot of time calming down people his boss had offended. Distrusting the incumbents, Montgomery had already begun to make room among his corps commanders for men who had served as his subordinates in the UK. Simultaneously, he made great efforts to improve training — another deficiency that Auchinleck had identified but been unable to address. Practising new tactics and rehearsing their part in the coming battle was a necessity not just for recent arrivals in the desert, but for veteran formations whose ranks had been filled with fresh replacements, using new equipment, under newly promoted officers.³

Montgomery was all too well aware that, despite these improvements, Eighth Army remained fragile. Its multiple separate national contingents made it difficult to keep units up to strength. Most of its infantry divisions lacked the trained riflemen and ready reserves to sustain a prolonged period of combat. It outnumbered the *Panzerarmee Afrika* only by about two-to-one: insufficient superiority to guarantee a breakthrough against the strongest Axis defensive position of the desert war so far. Lacking enough fuel to run an effective mobile defence, Rommel's troops had dug themselves into deep positions, with German and Italian units interspersed. Almost half a million mines — hundreds of thousands from captured British stocks — had been laid in thick belts to funnel any attack into killing grounds.

Montgomery initially planned an attack in three stages. While the artillery opened an intense night-time bombardment on the Axis line and guns, engineers would carve lanes through the minefields. Simultaneously, a four-division infantry assault would break quickly into the defences. Before the first night was over, the British armoured divisions, formed together in a single corps, would move through the gaps thus formed, breaking out into a rolling fight with the panzers on the far side. Reviewing this plan, Montgomery decided it was too optimistic about how

quickly a breakout could be achieved. A revised plan therefore allowed for a longer 'dogfight' while the infantry crumbled the defences. The armoured divisions still had to move through the minefields in a single night, but now their job was not to break out, but to protect the still-battling infantry from a counter-attack by enemy tanks. As it turned out, even this plan was too ambitious in its timing because it under-estimated the difficulties of maintaining offensive momentum; a problem that would dog British attacks till the end of the war.⁴

If Montgomery still looked for too much from his troops, he plainly understood the importance of morale. He insisted that every soldier should know his part in a bigger plan. The last two days before the battle saw officers briefing their men intensively about the significance of the battle: there would be a hard fight, with no thought of surrender, but they would emerge victorious and turn the course of the war. Under the cover of a carefully worked out deception plan, Eighth Army's gunners built up their stockpiles of shells.⁵

With shipments of fuel and ammunition still being badly hit by Allied air attacks, Axis forces had no choice but to wait for the Commonwealth offensive. In the cramped space between the Qattara Depression and the sea, the end of the campaign of movement had meanwhile brought the Eighth Army an additional advantage. Commonwealth junior officers might not have been instilled with the same spirit of aggressive improvisation as their German counterparts, but the traditions of imperial soldiering meant they were obsessed with sanitary discipline. Latrine trenches were carefully positioned, and excrement regularly removed and burned to prevent the spread of disease. In contrast, German and Italian officers tended to regard such issues as unworthy of their professional attention. Once the Panzerarmee halted, its positions were quickly surrounded with a ring of festering waste that attracted copious flies. By the end of October 1942, about a fifth of German troops in the Western Desert were sick, most of them wracked with dysentery. Rommel was suffering so severely from the symptoms of hepatitis that he had to return to Germany for treatment. Literally as well as figuratively, his lack of attention to logistics had left his men deeply in the shit.⁶

During October, the RAF and USAAF kept up their attacks on Axis merchant shipping and ports. Thirty per cent of the supplies despatched to Libya had failed to arrive in September 1942. In October, the figure rose to 50 per cent, including most of the fuel. Meanwhile the Luftwaffe launched a final major attack to try to neutralize Malta. This locked up six hundred aircraft on Sicily that could have been supporting Axis forces in the desert,

and all it demonstrated was that the island's Spitfires still had the upper hand. From 19 October, the RAF started to attack Axis airfields. Photoreconnaissance aircraft ranged freely over the *Panzerarmee*'s positions, checking the location of the artillery batteries and strongpoints to be hit by the Eighth Army's bombardment. The assaulting troops crowded into the assembly areas.⁷

On the first night of the battle, carefully orchestrated and well-prepared attacks by Scottish, Australian, New Zealand and South African infantry took most of their objectives. The armoured divisions, however, were unable to get clear of the minefields before dawn. Unable to make progress in daylight, the infantry went to ground while the tanks, artillery and the WDAF fought off German counter-attacks. As the advance stalled, Montgomery insisted that his armoured commanders press on with more vigour. Hemmed in by the minefields and wary of charging Axis anti-tank guns, they were sensibly cautious in how they interpreted orders to attack.⁸

Things were going no better on the other side. German tank crews, used to sitting back at long range and picking off their British opponents, came off worst against the Shermans. British anti-tank guns were now just as capable as their opponents of smashing armoured counter-attacks. Eighth Army's artillery dropped crushing fire on advancing Axis troops. General Georg Stumme, whom Rommel had left in command, went up to see what was happening in the front line and suffered a fatal heart attack. The WDAF had almost complete command of the skies. As repeated counter-attacks failed, German and Italian losses mounted. The fuel situation became ever more desperate. In the week after the battle began, Ultra-directed air attacks sank five large tankers on their way to North Africa, cutting off any immediate hope of resupply. Rommel, rushing back from Berlin, finally had to face up to the crisis.

Montgomery always claimed an unerring omniscience, but on this occasion, he managed something more impressive: recognizing and accepting that his plan had failed and devising a new one without losing his grip on the battle. As both sides sought to limit their losses, he narrowed and shifted the direction of the infantry advance, sending the 9th Australian Division northwards towards the coast to keep the Axis forces' attention while he withdrew battered formations and prepared a second breakout. Churchill and Eden, well informed from Ultra about Axis woes, moaned to Brooke about how long the battle was taking. The CIGS brusquely dismissed their anxious desire to interfere.

The Eighth Army's second effort opened with another intense artillery bombardment just after $1\ a.m.$ on $2\ November.$ It punched another deep

hole into the Axis defences, but the British armour was again unable to break out past the German anti-tank guns. Rommel, however, had to throw the last remnants of his two German panzer divisions into a counter-attack. In the largest tank-to-tank action of the battle, they were all-but destroyed. Rommel decided he would have to withdraw. The next day, Eighth Army flung in a series of costly minor attacks. With half or more of the men in most of its infantry battalions having become casualties, it was running out of soldiers to continue the advance.⁹

Despite the confusion caused when Hitler briefly ordered the *Panzerarmee* to stand fast, most of the surviving German forces managed to retreat from the battlefield. Without enough motor transport, the unfortunate Italians were once again left behind to be taken prisoner. So was General Wilhelm von Thoma, the commander of the *Afrika Korps*, captured as he commanded the rearguard. The *Panzerarmee* had lost about 2,000 dead, 5,000 wounded and 30,000 prisoners; the Eighth Army 2,350 dead and almost 9,000 wounded, with another 2,260 missing in action.¹⁰

By the end of 4 November, the Eighth Army was free to open its pursuit, but the chase quickly became snarled up in queues and confusion as all of Eighth Army's tanks and trucks tried to get after Rommel at the same time. Montgomery failed to co-ordinate a plan to cut off his opponent's escape. Then rainstorms bogged the pursuit in a desert quagmire. The air force proved no more able to halt the elusive, flakcovered enemy columns. That didn't stop Tedder pre-emptively blaming Montgomery for taking his foot off the throttle at the decisive moment.¹¹ Rommel's losses were far too heavy for a rapid recovery, and, while Montgomery might not have encircled the enemy, his logisticians had worked out how to keep the Eighth Army supplied while it raced through the desert. By the 23rd, Eighth Army stood in front of El Agheila on the far side of Cyrenaica, where it paused to prepare its next move. It had advanced 778 miles in twenty days. 12 What Montgomery had also done – though he got no credit from Tedder for it – was to make sure that the Eighth Army secured the Derna airfields, from which the RAF could cover the central Mediterranean, including the convoy traffic to Malta or between Italy and North Africa. As with the ground forces, this was a success that the airmen would have some difficulty following up. 13

For all the stupendous violence that had been unleashed, El Alamein was a very small battle by the standards of the Second World War. Nonetheless, it made Montgomery's reputation. It was a specifically British Commonwealth victory, after years of defeat. It was events at either end of the Allies' great central front, however, which would

demonstrate conclusively that the tide of the war against Germany had turned.

'TORCH'

Shortly before midnight on 7 November 1942, landing ships lowered assault craft packed with British and American infantry into the waves offshore of Algiers. In the early hours of the following morning they landed on beaches each side of the port. There was scarcely any resistance from the surprised French troops, but a stiff breeze pushed some of the invaders to the wrong location, and others got lost as they came ashore thanks to a thick fog. Two elderly British destroyers had been meant to crash their way into Algiers harbour and offload US Rangers who would secure the port facilities against sabotage. As they struggled to find the harbour entrance, however, the French shore batteries opened up, forcing HMS *Malcolm* to withdraw with boiler damage. HMS *Broke* eventually forced its way into the harbour, but landed its Rangers at the wrong place. Severely damaged by the French guns as it fought its way out, the *Broke* sank. The Rangers were forced to surrender briefly before being freed when Allied forces were allowed to enter the city.¹⁴

Further west, the debacle was bloodier. The two British sloops that tried to penetrate Oran harbour were shot up as they tried to dock. Most of the American troops aboard were killed or wounded before the ships blew up. Four French destroyers and a sloop emerged from the port to take on the vastly superior Allied fleet and were sunk in their turn. On beaches either side of the city, landing craft arrived late and damaged themselves in shallow waters and on unexpected sandbars. The delayed arrival of the invasion gave the French enough time to organize a defence of the city. It only surrendered the next day, after British cruisers and a battleship shelled the coastal artillery batteries. Even further west, the landing at Casablanca saw a gunfight between American and French battleships, and a major attempted sortie against the landing fleet by French destroyers that was beaten off with heavy losses. Casablanca held out until 11 November 1942.

Launching 'Torch' required a colossal maritime effort (see Map 3). Since the start of October, six advance convoys, totalling ninety-four ships and forty-two escorts, had travelled from the Clyde and Milford Haven to Gibraltar, bringing ammunition, fuel and other supplies for the landings, plus the tankers, coasters and landing ships that would ferry them across

the Mediterranean. From the end of October, four huge assault convoys departed the UK, carrying British and American troops, weapons and stores for the initial landings. They comprised 156 ships, including the specially equipped headquarters vessels from which commanders would run the fight to get ashore, and 52 escorts. Another 4 convoys, with a total of 138 ships and 75 escorts, travelled straight to Casablanca from the United States. In total, the Allied fleets covering the operation included six battleships, four fleet carriers, eight escort carriers, fifteen cruisers and eighty-one destroyers. Gibraltar, densely packed with planes, would act as a staging post from which fighters could fly in straight to newly captured airfields. Four hundred landing craft took part in the initial landings. ¹⁵

An operation of this scale could not be concealed. In the Atlantic, Uboats and aircraft sighted the approaching armada, while Axis agents in Spain reported on the build-up of forces in Gibraltar. The Italians guessed correctly that this presaged an invasion of French North Africa, but a wide-ranging British deception plan helped to convince the Germans that they were seeing preparations for a convoy that would head first for Malta before staging a landing either against Sicily or Sardinia or into the western part of Libya. The latter presumed a much closer co-ordination with Montgomery's attack in Egypt than the Allies ever achieved. 16 The French too were caught by surprise – they had assumed that any second front would involve a landing in Axis-controlled Europe. Fortunately for the Allies, the one U-boat pack operating to the west of Gibraltar was distracted at the end of October by an attack on Convoy SL125, then on its way southwards towards Sierra Leone. Remarkably, as more than 340 Allied vessels passed through the Straits of Gibraltar overnight on 7 November 1942, the only loss was one US assault ship damaged by an Axis torpedo. 17

With 70,000 troops disembarking from the invasion fleet, 'Torch' was the largest amphibious operation of the war so far. It demonstrated just how hard it was to conduct a successful mass assault even against a not-very-well-defended shoreline. Within three days, nonetheless, all the attacking formations were ashore, key airfields and ports had been secured and the brute force of the invasion armada had compelled an end to French resistance in the west. Yet 'Torch's' deep flaws would ensure that there would be no easy victory.

From the start, the Allies had disagreed about the location of the invasion. The British, eager to prevent the arrival of reinforcements and to clear the southern coast of the Mediterranean, wanted to land as far east as possible. The Americans, unconvinced about the strategic value of the

Mediterranean and worried their troops could be cut off by a German strike through Spain, wanted to establish a lodgement on the Atlantic coast. Churchill and Roosevelt agreed a vague and ugly compromise that left the whole operation's centre of gravity weighted westwards, away from the key Tunisian ports.

Overall command of 'Torch' had been given to Dwight Eisenhower. Despite his corn-fed Kansas smile, Eisenhower was an emotionally volatile man, suddenly elevated by General Marshall's favour to one of the most difficult commands in the transatlantic alliance. To his credit, he realized that managing inter-Allied relations was a key part of his job; he determinedly filled his Allied Forces Headquarters (AFHQ) with British and American officers and insisted that they should at least look as if they enjoyed working together. Like many commanders subsequently lauded for their individual talents, Eisenhower in fact functioned as part of a close-knit team with his chief of staff, General Walter Bedell Smith. Nicknamed 'Beetle', Bedell Smith was a bureaucratic bulldog who had already shown remarkable skill in alliance diplomacy and inter-service politics as secretary to the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington. Eisenhower's air forces were divided between British and American commanders. The naval forces that would cover the invasion were commanded by Admiral Andrew Cunningham, back from his post on the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington and put in charge of a new Allied naval command that stretched from the Atlantic coast of Morocco to the central Mediterranean.

Eisenhower had never commanded troops in battle, and his critics, including Brooke, dismissed him as a 'political' general. Ironically, therefore, it was the tortuous political situation created by Allied dealings with Vichy France that caused him some of his greatest difficulties. With their experience of Madagascar as well as Syria behind them, the British expected that occupying Vichy territory would involve a fight. The Americans, inspired by Roosevelt's personal envoy to North Africa, the diplomat Robert Murphy, hoped that if they took the lead and excluded de Gaulle, they could find Frenchmen who would welcome a transatlantic intervention with open arms. There were indeed French generals, such as Charles Mast, the chief of staff of the army in Algiers, who had spotted that the Axis powers were in trouble and hoped that an American expedition would allow them to safeguard French North Africa, and Murphy worked hard to recruit their support. Mast was aided by small groups of civilians, including Jewish families desperate to bring down Vichy. Some of these civilians were strong Gaullists, but Mast, like the Americans, loathed de Gaulle. He proposed a different figurehead – Henri Giraud, a distinguished French general who, having escaped from a German POW camp, was untainted by involvement with the Vichy regime.

At a secret meeting outside Algiers with Murphy and Eisenhower's deputy, US General Mark Clark, at the end of October 1942, Mast, under the impression that the invasion was still months away, promised that his conspirators could minimize any resistance. Other French commanders, however, including generals Noguès and Juin and Admiral Estéva, the resident generals in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia respectively, were far from convinced that the Allies were going to win the war. Admiral Darlan, the commander-in-chief of Vichy's armed forces, tried to play off the Germans and the Americans against each other. Hopes of a bloodless occupation proved badly misplaced.

Smuggled out of Vichy France to Gibraltar ahead of the landings, Giraud tried, unsuccessfully, to insist on being made supreme commander of the invasion. He told French troops to aid the landings. His orders were ignored, but Mast and his fellow plotters disrupted the territory's defences, captured Juin and Darlan (who was in Algiers to visit his sick son) and handed them over to the Americans. Darlan agreed a temporary ceasefire, which was promptly disavowed by the Vichy government. In Morocco, Noguès briefly fought back, until threatened with bombardment by the Allied fleet. In Tunisia, Estéva accepted Vichy's orders to assist the arrival of German and Italian troops. ¹⁹

Nonetheless, Darlan cut a deal with Clark and Murphy. If the Americans put him in charge, he'd bring over the whole of French North Africa. Eisenhower, worried at the prospect of a bloody fight, approved the arrangement on 13 November 1942. So did Cunningham, whose professional respect for his French colleagues outweighed his usually strong desire for battle. He believed that Darlan could order the remains of the French battlefleet to sail to Gibraltar. On 14 November, Admiral Darlan was installed as high commissioner of France in Africa.

Notwithstanding their surprise at the invasion, the Germans responded quickly. On 8 November 1942, Hitler told Field Marshal Kesselring to build up a bridgehead in Tunisia, and ordered the immediate occupation of Vichy France. The first German troops and Luftwaffe planes touched down in Tunisia on 9 November. Further reinforcements arrived steadily over the following days. The Germans shut down air attacks on the Arctic convoys and transferred fighters and bombers from the Eastern Front to the Mediterranean. The French authorities in Tunisia co-operated completely, handing over excellent port facilities and all-weather airfields.

Soon fifty German transport aircraft were landing a day, while the Axis air forces launched increasingly heavy attacks against the invasion fleet and advancing Allied troops. Fifteen U-boats were sent to attack Allied shipping off Morocco, while German and Italian submarines already in the Mediterranean concentrated off Algeria. Allied shipping losses started to rise. So too did those of Axis submarines. Advance elements of Lieutenant General Sir Kenneth Anderson's First British Army clashed with German troops for the first time on 17 November 1942. By the start of December, 15,000 German and 9,000 Italians, with about 100 tanks, had arrived to defend Tunisia. By the end of December, Luftwaffe transport units alone had flown in 42,000 troops, 8,600 tons of equipment and 1,500 tons of fuel.²⁰

Flying in this first rush of reinforcements cost the Germans 128 transport aircraft damaged or destroyed, but, critically, the Allies were not able to sever the supply routes to North Africa. Submarines from Malta could not break through the minefields protecting the sea lanes from Italy. The air forces in Algeria concentrated on defending the initial beachhead. In the Western Desert, despite the capture of the Derna airfields, Tedder's squadrons were too busy catching up with Montgomery's advance to intervene. Cunningham, blaming Tedder for a lack of effective maritime air support, did not reform Force K at Malta until 27 November. To the west, he established a new surface strike force, Force Q, at Bône only on 30 November 1942.²¹

The Allied inability to gain a quick victory in North Africa notwithstanding, 'Torch' had a major effect on France. Marshal Pétain retired. The Germans insisted that the government make major concessions, handing over all its remaining merchant ships – a 646,000-ton windfall for the beleaguered Axis merchant navies. Then German forces moved into the area under Vichy control. On 27 November 1942, they entered the naval base at Toulon. The fleet there had ignored Darlan's orders to come over to the Allies, but now abided by its pledge to scuttle itself rather than be seized by the Germans. French sailors wrecked and flooded a quarter of a million tons of warships. Allied naval planners no longer had to worry about the threat of French intervention, but French leaders on both sides of the Mediterranean had lost a significant bargaining tool. The Germans were now free to extract from France as much as they wished.

French troops in Tunisia did eventually come over to the Allied side, but Darlan had delivered on very few of his promises. Even on the basis of strategic pragmatism, therefore, installing him in power soon seemed like a very bad deal. Public opinion in Britain and America, where Darlan had been justly condemned as a Nazi collaborator, was appalled. Eisenhower and Cunningham nevertheless stuck by their man. Churchill and Roosevelt, however, were both sensitive to the impact on domestic opinion. They also feared the Russian reaction to this apparent compromise with Fascism. ²² Perhaps not coincidentally, on Christmas Eve 1942 Darlan was assassinated by a young French royalist who had been receiving training from SOE. Rumours ran rife that he had been done in by the British secret service. ²³ The French authorities in Algiers swiftly executed the assassin, rounded up the Allied sympathizers who had done their best to assist the 'Torch' landings, and installed Giraud in Darlan's place. Since Giraud neither purged Darlan's administration nor suspended Vichy's anti-Semitic legislation nor released those imprisoned by the previous regime, the reactionary taint remained.

By the time Darlan was assassinated, any chance of a quick conclusion to the campaign was gone. Through November, Anderson's British and American troops tried to cover the 500 miles between Algiers and Tunis. With the region entering the period of heavy winter rains, it was a race against the weather as well as the enemy. Even in good weather the terrain was difficult, with steep hillsides and mountains intersected by gullies and heavily cultivated valleys. Supplies were unloaded slowly at Algiers and the rail and road networks were very limited: the main lines of advance were easily recognized and blocked. In contrast, the infrastructure of harbours and airfields around Bizerte and Tunis greatly favoured the Axis powers. The Allied air forces' inability to control the skies meant Anderson's floating reserves could not be used to leapfrog up the coast, while the westward weight of the original landings made it difficult to maintain the pace of the advance.

Nevertheless, from 25 November 1942, it appeared that the First British Army might be on the brink of a dramatic success. British troops forced the Germans out of Medjez and Téboura, in the hills just west of Tunis, while American tanks shot up the airfield at Djejeida. This was, however, the last gasp of escaping steam. Inexperienced Allied troops were halted by German ambushes. German armoured reinforcements arrived in Tunis and, well supported from the air, went straight into action at the start of December, repulsing Anderson's advance. General Jürgen von Arnim, a veteran of the Eastern Front, arrived to take command of a newly formed Fifth Panzer Army: a mix of German and Italian troops that was now firmly positioned to defend Tunisia. Meanwhile Rommel's forces continued their retreat through Libya, withdrawing towards the eastern end

TRAVELLING AMERICAN

The Axis achievement in securing this foothold removed the possibility of quickly clearing the southern Mediterranean littoral. It also, however, stuck the Germans and Italians with a really costly commitment that would ultimately hasten their defeat. Just sustaining a much-expanded military presence in North Africa imposed an additional demand on Axis shipping. That put more strain on the already faltering Italian war economy. Then in December 1942, Allied strength – including American heavy bombers flying out of Egypt and Algeria – was finally brought to bear on the Axis supply routes to Tunisia. The effects were devastating. During that month, forty-five merchant ships and tankers left Italy for North Africa. Only twenty-nine arrived. Although German fighters, including newly arrived FW-190s, dominated the skies over Tunisia, Spitfires and Beaufighters flying from Malta began to exact a steady toll on German transport aircraft bringing reinforcements across the Mediterranean.

The attack on Axis supply lines was not yet enough to guarantee success on the battlefield. A renewed offensive from the First British Army, launched in late December 1942, ground to a halt in rain and mud as British, American and German units fought back and forth over a key terrain feature, Longstop Hill. Neither the British nor the Americans had sought a prolonged attritional battle for North Africa. Together, the failure quickly to grab Tunisia and the dirty dealings with the Vichy French put Eisenhower closer to being dismissed than at any other point in his career. Allied leaders remained convinced that a quick victory ought to be possible. In fact, however, what had been created was an opportunity to inflict a larger but slower defeat on Axis forces, who had forced their own head into the trap.

The commitment of US forces to North Africa opened personal possibilities too. Eisenhower's headquarters, at the Hôtel St George, just outside Algiers, swelled with staff officers and civilian administrators. As the Mediterranean focus shifted westwards, AFHQ became, for those ready to exploit it, a location of power alternative and superior to the might of GHQ Middle East in Cairo. Tedder, to his great reluctance, was due to return to London to take up a post as Portal's deputy. Instead, he responded to criticisms of RAFME's failure to isolate Tunisia by flying to

see Eisenhower.²⁷

Tedder argued that the newly arrived Allied air forces were repeating the same mistakes the British had learned to correct in the Middle East. He proposed the establishment of a new Mediterranean air command – with himself at the head – which would co-ordinate an air campaign across the entire theatre. Churchill and Portal supported the idea. Even Cunningham was in favour. Eisenhower, however, was wary both of American reactions and of the risk of being sucked further into the Mediterranean. He liked Tedder, but Eisenhower's preferred solution was to unify the command of 'Torch' air operations under an American airman, General Carl Spaatz.

A final decision on the organization of the Mediterranean air forces would be taken at the Anglo-American conference scheduled to take place at Casablanca in January 1943. While Tedder, back in Egypt, waited for his future to be determined, personal tragedy struck. His wife, Rosalinde, had accompanied him to the Middle East. Like other socially active spouses, she concerned herself with trying to improve the welfare of the men under her husband's command. On 4 January 1943, the aircraft flying her back from an inspection of hospital and recreation facilities in Benghazi crashed at Heliopolis airfield outside Cairo. Everyone aboard was killed. Quietly devastated, Tedder prepared to leave for Casablanca.

Meanwhile a new arrival had reached Algiers. Eager to get Britain back into the North African loop after the Darlan debacle, on 22 December 1942 Churchill had appointed Harold Macmillan as British minister resident to Allied Forces Headquarters. Macmillan was one of a cohort of Tories who had gone into politics after serving as junior officers in the trenches. He had a successful career as a publisher and writer between the wars, including writing *The Middle Way*, an influential attempt to map out a centre ground between socialism and individualism. Yet Macmillan had been dissatisfied with his lack of political achievement. A staunch antiappeaser, he had been brought into the Churchill Coalition government as a junior minister, first at the Ministry of Supply, then at the Colonial Office. Neither post had fulfilled his relentless ambition. When the prime minister offered him the chance to represent the Cabinet in Algiers, he jumped at it. Much to Eden's annoyance, Macmillan had a direct line to Churchill and licence to involve himself in the complex politics of the Mediterranean. The job made his career.²⁸

And almost ended it. In another reminder of the hazards of wartime air travel, on 22 February 1943 Macmillan only just struggled free from the burning wreckage after his plane crashed on take-off. Masked with bandages in a French army hospital, Macmillan was visited by Tedder and

Admiral Cunningham, who told him never to trust the RAF if he wanted to travel safely: 'For myself,' Macmillan recorded Cunningham saying, 'I generally travel American.' If this was, as the minister resident thought, 'just naughtiness and to tease the air marshal', it was in the circumstances pretty distasteful.²⁹ Yet Cunningham, Tedder and Macmillan were all going to benefit from the good working relationship they established with Eisenhower. Notwithstanding the disdain with which many British leaders initially regarded the fighting power of the American armed forces, the alliance created a route to the top that involved 'travelling American'. For Macmillan, who was — like Churchill — half-American, it came very naturally.

The key point about 'Torch' was less the failure to achieve a quick victory than the fact that it made the outcome of El Alamein irreversible. The threat of an Axis offensive through Egypt was finally ended. On the Eastern Front, meanwhile, the battle for Stalingrad had turned decisively against the Axis forces. On 19 November 1942, the Red Army had launched a counter-attack on each flank of the rubbled city. Four days later, they completed their encirclement. Throughout December, German forces outside fought unsuccessfully to break through to the army trapped within. Hitler's great summer offensive had been defeated.

The encirclement of Stalingrad meant that over the winter of 1942–3 the Luftwaffe had to try to sustain two costly improvised air transport campaigns simultaneously. Even attempting to do this required an all-out effort that emptied Luftwaffe training schools of students and instructors. As losses mounted on both fronts – to accidents by inexperienced pilots as well as to enemy action – the flow of newly trained aircrew began to be fatally interrupted.³⁰

With the threat of a German thrust over the Caucasus removed and Rommel retreating through Libya, Britain's position in the Middle East was at last secure, but the legacy of the colossal effort to defend the imperial nexus remained. The huge base areas in Palestine and around the Suez Canal were filled with depots of weapons and equipment. There were more than 850,000 troops under British control between Libya and Iran. Notwithstanding the rise of its rival Allied sibling at Algiers, Middle East Command in Cairo remained influential and was used to being at the centre of events. Its residual military might would exercise its own momentum during 1943.³¹

'A GREATER PORTION OF THE BURDEN WE ARE

EAGER TO SHARE'

Between November and December, Churchill and the chiefs of staff settled a new set of compromises over future British strategy ahead of their January conference with the Americans. This restated the Allied commitment to the struggle in the Atlantic, the bombing campaign against German cities and an eventual cross-Channel invasion by Anglo-American forces, but placed renewed emphasis on offensive options in the Mediterranean. Since the Allies did not for the moment have the shipping to bring all the troops they would need for a decisive invasion to the UK before summer 1943, British strategists argued, they should build on their success in North Africa to seize Sicily and try to knock Italy out of the war. Meanwhile, they proposed a major diplomatic effort to bring Turkey onto the Allied side, opening a new supply line through the Dardanelles to the Soviet Union, drawing off Axis strength from the Eastern Front and providing airbases from which Allied bombers could attack enemy oil production in Romania.

Both Churchill and Brooke were strongly attached 'Mediterranean Strategy'. Recognizing as it did the need to do something with the build-up of Allied power in the theatre, and the practical difficulties in relocating these forces to another theatre, it embodied the flexible, make-do-and-mend approach that the British had adopted since 1940. As before, it was based on the acceptance that Axis strength must be worn down before any attempt was made at a serious cross-Channel invasion. It also reflected deeper assumptions about the value of the Mediterranean as a location of imperial strategic power. As both Churchill and Brooke acknowledged, these were not shared by the Americans. They would therefore present the seizure of Sicily not as the path into southern Europe, but rather as the means to secure the Mediterranean and re-open it for merchant traffic, shortening the route to the Indian Ocean and saving a million tons of shipping in reduced journey times a year. The British chiefs insisted that shortages of shipping, landing craft and trained troops would rule out any invasion of Northwest Europe until 1944. Churchill, with promises to his allies to keep, demanded that the possibility of a cross-Channel attack in 1943 be left open, provided that a quick victory in North Africa released the necessary resources in time. Depending on one's point of view, this reflected incorrigible optimism, ignorance of military logistics, or a reluctance to disappoint Stalin and Roosevelt before he had to.³²

At the start of December, the prime minister took the decisions about how manpower would be distributed over the coming year. As the country approached the peak of mobilization, the 'strategical considerations' that Sir John Anderson had noted in November 1942 came into play. Forced to choose between the demands of service and supply departments, the British prioritized maritime and aerial power.

Since a renewed German air assault on the UK was unlikely, and the army would not be engaged in heavy fighting outside the Mediterranean, severe reductions were imposed on Civil Defence, the army's demands for new recruits cut from 809,000 to 429,000, and the Ministry of Supply's workforce reduced by 78,000 personnel. In contrast, the Admiralty's demands were cut much less, from 509,000 to 434,000 new sailors and workers. Nonetheless, a shortfall in shipbuilding labour required battleship construction to be halted in favour of the escort programme, which was to have the same priority as the manufacture of aircraft. For the RAF and the Ministry of Aircraft Production, the emphasis was to be on building new aircraft rather than manning new squadrons. The RAF's manpower requirements were slashed by almost half, to 247,000 men and women, but, relative to its gargantuan demand for labour, MAP suffered the smallest cut of any of the supply departments. It was to take in another half a million workers during 1943. This would give it a workforce of more than two million people, more than any other supply department, and not including the tens of thousands of workers making aircraft guns and filling bombs for the Ministry of Supply.³³

The prime minister also addressed himself to the shipping position. Thanks to 'Torch', British import levels fell to their lowest of the entire war over the winter of 1942–3. To make sure that Roosevelt lived up to his pledge on merchant shipping, Churchill reminded the president on 30 December that, without US help, he would 'be forced immediately to reduce the British War Effort in oversea [sic] theatres even though this involves prolongation of the war and leaves you a greater portion of the burden we are eager to share.'34 Unwilling to contemplate a further reduction in food imports, Churchill accepted that any shortfalls would be met with a temporary cut in raw material consumption, even if that meant lower munitions production (in the end there were sufficient stockpiles that it did not, but it was a trade-off he was willing to make). Encouraged by Cherwell, Churchill also sought to restore British import levels by diverting ships away from the Indian Ocean. He had long complained about the extravagant logistic demands of British forces in the Middle East. At the start of January 1943, he decided that they could live on the

fat they had accumulated over the previous years. This allowed the number of ships Britain was sending to the Indian Ocean to be cut by more than half. The rest could be used to bring an additional 2 million tons of imports into the UK.³⁵

This redirection of shipping had implications for civilians right round the Indian Ocean. Non-military shipments to the region had already been cut by about 60 per cent in order to facilitate the materiel build-up for El Alamein.³⁶ Already, local administrators were warning of looming food shortages. Since the summer, the interventions of the Middle East Supply Centre had only just forestalled a food disaster. Further cuts limited the Empire's ability quickly to ship in supplies in response to any future crisis.

'BACK TO THE STUFFY OLD WAYS'

According to Home Intelligence, the news of success in Egypt and the landings in North Africa meant that the British public thought the second week of November 1942 'the best . . . of the war' so far: 'While "a good many people try to remain cautious in the midst of general jubilation", reports . . . indicate a growing belief that the war will be over within the coming year — "the less thoughtful suggest the Spring or even Christmas".'³⁷

Churchill was cautious about a premature celebration. Only on 15 November 1942 did he order church bells, silent except for invasion warnings since the summer of 1940, to be rung in celebration of the double victory – after the Eighth Army had taken more than 20,000 prisoners and the 'Torch' landings were clearly firmly ashore with no risk of displacement. News of the deal with Admiral Darlan threatened to sour the good mood. Only 18 per cent of those surveyed by the BIPO in December 1942 approved of his appointment in North Africa: 52 per cent were against it.³⁸ Mass-Observation recorded widespread anger in street interviews: 'a rat . . . I think they ought to shoot him.' 'The chaps where I work have a lot to say about it . . . Just as we were thinking a bit better of them too, for this show in North Africa. Back to the stuffy old ways.'

Military victories had plainly not removed lingering suspicions about the 'old gang', but they did strengthen Churchill's political position. In September 1942, 41 per cent of those questioned by the BIPO had expressed approval of the government's direction of the war. By December that figure was up to 75 per cent. Ninety-three per cent of respondents approved of Churchill as prime minister.⁴¹

Churchill now settled the previous year's political disturbances with a reshuffle that totally secured his position. Cripps' earlier resignation offer was accepted. Moved out of the War Cabinet, he was made minister of aircraft production, replacing the Conservative Jay Llewellin, who was shifted to the post of minister resident in Washington, where he negotiated directly with the Americans over issues of supply.⁴² Eden doubled up his work at the Foreign Office by taking on Cripps' duties as leader of the House. His increased presence in the Commons made him popular with Conservative MPs, but threatened to exhaust him completely.⁴³ Oliver Stanley, after all his criticism from the backbenches, joined the government as colonial secretary.

The most important move of the reshuffle saw Herbert Morrison take Cripps' place in the War Cabinet. Greeting his appointment, the *Daily Express* praised his 'firmness' and 'honesty of purpose', while *Reynolds News* congratulated him for not having lost sight of 'the relationship of socialism to the war'. ⁴⁴ In tactical terms, it was a very clever stroke by Churchill; it helped to elevate a real rival to Attlee and shifted the political dynamics within the Labour leadership. But it also indicated both Morrison's rare achievement in having made a success of his time as home secretary, and the way in which the war had created an opportunity for a man of his remarkable political abilities.

With the danger of imminent collapse passed, Churchill pushed back harder against critics of the Empire. The US Republican politician Wendell Willkie, on a much-publicized world tour as Roosevelt's special envoy, had announced in Chungking that the war must mean the end of colonial rule. In a speech at London's Mansion House on 10 November 1942, during which he famously declared that the recent successes in North Africa represented 'not even the beginning of the end. But . . . perhaps, the end of the beginning', Churchill made a public reply: 'We mean to hold our own. I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.'⁴⁵

This was a powerful public statement of determination, aimed both at Wilkie (whose approach to colonial self-government was in fact notably gradualist) and at those within the government whom Churchill thought were rushing to abandon Britain's imperial mission. It was of a part with his bloodthirsty September celebration of the defeat of 'Quit India', and it was not wholly popular with the British public. Home Intelligence explained that reactions to this section of the speech were split: pleased though they were with the North African victory, many Britons did not

think that they were fighting to defend the Empire.⁴⁶

The ringing rhetoric of the Mansion House speech is well known, but a much less famous speech that Churchill gave to a Secret Session of the House of Commons on 10 December 1942 in fact had more immediate political impact. He explained plainly to MPs outraged by the Darlan affair not only that the whole business had been foisted on the British by the Americans, but also that London had little choice but to accept Eisenhower's decision because de Gaulle was so unpopular in France and in Washington. Buoyed up by the release of tension after 'Torch' and El Alamein, Churchill won over members on both sides of the House. Before long, however, political discussions were dominated by a new topic: the publication of Sir William Beveridge's *Report into Social Insurance and Allied Services*.

'WOULDN'T THE BEVERIDGE PLAN BE UTOPIA, IF IT EVER COMES TO PASS'

A new political mood was evident during the debate on the King's Speech that began on 11 November 1942. MPs praised the military and made clear their expectation of future controversies over domestic policy, including post-war planning and the Beveridge Report. Launching the debate, Churchill and Cripps (in his last act as leader of the House) re-emphasized that, while parliamentary time would be set aside to discuss reconstruction, the government would only legislate on non-war matters for which there was 'a general measure of agreement' across the House.⁴⁸

In that light, the reception being prepared for the Beveridge Report looked increasingly ominous. On 16 November, Brendan Bracken reported to the War Cabinet (as recorded by the Cabinet secretary in his notebook) that Beveridge had demanded the Ministry of Information's assistance in giving advanced briefings to the press, and was now 'Workg. up political campaign. To disclose not only contents of Rpt. but his views on it.'⁴⁹ The week before, the *Daily Telegraph* had reported an interview with Beveridge in which he said that his scheme would take Britain 'half way to Moscow'. This antagonized Conservative MPs, and was in turn portrayed by left-wing commentators as a deliberate attempt to block Beveridge's proposals.⁵⁰ Churchill complained to his colleagues about Beveridge's political naivety:

Pity if such a comprehensive scheme failed to get a fair chance because of propag. of its

author . . . He will spoil it all if he pushes it: will arouse opposition. WAJ [William Jowitt, the Labour minister of reconstruction] should tell him so. Let us have a little order and discipline. 51

Bracken and Churchill agreed that the government would publish the report as a Command Paper — a format that would allow ministers to avoid taking any official stance on it, because, as Churchill put it: 'like it or not, we haven't made up our minds . . .' With publication set for 1 December 1942, however, Attlee insisted that the government would then have to decide its position quickly, and well ahead of the first parliamentary debate on the report, which would take place early in the New Year. ⁵³

The Labour leader was walking a fine line. The pressure on Attlee from his own party did not cease with the 'turn of the tide'. He had no wish to be stampeded into a fight that might threaten the Coalition, but nor was he willing to be stonewalled for ever by Churchill's refusal to take practical steps towards social reform.⁵⁴

At the War Cabinet meeting on 26 November, Churchill lamented the lack of a wider plan within which to consider the costs of Beveridge's proposals. Echoing the advice he was being given by Cherwell, he told his colleagues:

All these things have to be considered together. Finance can't be left out of it. Like this Rpt., but must see how it fits into p-war plan as a whole. Ought to finish Article 7 convns with US. If we promise this largesse, far ahead of US standards, they may say 'we are being asked to pay for this'. 55

When Sir John Anderson asked, 'Could we not welcome it in principle?', pointing out that it would be a 'pity . . . to let it appear' that the government had been 'dragged reluctantly to support' the Beveridge plan, both Churchill and Chancellor Kingsley Wood 'Indicated some dissent.' ⁵⁶

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Information initially threw its weight behind the launch of the Beveridge Report. This reflected the way in which the military successes of early November 1942 opened a moment of opportunity in the battle for morale at home and abroad. The British people, still only at the 'end of the beginning', might, it was hoped, be reinspired by being shown that the government was considering the post-war world. The population of Occupied Europe could be offered a secure alternative to the deprivation of continued Nazi rule.

With its insistence that 'a revolutionary moment in the history of the world is a time for revolutions, not for patching', Beveridge's report was well suited to this role. Its emphasis on social security consciously echoed and referred to earlier statements of Allied war aims in the Atlantic Charter

and the United Nations' Declaration.⁵⁷ Thanks to the intervention of Beveridge's soon-to-be-wife, Jessy Mair, its less technical passages were written with a dramatic style unusual for an official report. They combined a Wesleyan depiction of the need to smite the evil giants on the road to progress – Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor and Idleness – with an insistence that improving social welfare was a natural part of the current struggle:

The prevention of war and the diminution and relief of disease . . . are in fact a common interest of all citizens. It may be possible to secure a keener realisation of that fact in war than it is in peace, because war breeds national unity. It may be possible, through a sense of national unity and readiness to sacrifice personal interests to the common cause, to bring about changes . . . which it might be difficult to make at other times. 58

At Bracken's instigation, the momentum of expectation that Beveridge had built over the previous months was reinforced by the official publicity machine. The BBC, newspapers and newsreel companies all celebrated and explained in detail what was now called the 'Beveridge Plan'. Large print runs were commissioned so that the report itself could be put on sale to the public. A special pocket version was prepared by the Army Bureau of Current Affairs for dissemination to, and discussion by, British and Dominion soldiers.⁵⁹

The public response went well beyond what anyone in government had anticipated. In its report on the first week of December 1942, Home Intelligence recorded that 'The Beveridge Report is everywhere said to have been the main subject of conversation, and "the war news has tended to take a back seat". It appears to have been welcomed by the great majority – enthusiastically, by many; "wage earners" are said to be particularly pleased with it.'⁶⁰ There was widespread concern, however, that Beveridge had done too little to address the needs of pensioners; businessmen worried about the implications for exports, and people 'in "all walks of life" 'feared 'that "the high rates of benefits may prove an incentive to laziness and thriftlessness".'⁶¹

Within a month of the report's publication, 100,000 copies had been sold — an astonishing figure for a 299- page official report with 7 substantial appendices. A huge survey commissioned by the BIPO at the end of December found overwhelming public endorsement of the Plan. Ninety-five per cent of respondents knew about the Beveridge Report. Eighty-six per cent — including three-quarters of those on higher incomes and nine out of ten professionals — believed that it ought to be implemented in full. Two-thirds of those in favour thought that it would

make them personally better off, but the Plan's supporters therefore included a substantial minority who did not presume on any personal gain.⁶³ By a combination of self-promotion and good fortune, Beveridge had created a document that symbolized the popular desire for the future to be spared the fear and worry of the past.⁶⁴

Right from the start, however, reactions were tempered by doubts that the Beveridge Plan would ever be delivered. According to Home Intelligence: 'General approval of the scheme' was

followed 'almost in the same breath' – by fear that it may be 'too good to go through'. 'Wouldn't the Beveridge Plan be Utopia, if it ever comes to pass' is a typical comment. To quote a 1914–1918 ex-serviceman (Postal Censorship): 'This new plan for social security makes me laugh, I don't forget the Land Fit for Heroes of the last war.'65

In Yorkshire, a forty-two-year-old housewife who was keeping a diary for Mass-Observation expressed her fear that Beveridge had not been revolutionary enough:

Seems quite sound but don't suppose it will come to anything in the long run. It won't be allowed to work. Anyway it seems to me that you can't build socialism on capitalist foundations. But as far as it goes it is good and it's full of pious aspirations. ⁶⁶

As that suggests, the release of the Beveridge Report brought divisions within and between the political parties to a head. Excitement about Beveridge suffused rank-and-file members of the Labour Party, who castigated their leaders' cautious approach as another example of their failure to seize the socialist moment. Their party wanted not just a firm commitment for the future, but the immediate implementation of all of Beveridge's reforms.⁶⁷

In contrast, the report exposed the continuing gaps between different elements of the Conservative Party. A rump of reactionary Tories was appalled by the onward march of socialism. More radical right-wingers and libertarians fretted at the erosion of individual responsibility. Moderate Conservatives accepted the need for welfare improvements, but worried about the cost, the consequences for taxation, and the extent to which this would distract from other national priorities. Even those, such as 'Rab' Butler, who recognized that it 'is important that our Party should not appear obstructive' were deeply irritated by Beveridge's co-option of the struggle against the evils of Nazism as a justification for his particular brand of collectivist reform. ⁶⁸ A group of younger Tory MPs, more progressive than moderates such as Butler, however, saw Beveridge's proposals as part of a new political reality to which they would have to

adapt. They would not accept the strategy adopted by other Conservatives in Parliament over the winter of 1942–3, which was to welcome the Beveridge Report in principle, but attempt to wear down and stretch out the details by which it would be implemented in practice.⁶⁹

For Beveridge, the immediate aftermath of his report's publication was the most fulfilling time of his life. Speaking at packed public meetings, elevated to the status of national guru by the newsreels and the press, buttonholed by female admirers – at last he was accorded the status he felt he had always deserved. He had cooked up a witch's brew for the government of popular enthusiasm, party politics and the practical problems of preparing for the post-war world. None of the ministers involved would let him anywhere near the policy-making machinery again.

The impetus that Beveridge had provided, however, was good news for Butler, whose plans for education now looked much more attractive to those who wanted to demonstrate progress on some non-Beveridgean reforms. Once Churchill had been assured that High Anglican Tory peers supported Butler's religious settlement, he came round to raising the school-leaving age: 'Ought to have been done years ago -helps to solve unemployment.'⁷⁰ Wood and Anderson worried about the cost, but Butler demonstrated that the new scheme could be phased in gradually. Anderson accepted the argument that better education was crucial to the country's economic survival. In any case, as he assured Butler, he would rather spend money on schools than 'throw it down the sink with Sir William Beveridge'. 71 Despite opposition from Herbert Morrison, who did not want a Conservative minister gaining political capital from reforms, Bevin and Anderson's support ensured that the Lord President's Committee approved Butler's plans for a White Paper. Delivered to Parliament in the New Year, it would form the basis for a new Education Act that would be the first concrete step on the road to reconstruction.⁷²

13

'Morning Thoughts'

January–March 1943

On New Year's Day 1943, Alan Brooke, the chief of the imperial general staff, looked back at the year just gone in his diary. On 'Jan 1st last year . . . I could see nothing but calamities ahead . . . Horrible doubts, horrible nightmares, which grew larger and larger as the days went on till it felt as if the whole Empire was collapsing round my head':

And now! We start 1943 under conditions I would never have dared to hope. Russia has held, Egypt for the present is safe. There is hope of clearing North Africa of Germans in the near future. The Mediterranean may be partially opened. Malta is safe for the present. We can now work freely against Italy, and Russia is scoring wonderful successes . . . We are certain to have many setbacks to face . . . but for all that the horizon is infinitely brighter. ¹

The shift in the war in the Allies' favour at the end of 1942 meant that new vistas opened up at the start of 1943. These encompassed not only attempts to develop a coherent Allied strategy for the offensives that would lead to victory, but also more concrete plans for domestic and international reconstruction. As usual, Churchill seized the military moment but hung fire on the post-war future. The decisions that would shape what happened after victory were being taken nonetheless: if not in London then in Washington.

'WE HAVE GOT PRACTICALLY ALL WE HOPED TO GET WHEN WE CAME HERE!'

Churchill and Roosevelt were both eager for an Allied conference to settle military policy for 1943, but Stalin rejected the invitation to join them. With the Red Army pinching out the Stalingrad pocket, however, the risk of a Soviet collapse no longer set the strategic agenda. Compared to the frantic transatlantic travelling of spring and summer 1942, January 1943

was a much riper moment to consider a genuinely offensive strategy.

The conference took place between 14 and 24 January 1943 at a tightly guarded complex of buildings around the Anfa Hotel, close to the Moroccan port of Casablanca. Getting there was not easy. Brooke and Mountbatten shared an uncomfortable night flight on the floor of a converted Liberator bomber, the snoring chief of Combined Operations draping his arms and legs across his infuriated companion, while the sleepless CIGS jabbed fruitlessly at him with his elbows. At least on their arrival, the warm sunlight and fresh oranges offered the British delegates a welcome change from the austere gloom of the London winter. Supported by a big team of staff planners, well briefed by Dill and ruthlessly marshalled by Brooke, they had two objectives: to reassert the primacy of the war against Germany, and to drive the southern front across the Mediterranean and into Italy in 1943, rather than attempting a Northwest European invasion.

The Americans disagreed, both with the British and with each other. Marshall wanted to shut down the Mediterranean so the Allies could concentrate on a cross-Channel attack. Admiral King wanted more resources for the war against Japan. Admiral Leahy, Roosevelt's chief of staff, too ill to attend the conference but an influential presence from afar, agreed. Leahy argued that unless the British could launch a major offensive from India to re-establish a land supply route to China, the Americans should step up their own efforts to ensure the defeat of Japan. Unlike his admirals, Roosevelt believed that America should devote the major proportion of its war effort to defeating Germany. He liked the idea of quick victories, however, and, unlike his generals, he was persuadable that the Mediterranean was the place to get them.⁴

The British and Americans quickly agreed on the importance of beating the U-boats in the Atlantic and maintaining the flow of supplies to the Soviet Union. The airmen pushed successfully for their independent bombing campaigns against Germany. Placed under Portal, this was termed the Combined Bomber Offensive. In fact, it would be fought almost completely separately by British and American forces operating at night and in daylight respectively. Yet the conference stalled when the British chiefs blocked Marshall's demands for an all-out effort to invade Northwest Europe in 1943.

Brooke was relentless in his logic: the Allies needed to increase their shipping capacity and weaken the German army in France before a cross-Channel invasion could succeed. An invasion of Sicily would achieve both. It would secure the Mediterranean sea route, freeing up a million

tons of shipping a year by cutting journey times to the Indian Ocean, and compel the Axis powers to commit forces to defend their long southern flank. In contrast, building up Allied strength in the UK ahead of a 1943 invasion of France would preclude any operation in the Mediterranean, leaving the troops already there standing idle and allowing the Germans and Italians to recover from the losses they were suffering in North Africa.⁶

For Brooke, the seizure of Sicily was part of a broader plan to crack open the Axis position in Europe. It would knock Italy out of the war, completing the long Mediterranean imperial war that the British had been waging since 1940 and defeating the weakest of the Axis powers. Not only would the Germans then be forced to commit troops who would otherwise be defending France or fighting the Red Army to their southern front, but the Allies would also develop a position from which to attack raw material supplies from Romania, Turkey and the Balkans. The great advantage of this strategy, from a British point of view, was that while not precluding an eventual cross-Channel assault, it offered the hope of sparking an Axis collapse without a prolonged attritional campaign in France. That might secure a relatively quick end to the war while Britain's relatively advanced military mobilization still gave it a powerful role within the Grand Alliance.

Rather than open up the gap between this strategy and Marshall's preference for a climactic land battle in Northwest Europe, Brooke presented Sicily as the logical culmination of the campaign in North Africa rather than a stepping-stone across the Mediterranean. He silenced divergent viewpoints from his own side of the table, including Admiral Cunningham's insistence that with the North African shore secure, he didn't need Sicily to protect the shipping through-route to the Suez Canal, and Mountbatten's argument (inspired by the joint planners) that Sardinia was a better option that would give Allied aircraft the range to attack into southern Germany. Having squashed the alternatives in private British discussions, Brooke was furious to hear Mountbatten loudly informing Harry Hopkins that his advice on Sardinia had been ignored.⁷

To break the deadlock, Dill and Sir John Slessor, the vice chief of the air staff, brokered a compromise deal. Crucially, it committed the Allies to an invasion of Sicily without defining what would come next. 'Now we have got practically all we hoped to get when we came here!', an exhausted Brooke confided to his diary, but this had been achieved in no small part because Admiral King recognized that the plan would allow him to keep funnelling maritime resources to the Pacific.⁸ After Casablanca,

the US Navy concentrated about 90 per cent of its strength on the war against Japan.⁹

Though the combined chiefs clearly understood that choosing the Mediterranean meant putting off a cross-Channel invasion until 1944, Churchill and Roosevelt, with promises to keep to Stalin, told them to write a potential autumn invasion into their plans. That meant continuing 'Bolero', the build-up of US forces in Britain. In response to American pressure, meanwhile, the British agreed to launch a large offensive from India into Burma. In American eyes, this operation, codenamed 'Anakim', was a quid pro quo for the Sicilian gambit, and Leahy seized on it as an indicator of good faith within the alliance. ¹⁰ Since, however, the British did not share the American belief in the importance of aiding China, and lacked the military resources to undertake such a major operation *and* fight their way across the Mediterranean, they would not quickly follow through on what the Americans thought they had promised.

This messy patchwork complicates the idea of Casablanca as a British success. To be sure, the British returned from Casablanca happy that they had secured the strategy they wanted in the Mediterranean – in contrast to American army staff officers who felt they had once again been finagled by their wily allies. Brooke was certainly relieved to have saved Allied plans from Marshall's naivety. The price, however, was another strategic bodge in which the British and Americans had, in part deliberately, talked past each other to achieve a temporary consensus. If that kept their alliance together, it also resulted in a global dispersion of effort and laid the foundations for accusations of betrayal as the balance of power tilted further in favour of the United States.

In terms of military experience and effectiveness, the British still held the whip hand. With Eisenhower's reputation close to rock bottom and the two fronts closing in North Africa, the Casablanca conference addressed problems of coalition command with a series of appointments that put British officers in control. Tedder took charge of a unified Allied Mediterranean Air Command that stretched from the Middle East to Morocco; Cunningham became commander-in-chief of Allied naval forces in the central Mediterranean; and as soon as the Eighth Army closed on Tunisia, General Alexander would take over command of land forces as Eisenhower's deputy. Booting 'Ike' upstairs did not, however, conceal the clear direction of travel in Anglo-American relations.

WASHINGTON ON LONDON'

One of the things that Churchill and Roosevelt did not talk about directly at Casablanca was the recent American decision to stop the interchange of atomic information with the UK. Churchill took the matter up with Harry Hopkins instead. Starting eight months of continuous lobbying, the prime minister argued that having shared so much of their knowledge in 1940 and 1941, it was only fair that the British should be given full access to the outcomes of the American atomic project. Hopkins promised action, but nothing changed. This confused Churchill, because he believed that Roosevelt would want to abide by the agreement they had made in June 1942, at which Hopkins had been present. In fact, as Hopkins now understood, Roosevelt shared the view of his soldiers and scientists, that, since the Americans were doing almost all the development work, they were well within their rights to lock the British out. 12 In the spring of 1943 the British contemplated restarting their own independent atomic programme; however, the estimates of manpower and material involved convinced them that there was no choice but to secure American assistance. 13

At Casablanca, Roosevelt was more concerned to plaster over the debacle of Eisenhower's dealings with Darlan. The British and Americans planned to meld Giraud's administration in North Africa and de Gaulle's Free French into some sort of coherent and respectable government. The British compelled a reluctant de Gaulle to come to Morocco, but when he found out the Americans planned to subsume him in a barely reformed Giraudist administration, he rebelled. The British, he raged, were complicit in an American plot to wreck France, 'not very willingly but by force, since the pressure in all areas exerted by Washington on London reaches an intensity and character [which are] literally unbelievable. 14 After a second meeting with Churchill descended into another shouting match, de Gaulle walked out. Roosevelt was not too concerned. At the press conference that closed the conference on 24 January, he tricked de Gaulle and Giraud into shaking hands in front of the cameras. The resultant pictures suggested that the president was the only one enjoying the occasion.

Roosevelt had a bigger reveal planned to occupy the attention of the pressmen. Determined to show that they would countenance no further compromises with the enemy, he and Churchill declared publicly that the Allies would be satisfied only by the 'unconditional surrender' of all the

Axis powers. The decision to make this declaration had been taken very quickly, but not so fast that Churchill had been unable to discuss it with the War Cabinet. The prime minister, in pragmatic mood, suggested that Italy might be left out of the announcement in order to encourage its political disintegration. His colleagues insisted that the term must apply to all Britain's enemies. 15

Diplomatically, unconditional surrender was a significant step that would complicate the war's ending; but both practically – bearing in mind the regimes they faced – and politically – given the strength of popular revulsion at the Darlan deal – it is hard to see what else Roosevelt and Churchill could have done. The reaction picked up by Home Intelligence at the time was largely positive: the only negative response being that any discussion of 'surrender' implied the Allies were offering 'the enemy a chance of giving in, whereas what they need is "beating, slaughtering and bombing at home".' As far as some Britons were concerned, 'unconditional surrender' wasn't strong enough.

'WILD DREAMS OF BRINGING TURKEY ALONG WITH US'

Churchill's commitment to the Mediterranean was apparent in the journey he and Brooke took from Casablanca. They went first to Cairo, then to Adana in Turkey, then (via Cyprus) back to Cairo again, then back along the coast to celebrate the Eighth Army's capture of Tripoli and confirm future plans at Algiers, before finally heading home.

Held aboard two stationary trains in the middle of a rain-sodden plain, the Adana meeting was one of the more bizarre episodes of the war. In an effort to remain incognito, the British officers accompanying Churchill had borrowed civilian clothes from the embassy staff in Cairo. Nothing fitted. A jacket belonging to the outsize ambassador, Miles Lampson, dwarfed even the elephantine 'Jumbo' Wilson. Brooke, making do with an oversized pair of trousers, had the waistband, hitched just below his armpits, poking out from the top of his waistcoat and covering most of his tie. Having made such an effort with his disguise, the CIGS was taken aback to be told by the Turkish foreign minister that the whole country was very excited about the secret British visit.

What was perhaps even more extraordinary was that the British were undertaking the mission at all, since they had copious intelligence indicating that Turkey's leaders would not abandon their neutrality. Explaining this stance to the British, the Turks complained a lot about the threat of German intervention, but in fact they had no desire to unbalance the prolonged Mediterranean confrontation, from which they were deriving considerable material benefit. ¹⁷ Churchill hoped that in return for British military supplies, the Turks would cease supplying chrome to Axis industries, and hand over airbases from which the RAF could attack Romanian oilfields. The inevitable German reaction would open a new front that would further overstretch the enemy. ¹⁸

After two days of discussion, even the previously sceptical Brooke thought they were making progress, his excitement matched only by the thrill of glimpsing a pallid harrier quartering the sky above the negotiations. The thrill soon faded when decrypts of the Turkish minutes of the Adana meeting showed that, like the harrier, they were going to keep circling the fight. It took a long while for Churchill to come round, but British hopes of Turkish belligerency diminished during the first half of 1943. Yet the interest in a Turkish deal demonstrated British fascination with the strategic possibilities of the eastern Mediterranean. This fascination, licensed by Churchill's attention, went far beyond anything to which the US military thought it had assented with the decision to invade Sicily.

The prizes on offer were enticing: not just the drawing down of Axis forces that might otherwise be used on the Atlantic Wall or the Eastern Front, but the achievement of significant strategic effect against raw materials, transport links and enemy morale. At the start of May, the joint planners estimated that if the Allies were able to occupy the Balkan Peninsula, they would cut off 50 per cent of Germany's chrome imports and 40 per cent of its copper, as well as posing a major threat to the oil supplies coming from Romania. More distantly lurked the desire to shore up Britain's future international position by re-establishing its influence across the Mediterranean's northern shore.

In practice, however, the opportunities for decisive action were limited, in part because British resources were already too committed to allow further independent action. The British had long toyed with the idea of seizing the Dodecanese as a means to dominate the Aegean – and to offer to Turkey as an inducement to join the war. From the start of 1943, officers at Middle East Command in Cairo worked up plans for an amphibious assault, codenamed Operation 'Accolade', to capture Rhodes and its crucial airbase. As Allied Forces HQ in Algiers became the power centre in the Mediterranean, 'Accolade' also offered a means for Cairo to

force itself back into the action. Staff studies demonstrated, however, that taking Rhodes would require a significant commitment of landing ships and aircraft carriers that would not be available until after the invasion of Sicily. Wilson kept pushing the plans; like others, he thought that opportunities were finally opening up in the eastern Mediterranean.²¹

The threat of an Allied invasion of the Balkans strongly influenced Hitler's decision-making in the aftermath of 'Torch'. In December 1942 he reinforced German garrisons and ordered a major offensive against resistance groups in Yugoslavia.²² German commanders on the spot decided to deal first with Tito's Communist partisans, who were offering the most effective resistance, then with Mihailović's Chetniks. Though the British had committed to support the latter, the lack of long-range aircraft for supply drops meant that SOE in Cairo could offer little useful aid.²³ In the absence of more help from the British, the Chetniks formed an alliance of convenience with the Italians, whose reluctance to participate in the anti-partisan offensive was just one of the obstacles facing the Germans. When the British told Mihailović to give up the Italians, the frustrated Chetnik leader insisted that he was fighting not for the high ideals espoused by the Allies, but for whoever would do best by Serbia. This in turn bolstered the case of those left-wing SOE officers who were already arguing that Britain ought to switch its support to Tito.

A joint German–Italian offensive, aided by Croat and Chetnik units, had meanwhile pinned Tito's partisans against the Neretva river. So bad was the situation that, unbeknown to the Allies, Tito had opened negotiations with the Germans, offering to help them fight the Chetniks and any British landing in the Adriatic. The talks broke down, but it didn't matter; Tito's fighters managed to hold off the attacking Axis troops and escape across the Neretva. More conservative British officers in Cairo were happy to keep working with Mihailović, and they lobbied for the aircraft required to step up the delivery of supplies to Yugoslavia. In April 1943, however, the Germans and the partisans both turned on Mihailović. Forced to withdraw into Serbia, he left them fighting each other, but forfeited his position on the coast just as the British, developing their deception plans ahead of the Sicily landings, had to pick which group could cause the Germans most concern about an Adriatic invasion.²⁴

In Greece, too, the British looked eagerly for a resistance movement with which to work. The Greek resistance took longer to gather momentum, partly because of the intensity of the German military occupation, and partly because of the catastrophic famine of 1941–2. A royalist government-in-exile, headed by the strongly Anglophile George II,

had very little popular support. Established Greek politicians who remained in the country largely collaborated with the occupiers, and only during 1942 did the first, scattered resistance groups start to come into being.²⁵

These included numerous unaligned guerrilla bands, born out of the chaos of the famine and the brutality of the occupation, but also the armed wing of EDES (the National Republican Greek League), which was based around Greek army officers trying to escape internment by the Italians, and ELAS (the Greek People's Liberation Army), which was the military wing of EAM (the National Liberation Front), a front organization set up by the Greek Communist Party (the KKE). None of these bodies had the manpower, weaponry or motivation to stage a wholesale uprising, and both left- and right-wing groups were preparing for the internecine struggle that would erupt when the Germans and Italians eventually departed. The Communists were the most effective in this preparation, meting out violence against the security forces of the collaborationist Greek regime, the German and Italian occupiers and other resistance groups with equal enthusiasm.

On 25 November 1942, with the assistance of EDES and ELAS guerrillas, an SOE team blew up the Gorgopotamos railway viaduct, north of Athens. The aim was to disrupt Axis supplies to North Africa, but the attack also disrupted energy supplies to the Greek capital. The British officers remained in place as a military mission that tried to energize the resistance, but with scant results. In February 1943, they reported back to Cairo that Greece was on the brink of a civil war that could only be forestalled by the expectation of British intervention. Only the Communists – to whom they owed their survival – had the potential to be turned into a really effective resistance movement. At that very moment, royalist officers in the Greek army-in-exile, based in Palestine, staged a short-lived mutiny. Forced to reconsider their expectations that the rightwing military would lead the fightback against the Axis powers and reestablish the pre-war order, the British told the Greek king to leave London and set up his court-in-exile in Cairo. Meanwhile in Greece, still more brutal measures of labour mobilization started to arouse more resistance activity. In response, the Germans set up a new collaborationist regime under Ioannes Ralles, a fierce right-winger who organized Greek 'security battalions' to fight the guerrillas, but maintained covert links to the British. With the aid of pro-Fascist armed bands, the 'security battalions' conducted a vicious counter-insurgency campaign against the guerrillas.

As ELAS attacked other groups, in March 1943 the British military mission, acting on its own initiative, drew up an agreement that was meant to get all the resistance bands to work together under British direction. Each would be allocated to its own area; no one was to talk politics. Anyone who refused to sign up would be cut off from British supplies. For the next four months, attempts to negotiate this settlement overlapped with efforts to step up sabotage ahead of the invasion of Sicily. The deepening entanglement in Greece would have a lasting impact, not just in terms of Britain's military commitments in the eastern Mediterranean, but on the politics of foreign policy at home at the end of the war.

'THE PUBLIC ARE V. MUCH INTERESTED IN THEIR POST-WAR CONDITIONS'

During January 1943, the War Cabinet continued to discuss its response to the Beveridge Report. From the Mediterranean the prime minister contributed directions from a distance. Churchill argued for caution, following the line laid out by Kingsley Wood. In the turbulent world after the war, Britain would have to spend more on defence to ensure a lasting peace, while increasing the value of its exports by 50 per cent over their pre-1939 level in order to make up for lost overseas investments. Ministers should not make promises on welfare provision that they might not be able to keep.

Party politics complicated matters. Whatever their views on Beveridge, a core of Conservative MPs was determined to oppose socialist influence within the Coalition. At the start of February, more than a hundred of them voted against Ernest Bevin's bill to guarantee minimum wages in the catering industry. Labour Party members had, meanwhile, coalesced around support for Beveridge as the key measure that their ministers were making progress in government. Both parties therefore looked forward to the debate on the Beveridge Report, scheduled for 16 February 1943, as a significant test of their strength in Parliament.

A new Cabinet Reconstruction Priorities Committee was set up to discuss the issue. Its members included such powerful ministers as Bevin, Morrison, Wood and Lyttelton, and it was chaired by Sir John Anderson. Morrison fought hard for an early adoption of Beveridge's proposed reforms, insisting that Wood's economic forecasts were too 'gloomy' and that, if the government wanted to, it could make the numbers work because: 'As we know, and as the people instinctively feel, finance is

within very wide limits the handmaid of policy.'²⁶ Despite such urging, however, on 11 February his colleagues confirmed the government's position: no commitments to welfare reform until it was clear how much would have to be spent on post-war defence and industrial reconstruction.²⁷

While Churchill had been away, Lord Cherwell, who had been appointed to the Cabinet in December 1942 as Postmaster-General, provided him with further evidence of Britain's straitened economic prospects. Nonetheless, Cherwell argued that Beveridge had established so much popular momentum that the government would have to make some kind of constructive response.²⁸ Churchill paid attention, even though he was very

ill. Exhausted by his Mediterranean odyssey, he had returned to Algiers with a heavy cold. By the time he got back to the UK on 7 February, this had turned into pneumonia. Doses of sulphanilamide antibiotic successfully fought the infection, but for the next fortnight he was extremely poorly.

Nonetheless, Churchill worked out a Beveridge compromise for the War Cabinet. It accepted that this 'approach to social security bringing the magic of averages nearer to the rescue of the millions constitutes an essential part of any post-war scheme of national betterment'. Some important elements of the scheme would have to be significantly refined. This could be done, and the necessary legislation drawn up, before the end of the war, but no laws would be passed or financial commitments entered into before peace arrived. At that point a general election would have to be held to renew Parliament, and as Churchill put it: 'We do not know what Government is going to be in power after the war, or what Prime Minister. We should get everything ready for them and leave them a free hand to take up or reject a scheme which will be perfected in detail.'29 Or as he explained in discussion with his colleagues later that day: 'No promises, no commitments, every conceivable preparation.'30 Given that, his illness notwithstanding, every minister, including Churchill, expected that he would win a post-war election, this solution is best seen as a bit of stalling to square the circle of competing party and Coalition concerns. It also, however, indicated the prime minister's continuing belief in a particular chronology in which wartime controversies could be put off because an extended transition to peace would allow time for longterm policy choices that would determine the nature of the post-war world.

The War Cabinet agreed Churchill's compromise position. This was a minor defeat for Wood and Anderson, who had sought to avoid any commitment to the Beveridge Plan, and a minor victory for Morrison and for Attlee, who had been telling Churchill that the government could not leave the work of reconstruction entirely until the arrival of peace. Though the government might be putting off a decision, the preparation of legislation represented a shift in the direction of travel that would be hard to reverse. It was not enough, however, to satisfy the Parliamentary Labour Party.³¹

Churchill, still ill, was absent on 16 February 1943, when the Commons debated a motion offering general approval of the Beveridge Report. Sir John Anderson was the first speaker for the government. Playing up to his reputation as a ponderous parliamentary performer, 'Pompous John', having just lost the battle in the War Cabinet, described the government's policy in terms that were guaranteed to annoy Labour backbenchers. In the words of the Labour junior education minister James Chuter Ede:

He read every word from a carefully prepared typescript. His speech was completely humourless. He devoted a long time to the difficulties of our present situation. He made everyone think, as he spoke to a running and approving murmur of Tory die-hard cheers, that the Govt. would shelve the whole matter . . . He gave specific pledges but the House had been so deadened by the preliminary lugubrious remarks that they just could not grasp that something was to be done. 32

When the Parliamentary Labour Party met, Attlee and Morrison failed to convince furious MPs that they had secured anything meaningful from the Conservatives. Labour's Administrative Committee resolved to put down an amendment expressing dissatisfaction with the government's policy and calling for the immediate implementation of the Beveridge Plan. Unlike previous Labour rebellions, this was a formal decision of the Parliamentary Party. Labour ministers who voted in support of the government would be defying their own party line.

When the War Cabinet met the following lunchtime, Anderson asked why everyone was so upset with him. Facing a potentially devastating uprising from their party, Attlee and Morrison tried to wring a promise of early legislation out of their colleagues. The Cabinet secretary's notes caught the argument that followed as a boisterous Churchill teased an adamantine Attlee:

P.M.: Has the time come to form a Govt. concerned with matters other than the prosecution of the war? . . . Many people concerned with the war. Country wd. oppose a desertion of the Coalition.

S/Doms [Attlee]: Didn't come into this Govt. on basis of dealing with War. Always understood tht. we wd. concern ourselves with preparations for post-war problems. Moreover the public are v. much interested in their post-war conditions. This Govt. must

either govern or get thro' Genl. Election a Govt. that will . . .

P.M. Peril to financial security: irresponsible commitments.

We must get our soldiers home and into employment . . .

S/Doms: Labour Party are not irresponsible about this.

P.M. Everyone wants it: but can you pay for it? You can't pass the Bill before you know where you are.

H.O. [Morrison]: If this Govt. leaves its successor with no legislative prepn. for postwar period we shall be treacherous to the country. ³³

Bevin, outraged at Labour MPs' disloyalty, was having none of it: 'We arrived at agreement on Monday. I stand by that . . . I'm not prepared to ride roughshod over people w'out negotiations, whoever they are, whatever Labour Party say.'³⁴ Attlee and Morrison's protests were for nothing. In the next day's debate, Kingsley Wood took the same line as Anderson, with even more emphasis on the provisional nature of the government's commitment to Beveridge.

On the following day, Labour's amendment was called. Speaking for it, the Labour MP James Griffiths called the Beveridge Plan 'a symbol of the kind of Britain we are determined to build when the victory is won, a Britain in which the mass of the people shall be ensured security from preventable want'. Its immediate implementation was, therefore, a 'test of the sincerity' of the government's commitment to that cause. In an impressive closing speech, Morrison, doing the dirty work of defending the Labour leadership, warned against pledging post-war finances, spelled out the extent to which the Beveridge Report had been accepted, and cautioned Labour MPs that they might bring down the government. It made little difference. Ninety-seven Labour MPs voted for the amendment. Of the Labour MPs who were not ministers, only two voted for the government.

For a moment, it looked as though this was the start of a political meltdown. Labour was in uproar. Warnings from senior ministers that the party risked obliteration if it sparked a wartime general election fell on deaf ears. They were saved only because they had the backing of the trade unions, but it took two months to regain a semblance of control. Bevin was so angry with Labour MPs that for more than a year he simply refused to attend their meetings.³⁷

Despite their inability to agree over reconstruction policy, the Conservatives did not think themselves in such disarray. They had, after all, voted overwhelmingly for the government, even if many of the Conservatives who had spoken in the debate plainly loathed Beveridge and his proposals. Churchill accepted that a statement on post-war policy was necessary, but the episode confirmed his view that the Beveridge reforms

were too politically controversial to be made the subject of legislation before the end of the war. As he told the journalist W. P. Crozier:

I don't think the time and energies of Parliament ought to be distracted, because they *would* be distracted to the details of a great programme like that, instead of devoting its mind mainly to the job of the actual war . . . a great deal depends, of course, on the length of the war and how much time we have 38

'THE DISAPPOINTED MAJORITY'

According to Home Intelligence, the popular reaction to the Beveridge debate was clear. A minority were pleased by the government's limited commitment to welfare reform. The 'great majority' of the population, however, were 'more inclined to judge the Government's attitude to the scheme than to take its proposals one by one and to compare them with the recommendations of the Report', and were therefore 'disappointed, cynical or angry' that the government was 'killing' the Beveridge Plan and thereby 'letting down the whole world'. 'The disappointed majority' included ' "the working classes", Liberals, Labour and the Left, a proportion of the middle classes and, according to three reports, a number of the rank and file of the Conservative Party'. 39 Reports on the morale of the army at home noted the 'adverse comment' that had been aroused by the publicity surrounding the withdrawal of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs' pamphlet explaining the Beveridge Plan, while from the Eighth Army, where the plan had 'aroused widespread interest' and 'been keenly discussed but without great knowledge of its details', there was 'a strong demand for information about post-war prospects in general . . . and some suspicion of the government's attitude . . . ' 40

For Labour supporters, it was a bitter defeat. Frustration at the government helps to explain the emergence as a factor in by-elections from 1943 onwards of 'Independent' Labour candidates and of a new party, Common Wealth. Formed out of two predecessor groupings, Forward March and the 1941 Committee, which had sought to unite intellectuals progressive behind а socialist vision of wartime transformation, Common Wealth was led by the former Liberal MP Sir Richard Acland. Calling for the high ethics of Christian socialism, Common Wealth attracted about 10,000 dedicated young members idealistic middle-class types with a passion for human fellowship rather than the gritty battle for better wages and working conditions that had traditionally motivated the organized labour movement. Acland, who lived

what he preached (signing over his family estate to the National Trust in 1943), proved much better at mobilizing these followers to campaign in the peculiar circumstances of wartime by-elections than he was at putting his party's finances on a stable footing. They would descend on a constituency en masse to canvass, speak and reaffirm their faith.⁴¹

Common Wealth fought its first four by-elections against incumbent Conservatives in February 1943. Another two were contested by 'Independent' Labour candidates. All called for 'Beveridge in Full Now'. In the context of the wartime electoral truce between the major parties, Common Wealth offered what was effectively a proxy Labour vote, and its candidates often had the help, covert or otherwise, of local Labour parties. In most cases, they managed to win a substantial share of the poll, reducing the Conservative share by 8–11 per cent. In each case, however, the Conservatives held the seat. Not until 7 April 1943 would Common Wealth secure its first MP, when RAF Warrant Officer John Loverseed won Eddisbury in Cheshire. The by-election was called following the death of the National Liberal MP Richard Russell: Loverseed, a Battle of Britain veteran and the son of a Liberal MP, played up the liberal nature of Common Wealth's platform rather than its socialist commitments.⁴²

In retrospect, and with good reason, the aftermath of the Beveridge Report debate came to be seen as a crucial point of political divergence and a key step on the 'road to 1945'. ⁴³ At the time, this sort of dramatic outcome was not apparent, let alone inevitable. Its popularity notwithstanding, the expectation that the Beveridge Plan would be neutered or knocked down was matched by a belief that the Tories would bounce back at a post-war election, particularly given Churchill's iconic leadership. That view had a strong effect on the political calculations of Labour's leaders, most obviously Herbert Morrison.

Through the spring of 1943, Morrison continued his campaign to advance his cause with Labour Party members. He gave speeches promoting himself as the party's champion within the government on a weekly basis, kept pushing to accelerate reconstruction progress, and spoke aggressively about the gains Labour ought to get from the war. Privately, however, he was pondering a complex coupon arrangement for a post-war general election, in which the major parties would campaign on separate versions of an agreed central platform, then reform the Coalition based on their representation within the new Parliament. Whatever political benefit Labour might have gained from the war, in other words, he did not anticipate that it would translate into sufficient electoral success to allow the party to form its own government. In an unguarded discussion

with W. P. Crozier in July 1943, Morrison complained that, 'the bulk of our fellows' had 'the idea that the country is waiting to hand them the reins of Government on a platter and that eventually they will do the country the kindness of taking office.'⁴⁴ He thought they had no idea just how strong the Conservative position was.

On 21 March 1943, Churchill responded to the Beveridge clamour and to the change in Allied military fortunes with a national radio broadcast. For the first time, he sketched out publicly his ideas about what would happen at the end of the war. It was a lengthy speech, forty-eight minutes in total, which had taken three weeks to draft, including advice from Keynes (who provided an upbeat assessment of Britain's post-war economic prospects) and Morrison (who boasted to Hugh Dalton that he had 'succeeded in improving some passages', particularly about the widening possibilities for state ownership), as well as approval by the War Cabinet.⁴⁵

First, Churchill reproached those who had 'jumped to the conclusion that the war will soon be over and that we shall all be able to get back to the politics and party fights of peacetime'. Nevertheless, he suggested a time frame for the war's end, with a victory over Hitler in 1944 or 1945 ('By which I mean beat him and his powers of evil into death, dust and ashes') enabling Britain and America to ship forces eastwards to complete the defeat of Japan. In the meantime, demobilization would begin, and the United Nations, led by the US, the USSR and the British Commonwealth, would begin bringing the guilty to justice and reconstructing the world. As an example, he laid out vague plans for a confederated council of European nations, closely integrated legally and militarily, that would prevent the territorial conflicts which had led to such bitter strife twice in his lifetime and enable 'the glory of Europe' (distinct here from the 'vigour, ingenuity and resilience of the British race') to rise again. 46

Moving on to domestic reconstruction, Churchill proposed a 'four-year plan' for the period immediately after the war, which would deal with 'five or six large measures of a practical character' on the home front. Significantly, he suggested that a completed version of this plan would be put to the nation at an election after the war with Germany was concluded, either by a continuing version of the wartime Coalition, 'or by a national government comprising the best men in all parties who are willing to serve'. While urging caution on the uncertain but enormous difficulties of post-war finance and defence, Churchill reminded his listeners of his long commitment to improving national insurance and lauded the opportunity for another step forward, insisting that 'you must rank me and my

colleagues as strong partisans of national compulsory insurance for all classes . . . from the cradle to the grave'. Though he did not specifically mention the Beveridge Plan, Churchill emphasized that 'Every preparation, including, if necessary, preliminary legislative preparation, will be made with the utmost energy . . . so that when the moment comes everything will be ready.'⁴⁷

The prospective 'four-year plan' would also include the construction of a national health service, more housing, better education and more equal access to opportunity ('a Britain so big that she will need to draw her leaders from every type of school and wearing every type of tie'). Economically, there would have to be a big increase in agricultural output so that Britain produced more of its own food, and greater state intervention to take over monopolies, invest in building and new industries, moderate the economic cycle and eliminate unemployment; but this would be achieved in partnership with private industry, with a reduction in the extraordinarily high rates of wartime tax, and without reducing the value of the savings that so many Britons had managed to accumulate during the war.

With its promises of something for everybody, the 'Four-Year Plan' speech could be read as a putative election manifesto, or as an attempt to balance all the competing post-war visions that were then in play. ⁴⁸ There was a notable subtext of concern, not just about the difficulties of transitioning from war to peace, but also about the preservation of national strength. Endorsing improved family welfare, Churchill famously declared that 'There is no finer investment for any community than putting milk into babies', but this was in order that 'larger families' would reverse a 'dwindling birth rate' and allow 'this country . . . to keep its high place in the leadership of the world and to survive as a great power that can hold its own against external pressure.'

Importantly, however, the speech was a reaction to the political moment created by Beveridge rather than a serious attempt to seize the initiative on reconstruction. Churchill was not exactly enthused by the subject: 'Well, anyhow, I *did* it', he told Crozier, when the journalist accused him of sounding resentful towards those who wanted to look beyond the end of the war.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the speech was generally well received. According to the BBC's research, three-quarters of the listening audience had tuned in to hear him speak – the second-highest audience figure of the war.⁵⁰ At 80 per cent, however, their level of satisfaction was lower than would normally be expected for one of the prime minister's broadcasts. Noting the diversity of audience reactions, Home Intelligence

pointed out that many listeners had been disappointed that Churchill had talked so little about the war, while others had simply struggled to follow such a lengthy and imprecise discussion of the future. Everyone had liked the emphasis on national unity and the rebuke to 'the malcontents of all parties', which meant that 'those on the Left believed that he was "putting the Tories in their place" while those on the Right believed that he "sat on the Labour Party" '. The 'most pleased and satisfied', however, had been 'the majority' among 'intelligent' listeners who 'like the middle of the road'.⁵¹

For a different sort of prime minister, the 'Four-Year Plan' speech might have been the start of a sustained effort to chart and capture the political centre ground as it had been redefined by the war. As Mass-Observation recorded at the time, however, the speech did little to win over those listeners who already had strong doubts about Churchill as a peacetime leader.⁵² Nor – unsurprisingly, given the political problems involved – was it followed with the sort of concentrated government action required to turn the 'Four-Year Plan' into reality. At the start of April 1943, Home Intelligence highlighted 'Fear that the post-war world may be worse than the wartime one', due not only to 'disappointment caused by the Government's attitude to social problems', but also to 'anxiety about the future of international politics'. ⁵³ Of 720 letters mentioning the postwar situation analysed, in typically impressionistic terms, by Postal Censorship in early May 1943, 559 showed 'an undercurrent of eager interest' in the future, with 241 mentioning the Beveridge Report. A substantial minority of 147, mostly identified as working class, displayed fears that, in the words of one writer: 'there'll be a real slump afterwards in spite of all this phoney post-war dope we're getting night and day.'54 These concerns were not going to be prioritized by a prime minister facing intractable geo-political challenges and strategic problems, who thought that there would be time to address reconstruction after Hitler had gone.

'ACADEMIC YET SWEEPING OPINIONS ... ALARMING IN THEIR CHEERFUL FECKLESSNESS'

For Anthony Eden, this reluctance to grapple with the future was the flaw in Churchill's foreign policy in 1943 as well. Since the summer of 1942, the Foreign Office had attempted to reassert its influence over foreign policy, against Churchill's habit of taking Britain's most important international relationships under his personal control. A new Economic and Reconstruction Department was set up, led by Gladwyn Jebb, Sir Alexander Cadogan's former private secretary, recently returned from his post as chief executive of SOE. The new department started assessing priorities and drawing up papers to establish a long-term foreign policy that would guide British diplomats through to and beyond the end of the war. ⁵⁵

The future objectives of British foreign policy were by this point clear: to maintain British power despite the already apparent decline relative to the USA and the USSR; to co-operate with these new great powers; and to rebuild peace by creating systems that would keep former enemies, particularly Germany, in check and allow the recovery of international trade and British export industries. For Churchill, the question of how these things were to be done was closely tied up with how he was fighting the war, and the answer lay above all in propitiating the Americans. He wanted a lot from the Americans in the present — a Mediterranean commitment, shipping, and renewed access to atomic research; he disliked long-term strategies that were rendered redundant by events; and (with the notable exception of the Empire) here too he preferred to put off potentially controversial decisions until the current conflict was done.

Foreign Office assessments recognized American primacy, but proposed a more dynamic engagement with US policy. In particular, in late 1942 the Foreign Office took up Roosevelt's idea of a post-war United Nations led by the four great powers (the USA, USSR, the British Empire and China) working together, but each with some freedom of action in its own sphere, on the basis that so doing would secure the economic support necessary for Britain's transition to the post-war world. It wanted more rapid progress on building the international partnerships for this four-power system before the fighting ended and while the UK was still in a position of relative strength. Eden adopted the policy with enthusiasm. As had been seen during 1942, his instincts were much more internationalist than Churchill's, and he was much happier about the idea of working with the USSR in Europe.

In November 1942, Churchill dismissed the idea of a British four-power plan as premature. He told Eden that it was more sensible to concentrate on winning the war first as a means to secure American support for a European settlement. Eden replied that this would leave British foreign policy too reactive to American initiatives and living 'from hand to mouth'. The prime minister would not let his foreign secretary operate independently: instead, during 1943 he floated his own proposals

for the future, while Eden fought hard to push a more considered policy that combined attention to American aspirations with British national interests in Europe.

Ahead of his Adana meeting with the Turks, Churchill wrote a memorandum entitled 'Morning Thoughts', which sketched out proposals for a European Council that would safeguard the continent's peace. This would include confederations of smaller states — 'a Scandinavian bloc, Danubian bloc and a Balkan bloc appear obvious' — to guarantee their collective security. If Turkey joined the war, he promised, it would get a say in this new order and thereby be able to protect itself from future German or Soviet aggression. ⁵⁶ Churchill returned to his rather vague plans in his 21 March 'Four-Year Plan' broadcast, in which he proposed the establishment of regional councils in Europe and Asia. Closer European integration would be 'found to harmonize with the high permanent interests of Britain, the United States and Russia'. ⁵⁷

When Eden arrived in Washington the following week, Harry Hopkins informed him that Churchill's speech had 'had a very unfortunate effect', because it had been taken as an attempt to establish British dominance. Concealing his own support for federal structures in Europe, Eden reassured Hopkins that he too wanted the post-war United Nations organized on an international, not a regional, basis. Churchill, he told the American, had been speaking 'on the spur of the moment'.

Discussions with Roosevelt and his under-secretary of state, Sumner Welles, gave Eden ample food for thought. From the foreign secretary's point of view, the good news was that Roosevelt had become much more willing to accommodate Soviet territorial demands in order to secure the USSR's involvement as one of the 'Four Policemen' he hoped would guarantee peace in the post-war world. Those demands included the absorption of the Baltic States and Poland, with the latter compensated with the addition of German territory to the west. This was a significant change from the American position in 1942 – though not one to which Roosevelt was willing to commit himself publicly. Eden had already accepted that redrawn borders would be the price of a lasting settlement with the Soviet Union. He still, however, believed that if Poland's borders were moved, it would be possible to secure a Soviet guarantee of genuine Polish independence.⁵⁸

Elsewhere, Eden was less pleased with the president's willingness to reorder other people's territory. In order to elevate China to the status of fourth policeman, Roosevelt floated the idea of the British handing back Hong Kong as a 'goodwill gesture'. Eden pointed out that the Americans

were not making similar gestures with their own overseas territories.⁵⁹ Discussing the Japanese-mandated islands in the Pacific, Roosevelt returned repeatedly to the idea of international trusteeship.⁶⁰

It was partly because of their implications for the British Empire that Eden found Roosevelt's thoughts on Western Europe so alarming. In his memoirs, he wrote that the president's knowledge of European political geography seemed to have been acquired from 'his hobby of stamp collecting', leading him to express 'academic yet sweeping opinions . . . alarming in their cheerful fecklessness'. Roosevelt wanted to dismember Germany into separate states, build a new 'Wallonia' out of bits of Belgium, Luxembourg and France, and break up the French colonial empire. This was the opposite of Eden's hope that a liberated and restored France would rejoin the ranks of the great powers, counter-balancing American anti-imperialism and bulwarking Western Europe against German revanchism or Soviet aggression. If Eden's interest in a new world organization fitted his reputation as a liberal internationalist, his plans for France reflected a traditionally British appreciation for the balance of power in Europe. 62

This led Eden to back General de Gaulle against Roosevelt and Churchill in a series of bitter arguments during 1943. The prime minister shared Eden's belief that France should be restored, but unlike the foreign secretary he found the Frenchman personally intolerable and was very willing to sacrifice him in the cause of Anglo-American unity. After his publicity coup at Casablanca, Roosevelt remained determined to break de Gaulle and block his moves to establish a de facto French government-inexile. When pressed, Churchill agreed with the president. Led by Eden and Attlee – an increasingly assertive figure in discussions of the post-war situation – the War Cabinet resisted.

The problem for Roosevelt and Churchill was that de Gaulle was a much more skilled political operator than Giraud. A new French Committee for National Liberation (FCNL), formed in Algiers in June 1943, was co-chaired by the two generals. Roosevelt refused formally to recognize it, but it sat as the effective government-in-waiting. De Gaulle then completely outmanoeuvred Giraud, first displacing him from the chair, then ousting him completely from the committee.⁶³

At the War Cabinet on 21 June 1943, Churchill lamented that de Gaulle's 'insensate ambition' made him the 'Greatest living barrier to reunion & restoration of France'. Attlee told him to remember 'that the name "de G." stands throughout France as the spirit of resistance: the man who never gave up etc . . . US views v. unreliable, they know nothing about

France.' Eden added that the Americans risked sabotaging the best hope of a united France, but as Churchill reminded ministers: 'We must avoid a serious row with US administration. Above all things important. Without their help and goodwill our power to carry on war wd. be gravely hampered.'⁶⁴ It took a series of blazing late-night rows with his foreign secretary over the next month before the prime minister reversed his position and Britain formally recognized the FCNL, with de Gaulle at its head, as the equivalent of the other governments-in-exile. De Gaulle would continue to fight with Churchill and Roosevelt, but Eden had won a crucial battle in building the strong France he wanted to underpin European security after the war.⁶⁵

To the east, the Foreign Office hoped to foster better relations between the Polish government-in-exile in London and the Soviet regime in Moscow, in the hope that the London Poles could be persuaded to accept a negotiated territorial settlement that left their country independent and recognized rising Soviet power. At the start of 1943, however, the London Poles and the Soviets exchanged acrimonious public statements about the frontier. On 13 April, the Germans announced that they had discovered mass graves in the Katyn Forest, containing the bodies of around 4,000 of the 15,000 Polish officers murdered by the Soviets three years before.

Most British ministers privately, and correctly, accepted Soviet guilt. Eden took too long to reach the same conclusion. Since no one in Whitehall wanted the revelation to get in the way of the Red Army fighting the Wehrmacht, the government sought to dampen the publicity battle that developed between the London Poles and the Soviets as a Nazi ruse to divide the Allies. When the Poles and the Germans invited the Red Cross to investigate the allegations, the Soviets accused the London Poles of collaboration and broke off relations. By warning the public not to be duped by Nazi propaganda, the British government effectively endorsed the Soviet lies. 66

Between a restored France and a deconstructed Poland, the Allies had to work out what they would do with a defeated Germany. For the first time since 1939, during 1943 British ministers started to think about the fate of their opponent after they had won the war. Eden and the Foreign Office took a traditional line. Once the Nazis had been disposed of and Germany's borders redrawn, it was in British interests to pursue 'the readmittance of a reformed Germany into the life of Europe'. A functioning Germany was essential to European prosperity: the best way to prevent potential future aggression was not to dismember the country but to invest in the Anglo-Soviet alliance.⁶⁷

In contrast, Churchill preferred the idea of breaking up the German state into its component parts, not least because this was also the idea that was gathering momentum in Washington.⁶⁸ On this issue, Labour ministers sided with the prime minister. Dalton, Bevin and Attlee all spoke publicly of their hatred for 'Prussian militarism'.⁶⁹ In the summer of 1943, Attlee showed himself determined to exert a decisive influence on planning for a post-war Europe. The deputy prime minister wanted to cleanse the country of the 'Prussian Junker class' that had started two world wars and overhaul the whole bureaucracy and economy to eliminate the 'Prussian virus'; and to expropriate German industry to improve living standards in Eastern and Central Europe. He sought 'poetic justice': 'Germany has conscripted millions of European workers for her war. Let us put the Germans to work for them in peace.'

'THE MAW OF SOME OTHER COUNTRY WITHOUT THE SAME EXPERIENCE'

While discussions about the future of Europe continued, the British grappled with American proposals for a statement about the future of colonial empires. Defending the argument that the commitment to self-determination enshrined in the Atlantic Charter should not be applied to the British Empire, Churchill had insisted before the Commons on 9 September 1941 that the British had already made 'declarations' on 'the progressive evolution of self-governing institutions in the regions and peoples which owe allegiance to the British Crown . . . which are complete in themselves, free from ambiguity and related to the conditions and circumstances of the territories and peoples affected.' This was a very British set of definitions: the move towards 'self-government', rather than independence, defined specifically in terms of the very different states of political and economic development within the Empire. 72

The problem, as the Colonial Office soon realized, was that these declarations did not exist. Encouraging as it did the idea that something was seriously wrong with the colonial empire, the disastrous loss of Malaya, Singapore and Burma in spring 1942 had spurred calls for a 'colonial charter' that would firmly state Britain's policies — an idea deflected by the then colonial secretary, Lord Cranborne, on the basis that it might lead 'certain of the less developed peoples' to 'wish to run before they could walk'. During 1942, as public criticisms of British

imperialism grew in the United States, a group of American experts led by Sumner Welles drew up plans to place all colonies under a system of international trusteeship that would guarantee their development towards independence. Welles' boss, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, limited this scheme to the post-1918 mandates of the League of Nations and the colonies of the Axis powers. Hull was, however, deeply committed to the principle that national independence was a fundamental right, and he combined these trusteeship proposals with plans for a declaration to 'dependent peoples' that would not only commit colonial powers to granting them independence, but fix timetables by which this would be achieved.⁷⁴

The British were aware of some of these developments. British ministers and officials were often irritated not just by American interference in the internal affairs of the Empire, but also by the level of ignorance displayed by the State Department. Though British ministers themselves held quite different positions on the future of colonial rule – from Cranborne's conviction that the pre-war systems should simply be restored, via Amery's belief that colonial welfare was a national (rather than an international) duty, to Attlee's insistence that international administration would be the best means of avoiding capitalist exploitation – the one thing that could get them to unite was a desire to present a firm front to the Americans. Not least because they believed that there was a positive, progressive story to tell, however, both the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office favoured negotiations that might help to educate the United States in the complexity of colonial administration.⁷⁵

Shortly after he replaced Cranborne as colonial secretary in November 1942, Oliver Stanley persuaded his colleagues that they should draw up their own declaration on colonial policy. They hoped to turn this into a joint statement with the United States that would reassert what seemed to be common ground with Hull – that there was a responsibility for the political development of 'dependent people', but that it lay with, and was best exercised by, the colonial power rather than through international trusteeship. Unlike Cranborne, Stanley was someone who was happy to work with ambiguity and leave things unsaid. He thought this would allow him to find a form of words on which both Americans and the British could agree. ⁷⁶

When Hull handed over the American draft of a joint declaration in March 1943, however, it soon became apparent that this would be much more difficult than the British had hoped. For one thing, the American 'Declaration on National Independence' showed Hull's commitment to

just that — 'independence' — a word with fundamentally different implications to the British 'self-government'. As Cranborne, now lord privy seal, told the American ambassador John Winant:

The colonial peoples were not ready for independence, and would not be ready for a very long time. If they were deprived of the protection of Britain they would merely fall into the maw of some other country without the same experience . . . and would be not better but worse off. 77

Worse, in reasserting the American belief that the Atlantic Charter applied to everybody, Hull's declaration treated the inhabitants of British colonies in the same way as those whose countries had been occupied as a result of enemy action during the war. Finally, it lumped together both the declaration of rights, the imposition of obligations on colonial powers and the scheme for international trusteeship. What Stanley had thought would be a way to define shared values seemed to have turned into an assault on the Empire.⁷⁸

Some ministers still hoped that the British and Americans could talk it out. Stanley's reaction was to give up on any joint declaration completely. Instead he decided to make his own declaration. The main point of this was to get some principles of future colonial policy on the record in such a way as to leave plenty of room for interpretation and without sparking a confrontation with the Americans. For these reasons, Stanley made his statement at the end of a long debate on colonial expenditure in the Commons, on 13 July 1943, three days after the Allies invaded Sicily.⁷⁹ Making the key points that 'There are no fundamental changes' and 'We retain complete control of our administration', Stanley addressed the issue of international co-operation by welcoming the idea of regional commissions, including neighbouring countries and colonial peoples, which would together address the need for development. This was a long way from trusteeship, but Stanley's declaration was barely noted in the United States. What American officials did notice was that the British had stopped co-operating on a joint statement. Rather than dissuading them from further action, this encouraged them to work with the Soviets and the Chinese to set their own terms for the future of the colonial world.

14

'Masters of the world and the heirs of the future'

February–July 1943

On 21 February 1943, Britain celebrated Red Army Day. Hammer-and-sickle flags flew from municipal flag posts and saluting daises, the 'Internationale' was broadcast on the BBC, and government ministers spoke at crowded rallies across the country. At the Royal Albert Hall in London, a national ceremony of celebration featured music from the band of the Brigade of Guards, a fanfare specially composed by the master of the king's music and a speech by Anthony Eden.¹ Public enthusiasm for the Red Army had only increased with news of the victory at Stalingrad. Asked by the BIPO in March 1943 which country was trying hardest to win the war, 60 per cent of those surveyed said Russia, 33 per cent Britain, 5 per cent China and just 3 per cent the USA.²

In October 1943, a ceremonial sword, forged to mark Stalingrad's resistance, was toured round the country before Churchill presented it to Stalin at the Teheran Conference. In a country bursting at the seams with modern weaponry, almost half a million people visited cathedrals and town halls to file past this mock medieval relic: a measure of how impressed the British were by Soviet sacrifices and of how much they still loved a good queue.³

Eulogies for Soviet military might notwithstanding, 1943 also saw the Anglo-American alliance fight crucial campaigns that demonstrated a conclusive turn in the war in the West. This was the period in which British Commonwealth forces had their greatest influence on the outcome of the conflict. The next two chapters explore these victories in the West – and continuing inefficacy in the Far East – but also explain why they were not enough to preserve British strategic power. Belated victories wore down German strength and would shortly force Italy out of the war, but they were too slow and too partial to allow the UK to maintain its

'LET US BE HONEST ABOUT IT: WE WERE FRIGHTENED IN THE ANTI-TANK DITCH'

In North Africa, major combat operations resumed in February 1943. Eisenhower had been told to complete the capture of Tunisia by the end of April in order to release forces for the invasion of Sicily. To the east of the Axis bridgehead, Montgomery's Eighth Army was on the Libyan border, approaching the old French border defences of the Mareth Line. To the south and west, Anderson's First Army and General Lloyd Fredendall's US II Corps stretched north—south, a patchwork of American, British and French colonial troops, along the Dorsal Mountains to the coastal plain and the sea.

Despite warnings about the vulnerability of the Tunisian bridgehead, Hitler believed in a counter-offensive that would drive the Allies back. In contrast, the German high command and the Italian supreme command focused simply on holding a bulwark against a future invasion across the Mediterranean. The two principal Axis army commanders in Tunisia, Rommel and von Arnim, accepted that there was an opportunity to attack the stretched-out line of Allied forces to the west before turning to counter Montgomery's approaching offensive in the east, but could not agree what form this operation should take. Kesselring, who would have preferred to remove Rommel, authorized both their plans.⁴

From January to March 1943, therefore, a series of Axis offensives rolled around the front line in North Africa. None developed the momentum required to inflict a major defeat on their opponents. Axis troops retook the passes through the Dorsal Mountains. At Kasserine (19–22 February), they surprised and scattered inexperienced American troops, but Allied reinforcements, rushed to the area, prevented any breakthrough. The First Army soon halted von Arnim's follow-up offensive to the north, and the Eighth Army, forewarned by Ultra intelligence, smashed a preemptive attack at Médenine on 6 March. Continued Axis offensives caused some pessimism among Allied commanders, and the debacle at Kasserine exposed Eisenhower to further criticism. As agreed at Casablanca, British commanders moved in to act as his air, land and sea subordinates, and Eisenhower replaced the lack-lustre Fredendall with the more firebreathing General George Patton. In fact, however, the failure to reverse

the Allied tide – in sharp contrast to events in the desert in 1941–2 – indicated the hopelessness of the Axis position. After Médenine, Rommel departed North Africa for good.

The sea and air garrotte around the Axis supply lines meanwhile grew tighter, directed as before by signals intelligence from the broken Italian convoy cipher. USAAF bombers played an increasingly important role, striking Italian harbours and joining British destroyers, submarines and torpedo bombers in attacks on supply ships at sea. Between January and May 1943, 172 large Axis merchant ships, totalling more than 550,000 gross tons, were sunk in the Mediterranean. Less than 60 per cent of the supplies despatched to Tunisia in these months got through. About a quarter of all the vehicles and guns, and about a sixth of the tanks, that the Germans lost in North Africa between November 1942 and May 1943 were in fact lost at sea while crossing the Mediterranean. Shortages of petrol and ammunition once more affected the Germans' ability to take advantage of Allied reverses. 6

Having taken control of all ground forces as Eisenhower's deputy commander-in-chief on 20 February 1943, Harold Alexander used Patton's troops in diversionary operations against Axis defences in the west, while the Eighth Army undertook a major offensive against the Mareth Line from 20 to 27 March. This was another of the alternating attacks that Montgomery was making his own, with a heavily supported set-piece assault on the fortifications by the British infantry divisions of XXX Corps combined with a sweep around the unfortified right flank of the line by the New Zealand Corps. When the direct assault, on too narrow a front and without adequate tank or air support, failed badly, Montgomery switched the point of effort to the outflanking hook. Accompanied by overwhelming air attacks from the Western Desert Air Force, this unlocked the Mareth Line, but did not prevent the Germans and Italians withdrawing to their next defensive position around the Wadi Akarit.⁷ Though less well fortified, this could not be outflanked from the south.

Montgomery ordered XXX Corps to punch through the Akarit Line with another set-piece assault. The Corps' divisional commanders successfully put forward an improved plan. In the pitch-black night of 5–6 April 1943, the Indian, British and Gurkha troops of Major General Francis Tuker's 4th Indian Division launched a silent attack to seize the high ground overlooking the battlefield and break beyond the Axis defences, before the heavy artillery bombardment and deliberate assault began on the plain below. Montgomery had little time for the Indian army or its British officers, but the 4th Indian Division were well trained, and

Tuker had instilled a flexible style of command that had been required by frontier service between the wars. Taking the Italian defenders by surprise, his soldiers tore a hole five miles into the Axis position and opened up a crossing over the anti-tank ditch in front of the Akarit Line. On the other side of the attack, the 51st (Highland) Division had also opened a bridgehead.⁸

For once, the Eighth Army had succeeded with its first blow, and the path was laid for its exploitation force, X Corps, to move over the crossings, destroy the remaining defences and open the way north to Tunis. Montgomery – his attention occupied with preparations for the Sicily invasion – was not, however, directing the battle with his usual 'grip'. Not least because of his normal practice, his corps commanders, lieutenant generals Oliver Leese and Brian Horrocks, had not developed the confidence to seize the initiative for themselves. They took too long to get their armoured units going, the tanks got held up by the remaining defences, and – to Tuker's fury – the Eighth Army defaulted to its normal setting, pausing and organizing a set-piece attack for the next day. That gave the Italians and Germans time to withdraw, establish another defensive line and force the Eighth Army into another expensive battle around Enfidaville on 19 April.

This was meant to absorb enemy reserves ahead of a major attack by the First Army, launched on 22 April 1943. With Allied troops already being withdrawn in preparation for the Sicily landings, however, this offensive was too weak, and progress quickly stalled. At Montgomery's urging, Alexander moved veteran formations from the Eighth Army westwards to spearhead the final punch through towards Tunis on 6 May 1943. The city fell the next day, and the last Axis forces in North Africa surrendered on 13 May. Typically, they were Italians, once again let down by their better-equipped and supposedly better-motivated German allies.⁹

It was a major defeat for the Axis forces, made much worse by the number of reinforcements that had been despatched to Tunisia since the start of 1943. The Allies took at least 240,000 prisoners between 20 March and 13 May 1943. Approximately half of them were German. More Axis prisoners were taken than had surrendered at Stalingrad, and, though the number of German divisions destroyed was lower (seven and a half compared to twenty at Stalingrad), they had generally been high quality, experienced formations. This was the first time such large numbers of German troops had been captured in the West. The Axis forces had lost 2,329 aircraft over North Africa and the Mediterranean since 8 November 1942, for Allied losses of 657 planes. Axis losses included more than 400

transport aircraft, most destroyed by swarming Allied fighters in April 1943 as they attempted to bring in vital supplies that were not making it through by boat. Together with the losses sustained during the initial rush of troops to Tunisia and the attempt to sustain the Stalingrad pocket, these casualties permanently wrecked the Luftwaffe's capacity for aerial resupply. The Political Warfare Executive quickly labelled the defeat 'Tunisgrad', and between 23 and 30 May 1943 British bombers dropped 2.84 million leaflets over the Ruhr with that title, mocking Hitler's predictions of inevitable victory. 12

For Italy, the fall of 'Tunisgrad' was a culminating disaster. Two Italian armies had already been destroyed in Africa in 1940–41, and a third had been ripped to pieces by the Soviets on the Don river in January 1943. The loss of a fourth army in Tunisia wrecked Italian military morale and brought the country significantly closer to attempting to exit the war. It was not quite the end of the Anglo-Italian confrontation around the Mediterranean, but the British were masters of the North African shore, huge Allied convoys could start to pass through the Mediterranean, and there was still time left to leap across the sea before the end of 1943. For all these reasons, 'Tunisgrad' was a more significant victory than El Alamein, and one that ought to be far better known.

One reason that it might not be was because glory had to be shared. On the ground in particular, British and Commonwealth forces might have been more numerous and more militarily effective, but it was an Allied victory in which American and French units had played a crucial part. Serving alongside the Americans for almost the first time, British servicemen found plenty to confirm their stereotypes about their allies. As a British sailor complained in a letter intercepted by the postal censor:

It makes us mad . . . they throw their money around like water and so the prices go up making it worse for everybody. The best of it is that they never seem to do any work, you can see our Tommies tramping about with all their kit while the blasted Yanks ride around all day in cars and when the war is over I expect they'll say they've won it again. 13

There was a sneaking sense of satisfaction, both at home and at the battlefront, that the Americans had been caught out by the Germans at the Kasserine Pass. ¹⁴ As another sailor put it, if the Americans had 'as much . . . nerve with a girl as they have with a Jerry, they'd never get a date'. ¹⁵

Among British leaders, the victorious end of the long North African campaign encouraged pride in their compatriots' achievements, optimism in further Mediterranean possibilities and condescension towards their still-learning allies. Watching the victory parade in Tunis on 20 May,

Harold Macmillan and Andrew Cunningham were struck by the 'splendid appearance' of the British in comparison to the American and French troops. Macmillan, deeply stirred, thought that 'These men – of this old country – were clearly the masters of the world and the heirs of the future.' American resentment at being patronized in a British imperial sideshow was understandable. Patton, busy with plans for the invasion of Sicily, complained that: 'The British are running the show in the sea, on the land and in the air. They are running it to their advantage and are playing us for suckers, not only in a military sense, but politically also . . ,17

In the air, however, close Anglo-American co-operation was key to the final stages of the campaign. After being appointed Mediterranean air commander, Tedder assembled a closely integrated Allied air organization that took charge of supply, training and maintenance as well as operations against the enemy, and sought to instil the good practice RAFME had learned by hard experience across the Allied air forces in North Africa. Taking over control of the tactical air forces during the Kasserine offensive, 'Mary' Coningham instigated a step change in US air operations, abandoning small fighter patrols for big sweeps, and attacks on enemy transport and aerodromes. Under his successor as commander of the WDAF, Air Vice Marshal Harry Broadhurst, the RAF further improved its systems for air support, with closely planned air strikes combined with 'cab ranks' of fighter-bombers ready to be called in by expert RAF observers on the ground. This support was what enabled Eighth Army to outflank the Mareth Line. Before the final stage of the ground campaign, the airmen targeted the whole of the enemy air forces, with radar-directed interceptions of any Axis aircraft and constant bombing attacks on airfields in Sicily and Sardinia. The combination of superior numbers and effective tactics overwhelmed the remaining aircraft of the Luftwaffe and the Regia Aeronautica. 18

Allied domination of the skies wrecked Axis mobility on the battlefield – at least in good weather. For all the excitement of the long-range pursuit through Libya, however, El Alamein, with its slow motion, engineer-heavy assault on a well-fortified Axis position, had been a precursor of what was to come. The scrubby hills of Tunisia were well suited to defence by Axis forces plentifully equipped with mortars and machine guns, backed up by a new generation of heavy armoured vehicles born out of the fighting on the Eastern Front. Once the Axis offensive had been halted, there was little alternative but for Alexander to pursue the sort of offensive he did – a rippling series of attacks along the line that used up enemy reserves,

supplies and room for manoeuvre to the point where a final offensive had to break through.

Both First and Eighth Armies relied heavily on their gunners to facilitate these attacks, and the campaign saw significant developments in the performance of British artillery, including the deployment of the first heavy batteries to serve overseas since the start of the war, the organization of army-level artillery groups to enable concentrated fire, and the spread of air-observation posts in light aircraft to direct the guns on the ground. Better radio equipment and improved drill meant that dense bombardments could be produced increasingly quickly – in 1939, it had been presumed that it would take about ten hours to bring a division's guns into concentrated action against a target, whereas by the time Eighth Army approached Tripoli it could do it in one or two. Artillery fire plans became increasingly complex and integrated with air attacks: when the 4th British and 4th Indian Divisions started the final assault that broke the Axis line on 6 May 1943, they attacked on a 3,000-yard front supported by 444 guns and 2,000 air sorties. Enemy artillery batteries were subjected to concentrations of fire designed to outmatch them ten to one. Stockpiling the ammunition and positioning the guns to achieve this density of fire was made much easier by Allied control of the air – an important and often overlooked aspect of the way in which air superiority determined the war on the ground. 19

As Mareth and Akarit demonstrated, however, this firepower-heavy approach came with its own problems. It was comparatively rigid, difficult to change if an assault ran into difficulties on the ground and militated against the rapid exploitation of fleeting opportunities.²⁰ Nor did it relieve the pressure on the poor bloody infantry. The battalion historian of the 5th Seaforth Highlanders called the three days they spent just being shelled in the anti-tank ditch in front of the Mareth Line – the straight ditch giving no cover from shell bursts, the ground being too hard to dig in, with nothing to shoot at and nothing to do except be shelled, the worst experience of their time in Africa – much worse than the comparatively much bloodier battle of Alamein:

Give a Jock a rifle or a bren gun and allow him to use it; and however frightened he may be, he will face up to most things. Put him, inactive, in a trench, and danger becomes progressively more difficult to bear. Fear is insidious, and it grows in inactivity. Let us be honest about it: we were frightened in the anti-tank ditch.²¹

In October 1942, the cumulative total of British soldiers killed in the war so far had surpassed the number of dead British civilians for the first

time since late 1940. From that point, the number of dead British soldiers accelerated rapidly. Almost half the men killed in the British army between the start of the war and May 1943 died *after* September 1942.²² This was partly because the fighting in North Africa became more intense, and British troops spent more time attacking, but it was also because there were simply many more British soldiers in contact with the enemy. In the Gazala battles in June 1942, the Eighth Army had the equivalent of four and a half British divisions and five and a half from the rest of the Commonwealth. By the spring of 1943, Alexander's Eighteenth Army Group had ten British and only two Commonwealth divisions (as well as three from France and four from the US).²³ This too was a turning point: Britain's war was going to get bloodier before it finished.

'DON'T SHOOT, SIR, THEY'LL ONLY SHOOT BACK'

On the India–Burma border, meanwhile, another debacle had unfolded in the spring of 1943 as Wavell tried to meet Churchill's demands for an early offensive against the Japanese. The driving force behind the Allied war effort in the theatre was the American desire to complete the Ledo Road from India to China – a colossal logistical project that would enable them to run supplies to Chiang Kai-shek and fuel a strategic bombing campaign against the Japanese home islands from Nationalist China. Yet the Indo-Burmese border was one of the most difficult areas in the world in which to support military operations, with high jungle-covered ridges giving way to a narrow coastal strip of paddy fields and mangrove swamps, intersected by deep-cut streams. Road and rail connections ran out well before the border, leaving supplies dependent on river boats, porters and pack animals. The further from the coast, the worse the communications. Ill-favoured and under-resourced, this was the backwater of Britain's war. Initial planning was based around sticking close to the Bay of Bengal, but shortages of ships and trained troops meant that dreams of an amphibious assault on Rangoon gave way to a much more limited objective: an advance down the Arakan peninsula to capture the port of Akyab and its vital airbase.

Without enough amphibious ships to attack the port directly, the British tried to advance down the coast. They ran into Japanese defensive lines built around carefully concealed wood-and-earth bunkers, which were all but impervious to artillery or air bombardment. Lieutenant General Noel Irwin, the commander of the Eastern Army, micro-managed

the battle, gradually feeding reinforcements into a series of narrow, fruitless assaults against the Japanese lines. Eventually, a total of nine Indian and British brigades (the equivalent of three infantry divisions) were involved, all controlled through a single divisional headquarters, whose ability to direct the battle soon broke down, overloaded by excessive command. In April 1943, the Japanese, having manoeuvred through the jungle, counterattacked on the British flank, throwing back the offensive in disarray.

Irwin was keen to blame his men. His son, a liaison officer, reported that British troops were 'disinterested [*sic*], indisciplined, untrained in many cases. In all they were gutless.' Soldiers had come to Burma 'hating the powers that sent them . . . only hoping to return on the morrow, and . . . praying that they may not have to fight'. 'Don't shoot, sir', one corporal had pleaded with Irwin junior as he tried to start a firefight in the front line, 'they'll only shoot back.'²⁴

Such poor morale was understandable but scapegoating the men in the front line was unfair. British and Indian troops were simply poorly trained and unprepared for the humid, insect-infested jungle or the terrifying Japanese. Not least because of the very rapid expansion of the Indian army, they lacked the specialized infantry skills required to work their way through dense jungle concealing Japanese positions. Exposed to malaria, dysentery and typhus, as well as to venereal disease as they passed through depot towns in eastern India, men went sick in huge numbers. In 1942 there were 1,850 admissions to hospital per 1,000 troops on the Burmese front: the equivalent of each soldier having two bouts of life-threatening illness a year.²⁵ During 1943, 120 men were admitted to hospital with tropical diseases for every one wounded by the enemy.²⁶ Battle casualties faced a grim prognosis: it took so long to evacuate them that any badly wounded soldier was, in the words of the adjutant-general, 'certain to die before he gets back to base'. British troops felt that 'England has forgotten them'.²⁷ Few Indian soldiers felt much desire to lay down their lives for a faltering Empire. Fresh from policing the 'Quit India' campaign, some were suborned by infiltrators from the Indian National Army and deserted to the Japanese. Others looked for the quickest chance to get out of the fighting, even if that meant enduring a self-inflicted wound.²⁸

The ignominious defeat in the Arakan would force changes from the generals in charge of the Indian army. Better recruitment and training specifically for the jungle were introduced, and the fight against disease was stepped up. Yet the defeat was part of a much bigger strategic problem within the alliance. Lack of preparedness for a war in Southeast Asia, plus

the concentration of imperial resources in the Middle East and Mediterranean, meant the British could not quickly give the Americans the land route they wanted to aid the Chinese. That further reduced their influence over strategy, not only in the war against Japan, but also for the war in Europe.

The resultant tension helps to explain the extraordinary trajectory of the one British officer who did well out of the disaster in the Arakan, Orde Wingate. A Royal Artillery officer with a messiah complex and a penchant for irregular warfare, Wingate had come to Wavell's attention in pre-war Palestine, where he had set up 'special night squads' in which British servicemen and Zionist fighters worked brutally together to suppress the Arab revolt. After the outbreak of war with Italy, Wavell used Wingate to train Ethiopian resisters to the Italian occupation, then brought him to India to fight the Japanese. Wingate developed tactics of 'long-range penetration', in which small units of lightly equipped infantrymen would infiltrate past the sparsely held Japanese front line and rove through the jungle, resupplied by air, attacking enemy supply lines.²⁹

As the Arakan offensive crumpled in February 1943, Wavell allowed Wingate to lead a force of about 3,000 men across the River Chindwin. This first 'Chindit' expedition was scarcely more of a success than the more conventional operation being undertaken further south. Over the three months of Operation 'Longcloth' Wingate's men managed to do some minor damage to railways before they were boxed in by the Japanese and forced to break up into evasion groups. The survivors struggled back to India. About a third of the original group did not return. Most had fallen sick and, to the distress of their comrades, had had to be left on the line of march. The rest were so thin and wracked with disease that they were effectively casualties. Their poor condition was not just the result of their time undertaking astonishing acts of endurance on inadequate rations in the jungle, but also of Wingate's dismissive approach to sanitary discipline and medical expertise, part of a personal ethos that emphasized the mastery of physical suffering as an inevitable part of the sacrifice required for victory.³⁰ He was a charismatic zealot, without much other skill as a commander, whose ability to inspire others with his faith allowed him to waste precious manpower on schemes of dubious military value.

In the circumstances of spring 1943, however, Wingate's expedition offered a welcome opportunity for publicity officers to tell a story that was different from the ignominy in the Arakan. Elite hard men raiding behind enemy lines, the Chindits fitted a narrative of daring-do established by special forces in Europe and North Africa, and could be used to show that

the Japanese were not the only ones who could survive and fight in the jungle. Wingate naturally took this as his due. He had already sent a report calling for a massive expansion of long-range penetration operations direct to Leo Amery, a patron since his time in Palestine. From the summer of 1943, Churchill's excitement at the possibilities offered by the Chindits would propel Wingate into the strategic stratosphere.

'THE BRITISH BOMBSHELL'

One of the key constraints on Allied activity throughout 1943 would be the shortage of shipping. Though the Allied merchant fleet was growing, it could not meet all the demands placed on it at Casablanca. During the first months of 1943, British imports were at their lowest level of the whole war. Losses in the Atlantic were bad, but the real culprit was the Axis decision to commit strong forces to the defence of Tunisia. 'Torch' had been meant to require sixty-six sailings a month to North Africa between November 1942 and January 1943, and thirty a month after that. Instead, it took 105 sailings a month until the end of January, 92 in February and 75 in March. The short-notice despatch of further reinforcements so that the Eighteenth Army Group could go on to the offensive imposed still further burdens on shipping. So did Churchill's promise of arms to the Turks.

At the start of 1943, British strategists had thought that the shortage of ships might even force restrictions on war production. Churchill had diverted ships from the Indian Ocean to keep up levels of supplies to the UK in 1942, but by 1943 governments around that Ocean were pleading for additional deliveries to make up for lost imports. When Lord Leathers, the minister of war transport, tried to juggle shipping allocations to meet these demands, Churchill told him that the situation was too desperate to permit mere 'goodwill' gestures. He told Leathers that 'There is no reason why all parts of the British Empire should not feel the pinch in the same way that the Mother Country has done.'³¹

In November 1942, Roosevelt had promised Lyttelton that US ships would be made available to make sure that the British could maintain import levels. He did not convey this promise to the US military. When the general in charge of US army logistics, Brehon Somervell, found out, he misinterpreted the president's pledge. Roosevelt had offered monthly transfers of ships to British control, the total accumulating over time. Somervell thought the British were to get the same fixed allocation of shipping each month. Like many senior US officers, Somervell was

suspicious of British claims of imminent shortage. He thought they were wasting imports by building up huge stockpiles and hiding ships on the intra-imperial routes in the Indian Ocean. The general didn't grasp the interconnected complexity of the southern trade routes, or the extent to which the British, with their import-dependent economy, wanted big reserves to guarantee against any interruption in supply. In practice, almost none of the ships Roosevelt had promised were handed over.

Neither Somervell nor Leathers was involved in the military decision-making at Casablanca, and, when they met in Morocco, Somervell insisted that if the British were serious about 'Bolero', the build-up of US forces in the UK, they would have to allocate 1.6 million more tons of shipping to assist with transport across the Atlantic. Trying to show willing, Leathers agreed that any available British ships would help, knowing that either none would be free or that rising US production would render the offer redundant.

In the middle of February 1943, with shipping demands to Tunisia still high, the British realized that they did not have enough ships to undertake *any* of the operations they had agreed to at Casablanca, let alone provide the additional ships wanted by Somervell. The Americans were informed of this 'British bombshell' just as their commanders in the Pacific demanded fresh reinforcements. The joint chiefs decided there was an easy answer: rather than renege on commitments, the British would have to accept a further cut in imports.

London was outraged. Visiting Washington at the end of March, Eden took the matter up with Roosevelt and Harry Hopkins. A paper composed by Churchill and Cherwell laid out British shipping losses, accused American generals of economic ignorance and threatened a cutback in British military efforts. Roosevelt intervened, instructing his officials to fulfil the original promise of shipping to the British even at the expense of military operations. Furious, the US armed forces did their best to resist. At that moment, however, the Allied shipping situation was about to ease dramatically, thanks to the reopening of the Mediterranean, the boom in US ship construction and a decisive victory in the Battle of the Atlantic.

'A TEMPORARY SHIFTING OF OPERATIONS TO AREAS LESS ENDANGERED BY AIRCRAFT'

After the terrible merchantmen losses of November 1942, in December 1942 and January 1943 Allied shipping losses fell, partly because the

British started to crack the more highly encrypted U-boat Enigma, partly because German naval intelligence briefly lost its ability to read the British convoy cipher, but mainly because the weather was terrible. Over the next four months, however, the Battle of the Atlantic reached its climax.³²

In January 1943, Admiral Raeder, the chief of the German navy, resigned. Admiral Dönitz took his place, although he retained direct command of the U-boat fleet, which had now grown to 300 operational submarines. With the Allies extending the reach of air cover from both sides of the Atlantic, Dönitz began to assemble huge U-boat wolf packs mid-ocean to catch passing convoys.

On the Allied side, the Canadian escort groups that had been blamed for the autumn shipping losses were withdrawn to retrain and re-equip. In January 1943, much to Harris's disgust, Bomber Command was instructed to attack the U-boat bases at Lorient and St Nazaire. Close to the bomber airfields and easily identifiable, the ports were ideal targets but the U-boat pens, covered in thick layers of concrete, were not. The raids did a lot of damage to French houses and the dock facilities, but had little effect on the submarines. During February, improved British signals intelligence allowed most convoys to be routed away from the waiting submarines. In an increasingly busy ocean, however, such evasion became more difficult. Those convoys that were located were heavily attacked, while the escorts fought back against the U-boats. From 4 to 8 February 1943, a bitter battle around Convoy SC118 resulted in the sinking of eleven merchant ships, eight from within the convoy itself, for the loss of three U-boats. From 20 to 26 February, ONS166 lost fourteen ships against the sinking of three Uboats.³³

Though air reinforcements were finally arriving, doubling the number of VLR Liberators covering the eastern part of the mid-Atlantic 'air gap' and allowing Coastal Command to restart its offensive against the transit routes in the Bay of Biscay, during March 1943 shipping losses worsened sharply. Delays in decryption reduced the effectiveness of British rerouting, but with seventy U-boats in the Atlantic, Dönitz had the convoy routes covered in any case. In early March, every convoy in the North Atlantic was intercepted by the submarines. Half were attacked. Between 16 and 20 March, as convoys HX229 and SC122 passed close together in the presence of a pack of thirty-eight hunting U-boats, two huge conjoined battles broke out. Twenty-one of the eighty-seven merchant ships in the two convoys were sunk, for the loss of one U-boat. ³⁴

This was a sign that the campaign was reaching a climax rather than that the Axis powers were gaining the upper hand. Allied efforts in the

Atlantic had been dogged by the difficulties of co-ordinating the British and American navies. In March, at a naval conference in Washington, the British were given control over the central ocean. Since the end of 1942, Admiral Max Horton, commanding the Western Approaches, had begun to form 'support groups' of escorts and small aircraft carriers, which would stay at sea to reinforce any convoy under attack. The withdrawal of vessels to make up these groups increased the strain on the remaining British escorts, and the Royal Canadian Navy was brought back to perform escort duties in the mid-Atlantic. Further air reinforcements arrived, including Wellington bombers equipped with Leigh Lights and centimetric radar for the Biscay offensive. By late March, thirty-eight VLR Liberators were available to fly over the air gap.

The strength and growing competence of the forces guarding the convoys meant that these spring battles were not easy for the submarines. Of the fifty-nine U-boats that attacked in the Atlantic in February 1943, twelve were knocked out by the escorts. When British naval intelligence regained its ability to read the submarine Enigma at the end of March, the number of U-boats reporting technical problems as excuses for staying out of battle, and the increasingly strident demands from Dönitz that they press home their attacks, suggested that the enemy's morale was at breaking point.

During April 1943, Horton shifted his strategy. By May, rather than avoid the submarines, he was seeking a confrontation, pushing convoys through on fixed routes to force the U-boats to battle. In the North Atlantic, there were now enough VLR aircraft and operational bases to ensure that the convoys had air cover throughout their voyage. The destroyers of the support groups kept up the hunt for U-boats while the escorts moved on, and the aircraft from their carriers spotted and attacked submarines over a wide area.

At the end of April 1943, U-boat headquarters tried to drive the submarines into battle, completely blocking the North Atlantic with groups of U-boats on every route. The result was to accelerate their defeat. When the Germans located Convoy ONS5 at the start of May, they sank twelve merchant ships, but seven submarines were lost and another seven damaged. The next week, attacks on HX237 and SC129 claimed two merchant ships and two U-boats. In the fight against SC130, from 18 May 1943, five U-boats were destroyed without the loss of any of the thirty-three ships in the convoy. Although British escorts only made up 60 per cent of those in the Atlantic, they did the overwhelming bulk of fighting in the May battles. The Bay of Biscay offensive was also stepped up.

Dönitz's instruction to his captains to fight their way through on the surface in daylight increased German losses. In total, May 1943 cost the Germans forty-one submarines, and on 24 May Dönitz told his crews to quit the North Atlantic, where, he concluded in his war diary, 'the situation . . . forces a temporary shifting of operations to areas less endangered by aircraft'. 35

As the U-boats headed across the Bay of Biscay, they were attacked by Allied aircraft equipped with improved radar and a new, more deadly pattern of depth charges. During June and July 1943, aircraft sank another twenty-one submarines in the Bay. Relying on reprovisioning from 'milch cow' supply U-boats, Dönitz moved his other submarines further south in the Atlantic. The supply rendezvous could now be identified from Enigma decrypts. Despite British fears about giving away their intelligence, the Americans pressed to allow their support groups to target these meetings. The result was catastrophic for the Germans. Between June and August 1943 they lost another seventy-nine submarines in the Bay of Biscay and in the mid-Atlantic.³⁶

This was a decisive victory, but it was achieved not in a brief moment from March to May 1943, nor simply by the arrival of a few very long-range aircraft, but rather by the accretion of Allied advantages – convoys, escorts, planes, training and tactics, anti-submarine weaponry and detection technology, and intelligence – over time. Had they all come quicker, it might not have taken so long, but until they were all in place, success could not have been achieved.³⁷ It was also the single most important victory won by forces under British command in the whole war. Germany had lost the one means by which it could break the maritime connections that held the Grand Alliance together, and its only hope of interfering effectively with the Anglo-American munitions colossus beyond the battlefield.³⁸

In fact, the battle had not entirely ended. Sporadic fighting continued in the Atlantic for the rest of the war. The Germans were already designing new submarines that could stay submerged for much longer periods, a persistent worry for Allied planners. Yet the threat of a huge U-boat fleet attacking every convoy never materialized. That meant that most of the effort that had gone into the huge escort construction programmes laid down in 1942 was wasted. By the time the Allies started to cancel future escort orders, in the second half of 1943, corvettes and frigates had already started to hurtle down the slipways. By the time they were afloat, the only purpose of these ships was to act as an insurance policy against a future submarine threat.³⁹

Though the Atlantic was now secure, however, the UK's import worries remained. The decisions of early 1943 had left the British dependent on American decisions on shipping allocations. As US strength grew, that would leave British civilian supplies vulnerable to the increasing demands of the US military.

PLANNING 'HUSKY'

The invasion of Sicily, Operation 'Husky', would be the first time that the Allies had staged a really major landing in an enemy country. It was fiendishly difficult to plan. The exact timing was dependent on the uncertain end date of the campaign in Tunisia. The invading forces would need quickly to seize ports to ship in supplies and reinforcements, but – as Dieppe had shown – these could not be taken by direct assault. They would also need airfields, because air cover was vital, and only the southern part of Sicily was within operational range of fighters flying from North Africa or Malta. Those objectives had to be balanced against the limited capacity of the suitable beaches and the uncertain availability of shipping. The stubborn resistance of Italian troops during the final battles in Tunisia encouraged fears they would fight hard for their homeland. When planning began in January 1943, it was impossible to know how many German units of what type would be on Sicily by the time the invasion took place. ⁴⁰

Unsurprisingly, the draft plan prepared for the combined chiefs and presented to the Mediterranean commanders in February was a dog's breakfast, with multiple landing sites around the coast to seize ports and airfields. Any general who had spent time fighting in North Africa could spot the problem: Allied forces would be insufficiently concentrated to sustain their advance or repel Axis counter-attacks. Since neither Eisenhower nor Alexander gripped this problem, and Tedder and Cunningham were happy with the naval and aerial objectives, it was left to Montgomery to address it.

Typically, he did this in the most grating way possible, pushing the Eighth Army to the fore and antagonizing the airmen, sailors and, above all, the Americans. With time pressing urgently, however, he got his way. The landings were concentrated in the south. Supported by parachute assaults to seize key points, four Eighth Army divisions, including the 1st Canadian Division, arriving straight from the UK, would go ashore south of Syracuse. Three US divisions of a newly formed US Seventh Army,

under General Patton, would land further west in the Bay of Gela. Together, the two armies would form a new Fifteenth Army Group commanded by Alexander. Once ashore, they would drive inland: the Americans on the left effectively relegated to a supporting role while Montgomery's divisions made the decisive push for Messina to cut off the defenders from the mainland.⁴¹

With the delayed end to the Tunisian campaign having forced a postponement of 'Husky' from June 1943 to July, there was barely time to prepare for such a huge landing on a hostile coast. Soldiers in North Africa had to be retrained to board and disembark from landing ships. Convoys, escorts and loading tables had to be organized to ensure that forces sailing from the US, UK, Algiers and Egypt all arrived at the same time and in the right order. An armada of more than 2,500 ships assembled, three-fifths of them British, to deliver 115,000 British Commonwealth and 66,000 American servicemen onto the island in the first stages of the invasion. There were six battleships, two fleet carriers and ten cruisers, intended to provide not just fire support but protection in case the Italian navy ventured out to immolate itself in one final desperate battle.⁴²

The preparations for 'Husky' showed how much progress had been made since 'Torch', much of it under the aegis of Mountbatten's Combined Operations. Detailed reconnaissance, including extensive analysis of aerial photographs, underlay the selection of suitable beaches. The number of specialized vessels had increased, including headquarters ships to coordinate the air, sea and land battle and rocket-packed landing craft to provide overwhelming overhead firepower in the final stages of the assault. Specific units had been created to take control of the beaches early on in the landing, organize those coming ashore and make sure they kept up the momentum of the advance inland. Nonetheless, there was a pervasive sense of things being done at the last minute. Divisional headquarters were left inadequately briefed and struggling with frequent minor changes of plan. Despite the great strength of the invading force, no one knew whether the amphibious system the Allies were creating would really work. Above all, there was very little intelligence about how the Italians would respond – a gap that would leave the Allies reacting to events after the invasion was launched.⁴³

Because Sicily was the obvious next jump from North Africa, deception operations played an important part ahead of 'Husky'. This was an area in which the British became particularly adept in the second half of the war, helped by their total control over German agents in the UK, the deterioration of German intelligence capability, and the checks on progress

provided by extensive and improving decryption of German signals. From the spring of 1943, British agents in London and Cairo played on the widespread knowledge of Britain's interest in Turkey and the Balkans to lay clues that the real point of attack would be Crete, the Dodecanese or the Greek mainland rather than Sicily.

This depended on selling an image of Allied forces as much bigger – and therefore capable of much further-reaching operations – than they in fact were. An entire fictitious Twelfth Army was created in the Middle East, poised to invade Greece while Eisenhower's forces bypassed Italy to the west. In a subsequently famous operation, codenamed 'Mincemeat', a corpse dressed as a Royal Marines officer was deposited off the coast of Spain, the apparent victim of an air crash, handcuffed to a briefcase full of documents indicating that Greece and Sardinia were the targets for invasion, and preparations for Sicily just a ruse to deceive the enemy. Duly communicated to German intelligence, these helped to compound Axis uncertainty. Simultaneously, the British mission in Greece sought to step up sabotage activity. From 20 June to 10 July 1943, there were forty-five major acts of sabotage against road and rail links, including the demolition of the Asopus viaduct and a comprehensive blocking of the Métsovo Pass, the only east-west road link in northern Greece. Most of these were carried out by SOE teams, with only limited help from the Greek resistance bands. Despite British efforts to weld them into a single force, they remained more concerned with husbanding their strength, ahead of inevitable German reprisals, in order to fight each other in the civil war to come.44

The confusion sown by deception operations was compounded by German suspicions that Italy would shortly seek to exit the war and Hitler's resultant unwillingness to commit troops too far south. As a result, whereas the number of German divisions posted to the Balkans increased from eight to eighteen between March and July 1943, only two German divisions were sent to Sicily. There they joined nine Italian divisions, a mixture of second-rate static coastal units and better-quality mobile formations.

Like their Allied counterparts, Axis commanders were also having to get to grips with the tactical challenges posed by an imminent assault from the sea, in particular the question of how to position reserves to counterattack the invaders before they could establish themselves ashore. Despite Allied concerns, the coastal defences were weak, Italian troops lacked both motor transport and motivation, and the two German divisions were significantly under-strength. In the event of a serious attack, there

'TRIDENT'

From 12 to 27 May 1943, as preparations for 'Husky' proceeded, the question of what should happen after Sicily was invaded was discussed in Washington at another Anglo-American conference, codenamed 'Trident'. The British chiefs of staff arrived determined to maintain their interpretation of Casablanca. The Allies would prioritize the war against Germany, and success in the Mediterranean would be exploited even if it meant delaying US forces' arrival in Britain. After Sicily had been taken, the next step should be an invasion to knock Italy out of the war, possibly combined with landings in mainland Greece or the Dodecanese. These would keep the Allies in action, force major new burdens on the Germans, and enable a cross-Channel invasion at some unspecified point in 1944.

To the Americans, this looked like the British building a new Mediterranean empire while avoiding the serious business of destroying Germany. After Casablanca, the US joint chiefs had overhauled their organization. This time, Admiral Leahy was fit to attend, and played a key role in preparing the American negotiating position. This sought to use US control of war production to pin Britain down on two commitments: a fixed date for the cross-Channel invasion in 1944, and a major new amphibious offensive in Burma, Operation 'Anakim'.⁴⁶

Again, the arguments deadlocked. This time, the combined chiefs only managed to agree a new set of compromises by clearing the room for offthe-record meetings at which they gave full vent to their frustration. Once again, Dill was translator and guarantor. This time the agreements tilted towards the Americans. The British agreed a definite date – 1 May 1944 – for the cross-Channel invasion, indicatively codenamed 'Overlord'. Transmitted to a newly established joint and combined planning staff under COSSAC – the chief of staff to the (as yet unidentified) supreme allied commander – this date meant that serious planning could begin in earnest for an invasion then less than a year away. The Americans agreed further operations in the Mediterranean, with the proviso that 'Overlord' took priority. Eisenhower would be left to decide the next step after Sicily was captured, but his resources would be strictly limited because troops, aircraft and ships must depart for the UK on a fixed schedule to join the cross-Channel assault. There was no firm commitment to invade Italy. These agreements represented a significant success for General Marshall:

Mediterranean successes could be exploited, but further operations would be shackled by the drawdown of forces for 'Overlord'. It would have been better for the British if they had accepted that these were not vague guidelines for future action but a contract that the Americans intended to enforce. Instead, their subsequent demands for strategic flexibility would appear increasingly to the Americans like a foot-dragging reluctance to begin the decisive operation of the war.

It didn't help that the British were trying simultaneously to put off any significant action in Burma. Since shipping shortages made 'Anakim' impossible, they agreed to further limited offensives in northern Burma and against the islands of Akyab and Ramree. Churchill decried these plans, comparing 'Going into swampy jungles to fight the Japanese' to 'going into the water to fight a shark'. ⁴⁷ He had a different proposal: using the British fleet released from the Mediterranean by an Italian surrender to seize the northern tip of Sumatra. There, the British would establish airbases from which to attack, and eventually cover the recapture of, Singapore. Since the prime minister had absolutely no sense either of the logistical difficulties involved or the vulnerability of such a base, if it could even be established, Brooke thought it was just another bit of cigarbutt strategy. In fact, the direction of Churchill's thinking was clear. For him, the point of Britain's war in Southeast Asia was not to sacrifice strength helping the Americans fulfil their obsession with China, but rather to rebuild imperial prestige and win back the most valuable colony, Malaya. He was talked down at Washington, but this Sumatran obsession would be a recurrent feature of strategic discussions for the next year. 48

British prevarication over 'Anakim' confirmed Leahy's view that the Americans could not rely on their allies in the Far East. The British were given no choice but to accept US plans to complete the capture of the British and Australian territories of the Solomon Islands and New Guinea, and to launch a new drive across the islands of the Central Pacific. Both of these objectives would require even greater supplies of merchant shipping and assault craft, as well as colossal fleets of warships and aircraft.⁴⁹

Advised by Sir John Anderson that any British attempt to build an atomic bomb independently of the Americans would take years to reach fruition, Churchill asked Roosevelt, as the 'Trident' conference drew to a close, what could be done to improve atomic relations between the two countries. The president suggested that Cherwell should meet with Vannevar Bush and Harry Hopkins to sort matters out. When Cherwell explained that the British wanted to work with the Americans now so that they could build their own atomic bomb more quickly after the war, Bush

presumed that Roosevelt would continue to refuse such a blatant declaration of post-war power-political concerns. Instead, at Hopkins' urging, Roosevelt agreed to a recommencement of mutual information exchange and joint work on the atomic project. Once again, however, the president omitted to pass on his decision to his subordinates. The result would be a period of desperate confusion for those British leaders who knew about 'Tube Alloys'. The Americans continued to refuse any interchange of atomic information. Apparently embarrassed by his decision, Roosevelt came close to rolling it back until Hopkins reminded him that he really had given his word.⁵⁰

Subsequent atomic anxieties aside, at the time Churchill regarded the 'Trident' conference as a great success that had further bolstered his close relationship with Roosevelt. It strengthened his perception that an intimately entangled Anglo-American alliance, built up over the rest of the war, was not only crucial to Britain's prospects but also culturally and spiritually inevitable. After 'Trident' finished, he persuaded Roosevelt that Marshall should accompany him and Brooke to Eisenhower's headquarters in Algiers. There, he tried to win Marshall over to an Italian invasion. The American would have none of it. When the invasion of Sicily began, therefore, it was still possible that it would be the last major Allied operation conducted in the Mediterranean.⁵¹

'It is a good thing to kill the Germans'

March-August 1943

In the spring of 1943, the strategic bombing campaign entered a far more destructive phase. At Casablanca, Portal had nominally been given responsibility for the Combined Bomber Offensive. Yet the capabilities of Bomber Command and the US Eighth Air Force, and the ways they thought bombing would work, remained very different. They seldom coordinated their efforts, and rather than a combined offensive, they fought effectively separate campaigns.¹

In the strategy adopted by the Air Ministry since 1942, the mechanics of how the destruction of German cities would actually break enemy morale and finish the war had never been clearly laid out. The Americans had a more clearly articulated approach, in which attacks on key war industries and the elimination of the German air force would enable the Allied invasion of Europe. These aims were endorsed by the combined chiefs as the 'Pointblank' directive, issued to both allied air forces in June 1943. To achieve its objectives, the Americans drew up lengthy prioritized lists of which industries needed to be hit in which order. From Harris's point of view, this was the sort of 'panacea mongering' that had failed in the first years of the war.

The USAAF's commitment to daytime precision bombing meant placing a lot of faith in the bombers' ability not just to hit well-defended targets, but also, in the absence of long-range fighter escorts, to protect themselves against the Luftwaffe. 'Pointblank' ensured the Eighth Air Force got the reinforcements it needed to pursue its campaign, but during the first half of 1943 it was very much the junior of the offensives. Between January and July 1943, it grew from 80 to 378 operational heavy bombers, less than half the equivalent figure for Bomber Command. On the few occasions they ventured over Germany, US squadrons suffered heavy losses.

In contrast, Air Marshal Harris felt at the start of 1943 that his bombers

were finally ready to start the 'real offensive' against Germany. He still believed that bombing might, in conjunction with Russian successes in the east, defeat Germany without the necessity of an invasion of Western Europe. He also thought that, given current operational capabilities, targeting specific industrial objectives was a waste of effort. He wanted to pursue his city offensive until it achieved decisive results.

'GOMORRAH'

By January 1943, Bomber Command had largely completed its reequipment with heavy bombers and its overall size began to increase. It had better bombsights and improved target-indicating munitions, and two new navigational aids – Oboe and H2S – had come into use. The former, a beam system based on ground stations in the UK, could guide aircraft directly over a target even when it was obscured by cloud or smoke, but only six aircraft could use it at a time, and to a range of only 300 miles. H2S was an air-to-surface short-wave radar, initially available only in limited numbers, that gave navigators a better chance of positioning themselves accurately with a crude picture of the terrain below. All this equipment was employed by 'Pathfinder' units, specially trained to find targets and mark them with flares and specialized incendiaries for subsequent bomber waves. Harris had initially opposed the formation of these units.

The decision to divert Bomber Command to attacks on the Atlantic ports and northern Italy provided time further to develop its strength and expertise. Between January and March, the Command's force of heavy bombers increased by about a third. By the summer, Bomber Command could mount 'maximum effort' raids of up to 800 heavy bombers against targets in Germany. From the start of March to the end of July, Harris launched a series of attacks against the industrial cities of the Ruhr, including Essen, Duisburg, Barmen-Wuppertal and Dortmund. As the raids went on, they got more concentrated, sparked bigger fires and caused heavier casualties.

The Ruhr had never before been hit with this ferocity. The raids killed 22,000 Germans, about twice the total number killed by all British bombing between May 1940 and February 1943.² The Battle of the Ruhr included Operation 'Chastise', on the night of 16–17 May 1943, in which the select crews of 617 Squadron, equipped with specially designed bombs, attempted to break the Möhne, Sorpe and Edersee dams. The aim

was to deprive the Ruhr's heavy industries of water. At heavy cost, they badly damaged two dams, drowning more than 1,200 people but doing little long-term damage to German production. Harris loathed the 'Dambusters' Raid as another distraction from the serious business of destroying cities.

In July 1943, Bomber Command shifted its effort to Hamburg. The port city was not only a centre for U-boat production but was also expected to burn well. In an unsubtle indication of the righteous level of destruction the British wanted to achieve, the attack was codenamed 'Gomorrah'. Though beyond Oboe range, Hamburg was easily identifiable by H2S, which was good at picking out the contrast between water and land. The attack saw the first use of 'Window', a new counter-measure designed to disrupt German radar. Aluminium strips were thrown in bundles out of aircraft on decoy missions to produce a mass of false contacts on German radar screens. 'Window' had been available since 1942, but it had been held back for fear that the Germans would use it against the Allies. During the raids on Hamburg, it confused the German defences, reducing Bomber Command losses and resulting in unusually well-concentrated bombing.

Ten days of raids from 25 July came close to achieving what Bomber Command had been trying to do for the previous eighteen months: urban destruction on an epic scale. On 27–28th, an attack by 729 aircraft created a firestorm that sucked in air, debris and people, fuelling its own spread and incinerating everything in its wake. Between 25 July and 3 August 1943, about 37,000 people were killed: almost as many people as had died in the entire German Blitz on British cities in 1940–41. Nine hundred thousand people fled from the city.³

That summer, the US Eighth Air Force flew its biggest raids of the war so far, against cities deep in Germany. On 17 August, the Americans attacked Regensburg – the site of an enormous factory making Messerschmitt fighters – and Schweinfurt – the German centre for the manufacture of ball bearings, which were crucial components for all manner of weapons and vehicles. These raids damaged German production, but the Americans lost almost a third of the attacking aircraft. The same thing happened to raids flown north from the Mediterranean. Flying beyond the range of escorts, the American bomber formations could not protect themselves against new Luftwaffe fighter tactics. Over Italy, however, American and British air power was also making itself felt against much less well-defended targets.

The British had been bombing Italy since June 1940. As with Occupied

Europe, they had always hoped that the combination of bombs and propaganda leaflets would produce a revolt against Fascist rule. The bombing effort was weak, however: a few raids with small numbers of Wellington bombers flying from the UK, but mostly it comprised attacks on Italian ports from Malta. RAFME never had the long-range bomber strength to mount a serious offensive against Italy, and its focus was on the battles in North Africa.

From the end of 1942, however, the raids were ramped up as the British sought to exploit the opportunity created by victory at El Alamein and the 'Torch' landings. From November to December, Bomber Command launched thirteen night-time raids on Turin and Genoa, as well as a daylight raid by eighty-eight Lancasters on Milan. The aim was explicitly to deliver a shock to Italian morale. Compared with the British or the Germans, Italian defences were poorly prepared for this onslaught. Shelter provision and civil defence organization were inadequate, there was no co-ordinated air defence system, and worsening shortages of fuel and operational aircraft severely limited any counter-measures. Only the arrival of German anti-aircraft units in summer 1943 provided an effective defence. By then, much of the damage had been done.⁴

In total, Bomber Command launched just twenty-eight raids against Italy in 1942 and 1943, but these must count as some of its most effective operations of the war. They included two raids of more than 150 aircraft in February 1943 and a double raid on Milan and Turin on 12 August 1943 that involved a total of 656 bombers. Simultaneously, the Mediterranean Air Forces stepped up their bombing of Italy, with RAF aircraft concentrating primarily on the southern ports and airfields ahead of the invasion of Sicily. The attacks on cities in northern Italy were much safer for Bomber Command crews than their operations over Germany. Out of 336 sorties in February 1943, for example, only 5 aircraft failed to return. Less hostile skies allowed generally more accurate bombing. Worried by the risk to Catholic opinion (as well as to classical monuments), however, the British held back from attacking Rome.

The inadequacy of Italian defences meant that the escalation of British bombing had an immediate and severe impact. Damage to factories led to orders to disperse industrial production that further reduced already plummeting output. People began to flee the cities for friends and relatives in the countryside. From the spring of 1943, the Americans also increased their bombing offensive, striking from the southern shore of the Mediterranean. By that point, Turin was emptying of half its population every night. The Allied air forces stepped up their assault on morale: the

Ninth USAAF dropped 64 million propaganda leaflets on the country between January and August 1943. That July, ahead of the Sicilian invasion, USAAF bombers attacked marshalling yards outside Rome for the first time.⁸

By that point, Italy was already moving out of the war. The shock of the bombing, and the inability of the Italian state to manage its impact, played a significant role in undermining the authority of Mussolini's Fascist regime. As in Germany, bombing broke down economic life and disrupted Italian society, but it also damaged the functioning of the Fascist party and its ability to exert control. More importantly, the prospect of still more bombing ensured that, when Mussolini was deposed in July 1943, the government that replaced him, led by Marshal Badoglio, decided quickly to ask for an armistice rather than remain in the war. That would not save Italy from the consequences of the continuing conflict as the country turned into a battleground in 1943–5.9

'UNQUALIFIED APPROVAL OF RELENTLESS AIR BOMBING'

As it came of age, Britain's bomber offensive was the product of an immense effort that stretched across the Commonwealth. In 1943, factories contracted to the Ministry of Aircraft Production made 4,615 heavy bombers, nowhere near the vastly inflated targets set earlier in the war, but ten times the number manufactured in 1941. MAP had a new minister, Sir Stafford Cripps, and a new chief executive, Sir Wilfrid Freeman.

Freeman was a career RAF officer who had overseen the service's rearmament in the 1930s, been posted to MAP in 1940 but departed after falling out with Beaverbrook; he had spent the next two years as vice chief of the air staff. Returning to MAP, he sorted out the mess left over from Beaverbrook's time in office, re-establishing the connection between the RAF and plane manufacturers, streamlining production and insisting on a 'realistic' heavy bomber programme that was based for the first time on what factories could make. Imaginary targets tumbled, but the number of aircraft delivered substantially increased. So did the output of spare parts, reducing the number of aircraft that were grounded awaiting repairs. One of Freeman's particular achievements was to step up the production of Lancaster bombers, the awesome workhorse that would undertake the bulk of Bomber Command's offensive duties in 1944.

Despite some suspicion at the new minister's habit of addressing aircraft workers as 'comrades', Freeman formed a powerful alliance with Cripps. Just like Dalton getting to grips with the civilian economy at the Board of Trade, Cripps was excited by the methods of industrial planning developed by MAP during the war. '[T]here's no limit in theory, is there,' he asked his civil servants, 'to central planning?' Following production failures at the aircraft manufacturer Short Brothers in March 1943, MAP sought to improve its efficiency by nationalizing the company, and demanded new management practices at other firms. Others saw this as partisan politics from a socialist minister: Freeman was impressed at Cripps' determination to get further increases in bomber production in the future. ¹²

When manpower allocations were reviewed in March 1943, it became apparent that the gap between military and industrial demands and the available supply of workers over the next nine months would be about half a million people. MAP had its quota of new workers cut, but was given priority in fulfilling this reduced allocation. With aircraft plainly crucial to the final act of the war, Churchill and the War Cabinet were insistent that production targets must be achieved. That still meant giving MAP as many workers as possible. By the end of 1943, more people would be working on contracts for MAP than were employed, directly or indirectly, by any other supply ministry.¹³

Czech, Polish, Dutch and Free French personnel all flew with Bomber Command, but about a quarter of its aircrew came from the Dominions. The integration of training and the need for a high proportion of skilled groundcrew made it impossible to have units exclusively from one country, but there were bomber squadrons crewed predominantly by Australians and New Zealanders, and, from the start of 1943, an entire Group, No. 6, that was Canadian.¹⁴

For the bomber crews, the Battles of the Ruhr and Hamburg were a period of extremely intense fighting. A loss rate of anything over 3 per cent on each operation had a desperate effect on their chances of long-term survival. In the early summer of 1943, more than 4 per cent of sorties were lost, although over Hamburg the use of Window dropped the loss rate to 2.5 per cent. Crews were expected to complete an operational tour of around thirty missions before they were moved to other duties. In the early months of 1943, only 17 per cent of men who started a tour would survive till it was completed. Less than 3 per cent would survive a second tour. ¹⁵

Prolonged night-time flying, aboard an aircraft heavily laden with flammable fuel as well as deadly munitions, was in itself a high-risk

activity. As well as the dangers of German flak and night-fighters, bomber crews had to spend hours coping with poor weather and physical exhaustion aboard their noisy, cold, juddering aircraft. Over the target, there were blinding searchlights, anti-aircraft shells and the risk of bombs dropped from aircraft overhead.¹⁶

Bomber Command aircrew were overwhelmingly wartime recruits in their early twenties, commanded by a smaller number of older reservists and pre-war regulars. They were all volunteers. They enjoyed a high status in wartime society, well paid by service standards, fed with eggs, bacon and doughnuts before and after operations, and identifiable by their uniforms and insignia. In mid-1943, there was a year-long waiting list to start flying training.¹⁷

Bombing was also a disproportionately middle-class business. Planes were captained by the publicly schooled sons of the professional and imperial middle classes, and crewed by grammar-school alumni who, if they had had time to hold a job before they joined up, had usually been engineers, clerks or shop assistants rather than industrial workers. Heavy losses notwithstanding, the allure of flight, the excitement of action and social esteem lured young men throughout the war.

Bomber crews lived the curious life of the 'combat commuter': sallying out to battle but returning home — perhaps even back to their wives and children — if they were lucky enough, at the end of their night's work. Off-duty, airmen held wild parties in the mess, or sought escape from the wide-skied eastern airfields with manic dashes into York, Lincoln, Cambridge and London.

During the war the RAF came to recognize that the extremities of modern war eventually drove all men to breaking point. As in the other armed services, that understanding co-existed with senior officers' determination not to give 'waverers' an easy way out by legitimizing signs of psychological distress. At the start of the war they had decided that the physically healthy who refused to fly should be classified as 'LMF', or 'Lack of Moral Fibre'. These men were cowards who should be stripped of their rank and flying qualification and discharged. As the war went on, controversies about how to distinguish 'LMF' cases from those suffering 'genuine' psychological disorders brought no change in the classification. Over the course of the war, Bomber Command suffered approximately 6,000 psychiatric casualties, approximately a fifth of which were classified as LMF. Compared to intense periods of ground combat, such breakdown rates were relatively low.¹⁹

The crews of Bomber Command had chosen their post and were

engaged in a nightly struggle from which many would not return. Few displayed any moral qualms about what they were bombing.²⁰ Nor, for the most part, did the British public. The raids of 1943 were widely reported in the press and by the newsreels, which showed official Air Ministry footage of the ruins. Movietone's announcers declared that 'The second largest city of the Reich is being liquidated in a series of record attacks by the RAF.'²¹

When the BIPO asked people in July 1943 what their feelings were when they heard there had been 'a heavy air raid on a German city', the most popular responses spoke of satisfaction and justice. Only 12 per cent said something like 'It's terrible; sorry for the Germans.'22 Home Intelligence found most people expressed 'unqualified approval of relentless air bombing'. Some said 'freely that it is a good thing to kill the Germans, not so much from vindictiveness as from policy'. The large minority who felt the bombing was 'horrible but necessary' had 'no wish to see the raids reduced in number and intensity' because they believed that they were winning the war.²³ Though the ingenuity of the 'Dambusters' Raid aroused fascination, there was also concern about the indiscriminate consequences: 'such floods are deliberate letting loose of the forces of nature – not far removed from epidemics of germs.²⁴ Newsreels gloating over scenes of devastation aroused similar disquiet. As one audience member put it: 'We appreciate the need for the liquidation of Hamburg, but for heaven's sake don't remind us of what we are doing.'25

'GERMAN EXPERIMENTS WITH A LONG RANGE ROCKET'

The dramatic increase in the destruction caused by Allied bombing in summer 1943 shocked German leaders. After Hamburg, Albert Speer told Hitler that six more such attacks would bring German arms production to a shuddering halt. He was just as worried by the American attack on Schweinfurt. The destruction also had an immediate effect on morale. In Hamburg, in particular, the level of damage, the regime's inability to deal with it, and the disintegration of the Nazi party's bureaucratic infrastructure (on which many Germans had come to rely) all raised doubts about whether Germany could win the war.²⁶

Yet German cities proved remarkably resilient. As in Britain during the Blitz, but on a much larger scale, the destruction concentrated minds on

endurance and survival, not revolution.²⁷ Even big raids failed to knock out war industry completely. Machines could be rescued, manufacturing processes adapted and production moved to make sure that the output of munitions was maintained.²⁸ For all the destruction, the Combined Bomber Offensive was not, in fact, achieving its principal intended strategic goals.

Nonetheless, it did have profound effects on how Germany fought, with critical consequences for the course of the war. British attacks on the Ruhr halted the expansion of steel output that Speer had started in autumn 1942, threatening a components crisis across German war industry. Smaller US raids on aircraft plants forced dispersal to new sites, badly disrupting production and preventing planned increases in output. From the start of 1942 to April 1943, German arms production increased at an average rate of 5.5 per cent per month. From then to February 1944, it averaged no growth at all.²⁹

Countering the effects of bombing absorbed manpower and raw materials. By the end of 1943, a third of a million workers in Germany were employed full-time dealing with bomb damage. Another million forced labourers were building shelters, flak towers and underground factories. Much more concrete went into safeguarding aircraft plants from bombing than was poured into fortifications on the French coast or the Eastern Front.³⁰ Anti-aircraft gun and ammunition production had to be increased, and at least a million German service personnel deployed to anti-aircraft batteries across Northwest Europe.³¹

Heavy bombing also forced the Luftwaffe to concentrate its effort on defending Germany, rather than trying to exercise decisive influence on the battlefields of the Southern or Eastern Fronts. By the end of 1943, almost 70 per cent of its fighters were in Germany. Following the defeat of the U-boats, this was the second great shift in 1943. The effect of this aerial relocation would have crucial consequences for battles on the ground in 1944, and it marked the moment when Germany started to spiral towards catastrophic defeat. Simultaneously, the German war economy became more focused on making fighters – just at the same time that compressed aircrew training schedules, to meet the demand for new pilots, resulted in increased accident rates that wrote off up to a quarter of the additional aircraft produced before they reached the front line.³²

That was only part of the problem. Convinced he must bolster German morale by avenging Bomber Command's night-time attacks, Hitler decreed that the German rocket programme he had approved in 1942 was

to be given maximum industrial priority. From 1943, it would absorb scientific and industrial resources in huge quantities, in an effort not just to design and manufacture the rockets, but to construct the underground factories in which they were to be built. Proportionate to the two countries' size, the rocket programme cost Germany at least as much as the Americans spent on the project to build the atomic bomb, but with very much less result. Mainly because of the tremendous technical challenges involved, the scientific endeavour was concentrated on engineering the rocket rather than its payload. The production version of the rocket, the V2, could propel itself high into the upper atmosphere, returning at supersonic speed towards a target up to 200 miles from its launch point. It was impossible to defend against, but also hopelessly inaccurate and carried a warhead of a single ton of high explosive – about a sixth the weight of the bombload of a single Lancaster.³³ At the peak of its production in 1944, the Germans would make 4,000 V2s, enough to carry about as much weight of munitions across the North Sea as a single large raid by Bomber Command.³⁴ The enormous effort would have been better ploughed into accelerating the production of the Luftwaffe's flying bomb, the V1, a less extravagantly advanced piece of technology that would cause the Allies greater problems.

In retrospect, the German rocket programme was, by a distance, the greatest waste of resources by any combatant country in a supremely wasteful war. Driving on Hitler's support represented Bomber Command's single greatest victory in its campaign against the German war economy. This was entirely inadvertent and came about not because bombing wrecked factories or demoralized workers, but because the appalling devastation unleashed on German cities required promises of still higher technological violence to keep the German people harnessed to Nazism's ideological drive.

In fact, the greatest danger posed by the V-weapons to the Western Allies was that an over-estimation of the threat would, in turn, affect their own strategic decision-making. Yet the risk that the Germans might be developing new super weapons was impossible to ignore. Accurately predicting the effectiveness of these weapons was therefore crucial; it relied on the most secret forms of intelligence and had important implications for the allocation of resources. Unsurprisingly, such a significant endeavour became the subject of a major bureaucratic struggle between spring 1943 and autumn 1944, in which recurrent 'flaps' about the rockets alternated with suspicions that the whole thing was being overblown.³⁵

The Air Ministry, the War Office, the Home Office and Ministry of Home Security all had a finger in the pie, but the key individual actors were Lord Cherwell, his protégé R. V. Jones (the scientific advisor to the Secret Intelligence Service and the Air Ministry's assistant director of scientific intelligence, who had played a major role in countering the radio beams used to direct German bombers in 1940–41) and Duncan Sandys, the Conservative MP and Churchill's son-in-law. Having commanded the first, more-or-less completely useless, British rocket anti-aircraft batteries, Sandys was now a parliamentary secretary at the Ministry of Supply.

At the end of 1942, information about rocket development started to reach the British intelligence services, from agents in Scandinavia and among Polish workers on the Peenemünde site on the Baltic, as well as from the interrogation and surveillance of German prisoners taken in North Africa. In April 1943, the chiefs of staff recommended to Churchill that Sandys ought to be put in charge of the investigation into 'German experiments with a long range rocket'. Further evidence then emerged from photo reconnaissance flights, from construction workers breaking ground on giant bunkers in northern France and, finally, from Ultra decrypts.

Jones, an excellent intelligence networker, was keyed into all these sources. Unlike Sandys, he and Cherwell were both read into the Ultra secret, a source of power that they did their best to conceal from the ambitious junior minister as he tried to establish his own anti-rocket empire. Sandys assembled a team of scientists who talked up the threat, drastically over-estimating the size of the rocket and its payload. Jones waited on the evidence that would allow him to crush these challenges to his expertise. Cherwell was from the beginning an outspoken sceptic. His disbelief in the V-weapons was hard to distinguish from his jealousy at Churchill's reliance on Sandys to undertake such crucial work.

When the War Cabinet discussed the matter in June 1943, no one was willing to take the risk that Cherwell was right. Bomber Command was instructed to attack Peenemünde. The raid took place on the night of 17–18 August, immediately after the American attacks on Regensburg and Schweinfurt. It was the first since Harris took command to use a really large force against a precision target. Almost six hundred bombers took part in the attack, under the direction of a 'master bomber', who flew round the target throughout the raid to direct incoming aircraft onto the aiming point. Even so, 80 per cent of the bombs fell in the surrounding woodland, but substantial damage was done to the research facility and 178 German engineers killed, along with 700 Russian and Polish prisoners

and workers barracked at the site. Forty of the bombers that took part failed to return. The raid did little to affect the technical development of the rocket, but together with the opening of the Combined Bomber Offensive, it did encourage the Germans to move production into underground factories. That made manufacturing the rockets even more complicated, time-consuming and expensive – and deadly, to the unfortunate slave workers and concentration-camp inmates who dug the tunnels in which the factories would be housed. The apparent success of the Peenemünde raid did not ease British concerns. That summer, further intelligence made clear that the Germans were working on two weapons, a rocket and a flying bomb. Through the autumn of 1943, arguments about – and confusion between – the two impeded the British response. In the meantime, the war in the Mediterranean moved into a decisive new phase.

'HUSKY'

Before it was anything else, the battle for Sicily was fought in the air. The air campaign that took place around the amphibious invasion not only allowed the landings to be successful, but represented a striking victory over the enemy air forces in their own right. Carefully organized preliminary operations began in the middle of May 1943 and culminated in the week before the invasion, 3–9 July. The forces at Tedder's disposal demonstrated the remarkable build-up of USAAF air strength in the Mediterranean since November 1942. Of 267 squadrons under his command, 146 were American and 121 from the British Commonwealth. With a front-line combat strength of 3,462 aircraft and the strong systems of maintenance and logistics he had transplanted from the Middle East, it was a really formidable weapon. In the seven weeks before the invasion of Sicily it wrecked Axis air power in the Mediterranean. In a striking contrast to continued British predominance in naval and ground forces in the theatre, it was the deployment of American air power (under the direction of a British senior officer) which really shifted the balance.

After the defeat in Tunisia, the Luftwaffe had moved aircraft from the Eastern and Western Fronts south to the Mediterranean. Most of these were bombers rather than fighters, however, and the reinforcements were dissipated because they had to be positioned to defend the Balkans as well as Italy. Of the 775 Luftwaffe aircraft in position to defend Sicily, about 289, together with 145 Italian planes, were based on the island. Serviceability rates were less than 50 per cent, not least because so many

tools, vehicles and spares had been lost in Tunisia. German attempts to introduce new massed attacks on enemy bomber formations backfired badly because they lacked the time and early warning networks to form up before they themselves were mobbed by Allied fighters.³⁷

First, American and British bombers hit ports, airfields and marshalling vards Italy, Sicily and Sardinia, across communications and maintenance facilities but not revealing the real site of the invasion. This phase included a prolonged bombardment of the island of Pantelleria, a small island about 60 miles southwest of Sicily and an important early warning station that had been heavily fortified by the Italians. Between 6 and 11 June, it was the target for 3,712 sorties, which dropped 5,324 tons of bombs, as well as a sustained naval bombardment. The stunned garrison of some 12,000 men then surrendered, and Pantelleria became a base for Allied fighters and anti-submarine aircraft.³⁸

From 3 July 1943, the air campaign intensified and became more focused. Airfields on Sicily and Sardinia were attacked round the clock, destroying entire squadrons on the ground and causing heavy losses to Axis groundcrew. Headquarters, rail and road connections were targeted. With only two airfields serviceable, Axis fighters had to leave Sicily – they would fight the invasion operating at long range from mainland Italy. During the preliminary campaign, Tedder's forces had destroyed 428 Axis aircraft, and put themselves in a powerful position to protect 'Husky'.³⁹

Nonetheless, the Axis air forces launched the largest effort they could to attack the invasion fleet, sparking a furious anti-aircraft barrage from the ships below. Significantly, however, losses to these air raids were much lighter than had been feared, and the dominance already established by the Allied air forces meant that the fight for the skies over the invasion site was relatively brief. During July 1943, Luftwaffe losses in the Mediterranean reached a wartime peak of well over six hundred aircraft, about a third of which were the most advanced single-engine fighters and their often highly experienced pilots. The overall figure was about 8 per cent higher than the number of German aircraft lost in the heavy fighting on the Eastern Front in the same month. As the Axis air forces were ground down in the Mediterranean, Allied bombers were able to undertake more intensive operations against the Italian mainland.⁴⁰

In contrast to this carefully worked out and devastatingly implemented air campaign, the airborne component of the invasion went badly wrong. The combination of inexperienced USAAF pilots, poor weather and heavy anti-aircraft fire from the invasion fleet resulted in the gliders carrying the 1st British Air Landing Brigade being released too far out: almost half fell

into the sea, drowning the elite airborne troops aboard. US paratroopers were scattered far from their drop zones. Subsequent airborne drops were badly hit by Allied anti-aircraft gunners.

On the morning of the invasion, however, the appearance of the airborne troops contributed to the mood of panic that overwhelmed the Italian coastal divisions. Taken completely by surprise and subjected to naval bombardment, they surrendered or fled. This saved Allied troops from the worst effects of the confusion that developed on the beaches as troops came ashore in the wrong order or the wrong place: a sign of how much could still go wrong amphibiously despite the improvements since 'Torch'. Italian and German mobile units counter-attacked but were repelled by naval gunfire. This was another indication of the fighting still to come – in all subsequent coastal battles, the devastating effects of naval bombardments on exposed Axis troops would be a critical Allied advantage.

Kesselring persuaded Hitler that with sufficient reinforcements he would be able to mount a prolonged defence of Sicily. A German corps headquarters, and a division each of paratroopers and motorized infantry, were sent to reinforce the island, and three defensive lines prepared in an effort to make the Allied advance as long and costly as possible. For all the successes of the air campaign, including major raids on railway marshalling yards between 13 and 19 July that blocked the route south from Rome, the Allies spread their air attacks too widely over the Italian transport network to block the movement of these reinforcements.⁴¹

The Allies therefore faced another prolonged attritional slog. Given the lack of Italian resistance on the beaches, Montgomery tried to push his troops north quicker than planned, but as German reinforcements arrived, the Eighth Army's advance towards Catania ground to a halt. In front of the Americans things were easier, and Patton believed the way was clear for him to leap out of the bridgehead and cut Sicily in two. Montgomery wanted to launch a second blow on his left, which would cut straight across the American line of advance. To Patton's fury, Alexander allowed this manoeuvre to go ahead. The precipitous terrain, however, meant that neither of Montgomery's attacks moved quickly enough to outpace the defence. Patton, deciding to conduct his own offensive, sent his army first towards Palermo, then across northern Sicily. Faced by less resistance, the Americans advanced swiftly, taking 50,000 Italian prisoners, and swung themselves into line alongside the Eighth Army. As their defensive perimeter diminished, however, the remaining Italians and Germans were able to hold up American, British and Canadian attacks alike, until 16 August, when Patton gleefully beat Montgomery into Messina.⁴²

Meanwhile the Axis forces staged an astonishingly successful evacuation to the Italian mainland, saving 50,000 German and 60,000 Italian troops as well as 51 tanks and 163 guns. 43 Bearing in mind the extent of their air and naval superiority, this represented a significant Allied failure. The narrow geography of the Straits of Messina made direct naval intervention impossible and allowed the Germans to mass antiaircraft artillery around the crossing points, but Tedder and Coningham (in command of the air units directly involved in the battle for Sicily) had failed to plan for a foreseeable eventuality. The US heavy bombers that might have clobbered the evacuation from high altitude during the day were in short supply, some having been committed to an attack from North African bases on the Ploesti oil refinery in Romania on 1 August, and others released for raids on Rome and German airfields in southern France. Since lighter aircraft could not penetrate the thick curtain of flak, the Germans and Italians completed a daylight evacuation almost unimpeded. Since the forces that escaped would play a crucial role in allowing the Germans to defend Italy south of Rome, it was a particularly consequential error.⁴⁴ Yet this operational shortcoming should not obscure the strategic success that the Allies had achieved. Not only had they crossed the Mediterranean and inflicted devastating casualties on the enemy air forces, but the shock of their arrival in Sicily would be sufficient to precipitate Italy's withdrawal from the war and force the Germans to defend the whole of Southern Europe. Thanks not least to the ambiguities over the future strategy that had permitted strategic agreements, however, the Allies would be unable to capitalize quickly or fully on this success.

'THE SUN BEAT DOWN UPON US AND SUCKED THE STRENGTH OUT OF US'

Sicily in the height of summer was a horrible place to fight a battle. It was blazingly hot. Much of the island was criss-crossed with terraced hills and vicious inclines. The flatter Plain of Catania was cut across by narrow rivers. Vehicles could make only slow progress and the climate and terrain left soldiers exhausted. Alexander Baron, one of the great British soldierauthors of the war, described the experience for infantry just holding their ground:

The sun beat down upon us and sucked the strength out of us. Our uniforms clung to us

uncomfortably, sodden black with sweat. We could not wash to keep cool or drink enough to keep thirst at bay, for water was scarce . . . We huddled, ill and miserable, in our burning little holes in the ground. 45

The few roads and tracks were easily blocked by mines or demolished buildings, thick-walled villages turned into miniature fortresses, and there was plentiful cover for enemy snipers and machine-gun teams. The landscape helped Axis commanders to stage a prolonged delaying action.⁴⁶

With malaria and sand-fly fever both endemic, soldiers in Sicily were also stalked by disease. Malaria had already been a threat in North Africa, where Allied doctors had tried to establish a regime of prophylaxis based on regular doses of Mecrapine (another crucial product of US industrial mobilization after the loss of much of the world's quinine production after the Japanese invasion of Java). Attempts to inculcate an understanding that self-protection against disease was each soldier's responsibility to his comrades were undermined when inadvertent over-dosing led to a mass outbreak of diarrhoea and vomiting in Algiers on 30 April 1943.⁴⁷ Combined with Axis propaganda suggesting that Mecrapine led to impotence, this episode helped to instil a prejudice against the drug among officers and men, and many didn't take their tablets while they were on Sicily. Supplies of mosquito nets and long trousers were inadequate, and army medical anti-malarial units came off the boats too late to protect the troops. As a result, during its time on Sicily the Eighth Army suffered 11,590 cases of malaria, compared to 7,798 battle casualties. This preventable disaster forced improvements in training and the very widespread use of DDT for the invasion of mainland Italy. That greatly reduced infection rates, but the malaria contracted on Sicily had a lasting effect on infected troops even after they returned to the UK.⁴⁸

Tactically, combat in Sicily required considerable adaptations. During the early days of the campaign, British and Canadian troops who had trained for the physical strain of mountain warfare staged some daring attacks that showed a lot of initiative. It was hard to find flat ground for gun positions in the broken terrain, but British artillery served the infantry well, responding quickly to the demands of advancing troops and bringing down concentrations of fire that devastated enemy units caught in the open. Infantry and tanks, however, still struggled to work together, and the landscape made it difficult for infantry to follow closely enough behind an artillery barrage to take advantage of its stunning effect before dug-in defenders recovered. The slow pursuit of the retreating Germans through northeastern Sicily indicated a lack of drive from battalion and brigade commanders as well as among their leading troops.⁴⁹

Since 1941, the army at home had been trying to improve the skills of British infantrymen through the establishment of 'battle schools', which gave men intense training to prepare them for the confusion of combat. This included the inculcation of drills that were meant to allow an infantry platoon to attack an enemy position using only its own weapons with a mixture of fire and movement. Some soldiers would shoot to force enemies to keep their heads down, while others approached through cover for a final assault. On the front line, however, these drills often broke down.

One problem was technical. Thanks to the remobilization of the German war industry since 1942, German infantry were increasingly well supplied with automatic weapons, with which they could produce a very heavy volume of fire. In response, the standard British infantry section weapons – the rifle, a sub-machine gun or two and the Bren light machine gun – could not always produce the firepower required to suppress opponents determined not to allow assaulting troops too close. The other problem was tactical, as diagnosed by Lieutenant Colonel Lionel Wigram, a Territorial Army officer and infantry training expert who visited the Mediterranean in 1943, commanded troops in action and interviewed officers and men about their experiences in battle with the aim of developing improved instructional techniques at home. He found that the tactical drills taught in the battle schools bore little relationship to how infantry platoons fought. Wigram believed that each platoon had a core of what he called three or four 'gutful men', who could be relied upon to act aggressively under fire, about another twelve 'sheep', who would follow the others if well led, and as many as six who would either refuse to move or run away at first contact with the enemy. Since everybody went to ground when the shooting started, attacks usually depended on the few 'gutful' men simply rushing the enemy without any covering fire from their comrades. If they got there, their opponents usually fled and the attack succeeded. If they were hit, the attack stalled.⁵⁰

Wigram wrote a detailed report proposing changes to how infantrymen were taught. In the long term, he proposed training them to use the terrain to infiltrate their way into enemy positions before an attack began. In the short term, he suggested grouping all the platoon's machine guns together under the senior NCO, to make sure that they would produce enough fire to allow the platoon commander to lead the rest of the unit into an assault. When a copy of Wigram's report reached Montgomery, the general was furious. It brought out both his determination to control the narrative around his army and his disdain for 'belly-achers', particularly junior

Territorial Army officers with disruptive ideas who criticized their superiors. With the supply of manpower to the army already running low, there was no time to retrain the infantry. Nor was this the moment to undermine the mood of certainty that Montgomery had worked so hard to instil. Wigram was demoted on the spot and returned to his infantry battalion as a company commander. With them, he went to Italy, where he volunteered to serve as a liaison with partisans, and was killed during an attack on a village in 1944.⁵¹

Whether or not Wigram's model was an accurate depiction of every unit in the British army, both his report and Montgomery's reaction help to explain some of the difficulties that afflicted British infantry units in combat between 1943 and 1945. They were a bit mechanistic in attack, very dependent on artillery support, and sometimes lacked the skill to fight their way through broken country. Casualties to the most aggressive soldiers meant that attacks quickly lost impetus. In and out of combat, that effect was compounded when battalions had been in action for a long time and away from home for even longer. The change in the strategic circumstances meant that senior officers no longer had to fear mass surrenders in the face of enemy offensives, as in 1942, but – particularly when physical conditions were bad – they continued to worry about whether their men would stick it out and how much urgency they would show in attack. Among officers and other ranks, the sense was growing that continued service was conditional on soldiers not being asked to do too much.⁵²

'A VAST BUT POSSIBLY FLEETING OPPORTUNITY'

The invasion of Sicily led inevitably to further operations in the Mediterranean. During July 1943, reports started to reach Cairo that Italian occupation forces in the Balkans were ready to come over to the Allies if they could be guaranteed protection from the Germans and from the local inhabitants. This caught the Allies without an agreed plan about what to do in the event of an Italian surrender.⁵³

Initial planning for follow-on operations to 'Husky' had been cautiously based on three possibilities. If an invasion of mainland Italy were not possible, the Allies would capture Sardinia. If it were possible, they would land either in the 'toe' of the Italian peninsula, across the Straits of Messina, or in the 'heel' to secure the port of Taranto. Both these

landing areas were easily covered from the air, but any advance from them would have to take place across considerable distances and difficult terrain. Neither therefore offered much prospect of decisive action. The disintegration of Italian forces on Sicily encouraged both Churchill and Marshall to ask for plans to be developed for an amphibious landing close to Naples instead. As well as cutting off southern Italy, this would capture a major port, from which they hoped to be able to launch a rapid advance towards Rome. Though Marshall accepted the logic of maintaining the momentum against a crumbling enemy, he hoped that such an operation would allow for a quick victory so that Allied forces in the Mediterranean could be quickly drawn down, guaranteeing the release of ships and troops for 'Overlord'. On 18 July 1943, Eisenhower and his British subordinates agreed to recommend an invasion of the Italian mainland. The American General Mark Clark was ordered to begin planning for the Naples landing, codenamed Operation 'Avalanche', with his Fifth US Army, which would comprise British and American troops.⁵⁴

In Rome, meanwhile, the combination of Allied bombing raids and the Sicily invasion had persuaded a group of senior Fascists, military leaders and the king that it was time to find a way out of the war. Mussolini was arrested on 25 July 1943, and a new military regime installed under Marshal Badoglio. Since it was plain that the Germans would not allow Italy simply to step out of the firing line, the new government declared its continuing commitment to the Axis powers but prepared to open secret negotiations with the Allies. It took weeks, however, for this process to get started. The lack of clarity over what was happening in Italy, combined with an increasingly pressing military timetable, encouraged AFHQ to over-estimate the possibilities of likely Italian co-operation. ⁵⁵

After Mussolini's arrest, the combined chiefs ordered Eisenhower to launch 'Avalanche' as quickly as possible. It was, however, a risky operation, planned at pace and with limited amphibious resources. To try to ensure that they could take advantage of any Italian collapse, on 20 July the British chiefs had ordered Admiral Cunningham to retain in the Mediterranean all the ships and landing craft that had been scheduled to move to the UK and the Far East. The move infuriated the American joint chiefs, who read British desire for flexibility as evidence that they wanted to overturn the agreements reached at 'Trident'.

Even so, it would take six weeks to assemble enough landing craft for 'Avalanche', and there would be only enough to put ashore one army at a time. The range limits of Allied fighters operating from Sicily meant the furthest north a landing could take place was the Bay of Salerno, just south

of Naples, on a long arc of beaches surrounded by an amphitheatre of hills. If Axis forces mounted serious resistance, it was very possible the landing would be pushed back into the sea.⁵⁶ The risk was balanced by the potential reward of a rapid advance through an Italy that might then be coming over to the Allied side. As Eisenhower told Marshall at the end of July 1943, there could be 'a vast but possibly fleeting opportunity to accomplish all we are seeking in the Italian peninsula.'⁵⁷

'Avalanche' was scheduled to take place on 9 September 1943. Since it could not be shipped over the same beachhead, the Eighth Army would cross the Straits of Messina six days earlier, on 3 September. This operation, codenamed 'Baytown', would be quicker and safer than 'Avalanche', but Montgomery's men would have to take a long and winding route northwards before they could meet up with Clark's Fifth Army. Montgomery could see no strategic value in 'Baytown', and he hated the plan. It's main attraction to AFHQ, as the clock ran down towards 'Avalanche', was that it offered a means to put further pressure on a wavering Italian government. ⁵⁸

Hitler had been extremely angry at Mussolini's arrest, and he was well aware that the new Italian government was looking for a way out of the war. The Germans had already developed plans to move reinforcements from the Eastern Front and France into Italy and to disarm and replace Italian garrisons in the Balkans. By the end of August, there was a total of thirteen German divisions in Italy, and an army headquarters had been set up in the south to command German forces withdrawn from Sicily. Hitler had also made it clear to Italy's leaders that he knew that they were stretching out peace feelers, and that his troops stood ready to act against any indication of treachery.⁵⁹

Yet Hitler and the German high command were also nervous about the risk of over-committing troops to Italy. The successful Allied deception operations that had accompanied 'Husky' meant that they over-estimated Allied shipping in the Mediterranean and believed that Eisenhower would be able to launch multiple strong amphibious assaults. They were therefore very worried that German units defending southern Italy would be outflanked and destroyed, or turn out to have been needed to face an attack in the Balkans. Allied disinformation played on these fears, making the Germans battle to place troops over a huge theatre with poor communications. While German deployments were therefore intended to keep the Italians in line for as long as possible, deter any Allied landing and delay its progress up the peninsula, Hitler's plan in the event of invasion was a strategic withdrawal north, where the smallest number of

German divisions would be able to hold a mountain line against any Allied attempt to drive over the Alps. Though evidence of the strength of German forces made Allied planners increasingly nervous, there was enough intelligence about this intended withdrawal for them to remain confident that, if their troops got successfully ashore, they would not face much resistance south of Rome.⁶⁰

The presence of German forces in Italy, however, meant that the Badoglio government had to move very carefully in negotiating with the Allies, and that its ministers were always most concerned with guaranteeing their own personal survival. Over-estimating both the scale of any Allied invasion and the likelihood that its details would be shared with them before it was launched, they wanted certainty that the Allies would rescue them before they signed any surrender agreement. While they played for time to achieve this, they could neither oppose the arrival of German reinforcements, nor issue instructions to their own commanders to prepare to change sides.

Any agreement on a surrender was further complicated by the memory of what had happened in North Africa, and Roosevelt and Churchill's subsequent statement on unconditional surrender. Eisenhower and Bedell Smith, eager for a quick solution that would maximize the chance of the Italians helping an invasion, drew up short terms for an armistice that masked the need for unconditional surrender. Nervous at the idea of Eisenhower once more taking charge of diplomatic negotiations, Washington and London both tried to insist on political control, including the Italians simply offering their surrender unconditionally and then accepting a long list of armistice terms drawn up by the Foreign Office and the State Department. Negotiations with the Italian envoys ate up more of the time that was counting down to the launching of the Salerno invasion.⁶¹

As the Italians provided information about German forces in the south of Italy, AFHQ became still more worried about the danger that they would counter-attack and destroy 'Avalanche'. Increasingly urgent military necessity allowed Eisenhower, Bedell Smith and Macmillan to take charge of the surrender process themselves, and on 3 September 1943, with the Eighth Army already across the Straits of Messina, they secured Italian agreement to what were essentially the original, shorter, surrender terms. ⁶²

Over the days that followed, however, the organization of the Italian surrender fell apart. AFHQ drastically over-estimated the organizational capacity of the Badoglio government, and under-estimated the strength of the German units massing round Rome. It narrowly avoided a disastrous drop of American paratroopers onto the airfields around the Roman capital in the mistaken belief that this would spur on Italian military resistance. Expecting a later landing at Salerno, the Italians failed to realize that they had run out of time to get more details of the Allied invasion before preparing their own troops to resist the inevitable German response. At 6.30 p.m. on 8 September 1943, Eisenhower broadcast his announcement of the Italian surrender. An hour and a quarter later, Badoglio followed suit. As the Germans activated their contingency plans, and generals, ministers and the royal family fled Rome, the Italian armed forces disintegrated. Rounded up, and in some cases massacred, by the Germans, they would offer no assistance to the invading Allies. 63

Bearing in mind the advantages in time and space that the Germans derived from having their troops on the ground, it is doubtful that the 'fleeting opportunity' Eisenhower perceived ever really existed. Given that the Allies were bound, as even Marshall recognized, to follow up Mussolini's departure with a landing on the Italian peninsula, the gap between Allied and Italian capacities and what would have been required to drive the Germans quickly out of the country was just too great. In the Allied case, however, at least some of these difficulties were self-inflicted. The lack of strategic agreement over Italy meant that there had been no proper preparation for its defeat. 'Unconditional surrender' had to be adapted ad hoc and the timetable of negotiations driven by an invasion which lacked the strength to guarantee success. The mismatch between aspirations and resources would continue to bedevil the campaign into which the Allies were now stuck.⁶⁴ That in turn reflected a continuing difference over strategic aims in the Mediterranean that was evident at the great Allied conference codenamed 'Quadrant'. Overlapping with the surrender negotiations, this was held at Quebec in Canada between 15 and 24 August 1943.

'QUADRANT'

During the summer of 1943, relations between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union seemed to deteriorate. Following the 'Trident' conference in May, Stalin had reacted furiously to news that a cross-Channel invasion had been set back until 1944. He complained that Churchill and Roosevelt were leaving the Red Army to fight the war by itself. Left out of the negotiations with Italy that August, the Soviets suspected that the British

and Americans were preparing a deal with the Fascists. Stalin replaced his ambassadors in London and Washington: a move that was interpreted as a demonstration of Soviet pique. Rumours started to circulate that, with the Germans retreating, the Soviets might sign their own peace with Hitler.⁶⁵

At the Washington Conference, Roosevelt and Churchill had agreed that they ought to meet again during the summer of 1943, preferably in a tripartite conference with Stalin. Behind the scenes, however, Roosevelt had been trying since the start of the year to arrange a bilateral meeting with the Soviet dictator. He wanted to lock the USSR into his plans for the post-war world without Churchill's enervating presence. When the prime minister found out, he was horrified. He had very much enjoyed his time as the peripatetic colossus of the Grand Alliance, and he did not want the other two leaders to settle anything without him. He wrote to the president proposing that all three might meet at Scapa Flow – or anywhere else. Since Stalin would not agree to a conference before the end of the summer campaigning season, however, Roosevelt suggested that the British and Americans might in the meantime meet in Quebec. With regard to the rapid developments in the Mediterranean, they had settled on mid-August as a date.

Marshall came to the conference determined to win the argument about strategy. As far as he was concerned, British actions since Washington, above all the 'standstill' order to shipping, had shown that they were still more committed to furthering their own interests in the Mediterranean than enabling decisive offensives against Germany and Japan. That view was only confirmed when the British chiefs announced that they'd like further operations in response to an Italian collapse to be the main topic at Quebec, ahead of plans for the Far East and with the 'Overlord' invasion third. In response, the joint chiefs insisted on reasserting the priorities laid down at the Washington meeting. When they said 'Overlord' came first, they meant it. As at Washington, the Americans were well organized and united, and, with his gaze already lengthening to the post-war horizon, Roosevelt backed them up. In the days before the August conference, Churchill stayed with Roosevelt at his Hyde Park home. He found the president would simply not be moved on issues of strategy. ⁶⁶

The British delegation was in any case more divided than at previous conferences. Pound in particular was showing signs of severe mental and physical deterioration: the result of the brain tumour, then still undiagnosed, that would kill him within a couple of months. Brooke, however, had prepared a detailed case that operations in Northwest Europe and the Mediterranean were interconnected. So far from giving up on

'Overlord', as the Americans suspected, he argued that its success was best served by committing sufficient forces to enable aggressive action in Italy. An Allied offensive into northern Italy would capture air bases from which to bombard southern Germany and compel the Germans to commit forces currently stationed in France, the Balkans or on the Eastern Front.⁶⁷ 'In my mind it is all so clear and palpable', he recorded in his diary on his way to the conference. 'If we pin Germany in Italy she cannot find enough forces to meet all her commitments.'⁶⁸

His argument was strengthened by the initial COSSAC plan for 'Overlord', which was presented to the combined chiefs for approval in Quebec. Based on an invasion across open beaches in the Baie de la Seine in Normandy, it laid down three preconditions for success: a substantial reduction of the Luftwaffe's fighter strength; the limitation of German army reserves, in theatre or on the Eastern Front, to ensure that they could not quickly assemble a large, high quality counter-attacking force; and the provision of artificial harbours to allow the invaders to be supplied before they had possession of a working port.

At Quebec, Brooke and Portal would argue that, by forcing the Germans to reallocate their air and ground forces, an offensive into northern Italy provided the best means of meeting the first two of these requirements. This would, however, require some flexibility from the Americans on the principles laid down at the 'Trident' conference. Some or all of the seven veteran divisions currently earmarked to move from the Mediterranean to the UK ahead of 'Overlord' would have to stay where they were to give the offensive in Italy its momentum. As a result, the launch date for 'Overlord' might have to be postponed from 1 May 1944 until June or July of the same year. Brooke contended that, without these changes to maintain Allied success, all the other forces committed to the Mediterranean might go to waste. To Marshall, on the other hand, this was further evidence that the British were not willing to give 'Overlord' the priority it required.⁶⁹

Brooke did not get a lot of help from Churchill. Excited by the successes in the Mediterranean, the prime minister wanted to seize the moment in Italy, the Balkans and Greece. Increasingly willing to express doubts about the success of any cross-Channel attack, he pointed out that the assembled troops could always be used to launch Operation 'Jupiter', his long-favoured landing on the coast of Norway. The chiefs, who rejected this idea, appealed unsuccessfully to him not to mention 'Jupiter' at the conference lest it further antagonize the Americans. The real focus of Churchill's excitement, however, lay in the Far East.⁷⁰

Here too the Americans were angry that the British had failed to see through their promises of a major offensive into northern Burma. Churchill, recognizing the need for the British to be seen to be doing their bit against the Japanese and frustrated with his generals' caution, had – at Leo Amery's suggestion – decided to establish a new South East Asia Command (SEAC) under a fresh supreme commander, whom he hoped would inject new vigour and enthusiasm into the theatre. Brooke and Churchill initially agreed on Air Marshal Sholto Douglas for this role, but he was vetoed by the Americans. The combined chiefs favoured Admiral Cunningham. He was unwilling to take the job. En route to Quebec, Churchill announced to an appalled Brooke that he had decided to appoint Mountbatten.⁷¹

This was not his only initiative. After the failure of the Arakan offensive in the spring, Churchill had given up on the Indian army, but he had noted the newspapers' celebration of Wingate's Chindit raid. Wingate was ordered home. After one meeting, the prime minister decided to take him to Quebec as evidence to the Americans that the British took Burma seriously. Wingate's long-range penetration tactics were offered as the means by which to clear northern Burma for the construction of the Ledo Road. Wingate quickly won over the Americans. This was a clever device by Churchill, a means to focus attention away from British failure, but it had significant consequences. Garlanded with promises of British troops and American resources, Wingate left Quebec as an acting major general with a key role in the next year's Burma campaign.⁷²

Churchill's real interest in Southeast Asia, however, was not Burma but Singapore – and for him the route there now lay through a descent on the northern tip of Sumatra. Despite warnings from his chiefs of staff that his plans were logistically fantastical, he had become obsessed with the dream of British expeditionary sea and air power recapturing what had been so humiliatingly lost in February 1942. The pleas of his military advisors notwithstanding, he repeatedly brought up the possibilities of landings in Sumatra, codenamed Operation 'Culverin', during the 'Quadrant' conference.

In the meantime, the combined chiefs argued out their differences over Europe. When the discussions broke down, over the American refusal to accept anything other than the outright prioritization of the cross-Channel attack, the chiefs once again moved into closed session to try to restore their trust. Once more, the outcome reflected growing American power. The British received recognition that 'Overlord' and the Mediterranean were linked and that some flexibility in the allocation of forces might be a

good idea. The 'standstill' order was rescinded, however, and the forces allocated to 'Overlord' would still depart the Mediterranean without contributing to Brooke's preferred campaign in Italy. With Wingate to the fore, the British agreed to make another major effort to recapture northern Burma, though news of heavy floods in north-east India placed the nature of any offensive in doubt. The Americans briefed the British on their plans for the Pacific, ignoring Brooke's suggestion that the allocation of landing vessels between 'Overlord', the Mediterranean and the Bay of Bengal would be easier if fewer of them were being allocated to the US Navy's war against Japan.⁷³

For Brooke, it was a bitter conference. He was desperate for another operational command, and Churchill had repeatedly promised him that he would appoint him supreme commander for 'Overlord'. During the prime minister's visit to New York before the conference, however, he had agreed with Roosevelt that, bearing in mind that COSSAC's planning showed that US troops would ultimately make up the majority of those invading Northwest Europe, it would be better if the operation were commanded by an American. Brooke was devastated, not helped by the fact that in the same conversation Churchill told him that Roosevelt had accepted his nomination of Mountbatten for SEAC. By the general's own admission, it took him months to recover. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he became increasingly irritated by Churchill's behaviour as the conference went on. They rowed repeatedly about Churchill's fascination with northern Sumatra. Brooke ended the conference disappointed with the Americans' desire to run the war according to a series of 'lawyers' agreements', but furious with 'a peevish temperamental prima donna of a Prime Minister' – who had disappointed his greatest ambition without a word of apology.⁷⁴

Churchill had been playing for higher stakes than Brooke's pride. After weeks of British worry, in July 1943 Harry Hopkins had told Roosevelt that he ought to stick by his promise to Churchill of atomic collaboration. Days later, Sir John Anderson had visited Washington to conclude a formal agreement, ready for Roosevelt and Churchill to sign at Quebec on 19 August. It committed their countries to work together on an atomic bomb. Neither would use it against the other, nor against anyone else without the other's agreement; neither would share nuclear information with a third party without the other's consent; and the US president would decide what industrial or commercial benefits the British would be allowed to draw from the atomic research programme after the war.

If this was a significant concession on Churchill's part, it was also a

calculated one. It was not just the best that he could do, but – as he saw it – the best way to bring the British and Americans into the closer association that would be vital to their shared future.⁷⁵ Roosevelt's willingness to restore the atomic alliance indicated how far he too was gazing into the future. By summer 1943, the president looked forward to a world in which, not least thanks to American actions, British power would have declined dramatically and Soviet power greatly increased. He hoped that the Russians could be persuaded of American good intentions, and he would shortly make a major personal effort to ensure that they worked with the Americans to build a stable peace. Yet he was also wary of the danger from a resurgent Soviet Union. Britain might have a part to play in defending American interests, and, in the meantime, he needed its cooperation in the establishment of his new world order. Of the 'four policemen' – the USA, USSR, Britain and China – who Roosevelt wanted to safeguard the peace, only two might be allowed to have atomic knowhow – and the decision on that would rest firmly with the president of the United States.⁷⁶

A large team of British and Canadian scientists now moved over to the United States, where they became a small part of the Manhattan Project to build the bomb. Among them was Klaus Fuchs, a brilliant young German theoretical physicist, a refugee from Nazism, and a Soviet spy. Fuchs, as it turned out, had no problem sharing nuclear information with a third party without the consent of either of the signatories to the Quebec Agreement.⁷⁷

'People have more money for saving and spending'

Wartime work, Rationing and the Black Market

At the start of 1943, Edward Relton, a thirty-two-year-old former journalist, returned to the UK after eighteen months of aircrew training in Canada. On the reports he had received while he had been away, he had expected to find 'a distinctly shabby lot of people (men in patched suits, women in bare legs or cotton stockings)', showing 'the usual stoic gloom . . . cynicism . . . fatalistic resignation'. Instead, he discovered that:

Nearly two years' immunity from air raids had wrought a form of super-organisation . . . Food was sparse but, to ensure health, adequate; in the case of those who, like myself, abhor carrots and potatoes, it appealed less to the palate than to the appetite. Everybody seemed very brisk and purposeful and tough.

It was a country of paradoxes that could 'acclaim the Prime Minister's (and therefore its own) declared resolve . . . to hang on to the Empire . . . allow the leader of the Indian National Congress to starve himself, if necessary, to death', and 'praise and rationally discuss such a kindly revolution in social economy as the Beveridge Report'. Relton concluded that: 'A democratic New Order is emerging; a wider and better emancipation, it seems, might be won, in combination with an enlarged sense of national and international duty, a sterner personal discipline.' 1

Shot down over France in 1944, Relton would not live to see whether his vision was realized. It was a partial view, a published statement that, like most such things, reflected an aspiration rather than reality. Yet Relton's sense of mid-war Britain as a *different* place deserves attention. The early autumn of 1943, with one of Britain's enemies defeated and preparations under way for the final offensive in Europe, is a good moment to break the narrative and explore what had changed as a result of the war. The next three chapters explore different aspects of the country in the middle years of the conflict, and they shift the focus of the account

from the battlefield and the conference table to the factory floor, the barrack and the cinema.

'THE NECESSITY OF THEIR WORK'

In the five years to 1943, the labour force grew by 3 million, to 22.3 million people: a figure that counted part-time workers as half and omitted those over sixty-five, overseas workers and Axis prisoners of war. Five million people worked in the engineering, metal, chemical and shipbuilding industries: 4 million of them making something for the armed services.² The state exerted unprecedented control over the labour market. Essential Work Orders – under which workers could not leave their jobs or be dismissed without the permission of the Ministry of Labour – covered more than 55,000 businesses and 8 million workers. Introduced to stabilize employment in munitions factories, they had been extended to every area where production was essential to the working of the war machine, including woollen and worsted dyeing, leather tanning, and the manufacture of pencils and sanitary towels.³

Throughout the war, many more British men worked than fought. The majority of civilian workers were always male, and in June 1943 they outnumbered servicemen by three to one. As the war went on, however, the male civilian workforce consisted increasingly of boys awaiting callup, older men past the age of conscription, those unfit for service, and those exempted because of the essential nature of their employment.

In 1943, men outnumbered women in paid employment by about three to two. Even at the height of mobilization, 55 per cent of the British adult female population remained at home. Nonetheless, the paid female workforce increased dramatically. Much of this growth occurred before female conscription was introduced. From the start of 1942, however, all single and childless women aged between twenty and thirty were classified as 'mobile', eligible for direction into war work wherever needed. The upper age was extended to forty in January 1943. Mothers with children under fourteen were exempt. Married women without children could be compelled to take work locally but were classed as 'immobile' and could not be directed further afield. In July 1943, women aged up to fifty were required to register for war work, a so-called 'grannies call-up' that resulted in more older women taking part-time jobs.

Between 1939 and 1943, the number of women in insured civil

employment increased from 4.8 million to 6.8 million. In some sectors, such as the railways, where the number of female employees increased from 25,000 in 1939 to 88,500 in 1943, women took the place of men who had gone to war. The greatest increase, however, took place in the warrelated engineering and munitions industries. The female workforce in this sector grew from 488,000 in 1939 to 1.9 million in 1943, increasing the proportion of female workers from 17 to 38 per cent.⁸

At the time, some women were enthusiastic about their achievements. Touring the home front in 1942, James Lansdale Hodson met a woman tool-setter in a munitions factory in northwest England, who told him: 'I've never worked outside the house before, but I love doing this.' She was earning more than £5 a week. One of her colleagues boasted to Hodson that she handled 'enough shells each shift to weigh thirty-seven tons, "but I'm jiggered at the end of it," she said.'⁹

Not everyone was so satisfied with the diluted, de-skilled jobs on which most wartime industrial recruits were employed. In her lightly fictionalized account of her own war service, Diana Murray Hill explained that she had 'high minded' thoughts of 'taking a more real part in the war effort' when she signed up for munitions work:

although I had very little sense of anything practical and certainly not mechanical, I hoped there would be thousands stupider than myself, and that if I listened to what I was told, and turned handles, I should get along. Here, of course, I was wrong, as it is not really cleverness that you want in a munition factory, and although turning handles is a wonderful rest for a time, you do need some mechanical sense and a lot of stamina. ¹⁰

Murray Hill's background was middle class, which made her unusual as a munitions worker. Very few middle- and upper-class women went into industrial work at any point during the war. A 1943 survey of adult women in industry found that about half of machine-tool operatives had worked in manufacturing before the war. Though as prone to boredom as anyone else, they were already familiar with the daily grind. They were also more likely than new entrants to experience the camaraderie and solidarity that made factory life bearable, as well as the satisfaction of getting higher wages than they had ever earned before. ¹¹

Moving into industry highlighted the differences of social behaviour that existed within the working class. Women from 'nice' jobs in shops or salons could be appalled by filthy working conditions and bad language. '[S]he did not mind swearing', one woman, a former confectioner's assistant who had 'not had a tender upbringing', told her mother after she started munitions work, 'but this was awful'.¹²

For women who spent all day working in greasy, dusty conditions, the paucity of toilets and washroom facilities was a cause of perpetual complaint. Even in factories that were well equipped, managers, suspicious that women were spending too much time away from the production line, locked doors, turned off water and removed mirrors at the end of scheduled breaks.

Most women war workers got a job relatively close to home or had chosen to move in search of work, but from 1942 to 1945 around 13,000 'mobile' women were directed to factories in different regions of the UK. Despite the wartime revival of heavy industry and the development of new munitions and engine factories, Scotland had a surplus of 'mobile' women, and it was from there that the first tranche of workers was drafted south, to the engineering factories of the Midlands, in 1942. The move aroused considerable protest from Scottish nationalists, the Scottish TUC, their parents and, as a Home Intelligence official reported, from the women themselves:

they remain grudging and querulous until assured of the necessity of their work. From the questions most frequently put at meetings they are very doubtful of that necessity. They ask 'When will we be sent home?', 'Are we going home in July?' . . . 'Why aren't there more factories in Scotland?', 'Why do we have to come down here?' 'Why are English girls employed in Scotland?' ¹³

Parental fears that daughters who went into war work would have their reputations ruined were not misplaced. War workers were talked about in the same terms as evacuated mothers or women in the ATS. '[S]o many of them are not house-trained' complained one unsympathetic billeting officer: 'they're dirty, throw food away, pieces of bread in the lavatory. Many of them arrive pregnant, some have VD, others scabies . . . They come from a long way off and from distressed areas – you can't blame the poor girls, but it is hard on the hostesses.' Hard on the girls too, travelling away from home to a strange place, for work of national importance, without the coupons to afford a new set of clothes, then having to pay a scrounging landlady for bread so stale that the only polite thing to do was to hide it away, then drop it down the loo.

The only thing worse than being a young woman was also being Irish—and therefore, apparently by definition, immoral, Catholic and drunk. Some billets refused to take Irishwomen, and some workers refused to work alongside them. Visiting a tank shock-absorber factory on the outskirts of London in June 1942, Hodson spoke to a woman from Killarney: "Why did you come?" "Oh," she said, "I expect it's this digging for gold." Her father and brothers are farmers. "They're glad I'm

doing war work," she said. "The Irish are not as bad as we're painted, are we?" The previous month had been the first since the war began in which the plant had not worked seven-day weeks.¹⁵

'BUT THEY SEE YOU GET THEIR WORK DONE'

War factories could be different from anywhere men or women had worked before. ROF Bridgend, one of the largest ordnance plants in Wales, employed 37,000 workers at the peak of its production, most of them women, many of whom had worked previously in domestic service, or in small tinplate factories, or shops. Now they entered a complex protected by armed guards, spread over three sites and nine hundred acres, with hundreds of buildings, sixty miles of roads and twenty-four miles of railway tracks. The complex had its own hospital, canteens and staff newspaper, as well as a laundry to wash the overalls worn by those in contact with explosives. In their scale, provision for workers' welfare and organization for mass production, the royal ordnance factories were very modern places, a long way from the craft traditions of older British industry. ¹⁶

Not all war work was done in this type of hyper-modern plant. The new factory to which the Mass-Observation investigator Celia Fremlin went to mingle with the workers, for example, was in a former stately home outside Malmesbury in rural Gloucestershire. It made radio detection equipment for the RAF. Most of the workforce were local young women with no prior experience of industrial work.¹⁷

Other workers stayed in the same place while production changed. Most engineering firms converted to war work for the duration. The Birmingham Railway Company, for example, shifted to making tanks rather than rolling stock; Lines Brothers – formerly toy manufacturers for Tri-ang – made landmines and sub-machine guns; Raleigh Bicycles made fuses, shells and cartridge cases; and Cadbury's sheet metal and mouldings departments turned from maintaining chocolate production lines to sub-assembling aircraft landing gear. ¹⁸ Other companies maintained pre-war production to meet the demands of the wartime state. Wartime bureaucracy generated enormous demand for files and filing cabinets: by June 1943, one person in three employed making paper and cardboard in the UK, and one in two of the furniture-making workforce, a total of more than 66,000 people, were engaged on contracts for the military. At the

same point, it took 17,000 workers just to keep Britain's servicemen and women in socks.¹⁹

As minister of labour, Ernest Bevin was determined that industrial conscription must be accompanied by better working conditions. He resumed control of factory inspections from the Home Office, and ordered factories to appoint doctors, nurses and welfare officers and to set up canteens. Bevin also demanded improvements in hostels, transport and entertainment. Industrial welfare provision did get better: the number of factory nurses increased from 1,500 to 7,800 between 1940 and 1944; nearly 12,000 factory canteens were established during the war; and new public nurseries provided 112,000 places for the children of working mothers.²⁰ In some areas, these were lasting improvements that would shape a pastoral experience of work and welfare for twenty years after the war.

A lot of the increased industrial effort, however, was damaging to workers' health. As well as traditionally cripplingly hard physical work in mines and docks, the war saw more workers exposed to dangerous chemicals and asbestos, used with abandon as an insulating agent and for waterproofing vehicles. Long hours and inexperienced, elderly or unhealthy workers resulted in increased rates of industrial accidents as the war economy accelerated. At their worst, in 1941, there were 1,646 fatal accidents at work, 43 per cent more than in 1938. Non-fatal accidents peaked at 313,267 in 1942, an increase of 57 per cent on before the war.²¹

Conscripted into the giant ordnance factories, young women had to move to remote areas, far from their homes. The government built official hostels – massive, ill-constructed dormitories, packed with bunk beds and with communal showers, in which the food was dismal and the entertainment minimal. All men were banned, and the hostels were surrounded by barbed wire. Lonely, homesick and bored, female workers loathed them. Billy Butlin, the king of the holiday camp, was appointed director of hostels in 1941. He instigated mixed dances, with carefully chaperoned male partners bussed in from nearby military camps. Even Butlin, however, couldn't rescue the hostels' reputation. No matter if it meant travelling for hours on overcrowded public transport, if they could, most women preferred to live at home.²²

The female workforce got older as well as more numerous. In 1931, there had been two and a half times more women workers aged eighteen to twenty-four than thirty-five to forty-four, and only 16 per cent of employed adult women had been married. By 1943, the cohorts of younger and older women were almost equal, and 43 per cent of women workers

were married.²³

As well as putting in their shifts, married women were still expected to keep house and shop for rationed food. In a heavily employed country, they were surely working the hardest: six days at work, trying to keep on top of feeding their families and cleaning the house, then a seventh day of backbreaking clothes washing, ready for the whole cycle to begin again. Some factories gave women additional lunch hours to get in shopping, or a special badge to put them to the head of the queue, but they remained subject to the tyranny of local shopkeepers, empowered by austerity to stick to strict opening hours and half-day closing and with whom women had to remain on good terms if they wanted scarce food and household goods. Workplace childcare provision, though much increased, remained minimal. Local authorities were meant to set up nurseries, but councillors often refused because they thought they damaged children. When the Wartime Social Survey interviewed working mothers in autumn 1943, only 5 per cent of their children attended nurseries. Instead, mothers relied on an informal network of relatives, neighbours and acquaintances.²⁴ As one woman complained:

I'm going to a new job on Wednesday – quarter to 9 till 6 . . . I'll get a friend to get a bit in for me, I expect. There's often someone to help you out, you get some good ones and some bad. They ought to give you an hour off to do your shopping but they don't. I don't know what I'll do next week – I'll manage somehow I suppose. It's awkward when you've got a baby, you've got to get a bit of shopping in. They don't do *anything* for the workers do they? But they see you get their work done. I haven't had any proper sleep this week. The woman who minds my baby nights has let me down. ²⁵

Working mothers were disproportionately prone to taking unauthorized absences, not just because they had to deal with family crises, or decided that, bugger the foreman, they were going to stay in the queue and finish their shopping, but also because they were exhausted, frequently ill and sometimes just unable to spring out of bed and run, on aching legs, for the bus.²⁶

Women workers knew that things would probably change with the end of the war. The munitions factories would close, the men would come back, and most of them would lose their jobs. After years of separation, many younger married women couldn't wait. When Mass-Observation talked to workers at a large factory on the outskirts of London about their plans for the future, a twenty-five-year-old woman said:

Anyway, I'd get out of it tomorrow and have twins if I could. My husband's got his job reserved when he comes home; I only hope he'll be able to settle down to it again. If he weren't so far away I'd very likely be having a baby by now.²⁷

Some older women, like this sixty-one-year-old, were more reluctant: 'I was lucky to get a good regular job here – I get the money coming in regular now, so I can manage. But what it'll be like for the old 'uns like me after the war, well, don't ask me.'²⁸ For this forty-five-year-old wife, part-time war work had come as a release:

I'd like to go on . . . if I could. You see, to me it's freedom . . . It makes you feel younger and it makes you *look* younger, going out to a job each day. I can do my housework and shopping in the morning – and I do let me house go a bit now. My Husband comes home at night and I give him a proper dinner. And that's how we live. And now I don't have to scrape every penny together. I wish part-time work had come to stay.²⁹

'THE CHAPS IN THE WORKS ARE PAMPERED TODAY'

Britons were conscripted and directed into jobs they didn't like, lost their right to change their employment if their factory became subject to an Essential Work Order, and could be fined or imprisoned if they were persistently absent. The shortage of labour during the second half of the war, however, meant that, for most workers, industrial discipline eased. The fear of dismissal vanished, and they could do things that would have meant the sack a decade before: smoking, chatting, singing, cheeking the foreman, arriving late, leaving early, or taking an extra day off. The piping of radio music to the shopfloor provided an audible demonstration of the shift in power.³⁰ In spring 1944, Richard Brown, a maritime engineer in Ipswich, recorded his experience of changing factory life in his diary:

Compared with pre-war treatment the chaps in the Works are pampered today. They have the tea wagon each morning and afternoon, a Works Council which acts as intermediary with the employers, concessions in time such as leaving off early on pay-day so as to draw money and be off at the usual time, are allowed to smoke all day and somehow get away with a slightly lower standard of work. I merely state this as a fact, not that I am opposed to any of it except the last item. 31

The pressure of wartime production and Bevin's regulation of the labour market forced even those employers who had previously banned trade unions to treat with organized labour. By 1945, 15.5 million of Britain's 17.5 million insured workers were covered by collective bargaining agreements.³² In return for working with their bosses to increase output and cut down absenteeism, shop stewards won the chance to recruit freely on the factory floor. Total trade union membership grew by more than 3 million people, 1 million of them women, over the course

of the war. In 1944, 8.2 million people belonged to a trade union, almost twice the number in 1934. Membership of the Allied Engineering Union grew more than fivefold between the start of rearmament in 1935 and its wartime peak of 825,000 members in 1943 – the year in which it decided to recruit women, as special temporary members, for the first time. Bevin's own Transport and General Workers' Union, which recruited women at an earlier stage in the war, grew from 460,000 members in 1935 to more than a million, nearly a third of them women, in 1943–4.³³

The growth in union membership was one of the great political facts of the war. The unions emerged from the conflict strong and certain that they would be included in any political settlement. It was an impressive victory for Bevin, confirming the pattern of industrial relations that had become established before 1939. Employers and trade unions still disagreed about the role of the state: the unions wanting nationalization, the bosses government-financed loans and a steady supply of workers. They agreed, however, on the need to keep the state out of wage negotiations. Despite Labour's commitment to central planning, Bevin's wartime regulations enshrined free collective bargaining as a fundamental principle. They also enshrined an aristocracy of labour that left 'weaker' workers in an inferior position. The corporate world of big employers and powerful unions that emerged from the war would persist for a generation afterwards. It was one instinctively opposed to individual enterprise.³⁴

One of the consequences of trade union expansion was that more people became involved in organizing workers. The number of shop stewards in the engineering and metals industries doubled during the war. Managers increasingly consulted them over production and welfare. Communist shop stewards, in particular, clashed with workers who thought that their representatives ought to be wringing better pay out of the bosses, not improving output, disciplining absentees and avoiding industrial action.³⁵

Not least as a result of this dichotomy, Bevin's Joint Production Committees did not become permanent fixtures of factory life. There were about 4,500 such committees in 1943. Most held only a few meetings. They were more popular, and lasted longer, in modern plants where industrial relations were quieter. Yet their appeal to workers was always limited because they were meant to restrict their discussions to production rather than pay and conditions. Bevin's hopes that the JPCs would form the basis of a new industrial democracy were to be disappointed after the war. ³⁶

In 1944, 3.7 million working days were lost to strike action, nearly

four times the number in 1940, though much less than the 5.8 million that had been lost in 1918.³⁷ Strikes were more frequent and much longer in areas where industrial relations were already bitter. Ninety-one per cent of all the days lost between 1942 and 1944 were in the coal and engineering industries.

In the aircraft, tank and munitions plants of southern England and the Midlands, full-blown strikes were rare. There were plenty of ways short of strike action – go-slows, overtime bans or mass absenteeism – by which workers could safely exert pressure on management. When they did occur, disputes were usually about pay, and swiftly resolved in favour of the strikers. In contrast, the shipbuilding yards of northern England and Glasgow proved much more prone to prolonged industrial action. Big shipbuilding strikes on the Tyne in October 1942 and at Barrow-in-Furness in September 1943 involved large numbers of workers in extended disputes over pay and traditional working practices, but also reflected shipwrights' frustration with union officials. There was a very large strike at the Rolls-Royce Hillington plant in November 1943 – the only major action during the whole war in pursuit of higher women's wages. ³⁸

At the start of 1944, the shipyards in Belfast and Tyneside were hit by even bigger strikes. In Belfast, 400,000 working days were lost, more than in any other strike outside the coal industry during the war. Simultaneously, the largest coal strikes of the war broke out. The pay award of 1942 had not ended miners' discontent. With the end of the war approaching, they doubted the government would really nationalize the mines. They became even more embittered and determined to look out for themselves. In January 1944, when demands for further pay increases were refused, miners struck in all the major coalfields. Bevin took drastic action. In April 1944 he pushed through a new Regulation 1AA, which promised harsh fines and sentences of up to five years in jail for those who instigated disputes in essential industries. Bitterly opposed by the unions and the Labour left, he argued that he had to deal with the Trotskyite agitators who were causing the strikes. Whether Bevin in fact believed in this mythical conspiracy is unclear, but its spectre got the minister of labour a powerful measure with which to threaten industrial militants.

In fact, however, the strikes were dealt with in traditional fashion: strikers in Belfast and the coal mines got their pay increases, and Bevin frightened the apprentices on Tyneside back into work by sending them their notifications of medical inspection prior to military call-up. Regulation 1AA was never actually used.³⁹

As a factory worker explained to Mass-Observation in September

1943, there was considerable sympathy for men striking for better conditions:

the miners are striking on the side of our boys in the forces if you look at it in the right way . . . They're not fighting only for themselves, they're fighting for the boys out East that'll have to go down the mines again when they come home and put up with the old conditions unless the men can better them now. 40

By March 1944, however, Home Intelligence reported that the miners' strikes were causing 'anger and disgust', particularly among

people who are short of coal, from relatives of servicemen, from farm labourers and people in rural areas, from middle class people and from those who resent anything which may prolong the war. Strong indignation is expressed by many at 'miners bargaining for money while their comrades are dying', at their 'blackmail' and lack of patriotism. ⁴¹

'TO THE EFFORTS OF ALL WHO CULTIVATE THE SOIL, THE COUNTRY OWES A GREAT DEBT'

In contrast to coal mining, agriculture was perceived as a great wartime success. The state's efforts to prepare for and to fight the war transformed the rural economy. Farming became profitable, but only thanks to massive state subsidies and through high intensity, large-scale arable farming.⁴²

The UK was never self-sufficient in food, but its farmers did grow a lot more during the war, despite the requisition of a million acres of farmland by the armed forces and the eventual use of another 10 million for military training. Helped by good weather conditions, 1943 produced a bumper harvest. Production of wheat and potatoes expanded dramatically, as did milk production. The net calorie output of British agriculture increased by 91 per cent, and the output of protein by 106 per cent.

Table 3. UK agricultural statistics, 1936–1943

1936–38 average	1943
13,088	18,728
1,652	3,447
-	13,088

Potatoes (1,000 tons)	4,873	9,822
Pigs (1,000s)	4,466	1,828
Cattle (1,000s)	7,930	8,428
Liquid milk sold (m gallons)	72 (1939)	97.2

Contemporaries put the success down to a mix of tradition and modernity. Propaganda posters showed the rural idyll of deep England as something the nation was fighting to protect. Farmers were lauded for their 'centuries of natural wisdom' - now combined with state-provided scientific expertise and new technology: tractors and combine harvesters, fertilizers, improved animal medicine and plant breeding, and more extensive use of silage. 45 In fact, such changes had relatively little effect. There wasn't the time or the spare resources for most farmers to innovate. The volume of nitrogenous fertilizers used almost tripled during the war, but uptake remained so restricted that it didn't make much difference to crop yields. 46 Agriculture became much more mechanized: by April 1944, almost 174,000 tractors were in use on British farms, a more than fourfold increase on pre-war numbers, as well as 2,500 combine harvesters.⁴⁷ Most of the latter were imported from the US under Lend-Lease, but the tractors were overwhelmingly Fordson Ns, mass-produced at Ford's Dagenham factory in the UK. They were simple and reliable, but so old-fashioned that they were no longer being manufactured for farmers in the United States.⁴⁸

The tractors enabled a wholesale ploughing up of pasture land. The area under cultivation increased by 50 per cent between 1939 and 1944, a shift to arable unparalleled in the history of the UK. The increases in crop production mirrored almost exactly the increase in acreage. Output went up not because of scientific miracles, but because of yet more really hard work.

In farming, as in many other essential industries, the core workforce were men exempted from conscription. Increasing reliance had to be placed on other sources of labour as the war went on. By June 1943, 843,000 people were employed in agriculture, an increase of 130,000 since June 1939. That included 223,000 women, 78,000 of them members of the Women's Land Army (WLA), and about 50,000 Italian POWs.⁴⁹ In the same year, 1,335 farm camps ran for urban children and adults, who were invited to 'lend a hand on the land' during their one week of holiday from

work. Soldiers stationed nearby were ordered to assist with the harvest.⁵⁰ Experienced men who had been called up were replaced with initially less efficient agricultural novices. Increases in production therefore relied on more people working longer hours.⁵¹

Despite initial resistance from farmers and farm labourers, the 'Land Girls' of the WLA eventually undertook a wide range of work. As well as arable and livestock farming, the 'Lumber Jills' of a subsidiary body, the Women's Timber Corps, worked in the forests cutting down trees, while WLA pest controllers played a leading role in a campaign against vermin that was estimated to have saved a million tons of food and feedstuffs in 1940–41.⁵² Land Girls were civilians, not service personnel, and they got only seven days of leave a year, compared to the twenty-eight they would have got in the auxiliary services. They were paid half the equivalent wage of male agricultural workers, plus board and lodging. Since farmers were officially prohibited from using them for domestic work, they escaped, at least in theory, the burden of keeping house, but their billets were often primitive. Like young women in munitions factories or the services, they were subject to frequent accusations of immorality.⁵³

The arrival of unfamiliar workers – Land Girls, conscientious objectors and prisoners of war – was just part of the disruptive effect of the war on the countryside. Waves of new arrivals changed day-to-day relations. Buildings and farmland were requisitioned, troops on manoeuvre crashed through crops, and new industrial structures – supply depots, vehicle and shell parks, airfields – were carved out of the landscape. Often, the experience confirmed a rural belief in the toxicity of modern urban life, and the interlopers sometimes seemed to revel in the confrontation. 'We have had enough complaints from you', an army officer told the owner of a manor house who had demanded compensation for the damage wreaked by billeted troops. 'If we have any more we shall take the whole place over at our valuation, lock, stock and barrel, do what damage we like, and sell it for what it will fetch. What do you expect from a conscript army?'⁵⁴

Simultaneously, the war brought significant benefits to male agricultural workers. Labour ministers made sure they got a better minimum wage and eligibility for unemployment benefit, while their scarcity value meant the wages they earned significantly increased. Though there were always criticisms about wealthy country folk buying in fancy comestibles, the rural food situation was better than that in the cities, with much greater access to fresh supplies of off-ration goods.

The key agents in forcing through rural change were the 'War Ags' – the County War Agricultural Executive Committees (CWAECs) in

England and Wales and the Agricultural Executive Committees (AECs) in Scotland – organizations of local worthies and bureaucrats who managed the countryside's contribution to the war.⁵⁵ Their members decided what should be ploughed up to meet the government's targets, tried to improve land management and restore infertile fields, and allocated pools of government-provided machinery. They also oversaw a host of other agricultural policies, from fen drainage to the provision of pigs for pork pies. By 1943, the 75 county-level committees in England and Wales were backed up by 30,000 full-time technical advisors and administrators, and 478 district committees: farmers who were meant to encourage their neighbours to meet the War Ags' demands.⁵⁶

Between 1941 and 1943, these district committees conducted National Farm Surveys. These included classifying each farmer as 'A', 'B' or 'C' according to their skill and probity in working their land. The 5 per cent classified 'C' could be required to vacate their property so that it could be taken over by other farmers.⁵⁷ By the end of the war, almost 2,800 people – mostly smallholders unable to keep up with demands for maximum production – had been dispossessed completely by the state. Distraught at this expropriation, at least two committed suicide. Another barricaded himself inside his farmhouse and was shot dead by the police.⁵⁸

War Ags were Tory organizations, dominated by landowners and large farmers: the male rural elite. They could support those who were struggling and pressure the recalcitrant. Their neighbours and tenants had little choice but to comply. Attempts to impose bureaucracy and promote modern methods aroused sceptical resentment, particularly when the drive for further increases in production resulted in the ploughing up of land that was useless for arable farming.⁵⁹ The National Farm Survey also sparked animosity, even from those who were meant to undertake the work. Major Claude Thompson, for example, an estate manager in North Yorkshire and chairman of his District WAEC, initially refused to ask his committee members to report on their neighbours:

it would be an unheard of intrusion on their voluntary services . . . It is really a compilation of a Domesday Book, and has no bearing on our effort to increase food supplies for the Nation. In fact it savours of some clandestine basis for political action at some future time. 60

Such fears were spurred on by Labour's long-term commitment to nationalizing the land. By the time the conflict finished, however, Labour leaders were moving away from this policy, partly because wartime experience made them aware of how difficult it would be to organize, and partly because the War Ags seemed to prove that the state could intervene successfully without large-scale expropriation.⁶¹ Thompson eventually relented, but like many farmers he thought that getting 'people well versed in agriculture' to spy for the government wasted 'time I should think would have been better employed in food production and getting on with winning the war'.⁶²

In the end, most big farmers had little to complain about. The war reinforced rural hierarchies, gave landowners, including the aristocracy, a national role and sense of purpose, and restored the value of land in a way not seen for a generation before. The incentives the government introduced to encourage the ploughing up of land heralded the shift to large-scale profitable subsidy farming that would characterize British agriculture for decades to come. Farmers with big acres who complied with the government's policies were able to make a lot of money and invest in improved technology. Having collaborated with the CWAECs, the National Farmers' Union ensured it would have a place in planning agricultural reconstruction after the war. In an atmosphere of anxiety and hope about future global supplies, it was already plain that these plans would involve continued reliance on increased domestic production, not least because of the power of the story that, having been abandoned between the wars, farmers had come to the nation's aid and must never be forgotten again.

'MORE MONEY FOR SAVING AND SPENDING'

In fact, the war meant higher earnings for all civilian workers. At the start of the war, wage rates had risen rapidly, and although wage increases lagged behind inflation, long hours of overtime and rising employment resulted in significantly increased household incomes. From 1941, official policies did more to stabilize costs, but wage rates continued to rise. As a result, by the start of 1944 a male manufacturing worker earned on average £6 3s 8d a week (an increase of 24 per cent in two and a half years), and more than £7 a week if he worked in engineering. Thanks to the overall shortage of labour, unskilled male workers enjoyed still greater relative increases, their wages rising from about 70 to about 80 per cent of their skilled counterparts during the war. ⁶³

For the most part, women entered industry during the war as dilutees, doing work that had been broken down into more quickly learned,

repetitive, less skilled sub-parts of a single male job. Women who did the same work as men were usually paid on a separate and lower women's pay scale. Even when they sought to recruit women, trade unions insisted on men's right to higher pay, and women working full time in war production typically earned about £4 a week. The gap between men's and women's pay narrowed during the war only because it reflected the shrinking difference between skilled and unskilled workers. In 1938, a women's wage in engineering had been about 52 per cent of a man's doing the same work. By 1943, it was about 64 per cent.⁶⁴

Particularly in places that had experienced prolonged unemployment during the great inter-war slumps, the combined effect of full employment and rising wages was transformational. In the South Wales Valley town of Blaina, for example, categorized as a 'distressed area' in the late 1930s, by 1942:

The unemployment problem has disappeared, a tenth of the population is in the forces, others in factory work and a few have returned to the pits. People have more money for saving and spending, are living better and on balance, more contentedly than for many years. 65

Nationally, Britons' total incomes before tax increased from £3,990 million in 1937–8 to £6,659 million in 1942–3. Over the same time, the official Cost of Living Index (CLI) had risen by 29 per cent. The resultant increase in prosperity, however, was more limited than this might suggest. An artificial measure based on the prerequisites of working-class life in 1914, the CLI did not reflect established patterns of consumption. While the government controlled the price of goods within the CLI to avoid still higher wage demands, the price of those outside the index rose more substantially. The CLI remained essentially static from 1942 to 1945; retail price inflation over the same period was about 14 per cent. ⁶⁶

Simultaneously, Britons paid a lot more tax. Lowered tax thresholds and rising incomes meant that the number of people liable for income tax almost doubled, to 18.25 million between 1937–8 and 1944–5. Since the number of those relieved of any payment under various tax allowances remained almost constant, the number paying income tax increased from 3.7 million to 12.5 million over the same period. Most of this increase consisted of workers who had previously paid little or no income tax. Before the war, very few workers had been liable for more than £3 of income tax. By 1944–5, an unmarried skilled engineering worker might be earning £350 a year, but he had to pay £88 12s 6d in income tax, just under a quarter of which was set aside as a 'post war credit', to be returned –

without interest – at an unspecified point after hostilities had ended.⁶⁷ Given the number of new taxpayers, the complexity of the previous system of tax calculation on past earnings and the widespread anxiety about unemployment after the war, the introduction of PAYE in 1943 (in which tax was deducted at source from every pay packet rather than calculated and paid for the previous tax year) was not just an important means of improving tax collection but a vital political step. As Bevin recognized early on, taxpayers needed to see revenue being drawn off their current earnings rather than building up liabilities for the future.⁶⁸

Those in the wealthy middle classes with an annual income over £2,000 were liable for surtax, which at its top rate (for income over £20,000) was a punitive 19s 6d in the pound. Though the numbers being assessed for surtax grew from 110,000 to 124,000 between 1941 and 1943, however, very few people paid at that top rate (just 1,740 in 1943–4, of whom 62 were assessed as having incomes over £100,000).⁶⁹ Rich clients sought out accountants who advised them on how to organize their affairs more efficiently – principally by deferring income and living off capital or tax-free interest on their investments. A new tax planning industry, brought into being by the war, would go on to become a major part of the UK's financial services sector.⁷⁰

With income tax rates as high as they could practically go, from 1941 the government made increasing use of indirect taxation to try to extract increased earnings from the economy. As a result, the share of indirect taxation within its revenues rose for the first time in a century.⁷¹ These included increased duties on alcohol, tobacco, theatre and cinema tickets, stamps and telephone calls, as well as a purchase tax of up to 100 per cent on 'luxury' consumer goods made outside the Utility regulations.

Taxes went up in every budget until 1944, and consumers had to get used to the fact that, although neither alcohol nor tobacco was rationed, both were much more expensive than before the war.⁷² Though efforts were made to increase the amount of home-grown barley – used in beer production – as a way to economize on grain imports, there was no great effort to restrict alcohol consumption, as there had been during the previous war. Consumption had in any case been at a historic low during the 1930s: increased earnings meant that it didn't fall further despite higher duties. A combination of rationing, price controls, the restriction of civilian production and subsidies (running at £190 million a year by 1943)⁷³ kept consumer expenditure on legally purchased food and rent essentially stable compared to before the war. Spending on motoring and

household goods plummeted, but between 1938 and 1943 consumer spending on alcohol increased from £285 million to £625 million, on tobacco from £177 million to £492 million, on communications from £29 million to £48 million, and on entertainments from £64 million to £140 million. 74

With so few consumer goods available to buy, and with thrift still celebrated as a domestic virtue, many people preferred to save their money. As a proportion of increasing disposable incomes, savings increased from 3.5 to more than 16 per cent between 1938 and 1944. Though many working-class families still kept their reserves in cash, tales of money lost in bombed-out homes encouraged a turn towards more formal saving. All banks reported increased rates of saving and decreased defaulting on loans. Almost a million new building society savings accounts were opened (building society interest was not liable for income tax). Financial products aimed at small-scale, working-class savers enjoyed a notable boom. Over the course of the war, the number of individual accounts at the Post Office Savings Bank grew from 12 million to 20 million, and the total sum they held increased by £1,100 million. During the same period, another £350 million was invested in the Trustees Savings Bank. Anxieties about personal survival encouraged more people to take out life insurance (a profitable line for insurers, since - like everyone else at the start of the war – they had over-estimated how many Britons would die as a result of enemy bombing), and higher wages meant more families paid more steadily into their assurance policies. Probably still the most ubiquitous form of working-class savings, collected weekly by the 'man from the Pru', these policies, which paid out a small amount on death if kept up to date, were terrible value but enjoyed a late boom from wartime prosperity, even as Beveridge was laying out plans to replace them with provision from the state.⁷⁵

A lot of small-scale wartime investment happened under the aegis of the National Savings campaign. This included the promotion of accounts with the Post Office and the TSB, the sale of Defence Bonds and the offer of 15-shilling savings certificates, purchased over time by buying stick-on savings stamps for minor sums, and which returned 5s 6d if held for ten years. Collecting money for these stamps was the focus of savings groups that flourished across the country during the middle years of the war. At their peak, in 1943–4, there were about 250,000 in England and Wales alone, and National Savings estimated that a third of the population were members. Just over half were based on individual streets and villages, with the rest distributed between workplaces, schools and social organizations.

By March 1944, there were even 23,000 such groups in the armed forces.⁷⁶

As the war went on, National Savings' publicity machine pushed the idea of savings as loans to the state to buy specific items of military equipment. To spur on the regular work of savings groups, a series of spectacular national campaigns, focused in turn on the Royal Navy, the RAF and the army, took place each year from 1942 to 1944, featuring parades, speeches and displays of military equipment, and based around local endeavours to achieve particular savings targets. A savings stamp might equate to a magazine of rifle bullets; a school might save enough to name a tank; a city enough to sponsor a destroyer.

From 1943, under the chairmanship of Harold Mackintosh, the owner of Britain's premier toffee-maker, president of the Advertising Association and the man who had made 'Quality Street' chocolates a household name, National Savings' marketing machinery became increasingly professional as it sought to extract further investment from a weary country. To launch the 1943 'Wings for Victory' campaign, Mackintosh had Trafalgar Square in London transformed into a tableau of an RAF airfield, complete with Lancaster bomber. Standing next to it, Lord Kindersley, the president of National Savings, released 1,300 pigeons, one to fly supposedly to every town, city and village that would be holding its own 'Wings for Victory' event (in fact they homed half a mile to the RAF communications centre from which Mackintosh had borrowed them).⁷⁷ In the seven years to the end of March 1946, Britons put £1,584 million into National Savings Certificates.⁷⁸ Together with the savings in the Post Office and the TSB, this meant small-scale private savers stored up during the war about as much money as was spent on the whole of Bomber Command's strategic campaign against Germany. 79

'I HATE THE QUEUING AND THEN FINDING THERE'S NOTHING LEFT WHEN IT COMES TO MY TURN'

Lots of the money earned was not saved but spent. As well as interviewing female factory workers on his 1942 tour round the home front, James Lansdale Hodson also took time to ask a trade unionist representing dock workers what his men were doing with their pay:

He said: 'Well, they can't buy household articles, etc. A suit they used to get for 50s costs £5 or £6. Whisky is 2s 10d a glass and beer 1s a pint and cigs 1s for ten. They can walk thro' that door yonder (a public house) and spend two quid in a night. If a man earns ten

A large portion of increased wage earnings disappeared this way, spent out of their pay packets by working husbands on beer and smokes and kept separate from whatever increased amount they allotted to their wives. The combination of high rates of duty on alcohol and tobacco and extensive price controls and food subsidies, however, had a small and completely unintentional redistributive effect within households: men spent more on booze and fags because of higher taxes, which the government used in part to stabilize the price of the food which was purchased by their wives.⁸¹

Earlier in the war, rising prices and supply problems had raised concerns about absolute shortages of essential foodstuffs. From 1942, as the systems of distribution and rationing developed and price rises were brought under control, there was much greater satisfaction about the quantity of food that was available.⁸² A thirty-five-year-old working-class woman, speaking to a Mass-Observation investigator in February 1943, explained: 'I think we are doing very well considering there is a war. I never was a one to bother about meat, and I find I've got plenty when I've got my rations.' A forty-five-year-old man explained that: 'To tell the truth I'm inclined to think we're better off than before the war. At least we can afford to buy what's going, and we're not on the bread-line by any means.'83 Lord Woolton, the businessman whom Chamberlain had appointed and Churchill kept on as minister of food, got a lot of the credit for the smooth running of the system.⁸⁴ According to Home Intelligence, people wished 'we had others like him, then the war would end this year'. 85 The king's private secretary, Sir Alan Lascelles, recorded in his diary that Woolton was 'the only man in the Government at whom I have never heard anybody express the wish to throw a brick'.86

Nevertheless, complaints about the difficulty of food shopping and dissatisfaction with aspects of rationing were a consistent element of wartime surveys of public opinion. Though a majority of male workers in heavy industry felt they got enough food to keep fit, they never felt that the ration gave them enough meat: something they would have expected to buy more of as their wages increased. Housewives expressed frequent discontent about the insufficiency of the fat ration, the unfair distribution of unrationed or only partially rationed food, including fresh fruit and eggs, and the lengthy queues, shopkeepers' favouritism and transport difficulties that characterized their experience of food purchasing.⁸⁷

Complaints about clothes rationing, however, were much more widespread than those about food. They grew stronger and more persistent

during 1944. There were particular problems for mothers of growing children and for working-class housewives whose stocks of clothes and linen were much sparser than those of middle-class households and who, unable to find replacements, were by this point 'struggling to keep themselves even respectable'.⁸⁸ Wartime clothing economies encouraged a female look with a squarer shape, shorter skirts and simple design. Utility clothing was widely regarded as poor quality, unlike the furniture, which was much more popular. Men disliked the look of the Utility suit so much that it didn't sell (stocks were eventually donated to refugee relief). Instead, they kept on wearing older clothes or tried to evade the austerity regulations.⁸⁹ Asked what they would buy if clothes rationing ended, men described better clothing for themselves; women listed shoes and stockings but also the towels and curtains that were needed at home.⁹⁰

As that suggested, women bore the weight of domestic management in war as in peace. Even for those not trying to find the time around full-time work, the hours they had to spend in queues or traipsing between shops meant that the burden was physical as well as emotional. When Mass-Observation investigated attitudes to shopping among women in Ealing, Chester and Bolton in autumn 1942, it found that 'the general feeling is one of more or less cheerful resignation, but those who dislike their shopping at all usually do so intensely'. That amounted to about a third of the women they spoke to, particularly – but not uniquely – among those aged forty to sixty years old, for whom, 'Dislike of shopping is centred more on queues than on any other subject.' Among the responses they collected were:

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C20 [i.e. a twenty-year-old 'artisan' class]: 'I get so tired . . .'
C40: 'It's not too bad now that things are rationed and it's fairer all round.'
C20: 'Waiting so long and queuing. There's no time to get home and cook the lunch.'
C40: 'I hate the queuing and then finding there's nothing left when it comes to my turn.'
D40 [i.e. unskilled working class]: 'I have to go all over for it now, whereas I used to be able to go to one shop and get it all there. Nowadays you have to hop about from one shop to another . . . it takes twice as long.'
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Middle-class women joked about the 'joy of the hunt' and had more time to search around, but the change for them was just as severe. Before the war they had been used to placing all their orders by telephone: now they had more frequently to pursue the quarry in person.⁹¹

One of the effects of the war was to push the government into addressing housewives directly as those required to implement the effects of rationing and control policies in individual homes. Communications included cinema 'shorts' and 'flashes', public displays of cooking in

'Wartime Food Demonstrations', and 'Food Facts' inserted as advertisements into newspapers. Most strikingly, however, it also included the BBC programme *The Kitchen Front*, which broadcast for five minutes at 8.15 a.m., six days a week from 1940 to 1943, and three days a week from June 1943 to July 1944.

Produced in collaboration (and sometimes in conflict) with the Ministry of Food, *The Kitchen Front* gave tips on the efficient use of rationed foods, the functioning of the points system and potential unrationed substitutes, as well as advice on how to use new imports, including dried egg. The programme also encouraged experimentation with new recipes for vegetarian dishes (largely variations on a theme of cheese and potatoes), promoted collective dining schemes such as British Restaurants and factory canteens as a good way to get a meal off-ration, and publicized the free vitamin supplements available for pregnant mothers and children. That *The Kitchen Front*'s experts had to try to persuade listeners to boil cabbage for *only* twenty minutes tells you all you need to know about British cuisine in the 1940s. ⁹²

Though aimed at women, *The Kitchen Front*'s regular presenters, the announcer Freddie Grisewood and 'the Radio Doctor' Charles Hill, were both male. They attracted substantial personal followings. Working-class housewives appeared most frequently as comedy turns: 'Gert and Daisy' (Elsie and Doris Waters) and 'Mrs Buggins' (Mabel Constanduros), all three of whom were also very popular with audiences. Combining useful advice with an entertaining format, without ever sounding too much like the voice of officialdom, *The Kitchen Front* was a successful programme. It had an audience of 5 million listeners, about four times that of any other daytime talk programme. About 55 per cent of housewives, drawn disproportionately from the working classes, were regular listeners. Whether or not they made all the dishes, they were grateful for any advice about how to make the ration stretch further, and they appreciated the assistance in coming to terms with something they had to do.⁹³

Wartime changes to the national diet, however, owed less to patriotic self-denial or culinary innovation than to simple necessity. Bread consumption fell by a fifth between 1939 and 1943, a decline largely down to the strong dislike some people felt for the National Wheatmeal Bread, which was by that point all that could be purchased. 'It's very crumbly and tastes like straw', one respondent to a Wartime Social Survey enquiry in 1943 declared. 'Does not even make good toast.'⁹⁴ Britons ate 12 per cent more potatoes in 1943 than in 1942, and 57 per cent of those whose consumption had increased said that they were substituting potatoes for

other foods. Mostly, this did not mean that they were making them into cheese pies or baking them for breakfast as the Ministry of Food proposed. Rather, the majority ate bigger and more frequent helpings of potatoes cooked in traditional ways: chipped, fried or mashed.⁹⁵

The success of *The Kitchen Front* encouraged other ministries to demand similar BBC co-operation on their own programmes. When the government attempted to promote voluntary restrictions on the use of fuel (as an alternative to formal rationing) in the summer of 1942, it was supported by a broad campaign of instruction and advice from the BBC. Freddie Grisewood presented thrice weekly *Fuel Flashes* and a weekly *Fuel Discussion*, with housewives providing their own economizing tips, and further publicity was inserted into regular talk and variety programmes (including *Children's Hour*, so that listeners could remind their parents how best to save fuel). ⁹⁶

From winter 1943, a *Fuel Front* programme replaced one of the daily *Kitchen Front* episodes, and elements of the campaign continued until April 1944. From an early stage, however, the BBC's own listener research suggested that the fuel campaign would be a failure. This was partly because, without formal rationing, very few people were willing voluntarily to restrict their consumption, but mainly because most of the advice that was provided – storing up tons of coal over the summer, gathering kindling in the (presumably extensive) garden, or eating in the kitchen rather than the dining room – was so alien to the experience of working-class listeners that they took it as evidence that the real problem lay further up the social scale.⁹⁷

Mass-Observation spent a lot of time in the autumn of 1942 investigating popular attitudes to fuel use and rationing. It found that many more women than men recommended the radio as the best means to address appeals to the public, but suggested that much of the fuel propaganda aimed at women failed to appreciate the factors that shaped working-class housewives' lives. Some kept a gas ring lit throughout the day, for example, to keep a kettle simmering (the only means to ensure immediate access to hot water), or because match shortages meant that if they turned the flame off they'd never get it re-lit. Financial hardship had often schooled them in economy well before the war, and if alone in the house they often would not light a fire throughout the day. Almost nothing, however (and certainly not the vague demands for voluntarism of a distant state), could dissuade them from trying to keep their children warm or building up a fire for when the man of the house came home. 'I don't mind for the mornings, I can muck along', an older woman told investigators,

'but I do like to have a good fire for them in the evenings.'100 'There, that looks a bit cheerful now for him,' said 'Mrs X', a fifty-five-year-old charwoman in Kilburn, finally lighting the coal fire just before her husband got off shift. 'He likes a good fire, Dad do.'101 With a new baby, 'Mrs F', another Kilburn woman, who lived upstairs from her mother and younger siblings, laid a fire once she'd got the other kids off to school and kept it burning all day. She could manage that only because her mother had told the coalman to deliver most of *her* allocation of coal to 'Mrs F' as well ('It don't bother her, the coal, she's out most of the day, and she's glad to save the money'). Before the baby had arrived: 'I didn't used to light a fire till Sid come home. I used to keep warm working about, and if I get cold I could always pop down to Mum's and have a warm up.'102

This was the common thread between the persistence of chips and fried potatoes as a dietary staple and the failure of the fuel economy campaign. These women did not ignore appeals to adapt to the demands of war. Used to putting other people first, they understood the appeals of self-sacrifice. They would not, however, put the demands placed on them as citizens ahead of those placed on them as wives and mothers – which was just how their menfolk, at home in overalls or overseas in uniform, wanted it.¹⁰³

If the wartime civilian economy replicated contemporary gender divisions, it also embodied divisions of social class. The wealthiest in society managed to maintain their food intake and the quality of their clothing pretty well. By the end of the war, however, reduced consumption had flattened out still further the differences in income and food intake between the middle and the prosperous working class. Unlike wages, salaries for most middle-class earners (apart from factory managers, designers and engineers) stagnated, with the result that they experienced both high tax rates and the erosion of their income differential with skilled workers. By the end of the war, middle-class families were consuming on average substantially fewer calories and less protein than before September 1939, bringing their diets more closely into line with those of the working classes. 105

This levelling down of diets contributed to tensions over the distribution of wartime sacrifice and encouraged anger against those seen to be paying their way out of austerity. It was also characterized by a strong shared expectation among the middle classes that wartime restrictions on consumption were a strictly temporary phenomenon. They could be endured in part because there would be a quick return to the halcyon pre-war days once victory had been achieved. 106

Wartime changes in consumption are sometimes thought to have had a significant effect on Britons' health. During the war, the British population as a whole ate more fibre and less sugar and fat than before the war, and expectant and nursing mothers and children could get additional 'welfare foods' of milk, dried egg, orange juice and cod liver oil. Most children drank the milk, but take-up of the other 'welfare foods' was limited, with the middle classes much more likely to take advantage of the supplemental rations. In fact, however, the consequences for health of these dietary changes were very limited. A few years of eating less fat made little difference to adults whose health had been determined by their nutritional intake since before they were born, particularly when many of them were smoking like chimneys, so there was no appreciable effect on levels of coronary heart disease. ¹⁰⁷ A much more significant change did take place in rates of maternal mortality, which plummeted from 84 to 25 per 1,000 births in England and Wales between 1939 and 1944. This largely resulted from the use of new sulphonamide drugs and blood transfusion, and the provision of free maternity care to wives of servicemen, however, rather than from better diets, though the latter may have helped to improve rates of stillbirth and neo-natal mortality, both closely related to maternal health. After 1941, infant mortality resumed its pre-war decline, but prewar differences between the social classes were maintained. 108

Children, however, were generally healthier. According to a British Medical Association Survey, by 1944, boys and girls had got physically stronger, about ¼ to ½ an inch taller on average, and 1½ to 2lb heavier than they had been before the war. A lot of this could be put down to the subsidized provision of school milk (much loathed by many children, but available to 76 per cent of them in 1944) and school dinners (40 per cent of schoolchildren in England and Wales ate a meal in school, compared to 4 per cent before the war). It also reflected mothers' determination, in the absence of fathers on military service or war work, to give the biggest portions and choice cuts to their children instead. 109 Death rates among children from diseases including scarlet fever, whooping cough and diphtheria fell very rapidly. Compared to the rest of the developed world, the British government had been late in introducing a programme of mass immunization against diphtheria, which only got under way in 1940. Unlike other countries, however, it was wealthy and stable enough to maintain the programme during the war. Holland and Germany, in comparison, had to abandon the immunization programmes which they had started before 1939, and suffered the worst epidemics in a generation in 1945. 110

'IT FELL OFF THE BACK OF A LORRY'

For those who wanted something extra, there was always the black market. Officials, lacking the manpower to crack down on every breach of regulations, were happy to make comparisons with the full-scale alternative economies that sprang up in Occupied Europe and insist that, in comparison, there was no real 'black market' in the UK at all. The interlocking control mechanisms put in place early in the war, regulating imports, production, supply and retail, made it difficult for illegitimate traders to operate at scale. Complaints about the quality and quantity of consumer goods aside, Britons were sufficiently well supplied that no one had to turn to illegal purchases in order to survive. Not least for this, the population overwhelmingly accepted the legitimacy of the state and its rationing regime: involvement in the black market in the UK was driven by the desire for personal enrichment rather than political resistance. ¹¹¹

Yet illicit exchange and criminal endeavour were so common that for most people they were a characteristic of wartime life. When Lord Woolton asserted publicly that there was 'no black market' in summer 1943, almost 90 per cent of those surveyed by the BIPO disagreed with him. In fact, contemporaries clearly distinguished between a 'grey' market of acquaintances bartering or gifting coupons, rationed goods or homegrown produce or getting 'under-the-counter' service from shopkeepers and a 'black' market of criminals engaged in large-scale theft, counterfeiting and illegal sales for big profits outside the control system. The first, though sometimes strictly illegal, was not widely regarded as immoral. The second, though never at a scale to challenge the legitimate economy, attracted much more moral opprobrium.

Official policy was always clear: people were free to do as they liked with rationed goods they had purchased, but coupons could not be pooled or swapped except within the same household. In practice, people were often convinced that coupons were their property; the equivalent of money which could be exchanged with others in return for cash or other goods. Rationing mechanisms designed to tie consumers to retailers and coupons to books were persistently circumvented, particularly when it came to clothes. Since shopkeepers were allocated sufficient surplus of rationed goods such as meat, fat and cheese to make up for the inevitable losses in cutting, dressing or display, it was easy for them to put enough aside to help out favoured customers with a bit more on the scales. 113

Swapping coupons between friends or doing right by loyal customers

bled easily into dingier areas of illicit behaviour, including buying coupons to sell on at a profit and pilfering by transport workers (long considered a perk of the job, it took on new significance in wartime). A thirty-six-year-old insurance clerk, keeping a diary for Mass-Observation in Newport, Wales, recorded that just before Christmas 1943:

a neighbour called in for an exchange of commodities. She is a private nurse and so has access to many delicacies. Her husband is also a dock-worker. She unloaded an orange, a few apples and a small quantity of Demerara sugar (did he bring it home in his boots?) . . . Of course we knew she expected something for these delicacies and she collected half a pound each of lard and margarine of which we had plenty. ¹¹⁴

There were other 'fiddles', such as retailers falsely inflating the number of coupons they had received or housewives declaring their ration books lost in order to get replacements while redeeming or selling on the original coupons. During the first year in which clothes rationing operated, the Board of Trade received almost 800,000 applications for replacement ration books, amounting to almost 30 million coupons in total. As news of how easy this scam was spread through communities like an epidemic, the Board had to stop issuing full replacements.¹¹⁵

The boundaries between grey and black markets were particularly porous in tight-knit communities - such as those around the docks in London or Liverpool – where local loyalties easily surpassed demands made by the nation, or for those with jobs where they came into contact with plenty of people who were eager to buy and sell. The playwright John Osborne's mother, Nellie, for example, benefitting from a torrent of tips from foreign sailors and soldiers in her job as a 'licensed victualler's assistant' ('not a barmaid . . . if you please') in the south London suburbs, showed no compunction about 'dealing openly in . . . coupons, points for sweets and ration books. Throughout the war, we always had more than enough butter, sugar, bacon and clothing coupons which cost, as I remember, three and sixpence each . . . I had all the oranges and bananas I could eat.' All of it was bought and sold openly in the pub's bar. Though she and her son 'had never eaten so well', she had to withstand withering disapproval from her late husband's mother, a strongly religious woman 'who would not turn on the wireless if the licence was a day out of date' and refused to accept gifts of black-market food for her other children. 116

At the other end of the spectrum, there were more substantial black-market activities. The majority of these were committed by legitimate businesses, usually small independent traders whose livelihood was threatened by wartime controls. They then diversified into illegal dealings, conducting a very profitable portion of their trade off-ration in order to

make ends meet. More determinedly criminal enterprises, including ration-book fraudsters and criminal gangs, made up a minority of black-market offences but got more attention and less sympathy than small businessmen being driven to the wall. The number of thefts reported to police soared during the war, not just because previously unremarkable consumer goods became more valuable by scarcity, but also because the apparatus of civilian bureaucracy and the vast stockpiles built up and moved around by the armed forces offered tempting targets in themselves. It was easy for consumers to take advantage of their ignorance and turn a blind eye to the criminality involved. This was the era in which 'it fell off the back of a lorry', as a euphemism for illicit acquisition, entered the popular lexicon. Organized gangs targeted delivery vans, meat stores and Food Offices (for the coupons they contained), but also ran rackets counterfeiting whisky and cosmetics for sale to unwitting punters. ¹¹⁷

Though Lord Woolton was very keen on tracking down and prosecuting every offender against food controls as a means to deter others, it was in practice very difficult for the government to enforce the regulations rigidly. From March 1942, there were stiff penalties for those found guilty of black-market offences, but proving a crime had been committed was hard. The public tended not to report illegal dealings from which they had themselves benefitted; the police hated enforcing regulations on businesses rather than chasing criminals; and ministerial inspectorates were initially under-staffed. A sharp rise in prosecutions for breaching control orders in 1942 came largely because an increase in the number of price inspectors allowed the state to scrutinize retailers more effectively. Even if a conviction was secured, however, there was little consistency in sentencing. Magistrates found it hard to keep track of all the regulations, and they were often reluctant to antagonize local opinion by issuing heavy fines or sentences to legitimate businesses who had dabbled in the black market on the side. 118

Not least because strict enforcement was impossible, the government sought to enlist popular opinion by portraying black-market dealing as unpatriotic and immoral. For the illicit trade in petrol, it made particular use of the blood sacrifice being made by merchant seamen aboard Atlantic oil tankers to condemn those seeking to profit from off-ration sales at home. Those who dealt in the black market were equated with the enemy, and those who bought from them with collaborators. During the war, this was a rhetoric that most Britons were very ready to accept, like these two people who spoke to a Mass-Observer in May 1943:

M35D: 'If I had my way, I'd make it a death penalty – that's the only way to stop it.' F40C: 'I feel they should be regarded as traitors.' 120

These sentiments were not just directed at other people's illicit activity. A few people rather liked the feeling of getting one over on the authorities. Most, internalizing the idea of the grey market, simply didn't think that their own actions were part of the unfair, illegal, profiteering world of the black marketeer. But while the war was on, many also took seriously the idea that they ought to try to stick to the rules, save scarce resources and do their part for a cause for which others were giving their lives. ¹²¹

'WHEN SHE SEES THE WORD "JEW" IN THE PAPER SHE HASTENS TO READ SOMETHING ELSE'

There was a commonly held belief that Jews in particular were profiting from the black market, and understanding this is crucial to any analysis of British reactions to the Nazi assault on the Jewish population of Europe. Before 1939, anti-Semitism in the UK was casual, persistent and widespread. Existing prejudices were brought out by the economic strains that followed the outbreak of war. Over- represented in food and clothes retailing – both sectors that were subject to close wartime control – Jews were disproportionately likely to be prosecuted for black- market offences relating to the sale of goods, rather than the infringement of regulations on manufacturing and supply. Newspapers, particularly the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Telegraph*, persistently and substantially over-reported Jewish criminality. Readers of their pages would have got the impression that about a quarter of all prosecutions involved those with Jewish-sounding names, when in fact the figure was closer to a tenth. ¹²³

The presumption of black marketeering affected popular responses to news of Nazi crimes against humanity in Europe. Wary of stimulating claims that the Jews had caused the conflict, the government did not initially emphasize Hitler's genocidal anti-Semitism in its propaganda. During 1942, however, the escalation of the extermination campaign in Eastern Europe was extensively reported at home and abroad. Stories described extreme brutality, deportations and mass murder – 'more than a million Jews killed in Europe' – involving the use of gas. ¹²⁴ On 17 December 1942, the Allied governments formally recognized that the Nazis were trying to destroy the Jewish population of Europe. Eden told the Commons:

From all the occupied countries Jews are being transported, in conditions of appalling horror and brutality, to Eastern Europe . . . None of those taken away are ever heard of again . . . The number of victims of these bloody cruelties is reckoned in many hundreds of thousands of entirely innocent men, women and children. 125

The bishop of London, responding on behalf of the archbishop of Canterbury in the Lords, declared: 'The deeds are so repugnant to the laws of God, and to every human instinct and decency, that whoever takes his share must receive dire retribution.' The archbishop of York insisted that the Allies were engaged on a 'crusade . . . to deliver our fellow men from a sub-human barbarism which, if victorious, would destroy all that is of value in human nature.' These comments were reported in the national press and by the BBC.

Yet many Britons failed to grapple with the horror.¹²⁷ It didn't help that the government was still reluctant to imitate the Nazis by singling out the Jews for special discussion. Public responses were often conditioned by existing prejudice. Asked 'How did he feel about Jews?', one man whose response was collected by Home Intelligence replied: 'Abroad – greatest sympathy; in England – general feeling that they badly want controlling.' A female railway clerk, keeping a diary for Mass-Observation, contrasted her own 'deep anguish' with the attitudes of others:

My mother-in-law says that, now, when she sees the word 'Jew' in the paper she hastens to read something else. My mother says 'If it wasn't for our men, God bless them, they'd be doing it here'. My landlady 'Oh, it is unspeakable, but mark my words – the tables will be turned, those that persecute the Jews never prosper . . .' I could not finish my meal the other day when they told of the things done to Jewish children on the wireless . . . The next day one of the clerks (who buys coupons) said 'that's one thing I agree with Hitler about, getting rid of the Jews.' I was so sickened by it all, that I told him what I thought, in no uncertain terms, not forgetting to mention that coupon buying people couldn't talk about black marketeers. I also addressed the office on the matter after he had left. They were silent about Jews but agreed that he was not one to talk about anyone. ¹²⁹

After the winter of 1942–3, reports about what was still happening to the Jews fell back out of the news. As the MP Harold Nicolson recorded, it seemed that editors were 'bored' of atrocities. Even as the last campaigns in Europe got under way, therefore, few Britons saw the Holocaust as a central part of the story of their war. The Blitz and the Black Market defined their struggle, not a fight against the Final Solution.

17

'We belonged to each other'

Military Service and its Consequences

Of all the changes in work that the war brought about, the recruitment of men and women into the military was the greatest. By 1943, the UK had been transformed into a colossal military base and training area, and, for many Britons, service in the forces – and its knock-on effects on those at home – defined the conflict. Service in the Second World War looked very different from that in the First. A generation before, in November 1917, 90 per cent of those serving had been in the army, which included the Royal Flying Corps. Every other soldier was an infantryman. Female auxiliaries made up much less than 1 per cent of those in uniform. Sixty-five per cent of British troops were overseas, most of them on the Western Front, and more than 540,000 British soldiers had died since August 1914.¹

Table 4. Comparison of British service personnel in UK armed forces. First and Second World Wars

	November 1917	September1943
Royal Navy (male)	407,000*	710,000
RFC/RAF (male)	105,185	982,000
Army (male, excluding RFC in WWI)	3.87 m	2.68 m
Auxiliary (Women's) Services,	19,000**	460,000
including nurses		
Volunteer Training Corps/Home Guard	285,000*	1.75 m

^{*} figure for November 1918

Table 5.1. Royal Navy strengths and locations, 1 April 1944

Theatre	Ashore	Afloat	WRNS
Home (including 'Overlord' preparations)	205,241	146,484	58,508

^{**} rising to 55,000 by 1918

Mediterranean	52,767	14,362	1,211
Eastern Fleet	35,083	12,278	1,064
Other	34,498	9,314	712
(not including 100 000+ on 'miscellaneous' postings including in transit in training and on long			

(not including 100,000+ on 'miscellaneous' postings including in transit, in training and on long leave)

Table 5.2. Army strengths and locations, 30 April 1944, with other ground forces under British Empire control

Theatre	British (Combat Arms/Support)	ATS	Dominion (all)	Indian (all)	Colonial (all)	Allied (all)
UK	1,468,021 (817,841/650,180)	206,000	167,817	0	0	42,750
Central Mediterranean	499,229 (305,982/193,247)	N/A	125,420	71,741	19,642	56,068
Middle East/ Persia/Iraq	230,600 (133,318/97,282)	N/A	39,383	145,280	122,764	68,170
India and SE Asia	239,781 (170,169/69,612)	N/A	0	1,657,773	101,016	441
West and East Africa	26,847 (11,817/15,030)	N/A	253	635	282,615	0

Table 5.3. RAF strengths by command (including Dominion, Indian and Allied personnel serving with RAF) and WAAF, 1 April 1944

Command	Aircrew	Groundcrew	WAAF
Bomber	48,861	135,519	32,245
Fighter	13,353	149,981	41,614
Coastal	12,606	56,018	12,957
Mediterranean	14,290	160,834	1,096
SEAC	5,765	102,546	4
Other (mostly UK-based, including Technical and Flying Training, Maintenance, 2nd Tactical Air Force, Non-Operational Duties)	111,815	271,746	84,716

Table 5.4. Trained/untrained strengths of personnel serving with RAF and WAAF, 1 September 1944

	RAF	Dominions	Royal Indian Air Force	Allied	WAAF
Trained Aircrew	73,183	26,121	493	4,712	N/A
Aircrew training	90,463 (38,553 postgraduate)	21,496 (all postgraduate)	182 (121 postgraduate)	2,117 (all postgraduate)	N/A
Trained Groundcrew	814,921	30,897	21,296	19,019	164,041
Groundcrew training	27,513	0	2,060	2,010	8,707

Twenty-five years later, in contrast, 43 per cent of servicemen weren't in the army, and, although approximately 210,000 Britons had been killed since the start of the war, only 52,000 of them had been soldiers.² One in ten of those in military uniform were women. The RAF had expanded into an independent arm which absorbed a significant part of the nation's manufacturing resources and skilled manpower. The Royal Navy was growing faster than either other service, as the convoy escort programmes reached fruition and men were trained up to sail invasion landing craft. It had more sailors than at any previous point in its history.³

The different accounting systems used by the armed forces and the constant movement of personnel make it difficult to track where exactly all these forces were deployed across the world over time, but it is possible to offer a snapshot of the location of forces under British control as the country gathered its strength ahead of 'Overlord' in April 1944.⁴

Once we combine these figures with those that indicate how personnel from the British Commonwealth and Empire were deployed, three things stand out. First, at this late stage in the war, the majority of British servicemen and women remained in the UK. Second, the commitment to the Mediterranean and Middle East had a lasting effect on where Britons saw service, which endured even as the focus of action shifted to Northwest Europe. Third, military service often meant employment behind the front lines rather than direct involvement in combat.

Between 1938 and 1943, the number of men in military uniform increased by almost four million. Almost three million joined between September 1939 and June 1941, three-quarters of a million in 1941–2, half a million in 1942–3, and a third of a million in 1943–4. There was also a steady flow out – not just combat casualties, but those too ill, old, or accidentally injured to serve. Between 1941 and 1944, a quarter of a million men were discharged from the armed forces for medical reasons.⁵

Most potential servicemen greeted the call-up with resignation rather than enthusiasm. A few sought exemption on the basis of conscientious objection. Those who wished to be registered as conscientious objectors had to apply to be interviewed by a local tribunal, which could give four verdicts: unconditional exemption (about 5 per cent of all those who applied); registration conditional on the undertaking of civilian work or non-combatant service in the armed forces (38 and 27 per cent respectively); and removal from the register of conscientious objectors (almost another 30 per cent) — on the grounds that their professed beliefs were either insufficient to exempt them from service (usually because they

were political rather than religious), or were not sincerely held. Objectors who disagreed with the verdict could appeal. When women were made liable for conscription, they were given the same rights to register their objection.⁶

Between 1939 and 1944, the local tribunals considered 58,780 applications for registration from men on the grounds of conscience. In 1939, about 2 per cent of all those registered under the National Service Acts identified themselves provisionally as conscientious objectors. During 1941, the equivalent figure was 0.4 per cent. By 1944, it was down to less than 0.25 per cent. This shift reflected the younger ages of the men called up in the later years of the war. The first conscripts in 1939 had come of age in an era of burgeoning support for the Peace Pledge Union. For their counterparts four years later, military service had become a fact of life.⁷

More frequently, men did not serve either because they did not meet the forces' physical standards or because they were employed in work that exempted them from conscription. All potential recruits were graded by medical boards. Eight per cent of the more than 2 million men under twenty who were examined during the war were judged unfit for military service, and 35 per cent of those aged thirty-six and over. The Ministry of Labour usually transferred these men to work in war industry.

Until 1941, entire industrial sectors had been reserved from conscription. From 1942, previously reserved workers were made liable for service, and their employers had to apply for deferment on a case-by-case basis to the District Manpower Boards of the Ministry of Labour. Between 1942 and 1945, these Boards dealt with more than 4.7 million applications relating to male workers, some of them repeats after a temporary reprieve. As the demand for manpower grew more intense, the rate at which applications were rejected climbed: from 10 per cent in 1942 to 21 per cent from the start of 1944. In total, however, only 600,000 were *not* granted. Most businesses that tried to retain their male employees did so.⁸

The Ministry operated blanket systems of deferments for professionals whose work was judged of national importance, including schoolteachers, trade union officials, surveyors, barristers, journalists and accountants, and for workers in specific sectors of the economy: agricultural labourers over twenty-five, construction workers, miners, dockers, iron and steel workers, railwaymen and shipbuilders. Male workers in the arms and aircraft factories only began to be called up in late 1943, in order to provide the quarter of a million new recruits required for the final offensive in

Europe.⁹ Men's attitudes to reservation depended on where they worked. Engaged in tough, physically demanding jobs and surrounded by their peers, few Clydeside shipworkers, for example, seem to have felt that they were less manly for not being in the forces.¹⁰ For others, not being in uniform was a matter of considerable frustration.

In contrast to the relatively small number of conscientious objectors, nearly a million and a half men volunteered for military service during the war, 187,000 in 1943 alone. Some were Irishmen – either from Northern Ireland, where there was no conscription, or from Eire, a source of tens of thousands of recruits for the British armed forces. The majority, however, lived in the mainland of the UK. They either preempted their call-up in the hope of securing more control over their eventual destination in the services, or left reserved posts in pursuit of adventure or social status. Explaining why he left his safe job in a paint-testing laboratory to join an infantry regiment in 1942, Gordon Moore wrote that:

I got fed up with working . . . I used to have a barney with the old man at home, so I joined up . . . To my alarm, my mother had started to cry, and I had crept off, out of the way. The younger fellows at work had regarded me with some awe and envy the next day. The older ones had given me some pitying, 'you daft bugger' looks, thinking that I had had a sudden rush of blood to the head. The seniors in the firm had been rather annoyed. 12

Volunteering for the army was unusual. Conscripts were given the chance to choose whether they would like to enter the Royal Navy or the RAF. Those who failed to get into their chosen arm, or who did not make a choice, were sent to the army. Since the navy and the air force enjoyed much more prestige, the number of men opting for each exceeded their requirements, and their recruits *wanted* to join their selected service. In contrast, many men ended up in the ranks of the army when they would have preferred to be anywhere else.¹³

A national system of conscription did not therefore mean that military service was equally spread across the country. On the contrary, since economic, social and cultural factors influenced not only whether men served, but which part of the military they served in, there were significant regional differences. London, with its disproportionately large pre-war population of young men in non-essential work, had a rate of military service much higher than in the cities of the West Midlands, the powerhouse of the British aircraft industry. Wales had a higher rate of conscientious objection than the rest of the mainland UK, and a lower rate of deaths in the armed forces. Though the number of Scottish soldiers who died, relative to its pre-war population, was only slightly higher than the

equivalent figure for England, some Scottish counties – Moray, Perthshire, Inverness and Nairnshire, Sutherland – suffered the worst army loss rates in the whole country, a function of both patterns of recruitment and military presumptions about a Scottish martial tradition. In these places, the proportion of men who died while serving in the army was about twice the average for the mainland UK.¹⁴

'THEIR VOICES CARRY WELL AND CAN BE CLEARLY HEARD IN THE DIN OF GUNFIRE'

Full-time servicemen were backed up by an army of male auxiliaries – the 1.75 million men who served with the Home Guard. After a hurried formation amid fears of invasion in 1940, the character of the Home Guard had substantially changed. Since 1941, attendance at its parades had been compulsory for healthy adult men not engaged in essential work or other war-related activities. Though still employed to guard against raiders, since 1942 the Home Guard had become increasingly involved in the training of the army at home. This included strenuous exercises in houseto-house fighting amid city bombsites. Home Guardsmen were allocated to Anti-Aircraft Command to keep up its strength as soldiers were committed to offensive operations. By May 1943, 112,000 men were enrolled in Home Guard anti-aircraft units, including nearly all the new Z-batteries of antiaircraft rockets. By that point, there were Home Guard bomb disposal units, medical teams and transport groups, as well as official female Home Guard auxiliaries. These were not meant to bear arms (though some took the chance to fire a gun) but to provide food, first aid and administrative assistance. 15

Home Guards had always wanted to be properly armed. At the start of 1942, there had been a public relations disaster when it was revealed that they were being issued with a quarter of a million 'pikes' – lengths of steel tubing with surplus sword bayonets welded to the end. This was the result of a Churchillian inspiration to address a shortage of rifles – albeit one taken more seriously by ministers and officials than the prime minister may have anticipated. What he didn't expect was the storm that broke when the pikes reached their intended recipients. Appalled at the notion of taking on mechanized opponents with spears, and suspecting that their endeavours were not being taken seriously, most Home Guard commanders simply locked the weapons away. At a moment when the

government's inability to fight a modern war was already under scrutiny, the episode was a gift to the press. Journalists poked particular fun at the Conservative Lord Croft, the under-secretary of state for war, who defended the pikes as a suitable weapon for night fighting. While Croft took the flak, Churchill escaped the blame.¹⁶

The pikes were, however, an aberration. From 1942, as the army became increasingly well equipped, the Home Guard got more of its handme-down weapons. Even before the pike debacle, it had been issued with bizarre, often ineffective, but cheap to manufacture anti-tank weapons – the Northover Projector and the Blacker Bombard. By the start of 1943, the Home Guard had about 40,000 of these 'sub-artillery' pieces, as well as 900,000 rifles, a quarter of a million Sten guns, and 20,000 machine guns. During 1943, it was issued with the army's cast-off 75-mm and 2-pounder guns. Eventually, 40 per cent of Home Guard small arms requirements were met with Sten guns. Not least because the issue of new weapons was seen as a way of reviving flagging interest as the threat of invasion faded, the arming of the Home Guard operated in inverse relation to the likelihood that it would face the German army in battle.

Lumping around anti-aircraft shells or loading heavy rockets were not jobs for the physically frail. Nor were prolonged outdoor battle drills or acting as the 'enemy' while regular forces practised urban combat. By the middle of the war, many of the older men who had flocked to the Home Guard in 1940 were very weary. As they dropped out, it became composed largely of men in reserved occupations, the middle-aged and youngsters awaiting their call-up. By 1943, the average guardsman was not a grizzled pensioner with a spear, but a thirty-year-old factory worker with a submachine gun. It was an army of dads, rather than of granddads.¹⁷

More significant than the arming of male auxiliaries was the extent to which the UK came to depend on female military labour. At the peak of wartime mobilization, about one in six British women in their early twenties were in uniform. The number had soared after single women aged between twenty and twenty-one were made liable for conscription at the start of 1942. Those conscripted were meant to have a choice between the auxiliary services and industrial work. At the end of 1943, female military conscription was extended to single women aged nineteen to twenty-four. Unlike young men, the conscription of young women aroused significant discontent, primarily because it threatened to remove unmarried daughters from parental supervision. ¹⁸ In fact, however, only 125,000 of the 550,000 women who joined the military during the war were conscripts. ¹⁹ Most female personnel volunteered: some because they wanted to, others

because they feared the alternative.

Women in the auxiliary services were subject to different terms of enlistment and separate disciplinary codes, and were paid less than men. Initially, they were employed primarily as caterers, cleaners, administrators and in communications work. As the war went on, they were increasingly employed in mechanical maintenance. Their sense of status paralleled that of male combatants: the closer it was to active duty, the more meaning it had in the context of the war.²⁰ With the exception of those women of the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry who enlisted as operatives with SOE, there was a complete official prohibition on women bearing arms. As of 1943, very few servicewomen had gone overseas. With the notable exception of nursing personnel, most of the servicewomen working in the Middle East or India were recruited in situ rather than shipped out from the UK.

The WRNS was regarded as the poshest of the three women's services. It was the smallest, entirely volunteer and drew most heavily on the social elite. Almost without exception (a few sailed as cipher clerks aboard the great troop-ship liners in the Atlantic), 'Wrens' did not go to sea, but they drove harbour launches, rode as motorcycle couriers, and maintained Fleet Air Arm aircraft and munitions.²¹ The WAAF was seen as the most modern auxiliary service. It was larger relative to its male equivalent than either the WRNS or the ATS, and WAAFs were more heavily integrated into the functioning of RAF combat units. Though they were not employed as aircrew, WAAFs were involved in every other stage of a bombing raid: analysing photo-reconnaissance images to identify targets, driving the vehicles carrying crew and bombs out to the aircraft, operating radar, direction finding and radio equipment back in the UK, and debriefing aircrew on their return. The WAAF received a lot of volunteers, and it would have been the first choice of many of those called up under the National Service Acts, if it hadn't already been full.²²

In practice, most women who were conscripted got a choice between the ATS and being directed into factory work away from home. For those who sought to remain respectable, neither was particularly appealing. As with male conscription, active resistance was rare. Between 1942 and 1945, just over a thousand women were registered as conscientious objectors. Another 3,000 were prosecuted for refusing to comply with orders directing them to work, of whom 199 were imprisoned.²³

Most sought other means to avoid conscription. Women got married and pregnant, or discovered a sick relative to nurse, or found jobs in the same essential industries in which their male relatives already worked,

which at least meant they could stay with their families. If they couldn't join the more socially prestigious services, middle-class women sought office jobs administering the war effort, took up voluntary work, or found other means of escape. A bright seventeen-year-old called Margaret Roberts, for example, the daughter of a Grantham grocer and prominent local councillor, desperate to leave home but reluctant to be forced into a factory or the ATS, applied to university a year early in 1943. That meant she could begin her studies before she got her call-up papers, thereby putting off the moment of conscription as long as possible. Her acquaintances apparently considered this tactic completely normal, although a physically fit young middle-class man who had evaded being called up in this way would probably not have enjoyed such a successful subsequent career in the Conservative Party.²⁴

During 1941, the shortage of manpower forced the army to use the ATS in a wider range of roles, including in Anti-Aircraft Command. Based at home, often in static gun positions, Anti-Aircraft Command was at the bottom of the army's heap when it came to allocating soldiers. As the threat from German air attack lessened, it depended increasingly on part-time Home Guard gunners, but it also needed operators for sophisticated equipment, including searchlights, radar sets, target predictors and its communication network. General Sir Frederick Pile, its commander, believed that servicewomen would be better at these complex tasks than 'low-category' men. The first mixed batteries were brought into operation in August 1941, and the first mixed searchlight troops in 1942.²⁵

For some young women, these skilled jobs were more attractive than the menial domestic work with which the ATS had previously been associated. As the ATS, under a new director, launched a major effort to improve its image and attract new recruits in 1941, its role in anti-aircraft defence was given extensive publicity. ATS members had to volunteer to work on anti-aircraft sites, and, while they could do everything else essential to the task of killing enemy aircrew, they were not allowed to fire the guns. During 1942, about half of all recruits volunteered to work on anti aircraft batteries. At their peak, 76,000 women were engaged in 'ackack' work (including the prime minister's daughter, Mary Churchill). Their deployment to gun positions around the UK was a great success in military terms ('Contrary . . . to expectations', recorded one senior officer, 'their voices carry well and can be clearly heard in the din of gunfire'), ²⁶ but raised concerns about living conditions and immoral behaviour. An official inquiry into welfare and amenities in the women's services, chaired by Dame Violet Markham and published in 1942, demonstrated

how baseless tales of debauchery were. For all the talk of 'officer's ground-sheets' and the 'Auxiliary Tarts Service', servicewomen lived under strict scrutiny and supervision, and rates of illegitimate pregnancy and venereal disease were lower than among the general population. This, however, did not halt the gossip, which grew even stronger when servicewomen were allowed to volunteer for overseas service in 1944.²⁷

'LEARNING TO MEMORISE ENDLESS TABLES OF COMPONENTS'

When we think of Britons in uniform during the Second World War, our mental image should be not the clichéd photographs of Battle of Britain pilots, infantrymen at El Alamein or landing craft going ashore on D-Day, but rather of drill, instruction and exercise. Across all the different forms of military service, the great commonality was not combat, but subjection to military training. On average, this was what men and women in the armed and auxiliary services did.

Basic training was essentially the same for everyone. Rites of passage – haircuts, uniform issues, medical inspections – marked the transition from civilian life. Then came six to eighteen weeks of marching, physical training, hygiene instruction and, for the men, small arms drill. The main aim was to accustom newcomers to military discipline. From the middle of the war, all three services made increased use of psychological tests, administered towards the end of this initial period, to identify those most suitable for advanced training and weed out those thought liable to mental breakdown.²⁸

The amount of training military personnel got after that depended on their role. In March 1943, for example, about 38 per cent of the 147,000 aircrew in the RAF were trainees. Instruction did not stop once men had learned how to fly. That September, about a quarter of RAF aircrew in training were on 'postgraduate' courses to prepare them for new aircraft.²⁹ In comparison, the population of groundcrew required less replenishment. Of the 860,000 groundcrew in the RAF in March 1943, just under 10 per cent were training – enough to replace retirements and losses and to allow the trained workforce to increase by about 30,000 groundcrew over the coming six months.³⁰

The RAF trained pilots and navigators overseas, mostly in Canada, where the British operated twenty-seven aircrew training schools.

Originally set up in order to shift aircrew training from the congested UK, in 1942 these schools were absorbed into the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, which trained airmen from the Dominions in their homelands. As well as the 116,417 Canadian airmen produced by this scheme, 47,406 British airmen received training in Canada during the war, from a permanent staff of instructors and groundcrew numbering several thousand more.³¹

RAF engineers, wireless operators and air gunners, like groundcrew, learned their trades in the UK. This included passage through established, but massively expanded, RAF bases such as Halton and St Athan as well as wartime training and reception centres in seaside towns and former holiday camps. For groundcrew, including WAAFs, specialist training lasted from one to seven months.

Like most military instruction, a lot of this was rote learning.³² Opinions on its value varied, with particularly scathing comments from better educated wartime recruits. John Sommerfeld, a Mass-Observer who was an Aircraftsman First Class in the RAF, reported of a 'bomb' course that it consisted

of learning to memorise endless tables of components that are a complete waste of time \dots we aren't learning a job at all, but to pass a Test Board. This seems pretty general in these training plans: result is that chaps who, usually, arrive enthusiastic to learn a job, after a few weeks don't give a fart in a colander for it, and are only concerned with getting through with the minimum amount of trouble. 33

Others, more used to memorizing what they were told, found it more rewarding. 'Erks' training to maintain aircraft were taught mechanical skills and an understanding of the physics of flight, all of which they carefully copied down into precisely diagrammed notebooks ahead of their cramming for the Board.³⁴ Across the services, as the war went on, increased use was made of techniques designed to make training more interesting, including the use of instructional films. It wasn't just the skills to look after machines that had to be taught. The RAF's wartime growth created a demand for men and women to manage its complex systems of invoices, accounting and chits. Between 1941 and 1944, it trained 21,000 male and female equipment assistants to handle the flow of items in and out of its stores.³⁵

Like the RAF, the Royal Navy conducted its specialist training in a mixture of pre-war schools, such as HMS *Excellent*, for gunnery, on Whale Island in Portsmouth, and new wartime establishments, such as HMS *Valkyrie*, for radar operators, on the Isle of Man. Recruits identified

as potential officers had to spend three months aboard ship after basic training as ordinary seamen before being posted to HMS *King Alfred*, at Hove, where they were given another three months of intensive tuition before selection for temporary commissioning into the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve. The wartime expansion of the fleet led to a heavy demand for engineering crew. The navy's determination to keep up standards meant that anyone with experience of working with heavy machinery was selected for training as an engine-room artificer, with stokers, who made up most of the engine room in all ships, chosen from whoever remained. In 1943, at the peak of the navy's growth, 15,000 men were being trained for engineering duties, and stokers were being turned out of training schools at the rate of 500 a week.³⁶

Unlike the RAF and the Royal Navy, both of which were in action from their UK bases during the war, and with the exception of Anti-Aircraft Command, Home Forces of the army was not in direct contact with the enemy. Preparing to fight was all that most soldiers in the UK could do. From 1941 Alan Brooke, during his time as commander of Home Forces, his successor, Bernard Paget, and the adjutant-general, Sir Ronald Adam, all did a lot to improve training and selection. One of Adam's aims was to improve the army's use of manpower. Following Beveridge's recommendation for reform, after 1942, new recruits were sent for basic training in the General Service Corps, during which their aptitudes were assessed. They were then allocated to a regiment or corps and spent between sixteen and thirty weeks on specialist training, before either being posted to a unit or sent for further training ahead of joining a reinforcement draft overseas.³⁷

To increase the supply of good-quality junior officers, in April 1942 Adam introduced a system of War Office Selection Boards (WOSB). These put candidates through a series of tests during which they were assessed for their leadership abilities by experienced officers, psychologists and psychiatrists, with the best selected to go on to Officer Cadet Training Units (OCTU). Though the introduction of WOSBs followed criticisms of class bias in officer selection, any democratizing effect was incidental: the main purpose was just to find more men to lead the army.³⁸ The effort involved was substantial: 140,000 candidates went before WOSBs between 1942 and 1945. This slightly broadened the social background from which officers came (something that probably would have happened anyway due to wartime expansion and turnover), and it seemed to improve the number of men who successfully passed out of the OCTUs. Adam also oversaw an army-wide programme to instruct officers

in the basics of man-management, which placed a lot of emphasis on the obligation to look after the welfare of the troops under their command. As these changes took effect during the second half of the war, British Other Ranks noticed how much more attention their officers were paying to them and became much more likely to express confidence in their leadership.³⁹

Brooke and Paget placed a lot of emphasis on training in all weathers to prepare soldiers for the miserable conditions they would have to endure on campaign. They promoted 'battle schools', which taught fire and movement drills and tried to inoculate soldiers to the shock of battle with live fire and thunderflash-accompanied assault courses. All of this was an improvement on the inertia that had followed the army's rapid growth in 1940, built up morale, and helped to make the infantrymen in Home Forces very fit, but it didn't really model the difficulty of getting men to do anything other than take cover in the face of German automatic-weapon fire (the major tactical problem for the army in the West from at least the invasion of Sicily onwards). Nor did it solve the larger obstacles to effective unit training – the lack of space and range time, the shortage of skilled instructors and impartial umpires, and the other tasks, from building fortifications to bringing in the harvest, that ate up time in the ranks.

In addition to the training carried out in individual army units and formations, each year Home Forces also staged large-scale, multi-corps manoeuvres designed to test commanders as well as to give troops experience of prolonged operations in the field. Tellingly, only in March 1943, in Exercise 'Spartan', did these operations shift from repelling a German invasion to an Anglo-Canadian advance out of a beachhead established on a hostile shore. 'Spartan' was a huge exercise, involving more than ten divisions, carried out across southern England west of London and stretching from just north of Southampton round to Huntingdon. It filled the area with troops, trucks, engineers and tanks, as well as aircraft involved in the first large-scale use in the UK of mobile tactical air forces to provide ground support.⁴⁰

'Spartan' showed some improvements in command techniques, including an increased reliance on verbal orders to speed the tempo of operations, but it also highlighted some significant flaws. Brooke bemoaned the ineffectiveness of the attacking commander, the Canadian Lieutenant General Andrew McNaughton, who seemed simultaneously unable to grip the battle and unaware of how long it would take to translate his orders into action. Taking this failure as proof that McNaughton was unfit to take command of troops in the coming invasion, during the autumn

of 1943 Brooke pushed him into resigning.

At a tactical level, the problems were just as telling. Officers showed little sign of grasping how hard the enemy would defend their positions, how much artillery fire was needed to suppress them, and how quickly assaulting troops would be required to repel a counter-attack. Brooke and Adam had greatly improved the army's training and administrative systems – probably as much as anyone could have done in the midst of the war – but they couldn't overcome the issues of equipment and manpower that conditioned the way their soldiers fought, or conjure up a new cohort of experienced, dynamic senior commanders, able to respond creatively to the chaos of combat.⁴¹

Yet fighting was not all that soldiers had to learn to do. Like the other armed services, the army had to train up hundreds of thousands of mechanics, drivers and medics. By September 1944, almost 400,000 soldiers were in the Royal Engineers and Royal Signals – men who were counted among the 'teeth' arms, but who spent most of their time in battle clearing obstacles and maintaining communications. Another 667,000 – about a quarter of the army – were in the Royal Army Service Corps, the Royal Army Medical Corps, the Royal Army Ordnance Corps (RAOC) and the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME): delivering supplies, caring for the sick and wounded, and maintaining munitions and equipment, mostly behind the front line.⁴² The insistence on preparing everyone for combat after the disasters of 1942 meant that many of these men were also run over assault courses and taught basic infantry skills, but in addition they had to be instructed in far more important technical roles.

REME's growth was the most remarkable. It had 78,000 soldiers when it was formed, largely from troops already in the Ordnance Corps, in autumn 1942. Two years later it had grown to almost twice that, primarily from new recruits. They were just part of an immense imperial maintenance network that included, by the end of the war, another 185,000 Dominion, Indian and African soldiers in their own versions of REME as well as 134,000 civilians at bases in the UK, India, Europe and the Middle East. As with the engineering branch in the navy, REME had to have recruits with either existing technical experience or the education and intelligence to acquire these skills. Essential as it was to a highly mechanized army, it got to pick and retain the most able conscripts.

The experience of Manfred Moses, a Jewish refugee from Germany, suggests some of the ways that technical training enabled military advancement. Moses had been working as a skilled tool-maker when he was interned as an enemy alien in 1940, then joined the Auxiliary Military

Pioneer Corps (a non-combatant unit for 'friendly' Germans), and only transferred to the RAOC in summer 1941. Over the next year he passed three trade tests and became a qualified instrument mechanic. Among his new comrades were not just former engineering workers, but bank managers, graphic designers and shop owners: anyone the army thought could be quickly re-trained for technical work. During 1943, Moses was reposted to the REME, changed his name to Michael Maynard (to protect himself in the event of capture), and passed out of a three-month course at the Military College of Science in Bury as an armament artificer: a senior NCO with special responsibilities as a technician. At the war's end, he was part of the REME unit that directed German factories making spare parts for US-manufactured British vehicles after the Americans cancelled Lend-Lease. 44

'MY ONE AMBITION FROM NOW ON IS TO BE AN EX-SERVICEMAN'

Life in the forces was relentlessly communal. Room was limited, possessions few and privacy non-existent. The conditions encouraged solidarity and caused perpetual friction. Petty theft and arguments were endemic. You could hear everything everyone else did, day and night. Men and women sought to assert their identities with photographs of families or pictures torn from magazines. For many of them, finding a bit of space they could make their own became an abiding theme of the war.

Military life was tightly ordered, though the harshness of discipline varied by unit and context. In a May 1943 report, the RAF's inspector-general lamented that, though groundcrew were 'reasonably well behaved . . . A NCO rarely gives an order – the most he can bring himself to do is to utter a friendly request for cooperation on the part of the other ranks with whom he is concerned.' In contrast, the majority of wartime recruits who ended up in the army were shocked by the immediate and relentless nature of its discipline. Minor infractions – wrongly done up buttons or failing to salute – resulted in summary punishment with extra drill, confinement to quarters, latrine cleaning or 'spud-bashing' for the cookhouse. 46

The selection processes championed by Adam were meant to remove potential 'problem soldiers' early on. For those who made it past the testers and were unable to comply with the army's demands, there was always desertion. Over the whole war, there were more than 99,000

instances of desertion from the British army, many of them repeat offences, about 60,000 of which occurred in the UK.⁴⁷ Servicemen who repeatedly defied authority, including recaptured deserters, ended up in military prisons. There was a public scandal in spring 1943 when an inmate of a detention centre at Fort Darland on the Medway, Rifleman William Clayton, died after being beaten up by two of his guards, who had decided that Clayton, who was suffering with advanced tuberculosis, was malingering. Both were subsequently convicted of manslaughter. A committee of inquiry, sitting after the army had been given time to clean up its act, concluded that, while 'calculated brutality' was unusual, military prisons were poorly staffed, frequently insanitary and relied on punishments such as putting prisoners on restricted diets. Despite all this, the inquiry also noted that the army's prisons were much more humane than those of the Royal Navy.⁴⁸

Willingly or otherwise, most servicemen soon accepted that the military authorities controlled their lives much more completely than any pre-war boss. Their new world was by its nature hierarchical and stratified. Notwithstanding the widening of the social base from which they were drawn, commissioned officers across all three armed services remained overwhelmingly middle class, and they were granted the trappings of a pre-war middle-class lifestyle, even as such standards became increasingly difficult to maintain in the civilian world. Out of action, officers lived separately from the other ranks, had smarter uniforms, ate better food and usually had a room of their own with a personal servant. Regular officers, presented with the opportunity of their professional lives, made sure they kept the top jobs. Their subordinates, commissioned for the duration, might bemoan military conservatism but had to play along.

Being ordered around and deprived of choice was infantilizing and often excruciatingly dull. Away from the front line, a lot of military routine – cleaning communal areas, maintaining equipment, uniforms and kit, guard or lookout duties, as well as the day-to-day running of an airfield, barracks or ship – was repetitive and, for people who thought of themselves as civilians in uniform, pointless. It didn't help when officers insisted on what the other ranks regarded as 'bullshit': unnecessary parades or excessive levels of smartness, even after Adam had told them to cut back on such irritants. Simultaneously, the forces institutionalized men and women to patterns of behaviour. Even off base, military hierarchies shaped the civilian world: personnel on their way on and off leave were identifiable by their uniform, they had to salute officers in the street, and pubs and clubs became segregated, formally or informally, for use by

officers, NCOs and other ranks.⁴⁹

Recruits from the suburban, mass-consumption Britain that had grown up between the wars were often antagonized by the rigidity of these military-social divisions. The more ambitious were particularly annoyed by the difficulty of making progress without the right accent or school tie. Few felt any great attachment to the armed forces. Most eventually accommodated themselves to being in uniform, but many dreamed of the day that they'd get out. In the words of one of Sommerfeld's RAF comrades: 'My one ambition from now on is to be an ex-serviceman.' Both acceptance and frustration contributed to an 'us and them' feeling that was characteristic of service life. 51

'THE EFFECT OF INTENSE OPERATIONS IS VERY GOOD ON MORALE ON THE WHOLE'

Before the war, the shared identity of military units had been built up by years of service, long continuity of personnel and enduring invented traditions. In the case of its line infantry regiments, the British army reinforced these traditions with a system of regional affiliations that tied regular and Territorial Army battalions to a recruiting area. In practice, the majority of regular recruits came from the great conurbations, but Territorial units shared the same local roots. The surge of enlistments in 1940, and the introduction of the General Service Corps prior to selection, effectively nationalized the army, however, and by the middle of the war only half of soldiers were serving with a unit with whom they had some sort of regional affiliation.⁵²

The 1/7th Battalion Middlesex Regiment, a Territorial Army unit, was fairly typical in this regard. Before the war it had recruited around its drill hall in North London, and, when it went to France in 1939, most of its soldiers were still locals. When the same unit came back to the UK from the Mediterranean in autumn 1943, its soldiers were given leave: just over 50 per cent gave a contact address in the capital or the county of Middlesex, but the rest listed addresses in thirty-nine different counties, and included sixteen Yorkshiremen, three Liverpudlians, twenty Scots, eighteen Welshmen, five Irishmen and one soldier from the Isle of Man. ⁵³ In infantry units, the trend accelerated as the ground war intensified. When Private Stanley Whitehouse's platoon of the Black Watch, a supposedly Scottish regiment, sent out a patrol of eight men in Holland in October

1944, for example, it included four Geordies, a Welshman called Edwards (inevitably known as 'Taffy') and Whitehouse himself, who had been born in West Bromwich and originally joined a battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry because it was the unit his father had served in during the previous war.⁵⁴ In these circumstances, collective identity was often formed out of function and repetition rather than from any shared pre-war heritage. The graffiti on the toilet walls of the Royal Army Ordnance Corps Depot at Donnington, carefully copied down by a Mass-Observer soldier, revealed the extent to which a tribal military culture established itself among wartime recruits. Remarks such as 'Up the Buffs' or 'Borders are Best' or '23 Pioneer Company have the right men' went up all the time, but so did 'wisecracks' about other units, including reworkings of the acronym of the RAOC ('called the Royal and Ancient Order of C---s').⁵⁵

Working together and for each other and enjoying success against the enemy all helped service personnel feel positive about their unit. According to an RAF warrant officer, serving with 111 Squadron RAF, who reflected on his experiences on campaign in North Africa, Malta, Sicily and France for the Air Ministry: 'The effect of intense operations is very good on morale on the whole. Both aircrews and ground personnel have a feeling that they are personally doing something useful, and not wasting their time.' In contrast:

When the Squadron has a lengthy stand down due to bad weather conditions the morale of the whole outfit soon goes to pieces, there is a lot of excessive drinking in all ranks, the mechanics nearly always get into slovenly ways and are rather inclined to 'bind' and find fault. 56

Similarly, it was the prolonged period of apparent inactivity in 1941–2 that proved so bad for the morale of Home Forces and required training in not just how to fight, but what the country was fighting for. For others, however, it was in the moments of mutual confidence away from the terror of battle or the 'bullshit' that the strongest communal connections were formed. For platoon commander Norman Craig, the 'happiest time of my whole army life' came at the start of November 1942, just after his shocking introduction to battle at El Alamein. After a couple of days guarding prisoners of war, he and his men were trucked up the coast to Mersa Matruh, where they found themselves left behind as the army surged past them up the coast road. There were plenty of rations, a well-stocked NAAFI canteen, and little to do but salvage broken-down vehicles and weapons. 'Nobody worried us. There were no unnecessary parades,

none of the irritating, outward formalities of discipline. Distinctions of rank scarcely existed. I lived and worked exclusively with the men and became completely identified with the platoon; we belonged to each other.'⁵⁷

As that suggested, the powerful communal bonds that formed out of shared military endeavour could be isolationist as well as collective. The tribal drive for shared survival might put the interest of immediate comrades well above those of the service, the nation or a shared ideological goal. In early 1943, for example, the War Office sought to highlight to soldiers how dangerously wasteful it was for them to 'make' or 'win' additional supplies and hoard them within their units. In the Middle East, military inspectors found that officers almost never enforced regulations on equipment and turned a blind eye to quartermasters and fitters 'scrounging' whatever was useful from unattended vehicles and supply dumps. One unit was caught in possession of 650 pieces of enemy equipment and 7,000 surplus British items. 'When "scrounging" goes on . . . [on this scale]', they concluded, 'it is not difficult to imagine the increased demand on our shipping . . . the delay in repairs and in equipping reserves . . . which has a direct operational effect . . . '58 Such injunctions never had much effect on the military locusts, for whom two mottoes dominated service life: 'I'm all right, Jack' and 'Fuck your luck'.

'MEN NOT RECEIVING LETTERS ARE INCLINED TO PUT THE WORST CONSTRUCTION ON THINGS'

About 55 per cent of British servicemen were married. Many more were, or during the war became, primary breadwinners for elderly parents or disabled relatives. Few other ranks could afford to move their families close to where they were quartered. Family life had to be conducted by leaves and letters. For those serving overseas, the separation was much more profound. Home leave was rare, communication more difficult and the chance of being posted back to the UK before the end of the war frustratingly remote. As of April 1943, just over a million British army other ranks had spent some period of their service abroad. About 182,000 of them, mostly early war recruits who had gone to France in 1939–40, had subsequently returned home. Of those who were currently overseas, almost 400,000 had been away for between one and two years, and 178,000 for more than two years. ⁵⁹ To economize on shipping, units sent

overseas usually stayed away – so the longer the war went on, the more time they spent without seeing home. Perhaps unsurprisingly, servicemen overseas were obsessed with the idea that they were being forgotten. They raged at newspapers or the BBC giving undue publicity to other units, bewailed the privileges supposedly enjoyed by those on other fronts, and fretted that their wives and sweethearts were actively putting them out of their minds.⁶⁰

As the army's Morale Report for the second quarter of 1943 concluded, 'the regular and speedy receipt of mail is the most important single factor in maintaining the spirit of our troops abroad'. Particularly during periods of rapid operational movement, however, it was still easy for communication to break down. 'All the big noises at home plaster us everywhere as to what we have done', wrote a furious sailor back to his wife in the spring of 1943, weeks after his ship had taken part in Operation 'Torch', 'but the only little bit of comfort and pleasure we can look forward to, that is a letter from our loved ones at home, seems to be denied to us.' For another sailor with a pregnant wife, the lack of any mail deliveries at all was:

a damned disgrace. Six weeks now without mail . . . It makes me wild to think that they can send any amount of human beings at their will and don't care what becomes of them, but to send a few bags of mail is too much trouble. I don't mind betting when I get the news the lady will be born and almost ready for school. 62

As one battalion commander in the Middle East pointed out: 'men not receiving letters are inclined to put the worst construction on things and suspect their wives, etc, of deliberately not writing.'

Stories about servicemen whose relationships had broken down spread like wildfire in camps at home and overseas. Another part of Adam's army reforms was to encourage soldiers to share family problems with their officers, and seek compassionate leave to sort them out. During 1942, 139,000 men across the British army applied either for compassionate leave or for a posting nearer home on the grounds of domestic hardship. ⁶⁴ The War Office relied on the forces charity SSAFA (the Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association) to handle these applications, and to visit estranged wives in the UK to attempt reconciliation with men stationed overseas. During 1942, SSAFA also established an office in the Middle East, while the War Office and the Treasury introduced measures making it quicker and cheaper for absent servicemen to divorce unfaithful wives. By the early summer of 1943, according to the Middle East commander-in-chief, SSAFA in the Middle East was dealing with about a

hundred cases of 'anxiety' over family matters a day.

Of this 1/3rd are proven infidelity of wives, 1/3rd suspected infidelity (in most cases the suspicion proves to have been well founded) and the remaining 1/3rd other forms of domestic trouble. To these must be added an average of 30 applications per day made to the Legal Advice section for divorce, making a total of over 60 definite and 30 suspected cases of infidelity per day. 65

If this figure was correct it amounted to an annual total equivalent to about 7.5 per cent of the married British servicemen stationed in North Africa and the Middle East in 1943.⁶⁶ According to an analysis in the same report, 'infidelity by the wife generally occurs either within three months of separation or shortly after three years'.⁶⁷

That prolonged separation put relationships under strain should come as no surprise. The presumption of female inconstancy said a lot, however, about servicemen's sense of unfairness and the ways in which young men at the time learned about sex (with regular injunctions not to get caught holding a baby that wasn't theirs). Such anxieties were not limited to those based overseas, as the words of a leading aircraftsman in the RAF, based in the UK and writing to his wife from the guardroom after being arrested for desertion, suggest:

To my loving wife (I hope) . . . Well I hope you got my last letter alright, as I have wrote you 3 letter and you have not wrote one to me. Well if you don't want to write to me, why don't you write and tell me, as I will know what to do you see. But I would like to hear how my baby is getting on. I am her Dad (I hope) ha ha. Well I hope you are getting your allowance alright . . . good luck to you, you will know what to do with it I hope. 69

In this case, the letter survived because it was sent to the station chaplain by the aircraftsman's wife. For once, her reply gives a different side to the story. As she told it, her husband's unfounded suspicions of infidelity meant that he'd stopped allocating her a portion of his pay. She had been left dependent on the charity of her mother-in-law, who had been evacuated to the countryside with the rest of the family. When the mother-in-law returned home to London, the wife was left with so little money that she had to seek assistance from the parish. Her husband might have told the air force that he'd deserted to look after his family, but he'd left her penniless and humiliated.⁷⁰

'EVERYONE HERE, EXCEPT THE SOLDIER'S WIFE, HAS MONEY'

That example is a useful reminder that the most frequent effect on families of male military service was not infidelity but impoverishment. Servicemen grumbled about how little they were paid for most of the war. Basic rates of pay started low: just over £1 a week for the lowest ranks, even after the award of a 20 per cent pay increase across the board in September 1942. The complex schemes of additional increments for proficiency, rank and seniority, as well as allowances for married men, wives and dependants, meant that most men earned more than this. A junior NCO got at least £2 a week, and usually more in the RAF, which paid its non-commissioned officers comparatively well.⁷¹ Those who had previously worked for the civil service, the big insurance houses and some large industrial firms had their pay topped up to its pre-war level by their former employers: a patriotic means of staff retention that could be written off against tax.⁷² Neither these top-ups nor military pay tracked the rapid rate of wartime inflation, as did the wages of civilian workers. Men in the forces were much less well paid than skilled male engineering workers (who might be earning over £6 a week by the middle of 1942), and they got relatively worse off as time went on.⁷³

The military authorities answered complaints about other ranks' pay by pointing out that high-earning civilians had to pay for necessities – accommodation, food, clothing, heating, dental and medical care – which service personnel got untaxed and for free. In 1942, the War Office estimated the board and lodging it provided for a single soldier at about 35 shillings a week. That claim might have been disputed by those carving foxholes into the rock of the Western Desert, but while servicemen in the UK might have had less disposable income than their civilian peers, the difference was not as stark as the absolute figures made out.⁷⁴

Junior officers were not necessarily better off than the men under their command. Unlike their men, they had to pay for food and drink in the mess, clothing and laundry. Newly commissioned subalterns without other means could find it difficult to make ends meet. With his customary understatement, Arthur Harris told his fellow RAF commanders that, in comparison with civilians in the aircraft industry, his young officers 'felt that they were now the paupers of the community'. The government, however, remained reluctant to consider any increase in service pay, not least because, given Bevin's insistence on maintaining free collective bargaining in industry, it was one of the few wage bills that could be tightly controlled to fight inflation. Only the need to keep men fighting against Japan after Germany was defeated proved sufficient argument for a

second military pay rise late in 1944.⁷⁶

Throughout the war, the financial penalties of low levels of military pay were borne most heavily by servicemen's families. Even here, however, the picture was complicated by the range of backgrounds from which men were called up. After the payments for each child were increased in September 1942, a serviceman's wife with two children got an allowance of £2 2s 6d a week, plus whatever extra was allotted to her by her husband from the remaining portion of his pay. For women whose husbands had been in unskilled casual work before 1939, this steady payment from the state was a boon that relieved the uncertainty that had once dominated their household budgets. For the wives of skilled working-class and lower middle-class men, however, it was insufficient to meet their commitments to food, clothing and rent. It was 'generally regarded as axiomatic', recorded the Army Morale Committee, 'that a private soldier's wife with children in an urban area who had no resources other than his pay simply could not manage'. The content of the payment is a private with children in an urban area who had no resources other than his pay simply could not manage'.

The contrast with the prosperity that the war brought to many industrial working-class communities was stark. In the words of a letter picked up by the postal censor: 'Everyone here, except the soldier's wife, has money.' A fifth of soldiers' wives surveyed in the middle of the war claimed to be living in poverty, with an average shortfall of income to expenditure of more than 15 shillings a week.⁸⁰ The wives of junior officers could also find themselves in financial difficulties. Officers received additional allowances for being married (which started at just over £200 a year and increased according to rank) and for each child. By the middle of the war, however, with tax factored in, that wasn't enough to set up home, let alone maintain the sort of middle-class lifestyle to which an officer was supposed to aspire.

The military's response was often to blame women for not knowing what grants and allowances they were able to claim. This was unfair. The official pay warrant published in 1940, before a host of wartime amendments, had five hundred pages of pay scales and conditions, including more than two hundred different rates of pay for the army alone. It was not an easy system to navigate.⁸¹ Relying on credit from local shops, taking in unwelcome lodgers, building up arrears of rent or compelled to move in with relatives, loath to degrade themselves by applying for public assistance, military wives often had little choice but to find someone to look after the children and get a job. If that eroded their husbands' *amour-propre*, it was just another instance of the extent to

which the conflict's burdens were borne disproportionately by British women.

'DISTRUST ABOUT THE POST-WAR INTENTIONS OF AN UNDIFFERENTIATED "THEY"'

Because so many of its troops spent so much of the war out of contact with the enemy, and because of the generally lower educational standard of its recruits, the British army spent more time than the RAF or the Royal Navy trying to teach servicemen and women what the war was about. In 1941, Adam had introduced a training scheme under the direction of a newly formed Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA). It was based on weekly compulsory discussions of topics including health, education and social security, led by regimental officers, supported by the Army Education Corps, two pamphlet series – *War* and *Current Affairs* – posters and travelling exhibitions.

One of the things revealed during ABCA's first year was that many officers and other ranks lacked the basic knowledge to have these discussions. In summer 1942, therefore, with the troops at home still depressed by the litany of defeats abroad, a new scheme was mapped out for the coming winter, which included a weekly hour of instruction in basic citizenship, known as (from the booklet of material that was meant to support it) 'The British Way and Purpose'. The weekly session remained part of the training syllabus for the rest of the war.⁸² Servicewomen in the ATS were allowed, but not required, to sit in on ABCA discussions, but it was presumed that they would not be interested in discussions of politics. Lessons on needlework, motherhood and cookery were what was needed to prepare women to be demobilized into the new Britain after the war.⁸³

From the first, current affairs education aroused political controversy. In 1941, after Conservative backbenchers claimed that it was a ruse to spread left-wing propaganda, Churchill told the War Office to shut it down (an instruction that was ignored and which he quickly forgot). During 1942, the director of ABCA, W. E. Williams (an executive member of the Workers' Educational Association and an editor at Penguin), became increasingly bold about the range of topics put forward for discussion in *Current Affairs*. These included a eulogy to the Soviet Union that annoyed Conservatives, and an issue devoted to Beveridge – the hurried withdrawal of which, after the government failed immediately to adopt his proposals,

provoked the ire of Labour MPs and peers.⁸⁴ In April 1943, a complaint from Bevin about the demoralizing nature of one of ABCA's poster series, 'Your Britain – Fight For It Now', renewed Churchill's suspicions and led him to direct Sir John Anderson to conduct an investigation. Anderson concluded that ABCA was working very well.

Army education reached its apogee during 1943–4. Between August 1943 and February 1944, civilian lecturers delivered 69,000 talks to troops in Home Forces. By that point, about 60 per cent of army units in the UK were undertaking ABCA sessions on a regular basis.⁸⁵ The Army Education Corps (AEC) sought to provide the same current affairs coverage to troops overseas, particularly in the Middle East, where servicemen left with time on their hands as the epicentre of the conflict shifted were strongly interested in the post-war world. At the start of 1944, Captain Gilbert Hall, an AEC officer who had been posted out of the UK after standing unsuccessfully as a parliamentary candidate for Common Wealth, helped to set up the Cairo Forces Parliament, a model assembly, based in a non-official welfare club, which held mock elections on party lines. The two hundred participants voted overwhelmingly for Labour and prepared to debate their new 'government's' legislation. At this point the military authorities, concerned at the extent to which an educational opportunity had become an expression of partisan political feeling, shut the parliament down: a measure that itself received wide publicity in the British and Egyptian press.⁸⁶

Neither the navy nor the RAF undertook a current affairs education programme on the scale of ABCA. This was partly because their service personnel had to sustain intensive operations over longer periods while the army trained in the UK, and partly because the controversies aroused by ABCA encouraged the other services to avoid stirring up trouble. Both were, however, influenced by the same desire to instruct men in the reciprocal obligations of modern citizenship. The RAF introduced a voluntary discussion-hour programme, but initially forbore from making it compulsory because of opposition from senior officers. ('The Army has to be kept occupied,' Arthur Harris told the Air Council. 'Bomber Command is at war.') By 1944, however, it had adopted a limited programme of compulsory current affairs discussions, backed by a pamphlet series of its own, titled Target. The navy proved more resistant, but in 1944, with attention turning to the need to keep sailors motivated for the war with Japan, it pressed its junior officers to pay more attention to their men's welfare, and encouraged voluntary discussion with materials obtained from ABCA.87

For all the scale of the exercise, there are good reasons to be sceptical of the subsequent myth that ABCA and its associated schemes simply indoctrinated servicemen in socialism. Even within Home Forces coverage was patchy and subject to the whims of commanding officers as well as the exigencies of military operations. When the size of the RAF and the navy is taken into account, current affairs education may have reached no more than half of service personnel at any given time. The sessions were not always interesting, and many participants welcomed them primarily as a chance to sit down and have a fag.⁸⁸

Nonetheless, service education plainly did have an effect as a lightning rod for political sentiments that would have existed, however inchoate, in any case. Those in uniform were hardly blank slates, particularly because the wartime influx of older men into the forces introduced a greater-thannormal range of life experience. Nor were they isolated from broader political and cultural trends — most obviously the widespread fascination with the Soviet Union and developing public interest in the world after the war. Noticeably, it was ABCA sessions on these topics that got the greatest engagement from soldier audiences: no matter the government's caution, large numbers were interested in and inspired by radical visions of the future. The Beveridge Report catalysed this interest, and discussions of it aroused strong feelings among service audiences throughout the final years of the war. ⁸⁹

In a sense this was not surprising, because the report's world of work, service and reciprocal obligation between citizen and state was closely related to the life that servicemen, in particular, experienced during the war. Military service brought its own perspectives — not least a sense of isolation from, as well as connection with, home. When a unit in India held a discussion on demobilization in April 1943, for example, the soldiers produced a list of questions that were all about the unfairness of their own situation:

How will it be ensured that troops serving abroad . . . obtain an equal chance of demobilization, and of jobs, with those serving at home? . . . How will it be ensured that war-time civilians (e.g. munitions workers) take their turn with troops in obtaining jobs after the war? . . . It was strongly felt that female labour should be got out of industry as soon as possible after the war, if necessary by compulsion. It was felt that married women and war widows should receive allowances or pensions large enough to render it unnecessary for them to work. 90

This developing sense of the rights they ought to expect from the state was not the only way in which wartime service shaped political attitudes. For the working-class conscripts who made up the overwhelming majority

of other ranks, it sharpened a shared class identity that had been blurred and fragmented before the war. Exasperation with the military hierarchy easily transferred into a desire to give the old order a good kicking. Military service abroad widened the horizons of some but gave others a chance to act out imperial racism in person, heightened disgust at the 'wogs' or created an ambiguous longing for home. The anger servicemen expressed against high-earning civilians, unfaithful spouses and overpaid allies all indicated their belief that things ought to be better arranged. Yet service life also functioned as an introduction to both the power and the frustrations of a dedicated state-run machine – a sentiment that would also have implications for whatever order emerged after the war.⁹¹

Even for those servicemen who were not enthused by reconstruction, however, thinking about life after the war was hardly apolitical. Writing in July 1943, the army's morale expert, John Sparrow, quoted with approval a censor's report on mail from North Africa arguing that most troops made 'no attempt to envisage the appalling complexity of post-war problems'. On the contrary, 'the majority' thought they would 'get home by the first boat and pick up the threads of their normal lives where they left off in 1939'. Some might hope for a 'Utopia, brought into being by sweeping social changes' but most 'simply' wanted 'to get back to the home they know . . . They are not interested in a "new Britain", so long as they can get "security" in the same job as they had before the war.' Soldiers might have greeted the Beveridge Plan as a 'symbol' of their 'desire for consideration', but 'complaints about its "rejection" had already 'given place to . . . distrust about the post-war intentions of an undifferentiated "they", a vague pronoun representing all those in authority'. 93 Sparrow, who had spent much of the previous year warning about the risk of a Communist insurgency within the army, might not have had his finger quite as closely as he thought on soldiers' political pulse, but he recognized that this 'distrust' was in itself a powerful sentiment. The matter of its party-political consequences, come the end of the war, remained to be seen.

'IF MY HUSBAND EVER COMES BACK THEN WE'LL HAVE SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO'

Any discussion of different wartime military experiences has to recognize that all of them could be enhanced, distorted or overwhelmed by the fact of imprisonment by the enemy. For many servicemen, it was the defining experience of their war. By 1945 more than 192,000 British personnel had been in enemy captivity for some length of time – about three-quarters in Europe and North Africa and the rest in the Far East. Almost all of those taken prisoner by the Japanese, and about a third of those taken prisoner in Europe and North Africa, were imprisoned for more than three years. ⁹⁴

In Europe and North Africa, the mass surrenders of 1940–42 overwhelmed enemy administration systems, leaving men just out of battle to march long distances or scrabble desperately for food, water or clothing as they sought to survive. In contrast, RAF officer pilots taken prisoner individually by the Luftwaffe received more care and attention. Once processed, prisoners were despatched to POW camps, principally in relatively remote locations in eastern Germany and central Italy. 95

The camps were divided up according to rank and arm of service. Officers received relatively better treatment. Their principal enemies were boredom and low morale, but they typically had more time to organize entertainment or come up with plans for escape. Unlike officers, other ranks, particularly from the army, could be posted to work details. Working long days in crippling conditions in mines, factories or on construction sites, they were too busy and exhausted to ponder escape. Agricultural work was better, with more access to food and local women, but remote rural areas made escape seem just as impossible. The largest army POW camp, Stalag VIII-B at Lamsdorf, housed ten thousand British prisoners at its peak, with another nine thousand in its associated work camps. Always a tough place, it grew grimmer in the autumn of 1943 when an influx of prisoners from Italy overwhelmed the water and sanitary systems. ⁹⁷

Senior officer and NCO prisoners often sought to maintain discipline, partly in order to protect their men. Since this usually meant working closely with the enemy, it left them open to charges of collaboration. Reluctant conscripts frequently regarded capture as a reason to slough off military hierarchies, and were happy to elect their own leaders and 'men of confidence' to represent them to the camp authorities and resolve their disputes.⁹⁸

The constant proximity of POW life bred camaraderie, but it also encouraged frustration, helplessness and irritation. Those not posted to work details found a range of ways to occupy their time: sport, cards, chess and draughts, brewing alcohol, theatre performances, writing diaries and logbooks or letters home, and reading anything that came to hand. Some men became deeply religious. From Stalag Luft III, for example,

Flight Lieutenant J. Hall wrote to his parents to tell them that his shooting down had been 'God's way of showing us the error of our ways and the only salvation was to revert to truly Christian principles to ensure a happy family life'.⁹⁹

Communication with the UK was slow. Other ranks were allowed to send two letters and four postcards a month via the Red Cross. An exchange of letters with a prisoner in Germany might take two months, with one in Italy, more like seven. Camp-published newspapers included announcements, news gleaned from letters, short stories and discussions of post-war reconstruction. Though in retrospect prisoners often recalled the monotony, at the time, many were kept going not just by the conviction that the Allies would win the war, but that this would happen relatively soon. 101

POWs in Europe underwent significant material hardship. Inadequate food and tattered clothing made the supplies delivered via the Red Cross all the more crucial. Though badly disrupted by the strain of war and official incompetence in 1940 and 1942, and sometimes hoarded or unfairly distributed after they arrived in camp, the parcels played a key role in prisoner survival. In theory, men were entitled to an initial parcel, three food parcels a fortnight, and a next-of-kin parcel every three months.¹⁰² Over a million of the last were sent from the UK to prisoners in Europe during the war, containing additional supplies of chocolate, clothes, soap and cigarettes. Another 180 tons of loose tobacco, and nearly 1.5 billion cigarettes, were sent to German and Italian camps by the British government's own Prisoner of War Organization. In a situation where most prisoners had very few means to fight back against the humiliation of imprisonment, the visible consumption of what had become luxuries in front of frustrated enemy observers could become a form of resistance in itself. 103

In October 1942, seeking to increase the intensity of the war in the West, Hitler targeted POWs. Responding to reports that Canadian soldiers at Dieppe and British commandos on Sark in the Channel Islands had tied the hands of prisoners, Hitler ordered first that a selection of a thousand Canadian and British prisoners be shackled in retaliation, then that any commandos captured by German forces should be executed. When the British responded by chaining German prisoners, the crisis escalated. By November 1942 several thousand POWs on both sides were being shackled for part of the day.¹⁰⁴

Churchill, determined not to back down, was all for upping the ante,

but his government came under considerable criticism from concerned relatives, clergymen and commentators, who attacked a policy of reprisal on moral grounds. Decisively, it faced pressure from Canada, whose soldiers were also being shackled, and where most of the German POWs restrained in response were being held. The British used the opportunity of Christmas 1942 to unshackle German prisoners, but the Germans persisted with the policy for another year. Right up until the end of the war, captured special forces soldiers, as well as SOE agents, were executed or sent to concentration camps.

During 1943, however, tensions over the treatment of prisoners eased. This was partly because the capture of a large number of German personnel in Tunisia reduced the imbalance between the number of captives on each side. The German army, worried about the implications for its own troops, did as little as possible to comply with the shackling order. In October 1943, the British and Germans negotiated an exchange of seriously ill and badly wounded prisoners, the first time this had happened since the beginning of the war.

Just over 4 per cent of British servicemen who reached German prisoner of war camps died in captivity. In contrast, almost 25 per cent of those taken prisoner by the Japanese did not survive the war. Expecting that their own soldiers would not surrender, the Japanese had done little to prepare for the huge numbers of prisoners they took in 1942. They cared little about their fate and never allocated the administrative resources required to locate prisoners or to allow the passage of welfare packages and supplies. A year after Japan entered the war, only 2,200 British soldiers, fewer than 6 per cent of those missing after the fall of Singapore, had been identified to the Red Cross as captives. Food parcels were few and far between, and among the prisoners severe malnourishment was soon prevalent.

Within the Japanese system too, however, there were important variations. British prisoners were held in camps or sent on work gangs across much of the new Japanese empire, from Burma, through the Dutch East Indies, to Formosa and to the home islands of Japan. The largest concentration, however, remained at the former Changi barracks in Singapore. Conditions were poor, but military discipline largely held up, and the prisoners were able to form a resilient community that kept a much higher percentage alive. In contrast, for those POWs sent to work on the infamous Burma—Thailand railway — alongside tens of thousands of Asian labourers forcibly recruited by the Japanese — the levels of physical abuse and disease were much higher. Here, as elsewhere, the happenstance of

location and sheer dumb luck could lead to profoundly different outcomes for those caught up in the confusion of war. ¹⁰⁶

When servicemen were captured, relatives at home did not automatically know that they had survived. Men were listed as 'missing' until their fate could be determined or sufficient time elapsed (normally, seventeen weeks from going missing) that they were presumed dead. Families never felt as if they got enough information from the authorities. Instead, they relied on other POWs' relatives and dutiful listeners to German propaganda stations, who noted down the lists of names read out by announcers. ¹⁰⁷

Those left behind had to endure months of uncertainty. On top of the emotional anguish, the financial implications were potentially severe. While a man was missing, the allowances and allotted pay due to his dependants continued to be paid as before. Once he was presumed dead, they were moved on to a much lower pension. The failure of the Japanese quickly to notify the Red Cross of the names of most of those captured at Singapore forced even the War Office to be flexible. It repeatedly extended the 'missing' period for those taken prisoner in the Far East – eventually right up to the end of the war – rather than presume that men had died. Even so, the fact that benefits and allowances were vested in servicemen, rather than their families, caused significant difficulties. Since men were unable to inform the authorities of their wishes, allowances and allotments continued to be paid as at the point of capture, regardless of changes in family circumstance or increases in military pay. ¹⁰⁸

Here, as elsewhere, the government relied heavily on voluntary endeavour. At a national level, this work was done principally by SSAFA and the British Red Cross. Locally, relatives of those taken prisoner formed their own groups. In Cambridge, for example, prisoners' families met on the first Wednesday for 'Tea and Talk' in the British Legion Hall on Petty Cury. In Huddersfield, a group set up by the wife of the local mayor, whose own son had been taken prisoner, held Christmas and garden parties, visited sick relatives and provided for those in need, and bought boots to send to POWs. 109

Mutual assistance could not, however, rescue families fully from the limbo of uncertainty. For those whose menfolk had disappeared into the maw of the Far Eastern war, not knowing was particularly bad. In Chelsea in April 1944, a Mass-Observation researcher spoke to a thirty-three-year-old working-class woman, living in two rooms with her eight- and four-year-old sons. Her husband had been taken prisoner at Singapore. 'I've had two cards from the Red Cross since he was taken', she explained. 'If

my husband ever comes back then we'll have something to look forward to, otherwise all I can see ahead of me is work so that I can bring the children up . . . the war's spoilt everything for everybody.' 110 The contrast with those who seemed to be enjoying the conflict was almost too much to bear.

18

'I think of Americans in terms of Hollywood'

Films, Foreigners and the British Home Front

At the end of 1942, a Mass-Observer noted down the goings on in a Bristol pub:

About 4 men, civilians, BC types, drinking beer. Two groups of American soldiers with girls C types. A group of five men had three A[uxiliary]F[ire] S[ervice] girls in uniform with them. The atmosphere was well-behaved and friendly and the men and girls were obviously enjoying themselves. The Americans were buying drinks in quick succession, over-riding the girls' protests that they were not ready for more. At one time, 3 glasses of spirits were lined up in front of one girl who was about twenty years old, and the others were laughing at her and persuading her to drink faster. When this crowd rose to go, two of the girls were giggling tipsily and holding on to each other, until the Americans put arms round them to escort them out. ¹

This was the sort of thing that could get a girl a reputation.

This chapter examines the effects of the influx of foreign servicemen into the UK, particularly the presence of Americans, the ways in which this fed both a mood of liberation and fears of moral crisis, and the suppressed yearning – for glamour, excitement and opportunity – that underlay much of wartime life. Understanding all that, however, requires us to leave the pub and visit the cinema.

The cinema was by a distance the most popular medium of public entertainment of the war. Though the imposition of purchase tax on cinema tickets pushed up prices, the number of tickets sold per week increased from around 19 million in 1939 to over 30 million in 1945. Seventy per cent of the people in a Wartime Social Survey study in 1943 went to the cinema sometimes, and 32 per cent at least once a week. Cinema-goers tended to be younger, more working class and more female than the population as a whole.²

The British film industry was reasonably healthy when the war began. Changes in quota regulations in 1938 had allowed the US firms that

dominated the market to concentrate their UK-based production on a smaller number of higher production quality films, a pattern matched by British producers as they emerged from the recession that had afflicted the industry in 1937. This put them in a good position to endure the start of the conflict, when the government requisitioned studios and closed cinemas, putting out of work film technicians who were left with little choice but to join up. Quickly, however, larger British studios recovered and adapted to the circumstances of the war. Though the number of long films registered in the UK each year fell, from 103 in 1939 to 69 on average between 1940 and 1945, the concentration of resources improved the standard of output.³ The Ministry of Information used a mixture of control over film stock and consultation with a largely compliant industry to shape UK-produced films to propaganda objectives, including the promotion – in the words of the Ministry's Films Division in July 1942 – of 'the positive values of British national characteristics and the democratic way of life'.⁴

Particularly from 1940 to 1943, lots of the films made in Britain were set in wartime. Some of these, including, for example, *Millions Like Us* (1943) or *Fires Were Started* (1943), would subsequently be celebrated as classic, realistic representations of the nation at war or new departures in the depiction of 'ordinary' working-class Britons. Taken together, the British film industry had a good war, with its products increasingly popular with audiences, plenty of support from the government, and the money from rising ticket sales re-invested in some high-quality films of lasting cinematic merit.⁵

The productions that remain well known, however, are not an accurate reflection of what audiences at the time were watching. For one thing, quite a large proportion of British studios' production remained variety-star comedy vehicles, including the series featuring Arthur Askey, Tommy Handley and the Crazy Gang. These were staple viewing, notable in particular for their anarchic debunking of authority figures, but by their nature pretty ephemeral. For another, from the middle of the war, both the public taste for war films and the cinema industry's output changed, so that the most successful British-made films from 1943 onwards were largely not set during the war. 8

The majority of the films screened in the UK between 1939 and 1945, however, and the most popular films of all, were American. The ratio was stark, though national figures for this period are not available and local studies make it clear that there was considerable variation in audience preferences. One cinema in Portsmouth, for example, screened a total of

233 American first features between 1939 and 1945, compared to 63 first features made in the UK.⁹

Among the most successful American films were big budget, glossy musicals with star line-ups (such as *Holiday Inn* (1942), with Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire, or *Cover Girl* (1944), featuring the Glenn Miller band) or strong female leads (like 1941's Sun Valley Serenade and Springtime in the Rockies (1942), starring Betty Grable); comedy vehicles (including numerous Abbott and Costello titles such as, also in 1942, Pardon My Sarong); and exotic fantasies such as *The Mark of Zorro*. 10 Young servicemen liked the comedies, but both the musicals and the fantasies were seen as particularly attractive to the women who made up the majority of the adult cinema-going audience. 11 So too was the high romantic melodrama of Now, Voyager, Random Harvest (both 1942) and Gone with the Wind (the wartime success, opening in the UK in 1940 and still being shown locally four years later). The last two both dealt with the devastating consequences of other wars, but more important to their success were their narratives of female transformation, endurance and determination. For similar reasons, British audiences even liked the rather mannered, middle-class version of the home front portrayed in *Mrs* Miniver, with Greer Garson as the eponymous lead. Cinema managers rated it the best box office performer of 1942. 12

DANGEROUS MOONLIGHT

Thanks to the continuing effects of the quota system, war films were also made in the UK by American production companies, with an eye on the possibilities of release in both countries. The most significant example of these films in terms of its contemporary cultural impact was *Dangerous Moonlight*, directed by Brian Hurst for RKO Radio Pictures and released in 1941. The film features the epic romance between American reporter Carole Peters (Sally Gray) and Polish composer-cum-fighter pilot Stefan Radetzky (Anton Walbrook). They start their affair amid the rubble of his shattered country, as he composes his masterpiece, the epic mock-classical 'Warsaw Concerto'. Escaping Warsaw just as it falls, he travels to New York, where he and Carole marry, but leaves her behind to come to the UK and join a Polish squadron fighting in the Battle of Britain. Having lost his memory as a result of the injuries sustained when deliberately flying his plane into a German aircraft, Stefan recovers through playing piano, which allows him to remember both Carole and his concerto.

Critics (and Walbrook) disliked the film's overwrought emotions, but it was a big hit with audiences, becoming one of the most popular films of the middle of the war. The syrupy 'Warsaw Concerto' became the background music, real or imagined, to many wartime romances. Playing as it did off the celebrity of aerial combat, *Dangerous Moonlight* was particularly beloved of RAF pilots. When Guy Gibson, the bomber hero VC-holder and commander of the 'Dambusters' Raid, appeared on *Desert Island Discs* at the start of 1944, the 'Warsaw Concerto' was one of the eight records with which he chose to be cast away. Another was the 'Ride of the Valkyries'.¹³

One striking feature of *Dangerous Moonlight* was that it featured an international romance, occasioned by the war, between a courageous, creative man and an independent woman. Another was that she was American rather than British. That made it a rather safe version of what was happening within the UK even as it was released, as hundreds of thousands of foreign servicemen were stationed in a country many of whose menfolk were away in the armed forces.

Initially, the most famous of these arrivals were European. From the moment they arrived in 1940, servicemen from Occupied Europe were given extensive publicity, not just because of the role they played in Britain's defence but also because they demonstrated the country's role within an international coalition. By 1943 there were about 30,000 Poles in the UK: sailors aboard destroyers and submarines, aircrew in fighter stations in southern England and bomber crews operating out of stations east of Nottingham, and about 20,000 soldiers and another 3,000 civilians based in Scotland, first in Lanarkshire, then to the north of Edinburgh. ¹⁴

The influx of Catholic Poles raised sectarian concerns, but local authorities and charities made a big effort to find them accommodation, transport and food, and to raise money for their welfare. Polish soldiers were reputedly smart, well mannered and tightly disciplined. Rural Scotland was socially conservative – one Polish infantryman's memory of the town of Crawford was that all the young women were 'locked up at dusk'. Nevertheless, by 1943 about 1,100 Polish servicemen had married British women, most of them in Scotland: the brides in the process legally forfeiting their British citizenship and becoming Poles-in-exile themselves. 16

It was the Polish fighter pilot, however – melancholic, passionate, sexually voracious on the ground and ferocious in the air – who became a staple of wartime folklore.¹⁷ For British soldiers serving overseas, a letter from home announcing that their wife had run off with a Polish fighter

pilot became a standing joke. The Poles liked to play up to the image but, given their relatively small number, *Dangerous Moonlight* plainly had a lot to answer for. ¹⁸

For most of the war, in fact, the most numerous overseas servicemen in the UK were Canadians, including those from the separately administered Dominion of Newfoundland. By the autumn of 1943 there were more than 215,000 of them: army units concentrated in Sussex and Hampshire, a new Canadian Group of Bomber Command between York, Harrogate, Middlesbrough and Stockton-on-Tees. Seven thousand lumberjacks of the Canadian Forestry Corps (part of the Canadian Army) – as well as civilians of the Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit - cut timber in Aberdeenshire. 19 Most Canadians, however, were not backwoodsmen but city-dwellers who were used to a North American standard of living. All were volunteers. A minority were French Canadians, but many had British relatives and most felt a strong attachment to a British Commonwealth, even though they had grown up in a Canada that was defining its own identity as a different, newer place.²⁰

The artillery officer George Blackburn, for example, remembered that though he'd been 'raised pro-British and honouring the Crown' he had 'not been impressed by many of the Englishmen' he'd 'met in Canada, who . . . never tired of telling all and sundry how much better things were in the "old country". 21 That wasn't how it seemed to newly arrived Canadian servicemen. Sapper Joseph Cunningham, for example, found himself quartered in an Aldershot house crammed with bunk beds and heated with open fires: 'Well, you had a bucket of coal per room a week to keep warm, in the dead of winter . . . poor freezing Canadians . . . we didn't know what open fires were . . . we were all used to central heating, most of us anyway, me being a city boy . . . '22 Not least because the Canadian armed forces needed to attract volunteers for overseas service, the basic rate of pay for a private was about twice that received by his British counterpart.²³ With their interesting accents and higher pay, the Canadians often crowded out British servicemen with local girls, and fights between them were a frequent occurrence.

Stuck in miserable camps and bored with routine training, over the winter of 1940–41 the Canadians developed a reputation for drunkenness and violent behaviour. Since they were liable for prosecution under English law, their misdemeanours were extensively reported in the crime columns of the local press. By 1943, however, the situation had improved, not least because a move into billets in hotels and boarding houses brought

them into closer everyday contact with British civilians.²⁴ By then, many of the Canadians had simply been in the UK for so long that they no longer seemed so foreign after all.

Grace Holland, a young middle-class woman from Brighton, helped out in the canteen set up for Canadian troops by her local church. The Canadians 'livened it up a bit, because they joined in everything'. ²⁵ Polite, shy Canadians sang and played table tennis, which was how she met the man who – after a three-year-long engagement while he went off to fight in Sicily and Italy – she eventually travelled to Canada to marry. Posted to a hilltop billet on the North Downs, meanwhile, Sapper Cunningham had picked up the company phone and started chatting up the women working the local switchboard. They passed him over to the girl at the bakery shop next door:

smashing bit of crumpet she was . . . and we used to have some sneaky talks on the phone, she wasn't allowed to go out with a Canadian, her father didn't have a lot of time for Canadians, he was a proper Englishman, but we happened to meet up the road of an evening and have a little walk . . . and that's how I met my wife. 26

Apparently reconciled to the lack of central heating, Cunningham emigrated to Britain after the war.

Between 1939 and 1945, half a million Canadian personnel passed through the UK. Forty-eight thousand of them married British women.²⁷ When news of these nuptials reached soldiers of 4/5th Battalion Royal Sussex Regiment, on garrison duty in Iran in summer 1943, they were infuriated:

A local paper reported a speech by the Mayor of Brighton to the effect that 7,000 Sussex girls had married Canadians since they had been stationed in England. Men, in letters, are hearing of members of their own and other families bearing illegitimate children by Canadian soldiers. At least one NCO of this unit has heard that his wife is expecting a child, although he has been abroad for a year. A Canadian is suspected to be the father.

They had vowed: 'There will be a lot of blood shed if the Canadians are still in England when we get back.'²⁸

'I AM VERY WELL OFF IN EVERY WAY, ESPECIALLY FOR FOOD'

Canadians and exiles from Occupied Europe were not the only foreign servicemen in the UK. In the summer of 1943, there were also 75,000 Italian POWs. By 1944, that figure had increased to 140,000.²⁹ Italian

prisoners were also transported everywhere in the Empire, including Gibraltar, Jamaica, South Africa, Australia and India.³⁰

Worries over the security risk posed by German prisoners meant that, whereas Italians captured in North Africa were brought to the UK, Luftwaffe crews who bailed out over Britain were transported to Canada for safekeeping. In contrast, the Italians were seen as a relatively safe source of labour. Some cast concrete blocks to build huge new antisubmarine barriers at Scapa Flow (work that would have contravened the Geneva Convention and was therefore classified as improving the Orcadian transport network).³¹ Most worked in agriculture. They were dressed in khaki jackets and trousers, with easily distinguishable coloured patches at the knees and shoulders. In the British countryside, the sudden appearance of standard-form prisoner camps was just another of the innumerable disruptions brought about by the war. To economize on British manpower, the Ministry of Agriculture petitioned for well-behaved Italians to be allowed to work without guards. Before long, co-operative Italians were living with farmers' families. After poorly provisioned camps in North Africa, many welcomed the chance for purposeful activity, reasonable rations and relative safety. Compared with being taken prisoner by the Russians or shipped to the Reich as a forced labourer, being captured and put to work by the British was one of the better things that could happen to a young Italian man in the early 1940s.³²

The Italians had a reputation for trying to avoid hard work (one Women's Land Army member recalled them disappearing under the trees 'at the first sign of rain . . . singing away very nicely while the rest of us kept on working'). Expectations of laziness were not the only preconception about the Latin temperament. Italians were thought to be emotionally expressive in a way that was alien to their British counterparts. British soldiers in the Middle East were outraged when the newspapers published pictures of 'Land Girls' laughing with Italian POWs in late 1942. Most farmers, however, short of labour and convinced they posed no threat, treated the POWs decently. From a farm in North Wales, one prisoner wrote back to his family: 'on Saturday evenings the son of the boss and I go to the cinema. He pays for me. At this farm I am very well off in every way, especially for food.'34

Ironically, animosity to the Italians increased after their country surrendered. The Italian government wanted them home as soon as possible. The British were determined not to give up valuable manpower, or to use precious ships transporting them back to Italy. After its surrender, Italy was redefined as a 'co-belligerent', rather than an ally. This allowed

the British to keep control of Italian POWs, even more of whom were then transported to the UK. Prisoners who volunteered as 'co-operators' (about two-thirds of the total) were offered a wider range of work and paid part of their low wages in sterling. They were also abused by the press for living in safety while British men died to defeat Hitler. The unions attacked them for depressing British wages. The severity of reaction when they were seen consorting with British women worsened as well. Writing home towards the end of the war, one Italian 'co-operator' explained that the police had taken to chasing off any girls seen talking to him and his comrades, telling the women that it 'would be better for them to be seen with a negro than with an Italian . . . '.³⁵

'I HAD GROWN TO SUPPOSE THAT ENGLAND HAD ALWAYS BEEN AN EGGLESS COUNTRY'

Eventually, the US presence in the UK dwarfed that of other overseas contingents, but the superiority was temporally and geographically specific. By October 1942 there were 220,000 US soldiers in the UK, but more than half of them left for 'Torch'. In May 1943 there were only 132,000. Only after summer 1943 did the rate of arrival rapidly increase in preparation for the 'Overlord' invasion.³⁶ US units were concentrated in four regions: army divisions in Northern Ireland and Southwest England, the USAAF in East Anglia, and logistics troops in two thick corridors between the fighting units and the western ports. The British government handed over requisitioned country houses, army camps and airfields to accommodate them, but an array of new depots, airbases and hospitals still had to be built.³⁷ In spring 1943, 76,000 British workmen were engaged on 'Bolero' construction projects. US engineers, equipped with powerful earthmoving equipment, built their own airfields and supply centres. As one remembered: 'there is nothing quite as final, quite as levelling, as an aerodrome.'38

In some places, from an early stage, the US presence was extraordinarily dense. In August 1942, three thousand GIs were living in the supply depot at Ashchurch in Worcestershire. Tewkesbury, the nearest town, had a population of fewer than six thousand people.³⁹ In other areas – most of Scotland, northeast England, mid- Wales – GIs were, even at the height of the American 'occupation', rare, and Poles, Canadians or Italians could have a greater effect on how local people experienced the war. Even

before they became numerically dominant, however, the US troops stood out from the other foreigners in the UK. They were wealthy in money and material resources, they had extraterritorial legal rights (uniquely among the Allied forces in the UK) and they brought a segregated army across the Atlantic. Compared to them, other foreign servicemen suddenly seemed much more acceptable.⁴⁰

What Britons and Americans knew of each other's countries derived mostly from the cinema. As one Mass-Observer wrote apologetically at the start of 1942: 'I think of Americans in terms of Hollywood, oranges, super-cars, lovely bath-rooms, strange menus, central heating, massive locomotives, sky-scrapers, chewing gum, gangsters etc – but I know I'm all wrong.' American preconceptions also owed much to Hollywood, in particular the highly successful historical melodramas of the 1930s, including Alexander Korda's smash success *The Private Lives of Henry VIII*. Most GIs thought of the UK as old-fashioned and militarily ineffective. They soon found evidence to confirm their prejudices.

Americans complained about the same things as Canadians: perpetual damp, shocking plumbing, weak beer, boring music, worse food. To anyone used to the booming economy of wartime America, British civilian life was shabby, the cleared bombsites, blacked-out streets, lack of civilian cars and clothes-rationed people signifying not an austere commitment to victory but rather the wreckage of an empire in ruins. 'Is it on account of the war you never have eggs?' one GI responded with surprise when quizzed in April 1943 about his perceptions of the UK. 'I had grown to suppose that England had always been an eggless country.'⁴²

The contrast was all the greater because, in order to ensure popular acceptance of the draft, the US army attended to the material needs of its soldiers to a degree unparalleled by any other combatant. After the first frantic few months, US troops in the UK were richly supplied not only with military equipment, but with precious consumer goods that were otherwise unobtainable. Unlike all the other Allied service personnel in the UK, they wore their own pattern of uniform, with colour and styling very different from the one-size-fits-no-one, sack-of-spuds battledress of the British army. US service dress, with its jacket and tie, gave the humblest American private the appearance of a British officer. US ration scales gave their soldiers about three times the UK civilian weekly ration of meat, about half as much again as the British armed forces. British visitors to US bases were astonished not just by the high-quality array of foodstuffs – canned fruit, white bread and sugary sauces and desserts – but also by the titanic levels of waste. The US Army also provided on-base PX

(Post Exchange) stores for its troops, where they could buy razor blades and boot polish at much cheaper prices than on the British civilian market (if they were available at all), as well as chocolates, cigarettes and nylons – the synthetic stockings much prized by their British girlfriends.

Even after the pay rise of September 1942, British pay rates for other ranks were between half and a third those of US servicemen. The Americans were paid monthly, whereas the British were paid weekly, so when the Yanks arrived in town on a leave pass, they were usually carrying what were by British standards immense amounts of cash. They soon stripped local shops and pubs of prized items: torch batteries, combs, cigarettes, fish and chips, whisky and beer. Away from their bases, they could stay in the network of 170 American Red Cross Clubs (provisioned by donations from the folks back home but usually staffed by unpaid British Women's Voluntary Service volunteers), with copious, free supplies of doughnuts and American-style coffee.⁴⁴

Even efforts to improve relations with the locals rammed home the contrast between British austerity and American plenitude. In the two years from 1 July 1942, the USAAF held 379 parties for children who lived close to its airbases. Nearly 60,000 British children attended these events – a boon of sugary excitement in the middle of the war and a welcome morale boost for US troops missing their own offspring.⁴⁵ By saving up their own rations, American soldiers could produce a lavish spread. At Honington airbase in December 1943, for example, a hundred evacuated London orphans were treated to a Christmas party in which 'Santa Claus' arrived 'from America' in a Flying Fortress. Descending from his 'sleigh', 'Santa' led the hungry children to a fully decorated Nissen hut, filled with tables crammed with 'roast pheasant with Yankee dressing and Southern giblet gravy, snowflake potatoes, buttered string beans, candied carrots, creamed corn, hot biscuits, ice cream sundaes, cookies and candy'. 46 It was very generous, and enough to make the hardiest orphan sick.

Other Britons also found the combination of material wealth and overwhelming self-confidence difficult to stomach. In July 1942, Home Intelligence warned of

trouble brewing between US and British troops, as a result of the lavish way in which the Americans fling their money about, and their relations with local girls. Irritation is also reported against their 'big talk', their 'swagger' and the fact that 'they are saying openly that they have come here to teach us how to do the job'. ⁴⁷

For most of the British public, Russia remained a much more popular ally,

not only because many Britons supposed Soviet egalitarianism and efficiency more appealing than US capitalism, but also because the Red Army was understood at the time to be doing the lion's share of the fighting. It helped that the Soviet Union remained a distant fantasy. Had Russian troops been stationed in the UK, British attitudes might have been rather different.

US troops were usually not billeted on British households. A few, whether through private invitations or official hospitality schemes, formed close relationships with British families eager to care for a serviceman far away from home. Like British Tommies in foreign lands, however, many GIs had little interest in venturing off base. Of the nearly six thousand men surveyed by US army opinion pollsters in November 1943 and March 1944, nearly half attached no importance to getting to know local people better. Even among those who had been in the country more than a year, one in ten knew no 'English' families and hadn't even 'gotten to know any English civilian girls'.⁴⁸

Those who did venture out were young, excited and ready to blow off steam. They'd descend en masse on the nearest town, or head to London, keen on spending their money and entertaining themselves as quickly as possible. In central London, the spectacle of the streets around Piccadilly Circus, close to the largest American Red Cross hostel, packed with US soldiers, prostitutes and so-called 'good-time girls', became a tourist attraction in its own right.⁴⁹

The riotous assembly of a mass of young men on leave was the only way in which some Britons encountered the Americans: drunk, libidinous strangers, hunting for brothels, propositioning every woman they met and leaving a squelchy flotsam of vomit and used condoms in their wake. Despite an almost complete absence of negative news stories about American behaviour – partly thanks to journalistic self-censorship and partly because GIs who committed civil offences were tried by US military courts, to which British reporters had no access – rumours soon spread of what a Mass-Observer visiting Peterborough called 'the usual stories': 'drinking with young girls in pubs, "goings on" in air raid shelters, and so forth'.⁵⁰

Yet these booze-fuelled nocturnal bacchanals were not the only way in which Britons and Americans met. There were working Yanks — route-marching through the countryside, parading through the towns for National Savings weeks or driving their massive trucks down narrow British lanes — and slouching Yanks — waiting bored on trains or street corners, or in cinema queues (a favoured place for women to talk to them because it was

easy to escape if they wanted to when they got to the head of the queue). Above all, there were dancing Yanks – in the giant dance-halls of the big cities, at local 'hops' and at the dances they organized on their own bases, and to which they invited women from surrounding villages, ATS camps and Land Army hostels.

It was often at these dances that British women really 'clicked' with American servicemen. There was much to attract them. The Yanks were not just better off, but better dressed and cleaner than their British counterparts. They were also often better dancers – a crucial characteristic given the importance of dancing in young British women's lives at the time. They brought with them exciting new dances, the jitterbug and the lindy hop, to the swinging jazz of the big band sound. They also brought slow, romantic smooth music, most famously that played by Glenn Miller's orchestra, with its signature tune, 'Moonlight Serenade'. Though some GIs were just as inarticulate as the most reserved local men, differences in dating culture meant many of them lived up to the expectations cultivated from the cinema. In a rather sorry commentary on British gender relations in the 1940s, the Americans didn't have to do much to out-perform the domestic competition: a gift from the PX store, a compliment on a woman's appearance, and the fact that they didn't talk about football for the whole evening or wander off half-way through to have a pint with their mates. In the memory of one woman: 'what a boost to her ego when one is greeted with "Hallo Duchess" (and you were treated like one!) or "Hi Beautiful!" That was so GOOD!'51

Talk of British women being taken in by American glamour usually ignored the tensions involved in choosing to spend time with the GIs. Ironically, bearing in mind that officials in Whitehall worried so much about British girls falling prey to mistaken visions of Hollywood, the time women spent in the cinema made them more literate in Americana than many of their compatriots. Americans were exciting and resource-rich and a way for young women who had spent all day at work or hadn't seen their husbands for years to have a good time. Many women, however, also shared the antagonism at American boasting, and felt that those who went out with GIs were letting down everybody else. Women perceived as 'Yank hunting' – particularly those with husbands in the forces – were condemned by their neighbours and work colleagues as 'Spam bashers' or 'Yankee bags'. Caution was necessary if reputations were to be preserved.⁵²

Throughout the war, the US army did everything it could to discourage its men from marrying foreign women. The British authorities feared that

their girls would either prove vulnerable to GI blandishments or march the first Yank they could get their hands on down the aisle. Only a very persistent couple would overcome the obstacles that both bureaucracies sought to put in their way. Combined with the relatively low numbers of US troops in Britain until the end of 1943, that explains why, though four times more Americans than Canadians passed through the UK during the war, they contracted about a fifth fewer marriages.⁵³

'THE BRITISH SOLDIER WHO FEARS FOR THE SAFETY OR FAITHFULNESS OF HIS WOMEN-FOLK'

The US army segregated black soldiers into separate units, usually commanded by white officers who had failed to get a more prestigious post. Disproportionately, black troops ended up in logistics and construction units rather than the combat arms. Segregation was a function of American civil society. Bringing together men from across the USA, the US army tended to default to the more brutal racism of the South.

The British government would have preferred as few black US servicemen in the UK as possible. Ministers and officials argued that segregation imposed impractical demands on space. Attempts to persuade the American military not to send black GIs at all failed at an early stage: not only did the US military need black soldiers to build up its British bases, but overseas service was being closely monitored by civil rights groups at home. As black troops arrived in the UK, relations between them, white Americans, and British service personnel and civilians were worked out on the ground.

The majority of the British population were not used either to people who weren't white, or to the practices of segregation that organized everyday life in the USA. The pre-war black British population was about 16,000 people, mostly concentrated in port cities. Many people, particularly in rural areas, had never seen anyone non-white in the flesh. Both the US military and the British civil authorities feared that the locals, particularly young women, would be fascinated by black Americans and unable to appreciate US prejudices, and that this would lead to dangerous inter-Allied conflict. Eisenhower, during his brief period as European Theatre of Operation commander in 1942, laid out the principles for what he thought would be a successful racial policy: equal treatment, no imposition of American standards on the British public, but separation of

white and black troops in order to minimize antagonism. White and black US personnel were therefore segregated off duty as well as on, with the better towns, pubs and other recreational facilities barred to black units. Nonetheless, white GIs, particularly those from the Deep South, routinely picked fights with their black comrades, physically attacking them without warning.

In summer 1942, the question of how British service personnel and civilians ought to behave towards black GIs raised concerns in Whitehall and among military and civil leaders in the West Country, where the first black units had arrived. The War Office, trying to keep US generals happy, instructed soldiers to try to adopt a white American point of view, not to get too friendly with black GIs, and to discourage women from associating with them. A whispering campaign got under way, through the Ministry of Information and the Women's Voluntary Service, to persuade British women to keep their distance. When details of these measures reached the press, there was an outcry, not least in the Colonial Office, wary of the effects on colonial opinion and eager to protect the rights of hundreds of technically skilled tradesmen who had been recruited in the West Indies for work in the UK. When the Cabinet discussed the topic in October 1942, ministers supported the War Office. Securing the support of Britain's most important ally meant endorsing US military apartheid even though by this point there were only about 7,300 black GIs in the UK.

Official concerns proved well founded. Their own array of prejudices and taboos about black men notwithstanding, Britons noted with gratitude how much more polite and respectful black soldiers were than white GIs. Attempts to segregate pubs and cinemas were seen as the imposition of alien values. Repeatedly, British civilians stood up for black troops being pushed around by white soldiers or military policemen. The relatively small number of black soldiers helped: the *idea* of the persecuted black GI embodied much of what Britons disliked in any case about Americans.

Much though they appreciated the fact that Britain didn't have the sort of overt discrimination they were used to at home, many black GIs felt just as bored and homesick as their white counterparts — more so, given that they were generally poorly led and much less attention was paid to their welfare. They were, however, as well paid as white Americans, and had the same access to the range of PX goodies. They too were attracted, and attractive, to British women. The sight of white women walking out with black men not only incensed white GIs: it also confirmed their belief that Britain was a declining country. It tingled British sensitivities too;

however much they disliked public discrimination, very many Britons retained a deep sense of anxiety about miscegenation. Wild talk of the number of under-age girls having sex with black GIs sparked concerns about an epidemic of brown babies. Despite the condemnation of US prejudice, plenty of drunk British men would shout racial epithets at black troops if they saw them with white women, and lots of hotel owners, pub landlords and dancehall managers were happy to impose a colour bar – sometimes because they had operated one discreetly for years anyway, sometimes because it freed them from the risk of fighting between enraged black and white GIs, and sometimes because the financial incentives of giving the white majority of US servicemen what they wanted were just too good to resist. All these tensions grew as the number of Americans – white and black – increased exponentially from summer 1943.

Between September 1943 and May 1944, an average of 130,000 American servicemen arrived each month, 223,000 in March 1944 alone. By the time the cross-Channel invasion was launched, more than 1.5 million Americans were in the UK. Not until December 1943 had the number of Americans in Britain topped 650,000: it did not fall below that figure until January 1945.⁵⁴ The pressure on accommodation meant that, for the first time, US troops were billeted with British families. Rather than being separated in their own camps, about 100,000 Americans lived alongside British people. They were noisy and noisome, but closer contact overturned some of the stereotypes of boastful, over-sexed Yanks. Simultaneously, the British authorities made an effort to improve Anglo-American relations, organizing inter-Allied military exchanges, forming 'hospitality committees' of local civic leaders to liaise with US officers, and setting up 'British Welcome Clubs' that were meant to provide GIs with a warm drink, a snack and a friendly smile. (They were filled by British troops, confused by the title but attracted by the free grub.) Meanwhile the American Red Cross arranged for older British couples to 'adopt' GIs and welcome them into their homes. By the start of 1945, more than a million home visits had taken place under this scheme.⁵⁵

The number of black GIs in Britain increased almost in proportion with the growth of US forces overall. By the end of 1943, there were 65,000 black Americans in Britain; by the start of June 1944, 130,000. Black GIs were almost completely excluded from the brief flourishing of fellow feeling in the spring of 1944. Rather than 'British Welcome', they had 'Silver Birch' clubs, a few of which were set up close to black units. Black Americans were not included in the exchange schemes or the ARC hospitality programme. The growth in the numbers of white and black GIs

was accompanied by an increase in violence, including a spate of incidents – among them fights at Bamber Bridge in Lancashire on 24 June 1943, at Launceston in Cornwall on 26 September 1943, in Leicester and Bristol in May and July 1944, and at Kingsclere in Devon on 5 October 1944 – in which black troops and white military policemen opened fire on each other. ⁵⁶

Responding to US concerns, the secretary of state for war, P. J. Grigg, a long-time supporter of segregation, proposed telling British civilians and service personnel to accept the necessity of American racial distinctions. He cast the problem in terms of military morale, telling Churchill that 'the British soldier who fears for the safety or faithfulness of his women-folk . . . would not feel so keenly as the BBC and the public at home appear to do in favour of a policy of no colour bar and complete equality of negro troops'.⁵⁷ Though the government shied away from such a forthright public stance, behind the scenes it made extensive efforts to dissuade British women from associating with black troops.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, American military racism continued to attract public attention. This included a furore in May and June 1944, led by the Daily Mirror, about the sentencing of black GIs to death for allegedly raping white British women. Not only was rape not a capital offence in the UK, but the disproportionately high rate at which the US army convicted black soldiers was perceived as an offensive importation of 'Jim Crow' laws into the British public space.⁵⁹ This concern with legal fairness was not matched by a change in popular attitudes. Indeed, the dramatic increase in the number of black troops in the UK encouraged more explicit British expression of racism.

'NO NIGGERS . . . BECAUSE OF THE AMERICANS'

The UK's pre-war black population were well-used to British patterns of discrimination – the (often unarticulated) colour bars and the associated fear of pollution that meant black people were seldom invited into white people's homes. The war put more black Britons into uniform. Some volunteered for service, others were conscripted. They served in all the armed forces, and, unlike the US army, they were not segregated into separate units. Following pressure from the League of Coloured Peoples, led by Dr Harold Moody, a Jamaican doctor who had settled in Britain before the First World War, the Army Act was altered to allow men not of

'pure European descent' to be commissioned. Moody's son Charles became an officer in the Royal West Kents, and eventually the highest-ranked black British officer of the war.⁶⁰

Service personnel and industrial workers were also recruited from the West Indies. From 1940, the RAF accepted a few black West Indians for training as aircrew. As in the UK, the RAF attracted the best-qualified and fittest volunteers. In total, about four hundred black aircrew from the colonies flew with the RAF during the war, at least seventy of whom held commissions. From 1943, another 4,500 West Indians were recruited and brought to the UK as groundcrew (some had thought they were volunteering for flying duties). About a thousand engineering workers came to work in British factories, and approximately the same number of forestry workers travelled from British Honduras to cut down trees in the UK. Despite its presumption that black West Indians lacked martial qualities and physical resilience, the War Office also recruited several hundred technically skilled men for service in the British army in the UK. In 1943, it had to revise a policy of accepting only white West Indian women into the ATS after accidentally accepting a black Bermudan. By the end of the war, about three hundred black West Indian women were serving in the ATS.⁶¹

At the start of 1944, after prolonged pressure from local politicians and the Colonial Office, the War Office established a black West Indian army unit. The service of the 1st Battalion Caribbean Regiment was defined by the politics of Empire and race. The War Office refused to deploy it to the UK because of the problems that would be caused with the Americans. Instead, its 1,200 soldiers were sent straight to the Mediterranean, where they arrived in Italy in autumn 1944. There, Charles Moody, about to go into action with the Royal West Kents, was posted to the unit to make up for a shortage of qualified officers. Despite the desperate manpower shortages afflicting the British army, however, the 1st Caribbean never went into battle. Seeing its existence as a sop to nationalist sentiment, generals doubted its military efficiency and feared unrest if it was attached to a fighting formation (not least because, as British subjects, the West Indians were paid at the same rate as British soldiers, much more than Indian or African troops). They sent the battalion to Egypt for prolonged training in the Western Desert. On leave in Cairo, black West Indians were attacked by British servicemen after they were seen dancing with white women.⁶²

The number of West Indians who came to the UK as a result of the war was tiny compared to the number of black GIs. Nonetheless, it represented

an extraordinary increase in the number of black British citizens in the United Kingdom. Enlisted during the second half of the conflict, these men came to a country where racial lines were being much more sharply drawn because of the American presence. This had important consequences for what they experienced.

A famous example came when the black cricketer Learie Constantine, a pre-war celebrity now working for the Ministry of Labour as a welfare officer for West Indian engineers, was refused the rooms he had booked in a London hotel on the grounds that, as the manageress told him, she could have 'no niggers . . . because of the Americans'. With the support of the Colonial Office, in June 1944 Constantine successfully sued the hotel for breach of contract. ⁶³

Though some of the young West Indian aircrew subsequently insisted that they suffered no discrimination in their squadrons, others clashed with their Rhodesian or South African comrades or found themselves singled out for bullying by their commanding officers. Those who became groundcrew often felt that they were lumped with menial duties around the airfields. Off base, they were sometimes – like black GIs – the subject of fascinated scrutiny. On leave in Scarborough in early 1944, for instance, Edward Noble kept getting stopped by people in the street: 'They wanted to know what part of the world I was from, and marvelled at the fact that I spoke English perfectly . . . The high spot . . . was a darling old couple, who humbly begged to be allowed to shake my hand for luck.' Venturing out to the Mecca dance hall that evening, Noble discovered that men were in the minority, but that he 'soon became the centre of attraction, either as a novelty or a curiosity, and to tell the truth, I didn't really care which'.

For black men who danced, let alone stepped out with a white woman, however, the threat of violence was endemic. The danger came not only from white GIs, but from outraged British servicemen: 'Hi Darkie! I see you are dancing with a white girl!', Stanley Hodges, a West Indian aircraftsman, remembered Scottish soldiers shouting at one of his mates. 'If you were in Germany you would have been shot, you black bastards!' In the fight that followed, one of the Scots was stabbed and Hodges was arrested. 66 Another West Indian serviceman recalled the words of passersby when he walked down the street in North London with his white fiancée:

'Look at them. It oughten to be allowed.' Such dehumanising utterances occurred quite frequently and had the effect of reducing one to less than a man! It was difficult to comprehend how people renowned for their sensitivity could be so overt in their disregard for others.⁶⁷

'WE HAVE LET SOME OF OUR MORAL STANDARDS SLIP BADLY'

The presence of so many overseas servicemen was just one reason why family life and traditional standards of public morality were seen to be in trouble during the war. An apparent rise in juvenile delinquency was blamed on the breakdown of family discipline, with fathers absent on military service and mothers out working in factories. So-called 'good-time girls' – young women, some of them under-age – were seen to be pursuing Americans for sex, cigarettes and nylons. With so many men absent on military service, the infidelity of wives and sweethearts was a topic of constant discussion.

In his radio address for the National Day of Prayer to mark the anniversary of the start of the war on 3 September 1942, the archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, warned listeners that

we have let some of our moral standards slip badly. I have been told by judges of the High Court that they think that there is less care for honesty, less shame at dishonesty, than there was. The Christian standards of conduct with regard to sex are very widely ignored. 69

Applications for divorce tripled between 1939 and 1945, and the rate of illegitimate births more than doubled. The number of women seeking treatment for VD at government centres increased by 72 per cent between 1939 and 1943, helping to spark an official publicity drive that surprised many with its frankness.⁷⁰

The rhetoric of crisis concealed more mundane realities. In Scotland, for example, the number of juveniles charged with offences each year was about a quarter higher than before the war. The majority of this increase, however, occurred among boys aged under fourteen, primarily for minor property crimes such as breaking windows. National figures concealed very substantial regional variations. Rather than a wholesale shift of young people towards criminality, the effect of the war seems mainly to have been to give groups of boys in industrial cities bombed buildings at which to throw stones.⁷¹

Similarly, despite the obsession of some parts of the press with 'good-time girls', the striking thing about most of the young women to whom Mass-Observation investigators spoke in January 1943 was how little free time of any sort they had. Under the control of authoritarian and often violent parents, many young women's lives were defined by servitude to the household as well as to the state. When she finished her 9 a.m. to 6

p.m. job in a grocer's shop, for example, a fourteen-year-old living in Bolton had to start cleaning and cooking. 'My mother's on night shift', she explained, 'so I have to do all the work.' A fifteen-year-old from London

works from 8.30 to 5.30 as a typist clerk, belongs to the Junior Women's Air Corps. Her mother is on shift work, so F15C takes it in turns either to do all the housework for the family (including two young brothers) in the morning before leaving, or else preparing and clearing up the evening meal when she gets back. ⁷²

To many of these young women, conscription came as a blessed relief.

Noticeably, wartime moral concern focused on the behaviour of heterosexual women, not homosexual women and men. Sex between men was illegal, and, in total, 4,951 men were prosecuted in England and Wales for homosexual offences during the war.⁷³ Yet the ratio of prosecutions to the number of offences known to the police went down as the conflict went on. With more regulations to enforce and – particularly from 1942, when policemen were allowed to join up – fewer personnel, the police devoted fewer resources to arresting homosexual men, something that in any case had become much harder thanks to the blackout.⁷⁴

Then there was the arrival of the GIs. The openness and attractiveness of the Americans were just as striking to homosexual men as they were to straight women. The Americans brought a version of homosexuality that was less reticent and more masculine than those which had prevailed in Britain between the wars. As the memoirist Quentin Crisp recorded: 'It was the directness of the Americans that astonished me . . . These young men walked, not behind, but beside you and at once began a conversation with some such words as "You and me's interested in the same things, I guess." '75

For many gay men and lesbians, the war offered a remarkable period of awakening. The dislocation of service life in particular brought homosexual people together in ways that would not otherwise have happened, and gave them new opportunities to explore their sexual identities. The results were not always liberating. At the start of 1941, for example, the writer Paul Scott, then a lance corporal in the East Kent Regiment, was 'caught out' when his soldier lover betrayed him to a senior officer. He was demoted to private and threatened with exposure and imprisonment. It took Scott a year to regain his coveted stripe and another eighteen months before he could apply for a commission. The setback embittered his military career and gave him a lasting grudge against authority. Scott decided that he had to control his desires, but the fear that his homosexuality would be revealed stayed with him for the rest of his

life. He would go on to create one of the great repressed homosexual characters in English literature, Ronald Merrick, the police inspector in the novel *The Jewel in the Crown*.⁷⁶

Despite the persistent fear of persecution, however, the lack of skilled manpower meant that the wartime military often proved more tolerant than civilian society. Provided men and women were good at their jobs, commanding officers were loath to lose them because of their sexuality. For other men, therefore, the war became a time of self-discovery. Kenneth Williams, a nineteen-year-old sapper in the Royal Engineers, had his first sexual experience in wartime Ceylon. After being 'brushed off' by a fellow soldier, Williams found it easier to accept an approach from a non-British stranger, and made his 'first tentative experiment in masturbation' with a young Sikh soldier in a coconut grove outside their camp.⁷⁷ By the time the war finished, Williams was an NCO who'd got over his nervousness about exerting military authority by going for laughs. His impressions of Winston Churchill and Bette Davis in the NAAFI were so popular that he was encouraged to apply for the Combined Services Entertainment Unit, then based in Singapore. There he really found himself as a performer with his own voice. An early appearance in a variety show called *Over to You* was capped off by Williams, in the words of his biographer, 'kicking up his legs to a burst of Harry Champion's "Any Old Iron" - "iron" could be an abbreviated form of "iron hoof", which was rhyming slang.'⁷⁸ Williams would go on to become one of the best-known comic actors of the post-war era. In stark contrast to that later period, with its witch hunts for gay traitors and stricter enforcement of anti-sodomy laws, the war itself came to seem in retrospect like a time of release.

'I THINK WE SHALL ALL HAVE TO WAIT TILL AFTER THE WAR AND SEE HOW THINGS GO THEN'

When it comes to assessing any supposed change in heterosexual behaviour, one problem is that the statistical proxies — rates of birth, venereal disease treatment and divorce — are either limited or were themselves affected by the war. Counting up numbers of illegitimate babies, for example, does not take into account successful attempts to end pregnancy before birth, whether by inducing miscarriage or via (then usually illegal) abortion. The number of instances of procuring abortion

made known to police increased significantly during the war.⁷⁹ To give another qualification: the war changed access to means of contraception, though cultural prejudices around their use remained strong.⁸⁰ All Allied servicemen had access to condoms, which their medical staff pressed on them as a prophylactic against VD. In contrast, after the fall of Malaya, scarcity of rubber badly affected supplies to the civilian population of the UK. By 1944, diaphragms were completely unobtainable and the number of condoms available for civilian purchase had fallen by approximately 50 per cent – making them a tempting target for theft from US servicemen.⁸¹

Even bearing these provisos in mind, however, the available statistics suggest that pre-war standards were challenged just enough to be really noticeable. Information on wedding dates, collected for the first time by registrars in England and Wales in 1938, but not published until 1947, suggested that about 15 per cent of babies before the war had been conceived before their parents were married. Seventy per cent of them, however, had been 'regularized' by marriage before the baby was born. During the war, the UK birth rate fell from 1939 to 1941, but then bounced back in a mini baby-boom before falling again in 1945. The percentage of babies conceived illegitimately was just below the pre-war rate from 1939 to 1944.⁸²

What the war did change was the likelihood of illegitimate conceptions being regularized by marriage – often because in the churn of war it was harder to track the father down. In other cases, men who might have liked to have married their pregnant girlfriends were unable to do so, because they had been posted away or killed. Proposals put forward in 1943 to allow servicemen to marry by proxy were blocked in Parliament by objections that this would leave men open to exploitation by women who wanted to snare fathers for their children.⁸³

The percentage of illegitimately conceived children born to parents who had married before the birth fell during the war, from 68 per cent in England and Wales in 1940 to 37 per cent in 1945. As a result there were 73,000 illegitimate births in the UK that year, 40,000 more than before the war.⁸⁴ For all the talk of 'good-time girls', the rate of illegitimate birth among women under twenty-five, some of whom were under stricter scrutiny in the auxiliary services or workers' hostels than they had been at home, was lower than it had been before 1939. Conceptions out of wedlock increased most substantially among those aged twenty-five to forty-five, and the rate was highest of all – up 41 per cent – among those aged thirty to thirty-five.⁸⁵

Since most official records registered a baby as legitimate if the mother was married, it is harder to estimate how many children were conceived by married women with men other than their husbands. In Birmingham, a survey by the public health department during the war suggested that there were three times more 'irregular' pregnancies of this sort in 1945 than there had been in 1940, and that about half of the mothers were married to servicemen. In this case, too, we have to be careful about presuming what 'married' meant – of these Birmingham women, about half were already separated or widowed when they conceived their child.⁸⁶

One statistic that contemporaries took as an indicator of married men discovering spousal infidelity was the rising rate of divorce. It climbed steadily, from 9,432 in 1939 to 12,757 in 1942 and 28,868 in 1945.⁸⁷ A backlog of wartime petitions and the difficulties experienced by reunited couples meant that the rise continued after the return of peace. In 1946 in England and Wales alone, nearly 42,000 petitions for divorce were filed. During and immediately after the war, the majority of petitions were filed by men. Divorce continued to attract social condemnation, not least from the Churches, who would not remarry divorcees. Many couples, particularly if they had children, therefore tried to make a go of it when they perhaps would have been better apart.⁸⁸

Undoubtedly, the dramatic increase in divorce petition filings reflected the difficulties into which many couples had been thrown by the war, but it was also the result of a legal change: the 1937 Matrimonial Causes and the 1938 Divorce (Scotland) Acts, which made divorces easier to obtain for Britons living outside Northern Ireland. More importantly, the financial aid offered by the War Office to servicemen made divorce a possibility for the first time for many working-class couples, who would previously just have separated. A divorce came faster and at less expense if filed for by a serviceman rather than his wife, which may also help to explain the bulge in husbands lodging petitions during and after the war. 90

When it came to venereal disease, although the percentage increases were dramatic, the absolute numbers of cases on the home front were low. In 1943, after the most dramatic wartime rise, 21,404 women were treated for venereal disease, 5,950 more than before the war. The civilian male figure for the same year was 34,848 patients, nearly 8,000 fewer than in 1938, the fall the result of the movement of so many sexually active men into the armed forces. There, infection rates were higher. The highest rates in the UK were among aircrew in Bomber Command, where 44 men per 1,000 were admitted to hospital with VD in 1943, about four times the

rate of their older (and more likely to be married) groundcrew. ⁹² In Italy, the equivalent figure among British Commonwealth forces rose from 51 to 71 per 1,000 between 1944 and 1945. In SEAC, VD rates rose from 70 per 1,000 troops in 1942 to 134 per 1,000 in 1943, before dropping back down again to about 60 per 1,000 as treatment improved in the last years of the war. Even so, that meant something like 24,000 hospital admissions for VD from British personnel in SEAC in 1945 alone. The new antibiotic drugs cured most of them before they returned home, which may help to explain why wartime infidelity is still discussed in terms of wives getting pregnant rather than husbands getting the clap. ⁹³

The numbers didn't tell the whole story. Individual examples might count for little in the statistics, but they could start stories that affected many more, particularly given the relentlessly communal nature of wartime life. Dorothy Griffiths, for example, was living near Hull with her year-old son when her husband, Griff, was posted to India in 1944. She knew other women who found it hard to stay faithful:

'there but for the Grace of God might have gone I' had it not been for my baby. He was all I wanted . . . A friend further up the street, a lovely person, with no thought of finding someone else – I know that to be true – went out one night . . . the next we knew she was pregnant. Her husband, too, was in India. Whilst everyone was ready to snub her, I felt so sorry for her. She'd been so lonely, and not having any children made it worse . . . Someone 'very kindly' wrote and told her husband . . . After much pain and heartsearching on both sides, they stayed together, but very unhappily so. 94

If war created new possibilities for women, it also created new dangers, and circumscribed their choices with new burdens, condemnations and expectations. Many women were able to navigate their way through this new landscape in ways that brought them satisfaction – but that outcome was not certain. For these reasons, they often could not take up romantic possibilities or act on their desires.

When Mass- Observation investigators spoke to wives in Fulham at the start of 1944 about their plans for the future, the responses were dominated by a sense of uncertainty and instability, shaped by the separations resulting from the war. 'Things are so unsettled now', a twenty-six-year-old mother with one child, explained, 'and you never can tell, yourself, just what you want from one day to the next':

My hubby's away from home on war work . . . and he used to come home every weekend, and now I hardly see him. I know he's taken up with another girl since he's been away, and, well, I got tired and lonesome . . . and now there's somebody else I rather fancy, and there's just no knowing how things will go. I think we shall all have to wait till after the war and see how things go then. 96

Married life had 'been a disappointment somehow', said another interviewee in the same study:

I feel I can't really think ahead till the war's over. If my hubby comes home all right, then it might be different. I miss him a lot, in some ways. And in other ways, I feel I've got more independent since I've been more on my own and I don't know how we shall settle down again. 97

That might take us back to the cinema. Few wartime British films fully depicted the competing public and private pressures affecting women on the home front. One notable exception was *A Canterbury Tale*. Released in 1944 and directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, the film is a paean to pastoral beauty and the deep values of the English countryside. One of its protagonists pours glue into the hair of local young women to deter them from stepping out with incomer-soldiers – an act of vigilantism which the film can't quite bring itself to condemn. Though *A Canterbury Tale* was not a box-office success, audiences seem to have been put off less by its culturally conservative message than by its mix of mystic plot and Expressionist style. ⁹⁸

In contrast, the films produced by the Gainsborough production company in the final years of the war were much less artistically rich but did much better business. Targeting these films directly at women, Gainsborough made both contemporary and costume melodramas. The first included films such as Love Story (1944), a snatched romance between a dying concert pianist and an RAF pilot who is going blind, and The Lamp Still Burns (1943), an adaptation of a Monica Dickens story in which a female architect finds her true vocation as a nurse, struggling to fit her natural independence with archaic regulations and putting her profession before romance. The second, starting with *The Man in Grey* (1943) and including Fanny by Gaslight, Madonna of the Seven Moons (both 1944) and *The Wicked Lady* (1945), were bodice-ripping dramas, usually with historical British settings and luxurious outfits, which juxtaposed archetypes of 'good' and 'bad' behaviour, had plenty of scandalous love affairs, and featured female leads who went against convention to exercise their will (even if they usually got their comeuppance in the end). Compared with most British films of the time, their portrayal of violence and sex was open and daring. They made celebrities of their stars, including Margaret Lockwood, Phyllis Calvert, Stewart Granger and James Mason. 99

These might have been escapist films, but they were not exactly irrelevant to the lives of the women who made up the overwhelming

majority of their audiences. Sitting down for a couple of hours in a safe, warm seat, they could watch heightened versions of their own brief wartime encounters or, revelling in beautifully clothed women doing what (and who) they wanted, imagine the alternatives that might have been. It was no wonder they became the most popular British films of the war.¹⁰⁰

PART THREE

Victory

September 1943–April 1945

19

'A bloody lot has gone wrong'

September 1943-March 1944

By summer 1943, it was clear that Germany was going to be defeated. The great offensives on the Eastern Front had failed and the initiative had clearly passed to the Soviets, Hamburg and the Ruhr had experienced devastating bombardment, the Allies were across the Mediterranean, and Italy was falling out of the war. Germany had no weapon that could even slightly threaten the security of the United States. Though the armies of its enemies were still a long way from the borders of the Reich, no rational assessment of Germany's prospects suggested things were going to get any better.

A quarter of a century before, a similarly gloomy prognosis had led the German leadership to seek the armistice that ended the First World War. History did not repeat itself. Since the logic of the Nazi regime was destruction, the defeats of 1943 drove a still more vicious escalation of its war effort. Hitler increasingly withdrew from public view, absorbing himself in military matters. Though his decisions still had material effects on the course of the war, his perception of the struggle grew more distant from reality. On the German home front, the Nazi party – Hitler's secretary, Martin Bormann, the propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, and the head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler – stepped into the gap and took over the running of the state.¹

Himmler's appointment as Reich minister of the interior in August 1943 indicated that Germany was heading further into the fire. More brutal efforts were made to extract manpower and raw materials from Occupied Europe and to increase munitions production. With an eye on 1918, the Nazis imposed tougher rules on the German home front and directed further violence against supposed 'enemies within'. Most German generals were now so far invested in Nazism's battle of survival – either personally or ideologically – that they stuck with the regime. The few who thought about resisting clung to dreams of a negotiated settlement leaving a strong

Germany that were now completely disconnected from the geo-political realities of what the Allies could accept.

Even as the military situation deteriorated, Germany kept working. The wheels of bureaucracy still turned. The munitions factories produced still greater quantities of arms, as Milch's and Speer's reforms worked their way through, and captains of industry vied to secure resources to sustain their business empires after the inevitable defeat. German servicemen and civilians soldiered on – some out of a faith that Hitler would still save them, others out of terror of their own government and fear of what would happen next. Crucially, the German state continued to function and retained its popular legitimacy, bolstered by a succession of crises that compelled the German people either to rally round the nation, or to seek refuge in fantasies of a private future that was not bound up in cataclysmic defeat.²

For the United Kingdom, in contrast, the drawing into view of the war's end created a different set of problems. Britain was quite clearly going to end the war on the winning side, but recognizing that there was a future beyond victory meant accepting that the domestic war effort had reached its peak. During the autumn of 1943, the key question became, how would Britain match its allocation of resources against the time remaining in the conflict, in order to maximize its strength on the battlefield and start to prepare for peace? Simultaneously, however, the great strategic opportunities that had seemed to open up earlier in 1943, in the Mediterranean and in the skies over Germany, were closing down thanks to a combination of enemy reactions, Allied disagreement and military inefficacy. Even as the supposedly imminent end of the war drove on demands for reform at home and internationally, victory crept further away. Worse, from the perspective of British leaders and for Churchill in particular, these battlefield disappointments were an indication of their diminishing international power. Britain did not have to re-escalate its war effort to avoid defeat, but it would have to manage, rather than determine, the end of the war.

'AVALANCHE'

Hearing the announcement of the Italian armistice aboard ship on the way to Salerno, the men of General Clark's Fifth Army thought the invasion would be a walkover. Instead, the Salerno landing on 9 September 1943 met the fiercest resistance of any major amphibious operation in the

Mediterranean. Surprise was impossible; the German troops were on high alert. Assisted by a huge naval bombardment, British infantry got ashore safely, only to be held up by machine-gun teams and assault guns in the coastal hinterland. The Americans, landing without the same supporting bombardment, ran straight into German artillery and mortar fire on the beaches. The resulting confusion, compounded by the wide landing front, left Allied infantry vulnerable. The Germans quickly put together counterattacks that prevented any rapid breakout while the defences were reinforced.³

Recognizing an opportunity, Kesselring and General von Vietinghoff, commander of the 10th Panzer Army responsible for defending southern Italy, reacted very aggressively, rushing in elements of five more mechanized divisions with the aim of destroying the beachhead. Shortages of shipping and landing space meant the Allies could not get enough forces ashore quickly to overwhelm the defenders. The Germans kept hold of the high ground, and the Luftwaffe mounted a major effort against the beachhead and the ships offshore. This was fought off by long-range Allied fighters and Fleet Air Arm Seafires flown from the six escort carriers that had accompanied the invasion, but they soon started to be worn down by the exhaustion of continued sorties. Raids by Allied heavy bombers did not stop enemy reinforcements arriving. Since Salerno was beyond the range of Allied fighter-bombers, there was little tactical air support, and the Germans could move troops and supplies safely just behind the front line.⁴

Between 12 and 13 September 1943, the battle reached its peak as the Germans tried – and failed – to break through to the beaches. They were fought off primarily because of the unprecedented weight and accuracy of naval gunfire, combined with artillery already ashore. In response to the crisis, Eisenhower, Tedder and Cunningham directed sea and air power to defend the beachhead, while Alexander bolstered Clark's determination to fight it out. American and British heavy bombers were redirected from strategic targets to saturation attacks on German positions, fighter-bombers started to intervene from airfields scraped out behind the advancing Eighth Army or within the beachhead itself, and paratroopers were air-dropped in to reinforce Clark's men. The British battleships HMS *Warspite* and *Valiant* arrived from Malta to add their supporting firepower.

The Germans hit back with new radio-guided anti-shipping bombs, which badly damaged two cruisers and *Warspite*. In a marker of the problems afflicting Germany in the air by 1943, however, these new weapons made little difference to the battle: there were too few of them

and more conventional anti-shipping attacks bounced off the extraordinary air umbrella that the Allies were able to throw over the invasion fleet. In the face of Allied superiority, Axis air activity melted away: between 17 August and 15 September 1943, Allied aircrews flew more than 31,000 sorties and destroyed 903 Luftwaffe aircraft, for the loss of 205 of their own. Salerno was the last time that the German air force made any serious intervention in the Italian campaign.⁵

The astonishing weight of the aerial and naval bombardment directed at the German forces around Salerno did not kill that many soldiers – the Germans suffered around 3,500 casualties in total at Salerno, of whom 840 were killed, compared to 8,569 Allied battle casualties – but its stunning force made it impossible to organize any effective counter-attack. As the first patrols of Eighth Army, advancing from the south, made contact with the beachhead on 16 September, Kesselring and Vietinghoff agreed that they would have to abandon their offensive and re-form a defensive line across the Italian peninsula, defending Naples long enough to demolish its harbour facilities before withdrawing to the line of the rivers Volturno and Biferno.

On the same day, in a subsequently famous incident, a draft of about seven hundred soldiers, newly arrived at Salerno as replacements for hardhit British infantry battalions, stayed on the beach and refused to join their new units. Drawn at short notice from reinforcement camps in North Africa, most of the mutinous soldiers were recuperating members of the veteran 50th and 51st Infantry Divisions. They had been told they were going back to join their original units, which were then in Sicily but scheduled for imminent redeployment to the UK. Deeply aggrieved at being thus unfairly treated, a group of about two hundred refused the cajoling of the military authorities and were shipped back across the Mediterranean for trial. Three sergeants involved were sentenced to death: a judgment that was later commuted, like that of the other mutineers, to a lengthy period of penal servitude, which was then suspended so that men could be returned to duties in the front line. Sent back to strange battalions in Italy, the men were often badly treated and some deserted. Their bitter reaction to an apparent betrayal of trust exemplified both the attachment they felt to their own specific units and the suspicion with which many veteran soldiers regarded the army as a whole.⁷

During October, the Eighth Army captured the Foggia airfields, from which US heavy bombers would be able to attack southern Germany and the Balkans. Allied commanders still anticipated a German retreat much further north. Signals intelligence, and the German evacuation of Sardinia and Corsica, confirmed that this withdrawal was well under way, and on 21 September Alexander expected that he would have taken Rome by 7 November. In fact, during the second half of September Kesselring persuaded Hitler not only that he could hold the Allied advance with a series of strong defensive lines south of Rome, but that so doing was the best way to defend the whole of southern Europe. Forcing the Allies to fight a long battle in central Italy, on a constricted, mountainous front, would soak up enemy strength that might otherwise be directed towards the Balkans. Hitler's agreement to Kesselring's proposals, on 1 October 1943, represented a sudden change of plan that reshaped the Italian campaign.⁸

Within a week, Ultra intelligence made it clear to Allied commanders that the Germans intended to fight hard south of Rome. They were all too aware of the consequences. As Alexander pointed out, however, they had little choice but to keep pushing north, partly because Rome represented the great political prize, partly to guard Naples and the Foggia airfields from a German counter-attack, and partly because having committed their strength to Italy, they had no other means to soak up German ground reserves ahead of 'Overlord'. The Germans had indeed had to send more troops to Italy – a garrison of six German divisions in July had grown to twenty-four, against Alexander's eleven, by October 1943 – but the immediate prospects looked grim. Alexander's troops would have to attack through the winter against fortified mountain positions, in weather that would often nullify the Allies' aerial advantage. Roads that could sustain Allied armoured divisions were few and easily blocked, and barely any of their troops had any mountain training. Worse, the schedules already drawn up for departures and reinforcements – not just for the landing ships and troops going for 'Overlord', but also the heavy bombers arriving to take advantage of the Foggia airfields - could not easily be altered to provide the men and formations required for a battering campaign up the peninsula. Alexander's Fifteenth Army Group had to fight as it was, unable to launch major amphibious attacks or maintain its ground offensives long enough to burst through the increasingly fearsome German defences.9

'A CARDINAL ERROR OF STRATEGY'

This problem was already apparent in October and November 1943, as the Fifth and Eighth Armies' push passed the Volturno and the Trigno and

tried to break through the thick, multi-layered defensive belts they called the Winter Line. With the combined chiefs having agreed to leave some landing craft in the Mediterranean until mid-December, Alexander planned, if his armies could just break these defences, to launch a pincer attack along the main highways to Rome. To the west, this would be supported by Operation 'Shingle', a single division amphibious landing – all that the available ships could lift – at Anzio, south of Rome.

The attacks went nowhere. Battle-hardened Allied units showed they could innovate and adapt to German defensive techniques, using silent assaults to surprise the enemy, exploiting broken ground to advance and learning, at great cost, the importance of getting anti-tank weapons across each river bridgehead early to hold off the inevitable armoured counterattack. A break in the weather allowed Montgomery to cross the Sangro, on 29 November 1943, with a traditional firepower-heavy Eighth Army attack, fully supported by the Desert Air Force. Then, however, the combination of the terrain, with steep mountains and flood-swollen rivers; the defences, with thickly sown minefields and fortifications blasted out of the rock or built into thick-walled villages; and the climate, with rain turning everything to mud and soaking the freezing, exhausted soldiers, forced both offensives to a dead stop. Beneath the stunning Allied artillery bombardments, the Germans were suffering too, but as Alexander gathered his strength for another attack, it was clear that the high hopes attached to the Italian campaign were going to be dashed. 10

British leaders felt this disappointment particularly hard. This was not only the culmination of the Mediterranean strategy they had pursued since 1940, but also their last chance to make an impact on the ground war in Europe before 'Overlord'. It was easy to blame American insistence on withdrawing shipping to schedule for Alexander's inability to establish any offensive momentum. Worse still, British expectations that they would be able to take advantage of the Italian surrender in the Eastern Mediterranean had meanwhile collapsed into humiliating defeat.

In the Balkans, as in Italy, the announcement of the Italian armistice created chaos. At best, the British had hoped that some Italian formations would change sides; at worst, that their weapons and supplies would become available to resistance armies at the same time that the loss of Italian garrisons imposed a new burden on the Germans. The problem was that the Italian collapse and the widespread belief in an imminent Allied invasion upped the stakes between resistance groups and accelerated the descent into civil war.

In Yugoslavia, Tito and Mihailović's men tussled over who was going

to receive the surrender of Italian troops and their precious equipment. In response to British urging, the Chetniks stepped up guerrilla attacks on the Axis forces, at the cost of increased civilian reprisals, only to hear the BBC attribute all their efforts to Tito's partisans. Though the loss of Italian manpower deprived the Germans of the ability to control the interior, they adapted their strategy and easily regained control of almost all the Yugoslavian coast. As the struggle for control of British policy in Yugoslavia continued, more senior officers were despatched to head the military missions at Tito's and Mihailović's headquarters. The elevation of the Conservative MP and SAS officer Fitzrov Maclean to the former was designed to make the case that Churchill wanted to hear - that the partisans were the only group properly fighting the Germans and that, whatever his politics, Tito was now the closest thing there was to a national representative of Yugoslavia. As the flow of Allied supplies into Yugoslavia increased in autumn 1943, they went almost entirely to the partisans, not just by air but also by sea, across the Adriatic, to the partisan-held island of Vis. 11

In Greece, the German takeover from the Italians meant a further escalation of violence from the occupiers, while the windfall of weapons from the Italian surrender allowed internecine warfare between the Greek resistance to intensify as EAM/ELAS sought to establish its dominance. In August 1943, an SOE-sponsored conference in Cairo saw a Communist-dominated mission press the government-in-exile to promise that the Greek king would not return without the approval of a plebiscite. When the king appealed for help to Churchill and Roosevelt, then meeting in Quebec, they told him to stand his ground. Fearing that a German withdrawal would precipitate an internal conflict which the Communists would win, the British began planning an expedition to restore order in Athens. News of British landings in the Dodecanese fuelled expectations of an imminent British intervention on the mainland, which triggered EAM/ELAS to strike against the National Republicans of EDES, starting a bitter struggle that would last throughout the winter of 1943–4.¹²

General Wilson and HQ Middle East had never given up on the idea of seizing Rhodes, with its naval bases and airbases. After Mussolini fell in July 1943, Wilson appealed unsuccessfully to Eisenhower for the ships and aircraft required to launch a major attack. Contacts from Italian garrison commanders in the Eastern Mediterranean before the armistice suggested that they might come over to the Allies – and Middle East Command secured permission from the chiefs of staff to send small parties of troops into the Dodecanese. The gamble was that the Italians would co-

operate with this cobbled-together force and compel the Germans to withdraw. The problem, as Ultra intelligence was already revealing, was that the Germans had reinforced their own garrison on Rhodes ahead of an Italian surrender, as well as strengthening the Luftwaffe in the Eastern Mediterranean. In contrast, the only Allied fighter aircraft with the range to reach Rhodes and fight were the American P-38 Lightnings that were badly needed over the embattled Salerno beachhead.

Thrilled that his dreams of controlling the Aegean and bringing the Turks into the war might finally be realized, Churchill urged Wilson on. This was the moment, the prime minister told the general, to 'improvise and dare' in pursuit of 'glittering prizes'. Even as this message was sent, a British advance party was landing on Rhodes to negotiate with the Italians. They were too late: the German commander had already arrested his Italian counterpart and was busy subjugating the rest of the Italian forces on the island. The British did manage to land on fourteen smaller islands where there were no Germans, including Leros, Samos and Cos, which had the only other airfield in the Dodecanese. Teams of special forces were followed up by infantry battalions and a few Spitfires, but this would have been a good point to recognize that the decisive moment, if it had ever existed, had been lost. Instead, Churchill pressed Eisenhower for the landing craft and long-range fighters necessary for a better-organized attack on Rhodes.

Eisenhower initially agreed, but on 4 October 1943 the Germans – again reacting quickly to a crisis – suddenly seized back Cos. Eisenhower then refused Wilson's urgent appeal for reinforcements. By that point, it was apparent that the Allies would be facing a much harder than expected fight in Italy. Alexander, Cunningham and Tedder all thought that the quest for glory in the Eastern Mediterranean was misguided – not just because the Germans could maintain their aerial dominance over the Aegean from the Greek mainland and from Crete even if Rhodes fell, but also because it so obviously smacked of a scheme to inveigle the Americans into an operation that they had always opposed.¹⁴

Churchill appealed directly to Roosevelt and, when the president refused, warned him that ignoring the Aegean would be a 'cardinal error of strategy'. Roosevelt responded frostily that even the capture of Rhodes would have unwanted consequences for other operations, including 'Overlord'. 'Strategically,' he asked Churchill, 'if we get the Aegean islands . . . where do we go from there and vice versa, where would the Germans go if for some time they retained possession of the islands?' Having watched the prime minister wind himself up during his

correspondence with Roosevelt, Brooke lamented to his diary:

He has . . . magnified its importance so that he can no longer see anything else and has set his heart on capturing this one island even at the expense of endangering his relations with the President and with the Americans, and also the whole future of the Italian campaign . . . The whole thing is sheer madness, and he is placing himself quite unnecessarily in a very false position! 17

By mid-October, German air attacks had made it impossible to sustain the garrison on Leros by sea. After the island fell to a German assault on 16 November 1943, the rest of the British-occupied islands were evacuated. The whole campaign had cost the British almost 5,000 casualties, 26 naval vessels and 113 aircraft. Most of the Italian soldiers who had helped the British were rounded up and executed by the Germans. By the standard of the Second World War, it was a sideshow, but a costly and revealing one. Even in an area under the aegis of General Wilson, a British supreme commander, unilateral British expeditionary action was no longer possible.

'WE CAN WRECK BERLIN FROM END TO END'

During the autumn of 1943, the two strategic air forces in Britain continued their separate versions of a Combined Bomber Offensive. In the six months to January 1944, the US Eighth Air Force more than doubled in aircraft strength, growing to 842 heavy bombers and 215,000 men. That gave it slightly more operational aircraft than Bomber Command. Even in daylight, the difficulties of navigation and bomb-aiming under attack from the German air defences meant the Americans struggled just as much as the British to hit exact targets. From September 1943, they therefore used a mixture of attempted precision bombing when the skies were clear, and 'blind bombing' guided by H2X, their version of the British H2S radar system, when conditions were bad. This meant that day and night bombing raids were in practice equally indiscriminate in their effect on German civilians, even if only the British took the destruction of cities as an objective. The Americans were careful not to publicize that they were bombing 'blind', but both air forces were in effect conducting areabombing campaigns. 19

In October 1943, the Americans recommenced heavy attacks deep into Germany. A highly accurate raid on the Focke-Wulf aircraft plant at Marienburg in eastern Germany wrecked the factory complex, but

increased German defences led to terrible losses. On 14 October, 60 of the 291 aircraft that attacked Schweinfurt were lost and another 138 badly damaged. Such losses forced the temporary abandonment of operations far into Germany, and over the winter of 1943–4, US bombers focused most of their efforts on targets in France, including V1 launching sites.²⁰

Since the American bombers could not rely on their defensive armament to fight off German fighters, they needed a fighter escort that could accompany them all the way into Germany. In autumn 1943, neither of the fighters available to the Eighth Air Force, the P47 Thunderbolt or the P38 Lightning, could go that far, but in December 1943 a new aircraft, the P51 Mustang, saw action for the first time. By the spring of 1944, when it became available in large numbers, it would be fitted with new drop fuel tanks that allowed it to fly all the way to Berlin and beyond.²¹

Simultaneously, the bomber losses of late 1943 brought home to General Arnold, the chief of the USAAF, that the Allies had to prioritize the destruction of the Luftwaffe, whether in factories or in the skies, before the bombers could do anything else. At the end of the year, he moved General Carl Spaatz from the Mediterranean to be commander of US Strategic Air Forces in Europe. Spaatz brought a new command team that was much more enthusiastic than their predecessors about using US fighters to take on the German air force.²²

Bomber Command spent the rest of 1943 failing to recreate the devastation it had unleashed on Hamburg. Air Chief Marshal Portal wrote to Arthur Harris from the Quebec conference to suggest a similar raid on Berlin, but Harris needed no encouragement: Bomber Command launched three large raids at the German capital between 23 August and 4 September 1943. On 3 September, the BBC correspondent Wynford Vaughan-Thomas and a sound engineer, Reg Pidsley, flew to Berlin in a Lancaster rigged with recording equipment. The radio programme made on his return mixed Vaughan-Thomas's live commentary with the crew's own intercom conversations. The audience, according to the BBC's own survey, were fascinated, moved and 'expressed great satisfaction to have participated in the dropping of a bomb on Berlin'.²³

Well defended and harder to ignite, Berlin was a much tougher target than Hamburg. It lacked the distinctive coastline that had shown up on H2S and was too far away to be pinpointed using Gee. The distance gave German night-fighters longer to attack the bomber stream. More than 7 per cent of the bombers were lost on each occasion, for little result. For the moment, Bomber Command also turned away to easier targets.

On 22 October 1943, a raid on the town of Kassel started the first

firestorm since Hamburg. Around six thousand people were killed. This raid too resulted in the loss of more than 7 per cent of the attackers. The damage done by German night-fighters meant the continued offensive power of the Luftwaffe was just as much a problem for the British as it was for the Americans. Portal became concerned that the objective set for the Combined Bomber Offensive in the combined chiefs' 'Pointblank' directive – wearing down the German air force before a 1944 invasion – was not being achieved. On the contrary, new intelligence estimates in November 1943 suggested that the German air strength on the Western Front had increased, as the Luftwaffe concentrated its efforts against the bombers, from 1,620 to 2,015 aircraft between July and October.²⁴ Officers in the Air Ministry criticized Harris's reluctance to co-ordinate his attacks with the Americans. For Harris, the only target was Berlin.

The German capital was home to factories making aircraft components, so Harris could justify his offensive as part of 'Pointblank', but he still believed that bombing by itself could achieve a decisive result.²⁵ Though he regarded area bombing primarily as an economic weapon, he happily played on hopes of an internal German collapse. On 3 November 1943 he stated his case directly to the prime minister: 'We can wreck Berlin from end to end if the USAAF will come in on it. It will cost between 400–500 aircraft. It will cost Germany the war.'²⁶ Though Churchill did not reply, Hamburg had restored some of his enthusiasm for strategic bombing. Over the winter of 1943–4, while the Americans worked out how to apply the sort of attack on the enemy air forces that had worked so well for the British in the Western Desert to the skies over Germany, Harris would attempt to flatten the German capital.

'THE DECLINING SCALE OF OUR OWN EFFORT'

Even as the British-dominated campaigns against Italy and Germany ran into problems, Whitehall had to take difficult decisions about the allocation of resources over the coming year. During the summer of 1943, the service and supply departments prepared their bids for the annual manpower budget. To meet their programmes, they claimed to need another 1.2 million recruits in 1944. As Bevin explained to the War Cabinet at the end of October 1943, however, the manpower balance was about to pass into the red. Since the 'standards and amenities of the civil population' could not be cut back any further, no more workers could be

diverted from civilian to military production. A demographic imbalance between the number of young Britons eligible for conscription and the wastage of workers thanks to old age and illness meant that even if everyone called up in 1944 went into the arms factories, there would still be fewer people making munitions than in 1943.²⁷

Churchill proposed two alternative assumptions from which to match the supply of labour to Britain's strategic goals. The first was that victory over Germany could be achieved with a maximum military effort before the end of 1944. In that case, munitions-making and military training could be cut back to get as many men as possible into the armed forces. The second was that Germany would not be defeated until well into 1945, in which case manpower must be gradually reduced across all departments. Britain's military strength would dwindle faster in the short term but be more sustainable for the longer haul. Whichever option was chosen, he emphasized, 'if the war with Germany continues after the end of 1944 we shall have to rely increasingly on United States resources to make up for the declining scale of our own effort.' In the first case Britain would depend still more heavily on US-built munitions; in the latter, on American fighting units. With the war heading to a climax, no one wanted the military weaker in the field. Unsurprisingly, ministers chose the 1944 option as the basis of their calculations.²⁸

Sir John Anderson settled the manpower budget at the end of November 1943. During 1944, the armed forces' strength would be maintained, but a third of a million fewer workers would be allotted to the supply ministries than in 1943. Some of the workers thus released would go into the Merchant Navy, railways or mines, to provide the transport and fuel for the second front.²⁹

In most categories of military equipment, British production therefore peaked in 1943. The Ministry of Supply was meant to cut its workforce by another 220,000 workers during 1944, although increased manufacturing efficiency meant that output did not fall in line with labour cuts.³⁰ In the dockyards, the output of completed naval ships was limited by the difficulties of fitting increasingly complex engines and fire control gear. The effort that had gone into plant and prefabrication for the escort programme in 1942 was re-allocated to making landing craft.³¹

Despite the introduction of 'realistic' programmes, the Ministry of Aircraft Production hadn't reached its production targets in 1943. There were further reductions in the programmes in September, then again after MAP lost its priority status for workers at the start of 1944. Production was concentrated on current types – Lancasters, Halifaxes, Spitfires,

Tempests and Mosquitos – in order to maximize output. MAP also got better at repairing badly damaged aircraft and making spares. In 1942, 25 per cent of the 2,652 heavy bombers delivered to the RAF came from repairs. In 1944, 37 per cent of the 9,010 bombers delivered were repaired aircraft. MAP's workforce reached a peak of 1.8 million workers at the start of 1944, although the emphasis given to aircraft production during 1943 meant that output continued to increase. The structural weight of aircraft produced rose from 12.67 million pounds in the final quarter of 1942 to 18.8 million pounds in the first quarter of 1944.³² In a country preparing itself as the launchpad for the decisive offensive of the war in the West, this represented an extraordinary industrial effort to generate cutting-edge military technology. Nonetheless, by the end of 1943 it was apparent that British strength within the Grand Alliance was going to diminish absolutely as well as relatively. As the prospect of losing the war drove on German mobilization, British power would dwindle even more rapidly if victory took too long to arrive.

'JOSTLED AND BEATEN UP BY THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER'

Notwithstanding the slowing of the bombing and Italian campaigns, the potential imminence of victory began to affect the political balance at home and abroad. The swing became apparent after the death of Sir Kingsley Wood on 21 September 1943. A lawyer specializing in industrial insurance turned Conservative technocrat, Wood had brought the qualities to the Exchequer that had made him a success as postmaster-general, minister of health and secretary of state for air: efficiency, ambition and a willingness to listen to experts. Wood had learned a lot from John Maynard Keynes and translated it into the politically possible with a ground-breaking anti-inflationary budget in 1941. He died on the morning that he was due to announce the successful introduction of the new PAYE scheme to the Commons. Keynes had thought that such a complex measure could never be achieved in wartime.³³

Wood was not a very likable man, and he had earned the enmity of many Conservatives by suddenly abandoning his long-term ally Chamberlain and backing Churchill at the height of the parliamentary crisis in May 1940. Since then, however, he had played an important role for the prime minister as a barometer of Conservative sentiment and as a

block on Labour demands for social reforms. Wood could be relied upon to make the Conservative case in 'responsible' terms, and his warnings about future costs helped Churchill put off controversial measures of reform. His death resulted in a minor Cabinet reshuffle that had significant consequences for the government.

Sir John Anderson – Wood's ally against Beveridge nine months before – was the natural choice to replace him as chancellor. Anderson's unrivalled authority meant that he continued to arbitrate over the manpower budget. He also continued his secret work on atomic matters. Like Wood, he could act as a 'responsible' block on future financial commitments, but he could not claim to represent Conservative opinion. Attlee took Anderson's place as lord president, allowing him to assert much greater influence over domestic policy-making. Churchill took the opportunity of the reshuffle to bring Beaverbrook back into the Cabinet as lord privy seal, although Attlee and Bevin fought off the prime minister's attempt to put him in charge of post-war planning.³⁴

Instead, Attlee, Bevin and Morrison lined up to bully Churchill into action on reconstruction. At a War Cabinet meeting on 14 October 1943, they took turns to attack the lack of progress. Attlee told Churchill that there 'were many subjects on which the formulation of policy could not await the end of the war: if decisions had not been taken and preparatory action put in hand, the end of the war would find us unprepared.' Calling the prime minister's bluff on the need to avoid political controversy, Attlee insisted that on this issue there was in fact 'a large measure of agreement between Ministers of different political parties'. Bevin all but began negotiating the terms of a post-war coalition, telling Churchill he'd need to revoke the 1927 Trade Disputes Act, with its restrictions on secondary picketing and the political levy, if he wanted the unions to agree to continued labour controls after the war. Economic reconstruction and improved welfare were linked, Attlee insisted: the country would not surmount the challenges of the post-war world unless its people were healthier and better housed and fed.³⁵

Under this pressure, Churchill gave way. A week later he told the Cabinet that having been 'jostled and beaten up by the Deputy Prime Minister', he had agreed that plans for the 'transition period' from war to peace must be in place by the end of the year. Churchill spoke of a 'Great Book of the Transition', full of plans that would impress the world, and explained to his Labour colleagues that 'if we hold together, we shall be more masters of our fate'. A new Cabinet Committee on Reconstruction was inaugurated, chaired by Lord Woolton — a notably non-party figure.

Attlee, Bevin and Morrison were all members. There was now no Conservative who could match their weight in domestic affairs.³⁷

Under Woolton's new committee, significant steps would be taken in planning reconstruction during 1944, including the publication of a series of White Papers and the preparation of plans and legislation for the immediate problems of demobilization and emergency housing. In the meantime, 'Rab' Butler's Education Bill was already on its way to Parliament, where it was promulgated on 16 December 1943. The government was now taking steps that would commit any successor administration to reconstruction in terms that could not simply be abandoned with the end of the war.

Herbert Morrison's championing of reconstruction allowed him to maintain his position close to the top of the Labour Party despite some significant setbacks. When the home secretary stood to become party treasurer at Labour's 1943 conference, Bevin used his control of the union vote to make sure Arthur Greenwood won instead. Morrison ran into further trouble when, on 17 November 1943, he announced he was going to release the British Fascist leader Oswald Mosley and his wife, who had been interned in 1940, from prison. He had received medical advice that Mosley was very ill and might not survive another winter in jail. According to Home Intelligence, disapproval of the Mosleys' release was 'almost unanimous': 'The Government is accused of letting down the Forces who are "Fighting to break what Mosley stands for", of softness, or temporising with Fascism, and of giving our Allies cause to doubt our sincerity.'³⁸

Letters of protest poured into the Home Office, angry meetings were held in munitions factories, and the unions turned wholesale on Morrison. While he explained his case to the Commons on 23 November, protestors outside were baton-charged by the police. The National Council of Labour and the National Executive Committee both censured the home secretary. Only when it looked like the Parliamentary Labour Party might expel Morrison did Attlee step in to stop the attacks. It was a sign of Morrison's robustness and political skill that he emerged from this episode still wielding power within the Labour Party and ready to continue his push for the leadership.³⁹

'INCOMPARABLY GREATER THAN THOSE OF ANY OTHER OF THE UNITED NATIONS'

Kingsley Wood's death also affected Anglo-American economic negotiations. After much discussion across the Atlantic from the autumn of 1942, Keynes' and Harry Dexter White's plans for new monetary systems were published simultaneously in London and Washington on 7 April 1943. Inevitably, the British thought Keynes' currency union better, not least because it would allow the Sterling Area to remain in existence. What stood out about White's plan was that members would subscribe to his new world bank in part in gold. It was therefore easy to associate it with the old Gold Standard and all the evils that were seen to have flowed from it between the wars.

Keynes' clearing union was also meant to encompass new rules on trade and investment. He had written in a scheme for 'buffer stocks' to stabilize commodity prices, while James Meade from the War Cabinet Economic Section had drawn up plans for an international commercial union whose members would minimize discrimination against each other, while maintaining it against those outside the bloc. This meant that a moderate form of imperial preference could be retained. Hugh Dalton and Attlee favoured the idea as a middle ground between protectionism and free trade. To Dalton's surprise, Churchill carefully shepherded the commercial union through the Cabinet, rambling about 'butter scotch' as an apparent mishearing of 'buffer stocks' to use up the time that Leo Amery might have employed to reject multilateralism in favour of imperial trade.⁴⁰

By the end of July 1943, the British were ready formally to open talks on Article VII of the Mutual Aid Agreement with the United States. The Conservative Richard Law – a junior minister at the Foreign Office and son of the former party leader and prime minister Andrew Bonar Law – was appointed minister of state to lead a negotiating mission that departed for Washington that September. While Keynes and White skirmished across the Atlantic about potential compromises between their plans, the Cabinet had prepared Law's terms of reference. These were largely about what modifications would have to be made to the American plan before the British could accept it.

Ministers also considered whether to accept American proposals for Britain to include more imperial raw materials, previously purchased with dollars, within supplies of Reciprocal Aid to the United States. The British were willing to accept the change because they hoped in return to loosen the tight restrictions on the use of Lend-Lease materials to manufacture civilian goods for sale overseas. They had imposed these measures themselves in response to American criticisms in 1941: now they wanted

the flexibility to rebuild Britain's export industries. Encouraged by the US State Department's reaction, on 22 July 1943, Eden, Dalton and Wood told their colleagues that they hoped for 'substantial relief'. In the meantime, Board of Trade officials relaxed their enforcement of the existing regulations.⁴¹

Then the US Treasury found out about the negotiations. The treasury secretary, Henry Morgenthau, thought Britain was trying to rebuild its dollar reserves and imposed an immediate veto. Simultaneously, the political mood in the United States moved further against the UK. Republican successes in the November 1942 Congressional elections had resulted in an atmosphere that was more nationalist and pro-business. Increasingly, Americans thought they ought to be compensated for saving the world, not exploited by their impecunious imperial ally. Between July and September 1943, control of Lend-Lease administration passed to the newly formed Foreign Economic Administration (FEA), run by the Democratic Party fixer Leo Crowley. Crowley was fiercely anti-British, and he blocked any idea of renegotiating 'Mutual Aid'. 42

In October 1943, meanwhile, five members of the Senate Military Affairs Committee returned from a tour of the Mediterranean and Middle East. The 'five angry senators' had plenty of stories about the British misusing Lend-Lease. A Senate Commission was set up to investigate, chaired by a Democrat from Missouri named Harry Truman. Emphasizing that Lend-Lease had only been necessary because the British could no longer pay their way in the world, Truman floated the idea that they should hand over all their oil and mineral concessions in grateful recognition of American generosity.⁴³

In these circumstances, Law's mission didn't go badly. Meade's plan set the basis for the commercial policy discussions, though the Americans insisted the British had to abandon imperial preference before they'd cut their own tariffs. Keynes was forced to accept White's monetary plans, but managed to extract greater freedom for members of the proposed international stabilization fund to control their own currencies. White's suggestion, carefully not followed up by the British Treasury, that the fund buy up the bulk of the sterling balances revealed all too clearly his desire to finish sterling as a major international currency.⁴⁴

Keynes grew increasingly irritable as the discussions dragged on. Over lunch with members of the FEA, he told them that Britain would have to defeat American attempts to limit its reserves because: 'The financial sacrifices which we had made for the common cause were incomparably greater than those of any other of the United Nations.' This argument did

not move either the US Treasury or the FEA, which were even then moving to take more items out of Lend-Lease in order to reduce Britain's rising stock of dollars. The Americans did, however, agree that the British could publish an official statement demonstrating the remarkable extent of Reciprocal Aid. This came out in November 1943 and had next to no impact on opinion in the United States. Instead, the British government's agreement to include more raw materials within Reciprocal Aid gave Washington still greater control over its financial reserves.⁴⁶

Nonetheless, Law and Keynes reported favourably on their progress. Providing the British were willing to accept the Americans' liberalizing agenda, there was still room to negotiate and to get the economic aid required to ease the transition to peace: they might, as Keynes put it with his usual optimism, 'sit as equals, instead of waiting on the mat outside the US Treasury'.⁴⁷

The atmosphere in London had changed, however, following Wood's death. Keynes had developed a lot of influence with the late chancellor: he had much less with Sir John Anderson. The new chancellor supported multilateral trade, but the hiatus gave opponents of Article VII at the Treasury and the Bank of England the chance to counter-attack: Keynes had to fight hard just to protect the joint statement he had agreed with Harry White. Lord Beaverbrook's return to the Cabinet strengthened those who opposed any concessions to the Americans. Bitter arguments about future external economic policy would continue into 1944. More significantly, the need to bend to US economic policy was now mirrored by Britain's declining strategic influence within the Grand Alliance.

'HE WOULD TORPEDO AE'S CONFERENCE LIGHTHEARTEDLY'

Inter-Allied agreements on the future shape of the world became more urgent as the defeat of Nazism drew nearer. On 11 October 1943, Eden set off from London on a long air journey, via the Middle East, for a meeting with Cordell Hull and Molotov in Moscow. The three foreign ministers were to prepare the ground for a subsequent conference between their heads of state. They would also listen to an Anglo-American military presentation designed to reassure the Soviets about the advanced state of planning for 'Overlord'.⁴⁸

Eden wanted to set up a new European Advisory Commission to

consider the future fates of Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia and Poland. Based in London, it would comprise representatives from the UK, USA, USSR and France. The Foreign Office had prepared a declaration of 'joint responsibility', which gave the British, Americans and Soviets equal say in the fate of liberated countries and committed them to restoring governments-in-exile that would pursue democracy and self-determination after the war. In return for British acceptance of a treaty being negotiated between the Soviets and the Czechs, Eden wanted Moscow to recognize the Polish government in London and resume a 'gentleman's agreement' that none of the 'big three' would make bilateral agreements in Europe without consultation with the other two.

These were ambitious goals, which Eden could only hope to achieve if Hull backed him up. When the War Cabinet met on 5 October 1943 to discuss Eden's terms of reference, Churchill horrified the foreign secretary by wondering whether weakening Germany too much was a mistake. Might not Britain need its former enemy's strength to fight a new war against the Soviet Union?⁴⁹ Roosevelt, meanwhile, had given his secretary of state a simple brief: a declaration on the new world organization in which the United States, Soviet Union, United Kingdom and China would participate after the war. Hull had no wish to be dragged into commitments over post-war Europe. Meeting in Teheran before they travelled on to Moscow, he avoided Eden's attempts to plan a joint Anglo-American approach.⁵⁰

The Moscow conference began on 19 October 1943. Protracted by translations, it lasted for eleven days, the longest tripartite Allied meeting of the war. News of the preparations for 'Overlord' put the Soviets in a good mood. Hull got agreement on a three-power declaration on a future international organization, which the Americans could present to the Chinese to sign as well. He had removed all elements that might have been taken as restricting Soviet actions in Eastern Europe.

As the three-power declaration was being drafted, the delegates turned to Eden's plans, but Hull detached himself from the discussion. Unsupported, Eden had to yield British acceptance of the Soviet-Czech treaty to get his European Advisory Commission without requiring Moscow's recognition of the London Poles. Molotov dismissed Eden's suggestions about joint responsibility or an East European federation. Since Hull made clear his lack of interest in the Balkans, Eden suggested this be made the subject of separate Anglo-Soviet talks.

On 26 October, Churchill instructed Eden to tell Stalin that 'Overlord' might have to be delayed by a month in order to accommodate continued

Allied action in the Mediterranean. Having just spent days reassuring the Soviets about Britain's unwavering commitment to the cross-Channel attack, Eden was surprised when Stalin took the news well. The Soviets, however, were not averse to accommodating another offensive that would at least keep the pressure on Germany over the winter. A grateful Eden was furious when he was informed that the prime minister wanted an Anglo-American strategic conference before the tripartite meeting with Stalin. According to his private secretary, the 'aghast' foreign secretary, certain that Soviet anger would jeopardize all he had achieved in Moscow, wailed that: 'The PM is untameable. He cannot leave well alone and he loathes the Russians. He would torpedo AE's conference lightheartedly.'51 No sooner had Eden recovered his equilibrium than Hull brought up a suggestion that wasn't on the agenda: the declaration on international supervision of the colonies that he had been pressing on the British since the start of the year. Molotov, sensitive to the risk of international scrutiny of the Soviet empire, hurriedly brushed the suggestions aside.

Despite such flurries, the conference ended in an atmosphere of goodwill. Hull was the most pleased of the delegates, because Stalin had confided to him that, after Germany was defeated, the USSR would enter the war against Japan. Eden was the least satisfied, but, reporting back to the War Cabinet, he argued that the conference had at least improved Anglo-Soviet co-operation. This was the line he had been pursuing since 1941. The Americans might pursue dreams of a better world, but the British and the Soviets needed a pragmatic settlement that recognized their intersecting interests in Europe.

'A PRETTY SERIOUS SET TO'

While Eden was away, Churchill cabled to Roosevelt to suggest a meeting of the combined chiefs of staff in early November. The president proposed an Allied conference in Cairo instead, between himself and Churchill, Chiang Kai-shek and Molotov. There would, Roosevelt led the prime minister to believe, be plenty of time for the staff talks he wanted before the Chinese and the Russians arrived.⁵²

Preparing for the conference, codenamed 'Sextant', Churchill and the British chiefs decided to request a review of 'the sanctity of Overlord'. Annoyed by the Allies' failure to seize fleeting opportunities in the Mediterranean, they sought a commitment that, before a cross-Channel attack took place, Britain and America would 'stretch the German forces to

the utmost by threatening as many of their vital interests and areas as possible'. That meant a continuing campaign in Italy, support for the partisans in Yugoslavia and Greece, bringing Turkey into the war and opening the Dardanelles to provide another supply line to Russia. The invasion of Northwest Europe would still happen in summer 1944, not on a fixed date, but rather 'as soon as the German strength in France and the general war situation give us a good prospect of success'.⁵³

Roosevelt, however, had no intention of allowing any prolonged Anglo-American discussion. His purpose was to make further progress with his project of bringing China to the top table of world powers in his new international organization — without telling Stalin, who did not share his high opinion of the Chinese. To avoid arguments over strategy, Roosevelt arranged for all the delegations to arrive in Cairo at the same time.

Meanwhile, a meeting was agreed between the British, American and Soviet leaders. This would take place in the Iranian capital, Teheran, after the talks in Egypt were concluded. No sooner was this settled than Stalin and Churchill found out about Roosevelt's plans to invite Chiang Kai-shek The Soviet delegation to 'Sextant' was withdrawn. Without Stalin's freedom of manoeuvre, Churchill grumblingly agreed.

The journey to Cairo gave everyone a chance for rumination. On board the battleship USS *Iowa*, Roosevelt and Harry Hopkins held lengthy meetings with the joint chiefs. According to the president, Eden's European Advisory Commission was just a tool for the British to keep 'kings on their thrones'. France was Britain's 'baby', and America would play no part in its reconstruction. The French empire was to be dissolved. British proposals to take the northern zone when the Allies finally occupied Germany, were obviously intended to control the supply routes to the US zone further south. Roosevelt sketched out a vast zone in northwest Germany to be occupied by American troops, but only for two years. The British, he complained, seemed to have an 'idea in the back of their heads to create a situation in which they could push our troops into Turkey and the Balkans'. The US must not 'get roped into accepting any European sphere of influence'.⁵⁴

Despite a growing realization that Nationalist China would never make a decisive contribution on the battlefield, Roosevelt was convinced that China was the great power of the future. He also needed to meet American public expectations raised by propaganda extolling Chinese valour. There was no chance that Chiang would not emerge from the Cairo conference with credit. Churchill's fate was less certain. Breaking their journey to Cairo in Malta, Alan Brooke listened to him deliver 'long tirades on evils of Americans and of our losses in the Aegean'. The exhausted CIGS feared the prime minister was getting bound up in the argument:

He is inclined to say to the Americans, all right if you won't play with us in the Mediterranean we won't play with you in the English Channel. And if they say all right well then we shall direct our main effort in the Pacific, to reply you are welcome to do so if you wish! 55

Frustrated by American 'incompetency', Brooke wearily readied himself for 'a pretty serious set to'. ⁵⁶

Contrary to US fears, the British were not planning to abandon 'Overlord', but they did hope to persuade the Americans to leave troops and landing ships in the Mediterranean long enough to launch a much larger amphibious attack during Alexander's winter offensive to capture Rome. And Churchill still had hopes of seizing Rhodes. Decisions on these operations had implications for what the British could do in Burma to help the Americans aid Chiang.

When the conference opened on 22 November 1943, the combined chiefs elected Brooke as chair. As he soon realized, the presence of Chiang, Mountbatten and Stilwell meant that strategy in the Far East had to be discussed before the chiefs could clear the room and talk about Europe. By this point in the war, only Marshall was still keen on the big offensive in northern Burma that the Americans had been urging on the British for the past year. King and Leahy had realized that the Allied offensives gathering pace in the Pacific would probably be enough to defeat Japan without a major campaign from China, but they were happy to call for a British amphibious attack on the Andaman Islands, a potentially key airbase whose capture Chiang had made a prerequisite for Nationalist Chinese involvement in Burma. Brooke thought that the British ought to live up to their past pledges, but he and Churchill both wanted operations in the Mediterranean to take precedence.

Making the case for the Mediterranean, Churchill antagonized the Americans, telling them that in the Far East it was Sumatra or nothing, and making it clear that he expected landing ships committed to an Italian offensive to be made available for operations in the Aegean. In the argument that followed, the normally measured Marshall told Churchill of the attack on Rhodes: 'not one American soldier is going to die on that God-damned beach'.⁵⁷ Roosevelt just read out estimates of British and American military strength in 1944 – a pointed reminder that US power was about to take the lead in fighting the wars in both the Pacific and

Europe. When Churchill countered that the British Empire meant to play its full part against Japan once Germany was defeated, the president said that war too might be over very quickly and drew the session to a close.

Harry Hopkins had an explanation for Churchill's 'havering' about 'Overlord': 'Winston has cold feet'. Churchill's doctor, Lord Moran, thought that the difficulties at Salerno had re-awakened all the fears the prime minister had quelled at Quebec. For all Churchill's passion for far-flung amphibious adventures, however, there was a sensible concern here that made up his common ground with Brooke: not that 'Overlord' should be avoided or that it would fail on the beach, but rather that the Germans – if not worn down beforehand – would hem in the invaders and force them to fight another slogging battle before they could even start the prolonged campaign across France and into the Reich. With the peak of wartime mobilization passed, the effect could only be further to diminish British power within the Grand Alliance and the country's influence over the settlement of the peace.

While the British and Americans argued, Chiang raised his bid on Burma, demanding not just the capture of the Andamans and the maintenance of US supplies, but also a significant commitment of British and Indian troops before his forces would take part. These demands were logistically impossible, and the British took them as proof that Chiang was greedy and unreasonable ('a cross between a pine marten and a ferret', Brooke thought). Privately Roosevelt had already promised Chiang the restoration of all China's lost territories, support against the Soviets and rapid decolonization in Southeast Asia. Now, to make sure he would play a visible military part, the president guaranteed that Operation 'Buccaneer', the attack on the Andamans, would take place. This meant that Roosevelt could stage another photo call and issue a public declaration to the American people that he and Churchill were fully supporting China.

Since the Allies did not have enough landing vessels simultaneously to assault the Andamans, land in Italy and Rhodes and prepare for 'Overlord', Roosevelt's promise was effectively also a decision about what would happen in the war in Europe. The British were not immediately aware of what the president had done. When the American chiefs offered the British the flexibility they wanted on the date of 'Overlord', provided they agreed to 'Buccaneer' and forwent their operations in the Mediterranean, it occasioned an even more bitter argument. They refused to let the British chiefs abandon the Andaman attack without the consent of the prime minister and the president.

With the delegates due to depart for Teheran, there was no time to

settle the debate. The British saw off the proposal for a single supreme commander for the whole of Europe, the Americans agreeing that the two Mediterranean commands should be unified instead. As Roosevelt had intended, there was no new Anglo-American strategy to present to Stalin. With the exceptions of Roosevelt and Chiang, everyone was angry after a dissatisfying conference, but as far as Churchill was concerned, there was still everything to play for. After the conference closed, on 26 November 1943, he spent five hours talking non-stop as he rehashed his arguments for his dinner guests. The next day, his party set off for the Iranian capital. On arrival, Churchill found that he had lost his voice. ⁶⁰

'EUROPE WOULD BE DESOLATE AND I MAY BE HELD RESPONSIBLE'

As in Cairo, Roosevelt set the pace at Teheran. He wanted to complete the work Cordell Hull had started in Moscow: forging a personal relationship with Stalin to guarantee Soviet involvement against Japan and participation in the United Nations after the war. He happily trod all over Churchill to achieve these goals, first abandoning, then humiliating, the British prime minister.⁶¹ The tone was set early. After the Soviets claimed to have discovered a plot to assassinate him as he travelled in from the more distant US compound, Roosevelt moved to the Soviet legation. The president rebuffed Churchill's suggestion of a lunch à *deux*, and instead met first with Stalin on his own. Roosevelt accompanied this encounter with a stream of criticism of the British and the French.⁶²

At the first plenary session of the conference, on 28 November, the president started with a lengthy explanation of the war against Japan, making clear the scale of the US commitment to the Pacific. Then he turned to the war in Western Europe. He laid out the different options under consideration in the Mediterranean, emphasizing that any of these would delay 'Overlord'. Stalin responded with a survey of the Eastern Front. Then he announced, with minimal fanfare, that the Red Army would indeed join the war against Japan as soon as Germany was defeated. The quickest way to do that, he declared, was for the Western Allies to launch two invasions: their planned assault on Normandy and another, from the Mediterranean, into the south of France. The latter was favoured by the Americans and had been briefly considered by the combined planners, but was so far down their list of possible operations that they hadn't even

brought the outline to Teheran. Any other operations in the Mediterranean, including the Italian front, were worthless, Stalin decreed. They would disperse Allied forces on divergent lines.

Churchill, having recovered his ability to speak, tried to protest. Stalin stood firm. Roosevelt declared that he absolutely agreed. Suddenly, the prime minister was faced with a combined US- Soviet strategic front to which he had no counter. Seeing a dispirited Churchill stalk away from the conference hall, Moran asked him if something was wrong. 'A bloody lot has gone wrong' was the answer.⁶³

The next two days of talks between heads of government and chiefs of staff merely confirmed this first meeting. The Americans and the Soviets wanted 'Overlord' to take priority and to be joined with landings in the south of France, Operation 'Anvil'. The British would have to accept the decision. After hours spent answering American and Soviet accusations that Britain was cynically pursuing post-war objectives, and dealing with the military commitments that Roosevelt had made (for post-war reasons) to Chiang and Stalin, Brooke felt 'like entering a lunatic asylum or a nursing home'.⁶⁴

The CIGS conducted a fighting retreat. If the US and the USSR were set on 'Overlord', then operations in the Aegean would have to be abandoned. He had always been less keen on them than Churchill. If the Americans were determined to have an invasion of southern France, however, then some of those precious landing ships would have to stay in the Mediterranean. In the meantime, they could be used to support his favourite campaign in Italy. The Americans also eventually accepted the British argument that the pace of the build-up of forces in the UK meant that the date for 'Overlord' would have to be pushed back from 1 May to 1 June 1944 — a decision that Roosevelt subsequently altered to 'during May' to placate Stalin. What to do about 'Buccaneer', and who was to command 'Overlord', remained to be settled after the British and Americans had returned to Cairo.

For Churchill, Roosevelt's ganging up with Stalin represented a double mortification: a bitter demonstration of declining national power within the alliance and a humiliating experience of being pushed around by men with whom he had walked as an equal. It was all the worse not just because of the risk that British power would diminish still further during 'Overlord', but because 'Overlord' and 'Anvil' neatly directed Anglo-American strength into Western rather than Southern Europe. Already worried about the implications of the Red Army's advance, at Teheran Churchill became still more conscious of the threat posed by the Soviet Union to

European security. Late at night, back in his room, his talk was of a dark future: 'There might be a more bloody war. I shall not be there. I shall be asleep. I want to sleep for billions of years', 'I believe man might destroy man and wipe out civilization. Europe would be desolate and I may be held responsible.'

Churchill immediately tried to rebuild his damaged prestige by making an offer to Stalin.⁶⁷ At dinner, the evening after the first plenary session, Roosevelt and Stalin started talking about the need to punish Germany, not least by moving the Polish border to slice off a chunk of German territory. Roosevelt, saying he felt unwell, went off to bed. Abandoning his earlier aversion to addressing post-war issues, Churchill used matchsticks to show Stalin a plan to accommodate Soviet territorial demands by moving Poland westwards. The best thing, he said, would be for the great powers to impose such a plan on the Poles. Watching, Eden was pleased that the prime minister was making a move to win Soviet confidence. He hoped that Stalin might then agree to maintain Polish independence, though this was a topic on which the Soviet premier remained quiet.

Neither Roosevelt nor Churchill had in fact won over Stalin. Protestations of friendship made him look automatically for ulterior motives. Nor was he averse to kicking an opponent when he was down. Perhaps to test Roosevelt's resolve, over the following days he publicly bullied Churchill. Roosevelt took the hint and joined in the fun. Stalin's sallies started with the direct, 'Do the English believe in "Overlord", or do they not?', and got more brutal. At dinner on 29 November, he accused Churchill of wanting a 'soft' peace with Germany so the British could use the Germans to hold back the Russians after the war. 'We Russians are not blind', he told the prime minister. Stalin suggested a solution to the problem of German militarism: shoot fifty thousand of them, maybe even a hundred thousand, including the whole of the general staff. When Churchill refused, Roosevelt laughingly proposed a compromise: just forty-nine thousand. Disgusted, Churchill walked out, only for Stalin and Molotov to fetch him back. He had only been joking, Stalin declared. He'd never order all those people killed in cold blood.⁶⁸

As the American and Soviet premiers piled on the humiliation, Churchill made still further concessions to Stalin. He offered to revise the 1936 convention that gave Turkey control of the passage through the Bosporus and Dardanelles to favour the Soviet Union, and contemplated handing over the entire Italian fleet to the Soviets. Such generosity owed less to any psychological supremacy established by Stalin than to Churchill's appreciation of the new vistas opened up by Roosevelt's

apparent betrayal. If British power were to be sustained, the price would be an accommodation not only with the president's dreams for the world, but also with Stalin's vision of Europe.⁷⁰

Earlier in the conference, in another private chat with Stalin, Roosevelt had brought up the post-war United Nations and the role of the 'big four'. Stalin said he did not favour the idea. The president recognized a bargaining position. By 1 December, with the military staff work done, there was time for the leaders to turn their minds more fully to foreign affairs: Turkey, Finland and Poland. In another private meeting with Stalin, Roosevelt explained that he would agree to move Poland westwards and to accept the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States. He would not be able to say so publicly, because of the number of American voters with an interest in Eastern Europe, and it would probably be best not to say anything to Churchill. Stalin more than understood. Roosevelt mentioned his United Nations plan again, and Stalin said he had reconsidered his position: the Soviet Union would come on board after all.⁷¹

The path was now open for all three men to discuss Poland's borders in session. Churchill explained that he would take a settlement that suited Stalin back to the London Poles and tell them it was the best they could get. Britain wanted a 'Poland which was strong and independent, but friendly to Russia'. Roosevelt, who according to Anthony Eden had spent most of this discussion pretending to be asleep, quickly moved the discussion on to Germany before any decisions could be made. He proposed a plan to dismember Germany to make sure that it could never make war again. Churchill put forward his own suggestion — detach Prussia but allow the other German states to federate to ensure Central European stability. Stalin said that he agreed with Roosevelt. The Americans composed a suitably vague and optimistic communiqué. With that, the conference broke up.

Teheran was a turning point — albeit a well-heralded one. The key decisions had been taken that would shape the campaigns in Europe for the rest of the war, and the perspectives of the Allied leaders as they sought to settle the peace. Roosevelt and Churchill had agreed to sacrifice Poland and the Baltic States in the hope that it would let them achieve higher aims. The American believed he was building a world system that would prevent wars; short-term concessions to tyrants were worth it for the good of the human race. This attitude legitimated a cavalier treatment of European issues that stored up problems for the future. The enormous impact of Roosevelt's interventions into strategy and diplomacy had shown the power that America now exercised on the world stage. He

probably thought he had made it clear to Stalin that he expected some form of political independence to be preserved in Eastern Europe, even if he recognized that the Soviets would arrange this as they saw fit.

Churchill, in contrast, had to confront head-on whether he could accommodate Soviet demands in Eastern Europe as the price of maintaining British power and preserving the peace in the West. Not only was he willing to make this compromise, he made further concessions to Stalin in order to put his preferred resolution in place.

With the Red Army already starting its winter offensive, Stalin had not needed Roosevelt's or Churchill's generous offers to remodel the borders of Poland. Nonetheless he probably thought that he had done a deal with Roosevelt — Soviet participation in the United Nations in return for the Pripet Marshes — and that the president had promised to square this with the American people. Not least because he did not trust Roosevelt, however, Stalin did not want to abandon the Anglo-Soviet agreement that had been building since 1942. Hull and Roosevelt's performances at Moscow and Teheran had demonstrated the very opposite of any American desire to get embroiled in Europe in the long term. He therefore continued to view a lasting European settlement as a matter primarily for the UK and the USSR.

Churchill was downcast. His hopes of Anglo-American unity had been struck a heavy blow. He had been humbled and made fun of in a situation in which he could not directly fight back. More severely, he faced the failure of the strategy that he had pursued since the USSR and the USA had been dragged into the war. Britain had not produced its own decisive military victories quickly enough to maintain its influence within the Grand Alliance.

The British and Americans returned to Cairo to discuss the operations settled at Teheran. Abandoning his original choice of General Marshall, Roosevelt declared that he would appoint Eisenhower supreme commander for 'Overlord'. Stalin's announcement that he would join the war against Japan, and that he favoured an invasion of southern France, decided the debates that had previously occupied the combined chiefs. The landing craft needed in the Mediterranean for 'Anvil' meant there could be no 'Buccaneer'. Eventually, grudgingly, and placing all the blame on the British, the president accepted that fact. Mountbatten would plan some alternative amphibious attacks, but Chiang would be told that 'Buccaneer' was off. Meanwhile, another set of meetings with the Turks made plain that they would not let the British develop the airbases they needed for an assault on Rhodes. That settled the question of operations in the Aegean.⁷³

On 7 December 1943, Roosevelt left for home. The British, and the American joint chiefs, remained behind. Everyone was relieved the whole thing was over. That evening, after a few drinks, Churchill asked them to take a bet on when Germany would be defeated. The more optimistic said March 1944. The more pessimistic, that November.⁷⁴

Churchill's lifestyle was unhealthy at the best of times. Over the previous two weeks he had spent a lot of time flying in unpressurized aircraft and fighting in high-pressure talks. Despite warnings that he needed rest, he was determined to accompany Brooke on a tour of the Italian front. From Cairo, they travelled to Tunis on 11 December, landing at the wrong airport, where the disconsolate prime minister was left sitting on his luggage in the cold wind. The next day, while his staff wandered round the ruins of Carthage – another doomed Mediterranean empire – he rested but did not recover. That night, Brooke was woken by shouts from Churchill, lost and confused, running a high fever and searching for his doctor.⁷⁵

It was another bout of pneumonia. Clementine Churchill was sent for, and the War Cabinet insisted – despite Moran's protestations – on more medical specialists being sent out. Once again, the new sulphonamide antibiotics saved Churchill. Eager to return to work, he tried to defy the doctors who had gathered at his villa. They confined him to bed, where he had to stay for two weeks, before going to Marrakesh to convalesce. Back in London, Churchill's health crisis was announced to Parliament and became the subject of daily news updates. There was some speculation about whether he could continue. But the prime minister, and the war against Germany, were going to go on longer than anyone thought.

'THE BIG CITY'

In the meantime, the battles of Berlin and the Winter Line continued. Both were fascinating examples of the path dependence of strategy. Britain had not embarked on the strategic bombing campaign or crossed the Mediterranean with the intention of fighting prolonged, costly and ultimately unsuccessful battles of attrition. Yet at each step the choices that led them to this point had appeared sensible. If some British strategists blamed American intransigence for failing to capitalize on the opportunities that had finally been created, the rest of us should probably be grateful that in neither case had the United States come fully 'in on it',

since the outcome of that failure was almost certainly a quicker end to the war.

Between November 1943 and March 1944, Bomber Command launched thirty-five major raids against 'the big city', comprising more than twenty thousand individual sorties. The Battle of Berlin was Bomber Command's greatest solo campaign. It was also a defeat. Severe damage was done to the Berlin cityscape, and the repeated heavy raids made Berliners' lives a misery, but Bomber Command never managed to raise a Berlin firestorm. British bombing killed more than 9,000 people in Berlin and made more than 800,000 homeless over the winter of 1943–4, but the British lost more than 3,300 aircrew killed and another 1,000 who escaped their crippled planes only to become prisoners of war. The Bomber Command never managed to raise a Berlin firestorm. British bombing killed and another 1,000 who escaped their crippled planes only to become prisoners of war.

Amid the heavy losses, morale among the surviving crews was fragile.⁸⁰ Frank Waddington, a navigator on his second tour with 7 Squadron RAF, a pathfinder unit, remembered the groans of horror that went up when the curtains in the briefing room were drawn back to reveal that Berlin was the target again:

I cannot emphasise how frightened I was . . . in my imagination I used to imagine being shot down and being in a plane which was blazing and we were all fighting to get out, the most terrible thing. I used to drink, like a fish, but it didn't really help, I really just wanted to go home to Mummy. I suppose many of us were like that but it was a thing that you never, ever talked about.

Despite his fears, when Waddington's aircraft was shot down on the night of 20–21 January 1944, he calmly escaped his crippled bomber. Captured on the ground, he was driven away through a crowd that spat and shouted at the prisoners.⁸¹

Harris rejected urgings from the Americans and the British air staff to co-ordinate Bomber Command's attacks more closely with the raids on specific industries undertaken by the USAAF. He argued that it was unrealistic to expect his crews to hit relatively precise targets in the depths of a North European winter, and that to divert their efforts would release the pressure he had built up on German industry over the previous year. When Bomber Command did try to hit the ball-bearing plants at Schweinfurt, most of the attacking aircraft missed the target. That seemed to bear out Harris's point.⁸² Yet it was increasingly apparent that Bomber Command was losing the battle against an increasingly sophisticated German air-defence system. The last large British raid on Berlin, on 24–25 March, suffered losses of 8.9 per cent but did no major damage to the city.⁸³ Six days later, a disastrous attack on Nuremberg resulted in the loss

of 108 out of 781 attacking aircraft, 79 of them to night-fighters.⁸⁴ Even Harris had to admit that these casualty rates could not be sustained.

'SUSPENDED OVER THAT DEVIL FURNACE OF THE ENEMY DAY AND NIGHT'

In Italy, too, the need to keep up the pressure ahead of 'Overlord' meant there could be no halt to the fighting over the winter. During December, Alexander's armies renewed their offensives, trying to open up the German lines before the planned landing at Anzio. To the west, the Fifth Army managed to break into, but not through, the defences of the Bernhardt Line, with the British X Corps seizing the heights of Monte Camino. To the east, the Indians, New Zealanders and Canadians of the Eighth Army cleared the River Moro. The Canadians spent 20–28 December fighting through the town of Ortona, which German paratroops and engineers had transformed into a maze-like fortress, before this offensive too ground to a halt.⁸⁵ By 21 December 1943 it was clear that too little progress had been made to allow a breakthrough that could be exploited by an outflanking landing, and Alexander cancelled 'Shingle'.

Simultaneously, there was a turnover of troops and commanders as the Allies reshuffled their resources in anticipation of 'Overlord'. Eisenhower went to London to become supreme commander of the European theatre. He took Tedder with him as his deputy. Montgomery left to take command of the British Twenty-First Army Group that would take part in the invasion. Allied Forces Headquarters and Middle East Command were united under a single (British) supreme commander of the Mediterranean: Brooke ensured the job went to 'Jumbo' Wilson.⁸⁶ US General Ira Eaker took over command of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces from Tedder. It was now a huge organization with more than 12,000 aircraft and almost a third of a million personnel.⁸⁷ Montgomery's place at the head of Eighth Army was taken by his protégé, Lieutenant General Oliver Leese, and Brooke appointed a new chief of staff, Lieutenant General John Harding, to Alexander's headquarters. One of the army's rising stars, just recovered from wounds sustained leading his division after Alamein, Harding was meant to bring his steely drive to stiffen Alexander's emollient façade.⁸⁸

In the midst of this upheaval, Brooke and Churchill made sure that 'Shingle' was put back on. By stretching out any slack in the 'Overlord' assembly plans, enough shipping was located for a landing with two

divisions in the first wave. Churchill hoped to fling ashore a 'wildcat' that would tear up the back of Kesselring's defences, forcing him to abandon the Winter Line and accept the loss of Rome. The problem, as always in Italy, was one of strength and timing. Two divisions were not enough for the invaders quickly to establish the firm base they'd needed and to strike out against Axis supply lines before the inevitable counter-attack.

Alexander moved divisions across the Apennines from the Eighth to the Fifth Army, strengthening his western flank for another major offensive. This was meant to fix the German reserves before the Anzio landing and then, once 'Shingle' had come ashore, punch through the weakened German front to link up with the beachhead. In the absence of a stronger landing force or the Allied means quickly to break down the Winter Line – now anchored on the formidable massif of Monte Cassino, with its famous monastery – the plan depended on a powerful element of bluff. If 'Shingle' didn't shock the Germans into retreat, it might well be isolated and defeated. This risk was all too apparent to Alexander and Clark. It also worried US General John Lucas, whom they appointed to command the combined British and American corps that would land at Anzio. Already exhausted from the fighting to break the Winter Line, Lucas took a very cautious approach that guaranteed 'Shingle' would not have the effect that Churchill intended.

Fifth Army's offensive opened on 17 January 1944. In what was meant to be a diversionary attack, the British X Corps forced its way over the River Garigliano, in horrendous weather and across river banks that had been extraordinarily thickly sown with mines. Nonetheless, X Corps established a firm bridgehead that threatened to turn the German front and forced Kesselring to commit his reserves. It would spend the next two weeks in a desperate defence, as British artillery smashed a series of counter-attacks intended to re-establish the river front line. Meanwhile. Clark's American divisions attacked across the Rapido, trying to cross rivers in full spate against defences of great depth and complexity, and under constant observation from Monte Cassino. The attack was a disaster. In the mountains to the Americans' right, however, French colonial troops under General Juin had made much quicker progress. Lightly equipped and practised in mountain warfare, Juin's men were much more effective in the terrain than their British or American allies, but they too suffered heavy casualties.

The landing at Anzio came ashore on 22 January 1944. Despite the short notice it was well organized, with copious air cover despite the winter weather. German resistance was minimal, and by the end of the first

day, 36,000 men and 3,000 vehicles had arrived in the beachhead. For the next week, while reinforcements and supplies were slowly shipped in, Lucas stood firm. By the time he ventured to attack out of the beachhead on 30 January, the initially panicked Germans had recovered their equilibrium, rushed troops to Anzio and established a perimeter too strong for him to break through. By 10 February 1944, three and a half divisions had been brought ashore, but Kesselring had managed to assemble the equivalent of five German divisions to attack the Allied lodgement. With both sides aware that the great cross-Channel offensive was coming that summer, the battle for Anzio had a symbolic significance. Hitler wanted to show that Germany could destroy an amphibious landing; the Allies could not afford to let the beachhead be eliminated.⁸⁹

Meanwhile, the offensive on the Fifth Army's front continued. American troops forced their way towards Monte Cassino but were brought up short by German reinforcements. With Allied intelligence suggesting the Axis defence was teetering, Alexander threw the New Zealand Corps, which had been meant to exploit a breakthrough, into the struggle for the mountain. The Germans had flooded the approaches and covered the remaining routes with mines, machine gun and mortar fire. They were not at this stage occupying the monastery, but every Allied soldier who looked up at the mountain was convinced it was being used as an observation post.

Before another attack, Alexander approved an air raid to crack open the defences, and, on 15 February 1944, US bombers plastered the mountain, wrecking the monastery and killing Italian civilians who had taken shelter inside. To take advantage of a break in the weather, the air strike took place two days before the assault. That left the Germans plenty of time to gather their wits and occupy the rubble. Indian, British and New Zealand troops launched two offensives consisting of disjointed attacks, the first on 17-18 February, the second on 15-23 March. This was preceded by an even heavier bombing raid as well as a devastating artillery bombardment. Both failed to take the monastery. Heavy bombing could not solve the essential difficulty that made any attempt to take Cassino so costly: the impossibility of combining manoeuvre with fire in the jagged terrain. Indeed, the bombing made things worse, creating an impassable moonscape without eliminating the most dogged defenders in the rubbletopped bunkers. Despite their heavy numerical superiority over the defending Germans, the attacking divisions were also showing the effects of prolonged service overseas and the bitter Italian winter. The New Zealanders, in particular, were in the midst of a morale and manpower crisis following a botched scheme to give long home leave to veteran troops. This had resulted in mutinies and bitter arguments over unequal wartime sacrifices back in New Zealand, and deprived the 2nd New Zealand Division of experienced and rested replacements just before they entered one of the toughest battles of the war. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the soldiers who had remained in Italy proved unable to push through the final German defensive positions in the critical struggle for the town of Cassino. The Fifth Army's offensive ground to a bloody halt without breaking through to reach their embattled comrades at Anzio. 90

As German attacks forced Lucas's corps onto the defensive, the Anzio beachhead became an ants' nest of trenches and shelters, filled with soldiers seeking cover from enemy fire. A Swazi military pioneer called it a life 'suspended over that devil furnace of the enemy day and night, hour after hour, minute after minute, neither sleep at night nor rest at day time . . . '91 In a replay of Salerno, it briefly looked as if disaster would ensue. By 17 February the Germans were threatening to breach the defences and crush the landing. Once again, the situation was saved by overwhelming Allied naval gunfire and air power. Poor weather had prevented Eaker's MAAF disrupting German reinforcements on their way to the beachhead, but – unlike at Salerno – Anzio was within range of supporting airfields. At the critical moment, bombing not only hit transport links and supply convoys but also enemy troops forming up to attack. The beachhead survived. Lucas was sacked. The Winter Line would last unbroken until May 1944.

The Anzio landing embarrassingly failed to fulfil Churchill's hopes of a rapid victory – as he famously lamented, the 'wildcat' had turned into a 'stranded whale' - but it also marked another stage in the deterioration of Germany's military position.⁹² Not least because they got so much practice, the Wehrmacht remained very good at improvising scratch responses to Allied offensives – much to the anxiety of the planning staff preparing the D-Day invasion. A mixture of ideology, training and fear kept German soldiers fighting hard, while their logisticians, largely by over-riding civilian needs, kept up a flow of munitions to the front. The German military, however, had no enduring solution to the problem of overwhelming Allied firepower, to which they only became more exposed as they counter-attacked. The Germans had lost almost 3,500 men failing to eliminate the Salerno beachhead. At Anzio, they lost 10,500 men trying to do the same thing. With the Allied air forces dominating the skies above and behind the land battlefields, everything became more costly and difficult. 'Shingle' might have failed, but the implications for the German

response to any Allied landing in France were grim. 93

The failure encouraged another Anglo-American disagreement over strategy. Brooke argued that the best use of Allied resources in the Mediterranean was to tie down German forces in Italy, rather than shift them away for the 'Anvil' landings in southern France. Marshall took the opposite position: 'Anvil' was essential to the success of 'Overlord'. Unspoken between London and Washington, but obvious to both, was that the commitment of forces to 'Anvil' would not only limit further offensives in Italy, but also prevent the British embroiling the Americans in any imperial adventures in the Balkans.⁹⁴

One of Eisenhower's first decisions as supreme commander of 'Overlord', however, was that the scale of the initial Normandy landings had to be greatly increased. That meant that there weren't enough ships for 'Anvil' to happen at the same time. In April 1944, the joint chiefs agreed to delay 'Anvil', but refused to leave any spare landing craft in the Mediterranean, where the British wanted to use them to support fresh operations in Italy. Brooke was furious at this 'bargaining equipment against strategy', but the situation reflected the vicious circle that now constrained his hopes for the Italian campaign.⁹⁵

'EVERY NEAR-MISS DESTROYED SOMETHING IN YOUR BRAIN'

From 3 September 1943 to 11 May 1944, the fighting in Italy cost the Commonwealth armies 60,987 battle casualties, of which 12,108 were killed. Roughly three-quarters of the casualties and just over two-thirds of the dead were British. Over the same time period, US ground casualties were 45,661, of which 8,412 were killed. The struggles around Salerno, Anzio and for the Winter Line were some of the most horrendous battles of the British army's war: they were often fought in vile weather across a range of appallingly difficult terrain, from mountains and muddy gullies to the rubbled streets of Ortona and Cassino. In these conditions, even tracked vehicles' mobility was constrained, and the armies became increasingly reliant on four-legged transport: by May 1944, British and American forces in Italy were using nearly 25,000 mules and horses, which consumed about 10,000 tons of forage a month. Trying to break through German defences, British forces also became even more dependent on artillery. Between October 1942 and May 1943, the British

armies in North Africa had expended about 10,000 tons of artillery ammunition a month. Between October and December 1943 their successors fired 22,000 tons a month. Over the winter this was enough to cause significant shortages of shells that ultimately led to a rationing scheme being introduced after the failure of the spring offensives to make sure there were enough shells for the summer drive.

Even so, minor territorial gains cost heavy infantry casualties, and attacking units were quickly exhausted. Five days of action during the attack across the Garigliano, for example, cost the 2nd Battalion Wiltshire Regiment 9 officers and 186 men killed or wounded, about 40 per cent of its rifle strength. Facing German bombardment and counter-attack in an embattled beachhead could be just as bloody. After a month of service in the Anzio bridgehead – during which time reinforcement drafts arrived to replace losses – the 1st Scots Guards suffered 646 casualties, the equivalent of 85 per cent of those who had gone ashore. Leven holding the line during a lull in operations involved a steady drain of strength. During March 1944, for example, while holding defensive positions in the mountains, the 2nd Battalion Lancashire Fusiliers lost fourteen men killed or missing, and another forty-two men wounded, including five officers. 102

There were also the illnesses that were the stock-in-trade of a life spent out of doors. During the whole of 1944, six times more British personnel would be admitted to hospital in Italy for sickness than because of injuries sustained in action. Forty per cent of them had malaria (often a legacy of Sicily), throat infections or skin complaints, including 'trench foot' – a condition familiar, like much of the rest of the campaign, from the First World War. ¹⁰³

The psychological strain of such prolonged periods in action was intense. As one soldier described the experience of being mortared in the mountains:

a sort of multiple cough in the distance and the next thing would be a whistling glissando of sound that screwed your nerves up against the blast . . . Every near-miss destroyed something in your brain, so you were less prepared for the next stonk when it came. 104

Soldiers who displayed psychophysiological symptoms such as uncontrollable crying, trembling, screaming and twitching were described by their comrades as 'bomb happy', although many reached back instinctively for the term of the previous war: 'shell shocked'.¹⁰⁵ British servicemen usually saw the loss of emotional grip as a personal failure, but, by 1944, the army had come to recognize what many soldiers had discovered for themselves: under the stress of combat anybody could break

down. Rather than 'shell shock' – mysterious, traumatic and incurable – from 1942 the army referred to 'battle exhaustion'. This represented a realization that most of the 'bomb happy' were physically as well as mentally shattered, rather than morally inadequate, but it also had a treatment and a prognosis. Sufferers were expected to get better and return to the fighting.

Despite generals' suspicion of 'trick cyclists', by the start of 1944 army psychiatrists were demonstrating they could quickly restore large numbers of 'exhausted' men to working order. The soldier who went 'bomb happy' would be evacuated quickly to a Corps Exhaustion Centre, given a chance to put on clean clothes, eat and sleep, often assisted with a dose of barbiturates. Ideally, after five days of recuperation, he would be fit to rejoin his unit – the fate of about a third of patients. The rest required longer rehabilitative treatment, and they were often left in a depressing limbo in the base area. Subsequent psychiatric assessment might downgrade them to a non-combat role, but about a third would have to be invalided out of the army altogether. If treatment relieved a lot of symptoms, how far men were healed is open to doubt: out of 107 exhaustion cases studied at British general hospitals in autumn 1944, 46 were suffering relapses. ¹⁰⁶

It was no accident that the infantrymen who bore the brunt of battle casualties and illness were also the most likely to fall victim to exhaustion. As the experience of the New Zealanders at Monte Cassino indicated, troops who had fought through North Africa were often close to the end of their tethers after a winter in Italy: they needed careful management, rest, or replacement with fresh troops. 107 Yet British Commonwealth infantrymen were also in increasingly short supply. At the start of 1944, there were not enough trained infantrymen to provide adequate reinforcements to the Mediterranean and the Far East and to prepare for the heavy losses expected during 'Overlord'. In March 1944, the War Office told Alexander that his current draft of 13,000 infantry reinforcements would be the last he could expect until September. Meanwhile, the introduction of home leave for British soldiers who had served more than five years overseas began to exert a steady drain on experienced units. In Italy, as in the Far East and Northwest Europe, British generals would spend the final years of the war trying to manage dwindling human reserves while taking on fanatical opponents in the death throes of defeat.

'Being paid a million a day by us for doing nothing about the war'

April 1943–August 1944

During May 1943, Captain Kenneth Hulbert, a doctor with the Royal Army Medical Corps, travelled east from Lahore to Cox's Bazar in Bengal. He had been ordered to set up a new hospital as part of the preparations for an Allied offensive in northern Burma. During the long train journey, Hulbert talked to his Indian fellow officers about the political situation. They wanted independence but had no idea how to surmount the divisions that were springing up between Hindus and Muslims. At every station, the carriage was 'besieged with children chanting: "No momma, no poppa, no brother, no sister, no cousins, no uncles, no aunts. No food. Baksheesh." 'The officers transferred to a narrow-gauge railway and took the ferry across the vast Brahmaputra river.

Hulbert's experiences of and reactions to India might stand for those of many wartime visitors: awe at the scale of the landscape, the weather and the length of the railways; horror at the poverty and the lack of sanitation; uncertainty about the politics. Shortly after he got to Cox's Bazar, the monsoon began. Carried by boats to the island where the hospital was to be built, he and his Indian orderlies spent a day trying to get up tents and decontaminate water. Then they unpacked the hospital beds and, beneath a mosquito net, Hulbert tried to fall asleep.

After sunset a dull low moaning sound started up and seemed to go on all night. I asked one of the Indians what this was and he said that it was coming from the Indian village around us. He said it was the sound of people dying of hunger. What a dreadful place this is. The distressing thing is that there is nothing we can do to help them. ¹

The noise of the dying stayed with him for years. It could have been heard, in one form or another, all around the Bay of Bengal: the background music to the last and greatest military effort of the Raj.

'THE ONLY WAY OUT OF A DIFFICULT PLACE'

Since 1942, the British had been worrying about who would replace the time-expired Lord Linlithgow as viceroy of India. Churchill wanted to appoint Oliver Lampson, the ambassador to Egypt, in the expectation that he would provide the same firm imperial rule that he had brought to Cairo. Amery preferred Sir Samuel Hoare, who was ruled out because of both his opposition to Churchill over the Government of India Act in 1935 and his involvement in pre-war appeasement. Attlee and Eden were both canvassed for the role: Attlee was sensibly appalled, Eden tempted but reluctant to be diverted from guiding Britain's international diplomacy and preparing his way to the premiership.²

With no better option, in June 1943 Churchill decided to appoint Wavell to be viceroy instead. After eighteen months of failure against the Japanese, Churchill wanted to get him away from military command. The prime minister thought Wavell would be a safely conservative pair of hands who would keep a lid on India until the end of the war. Amery welcomed the appointment. He thought Churchill had under-estimated Wavell's sympathy for Indian political aspirations.

With many members of the Congress Party still locked up, Gandhi's fast failed to re-ignite active opposition to British rule. Amery wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to reshape India's political structures, strengthening the position of Indian ministers on the Viceroy's Council but separating them from a federal assembly. Not coincidentally, a federated India in which the major parties had been separated from the state was also less likely to seek an absolute split from the United Kingdom. Wavell sought to achieve the same end by a less Machiavellian route. He wanted to involve Congress and the Muslim League more fully in the government of India before the transition of power. By inducting party politicians in the running of Indian affairs, he hoped that the crucial links between Britain and the subcontinent would be maintained.³

Looking back from the end of 1943, Wavell reflected in his diary that his appointment had been 'forced' on Churchill 'as the only way out of a difficult place; he was pleased to find it well received, and then horrified to find I had liberal views about India and was prepared to express them.' Much to Amery and Wavell's frustration, the prime minister tried to put off any discussion of Indian constitutional issues. His tactic, as usual, was explosions of rage about the accumulation of India's sterling balances, the 'harrowing picture of British workmen in rags struggling to pay rich

Indian mill-owners' and complaints about the 'worthlessness' of the Indian army.⁵ Having watched ministers falter before this filibustering, Wavell concluded that the Cabinet was a mess of 'spinelessness, lack of interest, opportunism', 'not honest in its expressed desire to make progress in India', and easily put off by a prime minister who feared 'a split in the Conservative Party and trouble in Parliament over any fresh political advance in India, so is determined to block it as long as he is in power.'⁶

Wavell was replaced as commander-in-chief in India by Auchinleck, brought back into service after his despatch from the Eighth Army. Together, Wavell and Auchinleck represented a very different version of India's future from that which Churchill still hoped to preserve. While he was still commander-in-chief, Wavell had set in train an investigation into the poor performance of the Indian army thus far in the war against Japan. It identified a deterioration in quality because of the great expansion in the size of the army since 1940, and the lack of infantry training in jungle warfare. These problems started to be addressed after Auchinleck took over. Whatever the failings he had displayed in the Middle East, Auchinleck knew and loved the Indian army, and he oversaw its transformation from a force that was growing rapidly in numbers while deteriorating even quicker in quality, into a more compact, modern force that was increasingly agile and highly skilled.

By the end of 1943 the Indian army comprised almost two million men. Though most of its soldiers still came from rural villages, the war had forced an extension of recruitment across communal boundaries and an official abandonment of the idea that some races were more martial than others. Nothing could really turn the creaking bureaucracy of the Raj into an efficient war machine, but pay, medical care and food rations were all significantly improved — the last not least because recruits needed building up physically before they could be put into combat. Concerns about Indian loyalty meant that military morale was closely monitored. Every unit was ordered to set up 'Josh' groups — small group discussions, supported by newsletters and pamphlets, which were meant to explain the purpose of the war against Japan, spread propaganda and inculcate hatred of the enemy.

Auchinleck was a dedicated proponent of the 'Indianization' of the officer corps – a route that had been resisted by more conservative officers not just because it meant sharing their messes but because it would give Indians the power to order and discipline white troops. Auchinleck, however, was clear not only that more Indians was the only means by which to permit the necessary expansion but that it would require 'equal

treatment regardless of colour'. This was a revolutionary step, but one that caused much less concern to hostilities-only British officers than to some of their more traditionally minded counterparts. The young middle-class men being commissioned into the Indian army for the duration of the Emergency often lacked the obsession with racial distinction that characterized colonial life. More importantly, even on the rare occasion when they might get ordered around by an Indian, they knew they wouldn't have to endure it for long. Between 1939 and 1945, the number of Indian officers increased from 577 to more than 15,000, including 220 lieutenant colonels and 4 temporary or acting brigadiers. The normalization of their presence created a career path for Indian officers who expected to be running their own armed forces after independence. ¹⁰

In fact, the whole army was being Indianized as the number of British troops available for service in the front line fell. Though the total commitment of British manpower to the theatre increased as the Royal Navy and RAF were reinforced, the British infantry units that had traditionally been brigaded with Indian battalions were a wasting asset. Both in British and Indian divisions, British battalions went into the 1943–4 campaigning season already under strength. Two of the Indian divisions that would do some of the hardest fighting in Burma – the 17th and 23rd – had only a single British battalion within the formation. ¹¹

Auchinleck's reforms were introduced into an army that was no longer pursuing the frantic expansion of 1940–42. With the Axis threat to the Middle East removed, it became possible to limit the growth of the Indian war effort. In May 1943, just before Auchinleck replaced Wavell, the War Cabinet in London decided to fix the Indian army at fifteen divisions. This fitted well with Churchill's complaints about its size and inefficiency (though the prime minister was absent, on his way to the Trident Conference in Washington, when the decision was taken). The limit also, however, reflected the reality that India's military capacity was reaching its peak. From a military point of view, it allowed the concentration of equipment, manpower and training that was required for a subsequent improvement in fighting quality.

Like other fighting forces of the British Empire, during 1943 the Indian army began to benefit from an influx of American supplies as well as the mobilization of a domestic war industry. Burma was never at the top of London's or Washington's priority list, but tanks, guns, anti-malarial drugs and ration packs all began to arrive in greater quantities. Critically, so too did aircraft, including not only Spitfires but also long-range USAAF bombers and fighters. The Spitfires guaranteed air superiority over eastern

India, preventing Japanese bombers and photo-reconnaissance aircraft flying over base areas. The longer-range American aircraft allowed Allied air commanders to take the fight to Japanese airfields and played a crucial role in establishing air superiority over the Burmese battlefields.¹²

These improved resources meant nothing without the infrastructure to get them to the front line. 13 From autumn 1943, following instructions from the chiefs of staff that it be built up as a base for operations across Southeast Asia, India Command undertook a huge programme of building and stocking of airfields, barracks and depots. In these, India mirrored the experience of Australia, Egypt and the UK in becoming a vast landing strip-cum-storehouse as the Anglo-American war effort accelerated on to the offensive in 1943. Between these operations and the drivers, porters and construction gangs labouring to get supplies up towards the front line, another army of more than 1.5 million civilian workers was employed supporting military operations from India. ¹⁴ Meanwhile the Americans, unhappy with the slow pace of supplies via the docks and railways, forced the British to accept US equipment, training and transport battalions. Together, during the spring of 1944, these transformed the quantity of materials that could be unloaded and carried over the Burma and Assam Railway. 15

During the autumn of 1943, a reshuffle of commanders and organization took place before Mountbatten's arrival at Southeast Asia Command. Wavell had sacked Lieutenant General Noel Irwin, who had led the Eastern Army into its last debacle in the Arakan. His replacement, General Sir George Giffard, was a great colonial organizer who since 1940 had been in charge of West Africa Command: a critical waypoint on the route east and an increasingly important source of military personnel, including two out of three of the African divisions which would serve in Burma later in the war. Within months, Giffard had been appointed to command SEAC's ground forces at the head of a new Eleventh Army Group. The Eastern Army was renamed the Fourteenth Army. Its new commander was Lieutenant General William Slim.

A shopkeeper's son from Birmingham, Slim had achieved his ambition of having a military career only because of the First World War. Twice badly wounded fighting Ottoman troops, he became by the war's end a junior staff officer in Delhi, a post that enabled him to transfer into the Indian army as an officer in the Gurkha Rifles. Though a successful regimental and staff officer between the wars, his career had nearly stalled before the Second World War, which he began as an acting brigadier. Since then, he had commanded Indian formations in action in Ethiopia,

Iraq and Syria before being posted to command a combined Indian-Burmese corps during its prolonged retreat before the onrushing Japanese. Following their escape, Slim was sidelined by Irwin right up until the point that it became clear that the Arakan offensive was unavoidably a disaster. At that point Irwin attempted, unsuccessfully, to hand Slim the blame.¹⁶

Slim had as much experience as any other British officer of fighting the Japanese. Even by the standards of generals, he was determined and aggressive, but he was also a self-critical and quietly funny man. Like other British generals of the time, he understood the need to build up his army's morale by making himself visible to his troops: though how far he could make himself understood to those who didn't speak English or Gurkhali is open to doubt. Unlike the stylized eccentricities of Montgomery, Slim had the knack of embodying male authority — battle-hardened but humane — in a way the troops found authentic, which was why they nicknamed him 'Uncle'. British soldiers made up a declining minority of his army, but in men who felt unloved — stuck in a backwater of the war, in appalling conditions, apparently forgotten by the politicians and the folks back home — he inspired a rare devotion.

Slim was lucky to have a set of able colleagues and subordinates, most of them British Indian army officers who had shared inter-war experience, understood each other and were able to adapt to the war. This included Frank Messervy and Thomas Rees, who had lost fighting commands because of perceived failures in the Western Desert in 1942, but maintained their military careers thanks to Auchinleck's patronage, then returned to lead divisions in Burma in 1944–5. 'Punch' Cowan, the commanding officer of Slim's old unit, 1/6th Gurkha Rifles, who led the 17th Indian Division from 1942 to 1945, was probably the best British divisional commander of the war, not least because he had so much time to get good at his job. Slim normally trusted his subordinates to fulfil their objectives without interfering closely in the running of their battles. Given the increasingly large size of the Fourteenth Army and the vast and impenetrable area over which it fought, he had little choice. ¹⁷

Slim had developed his own sense of what would be required to beat the Japanese. It matched closely the conclusions of the official investigations. At its foundation lay better training: not just physical fitness and basic personal skills, but also the unit and formation tactics required to take on the Japanese. Adapting to the jungle necessitated reorganizing Indian infantry divisions to reduce their reliance on mechanical transport and strengthen their battalions' rifle strength. Under Auchinleck, the training structures in India became much more

substantial and standardized. Behind Slim, Giffard overhauled the reinforcement camps and hospitals to improve the flow of soldiers to and from the front line and oversaw a major anti-malaria campaign. Together with Slim's determination to ensure good anti-malarial discipline, this led to a major improvement in military health. Admissions to hospital for disease fell from 1,400 per 1,000 troops in 1943 to 100 per 1,000 in 1944.²⁰

'DAMAGE TO OUR REPUTATION . . . IS INCALCULABLE'

In the meantime, terrible famine broke out in Bengal. The disaster had been building for some time. Unable to borrow or tax enough to pay for the accumulating cost of the war – which was falling directly on India even as it built up the sterling balances in London – the Indian government told the Reserve Bank of India to print more money. The rising sterling balance enabled this expansion in currency, since the Bank could only issue notes against assets held in sterling. The result was runaway inflation: between 1939–40 and 1943–4, the Indian wholesale price index increased by 89 per cent. The effect of this inflationary financing – and the lack of the measures that Keynes and Wood had introduced in Britain to protect the population from the cost of the war – was publicly but fruitlessly criticized by Indian economists at the time. The effects of these price rises hit almost the whole of Indian society, and they pushed a large swathe of the population, which had been just able to make ends meet, into scarcity, which tipped easily into starvation. The impact of hunger was felt right across India.²¹

In Bengal, wartime inflation was further compounded by the Japanese capture of Burma, which significantly reduced rice imports, by the wrecking of fishing boats in 1942 lest they be used to aid a Japanese advance, by a typhoon which struck the region that autumn, and by the resultant panic-buying and hoarding by farmers and middlemen. The price of rice shot up; in Chittagong a maund (about 80lb) of rice, which had cost three to five rupees before the war, cost thirty rupees by May 1943 and eighty by October. Both local and national government proved completely unable to address these issues, either by taking control of food supply and distribution or by initiating famine-relief work.

During the spring of 1943, starvation began to wreak havoc in the

Bengali countryside. By July, hungry refugees were an inescapable feature on the streets of Calcutta. Across Bengal, the poorest were hit hardest: they died of hunger or fell victim to malaria and cholera. The rate of fatalities peaked between September and November 1943. Eventually, the famine killed somewhere between 2 and 3 million people out of a population in Bengal of around 60 million. It was an appalling and shameful humanitarian catastrophe that was symptomatic of a much broader failure of government.²²

It would be wrong to blame Churchill individually for the way in which the UK had chosen to order its imperial finances, still less for bad weather or for the inadequacies of local civil and military administration. His attitude towards India, however, certainly did condition London's response when the crisis became apparent. Until the summer, the official position was that there was 'no overall shortage of foodgrains', and that problems of hunger were due to food hoarding. Only in July 1943 did officials step up their appeals to the Indian Office for help. Realizing the urgency, Amery pressed his colleagues for food shipments, but the War Cabinet interpreted Indian requests for aid as attempts to avoid unpopular measures to tackle hoarding. Inevitably, discussion of India meant talking about the sterling balances, a topic now guaranteed to induce apoplexy in the prime minister. As debts to India accumulated, the idea that Britain had tied itself into an unfair financial model that ought to be replaced with a version of Mutual Aid became increasingly popular in London. Keynes and Cherwell both wanted to cancel at least a portion of India's accumulated sterling balance: the Treasury was so determined to keep alive the possibility of cancellation that it refused an offer from the government of India to renegotiate the debt onto still more favourable terms.²³ Churchill talked of pressing a counter-claim for the costs entailed in defending the subcontinent. Amery pointed out that this might not be a good idea if Britain required Indian co-operation while the war was still on^{24}

As Amery recognized, however, he was also struggling with the 'military preoccupations of the War Cabinet and the difficulty of diverting shipping from the first duty of winning the war.' With British shipping still hard-pressed, his request for half a million tons of grain imports was whittled down to 150,000 tons of barley and wheat. Churchill wanted to have shipping available to provide food aid to Greece in the event of an Axis evacuation: according to Amery, he argued that 'the starvation of anyhow under-fed Bengalis is less serious than sturdy Greeks, at any rate from the war point of view . . . '26 This was typical: the Cabinet couldn't

start talking about famine relief until the prime minister had unburdened himself of his views on, for example, 'Indians breeding like rabbits and being paid a million a day by us for doing nothing about the war'.²⁷

Public awareness and concern about the disaster grew in the UK during the summer of 1943. By July, Indian and British press reports had started to use the previously forbidden word 'famine' to describe what was happening in Bengal. By September, Home Intelligence was reporting disquiet: 'Though some people admit that they don't know enough about it "to apportion blame", it is asked "how can we plan to feed Europe when our own people in Bengal are starving?" ', 'The general view appears to be that the blame must rest with us . . . '.²⁸

British units in India were self-contained. Well fed by Indian standards inside their camps, the famine had very little direct effect on them. Yet as they travelled in their thousands through Bengal to the front line or back to Calcutta on leave, British personnel passed through scenes of catastrophe. It was the emaciated bodies they'd remember, on the pavements of Calcutta, being cleared away from doorways into bullock carts, or spread out along the railway tracks. Charles Hall, an NCO with the Royal Signals, just returned from the Arakan, remembered passing station after station with platforms packed with starving people. It was different from the poverty he'd observed in India before he'd gone into Burma: 'there's a difference between someone who's undernourished and someone who's a walking skeleton, or an immobile skeleton, and you see all the joints, the knees, where there's hardly any flesh on people's bones.'29 Hall, a Communist, had made contact with the party in India, and only felt he'd grasped the scale of the famine when he read its English-language newspaper, People's War. Like many left-wing soldiers, he was furious at the moral failure of imperialist capitalism.

For Indian soldiers, wartime inflation and the food crisis had different consequences. For some, the guaranteed income and food of military life were reasons to serve. Others thought they could be making more money back home on the farm. Soldiers in Burma and the Middle East were desperately worried about their families' welfare and frustrated that they could do so little to help. Aware of these concerns, the Indian government did its best to shield the traditional recruiting areas of the Punjab from the worst food shortages and comforted troops with propaganda emphasizing their success in protecting living conditions at home. For many Indian soldiers, the army offered their best hope of economic security: unlike their British counterparts, they wanted to stay in it after the war.³⁰

It was the famine's potential effect on the military that stirred the

politicians in London to action. During September, the chiefs of staff notified the War Cabinet that the famine was a 'serious menace to supply operations and to the movement of troops. The sight of famine conditions cannot but cause distress to the European troops and anxiety to the Indian troops as to the condition of their families in other parts of India.' This secured some more grain shipments, but real efforts to address the crisis only began after Wavell started to tackle the situation at the end of October 1943.

Unlike Linlithgow, Wavell didn't worry about the constitutional proprieties of over-riding the provincial government. He went to the streets of Calcutta to see the problem for himself, used the army to move grain into the affected areas and set up a system of rationing. He also encouraged a major overhaul of the local administration. For weeks, his appeals to London for more food aid went unanswered. Not even a bumper rice harvest solved the catastrophe of mass starvation. Wavell thought that it had been 'one of the greatest disasters that has befallen any people under British rule', and that the 'damage to our reputation both among Indians and foreigners in India is incalculable'. 32

Whatever the causes, in India the British were clearly and rightly blamed for having overseen it. The appalling suffering of the starving not only stoked the anger of anti-imperial activists, but also served as evidence of the inadequacy of British rule.³³ Importantly, the famine was just the most extreme facet of an economic crisis that was gripping the whole of India as the country was pushed to its limits by the demands made on it by the war. Coal production was falling as miners found they could earn better wages building military ports or airfields. Everyone, saving a few wealthy war profiteers, was spending more and more of their income on food. Thanks to falling coal supplies and the despatch of engines, tracks and wagons to the Middle East, the railways had become less and less able to move goods and passengers around.³⁴ The strain imposed on India was profound – and the result was an increase in labour militancy in the cities and the countryside, the spread of Communism in rural areas – particularly in Bengal, where the Communists worked hard to try to relieve the famine - and a growing mood of unrest and resistance. These would break out with force after the end of the war, impressing both British officials and Congress Party leaders with the fear that India might soon become ungovernable.35

TEMPERAMENTAL'

At the end of 1943 the revitalization of the Indian army was far from complete. Training levels were patchy, and equipment well below standard. Attempts to improve nutrition struggled against a combination of logistical difficulties and military traditions.³⁶ Morale remained uncertain. Slim certainly believed that his army was fighting for a higher moral purpose, above all the right 'to be free in body and mind'. He also recognized, however, that this was not enough to inspire young men who were serving to put food on their families' tables, middle-class Indian officers already looking forward to the end of imperial rule, or increasingly cynical British soldiers who could only dream of the measures of military welfare now standard in the UK or the Mediterranean. Instead, he focused his soldiers on their shared purpose: 'not to defend India, to stop the Japanese advance, or even to occupy Burma, but to destroy the Japanese army, to smash it as an evil thing.'37 Ultimately, killing and being killed by 'Japs' was what would bind his army together. Like the tactics that enabled victory, this characteristic could only really be developed in battle.³⁸

Nevertheless, the Indian army was on the path from the disasters of 1942–3 to the triumphs of 1944–5. Bearing in mind the depths it had plumbed in spring 1943, this was one of the great military transformations of the war. It went unrecognized by Churchill, and played no part in the solution that he thought he had found to the strategic problems posed by the Japanese and the Americans in the Far East. The plans thrashed out after Quebec were for Wingate's 'Special Force' of Chindits to be inserted behind Japanese lines in northern Burma to assist Stilwell's drive on Myitkyina, while Slim's troops pressed forward from Assam and further Chinese forces drove westwards from Yunnan. Since Wingate refused to use Indians, the British return to northern Burma would be spearheaded by British and Gurkha soldiers. The Indian army would be reduced to a supporting role and garrison duties – just as well, as far as Churchill was concerned, since he doubted both its loyalty and its competence.³⁹

Blessed with the imprimatur of Churchill and the combined chiefs of staff, Wingate returned to India in September 1943 to complete the assembly of six Long Range Penetration Brigades. His progress was slowed only by hospitalization for typhoid, contracted when, in a typically melodramatic moment, he drank water from a vase of flowers in order to quench a thirst. Wingate's demands for troops forced Auchinleck into a

desperate search for British personnel that led to the breaking up of one British division and the conversion of anti-aircraft gunners and tank crew into Chindit infantrymen. Still short of the British and Gurkha soldiers he wanted, Wingate was forced to accept a West African infantry brigade. He also had substantial American air assets under his command. Win-gate's stories of sick and wounded Chindits having to be left behind on his first expedition had horrified 'Hap' Arnold, and he had ordered a new Air Commando Group be formed specifically to support future LRP operations. This included 25 transport planes (which were in desperately short supply throughout the theatre), 100 light aircraft for communications and casualty evacuation, 30 Mustang fighters and 12 medium bombers. 40

The result was a very unbalanced force. It had twenty-four infantry battalions, as many as a conventional corps, but with none of the artillery, engineers or support arms that made such a formation so powerful in combat. It was heavily reliant on a hit-and-run style of combat that worked well for small groups hoping to tie up larger numbers of second-class opponents but offered no means to fix and destroy an enemy's main force. Expanding size led to decreasing returns on the mighty investment of manpower, equipment and aircraft that Wingate had managed to soak up.⁴¹

Fired by his usual messianic zeal, Wingate pressed on with turning soldiers into Chindits. 'Many of you are going to die, or suffer wounds, or near starvation', he told an audience of 1st Battalion The Cameronians after they completed their final exercise. 'All of you will meet hardship worse than anything you have imagined.' This was not a message that went down particularly well with his audience. Wingate was capable of inspiring remarkable loyalty from some of his subordinates, but this promise of victory via redemptive suffering was out of tune with the mood of many of his troops.⁴²

His mission was also being undermined by events. By February 1944, Wingate had three brigades ready to go. By then, however, the Cairo and Teheran conferences had scotched the planned amphibious operations across the Bay of Bengal. Chiang had in turn cancelled the Yunnan offensive, and Slim reduced the scale of the corresponding advance over the Chindwin. Wingate's response was to escalate his own ambitious demands, proposing to Mountbatten a further, grander expansion of his 'Special Force' to create an army that would long-range penetrate all the way to Thailand and Indochina. Slim faced down an attempt to co-opt an Indian division to guard the 'stronghold' positions from which Wingate wanted his mobile columns to operate against Japanese supply lines maintaining Myitkyina.

Convinced of his own rectitude, and working against the clock, Wingate paid no attention to the mountain of systematic staff work that would have been required to keep this second Chindit mission properly directed and supplied. Operation 'Thursday' nonetheless developed considerable momentum and continued to meet the political demand to demonstrate support for the Chinese to the Americans. The officers whom Wingate had antagonized with his impossible demands suspected it was going to be a wasteful fiasco.

Mountbatten too had arrived in Delhi. As usual it was easy to mock his vanity and self-importance – even more so after he abandoned the lethargy of the Indian capital for a palatial headquarters at Kandy in Ceylon with more than five thousand staff, including his personal hairdresser flown out from London to maintain the supreme coiffure. As when at Combined Operations, however, for all the flummery, Mountbatten did the job that Churchill wanted: winning over the Americans and preparing to recapture Britain's Southeast Asian Empire.

Visiting the viceroy in December 1943, Mountbatten persuaded Wavell to sit through a screening of *Casablanca*. As Wavell recalled for his diary, when he confessed that this 'typical film story of the sentimental-thriller type' had left him 'neither touched nor thrilled', Mountbatten was appalled: 'He apparently has one [a film] most nights – "so much easier and quicker than reading a novel" . . .' Wavell replied that biographies and poetry were more his line: to Mountbatten's horror, he said he didn't even like musicals. As that discussion suggested, Mountbatten was closer culturally to his troops. For British servicemen in a demoralized and under-resourced theatre, it wasn't the worst thing to be sent a royal celebrity who enjoyed demonstrating the common touch. Mountbatten's visits to the troops were more theatrical than Slim's, but he did his best to improve supplies of cigarettes, newspapers, letters from home and in-camp entertainment.

Mountbatten's chief of staff, Lieutenant General Sir Henry Pownall, soon developed a balanced view of his flaws and virtues:

apt to put urgency into matters which are not the least urgent or subjects which ought to be carefully considered . . . his energy and drive are most admirable features . . . and his judgement is good when things are put fairly and squarely to him. He doesn't always allow time for that latter item to happen.⁴⁴

Pownall was annoyed by the thrall that Wingate ('a good long way towards being mad') exerted over the supreme commander, but he at least understood the reasons for it:

Mountbatten considers himself personally charged by the PM to look after Wingate's interests and Wingate, being abnormal at best, takes advantage of this to do abnormal things . . . The PM is absolutely set on it, has taken Wingate to his bosom, and rejoices in the fact that Wingate is different from 'stereotyped generals'. 45

Mountbatten's support for Wingate worsened a growing tension with Giffard, heightened by a gaping generational divide. To Mountbatten, his land commander seemed old and staid. Giffard was offended not just by his subordination to Mountbatten and by the attention being paid to Wingate's wishes, but also by the supreme commander's desire to interfere closely in the deployment of his army group. As Pownall diagnosed, Mountbatten's 'highly strung, inconsequential and temperamental' approach to command risked making everybody else 'unbalanced' and nervous as well.⁴⁶

From the start, Admiral Somerville wanted to 'keep Dickie and his party on the right lines' by asserting the operational independence of his Eastern Fleet — which had responsibilities for protecting sea communications far beyond Southeast Asia — against SEAC's tendency to impose direct command. He wanted plans developed in partnership with his fellow air, land and sea commanders-in-chief, whereas Mountbatten preferred to build up his own mighty staff of planners, British and American, who drew up schemes for the commanders to implement. Since both men were very conscious of their status, their dispute widened to include such issues as whether Mountbatten had to be given an invitation before he could stage one of his carefully choreographed 'impromptu' visits to the Eastern Fleet's ships. He

The two men might have squabbled less had there been more for the Royal Navy to do. Following the surrender of the Italian fleet, it started to be reinforced and returned to Ceylon in the autumn of 1943. In February 1944, there was a brief flurry when the Japanese fleet arrived in Singapore. Fears that this presaged another foray into the Indian Ocean were calmed when intelligence revealed that they were there not to raid westwards, but to escape the American onslaught in the Pacific. Joined by the US carrier *Saratoga*, Somerville's ships undertook raids on Sabang (a Japanese base off Sumatra) and Surabaya (a major oil refinery and port). These gave opportunities for training up crews but had little effect on the Japanese war effort. Meanwhile, Mountbatten's planners set to work with a will to come up with new and more grandiose schemes to project imperial amphibious power back into Southeast Asia. ⁴⁹

'THE MORTAL THRUST WILL BE THE PACIFIC THRUST, UPON WHICH THE AMERICANS HAVE ALREADY EMBARKED'

By the end of 1943, the Americans had developed three different strategies for the war against Japan. Generals Marshall and MacArthur favoured an advance through the islands of the Southwest Pacific, retaking New Guinea and the Japanese base at Rabaul and then invading the Philippines. For Marshall, this was a means to secure a Western Pacific base from which to supply China and for air and amphibious offensives against the home islands of Japan. For MacArthur, it was a means of restoring the pride sullied by his humiliating flight from the Philippines in 1942 and fulfilling his promise of eventual return. General Arnold, meanwhile, favoured a bombing offensive against Japan, flown by long-range, technologically advanced B-29 bombers operating from airfields in Nationalist China. The immense logistics effort that would be required for this offensive was the major reason for the burgeoning US presence in India from 1942. Alongside the American desire to keep Chiang Kai-shek in the war, it explained the pressure on the British to advance into northern Burma and allow the construction of a land route – the Ledo Road – and a fuel pipeline into Nationalist China. Until these were built, all supplies had to be flown over the 'Hump' of the Himalayas, a dangerous operation that required a major commitment of transport aircraft, of which the Americans were very protective.⁵⁰

A third strategy, developed by Admiral King, involved a naval offensive across the Central Pacific towards the Mariana Islands, and from there, a direct assault on Japan. As King appreciated, the Marianas would provide a transformative airbase, not only for attacks on Japanese merchant shipping, against which the US Navy was already conducting a successful submarine campaign, but also by putting the B-29s within range of the Japanese home islands.⁵¹

Initially, King, like everyone else, thought of a Central Pacific thrust in terms of a series of hops between isolated island chains. A key step would be the seizure of the heavily fortified base at Truk. The vast size of the Pacific meant each operation would require an immense maritime effort, not just to launch the assault force but to keep it supplied and repaired. They would also require the US Navy to project decisive air power across the ocean – something that, despite the vast output of US shipyards and aircraft factories, it could not do until quite late in the war. Only in May

1943 did King regain the fleet carrier strength he had had before the Battle of Midway almost a year before. By the end of 1943, another three carriers had been launched, and during 1944 the US fleet carrier strength would double, from seven to fourteen vessels.

By the autumn of 1943, the strain of the huge scale of the Pacific War was already affecting the Japanese military machine. The toll of merchant shipping being taken by US submarines significantly reduced supplies of aviation fuel and made it harder to keep distant garrisons supplied. At the same moment, all three Allied campaigns got under way. In November 1943, the US Navy began its Central Pacific advance with the invasion of the Gilbert Islands, including a three-day battle for the atoll of Tarawa. From September, Australian and American forces under General MacArthur launched Operation 'Cartwheel', a multiphase series of attacks on both sides of the Vitiaz Strait intended first to allow the capture of Rabaul, but which in fact enabled it to be isolated and bypassed instead. These were bloody, brutal battles, in which the Japanese continued to display the capacity for fighting hard, even in the direct circumstances, which they had shown at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands a few months before. The battles also, however, showed Allied forces using their growing material strength and an increasingly sophisticated approach to combined operations. The assault towards Lae in New Guinea in August and September 1943, for example, saw the secret construction of an advanced airbase so that USAAF fighters could quickly seize air superiority, an amphibious landing, a paratrooper descent and the air transport of Australian reinforcements – all of which left the Japanese completely outmanoeuvred.⁵²

The American supreme commanders in the Pacific – Admiral Nimitz and MacArthur – were extraordinarily powerful figures, directing highly modern, technologically advanced forces in operations that stretched across vast expanses of sea and sky. This was the sort of role into which the new supreme commander of Southeast Asia felt he could fit perfectly. Mountbatten never wanted the strategic equivalent of the Oscar for best supporting actor. Nor did Churchill want British forces relegated to easing the flow of American supplies. Singapore being to the prime minister rather what the Philippines were to MacArthur, he was still fixated on the idea of seizing the northern tip of Sumatra as the first step towards a reconquest of Malaya. Even as he recuperated after the Cairo conference, therefore, Churchill instructed Mountbatten to plan to initiate Operation 'Culverin', the codename for the Sumatran landings, in the autumn of 1944 (see Map 4).⁵³

Unrealized by the prime minister, an alternative strategy had already emerged. Conscious of the gathering pace of the American offensives, at Cairo the chiefs of staff had pressed for British forces to be included in the outline plans for the conclusion of the war in the Pacific. The Royal Navy's capital ships, now increasingly lacking major Axis units to fight in the west, would be transferred eastwards to form a new British Pacific Fleet, based in Australia, which would join the US Navy in its drive across the central ocean. Once Germany was defeated, RAF squadrons and British army divisions would also be shipped out to take part in an eventual invasion of Japan. Such a contribution would make no difference to the outcome of the conflict, but it would allow the British to demonstrate their continued commitment to defending the Empire, and prove to the Americans that they were a worthy ally, strengthening the key military relationship on which they would rely after the war.

A British commitment to the Central Pacific would drain the strength away from SEAC's operations in the Indian Ocean. At the start of 1944, Mountbatten's staff responded with their own ambitious plans – this time to tie in with MacArthur's advance across the Southwest Pacific. The Ledo Road, they argued, was a waste of effort. Instead of tying resources down in northern Burma, they proposed a leapfrogging amphibious campaign, via Sumatra and Malaya and up the coast towards Hong Kong, to meet the American— Australian drive across the South China Sea. The enormous combined forces required for SEAC's plan would have put Mountbatten in charge of the largest fleet deployed under British command at any point during the Second World War. He was very enthusiastic about its potential.

Between February and March 1944, a team of SEAC planners toured London and Washington trying to drum up support. This sparked a hostile response from Stilwell. As commander of US forces in the China-Burma-India theatre, as well as Mountbatten's deputy at SEAC, he fought back hard against his own chief's plans, not least in the American press. In his diary, Stilwell referred to Mountbatten as 'childish', 'glamour boy' and 'pisspot'. Mountbatten and his staff fully reciprocated the sentiments. They thought Stilwell's focus on northern Burma was unbalancing the whole theatre and sought repeatedly to have him removed.⁵⁴

Churchill had initialled the conclusions of the Cairo conference that recorded the British commitment of a fleet to the Pacific. He hadn't, however, taken in the detail. Only after he returned to London in January 1944 did he notice what the chiefs had agreed. Understanding that this would mean no 'Culverin', he squared up for a fight. The result – often

ignored in histories that concentrate on British anxieties about the imminent invasion of Northwest Europe – was the longest and most bitter dispute between the prime minister and his strategic advisors of the entire war.

While these arguments were raging, the American advance towards Japan gathered pace. As elsewhere, the real game-changer was US airpower. In the Central Pacific, it meant that US naval task forces could effectively seal off an atoll such as Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands, as they did in February 1944, and pound it with so many shells and bombs that the final assault was relatively light in US casualties. More importantly, as became apparent in the operations mounted in the same month against Truk and Rabaul, American naval airpower could be used to overwhelm key Japanese bases without having to capture them. The fortress islands could be left to wither on the vine. The US Navy's ability to establish air supremacy even over well-defended islands was unlike anything anyone had done before. Rather than take Truk and Rabaul, the Americans pressed on straight to the Marianas and the Philippines.⁵⁵

As the chiefs told Churchill, unless the Americans agreed to divert aircraft carriers and landing ships away from the Pacific (never a likely possibility), the British would be unable to launch an attack like 'Culverin' until Germany was defeated. Even on the most optimistic schedule, no one thought that was going to happen before October 1944, which meant that the very earliest 'Culverin' could happen was March 1945. While it prepared to attack Sumatra, SEAC would have to sit immobile while the Americans defeated Japan. In contrast, if Britain could reach agreement with America and Australia, the task of moving ships and finding bases for the British Pacific Fleet could start immediately. Heading to the Pacific offered the best chance of preserving British power.

If, like Churchill, you simply refused to acknowledge the central issues of practicability and timing, however, there was much to be said for his plans. Since the Americans were still talking about putting the world's empires into international trust, retaking Malaya was much more important than tagging along with the US Navy. As the prime minister put it to the chiefs on 3 March 1944, the Americans might 'feel with conviction: "We won the victory and liberated these places, and we must have the dominating say in their future and derive full profit from their produce" . . '56 The chiefs' response was tart:

Whatever strategy we follow, the major credit for the defeat of Japan is likely to go to the Americans. Their resources and their geographical position make them the predominant partner in Japan's defeat. The mortal thrust will be the Pacific thrust, upon which the

With everyone strained by the approach of 'Overlord', Brooke frustrated at the years he had spent nannying the prime minister, and the combustible Andrew Cunningham having replaced the somnolent Admiral Pound, the atmosphere became simultaneously toxic and explosive.

Via Dill, Brooke asked the US chiefs for their help in confining Churchill. The Americans, keen for the British to concentrate on clearing Burma, obliged. The prime minister marshalled Attlee, Eden and Lyttelton, the production minister, to emphasize the political importance of operations in Southeast Asia. When that failed to move the chiefs, he told them that he would overrule them and set his own strategic priorities. Prolonged argument, abuse and dirty tricks were things to which the chiefs were used by now: the announcement that he would ignore their judgement was a new departure. It left Brooke worrying that Churchill was losing his mind. Together, the chiefs of staff decided to offer their collective resignation if he went his own way. Given the strength of his popular reputation at the time, Churchill could doubtless have survived their departure, but their threat raised the stakes in a way he could not ignore. ⁵⁸

For a while, Churchill seemed to come round to abandoning 'Culverin', at least for 1944. The chiefs sought a compromise, developing a 'middle strategy' in which the fleet would operate westwards from Australia – striking north to Singapore before turning back towards Hong Kong, or tracking the left flank of MacArthur's offensive through the Philippines. This was not what the chiefs really wanted, but it provided a means to win Churchill round to the shift of effort to Australia. ⁵⁹

During May and June 1944, the British chiefs secured Australian and American agreement to these plans. MacArthur, who had long struggled with his arguments with the US Navy, was pleased enough to have a fleet of his own – providing it was fully under his command. This was a condition to which the British chiefs were willing to acquiesce. When they explained the idea to Churchill, he said that he wanted to attack across the Bay of Bengal to take back Singapore.⁶⁰

By then, Eden and Attlee had both come to see that the idea of an independent British amphibious offensive charging across Southeast Asia was a fantasy. Yet the prime minister kept replaying earlier discussions or just going off on a tangent whenever the need for a decision was mentioned. Brooke and Cunningham thought he was no longer able to follow the arguments. It seems more likely that Churchill understood but

didn't like what he heard, and so simply refused to make up his mind, played for time and hoped, as usual, that things would turn out for the best.⁶¹

'A MILLION SHATTERED TREE STUMPS'

While these arguments raged in Whitehall, Indian, British and Chinese forces fought the Japanese along the Indo-Burmese border. From December 1943, Stilwell led an offensive by Chinese troops towards Myitkyina and Mogaung, assisted by the American equivalent of the Chindits, the 5307th Provisional Regiment, a unit nicknamed, after its commander, 'Merrill's Marauders'. In a slow and bloody series of actions, the Chinese and Americans forced the Japanese out of one jungle defensive position after another.

From 8 February 1944, the Chindits moved in to cut off Myitkyina from the south. Over the next six weeks, one brigade marched 450 miles from Assam, while two more were flown in between 5 and 10 March. By 12 April, two further brigades had been flown in. Both their arrival and the size of the force took the Japanese by surprise. Wingate had hoped to expand his offensive to interfere with the supply lines of the Japanese facing the Fourteenth Army, but on 24 March he was killed in an air crash. Slim replaced him with one of the Chindit brigadiers, Walter 'Joe' Lentaigne, who was told to concentrate his efforts in support of Stilwell to the north. 62

The Japanese had scraped together about a division's worth of infantry to counter the Chindit incursion, but neither this diversion of strength nor the damage done to their supply lines resulted in a speedy end to the campaign. On 17 May 1944, Merrill's Marauders took the airfield outside Myitkyina and more Chinese units were flown in to take up the assault, but they could not capture the town. A new Chinese offensive from Yunnan failed to force the Japanese into withdrawal. The Chindits were now placed directly under Stilwell's command. He treated them as carelessly as the rest of his troops, directing some into an attack on the fortified town of Mogaung, while others adopted fixed blocking positions across Japanese lines of communication.

In both cases, Chindit units, already exhausted from the strain of long jungle marches with heavy packs, had to abandon their tactics of avoiding unfavourable combat and were required to act as conventional infantry, just as the monsoon began to limit their air support and make fighting

conditions still more miserable and their health worse. Rates of malaria and sickness and diarrhoea had already been high: almost half the 10,800 British other ranks who served with the Chindits in 1943–4 were eventually hospitalized, with the sick outnumbering battle casualties four to one. On 23 June 1944, they took Mogaung, but by then the condition of the whole force was so bad that the earliest arrivals had to be evacuated. Myitkyina continued to hold out.

In the meantime, the decisive battles had taken place further south. Since November 1943, Slim's XV Corps had been moving forward into the Arakan. Once more it came up against deep Japanese defences built on mutually supporting and apparently indestructible bunkers. Despite improvements in the artillery, armour and air support since the last Arakan offensive, the advance was held up by the forest fortress of Razabil on 26-30 January 1944. As the Fourteenth Army began to learn, for all the emphasis on infiltration through the jungle, these sorts of positions could only be taken by deliberate attacks that required a different set of tactics – drawn in part from the experience of Australian troops 'bunker-busting' in New Guinea. Since the terrain made it hard to co-ordinate artillery barrages or air strikes with an infantry assault, individual bunker positions had to be suppressed by tanks or anti-tank guns, manoeuvred laboriously into position, long enough for the infantry to get close and destroy them with grenades or pole charges. Even when successful, attacks like this took a long time and cost a lot of casualties.⁶⁴

Then the Japanese counter-attacked. Repeating their usual offensive tactics, they moved quickly through gaps in the front line, cut off the 7th Indian Division and overran the divisional headquarters. Rather than retreat and disintegrate, however, this time the surrounded troops formed all-round defensive 'boxes' and stood their ground. Supplies were brought up on mules and air-dropped in. The focus of the fighting took place around the 'Admin Box', formed around XV Corps' maintenance area at Sinzweya, where the 7th Indian Division's headquarters reassembled. It was held by a few infantrymen fighting alongside a mix of mechanics, clerks and storemen, supported by tanks and artillery that allowed the defenders to outgun the Japanese. While the boxes fought off repeated assaults. the divisions outside the encirclement themselves counterattacked, forcing the Japanese to withdraw on 24 February 1944.

One of the reasons that the Japanese had attacked was to pin down Slim's reserves ahead of a major offensive of their own on the Assam front. General Mutaguchi Renya, the Japanese commander, believed that once his Fifteenth Army attacked, the British would quickly withdraw. He

ordered his men across the River Chindwin and through the thick jungle to seize the supply bases that the British had been building up at Imphal and Dimapur. A vast animal supply chain – the Japanese columns were accompanied by herds of goats and more than 12,000 horses and mules, 30,000 oxen and 1,000 elephants – would keep the attackers going until they could capture the British supply dumps, which would then sustain their further advance.⁶⁶

Beyond Dimapur, Mutaguchi dreamed of setting India ablaze. In May 1943, the Indian nationalist leader Subhas Chandra Bose arrived back in the Far East from Berlin. From July, he based himself in Singapore, where he reinvigorated the Indian National Army and set up a new provisional government. The first incarnation of the INA had collapsed at the end of 1942, when the Japanese arrested and exiled its leader, Mohan Singh. The Indian volunteers who had joined the new army had been returned to their POW camps. Under Bose's leadership, the INA was reborn. Eventually, it numbered 45,000 Indians, about two-thirds of whom were former soldiers in the British Indian army, the rest civilians recruited from the territory occupied by the Japanese. The Japanese were disposed to treat the INA as a paramilitary labour corps rather than as an ally in the fight for Asian liberation, but Bose pressed for his men to take part in the forthcoming offensive. When his liberating army appeared, he promised, Indian battalions would desert the British en masse. So, while INA saboteurs were dropped off Japanese submarines in the Bay of Bengal, the 1st INA Division accompanied the Japanese over the Chindwin and into Assam.⁶⁷

Signals intelligence meant that Slim knew that Mutaguchi's attack was coming, though he over-estimated how long it would take to develop. He planned to withdraw his IV Corps into the more open country around the supply dumps on the Imphal Plain. Reorganized for defence, these would make it easier to maintain supplies and ensure that the Fourteenth Army's superiority in artillery and air support could tell. When the Japanese struck earlier than expected, on 7–8 March 1944, the 17th Indian Division was surprised and IV Corps had to commit its reserves to help it extricate itself and withdraw on Imphal.

Slim had prepared to move the veteran 5th Indian Division from the Arakan to support IV Corps. He now needed to accelerate this reinforcement. Mountbatten, having already secured the combined chiefs' permission to remove transport aircraft from the Himalayan 'Hump' operations to fly in supplies to the Arakan, promised to use these aircraft to airlift the division into Imphal. Giffard and Slim meanwhile moved all available units as quickly as possible to support the Assam front. These

included XXXIII Corps, then in reserve in India, which Slim intended to use to strike back at the Japanese as they pinned themselves against the Imphal defences. Nonetheless, Mountbatten decided that Giffard was acting too slowly. He would soon become convinced not only that he had to sack Giffard, but that his own decisive action had saved the day.⁶⁸

As a prolonged stand by the 50th Indian Parachute Brigade at Sangshak saved the vital airfields from attack, between 19 and 29 March 1944 the whole of the 5th Indian Division – including its guns, jeeps and mules – was airlifted into Imphal. As the Japanese lapped round its attempts to block their advance, IV Corps established an all-round defence, which would also have to be sustained from the air. Despite Mountbatten's success in securing aircraft from the 'Hump', still more were needed to keep IV Corps supplied. After a wrangle with both the British and the American chiefs of staff, more US Dakotas and crews were secured from the Mediterranean. Fourteenth Army's needs now competed with those of Alexander's troops in Italy and the forthcoming invasion of France. The aircraft were meant to stay only for a month, but Mountbatten – in a key intervention – ordered them to remain and maintain the supply run after the start of the monsoon. In an astonishing display of aerial logistics, between 18 April and 30 June 1944, RAF and USAAF planes flew 7,500 sorties to supply Imphal, bringing in 19,000 reinforcements, 13,000 tons of cargo and 835,000 gallons of petrol, and flying out 43,000 noncombatants and 13,000 casualties.⁶⁹ In a sign of the air superiority enjoyed by Allied forces, the RAF squadrons involved lost only three Dakotas to enemy action and twenty-nine to other causes, mostly the result of the bad monsoon weather. 70

While the planes stayed, IV Corps could hold out. In a series of messy battles between April and June 1944, Japanese attacks failed with heavy losses. To the north, however, Slim had under-estimated the strength of the thrust that the Japanese would launch along the road from Imphal, via Kohima, to the supply dump at Dimapur. When the strength of this attack became apparent, reinforcements had to be rushed in to meet the unanticipated threat. A hastily thrown-together garrison included one of 5th Indian Division's British battalions, the 4th Royal West Kents, elements of the Assam Regiment, the Assam Rifles and the 4/7 Rajputs: in total, a weak infantry brigade, in which the majority of troops were Indians. It would have to hold off a Japanese division.

From 8–18 April 1944, the garrison endured a terrible siege. After the Japanese took the main water source, supplies ran very low. Japanese shelling and attacks were unremitting. There was nowhere safe to treat the

wounded, and it seemed certain that the station would fall. Air drops into the beleaguered garrison were very difficult and supplies often fell into the hands of the Japanese. By persisting with their attacks, however, the Japanese missed the bigger prize of seizing Dimapur.

Arriving from India, XXXIII Corps secured Dimapur and broke back through the Japanese lines to re-establish contact with Kohima on 18 April. Newly arrived troops gagged at the sight and smell of the tiny battlefield, which was carpeted with shellholes, dismembered dead and unburied faeces. The lead formation, the 2nd British Division, needed to clear the Japanese positions on the Kohima Ridge and reopen the Kohima—Imphal Road to allow XXXIII Corps to act as the hammer against the anvil of the besieged IV Corps. Speed was important, because Slim wanted to restart an offensive into Burma before the Americans insisted on the return of their transport planes.

By the middle of April, the Japanese division that had marched on Kohima was in a terrible state. Worse than the losses it had suffered in battle were the casualties caused by disease. Food had run low, and, as the mules were killed for meat, it took longer and longer for the dwindling supplies of ammunition to reach the front. The 2nd British Division, however, was not well prepared for the battle it was about to face. It had not fought together as a complete formation since 1940, had until recently been preparing for amphibious operations, and, arriving fully motorized, had suddenly to switch its road-bound lorries for mules and porters. On a confined battlefield against an opponent dug in to bunkers, there was little room for infiltration: instead the division launched a series of direct attacks and flanking manoeuvres with all the artillery support it could muster. These were all costly failures. Only when Indian army formations arrived to reinforce the British did the offensive start to make progress. The fighting stripped the jungle from the hills, 'leaving' in the memory of one British officer, 'a million shattered tree stumps'. 72

It took six weeks of brutal close-quarter fighting before the Japanese were finally driven out of the bunkers and trenches they had built around Kohima. Only on 22 June 1944 was the last roadblock brushed aside and the road into Imphal opened. By that point, the monsoon had been going for nearly a month. Finally, Mutaguchi asked his superiors for permission to withdraw. By the time this request was granted on 5 July, the retreat was already well under way. Wracked by malaria, dysentery and typhus, Japanese soldiers fell at the side of the jungle tracks and died, or clasped grenades to their chests and committed suicide.⁷³

Defeating the Japanese offensive had cost 16,700 Indian and British

casualties.⁷⁴ It had been a disaster for the local tribes, who had helped the British but more than 41,000 of whom were still refugees in September 1944.⁷⁵ The Japanese had suffered at least 53,000 casualties. Nearly half of all the Japanese soldiers who took part in the campaign may have been killed or died from wounds, illness or starvation.⁷⁶ The Indian National Army had also suffered terrible losses. Its propaganda had had no noticeable effect on the troops under British command, and about a third of the nine thousand INA troops who took part in the campaign were killed or starved to death. Another seven hundred surrendered.⁷⁷

Rather than halt for the monsoon, Slim drove the pursuit forward, resting the divisions that had borne the brunt of the Imphal and Kohima battles and pushing fresher units to the Chindwin river. Air supply allowed the advance down the Tiddim Road to be continued even though the road itself collapsed into muddy ruin behind the forward units. Down the malaria-infested Kabaw valley, in the worst weather of the campaign, Slim sent the 11th East African Division. Slim did not have the highest faith in African soldiers' fighting abilities, but he wrongly believed that they had a naturally higher resistance to malaria. The East Africans grappled through a liquid landscape, but as the monsoon eased in October and November, they reached and crossed the Chindwin. The pursuit had cost the Fourteenth Army fifty thousand casualties, 90 per cent of them to illness, but it was ready to carry its offensive into central Burma.⁷⁸

The fighting on the Arakan and Assam fronts in early 1944 was some of the most intense and atrocious of the entire war. In their first encounters with the Japanese, inexperienced British and Indian troops were hesitant and slow to adapt to jungle conditions. Yet the fact that Slim's army had not fled forced the Japanese to mount prolonged sieges for which they were unprepared, against an enemy strong in artillery, tanks and air support. Stubborn as they were in defence, in attack the Japanese kept using the same tactics that had worked for them at the start of the war: 'jitter' raids to get their enemies to reveal their position and use up their ammunition, night-time raids to isolate their opponents, and massed infantry charges to rush defensive positions. The Commonwealth armies had learned how to deal with these attacks: holding their fire, protecting their perimeter, and calling down their guns to destroy Japanese assaults. They had got better as a result of their defeats in 1942 and 1943. The Japanese had not.⁷⁹

How to take on the Japanese in battle was not all that Indian and British soldiers had learned. During the defence of the 7th Indian

Division's 'Admin Box' on 7 February 1944, Japanese soldiers captured the divisional Main Dressing Station. Thirty-five medical staff and patients were massacred. News of this and other incidents spread rapidly and managed what propaganda sessions in Indian training camps had not. When the Japanese launched desperate attacks, the defenders fought for their lives. Since the Japanese not only regarded surrender as a disgrace but had been told that the British would torture and kill any prisoners, they too fought ferociously in defence. Once British and Indian soldiers learned that even wounded Japanese could be a threat, they had little incentive to leave any of them alive, and the Japanese still less to cease fighting. Conditioned by the circumstances of battle, both sides not only abandoned any expectation of mercy, but fought with a mix of fanaticism and fatalism that reflected their understanding that they had no choice.⁸⁰

OPERATION 'ICHI-GŌ' AND THE START OF THE END OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The battles at Kohima and Imphal and the pursuit over the Chindwin were an appalling defeat for the Japanese army, which laid the basis for the still more remarkable campaign that Slim would fight to re-conquer Burma in 1945. Neither operation, however, had any significance for the eventual defeat of Japan.

In August 1944, Stilwell finally took Myitkyina. With the Japanese forced out of northern Burma, the path was now open to complete the Ledo Road and connect American supply dumps in India to Nationalist China. The new link was completed in December 1944. By that point, the whole shape of the US drive across the Pacific had changed. Airfields completed, B-29s flown laboriously into position and supplies arriving over the 'Hump', on 15 June 1944 the USAAF was able to launch its first long-range bombing raids from China against Japan. The Japanese had already prepared their counter-strike: an enormous offensive by the army in China to destroy the airbases and open a route to Indochina. Operation 'Ichi-Gō', Japan's last-gasp endeavour to secure its position in mainland Asia, involved half a million troops and two hundred bombers. In May 1944, it smashed its way into the Nationalist armies in central China. Nationalist fighting power had badly deteriorated since 1941, and Chiang's best remaining troops had gone south with Stilwell and died in the Burmese jungle. His regime was soon in severe trouble. As the Nationalist armies disintegrated over the summer, the Japanese advanced headlong, displacing the US airfields and breaking through to Indochina in the autumn of 1944. About three-quarters of a million Chinese became casualties. Roosevelt's faith in Chiang's government was broken, Sino-American relations badly damaged and Stilwell was recalled to the United States. The Americans began to wonder how to get the more ruthlessly efficient Chinese Communist Party fully into the war.⁸¹

The loss of the Chinese airfields and the near collapse of the Nationalist regime removed most of the reasons that the Americans had forced the British to fight a campaign in northern Burma, but it didn't impede the US bombing campaign against Japan. On 15 June 1944, the Americans launched their assault on Saipan, the largest island in the Marianas. In a colossal demonstration of combined sea and air power, the invasion fleet and its thousand carrier-borne aircraft squashed Japanese resistance before the Marines went ashore to complete the capture of the island. The Imperial Japanese Navy tried to strike back, in the days after the initial landing, at the Battle of the Philippine Sea, the largest single naval confrontation of the war. It was a disaster for the Japanese, with poorly trained aircrew shot down in droves and six carriers sunk or badly damaged. By the end of July, the Americans had captured Saipan, Tinian and Guam and had secure island bases within B-29 range of Japan.

It was clear that there was no way back, and, in Tokyo, the Tojo government resigned. The fierceness of Japanese resistance even in defeat, however, showed there was still much fighting ahead, not least between King, Marshall and MacArthur as they argued about future strategy in the Pacific. King argued there was no need to take the Philippines before developing an offensive against Japan. Marshall, anticipating that an invasion would be bloody and unnecessary, accepted the argument. MacArthur violently disagreed. So fierce was the dispute that a seriously ill Roosevelt had to fly to Hawaii at the end of July 1944 to settle matters directly. Concerned that MacArthur might run as a Republican candidate in the forthcoming presidential election, Roosevelt gave in to his demands for an invasion of Luzon, the main island of the Philippines. He thus condemned US forces – and Filipino civilians – to a bloody, atrocious and strategically completely unnecessary campaign. ⁸³

At least the Americans had made up their minds. Churchill and the British chiefs were still deadlocked over the right strategy for the Far East. As the Fourteenth Army pursued the Japanese, SEAC produced two plans for future offensive action in Burma. Operation 'Capital' would continue the ground offensive from the north. Operation 'Dracula' would launch a

huge amphibious assault from the south through Rangoon. One thing on which Churchill and the chiefs could agree was their dislike of 'Capital', which they expected would be costly in lives and very prolonged. They all preferred 'Dracula', but the prime minister was unimpressed because it would commit SEAC to Burma rather than Sumatra and Singapore. He wanted SEAC, having taken Rangoon from the sea, to swing eastwards to Malaya rather than occupying the Burmese interior. A swift and overwhelming 'Dracula', however, would have required landing ships and Indian infantry divisions from Italy, from where Churchill by this point hoped to launch a strike across the Adriatic and the Alps. It would take a long time, and more bitter arguments, before the prime minister accepted that he couldn't have either of these offensives.⁸⁴

The British chiefs asked the Americans and Australians to consider the provision of an imperial task force to fight alongside MacArthur in the Southwest Pacific – the so-called 'middle strategy'. After another clash with Churchill at the start of August, they thought they had settled on a compromise. Britain would start by offering a fleet for the Central Pacific and an offensive in Burma. Only if this was rejected would they adopt the middle strategy, sending a task force for service on MacArthur's left flank. In the meantime, however, the American joint chiefs formally accepted what was now meant to be Britain's fall-back offer as their first choice. Worse, Churchill remained insistent that he wanted an early assault on Singapore. As the British prepared for one of the most crucial conferences of the war, at Quebec in September 1944, they were no nearer settling what part they wanted to play in the final defeat of Japan.

By then, even fewer people in Britain were paying any attention to Burma. Their eyes were fixed on the overwhelming victory that the Allies had just won in Northwest Europe, which they hoped would bring a quick end to the war.

21

'Everybody talking about the Second Front now'

January–June 1944

'I knew summat was on directly I 'eard them planes going over.' The woman was describing the morning of 6 June 1944 to a Mass-Observer:

Thousands of 'em. I must 'ave dozed off, for 'e (pointing to husband) woke me up, and asked the time. Funny like, I says, 'ave a look at the clock, that'll tell yer,' and 'e says, 'The clock's stopped at 'aff past five.' 'Stopped,' I says, 'that's funny, it's never stopped since yer father died. Summat's 'appened, I can feel it. It must be the Second Front's begun.' 1

It was 9.30 that morning before the official announcement came over the BBC. Lots of people missed the news because they'd left for work. In a south London factory, the management were persuaded to put the 11 o'clock bulletin through to the loudspeakers on the shopfloor. Then, 'Some seemed to be too much excited to concentrate on their work, whilst others were stimulated into working faster than ever', though 'Poor Lily, whose boy is in a corvette, was in tears most of the day.' Emotions, reported Home Intelligence, were generally well concealed: "Everyone is inwardly thrilled", but people are undemonstrative, and there are few signs of jubilation. Many are said to be awed, both by the magnitude of the operations and the issues at stake.'

Given the undeniable drama of the moment, it's easy to understand the weight of historical writing that focuses on D-Day and the subsequent ground fighting in Normandy.⁴ To appreciate what those events meant, however, it is necessary to widen the aperture, and see the Battle of Normandy as just the core of a larger, longer, multifaceted campaign, fought between January and August 1944, that stretched from production lines in the US, via the Atlantic convoy routes and the Channel coasts of the UK and France, to the skies over Regensburg, Leipzig and London (see Map 5). The next two chapters describe this intensely modern campaign,

explain why it took the course it did and explore its consequences for Britain's war.

'MAYBE THE BOMBING WILL ACCELERATE MATTERS'

'Everybody talking about the Second Front now, whereas a short time ago you heard people say "it's always just coming but never comes" ', explained a forty-five-year-old typist from Forest Hill in her New Year's Day 1944 diary entry for Mass-Observation. 'Cold shivers go down my spine when I think about it . . . Somehow I have not much confidence in our military leaders . . . But maybe the bombing will accelerate matters. I can't let myself think about the bombing either.' ⁵

Aerial bombardment was the dominant feature of Western Europe's experience of war in 1944. The air industries of Britain, Germany and America were all at their wartime peak. As the Germans concentrated production on fighters, they turned out more than 40,000 aircraft, overtaking the number of aircraft produced by the UK for the first time. The structural weight of aircraft produced by British factories, however, remained far higher, reflecting the emphasis on the manufacture of heavy made than bombers. The Americans more 96,000 aircraft. comprehensively out-building everybody else and enabling them to fight an overwhelming high-tech war on both sides of the planet at the same time.6

As Bomber Command struggled through the last weeks of its offensive against Berlin, the Luftwaffe launched a new bombing campaign against Britain. Aiming to disrupt invasion preparations and bolster German morale, from 21 January 1944 it began what the British called the 'Baby Blitz' – thirteen substantial raids against London in the space of three months, the largest involving more than four hundred aircraft, followed by attacks against southern ports. Against fearsome anti-aircraft fire and radar-equipped night-fighters, poorly trained German aircrew struggled to have any effect. On the first of the January raids, only about thirty tons of bombs hit London, and 8 per cent of the German planes failed to return. Five raids from 18 to 25 February were more concentrated and accurate, but failed to start the intended conflagration. The size of the high explosive bombs and the proportion of incendiaries were much higher than during the Blitz, but they failed to overwhelm the Civil Defence services. Finally

called into action after years of sleepless nights, the Fire Guards extinguished most of the incendiaries shortly after they fell.⁸

The raids, however, came as a severe shock to Londoners who had stopped taking precautions when the sirens went. During the first three months of 1944, about 1,300 people were killed by German bombing. There was greatly increased demand for Morrison shelters, but according to the London Regional Commissioner, Anderson shelters had fallen out of favour because of the ear-splitting intensity of the British barrage. If people had to leave their houses, then they wanted somewhere that was safe and quiet: by the start of March 1944, 150,000 people were sheltering in the Underground each evening, with more than a third staying all night.

By then, the German offensive was on its last legs. Accumulating losses meant that the raids got smaller as time went on. When the Germans turned, unsuccessfully, against the invasion ports, one in ten of the raiders that took off did not return. Altogether, the Germans had dropped about 4,000 tons of bombs on the UK between January and May 1944 – about 1.5 per cent of the weight of bombs that Bomber Command and the US Eighth Air Force released over Germany and Occupied Europe over the same period. The raids made no difference at all to 'Overlord'.

At the start of the year, Bomber Command and the US Eighth Air Force both had just over eight hundred heavy bombers available for operations in the UK. By the middle of 1944, the Eighth Air Force had 2,100 heavy bombers to Bomber Command's 1,100, while the US Fifteenth Air Force, operating out of Italy, had almost another 1,200 aircraft.¹³ The presence of vast US bomber fleets became a defining sight of wartime skies. There were so many planes that their vapour trails affected the weather, conjuring up their own cloud systems that lowered temperatures on the ground.¹⁴

The Allies therefore possessed the four-thousand-plus bomber force at which the RAF had aimed in 1941. As the British had intended, most of them had been made in American factories. What they had not foreseen, however, was that the majority were now also flown by American airmen, under the control of an American general, Carl Spaatz, and that, as a result, the United States had become the dominant partner in the Combined Bombing Offensive.

The disparity in hitting power between the two allies was not in fact as great as the numbers of bomber aircraft might suggest. Each Lancaster usually carried more than twice the bombload of a B-17 or B-24 and, as

Bomber Command was re-equipped with Lancasters and Mosquitos, its total bombload doubled between December 1943 and September 1944.¹⁵ It wasn't just what the Americans had, however, but what they did with it that mattered.

By the start of 1944, the Eighth Air Force's bombers were supported by large numbers of fighters, including squadrons of P-51 Mustangs that could escort the bombers deep into Germany. By June 1944, there were 3,046 US fighters in the UK.¹⁶ The Americans overhauled their tactics, allowing the fighters to range away from the bombers to seek battle with the German fighters, which were targeted as they assembled using RAF radio intercepts. General Spaatz was eager to use this formidable force to secure the 'Pointblank' objective: air superiority before the 'Overlord' invasion began.

While the British and Germans rained ineffectual blows on each other's capital cities, therefore, the Americans won the European air war. On 19 February 1944, the weather cleared sufficiently for the all-out assault Spaatz wanted. What followed was Operation 'Argument', the 'Big Week' in which American aircraft flew more than six thousand sorties against aircraft factories and ball-bearing plants, while the escorts took on the Luftwaffe's fighters over Germany. Over that week, the Americans dropped as many tons of bombs as the Eighth Air Force had managed in its entire first year of operations. ¹⁷

The damage caused to the German airframe industry was extensive but not critical. The scale of the attack, however, forced the Germans to disperse production eastwards or into underground facilities, costing time and output. Speer took over aircraft production for the first time. With the director of the Armament Ministry's Technical Office, Karl-Otto Saur, he made more brutal use of foreign workers and concentration camp inmates to increase aircraft output. Aircraft production in February 1944 was 18 per cent down on January, but by March it had bounced back and continued to increase until July 1944. ¹⁸

During March and April 1944, Spaatz sent his bombers against aircraft plants deep inside Germany, giving plenty of time for the escorts to take on the defending fighters. Enormous dogfights erupted. In March, the German air force lost more than half its fighter strength. American losses were also heavy: 226 bombers were destroyed during 'Big Week' alone. These losses, however, were quickly made up, while the Germans were being worn down. Despite the production drive and the withdrawal of aircraft from the Mediterranean and the Eastern Front, they struggled to

maintain the number of planes defending the Reich.²⁰ Attacking the Luftwaffe was only part of Spaatz's plan, however. His staff proposed wrecking Germany's fighting power and war economy by striking the oil industry, rubber production and the transport network. Spaatz prioritized the last of these.

'NO-BALL'

The strategic struggle was not the only bombing campaign going on. During the final months of 1943, British intelligence tracked German testing of their V1 flying bomb in the Baltic and identified the 'ski-site' bunkers which had sprung up on the French coast. German operational testing focused attention on the flying bomb rather than the V2 rocket as the most imminent threat to London. Since the Air Ministry's scientific intelligence expert R. V. Jones was reading decrypted versions of the same radar plots being studied by German technicians, Cherwell was able to reassure Churchill that the missiles were very unreliable.

Over the winter of 1943–4, the British shared details about the V-weapon threat with the Americans for the first time. The danger that it might interfere with 'Overlord' was taken very seriously, and the Allies started a new bombing campaign against what journalists were soon calling the 'rocket bomb coast'. As well as the 'ski sites', they struck at seven large bunkers (six of which were V2 launch sites and the seventh, at Mimoyecques, for a never-completed super gun). With Bomber Command occupied over Berlin, the British wanted the Americans to use their heavy bombers. The USAAF generals, reluctant to be diverted from 'Pointblank', argued that low-level fighter-bomber strikes would be much more effective.²¹

A pattern developed of American heavy bombers attacking the bunkers while the British and American tactical air forces practised their precision attacks against the 'ski sites'. The assembly of the tactical forces – the US Ninth Air Force and the British Second Tactical Air Force (TAF) – was an important element of the preparations for 'Overlord'. Together, their 195 squadrons (85 British, 110 American) would by early June 1944 make up about a third of the total Allied air strength available for operations over Northwest Europe. As they gathered, they escorted bomber squadrons, flew low-level sweeps over Occupied Europe and struck at targets including power stations and steel works.

In November 1943 the British had reorganized their air commands in

the UK, putting most of Fighter Command and the army's Anti-Aircraft Command into a single body, Air Defence of Great Britain (ADGB), and grouping together the fighter squadrons that would accompany the invasion, the light and medium bombers of 2 Group Bomber Command, and the fighter-bombers of Army Co-operation Command together into the Second TAF. Over the winter and spring, Second TAF underwent an extensive period of re-equipment and retraining that drew on the experience built up by the Desert Air Force in North Africa. From the start of 1944, the fighter-bomber wings began to move to new airfields on the south coast, their primitive airstrips packed with planes and maintenance vehicles. Like the rest of the RAF, Second TAF was multinational, with Dutch, Australian, Free French, New Zealand and Czech squadrons, as well as an entire wing of Canadians. Many of the pilots had years of combat flying experience; others, after long months of training in the Commonwealth, still had to be introduced to battle. There were also new planes: the latest marks of Spitfire and Typhoon as well as Mosquito and Mitchell bombers. It took months to convert some squadrons to the newer aircraft.²²

Just like the Eighth Air Force with its heavy bombers, the US Ninth underwent an astonishing expansion during early 1944. By the start of June it had almost 4,500 planes.²³ Unlike the Eighth in East Anglia, the Ninth Air Force occupied a crescent of bases reaching up from the Hampshire coast, round the north of London and back down into Kent. As soon as the Allies were firmly established in France, the Ninth would move across the Channel and get its supplies straight from the Atlantic ports.

Between December 1943 and the start of May 1944, the Allied air forces flew about 25,150 sorties – codenamed 'No-Balls' – against the bunkers and 'ski sites', dropping 36,000 tons of bombs, about half from US Eighth heavy bombers, and most of the rest from the two tactical air forces. This was roughly the same tonnage, though at a much shorter distance, that Bomber Command had dropped on German cities in the final quarter of 1943. One big difference between Second TAF and the US Ninth was that the latter had many more medium bombers, and they flew more sorties and dropped more tons of bombs than the Mosquitos, Spitfires and Typhoons of the TAF. The fighter-bombers, however, were more accurate, with the result that all three air forces inflicted approximately the same amount of serious damage on the launch sites.²⁴

Though USAAF commanders grew doubtful about whether the threat from the V-weapons was even real, photo-reconnaissance suggested that

the attacks were making a difference. When the British chiefs reviewed the situation in the middle of March 1944, they could assure the War Cabinet that, at the current rate of destruction, all the 'ski sites' would be knocked out by the end of the following month. During April 1944, the level of Luftwaffe opposition to the raids plummeted, as German fighters were pulled back towards the Reich. With the launch sites apparently wrecked, attention shifted to the targets required to aid the invasion, including the chain of German coastal radar stations.²⁵

In fact, almost all the Operation 'Crossbow' bombing in the spring of 1944 was wasted. With the V1 and V2 programmes held up by technical problems, the Germans revised their launch schemes. Both bunkers and 'ski sites' were effectively abandoned, with superficial repairs being carried out to convince the Allies they were still worth attacking. Instead, the Germans constructed new, simpler launch sites for the flying bombs: prefabricated and easy to conceal and repair. Simultaneously, German technicians improved the missile's reliability. They wanted to get the first ones into action before the invasion began.

'STRANGLE'

The first place where the battlefield effects of burgeoning US airpower became apparent was Italy, where John Harding, General Alexander's chief of staff, had drawn up plans for a spring campaign codenamed 'Diadem'. Shifting nearly all its weight to the west coast, Fifteenth Army Group would break through the Winter Line at the same time as a breakout took place from the Anzio beachhead, cutting off the German retreat. Harding aimed not just to draw in enemy forces ahead of 'Overlord', but subject them to a crushing defeat. Simultaneously, Alexander refreshed his forces, bringing in British, Indian, South African and Polish troops from the Middle East and North Africa, and moving exhausted divisions out of the line and across the Mediterranean. The ground offensive, when it came, would be both concentrated and renewed.²⁶

While the armies were rearranged, the Allied air forces launched a campaign of their own. Operation 'Strangle' tried to hit every part of the transport system across central Italy, from marshalling yards and repair workshops to bridges, tunnels and viaducts.²⁷ Bad weather meant that 'Strangle' only got under way on 19 March 1944. Over the next three weeks, enjoying complete air superiority, the Mediterranean air forces

flew 65,000 sorties (just under half by the RAF), 50,000 of them against lines of communication targets, and dropped 33,000 tons of bombs.²⁸

Most of this effort was against bridges and tunnels. The raids badly disrupted supplies, but German quartermasters adapted to make sure the important deliveries got through.²⁹ Spells of bad weather gave them time to make repairs. Since there was no heavy fighting at the front, German formations in fact built up their stores while 'Strangle' was on, but by the time 'Diadem' started, on 11 May 1944, the supply system behind the German lines was under severe strain.

'Diadem' began with a colossal artillery bombardment. Across the Eighth and Fifth Army's fronts, 1,700 pieces of artillery, served by a total of 74,000 gunners, opened fire. Initially, however, the offensive made little progress.³⁰ The Polish II Corps – formed from Wladysław Anders' troops who had escaped through Iran in 1942 – suffered terrible losses as it hurled itself at the German defences on Monte Cassino, British and Indian troops only just managed to cross the Rapido river, and a French assault on the Garigliano was repelled. The Germans, however, suffered badly under the artillery fire and from the attentions of Allied aircraft. Between 12 May and 5 June, helped by improving weather, MAAF aircraft flew an average of 2,352 sorties a day.³¹ Air strikes knocked out the headquarters of the German Tenth Army on the first day of the battle and the movement of reinforcements and supplies was paralysed. In contrast, the Luftwaffe in Italy attacked Allied forces during the offensive a total of fourteen times.³²

Since 1942, German generals had proved well able to improvise defences against numerically superior opponents. During 1944, that became increasingly difficult because of Allied command of the air. Many of the heaviest losses of German equipment would now come either as they moved up to battle or because they lacked the mobility to retreat. As General von Senger, the defender of Monte Cassino, reflected: 'In a battle of movement a commander who can only make the tactically essential moves by night resembles a chess-player who for three of his opponent's moves has the right to make only one.'

By 16 May 1944, Leese's Eighth Army had pushed up the Liri Valley. Kesselring ordered his outflanked troops to withdraw from Monte Cassino, which the Poles captured on 18 May. In the key moment of the battle, the French had unlocked the southern end of the Gustav Line with a rapid advance over the mountains. On the 23rd, as Kesselring began a general retreat from the Gustav Line, Canadian troops broke through German defences in the valley. At the same time, US and British units broke out of

the Anzio beachhead. The German defences collapsed. As Leese's men tried to move up the Liri Valley, however, poor traffic control left them stuck in a military tailback of epic proportions – a disastrous outcome if the Luftwaffe in Italy had retained any ground-attack capability. Meanwhile, General Clark directed the Anzio breakout towards Rome rather than to block Kesselring's retreat. Contrary to the accusations of glory hunting often levelled at Clark, this was quite a sensible military decision to protect the flank of the Allied exploitation as the German Tenth Army disintegrated. With the troops that escaped, however, Kesselring was able to reorganize his defences to the north of Rome. The Fifth Army took the Italian capital on 4 June 1944, but the acclaim was short-lived: two days later, the Allies went ashore in Normandy. Nonetheless, and in another indication of the effect of airpower, Allied casualties during 'Diadem' had been much lower than those of the Germans: 44,000 (12,000 British Commonwealth, 18,000 American, 9,500 French and 3,900 Polish), against at least 51,000 and around 250 tanks.³⁵

'THE CRISIS OF THE EUROPEAN WAR FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE UK AND THE US'

Eisenhower, newly appointed as supreme commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces, arrived in London late on 15 January 1944. He was not much refreshed by a Stateside vacation with his family, during which he had repeatedly called his wife, Mamie, 'Kay', the name of his mistress, Kay Summersby. Reaching London, and passionately reunited with Summersby, he was keen to get on with his new command. Six days later, having met with Churchill, he reported to Marshall that the prime minister had

emphasized his anxiety to support to the limit all our activities, stating several times that the cross-channel effort represented the crisis of the European war from the viewpoint of the UK and the US. He said he was prepared to scrape the bottom of the barrel in every respect to increase the effectiveness of the attack. 36

Around Eisenhower assembled the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), another of the war's great Anglo-Canadian-American institutions, in which staff officers from the Atlantic allies worked side-by-side with each other, often to the frustration of everyone else. Eisenhower brought with him his chief of staff, Walter Bedell Smith, and Arthur Tedder, who was appointed the new supreme

commander's deputy. In the Mediterranean, Tedder had shown himself an able and loyal friend to Eisenhower. As his British right-hand man he enjoyed a lot of influence.

At the suggestion of the British, the combined chiefs had agreed to the appointment of subordinate commanders to take charge of air and sea operations. Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay would command the naval force required to get the Allied armies across the Channel. Having organized the evacuation from Dunkirk and the 'Husky' landings, Ramsay was one of the great naval logisticians of the age. As Allied Expeditionary Air Force commander, Air Chief Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory would take charge of the two tactical air forces, but not the strategic bombers. Leigh-Mallory had a long interest in army-air co-operation, and as head of Fighter Command since 1942 had overseen the formation and training of Second TAF. Bullish by appearance and temperament, however, he did not fit with the command team that had formed in the Mediterranean. When Eisenhower won the fight to have the strategic air forces placed under his control for the duration of the invasion, Spaatz insisted he would not work under Leigh-Mallory. Tedder therefore became supreme air commander, but Leigh-Mallory was left in place.³⁷

Eisenhower had two army groups, one British and Canadian and the other American. Once they were fully ashore he intended to take command of both himself. During the opening phase of the invasion, however, Operation 'Neptune', which would run from the landing to the establishment of a secure lodgement in France, all ground forces would be placed under the British general commanding the Twenty-First Army Group. Eisenhower and Churchill would have liked this to have been Alexander. Brooke made sure it was Montgomery. With his feel for battle and dedication to maintaining his troops' morale, Montgomery was an understandable choice, but his appointment transferred antagonisms born in the Mediterranean - those between Montgomery and the Americans, including General Omar Bradley, who would command the Twelfth US Army Group, but also those between Montgomery and Tedder and Air Marshal 'Mary' Coningham, who was appointed to command Second TAF and the advanced elements of both tactical air forces during 'Neptune'. The airmen thought Montgomery overly cautious and vain; in Tedder's words: 'a little fellow of average ability who has had such a build-up that he thinks of himself as Napoleon – he is not.'38

The inevitable corollary of an experienced team of commanders, these personal antipathies would fuel some striking disputes between senior officers after Allied forces crossed the Channel. In the short term,

however, Eisenhower's commanders were united by the pressure of an increasingly imminent D-Day. The final decisions on 'Neptune' could only be taken after the supreme commander was appointed. By the time Eisenhower arrived in London, there were less than six months in which to complete all the preparations. Everything would have to be done against the clock.

The plans approved at Quebec had set the parameters for the invasion, but they were based on the resources available in the summer of 1943. They therefore proposed an attack by just three divisions across the beaches and another by an airborne landing. From Churchill downwards, everyone examining the plan that winter thought these forces were too weak. In the shadow of Salerno and Anzio, they were concerned not just about the initial assault, but whether the Allies could quickly build up the beachhead, resist the inevitable counter-attack, capture permanent port facilities and move to a decisive battle of manoeuvre in central France. Eisenhower and Montgomery insisted on expanding the amphibious attack from three to five divisions, with another two quickly reinforcing the beachhead. The landing frontage was extended to bring it closer to the port of Cherbourg. The airborne descent grew from one to three divisions. Mounting an assault twice as large as previously planned meant more landing craft and transport aircraft, which required delaying 'Anvil' – the landings in southern France – and putting off 'Neptune' to the start of June. The revised plan was approved by the combined chiefs on 1 February 1944. With Eisenhower picking the final date depending on weather and tides, there were five months until the invasion began.

'NEPTUNE'

On 25 February 1944, the ships of the Second Escort Group, led by the celebrated submarine hunter Captain 'Johnnie' Walker, returned to Liverpool. Over the previous fortnight, they had sunk six U-boats in the Atlantic. One of them, U-734, was attacked for six hours, with 266 depth charges, before being destroyed. Two-fifths of Walker's crews were from Merseyside. As they entered the harbour, a cheering crowd lined the dockside and every vessel in the port sounded its horn in celebration.³⁹

The Battle of the Atlantic had not come to an end with the Allied victory in May 1943. At the start of 1944, Admiral Dönitz attempted to regain a foothold, massing his submarines to the west of Ireland to attack the huge convoys now traversing the Atlantic. The operation failed

completely: a combination of excellent Allied intelligence, radar-equipped aircraft and aggressive escort group tactics prevented the wolf packs from assembling. Anti-submarine aircraft hunted U-boats to exhaustion. Escort groups pursued them even when they dived deep. Already, the rolling underwater barrage employed by Walker's group was being superseded as a new generation of frigates, equipped with sonar sets and improved depthcharge launchers, fixed and killed the submarines more accurately. During the first quarter of 1944, twenty-nine U-boats were sunk in the North Atlantic, eighteen of them by warships. The vast traffic of ships required for 'Overlord' passed almost undisturbed by enemy attack.⁴⁰

Walker was famously driven, even more so after his son, a British submariner, was killed in action in the Mediterranean in 1943. The father worked himself into his grave, dying aged forty-eight in July 1944 from a stroke brought on by exhaustion. By that point, Allied escort forces were facing a very different battle, trying to protect the invasion fleet from submarines lurking in the shallow, wreck-strewn waters of the Channel.

The last capital ships of the German navy meanwhile met their end in northern seas. In September 1943, a British midget submarine successfully mined the battleship *Tirpitz*, putting it out of action for six months. On 26 December 1943, Admiral Fraser, commander of the Home Fleet, got enough warning from naval intelligence to pounce on the battlecruiser *Scharnhorst* when it tried to attack an Arctic convoy. Crippled by shells fired from radar-controlled guns in poor visibility, the *Scharnhorst* was finished off by a fusillade of torpedoes. No sooner had *Tirpitz* finished its repairs than it was disabled again by a carrier aircraft strike in April 1944. That September, *Tirpitz* was damaged by RAF Lancasters dropping 12,000lb 'Tallboy' bombs. It never took to open waters again and was finally sunk in another 'Tallboy' attack in November 1944.

The nullification of the German naval threat eased the pre-invasion build-up. Earlier shipping shortages and delays in decisions on 'Overlord', however, meant that the transport of US servicemen and supplies had to be conducted at tremendous pace. The US military presence in the UK went from less than half a million personnel in October 1943 to more than one and a half million in May 1944.⁴¹ The same story was true of equipment and stores. Forty per cent of all the American tonnage landed at British ports between the start of 1942 and D-Day arrived between January and May 1944. The result was severe tension between Britain's import programme and the demands of the US military. With only a few weeks to go, Eisenhower had to appeal to Churchill to postpone the unloading of half a million tons of civilian supplies. The tonnage of food imported for

the British home front during the second quarter of 1944 was the lowest of any equivalent period for the whole war. Since stockpiles had been rebuilt during 1943, Britain was well able to withstand this disruption. Yet again, however, the greatest impact on British imports had come not from German submariners, but from US logisticians.⁴²

In comparison to the influx of American personnel, the strength of British Commonwealth troops in the UK changed much less. Between August 1943 and April 1944, the number of British, Dominion and Allied European soldiers increased from 1,580,220 to 1,678,588 men. As a result of demography, earlier policy decisions about the allocation of manpower, and the departure of some Canadian formations to the Mediterranean, however, the number of fighting troops in fact fell, from 986,151 to 964,829 men. The increase in personnel was reflected instead in the expansion of the support services that would be required to sustain and repair the army about to cross to Northwest Europe. There were 713,759 of these troops in April 1944, about 125,000 more than there had been six months before.⁴³

That mirrored the astonishing array of technological might assembled ahead of 'Overlord'. Of the eighteen divisions in Montgomery's Twenty-First Army Group, six were armoured, supported by another eight independent armoured brigades: a higher proportion of armoured to infantry formations than any other major combatant on either side in Western Europe at any point in the war. An entire armoured division – the 79th – was equipped with specialized armour meant solely to surmount the problems of beach landings, river crossings and attacks on German defences: Duplex Drive (DD) tanks, with a collapsible fabric screen and propeller, meant to 'swim' their way ashore in front of the infantry; 'Crabs' with flails to clear minefields; and 'Crocodiles' fitted with flamethrowers. Eighteen per cent of the soldiers in Twenty-First Army Group were gunners, compared to 15 per cent in the infantry, and Montgomery had six powerful Army Groups Royal Artillery to provide additional firepower in attack and defence.⁴⁴ A total of 254 RAF squadrons were available for operations to support the invasion – protecting bases at home, patrolling the North Sea and the Channel, bombing German positions and carrying airborne troops to the drop zones.⁴⁵ Below, the Royal Navy deployed in direct support of the invasion four battleships, two monitors, seventeen cruisers and twenty-eight fleet destroyers, as well as hundreds of smaller vessels to guard and guide the fleet of landing ships, while the Home Fleet stood ready at Scapa Flow to block any German attempt to interfere with the invasion.⁴⁶

This was the densest collection of military machinery in the history of the British Empire – albeit one built substantially thanks to US economic power. Despite the months of planning, its assembly was completed only at the last minute. A wide range of new equipment was issued just before the invasion, and, during the spring of 1944, units had to convert to the weapons with which they would have to fight in a few weeks' time. It was March before some Second TAF squadrons changed over from Hurricane to Typhoon fighter-bombers; some tank units that would land on D-Day only started to get new Shermans (including the Firefly, with its unfamiliar gun), in April, and didn't complete conversion until the middle of May 1944. In this period of intense activity to be ready for the invasion, no sooner had new vehicles been run in than they had to be waterproofed and put into storage, before being transported to the loading areas.⁴⁷

At least some of the sailors and soldiers who would land on the British and Canadian beaches had had more time for basic training. Landing craft crews trained on individual vessels at Hayling Island in Hampshire, before moving north for collective instruction and practice at the Combined Training Centre at Inveraray in Scotland. By April 1944, they amounted to more than 41,000 British sailors and marines.⁴⁸

Having narrowly missed out on previous operations, the 3rd British Division, one of the formations selected to lead the assault on the beaches, had conducted amphibious training for years. Its soldiers spent the winter on route marches and landing exercises in freezing water at Burghead Bay in Scotland. They were physically hardened, very fit and had practised repeatedly over terrain selected to resemble their objectives on 'Sword' Beach.⁴⁹ In comparison, the 50th (Northumbrian) Division, which had gone ashore in Sicily, had more 'real' experience of a combat landing, but against a much less hardened coast. The division only returned from the Mediterranean at the end of 1943, and morale slumped as soldiers went home on leave, confronted domestic disruption and worried about their future after the war. Only the prospect of imminent action — and the insistence from commanders that conviction would offer no escape route from the assault — reduced the sky-rocketing rate of absence without leave.⁵⁰

The construction of the two prefabricated 'Mulberry' harbours, which would be towed across the Channel and assembled off the invasion beaches, was also done in a rush. The components included 115 floating 'bombardon' cross-beams, each involving about 200 tons of steel; 167 concrete caissons, weighing between 1,600 and 5,780 tons, for the walls, and 10 miles of steel roadways required to connect 23 floating pierheads to

the shore. With the first contracts not issued until October 1943, the Mulberries were given overwhelming priority in the allocation of workers and materials to make sure they were finished on time. They cost £25 million, or about 5 per cent of the combined output of the Admiralty and the Ministry of Supply in the first half of 1944.⁵¹

The tasks facing Ramsay were formidably complex: co-ordinating his multinational fleet of warships, organizing the landing vessels to get the assault formations across to the right location, in the right order, and overseeing the movement of shipping for the subsequent build-up, including the shuttling back and forth of landing ships and the arrival of large cargo vessels. All this had to take place within a very confined area and required co-ordination with government departments including the Ministries of Supply and War Transport, as well as co-operation between Allied navies with different traditions of command and control. The use of new technology introduced an additional element of uncertainty: Ramsay certainly had his doubts about how what he called the 'damned Mulberries' would be towed into place and whether they would really work.⁵²

Ramsay tried to solve the problem of complexity by producing very detailed operational orders with exact instructions about every aspect of 'Neptune'. Issued in April 1944, these had twenty sections and more than a thousand pages. Rather to the frustration of the Americans, they left very little for his task force commanders to do. To preserve security, ships' captains and other commanding officers were allowed to read the orders only in the final week before 'Neptune' began. Since the plans were also subject to multiple minor last-minute changes, they were presented with a thick wad of papers that had to be amended as well as understood.

The invasion would start as an approximately equal Allied effort. The air, naval and amphibious landing forces involved in the first landings were roughly equivalent – the Americans providing many more medium bombers, the British and Canadians the overwhelming majority of the minesweepers and escort vessels. The initial assault would be conducted by four American, one Canadian and three British divisions, and, for the first month, British Commonwealth and US army formations would arrive in the beachhead at the same rate. At that point, British forces would reach their peak, but Americans would continue to arrive, through the French Atlantic ports and the Mediterranean as well as the UK. By the end of August, US divisions would outnumber British and Canadian divisions three to two. By the end of 1944, it would be three to one.

Montgomery's armies would decline not just relatively but absolutely.

As they prepared for the invasion, senior British officers knew that the decisions made about manpower allocation in 1943 meant that the flow of infantry reinforcements would not keep pace with heavy losses, even in the highest priority ground campaign of Britain's war. A host of measures were employed to strengthen manpower reserves, including the posting of surplus Canadian ('CANLOAN') officers to British infantry units, the transfer of reluctant recruits from the RAF to the army, and the retraining of anti-aircraft gunners as infantrymen. Nonetheless, British generals accepted that at some point they would have to disband more divisions, reducing the fighting power of the army, in order to keep the rest up to strength. Montgomery's desire simultaneously to preserve his army and to play a leading role in the fighting would shape his conduct of the campaign.⁵⁴

'BREATHE THE CONFIDENCE OF SUCCESS'

All the air commanders thought they knew how the strategic air forces ought to contribute to the coming campaign. Leigh-Mallory wanted them to cut the transport links into the invasion area. Spaatz and Harris wanted to maintain their offensives against Germany. Tedder supported a different plan, drawn up by his chief scientific officer, Solly Zuckerman, on the basis of an analysis of bombing in Italy. Zuckerman proposed an attack on the whole transport system, designed to put it under such strain that it would be unable to respond when key connections were knocked out. To begin with, this approach would prevent German reinforcements reaching the beachhead. Subsequently, it could be used to attack the German war economy.

Though Spaatz and Tedder disagreed about targets, their desire to attack oil and transport infrastructures overlapped: they both wanted to destroy the enemy's ability to move. At the end of March 1944, Portal directed Harris to hit French railway marshalling yards. Harris was surprised at the accuracy his crews could achieve over Occupied Europe, where directional aids worked better and defences were lighter than in Germany, but he was not persuaded that using his bombers against transport was a good idea. Bomber Command estimated that somewhere between 80,000 and 160,000 French civilians would become casualties if it were unleashed on the French railway system.

At a meeting on 25 March 1944, Portal and Eisenhower backed Tedder. Since Tedder had already decided that Bomber Command would

be more fully dedicated to transport attacks than the Eighth USAAF, Spaatz left the meeting 'jubilant'. Not only would he not be put under Leigh-Mallory's command, but the offensive against the Luftwaffe would allow him to keep attacking industrial targets in Germany. Harris grumbled but followed orders. He may not have been unhappy to give his command respite from the losses it had taken over Berlin.

Churchill, however, influenced by Cherwell, opposed a plan that would result in 'very heavy' French casualties. Brooke shared his concerns. So did Eden, who warned the War Cabinet about the risk that Communist propaganda would portray the Red Army as having done all the fighting against the Germans, while the British and Americans just killed innocent French 'women and children'. When Zuckerman produced a lower estimate of civilian losses, the campaign was allowed to go ahead, but the prime minister withheld his full approval. With his perspective shifting to the post-war world, he was not just concerned at the diplomatic damage and appalled that friendly European civilians had become an incidental cost of war. To Tedder's frustration, Churchill refused to accept that attacks on transport would avoid a drawn-out struggle on the ground. As far as the deputy supreme commander was concerned, Churchill was refusing to take responsibility for a difficult moral decision. Smuts backed Tedder up, insisting that 'political considerations must yield to military', but Churchill continued to resist, telling Tedder he was 'piling up a lot of hatred', proposing alternative targets and, on 7 May 1944, writing to Roosevelt suggesting he might want to 'call off the slaughter' – to which the president, having the last word, responded that he had no intention of interfering with Eisenhower's plans.⁵⁵

During spring 1944, therefore, British bombers shifted from attacking German cities to hitting transport hubs, troop concentrations and supply dumps in Occupied Europe. Bomber Command's strength increased, from 942 to 1,162 aircraft between March and June 1944. They flew smaller raids, but more of them: 5,650 sorties in January 1944, but almost 9,900 in May. With incursions into enemy airspace briefer and German defences weaker, loss rates fell. In January 1944, 5.6 per cent of aircraft on bombing sorties had gone missing. In May 1944, the equivalent figure was 2.6 per cent. Since the targets were closer, aircraft could carry more bombs and fuel, and the total tonnage of bombs dropped increased dramatically. ⁵⁶

As the date of the invasion approached, all the Allied air forces stepped up their efforts. Shortly before the amphibious phase began, the US Ninth Air Force struck at bridges and viaducts to cut Normandy off from German supplies and reinforcements. Simultaneously, the French resistance attacked the railways. The resistance disabled more wagons than the bombers, but the bombers did more to wreck the rail system, causing major damage to intersections and repair centres. By sacrificing French civilian traffic, the Germans kept the railways rolling, but the backlog of undelivered materials stuck in transit grew. By the start of June, this amounted to 1,700 trainloads of military supplies. Estimates for that month's fuel deliveries had fallen by 30 per cent.⁵⁷

At the same time, the Allies escalated their campaign against the V-weapons. Agents in France provided information about the modified V1 sites, sparking a major photo-reconnaissance survey to identify their locations. The agents reported there were more than a hundred, but by the start of June only thirty-one had been identified. Unable to find the new sites, the British asked Eisenhower to step up attacks on the installations they already knew about. To Spaatz's fury, Eisenhower gave these 'Crossbow' targets maximum priority. During May 1944, the American air forces launched another 4,600 sorties against the rocket bunkers and 'ski sites' – every one a complete waste of effort.⁵⁸

The French paid a high price for all this bombing even before the invasion began. Attacking transport targets, Bomber Command used new navigational methods and low-level target marking that made some of its attacks unusually accurate. In thirteen attacks by squadrons from 5 Group in April and May 1944, for example, 83 per cent of bombs fell close to the target, with an average error from the aiming point of just 380 yards. Most British and American bombing was not this accurate, and even a 380-yard error was grim news for those living nearby. At least 25,266 French civilians were killed by Allied bombing between April and June 1944, about 160 per cent of the British Commonwealth fatalities caused by enemy action during the subsequent Normandy campaign. ⁵⁹

Spaatz meanwhile began his attack on the German oil industry. From April 1944, the US Fifteenth Air Force's heavy bombers, based in Italy, attacked the Ploesti oil refinery in Romania. US losses were severe, but German oil imports plummeted by two-thirds. On 12 May, Spaatz launched the first of a series of large raids on German synthetic oil plants, which manufactured nearly all the Luftwaffe's high-octane petrol. It was so successful that Eisenhower mandated further raids at the start of June, and a few weeks later the Americans returned. German fuel output in June was two-thirds that of April 1944. A drastic fuel shortage started to afflict the Luftwaffe. 60

While these decisive attacks went on, the Allies were also engaged in an elaborate deception operation, codenamed 'Bodyguard', designed to maintain German uncertainty over the exact site of the invasion. Again, the key method was to persuade the Germans that Allied forces were more numerous than they were, and to feed their existing beliefs, first in a potential additional invasion in Norway, and second, that any cross-Channel attack would come across the narrows, towards the Pas de Calais.

This was primarily a British operation. It was much aided by the remarkable success of British counter-intelligence since the start of the war in identifying the whole network of German spies in Britain, and turning them back against their controllers. The largest 'Bodyguard' operation, 'Fortitude South', was meant to misdirect the Germans towards the Pas de Calais and the Scheldt estuary. It relied on the fabrication of a fictional First US Army Group, based in Kent and supposedly readying itself for the main invasion further up the Channel coast. A key component of this Army Group was the First Canadian Army – an already complete Canadian-British-Polish formation that was in fact scheduled to arrive in Normandy after the beachhead had been expanded, but which in the deception commanded one US and one Canadian corps and was readying itself for a descent on the Pas de Calais. While radio traffic and decoy vehicles were used to fabricate the gathering presence of US troops, and British-turned double agents despatched information to Berlin, real Canadian and British units moved to Kent and carried out amphibious exercises on the Medway to provide hard evidence that 'First Army Group' was assembling.⁶¹

The point of 'Fortitude South' had to be misdirection rather than complete concealment. The range of places and times where an invasion could take place was limited, and the final assembly of the invasion armada and its slow progress across the Channel would be very difficult to hide from German air and sea patrols. Allied planners hoped to keep their enemy uncertain about whether the Normandy landings were the main invasion or a diversionary operation, an aim that was only possible because the Germans were willing to entertain a vastly inflated Anglo-American order of battle. The Allies did not, however, expect that the Normandy invasion would achieve much tactical surprise. Rather, they anticipated the Germans having twelve to twenty-four hours' warning of its approach. German night-fighters would be hunting the aircraft transporting the airborne divisions, and German generals would already have started moving their armoured divisions towards the landing area. 62

The expectation of an enemy standing ready was one reason for Allied anxiety about the invasion. Firmly committed as they were to 'Overlord', the risks of a setback weighed most heavily on the British. Churchill's

willingness vividly to articulate his concerns – 'the tides running red with blood' – perturbed Eisenhower and annoyed Brooke, himself struggling to 'breathe the confidence of success into all those around'. It was, he told his diary, 'made doubly hard when subjected to the ravings of prima donnas in the shape of politicians, who seem to be incapable of having real faith in their own decisions!'⁶³

To men in this mood, Montgomery provided a comforting conviction. At two subsequently much-discussed briefings, on 7 April and 15 May 1944, he presented Allied strategy for the ground campaign to senior officers at his headquarters at St Paul's School, London. With maps suggesting the probable location of the front line as the campaign progressed, he explained the plans developed with General Bradley and Lieutenant General Miles Dempsey, commander of the British Second Army. The lines mattered less than the impression of an aggressive attack that would keep the enemy off balance while Allied forces secured the key geographic features required quickly to hold, reinforce and break out of the beachhead.

Landings would now take place at five close but separate beaches, codenamed 'Utah', 'Omaha' (both American), 'Gold', 'Juno' and 'Sword' (British and Canadian). On the first day of the invasion, these landings would join up, and British and Canadian troops would secure the city of Caen (a key road junction) and the crossings over the rivers Orne and Odon. With these and the plateau between Caen and the town of Falaise in their hands, they would then form a strong flank against German counterattacks from the east, with room behind to scrape out airfields for the tactical air forces. Simultaneously, the Americans would strike west, cutting the Cotentin peninsula and capturing Cherbourg.

Eighteen days into the invasion, Montgomery hoped the Allies would have defeated the first counter-attacks, hold Cherbourg and control a square of Normandy from Granville in the west to Falaise in the east. The Third US and First Canadian Armies would then arrive to expand the initial lodgement – the British and Canadians pivoting eastwards on Falaise while the Americans cleared Brittany to secure their logistical base. As the Americans swept back east and came into line with the British advance, the Germans, recognizing they had lost the first phase of the campaign, would retreat to the next defensible positions, along the Loire and Seine. This point would be reached, Montgomery forecast, about three months after D-Day. No matter how much they disliked him, the assembled officers found his certainty uplifting. They would not forget it when things did not go to plan.

Despite the emphasis on aggression and ambition, Montgomery did not under-estimate the difficulties of getting ashore and the dangers of a rapid German armoured counter-attack. Subsequent accounts of the invasion would place a heavy emphasis on the role of the bocage – the very densely packed mix of narrow lanes, high hedgerows and small fields that characterized parts of the Normandy battlefield and which were very difficult to fight through. Yet as significant were the valleys and hills that bounded the beachhead, and the areas of more open terrain across which attacking armour would be able to move. Almost from the moment that Normandy had been chosen as an invasion site, Allied planners had identified the ground either side of the Mue river, west of Caen, as the likeliest and most dangerous location for a thrust by German tanks in the period immediately after D-Day. The task of defending it was given to the 3rd Canadian Division, following its landing on 'Juno'. To assist them, the Canadians were allocated more than twice the usual divisional complement of field artillery, reinforced by regiments of medium artillery and anti-tank guns, as well as the 95mm howitzers of the close-support Centaur tanks operated by the Royal Marine Assault Squadron. Once ashore, 3rd Canadian Division would have as many gunners as infantrymen in its order of battle. Visiting the Canadians in February 1944, Montgomery warned them that the Germans would throw everything at them and that they should expect heavy casualties.⁶⁴

This mix, between the ambition of quickly expanding the beachhead and the more pragmatic recognition of the risk of a ferocious counterattack, continued to shift in the months before D-Day as the nature of German preparations became clear. Convinced that the coming assault was a moment of opportunity for German arms, Hitler looked forward to the invasion. At the end of 1943 he sent Rommel to France as commander of Army Group B, with instructions to make the defences in Normandy and the Pas de Calais impregnable. Rommel's arrival was part of a proliferation of headquarters in Western Europe that greatly confused German systems of command.⁶⁵ While he struggled to extend his remit, Rommel oversaw a new programme of fortifications. Most were concentrated on the Pas de Calais and around the mouth of the Seine. During the spring, he started to strengthen the defences of Normandy as well. These included a dense forest of beach obstacles, most of them mined, to wreck landing craft as they neared shore. At the end of April 1944, the realization of the extent of these obstacles forced the 'Neptune' planners to shift the timing of the assault to low tide. After months of planning, all the loading tables for the invasion had to be rewritten in the

space of a few weeks.⁶⁶

By May 1944, there were fifty-nine German divisions in France. Many of them reflected a deep scraping of the manpower barrel. Just under half were the fortress divisions manning the coastal defences, made up of older men, padded out with battalions of Eastern Europeans whom the Germans didn't trust to fight by themselves. The rest were better quality infantry, parachute, mechanized and armoured divisions. Outside the panzer and motorized infantry divisions, the army's tactical mobility depended on purloined French transport, horses and bicycles, or how far its soldiers could march. The only way to believe that it was going to prevail against the abundantly equipped behemoth assembling in Britain was to fall back on expressions of national will and destiny and the supposedly miraculous effects of the V-weapons. From early 1944, the Germans reinforced their strength in Western Europe physically and ideologically. Hardened NCOs and officers were transferred in from the Eastern Front. Extra effort was put into indoctrinating German soldiers with the ethos of Nazism. 67

Over the winter of 1943–4, Rommel and the commander of German tank forces in the West, Geyr von Schweppenburg, argued about where to put the armoured divisions. Like most Germans who hadn't experienced Allied air superiority at first hand, Schweppenburg thought he could keep a strong mobile reserve well back from the beaches. Rommel wanted the armoured divisions closer to the coast, less concentrated but quicker into action. Like Rommel, Hitler was convinced by the spring of 1944 that the first (though possibly not the principal) Allied invasion would be directed at Normandy. He split the difference, keeping half the divisions in reserve – to be released for action only on his orders – but allowing Rommel to direct the rest. Even as Montgomery prepared to give his second briefing at St Paul's School, British intelligence picked up the arrival of additional panzer divisions in the invasion area and the reinforcement of the Cotentin peninsula.⁶⁸

By the end of May, Twenty-First Army Group estimated that four panzer divisions might be able to attack the beachhead on D+1 (the day after D-Day), with up to eight panzer and motorized infantry divisions by D+6. This armoured might would be concentrated, as had been predicted, towards the open terrain southeast of the beachhead, and it would include the 12th SS (Hitler Youth) and Panzer Lehr Divisions, both over-strength, powerful and highly motivated formations that could do a lot of damage if they broke through to the beaches. Over-estimating enemy numbers, British planners suggested there might be as many as 540 German tanks, including many Tigers and Panthers, around Caen. These were a source of

serious worry to senior Allied commanders, but by this point there was almost no room to alter the invasion. Faced with strengthening German forces, Montgomery had already adapted plans to allow for Caen not being seized on D-Day and having to be taken by follow-up troops. The one part of the operation that could have been changed was the drop of the US airborne divisions on the Cotentin. Eisenhower decided it should go ahead.

'STRANGE CREWS MANNING STRANGE BOATS IN A STRANGE HARBOUR'

The same feeling of unstoppable momentum was apparent throughout the UK as the country approached the climax of the conflict. Notwithstanding a fall in the engineering workforce and a surge of industrial unrest, armaments production in the first half of 1944 was the highest of the whole war.⁶⁹ Heavy bombers poured off the production lines and the Ministry of Supply, reacting to the heavy expenditure of artillery ammunition in Italy, re-accelerated the filling of 25-pounder shells.⁷⁰ Civilian supplies of cloth, hosiery, shoes, crockery, kettles and household brooms were lower in 1944 than they had been in 1943. You couldn't get a toilet brush or a baby's pram for love nor money. The number of civilian houses built was a third lower than the year before – a mere 8,000 dwellings, 2 per cent of the average construction number pre-war – a desperate figure for a country with so many new families, and where so much bomb damage was still only temporarily repaired.⁷¹

With coastal shipping required to take part in the invasion, even more goods had to travel by road and rail. Over the winter of 1943–4, the juggling of airbase supply in East Anglia and increased freight imports from the west coast ports pushed the railways close to breaking point. In the six months to the end of March 1944, the railways ran 34,000 special service trains for the government, a 79 per cent increase on the same period in 1942–3.⁷² For 1944 as a whole, the number of passenger miles travelled on railways in the UK was about two-thirds higher than in 1938, and the approximate ton-miles of freight moved about a third higher. The distance of old tracks repaired was about a third less.⁷³

Military preparations were unmissable. On the south coast, every creek and inlet had ships in it. More than 1,550 miles of new roadway had been laid to get troops to the embarkation points.⁷⁴ In East Anglia, airfields were covered in planes and gliders. Throughout the country, the Home

Guard were given new duties protecting strategic installations against German spoiling attacks.⁷⁵ The press was filled with speculation about where and when the invasion would begin.⁷⁶

The extraordinary influx of US service personnel in preparation for the invasion changed the character of the American 'occupation'. The first arrivals had now been in place for more than two years, and, despite crosscultural antagonisms, they had had time to establish quite cordial relations with nearby communities. In contrast, many of those arriving after the start of 1944 were self-consciously just in transit to the battlefields of mainland Europe. Across the 'American triangle' drawn between Liverpool, the southwest coast and the airfields of East Anglia, the physical presence of huge trucks, loud young men and PX-purchased consumables could feel overwhelming – as in central London, where dense packs of bored GIs, desperate for furloughed adventures, lolled around Piccadilly and Trafalgar Square. The surge was exciting – not least for those fans of variety and swing music who lived close enough to an American base to pick up the low-powered transmissions of the American Forces Network, a radio station established in July 1943, in a remarkable contravention of the BBC's monopoly, to broadcast US material to entertainment-hungry GIs – but it was also intimidating. This period saw both an increased public realization that the USA was playing a major part in the war, and a rising sense of nationalist irritation: not only at bumptious American behaviour, individually and internationally, but also at the cultural challenge from US commercialism.⁷⁷

The speed of the build-up also posed more practical problems, as was apparent at Portland harbour in Dorset. Constructed by the Victorians as a base for the Royal Navy, Portland remained one of the largest man-made harbours in the world. A key site for research and training in antisubmarine warfare before the war, it then operated as a base for coastal forces.⁷⁸ None of this really prepared it for its crucial role as an embarkation point for American troops heading towards 'Omaha' Beach. Preparations to ready the harbour for a future invasion, including the construction of hard standings, from which to load landing vessels, and ammunition huts, only really got going in 1944. As the ships started to gather, changes to the naval bombardment plan late in March resulted in a sudden need to triple ammunition storage to 6,000 tons. Teams of sailors, reinforced by fifty boys brought in from a nearby borstal, worked from seven in the morning to ten at night, seven days a week, from March to May, unloading fuses and shells and stacking them in nearby quarries and villages and in lighters within the harbour. ⁷⁹ The number of Wrens at the

naval base increased from 670 at the end of 1942 to 1,500 in April 1944. They worked as wireless operators, stewards, drivers, cooks and mechanics, but also collecting and delivering mail. In 1943, about eight hundred letters and telegrams had arrived every day. By 6 June 1944, that had increased to more than eight thousand a day.⁸⁰

Just before then, Portland had been filled with 10 big transports, 26 Landing Ships (Tank), 130 Landing Craft (Tank), 12 Landing Craft (Infantry) and 85 coastal craft of various sizes. In nearby Weymouth harbour were twenty-six landing craft, with another eighty ships moored in Weymouth Bay. Each vessel was meant to have a designated berth, but since there was a constant flow of ships coming in or heading out for training, newcomers seized whatever space they could find. When the first US shore parties arrived, everything was confusion. The US Army initially refused to provide food for US Navy crews, leaving them to be fed from Admiralty stores instead. In the quarter to June 1944, Portland issued 1,438,000lbs of potatoes and 442,000lbs of meat — about four times more than it had done six months before. British and American sailors disagreed about how to organize loading the ships. There were frequent crashes. In the words of one British officer: 'Not much could be expected from strange crews manning strange boats in a strange harbour.'81

Things got better in the harbour when it was established as a US amphibious base and a parallel American operations room was set up to administer the ships. Problems continued ashore. The Americans insisted their men could not sleep more than three to a tent (the British standard was eight) and set up camp right next to an installation designed to decoy bombers away from the harbour. Anti-aircraft guns and barrage balloons proliferated, designed to ward off bombing raids that never really came. A unit of black US Army engineers arrived with smoke generators to cloak Portland from the skies, sparking a lecture to the Wrens from their commanding officer about 'an understanding of relations with coloured troops'. The generators were started up with the wrong concentration of smoke, which failed to rise, sending dense, choking clouds through the base and into the surrounding villages.⁸²

Portland was one of the harbours from which landing ships set out to take part in Exercise 'Fabius' between 3 and 6 May 1944. Together with the smaller Exercise 'Tiger' (22–28 April 1944), these were simultaneous rehearsals of every aspect of the invasion. Conducted at ports from Portland, via Portsmouth, to Tilbury and beaches from Slapton Sands in Devon to Littlehampton in Sussex, they included the berthing and loading of ships; the at-sea assembly of the assault forces and their transit in

convoy to the areas they were to attack; the assaults, unloading of supplies and initial defence of the beachhead; and the subsequent movement of reinforcements to the docks. They also played a part in the deception plan for 'Overlord': not only involving the supposed loading of elements of the fictitious First US Army Group, but also setting the precedent that the choreography of troops and ships before the invasion might be just another elaborate rehearsal.

A disaster during 'Tiger' briefly seemed to threaten the security of the invasion. Poor co-ordination between Royal Navy escorts and US landing ships allowed German torpedo boats to get among a convoy. Three ships were sunk or badly damaged and 749 US servicemen killed. Among the missing were officers cleared to know the plans for D-Day: until all the bodies were accounted for, it was feared they might have been captured by the Germans. The Allied navies responded by improving their radio communications and providing more rescue vessels to help soldiers trying to escape from stricken ships, but the incident showed how vulnerable the landing ships were against fast-moving, powerfully armed opponents.

As the invasion approached, the UK was locked down. From 13 March 1944, all travel to and from Eire was banned. From 1 April, movement into a belt of protected areas stretching ten miles inland from the coast was prohibited, except for residents and those on essential business. 'Privilege' (i.e. non-compassionate) military leave was cancelled from the beginning of May, which had the thankful effect of lessening passenger traffic on the railways just as the final build-up in the invasion areas took place. ⁸³ Little wonder that civilians and servicemen got impatient and irritable. According to Home Intelligence, reporting on the first week of May 1944, 'thinking, talking and reading invasion' had overtaken everything else:

comment over any other war topic is almost at a standstill . . . Despite apprehension over casualties and awareness of the difficulties ahead, the majority long for it to start, to get the strain of waiting over and to hasten the end of the war with 'all its restrictions and difficulties'. 84

'ERNIE, WHEN WE HAVE DONE THIS JOB FOR YOU, ARE WE GOING BACK ON THE DOLE?'

Both the mood of approaching military climax and the fact that the war might soon be over had important political consequences, both on parties pondering how they would fight a post-war general election and on ministers grappling with the problems of reconstruction. On 12 December

1943, the Conservatives only just held the seat of Darwen, Lancashire, against an Independent Liberal candidate. Three weeks later, they lost the by-election in Skipton, West Yorkshire, to Common Wealth. The Conservative candidate, a sixty-one-year-old businessman, was defeated by Hugh Lawson, an army officer half his age. To Conservative Central Office, this defeat demonstrated the need to get a clear domestic manifesto. To Churchill and Beaverbrook, it showed a party more concerned with finding constituencies for elderly nonentities than adopting the bright young men who had come of age during the war. When the MP for West Derbyshire, Henry Hunloke, resigned in January 1944, they thought they had a chance to prove the point. 86

Like almost every West Derbyshire MP to that point, Hunloke was a relative of the Cavendish family, who as dukes of Devonshire owned much of the constituency. Married to the tenth duke's sister, he had to step down when the family discovered he was having an affair. Churchill and Beaverbrook got the writ for the by-election moved quickly so that the duke's son, the marquess of Hartington, a twenty-six-year-old major in the Coldstream Guards, could stand while on leave from his regiment. He ran on a platform of national unity and support for the prime minister. A former Labour candidate, Charles White, resigned from the party to stand against Hartington. Fighting with help from Common Wealth and local Labour activists, he campaigned on welfare reform. White won a huge victory, taking 57.7 per cent of the vote and turning a 5,000 Tory majority into one of 4,500 for Independent Labour. Once in Parliament, White took the Labour whip. Hartington rejoined his regiment and was killed in action on 10 September 1944.⁸⁷

Shocked at the defeat, Churchill briefly focused on revivifying the Conservative Party. He met with party officials, Eden, Beaverbrook and Brendan Bracken to work out a strategy. Plans were drawn up to counter Common Wealth with a flying squad of Conservative activists. A new campaign was launched to identify potential candidates and get them adopted by constituency associations. There was no shortage of able, young, middle-class men in uniform who thought they might have a future on the political right. Guy Gibson, the Dambuster hero, would almost certainly have become a Conservative MP had he survived the war. Central Office issued new policy information and rebranded the party's youth wing. Formerly the 'Junior Imperial League', it became the 'Young Conservatives' in September 1944.⁸⁸

As before, left-wing by-election victories reinforced the Labour movement's sense of disillusion with the Coalition and heightened calls to take the fight to the country. Labour ministers, however, were reluctant to risk putting themselves out of power. Herbert Morrison proposed that they should remain within a post-war coalition. This would govern for the first year of peace, then re-establish its mandate with a coupon election in which the government would back any candidate who supported its programme. Labour's NEC blocked this idea, deciding privately in February 1944 that Labour would fight the next election independently. Attlee, however, carefully avoided any commitment to leave the Coalition or hold an election immediately after the end of the war. He preferred to wait until the roars of victory had died down before challenging Churchill at the ballot box.

Meanwhile, the reconstruction boulder rolled slowly on. The Education Bill was well received by both sides of the Commons during its second reading in January 1944. Butler emphasized the solution to the denominational 'problem' and hived off public school reform to a separate committee under Lord Fleming. Given that most Labour-supporting teachers wanted comprehensive schools, there was strikingly little discussion of the problems of the Bill's proposed tripartite division between grammar, secondary modern and technical establishments. Most MPs accepted that these institutions could enjoy parity of esteem and that children could be split between them based on a test at eleven. Both views were typical of the age.⁸⁹

Led by the feminist Conservative MP, Thelma Cazalet-Keir, rebellious Labour MPs and Tory reformers tried to amend the Education Bill to include a specific date to raise the school-leaving age and to require that male and female teachers be equally paid. Butler and his education minister Chuter Ede opposed changes that would make reform more expensive and, they feared, derail the whole Bill. Since no one expected the amendments to pass, neither Labour nor the Conservatives marshalled loyal MPs before the vote on 28 March. To everyone's surprise, the rebels passed the equal-pay amendment by one vote – the first time since its formation that the Coalition had been defeated in the Commons. 90 Churchill, wanting to stamp the Coalition's authority ahead of D-Day, was delighted by 'the opportunity to rub the rebels' noses in their mess'. 91 The next day, he informed the House that the government would make the removal of the offending amendment a vote of confidence. The government duly won by 425 votes to 23. Churchill made Cazalet-Keir a junior education minister in his 1945 caretaker government. It would be thirty years before female teachers were paid on the same basis as men. What really made people outside Westminster sit up was Churchill's

determination to crush any opposition.⁹² It confirmed the suspicions of those who doubted his suitability as a peacetime leader.⁹³ Back in Parliament, the Bill sailed through the Commons and the Lords and received royal assent on 3 August 1944. Meanwhile, Fleming recommended that public schools open a quarter of their places to scholarship pupils in return for local authority subsidies – not an idea that would appeal to schools, families or the councils who had to pay for the whole thing after the war.

Butler had secured a largely state-funded system of universal secondary education for England and Wales, in which non-denominational Christianity would be embedded as the spiritual basis for social and political life. In the medium term, the latter change would fail to hold back the rising tide of secularization. In the short term, it represented the effective, pragmatic realization of a political vision despite the enduring partisan divide. Archbishop Temple, who had done so much to help Butler, did not live to see the Act implemented. Frenetically busy, extremely overweight and crippled by gout, he persisted with his engagements even after both knees gave out and he had to be carried around in a chair by four hefty St John Ambulance men. He died of a pulmonary embolism on 26 October 1944. He was cremated, the first archbishop of Canterbury to be so, part of the sea change in attitudes to the practice in the middle of the twentieth century.⁹⁴

While Butler's Education Act went through Parliament, ministers on the new Reconstruction Committee debated other blueprints for rebuilding Britain after the war. Composed of hard-working ministers who knew how to get things done – Woolton, Attlee, Bevin, Morrison, Lyttelton, Butler, Cranborne and Anderson – it was a serious body. Driven on by the potentially imminent end of the war, its members wanted progress on reconstruction, but their actions were also conditioned by the political divide. Much of the committee's work therefore consisted of finding those areas where compromise between its members' competing instincts could be achieved. Attlee, Bevin and – in particular – Morrison exerted a lot of influence, but Sir John Anderson continued to restrain future spending commitments. When that barrier failed, Churchill relied on the barracking of Bracken and Beaverbrook to stir up a fight about creeping socialism that allowed him to put off decisions for another day. 95

Nonetheless, preparations for the opening of the second front meant that the need for practical progress on reconstruction was now unavoidable. This included immediate measures for the transition, such as the announcement in March 1944 that resources would be allocated to build half a million prefabricated houses, and up to 300,000 permanent houses after the war; the introduction of a Town and Country Planning Bill that June, which would give local authorities compulsory purchase powers over blitzed land; and the development of demobilization plans by the Ministry of Labour. It also resulted in a series of White Papers on different aspects of post-war domestic policy published during 1944: 'A National Health Service' (February), 'Employment Policy' (June), 'Control of Land Use' (July), and 'Social Insurance' (September).

The construction and the publication of these White Papers brought out differences over the future. Take the White Paper on a National Health Service, which proposed replacing the hotch-potch of competing selfemployed general practitioners with local health centres, staffed by salaried doctors and administered by regional health boards that would also run most hospitals. The British Medical Association opposed the loss of free enterprise and private profit entailed in the shift to state employment. Conservative ministers tried to reduce the role of local health though Attlee pushed the proposals through Reconstruction Committee and the Cabinet, the White Paper was deliberately vague about how important details of the new scheme would operate. The Conservatives could welcome it as a gradual improvement of the existing system, while Labour were pleased that important principles of nationalized health care had been laid down. Over the months that followed, however, the Conservative minister for health, Henry Willink, entered privately into fresh rounds of negotiations with the BMA. Changing his plans, he decided to keep doctors out of local authority control and guarantee funding to voluntary hospitals. These changes undermined the principles Labour thought had been agreed and ensured that no National Health Service Bill could be introduced before the end of the war. 96

The official formulation of employment policy was driven by anxiety at William Beveridge's decision to launch an independent inquiry of his own into the topic. The question of how permanently and fully the state should intervene in the economy to maintain employment occasioned fierce arguments between Anderson and the Labour ministers on the Reconstruction Committee. The published White Paper accepted the 'maintenance of a high and stable level of employment' as 'one' of the government's 'primary aims' (with a maximum level of joblessness set at a substantial 8.5 per cent). Its proposals for how this was to be achieved, however, included both increased public investment and a gradual reduction of economic controls. Deliberately, it did not resolve the divide

between those Keynesian economists and civil servants who accepted deficit financing for spending to maintain employment during cyclical economic downturns, and their more traditional colleagues who preferred to maintain the value of the pound and rely on private enterprise.⁹⁷

Ministers agreed to disagree on these topics because they wanted to get the White Paper out before Beveridge went public with his own recommendations. Introducing it to the Commons on 21 June 1944, Bevin spoke of watching with Churchill as soldiers from the 50th Division, recruited from formerly depressed areas in northeast England, embarked for the invasion: 'The one question they put to me when I went through their ranks was, "Ernie, when we have done this job for you, are we going back on the dole?" . . . Both the Prime Minister and I answered, "No you are not".' Though the anecdote subsequently became part of the folklore of Bevin's devotion to the working class, at the time he told it as part of his efforts to forestall attacks from the backbenches. Bevin told MPs that they all had 'an obligation' to do all they could to find a solution to mass unemployment, 'and not to dissipate energy merely in destructive criticism'. 98 That did not stop Labour MPs complaining that the White Paper did not commit the government to a programme of public ownership. On this issue, as Aneurin Bevan pointed out, the gap between Labour and the Conservatives was such that it could not be settled without rupturing the Coalition.⁹⁹

That point would be made abundantly clear when the Town and Country Planning Bill went before the Commons. Progress on urban reconstruction, in particular, was by this point urgently needed. Since 1942, local authorities had continued to prepare their schemes for rebuilding blitzed cities. Two of the most ambitious, both developed in partnership with the architect and champion of radical town planning, Patrick Aber-crombie, had been published in 1943, as the Plan for Plymouth and the County of London Plan respectively. The latter contrasted the unplanned, dangerous sprawl of pre-war London with the potential for a reordered, healthier metropolis. Carefully controlled redevelopment, with stricter control over the use of land for industry and housing, would clear away slums and bomb damage and allow the rebirth of London's local communities, while at the centre of the capital, the West End and City would be rebuilt in monumental style. Beautifully presented, the County of London Plan became an exercise in public education in democratic citizenship; 10,000 copies were sold, abridged booklet versions were sent to schoolchildren and military units, and exhibitions at County Hall and the Royal Academy attracted 75,000 visitors and extensive media discussion. It was followed in 1944 by the *Greater London Plan*, which offered the hope of new homes and solutions to overcrowding through planned suburban development and the creation of new towns outside the capital's green belt.¹⁰⁰

A new Ministry of Town and Country Planning had been set up in February 1943, but physical reconstruction could not go further until there was clarity about the legal powers and financial resources that would be available to local government. The political arguments aroused by the Town and Country Planning Bill, however, made it clear why the government had been in no hurry to move legislation earlier in the war. Labour MPs criticized the Bill for failing to address the larger questions of land nationalization and central economic planning. Conservatives were appalled at the blow to property rights represented by the new powers of compulsory purchase, and particularly at the fact that compensation would be based on the value at the start of the war, rather than current prices (which had increased by about a third since 1939). The minister for economic warfare, Lord Selborne, nearly resigned, and only a series of government concessions prevented a major Conservative revolt. In increasingly acrimonious debates, the Tories accused Labour of incipient totalitarianism and Labour accused the Conservatives of supporting war profiteers at the expense of the common good. 101

The result was an Act which would not sustain radical city reconstruction without extensive and determined local support. In particular, central government financial assistance was limited to the rebuilding of blitzed areas, rather than also applying to those afflicted by urban blight, and would be provided for only ten years — not enough to see through some of the more ambitious plans envisaged earlier in the war. The reason the legislation was passed, these insufficiencies notwithstanding, was that there was agreement that something had to be done to allow rebuilding to begin. 102

Taken together, moreover, the Education Act, the White Papers and the Town and Country Planning Act sketched out a vision of future domestic policy which was different from the pre-war. How different, bearing in mind both the trend towards growing state involvement in the economy under Chamberlain and the wriggle room left within the White Papers, would depend on the composition of the first post-war government. Whatever form it took, however, that government was increasingly being committed to higher spending on more universal services. How this would be afforded, and whether the resultant perpetuation of high wartime taxes would impose a brake on the revival of Britain's export economy, were

real concerns for Churchill.

A few days after the White Paper on Employment Policy was published, Woolton wrote to the prime minister to insist on progress in implementing the government's commitment to a new scheme of social insurance. Churchill responded by asking Sir John Anderson to halt 'the rapid growth in our national burdens'. Anderson had already factored increased postwar social expenditure into his budgets, but he duly told the Cabinet that the government must either take a gamble on rapidly cutting post-war taxes in the hope of stimulating growth and driving up revenues, or delay welfare reforms for fear of damaging economic recovery. Since this resulted in a fight between Labour and Conservative ministers, Churchill could insist the whole subject was so controversial that any legislation would have to be put off until victory had been achieved. The White Papers on Social Insurance that followed showed little practical advance on the promises made after the publication of the Beveridge Report.

Few of these plans and debates broke into public awareness. The White Paper on a National Health Service, the titular progenitor of that great British shibboleth, got barely any coverage in the popular press. Parliamentary debates about employment policy and planning law attracted little interest – though what comment there was emphasized strengthening 'cynicisms about the Government's intentions'. The lack of fascination with the minutiae of future domestic policy indicated less public apathy – though there was doubtless more interest in practical measures than further talk – and more the course of the war. As the long years of getting ready came to an end, everyone's attention was absorbed by the brutal struggle taking place across the Channel.

'WHERE ARE THEY NOW?'

As the date set for D-Day, 5 June 1944, approached, columns of vehicles began to wend their way through the holding camps and towards their embarkation points. Even those who had observed the rehearsals were astounded by the awesome scale of the endeavour revealed for the first time as the invasion forces assembled. As servicemen waited in their lorries, inching forward in the traffic jam, civilians came out of their houses to offer tea, food, or the chance to have a wash. Not unlike the summer of 1940, there was a shared mood of excitement and apprehension. Watching a troop of commandos dozing in the sun, the

Wren Maureen Bolster found tears rolling down her cheeks. 'They looked so young I could hardly bear it', she wrote to her fiancé a few days later. 'Where are they now?' 105

Troops started to board on 30 May. It took four days before loading was complete. The ships were packed and the men had to spend most of the time standing up. The first vessels slipped their moorings and headed out to the forming-up points offshore, only to be called back on the morning of 4 June. Storms were sweeping in from the Atlantic and Eisenhower had decided to postpone the invasion by twenty-four hours. That evening, after SHAEF's meteorologists suggested that a window of better weather might be on its way from the west, Eisenhower took the decision to go – a choice that seemed vindicated the next morning as the weather started to improve. The armada set off again, to discover what fate awaited it off the Normandy coast.

'Something more than courage and endurance'

June-September 1944

There was no battle in the Channel. German commanders, convinced by the bad weather that no attack could take place, discounted warnings from their intelligence officers who had broken the code used to issue preparatory messages to the French resistance through broadcasts on the BBC. Air and sea patrols were cancelled, senior officers, including Rommel, were away from their posts, and German forces began to react only after the airborne assault began. This was a degree of surprise the Allied planners had not anticipated.¹

Packed with puking soldiers, the armada ploughed southwards, buffeted by the bad weather rather than the enemy. As the Eastern Task Force lowered its landing craft, four German E-boats sank a Norwegian destroyer, then fled through the smoke screen that the Allies had laid to protect themselves from an air attack that never came. Altogether, Allied planes flew 14,075 sorties in the twenty-four hours from the night of 5–6 June 1944. RAF planes flew just over 5,500 of them, including escort duties, bombing raids and transporting paratroopers.² The Luftwaffe air fleet in France managed a total of 319 sorties in the first twenty-four hours of the invasion.³

The airborne drops were scattered, but 6th British Airborne Division secured the eastern flank of the assault, seizing the crossings over the Caen Canal and River Orne and knocking out the coastal battery at Merville. To the west, the more dispersed US airborne divisions failed to take all their objectives, but unintentionally confused the Germans still further about the direction of the invasion. Meanwhile, the fleet and air forces began their bombardment of the coastal fortifications.

The Allied landings were meant to be carefully phased attacks, with amphibious additions but of a type familiar from attacks on fortified lines

in North Africa or Italy: a bombardment to knock out the defensive strongpoints, engineers clearing paths through the obstacles and minefields, Duplex Drive (DD) tanks swimming to the water's edge to provide direct fire support, then the infantry companies landing to complete the assault while the engineers opened routes for the breakthrough inland. Given the numerical and firepower superiority they enjoyed, the questions were not whether the Allies would win these battles, but what would be their duration and cost. The factors determining these were apparent in the two sectors of the 50th Division's attack on 'Gold' Beach.

On 'King' sector, to the east, the bombardment stunned the defenders and visible landmarks enabled most of the attackers to come ashore in the right place. The sea was too rough to launch the DD tanks, which were carried all the way to the beach, but tanks, infantry and engineers managed to fight their way through the fortifications. By late morning the assault brigade was advancing inland.⁴

On 'Jig' to the west, the bombardment missed and the defenders pinned down the engineers. They couldn't clear the beach exits. Congestion offshore meant that the DD tanks arrived half an hour after the lead infantry brigade, which landed further east than planned because of high winds. Officers, standing up to locate their men, were hit by bullets and shrapnel. When the tanks did arrive, they immediately got bogged down. Nonetheless, naval gunfire eventually suppressed the German artillery and the infantrymen stormed the defences. They suffered twice as many casualties as their counterparts on 'King'. The delay meant that the first follow-up troops landed two hours later than planned; 47 Royal Marine Commando, which was meant to conduct a fighting march from 'Gold' to 'Omaha' Beach, lost a fifth of its men during the run in to the beach, and had to spend the morning reorganizing before it could set off.

The same pattern was discernible across the other beaches. On 'Juno', the 3rd Canadian Division, landing later so that the rising tide would cover an inshore reef, suffered greater damage to its landing craft as a result from now submerged obstacles.⁵ On 'Sword', resistance from a strongpoint that had survived the bombardment slowed the opening of exit routes.⁶ Things went best on 'Utah', where the bombardment knocked out not just fortifications but also the supporting artillery, and worst at 'Omaha', where the defences, strongly positioned on the bluffs, remained largely intact, and the GIs were trapped on the shoreline until direct fire from destroyers helped them storm the cliffs.

'Omaha' aside, by midday it was plain that the landings had been

successful. The cost to Commonwealth forces was lighter than anticipated: about 2,700 across the three beaches, fewer than the Americans suffered on 'Omaha' alone.⁷ For all that it had not stopped the invasion, however, the poor weather continued to exert an effect. The engineers removing the explosive-rigged beach obstacles were engulfed by a tide rising faster than normal because of the strong onshore wind. Behind them, the next landing craft were already moving in. Damaged, they clogged the beaches, slowing subsequent arrivals. As the tide peaked, the space to disembark reinforcements narrowed and tailbacks of vehicles built up behind the gaps that had been cleared.⁸

The congestion weakened the British drive to secure Caen. Always optimistic, the plan was finished off by the presence of German strongpoints and armoured reserves between the beaches and the city. Potentially more significantly, the individual beachheads were not united. A hundred and thirty thousand Allied troops had come ashore, but only 'Juno' and 'Gold' had been linked. Slow command responses and a conviction that the main invasion was still to come elsewhere delayed the release of more distant German mobile reserves. During the afternoon and evening of D-Day, however, German units closer to the front line, hardwired to react aggressively, tried to counter-attack the beachhead with infantry, assault guns and tanks. Allied naval gunfire, and tanks and antitank guns in pre-planned defensive positions, quickly broke up these attacks. ¹⁰

'ALL IS GOING WELL, AND . . . THERE IS EVERY REASON FOR THE HIGHEST CONFIDENCE'

At nine o'clock that evening, George VI spoke to the nation ahead of the nightly news. Eighty per cent of the adult population of the UK was listening, the highest audience figure ever recorded by the BBC.¹¹ In a Fulham pub, a Mass-Observer recorded the scene. A baffled regular stumbled in, heard who it was, then stumbled out. Everyone else listened quietly, as the king, referring to 1940, made a spiritual appeal:

Once again what is demanded from us all is something more than courage and endurance; we need a revival of spirit, a new unconquerable resolve . . . We who remain in this land can most effectively enter into the sufferings of subjugated Europe by prayer, whereby we can fortify the determination of our sailors, soldiers and airmen who go forth to set the captives free.

The Queen joins with me in sending you this message. She well understands the

anxieties and cares of our womenfolk . . . and she knows that many of them will find, as she does herself, fresh strength and comfort in such waiting upon God.^{12}

In Fulham, the effect was immediate:

F60C next to investigator begins to sniff, gets out her handkerchief, and sobs audibly. F45C on the other side of the bar mops her eyes. Then men begin to cough slightly and sniff. When God Save the King is played at the end, M60C looks round the bar and beckons everyone to stand up and they promptly do so. 'I've got two in this', sobs F60C to investigator. 'They're my last'. ¹³

After the news came the first edition of a new radio programme called *War Report*. This D-Day episode interspersed declarations from Eisenhower, de Gaulle and Montgomery with accounts from BBC correspondents who had been with the invasion forces. Howard Marshall, the doyen of BBC outside broadcasting in the 1930s, had in fact been wounded on 'Gold' Beach, and had two landing craft sunk under him, but still got back to the UK to telephone his report down the line in time for the broadcast. Emphasizing how quickly the battle had turned in the Allies' favour, he explained to listeners that 'all is going well, and . . . there is every reason for the highest confidence'. 15

War Report went out every evening between D-Day and the end of the European war. The correspondents of a special War Reporting Unit had been carefully instructed in censorship, battlefield survival and the right tone ('Let pride in the achievement of our armies come through', they were told, 'But never seek to "jazz up" a plain story'). 16 New US portable wire recorders allowed them to get close to the battle's edge. As soon as outside broadcast vehicles got across the Channel, their voices were patched in live to the programme. The combination of live relays and recorded accounts, linked together in the studio and passed by the censor just before they went out, put the programme at the technical cutting edge of contemporary radio journalism. Ten to fifteen million Britons listened to every edition – as many people as tuned in for the hit comedy programme *It's That Man Again*. ¹⁷ Servicemen listened as well. A Royal Navy lieutenant, shepherding shipwrecked ratings back to the UK aboard an American landing craft, heard Marshall's report over the loudspeakers: 'I could have smashed that radio', he recalled, 'because it was so untrue as far as Omaha was concerned.'18

'GOING LIKE "DING-BATS"'

As the Germans overcame their surprise, the period after D-Day was one of intense action at sea and in the skies. Though their squadrons outnumbered the Luftwaffe air fleet defending France by about twenty to one, Allied air commanders anticipated a major German effort against the invasion. To maintain air superiority, they sent sorties to attack enemy airfields, intercept German reinforcements, and to keep a powerful fighter screen over the beachhead. During June 1944, Second TAF alone flew 31,000 fighter sorties, almost two-thirds of them defensive patrols.¹⁹

In the week after D-Day, German aircraft launched hundreds of attacks on the fleet, including some with radio-controlled bombs. Very few got through, not just because of the array of anti-aircraft guns and fighters, but also because new electronic counter-measures jammed the signals to the guided bombs. Between 6 and 20 June 1944, just two Allied ships were sunk from the air. Realizing that bombing the beachhead was effectively impossible, the Germans switched their bombers to minelaying instead. Crucially, Allied control of the air allowed warships to come in close to the shore and use their guns to support troops operating on the ground. As had become apparent in Italy, they would make a vital contribution to defeating attempted German counter-attacks over the following days.

The Luftwaffe's counter-invasion plan relied on redeploying fighter aircraft from the Reich to France. It failed disastrously. Allied bombing knocked out most of the prepared airfields. Poorly trained pilots got lost, crashed, or were surprised by Allied fighters, directed to the incoming German squadrons by Ultra intelligence. With railways and roads in chaos, groundcrew and supplies took weeks to turn up, so the Germans struggled to keep even the planes that made it to Normandy in action.²¹

Nonetheless, a week after D-Day the Germans had built up a substantial air force to take on the Allies. Despite continual losses, reinforcements meant that it peaked at about a thousand aircraft. This was not enough to challenge for air superiority, but it did mean a period of fierce combat. Between 6 and 30 June, the German air fleet in France lost 968 aircraft destroyed and 575 damaged, with another 385 destroyed and 442 damaged over the Reich. Allied combat losses over Northwest Europe in the same period amounted to 1,508 aircraft (including 726 British aircraft and more than 3,000 British aircrew). As a percentage of the available strength, the effect on the Germans was far more devastating. It was the start of a repeating pattern: as soon as the Luftwaffe in the West accumulated any strength, it was ordered into an all-out attack in a desperate attempt to influence the land battle, then shot out of the skies. ²³

The contrast with the Allied air forces was stark. As one Second TAF

staff officer put it, his crews were 'going like "ding-bats" '.²⁴ In the days and nights following the invasion, medium bombers hit towns close to the beachhead, including Vire and Falaise, to wreck stations, block roads and break up German troop concentrations. Further afield, Bomber Command's heavy bombers targeted rail junctions around Paris, including at Versailles and Massy-Palaiseau, to isolate the battlefield from further reinforcement.²⁵ Close to the front, fighter-bombers provided direct support to ground forces, while others roved behind the German lines on 'armed reconnaissance', shooting up supply vehicles and troops.

Partly because of the bad weather, Allied air attacks during and immediately after D-Day were not as successful as Leigh-Mallory's headquarters had hoped. Air attacks did not stop the Germans moving up their reserves, and this slowed the drive off the beaches. Nor could they clear a path for the soldiers on the ground. The fighter-bombers, at their best against an enemy moving in the open, struggled to locate dug-in defenders. Wary of the Luftwaffe, army units had not painted large air recognition symbols on their vehicles before the invasion. Unable to identify friend from foe, pilots frequently attacked their own side.

As in Italy, however, Allied air superiority imposed a brake on the Germans' ability to make war. Reinforcements had to take long detours around broken rail lines and detrain well outside the battle zone. Longer approach marches took more time, used more fuel, and exposed the mechanical unreliability of German tanks and their lack of tank transporters. Even more significantly in these early stages of the campaign, air attacks directly impeded senior German officers' command and control of the battle. After Ultra decrypts identified Panzer Group West's headquarters, a hundred Typhoons and Mitchells from the Second TAF attacked it on 10 June. Von Schweppenburg was badly injured and the headquarters put out of action for two weeks.²⁷

Allied air superiority also had consequences for the fight at sea. German torpedo boats launched night-time attacks on cross-Channel convoys, but were driven off by powerful surface escorts, then pursued by Coastal Command. When the three available German destroyers attempted to intervene on the evening of 6 June 1944, Coastal Command Beaufighters drove them back into port. Reinforced, they ventured out again on 8 June, only to be routed in a night battle by a combined flotilla of British, Canadian and Polish destroyers. A week later, Bomber Command raids knocked out the torpedo-boat bases at Le Havre and Boulogne.²⁸

Turning to minelaying, the Germans employed a new 'oyster' mine,

triggered by hydrostatic pressure. German ships and aircraft laid more than four thousand of these between June and August 1944. The new mine was immune to sweeping, and during June it sank at least ten smaller warships, making it by far the most effective German maritime weapon of the campaign.²⁹

Allied naval commanders had been most concerned about the threat from submarines. Like the airmen, they anticipated an all-out German effort against the invasion. Here, too, overwhelming Allied strength preempted any attack. Ten veteran British and Canadian anti-submarine groups were posted to the western end of the Channel to block U-boats coming eastwards from the Atlantic ports. Above them, 350 aircraft of Coastal Command's 19 Group flew blanket patrols. To the north, 18 Group, including experienced aircrew sent over specifically from Canada, barred submarines from Norway travelling down to join in the attack.³⁰

The air coverage forced Dönitz to limit his campaign. The Kriegsmarine was starting to re-equip with new snorkel U-boats that could travel long distances underwater. Most of its submarines, however, remained very vulnerable to air detection and attack. Of the forty-nine U-boats ordered to the Channel immediately after the invasion, six were quickly sunk by Coastal Command and another six so badly damaged that they had to return to port. On 12 June 1944, Dönitz ordered all the boats without snorkels to withdraw.

A total of thirty snorkel-equipped boats operated in the Channel during that summer. Such was the strength of the Allied anti-submarine groups on the surface that they faced a struggle just to get to the shipping lanes. Experienced British and Canadian crews, however, also struggled to adapt to the Channel's narrow waters, wreck-strewn bottom and tidal flow. During July 1944, the battle intensified as the submarines reached the convoy routes and the U-boat hunters developed new techniques to pursue their prey. Sailors on both sides worked under tremendous strain – the Germans closed down in their stinking boats; the Allied crews depthcharging so close to their own ships that they were themselves at risk from the explosions. The U-boats never challenged the Allied build-up in France, but Dönitz successfully preserved his submarine fleet to fight another day.

THE DAYS AFTER D-DAY

On the ground, both sides spent the days after 6 June fighting as they had

been programmed to do before the invasion began. Allied formations tried to link the landings, defend the beachhead, and achieve their first-day objectives, while, behind them, the Mulberry harbours, towed across the Channel, were assembled. The Germans, still fogged by the 'Fortitude tried to defend Cherbourg and brought deception, reinforcements. Despite air attacks, 1st SS Panzer Corps, including the powerful 21st, 12th SS and Panzer Lehr armoured divisions, assembled north of Caen, ahead of an attack against the Anglo-Canadian beaches. As damaged landing craft and bad weather slowed the reinforcements, Second British Army's drive towards Caen ground to a halt, but the 50th British Division captured Bayeux on 7 June, securing the centre of the Allied Front and unhinging the German defences in front of 'Omaha' Beach. That allowed the Americans there to expand their beachhead, while, to the west, the Germans fought US paratroopers for control of the critical road junction at Sainte-Mère-Église.

To the east, the Panzer Lehr Division, disrupted by Allied air attacks, arrived on the battlefield too confused to play much of a role on 8 June. Between 7 and 9 June 1944, the 12th SS Panzer Division led the attack on the Canadians each side of the Mue river, launching a series of very strong, but poorly executed assaults, which the Canadians fought to a standstill. The teenagers and Nazi thugs who made up 12th SS Panzer were ferocious but tactically naive. In the first five days of the invasion they murdered 156 Canadian prisoners, but their successes relied on shock and weight of numbers. The Canadians fought a closely co-ordinated defensive battle integrating artillery, anti-tank guns and infantry. As soon as the guns were ashore and warships became available, the great weight of firepower that the planners had allocated to this sector of the beachhead told, wrecking German attempts to seize the start line for a more substantial armoured offensive. Meanwhile, the capture of Bayeux opened up a gap in front of the 50th British Division, forcing the Germans to move Panzer Lehr sideways to restore the line.³¹

Montgomery wanted Caen. Ruling out a direct attack on the city as too costly, the British planned an encirclement, with I Corps attacking out of the Orne bridgehead to the east, the 1st British Airborne Division dropped on the plateau behind, and XXX Corps, led by the newly arrived 7th Armoured Division, pushing south and round the city from the west. Leigh-Mallory vetoed the use of the airborne troops, however, and German counter-attacks dragged I Corps into a fight for the bridgehead over the Orne. All that was left of the plan was the right hook from XXX Corps, codenamed Operation 'Perch'. Informed by Ultra of the narrow and

closing hole in the German line, Dempsey moved 7th Armoured Division's advance westwards, hoping to outflank Panzer Lehr, seize the crossroads village of Villers-Bocage and drive south towards the high ground of Mont Pinçon.³²

When the lead elements of 7th Armoured Division reached Villers-Bocage on 13 June, they were ambushed by the last available German armoured reserves. In the fighting that followed, both sides suffered heavy losses, but the British manoeuvre had been contained. Next day, the 7th Armoured Division withdrew. Dempsey blamed his subordinates' timidity, but a much greater problem was the limited margin of superiority. Like other British armoured divisions, the 7th Armoured had arrived in Normandy organized to exploit a breach, not to fight a slugging match against an unbroken opponent in countryside seemingly designed for defence. Since the panzer divisions were not yet ready to disintegrate, 'Perch' was never likely to succeed.

Further west, a much more significant event had taken place as US paratroopers took the town of Carentan, completing the unification of the beachhead, and occasioning a shift in German campaign strategy. The last German defenders withdrew just as reinforcements, delayed by air attacks, were about to arrive. Enraged, Hitler insisted all his soldiers hold their ground until an armoured offensive rolled up the beachhead from the east.

With the defeat of 1st SS Panzer Corps' attempted offensive on 7–9 June, and sixteen Allied divisions already in Normandy, the chance of a successful German counter-attack had already gone. Hitler's intervention, however, determined the next phase of the Normandy battle. Assailed by Allied airpower behind the lines and a series of offensives as Montgomery sought to break out of the beachhead, the Germans would end up committing reserves piecemeal to a battle of attrition against the industrial might of the Atlantic alliance around the beachhead, rather than after a withdrawal into central France.

The rigid German defence upset pre-invasion predictions. Rather than racing into Brittany, the Americans had to fight hard just to get out of the bocage. In their sector, British and Canadian commanders faced a much longer and tougher battle than they had anticipated to blast through thick German defences around Caen, rather than a quicker breakout followed by a fast-moving clash with the panzer reserves in the plains beyond.³³

'THE "WALK-OVER" TO BERLIN HAD DEVELOPED INTO AN INFANTRY SLOGGING MATCH'

Over the next six weeks Anglo-Canadian troops fought a series of major and minor offensives, ranging in size from single divisions to several corps. After Operation 'Perch', only one of these involved the wholesale commitment of troops to the bocage; mostly, the British and Canadians attacked in the more open landscape around the southeastern edge of the beachhead. Thanks to the lack of cover, it was actually more dangerous to be an infantryman in these offensives than in the confined confrontations among the hedgerows. Simultaneously, however, those units which were not attacking also carried on a prolonged battle of aggressive defence around their section of the Normandy perimeter. This was a stressful and costly struggle of foxholes and flares, patrols and sniper fire, interspersed with larger raids to maintain the initiative or capture key ground. The greatest threat was German mortars, which caused 70 per cent of Twenty-First Army Group's combat casualties up to the end of July.³⁴

The major Anglo-Canadian offensives were set-piece attacks, with concentrated artillery fire supporting the infantry divisions independent armoured brigades as they sledgehammered their way into German defences on a narrow front, then broke up the inevitable counterattack. At some point, Montgomery expected, one of these 'colossal cracks' would force an opening for the armoured divisions to exploit. By this stage of the war, however, the Germans were constructing defensive positions so deep that Allied gunners had neither the range nor the firepower to cover them with shells from behind their own front lines. Attacks that broke into German defences often then ground to a halt. Montgomery, determined to maintain control, quickly closed such operations down and shifted the effort to another part of the front, maintaining the initiative and compelling the Germans to commit their reserves. It was easy to blame the approach – rather than the German defensive strength it was designed to overcome – when progress expanding the British sector of the beachhead slowed.³⁵

For many of the British and Canadian soldiers in Normandy, this was – after nearly five years of war – their first experience of battle. Even for combat veterans, however, it was a new sort of fighting. The dense concentration of forces on both sides meant that combat persisted at high intensity for longer than at Salerno or Anzio. And there was little of the willingness to live and let live that had occasionally been visible in the Western Desert. When bad weather slowed the arrival of reinforcements, the first troops ashore, men who had experienced the extraordinary tension of D-Day itself, had to keep fighting for three weeks with only the sparsest relief. To begin with, keyed-up soldiers were very aggressive. As time

went by, however, tea, cigarettes and Benzedrine became decreasingly effective at warding off overwhelming fatigue. Around the Orne and the Odon rivers, clouds of mosquitoes, hanging in the damp summer air, added a further layer of itching misery. Rates of exhaustion rose rapidly, from 11 per cent of all casualties in the last week of June 1944 to 16 per cent in the middle of July.³⁶

For all the battle schools, War Office Selection Boards and exercises, exposure to combat in Normandy was an unprecedented test of tactics, technology and personnel. It was particularly hard on the already-scarce infantry. Though total casualties were initially lower than expected, they rose sharply as the intensity of action picked up. Loss rates were higher than in North Africa or Italy, and battalions who had become soldiers together over years of training in the UK experienced an appalling churn of personnel as the beachhead battles went on. Individual platoons, companies and even battalions could experience these losses in the space of a single action or a few days — an evisceration of comradeship that could be devastating for morale. Loss rates were highest among infantry officers. Typically, however, units underwent a sporadic but more drawnout process of attrition and reinforcement, in which there was time for replacements to join battalions before they too were wounded or killed.³⁷

In either case, the effect on rifle battalions, in particular, could be significant. In the 3rd British Division, for example, the 2nd Battalion East Yorkshire Regiment lost 9 officer and 197 other rank casualties on D-Day (about a quarter of its landing strength, one of the worst casualty rates among the assault battalions), received 63 replacements the next day, but suffered another 98 casualties in its next major attack at the end of June. In less than a month, its casualties were the equivalent of almost the entire strength of its rifle platoons.³⁸ In the prolonged fighting in the Orne bridgehead – but without participating in a major offensive – the 5th Battalion Cameron Highlanders, in 51st (Highland) Division, suffered 17 officer and 294 other rank casualties during its first three weeks in Normandy, cutting a swathe through its junior officers and NCOs.³⁹ By the end of June 1944, 50th British Division had lost 237 officers, including 10 out of 12 commanding officers for its infantry battalions. Within a month of arriving in the beachhead, many of its surviving soldiers were being commanded by strangers.⁴⁰ As the psychiatrist attached to Second Army put it in his report on battle exhaustion, 'the gradual realisation that the "walkover" to Berlin had developed into an infantry slogging match caused an unspoken but clearly recognisible [sic] fall in morale.' As far as the soldiers knew, this was how the fighting would be until the end of the

war.41

One thing that took British tank crews by surprise was how undergunned they felt relative to their opponents. About three-quarters of all British tanks in Normandy mounted a 75mm gun that could not penetrate the thick armour of the enemy's Tigers and Panthers, or even reliably knock out the less well-protected Mark IVs and self-propelled guns that made up the majority of German armoured fighting vehicles in the campaign. Criticisms of deficient armament reached Montgomery at the end of June 1944. Eager to protect his soldiers' morale, he tried to quash the complaints, but tankmen made their weapons' weakness the subject of dark humour, and it subsequently became part of the folklore of the Normandy campaign. 42

Much of the tank combat in Normandy, however, took place at relatively close range, with the defender getting off the first shot before shifting firing position. In these circumstances, no tank could carry enough armour to protect itself, and the British tended to lose more tanks because they did more attacking rather than because their weapons were inferior. In the more open landscape around Caen — including the Mue plain and the slopes of Hill 112 — the German advantage in range and hitting power was more pronounced, but well-placed Commonwealth anti-tank guns could also exact a heavy toll on counter-attacking German tanks.

The superiority of German armoured firepower might have been more striking in the rolling encounter battle that could have taken place if the Germans hadn't been so committed to holding the beachhead perimeter. As it was, though the terrain was distinct, the key tactical problems of the ground battles in Normandy – the depth of enemy defences, the volume of German automatic weapon and mortar firepower, and the difficulty of coordinating infantry, artillery, air support and armour – were not that different from those encountered in Tunisia or Italy. The density of forces around the beachhead and the lack of room for manoeuvre, however, intensified both the ferocity of combat and the consequences of a failure quickly to adapt. Subsequently, British and Canadian troops would be criticized for a lack of dash, an over-reliance on artillery and low morale, but it is hard to see that these were universal characteristics, let alone the decisive factors. A myth soon sprang up that the veteran divisions brought back from the Mediterranean were particularly cautious and tactically stodgy. In fact, since both troops and units had been swapped in and out of these formations before the invasion, the fault seems to have lain not with weary soldiers, but with inadequate commanders or the particular circumstances of the battlefield.⁴³

The combat effectiveness of British and Canadian troops varied a lot at unit level, particularly in attack and particularly at the start of the campaign. This resulted from the lack of a previous proving ground for commanders and tactics, and the army's reluctance to impose a rigid doctrine, but also the dumb fate of battle. Right from the start, units that had previously worked closely together, with experienced or resilient officers, adapted quickly to the unexpected nature of the campaign, combined arms skilfully and fought aggressively. Others stuck for too long with unsuitable tactics, were unable to co-operate with unfamiliar units, suffered breakdowns in command when officers failed under pressure or became casualties, or were thrown into unwinnable confrontations against superior opponents. Disappointed hopes of a quick victory, a run of terrible luck or bad leadership, or exhaustion from the prolonged strain of the front line all caused morale to plummet, though seldom to such a level that it could not be repaired. Problems of unsuitable tactics, poor combined arms co-ordination and deficient command were hardly limited to British and Canadian, or even to Allied, formations. The Germans struggled with the same problems, which were even harder to address because of the aerial and material inferiority which they had to endure.

At different points in the campaign, senior officers expressed concerns about what their men could withstand. Sometimes, this formed a useful cover for their own failure. As before, the preservation of morale was an important concern for Montgomery, and it played into his concern to grip the fighting and to control his 'colossal cracks'. In the context of Normandy in 1944, with a German army locked into battle but hardly beaten, and whose junior commanders were still able to react quickly to the chaos of combat, Montgomery's reluctance to embrace substantial risk before the enemy front disintegrated, and his willingness to rely on shells and bombs, served his troops, his country and the Allied cause very well. Yet this approach restricted what any one attack could achieve: not just because each set-piece battle took time to organize, but also because the narrow-front advances required to concentrate fire made attacking momentum difficult to sustain.⁴⁴

'THE OVERRIDING FACTOR IS THAT THERE MUST BE NO SET-BACK'

After the failure of 'Perch', Montgomery accepted that he would have to

stage a set-piece battle to take Caen. As the Americans prepared for a new offensive on the Cotentin, he hoped to secure both Cherbourg and Caen by the last week of June. General Bradley would then turn south, and the Twenty-First Army Group would attack from both ends of the beachhead at the same time to break the German defence. With the fantasy of 'Fortitude South' still pinning German divisions in the Pas de Calais, Montgomery was determined to prevent the build-up of enemy armoured reserves required for a counter-attack.

The mismatch of reality with the pre-invasion plans exacerbated tensions between Allied commanders. On 14 June, Leigh-Mallory offered direct support from US heavy bombers for an assault on Caen. Montgomery happily accepted, but Leigh-Mallory had not cleared it with either Coningham or Tedder. Both thought the failure to take Caen was a major crisis for which Montgomery should be handed the blame. Neither wanted to use heavy bombers for ground support. Relations between Montgomery and Coningham had broken down, and Tedder was still working to ease Leigh-Mallory out. On 15 June, they flew into Normandy and Tedder vetoed the plan. As far as Montgomery was concerned, at least Leigh-Mallory did 'not spend his time trying to "trip-up" other people'.

Lack of space in the Orne bridgehead meant that the next British offensive towards Caen was again scaled back to a single western hook, led by the newly arrived British VIII Corps, under Lieutenant General Sir Richard O'Connor. The attack was supposed to begin on 23 June, preceded by a major bombing campaign from the tactical air forces. Then the weather intervened. Starting on the night of the 18th, a three-day storm swept through the Channel. It was the worst June weather for thirty-five years. Landing craft sailings were suspended. About eight hundred smaller vessels were lost. Mulberry harbour 'A', in the American sector, was wrecked and had to be abandoned. The inflow of troops and supplies was badly affected. Before the storm, the British and Canadians alone had brought about 16,000 men, 3,000 vehicles and 10,500 tons of stores ashore each day. While it raged, the daily average fell to about 4,000 men, 1,300 vehicles and 4,300 tons of stores.⁴⁷ The Germans had a precious period free from air attacks in which to organize their defences.

With field artillery ammunition running low, the British had to postpone their offensive, but the Americans fought their way up the Cotentin, and by 26 June they had captured most of Cherbourg. The port was so badly damaged that it would take six weeks to reopen. On 25 June, the British opened the preparatory attack, Operation 'Martlet', designed to

draw in German reserves ahead of their delayed main offensive, Operation 'Epsom'. The latter was planned to see two infantry divisions (15th Scottish and 43rd Wessex), supported by two armoured brigades, push south, cross the River Odon, and capture Hill 112, a key piece of high ground southwest of Caen. From there, 11th Armoured Division would be launched southeastwards and up the Orne valley, forcing a German withdrawal from Caen.

The weather remained dreadful, limiting air support, but Montgomery, wary of a German counter-offensive, was unwilling to wait. 'Epsom' started well, though tank and infantry co-operation was often poor. Strengthening German resistance held up the advance well north of the Odon. Trying to get across the river before day's end, O'Connor ordered 11th Armoured Division into the attack. It too was halted short.⁴⁸ On the 28th, the British managed to push their tanks temporarily onto Hill 112. By then, Ultra intelligence showed that the Germans had massed six armoured divisions to pinch out the newly created salient. Montgomery, determined that 'the overriding factor is that there must be no set-back', ordered the troops off Hill 112 'and get all set to receive a strong attack'.⁴⁹ The description written later by Robert Woollcombe, a junior officer with the 6th King's Own Scottish Borderers, gives a sense of the physical intensity of the action:

Noise raged, indescribable. It beat on our senses. It dulled us. It bludgeoned us. Never again did the enemy attain quite the intensity of shelling they put down against us here. And our own gunners answered . . . the enemy so near that the gunners were bringing down their concentrations almost on top of their own infantry . . . Smoke, spinning shrapnel, listing trees and falling branches, and shuddering blast. To the soldier in his slit, impossible to cope. Just keep his head down and exist — until shouted at by his officer to stand up, because he cannot see to shoot from the bottom of his trench. 50

As the Germans struck back, they were hammered by British gunfire and a Bomber Command raid on Villers-Bocage. Their counter-attack ground to a halt. The British had forced the Germans to commit their armoured strength to maintaining the line: but once again, they had failed to capture Caen.

For German generals, the loss of Cherbourg and the 'Epsom' offensive were signs that the campaign was already lost. With the – fictitious – First US Army Group still expected to attack in the Pas de Calais, and the Soviet summer offensive, Operation 'Bagration', carving through Axis defences on the Eastern Front, there seemed little chance of holding the Allies in Normandy. They wanted to withdraw across the Orne. Hitler's staff officers suspected this was the prelude to a retreat right across France.

Hitler sacked von Schweppenburg and Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, the commander of the German army in the West, replacing the latter with Field Marshal Günther von Kluge. Rommel remained in place. Despairing of victory, he was already peripherally involved in a plot by senior army officers to assassinate Hitler, stage a coup and seek a compromise peace with the Western Allies.⁵¹

'DENTAL CHAIRS AND YMCA INSTITUTIONS INSTEAD OF BAYONETS'

After they toured the landing sites on 14 June 1944, Churchill joshed Brooke that the army was bringing in 'dental chairs and YMCA institutions' rather than 'bayonets'. This missed the extent to which both massive material preponderance and attention to soldiers' welfare underpinned the army that Brooke, Adam, Paget and Montgomery had built. Those foundations would allow it to endure the grim turn in the campaign and improve its ability to impose itself on its enemies.

A map of the British beachhead at the start of July 1944 resembled a right-angled triangle with two giant bites taken out of its longest side. It covered about twenty-five miles of coast from the mouth of the Orne to Port-en-Bessin. Due south, at its deepest, it was just sixteen miles from the sea. On either side of the bridgeheads across the Orne and Odon, the front curved in again around Villers-Bocage and Caen. By 7 July 1944, it contained half a million British and Canadian soldiers.⁵³

In the week after the great storm, the delivery of men, stores and vehicles accelerated again. The remaining Mulberry harbour was almost in full operation, allowing men, vehicles and materiel to arrive dry-shod. Off the other beaches, flocks of amphibious DUKWs ferried supplies into temporary dumps before trucks carried them further inland. Troops fresh to Normandy drove to marshalling areas to strip the waterproofing off their vehicles and wait for the rest of their units to debark. Hospital tents pulsed with casualties and workshops clanged as mechanics repaired vehicles. There were anti-aircraft guns everywhere: taking no chances against the risks of Luftwaffe attack, British planners had made sure that 42 per cent of the guns landed in the first month of the invasion were anti-aircraft artillery. Wounded men, wrecked machines and prisoners awaited despatch to the UK. Pioneers carried casualties and supplies, built landing strips and widened roads to bear the weight of a modern army. As one

Royal Army Service Corps officer reported, new arrivals were baffled by the anthill: 'Roads are very congested and drivers are often imperfectly instructed as to their route and destination. Much time is wasted and congestion caused by drivers stopping on the road to make enquiries. Maps are scarce.'55

The area available within the beachhead was less than a fifth the size foreseen in the pre-invasion planning. Montgomery decided that the headquarters of the First Canadian Army would have to remain in the UK until there was more room in France. Its armoured formations were phased back for embarkation, and its infantry divisions pushed forward and placed under the temporary command of Second British Army.⁵⁶

On 2 July 1944, *War Report* described for listeners 'the colossal storehouse' that had been created in the beachhead, and which combined 'the features of a military camp, a vast salvage dump, and the approaches to Wembley on Cup Final Day.'⁵⁷ The vast material wealth included 4.7 million issues of the new 'compo' rations, a popular innovation that gave soldiers a greater variety of tinned and dehydrated foods, as well as about 65,000 tons of ammunition.⁵⁸ The British had also stockpiled 5.3 million gallons of diesel and petrol and 868,000 gallons of aviation fuel, all delivered in bright yellow jerrycans before the opening of a buoyed bulk petrol unloading pipeline through which tankers could discharge fuel directly to shore.⁵⁹

Had the Luftwaffe been able to exert any serious pressure on the ground, this assembly could never have been sustained. As it was, it was easier for the Allies to ship supplies into the beachhead than for the Germans to bring them up by road and rail – an astonishing overturning of the usual logic of amphibious operations and another demonstration of the importance of gaining control of the air. No part of the British sector was wholly safe – between D-Day and the end of June, for example, 307 RASC personnel were killed or wounded in Normandy – but safety increased exponentially with distance from the front line.

There was about one British medic to every five British infantrymen in the Twenty-First Army Group.⁶² The routine use – for the first time – of whole blood for transfusions, and penicillin to prevent infection, greatly improved the odds for wounded men who made it off the battlefield. Even during June – with the medical infrastructure still being set up – four-fifths of all Allied casualties who needed surgical treatment survived. By the end of the month, the British had six field hospitals in the beachhead, and almost all casualties requiring urgent surgical treatment received it in

Normandy before being transported to the UK. Air evacuation began on 13 June. Once the system was up and running it improved survival rates, bolstering the morale of those remaining behind. On the narrow frontages on which most British attacks were made, evacuating casualties along congested roads was much more difficult than getting them across the Channel.⁶³

Pre-invasion planning had provided for a much greater presence of psychiatrists and psychiatric nurses than in North Africa or Italy. Estimates of the number of soldiers hit by battle exhaustion, however, proved too low. Since senior officers still feared giving shirkers an easy way out, they tried to keep a strict limit on the numbers diagnosed. Regimental medical officers applied the term more generally to anyone they thought should be out of the front line. Straight out of battle, these, 'filthy, exhausted, tremulous, stuttering men', in the words of Second Army's psychiatrist, sat 'huddled under their blankets'.⁶⁴ Unsurprisingly, a disproportionate number were infantrymen. Senior NCOs, some of them already worn down from previous campaigns, were also over-represented. Those who didn't recover quickly were sent to a convalescent depot to be rehabilitated for manual labour behind the lines. The opening of a psychiatric hospital and additional treatment centres in the beachhead increased capacity but didn't solve the problems of rising exhaustion levels. The medical services did not get on top of them until after the completion of the Normandy campaign.65

Shattered limbs and minds were not the only medical conditions requiring treatment. Since joining the army, many soldiers had had the best dental care of their lives, but had smashed teeth or had lost dentures during rough Channel crossings or in the primitive conditions of the front line. By the end of June, twelve mobile dental units were ashore. Dental mechanics worked round the clock turning out new plates and replacement false teeth. At the other end of the army's alimentary canal, some previously UK-based units lacked the good sanitary discipline instilled among troops in North Africa. An essential role was therefore played by Field Hygiene Sections, which toured the beachhead, regulating water usage, knocking together toilets out of ration boxes and hessian, and trying to make sure soldiers crapped in the right place.

The first NAAFI scouts arrived in Normandy on 23 June. Three weeks later, there were five mobile canteens in operation, and NAAFI stocks in the beachhead included 670 million cigarettes and more than 3 million bottles of beer. From the end of June, the Army Kinema Section began to

set up screens and projectors in barns and tents behind the lines. The first ENSA troop, a swing band called 'Sid Millward and His Nit-Wits', was already touring the beachhead.⁷⁰ ENSA sent some of its most famous artists to Normandy, putting on 309 performances between July and August 1944. Troops at home complained that, as a result, the shows they got were even worse than before.⁷¹

As disgruntled fighting soldiers were all too well aware, cinemas and shows were much more accessible for the 'base wallahs', who even in the tightly confined beachhead, lived in comparative safety behind the lines. Most of the combat troops just wanted a rest. After the end of June, the arrival of reinforcements created room to move exhausted men out of the front line, first by rotating them through reserves, then by a period of more complete rest further back in the beachhead. Units at 'rest' might still be shelled, or be working hard on routine maintenance, but they were much safer and could assimilate reinforcements while soldiers got a shower and a change of clothes from a mobile bath unit, wrote letters home, or just slept.⁷²

'THIS INVISIBLE BATTLE HAS NOW FLASHED INTO THE OPEN'

On 6 June 1944, Hilda Curran had written from her home in East London to her husband, Jim, a private on a Royal Army Ordnance Corps base in Shropshire. Pleased that D-Day had come, she was even gladder that her husband wasn't in it:

I think nearly everybody is relieved in a way although it's going to cause plenty of worry for everyone especially the womenfolk at home wondering if their absent ones have gone over. It doesn't bear thinking about what the poor devils first over are maybe suffering. How thankful I am that you are where you are and I hope you have the luck to stay there. ⁷³

Twenty days later she was dead, killed alongside her children Pat and Bob, her parents and Jim's sister when a flying bomb struck their house. Apart from their soldier father, the Currans' eighteen-month-old daughter Sylvia, pulled alive from the wreckage, was the only member of the family to survive.

The first flying bomb had been launched towards the UK at four in the morning on 13 June 1944. Of ten missiles loosed in the first salvo, six crashed before crossing the Channel. Three plummeted into fields in Kent and Sussex. The last flew on to the East End of London, where it struck a

railway bridge in Bethnal Green, killing six people, wounding twenty-eight and damaging about two hundred houses.⁷⁴

The offensive accelerated rapidly. Between 15 and 16 June 1944, the Germans launched 300 missiles, 144 of which reached the UK. Seventy-three hit London.⁷⁵ For the next two and a half months, no more than fourteen hours would go by without a flying bomb striking the capital. On 22 June, German propagandists started to refer to the flying bombs as V1s. London, they claimed, had been reduced to rubble.⁷⁶

Launched on a compass bearing, the missiles had a tiny propeller, driven by the flow of air, on their nose. This turned an odometer counting down the distance travelled. When it reached zero, it released a mechanism sending the missile into a steep dive. This cut out the engine. The warhead's ton of high explosive detonated as it hit the ground. At night, the V1s' passage was marked by the cherry glow of the pulse jet engine. During the day, their ungainly forms could be seen skidding across the sky. The 'peculiar deep throb' of the jet engine led to them being nicknamed 'buzz-bombs' or 'doodlebugs'. Listeners soon learned that the danger came when the noise ceased.

There were some awful incidents. On 18 June, a V1 hit the Guards Chapel in St James in the middle of the morning service, killing 121 people and wounding another 141. On 30 June, another landed on the Air Ministry building in the Aldwych, slid off the roof and exploded in the road outside. Forty-eight people were killed, and more than two hundred injured. For the most part, however, the V1s were not high casualty weapons. On average, each bomb that reached London at night killed two people and wounded eight more. An average daylight attack killed five and wounded fifteen. The writer George Beardmore, working as a post-raid information officer in North London, was surprised 'how *localised* these explosions are'. Nonetheless, the bombs created disruption and anxiety, as Kathleen Church-Bliss and Elsie Whiteman recorded in their diary:

Another awful night. We slept at intervals, but in the middle of the night there was a period when four or five came over together and others followed in quick succession. The house shook many times. From 5.30-7 am there was another heavy attack and bombs fell about every 4 minutes and we had many interruptions to cooking our breakfast as every time a bomb roared over the house we switched off the gas and rushed downstairs. Mercifully there was a lull soon after 7 am and we cycled off to work with our tin hats. When we got there we found the night shift had kept a tally of the number of bombs and red alerts they had had -25 bombs and 18 alerts! Up and down in the shelters all day and all the meal breaks interrupted too. 80

Unsurprisingly, according to Home Intelligence, the main feeling after

a week of these attacks was: "incredible tiredness"... coupled with nervous anxiety, arising in part from the "weird and uncanny" nature of the device, and in part from the strain of listening for and to their approach.'⁸¹ At the start of July 1944, 77,360 people were sheltering overnight in the Underground.⁸² Home Intelligence warned that: 'Many think these raids worse than the blitz . . . In Lambeth, Southwark and Deptford they are said to be demanding retaliation by gas "to bring a sense of horror to the sadistic Germans".'⁸³ They weren't the only ones.

'IN A FLAT SPIN ABOUT THE FLYING BOMBS'

On 16 June 1944, a special staff conference attended by Churchill, Tedder and the chiefs of staff agreed to implement Operation 'Diver', the defensive plan against the V1s. Eisenhower agreed that any aircraft that could be spared from 'Overlord' should be sent against the launch sites.⁸⁴ On 18 June the War Cabinet set up a special 'Crossbow' sub-committee, chaired by Churchill, to deal with the offensive. At its first meeting, the prime minister emphasized that the 'matter had to be put robustly to the populace'. Their 'tribulations were part of the battle in France, and . . . they should be very glad to share in the soldiers' dangers'.⁸⁵ The next day, he delegated the chair to Duncan Sandys, the minister in charge of investigating the German rocket threat.

RAF fighters tried to intercept the flying bombs between the Channel and the North Downs, where a belt of anti-aircraft guns attempted to shoot down any that got through. The V1s moved too fast for the quickest propeller-driven aircraft to catch them in a straight chase. RAF mechanics stripped out planes' armour and polished them till the metal gleamed in an effort to get more speed. Pilots developed their own techniques to make the missiles crash, coming alongside to prod them with a wing tip or diving in front to create destabilizing turbulence. Anti-aircraft gunners found countering the bombs even harder. The V1s flew in between the effective heights of the light and heavy guns, and the folds of the Downs interfered with their gun laying radar. As fighters chased their prey into the antiaircraft barrage, airmen and gunners grew frustrated with each other. By the middle of July, the RAF was disposing of 31 per cent of the V1s that reached the UK, but the guns and barrage balloons brought down only 11 per cent. The majority of the missiles that crossed the coast got through.86

The Allied bombers struck back. In the second half of June they flew more than 8,000 sorties against 'Crossbow' targets and dropped over 22,750 tons of bombs: a greater tonnage in a fortnight than the Germans had dropped on London over eight months of the Blitz. Two-thirds of it was dropped by Bomber Command.⁸⁷ It made no difference. Since the Air Ministry continued to prioritize the large bunkers and 'ski sites', almost half these sorties bombed sites that weren't in operation. The new 'modified' launch sites were moved up the priority list, but they were difficult to hit and easy to repair. By the end of June, the rate of missile firing had risen to about two hundred a day.⁸⁸ Harris, Spaatz and Portal thought they ought to be hitting strategic targets in Germany. Tedder and Eisenhower insisted that 'Crossbow' attacks had to carry on. When Tedder told Churchill that the weather had prevented a still heavier bombing effort against the launch sites, the prime minister 'went for' him: 'The weather, the weather, the weather! What could the navy do for us if they were always thinking about the weather!'89

Public outrage about the 'indiscriminate' targeting increased the political pressure. Herbert Morrison took the attacks on South London very personally. On 27 June, he put a paper before the War Cabinet warning his colleagues 'to be human': 'people are asking "Where is this air superiority they are talking about?" . . . they will resent this new trouble increasingly and want to know what we are doing about it.' He wanted the defeat of the flying bombs to be made a strategic priority, including 'maximum action' from the air, naval bombardment and commando raids on the launch sites. Morrison also revived the idea put forward by Churchill during the last flying bomb panic in December 1943: a threat to attack 'smaller' German towns with poison gas. 92

According to an appalled Brooke, the subsequent meeting: 'Finished up with a pathetic wail from Herbert Morrison', 'a real white-livered specimen!', who was 'in a flat spin about the flying bombs and their effect on the population! After 5 years of war we could not ask them to stand such a strain etc etc!!'⁹³ As usual, Brooke missed the political subtext: a Labour home secretary had laid down a marker about who took public safety seriously. To Brooke's relief, Churchill told Morrison to get the attacks in proportion. The 'hardships imposed' on civilians 'must be considered in what was being suffered by the enemy population who were subjected to our air raids'.⁹⁴

The prime minister was under great strain. He was arguing bitterly with the Americans and his own chiefs of staff about strategy in the

Mediterranean and Pacific. Eisenhower warned him that Montgomery's caution was bogging the Normandy campaign down. As victory approached, all the economic and geo-political problems of the post-war world were crowding in. The V1 offensive intensified: in the first week of July, more than eight hundred missiles were spotted approaching the UK.

Lurking in the background was the prospect of a more devastating rocket attack. Information about the rockets accumulated inconsistently. Even the sceptical Cherwell had finally to admit that they probably existed, but since Allied bombing had prevented the Germans finishing the bunkers in the Pas de Calais, it appeared that any attack had been delayed. Unable to believe that the Germans would have invested the huge resources required unless the rockets could do serious damage, however, British scientists over-estimated their payload. If they came, they believed, the rockets would be far worse than the V1s. 95

Churchill had already suggested to the chiefs that the British should threaten to flatten a selection of German cities in retaliation. On 6 July 1944 he insisted they re-examine the use of gas, if 'the bombardment of London really became a serious nuisance and great rockets with farreaching and devastating effect fell on many centres of government and labour'. Reasoning that the Allies could if necessary 'drench the cities of the Ruhr and many other cities in Germany in such a way that most of the population would be requiring constant medical attention', he insisted that he wanted 'the matter studied in cold blood by sensible people and not by that particular set of psalm-singing uniformed defeatists which one runs across now here now there'. The chiefs and Eisenhower firmly opposed such revenge attacks on the basis that they'd only spur the Nazis to do something worse. The suggested to the chiefs and suggested to the suggeste

On the same day, Churchill made an official statement to the Commons that showed a clear sense of the effect the V-weapons had had on both combatants' war efforts: 'Quite a considerable proportion of our flying power has been diverted for months past . . . The Germans, for their part, have sacrificed a great deal of manufacturing strength . . . It has yet to be decided who has suffered and will suffer the most.' As he concluded, for the past year, both sides had poured 'great resources' into an 'unseen battle', that had now 'flashed into the open': '[W]e shall be able, and indeed obliged, to watch its progress at fairly close quarters.'98

Having consumed more than a few drinks to recover after his speech, Churchill went into a four-hour meeting with Attlee, Eden, Lyttelton and the chiefs of staff. The prime minister repeated Eisenhower's complaints about Montgomery, sparking a blazing row with Brooke, who asked him 'if he could not trust his generals for 5 minutes instead of continuously abusing and belittling them'. Then Churchill picked a fight with Attlee over India, under which 'smokescreen' the CIGS and his colleagues gratefully withdrew.⁹⁹

'DRAWING THE GERMAN ARMOUR ONTO YOURSELF – SO AS TO EASE THE WAY FOR BRAD'

With servicemen and civilians dying simultaneously in conjoined campaigns, the summer of 1944 was the most total moment of Britain's total war. No wonder that the pressure rose for Montgomery to get a move on, or that the question of how much the British people could take played on politicians' minds – even if the real issue was whether those at the top could resist the urge to *do* something to hurry up a decision at the front.

At the end of June, Montgomery laid out to Dempsey and Bradley what he wanted them to do next. The First US Army would begin an offensive southwards on 3 July to clear the base of the Cotentin peninsula, opening the path for one American corps to advance into Brittany, while the rest of Bradley's army pushed the Germans eastwards towards the Seine. Meanwhile, Dempsey would launch a direct attack on Caen. Before long, Bradley's offensive was bogged down. Poor weather continued to hamper Allied air support, and the terrain through which the Americans had to attack was some of the worst in Normandy – extensively flooded by the Germans, with the densest of the bocage and a lack of north—south roads to support the US advance. Montgomery thought Bradley was dissipating his strength by not concentrating on a narrow front. After a week of fighting, First US Army's attack had ground to a halt north of Saint-Lô. 100

By that point, the attack on Caen, Operation 'Charnwood', was already under way. Following a preliminary attack on Carpiquet aerodrome, the British and Canadian troops of I Corps were to fight their way into the city behind an avalanche of high explosive delivered by four hundred pieces of artillery, the guns of the monitor HMS *Roberts* and the battleship HMS *Rodney*, and a heavy bomber raid, requested at the last minute by Montgomery – and this time approved by Eisenhower. Four hundred and fifty Bomber Command aircraft launched their attack later that night, their bombs fused to explode six hours later in co-ordination with the ground advance. ¹⁰¹

The point of using the heavy bombers was that only they could drop the weight of explosive required to suppress the whole depth of German defences north of Caen. The resultant destruction would also hinder German reinforcements moving into the battle zone. Rushed planning and well-justified RAF concerns about hitting their own side, however, meant the target area was set well back from the front line. The raid impressed the waiting troops, but the bombs had little effect on the defensive system – though they did fill the streets of Caen with rubble and kill approximately four hundred French civilians.

With the defence unsuppressed, I Corps was initially able to make little progress when it attacked on 8 July. At the end of the day, however, with British and Canadian troops threatening to surround them, the remaining German forces began to retreat. The following night, the Germans withdrew from Caen west of the Orne. They still held the south and east of the city, however, and with their line pulled back to the higher ground east of the Orne, their overall position was stronger than before.

To exploit the aftermath of 'Charnwood', VIII British Corps launched Operation 'Jupiter', an attack to the west of Caen to seize Hill 112, on 10 July. Despite another heavy artillery barrage, however, the 43rd Wessex Division was unable to take the top of the hill. The fighting became deadlocked: the Germans using their longer-ranged tank and anti-tank guns to full effect in the more open terrain but suffering terrible losses when they counter-attacked. Villages were reduced to rubble, orchards to splintered stumps, and the dead lay unburied on the battlefield. 102

Since D-Day, German formations in Normandy had suffered 100,000 casualties and received fewer than 9,000 replacements. On 8 July Hitler instructed his generals to abandon counter-offensive plans and concentrate on holding their positions around the beachhead. Convinced that the V1 bombardment would force the Allies to launch the mythical First US Army Group against the launch sites in the Pas de Calais, he insisted that the Fifteenth German Army must remain where it was. German generals feared another Allied offensive might cause a general collapse. On the 17th, Rommel was badly injured when an RAF Spitfire strafed his car. Von Kluge took over command of Army Group B; he shared his predecessor's expectation that defeat was inevitable.

Bradley was planning a big offensive to break through the German line. Montgomery ordered Dempsey to keep 'hitting: drawing the German armour onto yourself — so as to ease the way for Brad.' The two complementary offensives, British and American, were meant to open simultaneously on 18 July 1944. When difficulties in securing the startline

delayed Bradley's offensive, the British attack went ahead by itself. 103

While planning the British operation, Dempsey proposed extending its ambition and breaking out of the beachhead himself; Montgomery constrained him. Preliminary attacks by XII and XXX Corps on each side of the Orne (Operations 'Greenline' and 'Pomegranate', 15–16 July) would force the Germans to move their tanks back and forth across the river, exposing them to air attack. Then Operation 'Goodwood' would use heavy bombers to clear a path for the three British armoured divisions of VIII Corps, supported by I Corps to the east and a newly formed Canadian II Corps to the west, to swoop southwards from the Orne bridgehead, across the Caen plain, and capture the Bourguébus Ridge. The large-scale use of tanks would take the pressure off the infantry, and the bombing would allow the armour to advance on Falaise, more than twenty miles to the south. ¹⁰⁴

'Goodwood' was bigger and more ambitious than anything the Second British Army had tried thus far. Eisenhower and Tedder were enthusiastic. With their backing, Dempsey secured air support from the US Eighth Air Force as well as Bomber Command. On 15 July, however, Montgomery, concerned by strengthening German defences, scaled back the attack, limiting its principal objective to securing the Bourguébus Ridge. This change was not communicated to SHAEF.

'Goodwood' still involved some significant risks. The Orne bridgehead was too small to assemble the armoured divisions, so their tanks had to cross the river on the night before the attack, then move quickly to catch the Germans before they recovered from the bombardment. The armoured divisions' infantry would be committed relatively early in the attack, and their artillery also had to cross the Orne. The further the tanks drove, the less help they would have against the defended villages flanking their advance.

'Goodwood' opened with a raid by more than a thousand RAF heavy bombers just before six o'clock on the morning of 18 July. Seven hundred and sixty artillery pieces opened up, then another nine hundred USAAF bombers attacked the defended villages and the German gunline along the Bourguébus Ridge. As a rolling artillery barrage advanced in front of the troops, another eight hundred fighter-bombers provided direct support overhead.

The bombing was better positioned than before 'Charnwood'. The bombers released more than 6,700 tons of high explosive and fragmentation bombs. Explosions flipped over tanks, wrecked gun sites and kicked up dense clouds of dust. The first Germans the British

encountered were too stunned even to surrender. Behind the advancing troops, however, a traffic jam developed as the follow-up divisions crossed the Orne. The forward German positions were wrecked, but the defenders further back and on each flank escaped the bombing or had time to recover. Bypassing these strongpoints, by noon the advanced elements of the 11th Armoured Division had reached the lower slopes of the Bourguébus Ridge. Units moving up behind them, however, came under fire from the flanks, constricting the advance and perpetuating the congestion behind. On the first day of 'Goodwood', most of the rearmost British armoured division didn't get into battle at all.¹⁰⁵

Believing the morning break-in was the prelude to a breakout, the Germans organized a substantial counter-attack. As German tanks moved piecemeal from the west, they ran into British armoured units trying to advance. With insufficient strength to overcome the anti-tank guns on the ridge, and the German armour ahead and to their flank, out-ranged British tanks suffered heavy losses. Busy losing this gunfight, British troops did not notice the attempted German counter-attacks, which were broken up by Allied fighter-bombers. The fighting lasted till nightfall: the British clearing the area taken by the initial attack, the Germans holding out in the villages and along the ridge. The offensive was already being shut down.

On the afternoon of the first attack, Montgomery had told the press and SHAEF that 'Goodwood' had been completely successful. In fact, although the British had advanced seven miles, they had taken no important ground. Almost 500 British tanks had been lost, though only 330 of those were seriously damaged or destroyed. Since most of the crews had survived, lightly damaged tanks were quickly recovered and replacements were not in short supply, the material losses were swiftly made up. More seriously, given Second British Army's manpower problems, the human cost of such a big offensive had still fallen on the infantry. In total, Second Army suffered more than five thousand casualties between 18 and 22 July 1944. ¹⁰⁶

On the opposite side of the battlefield, German commanders were convinced that they had only just halted a breakout that might at any moment be renewed. They had no defence against the tactical use of heavy bombers. Together with their own repeated counter-attacks, the offensive had caused them casualties that they could ill-afford, including two thousand prisoners and about a hundred tanks. Despite funnelling infantry reinforcements to the British sector, moreover, they had been unable to withdraw armoured units from the front line. By 25 July 1944, eight out of ten panzer divisions in Normandy were in the British sector of the line.

'JUST SOMETHING TO BE ENDURED'

During the summer of 1944, somewhere between a million and one and a half million people left London. A new official evacuation scheme got 307,000 children and mothers away and assisted another half million with billeting or travel costs. Those that remained had little choice but to adapt to the V1s, taking precautions as best they could. They now saw the bombs, according to Home Intelligence, as 'just something to be endured'. As estimated by the Ministry of Production, the loss of working time in large firms as a result of taking shelter from the flying bombs declined, from 13 per cent in the last week of June to 7.4 per cent in the second week of July and 3.9 per cent in the second week of August. 109

During July 1944, Bomber Command alone dropped 24,292 tons of ordnance on 'Crossbow' targets, more than it had dropped on German cities in any previous month of the war. While the US Eighth Air Force attacked factories in Germany, halting planned increases in missile production, RAF bombers, directed by Ultra decrypts, hit subterranean supply depots. Two out of three of the depot roofs collapsed, halving the rate of flying bomb launchings for a week. It was Bomber Command's only big success of the 'Crossbow' campaign. Most of their effort continued to be directed, uselessly, at suspected launch sites. The number of sites in use increased from seventy-six to ninety-four.

Simultaneously, however, the defensive system was reorganized, with anti-aircraft guns brought down to the south coast to give them a clear field of fire and the fighters operating between the anti-aircraft barrage and the capital. In the space of five days, more than nine hundred antiaircraft guns were relocated. As well as shifting the guns, 31,000 men and women from Anti-Aircraft Command and the RASC, using more than 8,000 trucks, laid more than 3,000 miles of telephone cable and shifted 60,000 tons of stores, travelling more than 2.75 million miles in the process. In the first week after the move, the gunners shot down more V1s, but not enough to make up for the reduction in the losses inflicted by the fighters. Just as many missiles got through to London. In the meantime, the threat from the V2s suddenly appeared much more imminent.

At a full 'Crossbow' Committee meeting on 18 July, R. V. Jones made another dramatic revelation: the Germans were not going to fire the rockets from massive bunkers. They had developed an easily transported weapon that could be launched from little more than a hard standing. Moreover, they had a stock of a thousand rockets, each with a five-ton warhead, ready for immediate use. Churchill was furious. Blindsided, Sandys set his own experts to work. They predicted ten-ton warheads, possibly filled with a new super-explosive. In the meantime, Jones reassessed the evidence. He now diagnosed, correctly, that the rocket could have a payload of just one ton: the same as a flying bomb. The out-scale predictions of Sandys' scientists convinced Jones they couldn't be trusted, just at the same moment that Sandys, charging Jones with obstruction, sidelined him from rocket intelligence. Cherwell, however, continued to provide a link between Jones and the prime minister. ¹¹⁵

As the scientists and spooks scrambled to understand the threat, ministers prepared for things to get worse. Morrison's Ministry of Home Security forecast that if the ten-ton rockets hit alongside the flying bombs, 18,000 people would be killed within a week. Having recently been booed on a visit to a V1 bombsite in his constituency, Morrison told his colleagues that rocket attack might lead to civil disorder. He set up a new Rocket Consequences Committee to arrange the evacuation of a further 2 million Londoners. Churchill told the chiefs to think again about poison gas. They warned him that German retaliation in kind might break British domestic morale. ¹¹⁶

'SOME VERY CURIOUS UNDERCURRENTS MUST BE GOING ON'

This was not a good moment for Montgomery and Churchill's relationship to deteriorate. On 19 July 1944, after the prime minister misinterpreted Montgomery's ban on official visitors as an attempt to exclude him from the battlefield, Brooke had to move quickly to repair the rift. The next day, Eisenhower flew into the beachhead to re-warn Montgomery about the dangers of a stalemate.

He was greeted with extraordinary news. German army conspirators had attempted to assassinate Hitler with a bomb at his east Prussian headquarters. Temporarily, it seemed like it might mean the end of the war, but it soon became clear that the plot had failed. Hitler survived, the conspirators were rounded up by the Gestapo, and any signs of incipient revolt in the field army were swiftly crushed or concealed.

Eisenhower warned Montgomery not to allow any diminution of British efforts while the Americans took the strain. This apparent failure to understand his strategy did not improve Montgomery's view of Eisenhower ('Some very curious undercurrents must be going on', he noted in his diary, 'I have no intention of stopping operations on the eastern flank'). His attitude towards SHAEF became still more disrespectful. On 21 July, in an unusually direct piece of politicking, Tedder told Eisenhower to consider getting rid of Montgomery if he wanted to secure the quick breakout required to take advantage of the attempted coup and relieve the misery of the flying bombs. Eisenhower did not take this advice, but the episode indicated the pressure produced by the deadlock in Normandy and the threat of a new vengeance offensive against the UK. In the aftermath of another apparently unsuccessful offensive, meanwhile, morale among British troops hit its lowest ebb of the campaign. All the infantry, in particular, could look forward to was more slogging attacks into deep German defences. 119

For all his disdain for the intriguers at SHAEF, Montgomery passed on the pressure from Eisenhower, stepping up the tempo of operations in the eastern part of his line. On 25 July, the newly activated First Canadian Army (composed of Canadian, British and Polish divisions) under Lieutenant General Harry Crerar, launched its first offensive, Operation 'Spring'. A limited attack to capture the high ground around Verrières, 'Spring' was too weak to crack open the German defences. It failed, but it helped to disrupt the German response to General Bradley's much larger American offensive, Operation 'Cobra', which finally got under way on the same day on the other side of the beachhead.

'Cobra' opened with another heavy bomber attack. Once more, it was inaccurate and killed a lot of friendly troops. As a result, the offensive only really began to accelerate on the 27th. It was at this point that the failure of the German strategy became apparent. They had run out of forces to stop the attack. From the town of Saint-Lô west, their front line disintegrated. As the Germans' ability to contain Allied ground forces crumbled, the campaign moved into its final phase.

Eisenhower, Montgomery and Bradley all anticipated that in the event of a successful 'Cobra' breakout, the Germans would swing their front back and conduct an ordered retreat through France. Montgomery therefore tried to capitalize on the American success by ordering the Second British Army to attack in the centre of the Allied line, through the steep slopes and wooded terrain south of the town of Caumont. All of Second British Army's six divisions would be involved in Operation 'Bluecoat'. The aim was to punch through the German lines at the point about which they would pivot as they retreated before Bradley's advance.

While British staff officers raced to get 'Bluecoat' ready, the Americans activated General Patton's Third US Army. Together with the First US Army, it formed a new Twelfth US Army Group, commanded by Bradley, with Montgomery for the moment still in command of ground operations. Patton's twelve divisions charged through the gap in the German lines, taking Avranches, surrounding Saint-Malo and heading towards Rennes. His advance was an awesome progress of tanks, armoured vehicles, fighter-bombers and a non-stop stream of supply trucks. Unleashed just at the point when the number of US divisions in France overtook those from the British Commonwealth, it was a striking demonstration of surging US power.

'Bluecoat' began on 30 July 1944. Though overshadowed by Patton's breakout, Second British Army's forty-eight-hour reorganization of its front to mount the largest British offensive in Normandy was also a remarkable instance of military mobility. Thanks to the landscape, as well as the German defences, Dempsey's rate of advance was much slower. Although the 7th Armoured Division's hesitancy cost its commander his job, to the west, O'Connor's VIII Corps seized a fleeting opportunity to capture Hill 309, then held it against fierce German counter-attacks. The British also finally seized Mont Pinçon. As the British sliced into his front, von Kluge was forced to commit armoured units to halting their advance rather than holding up the Americans. 122

'Bluecoat' showed how much the British had adapted since D-Day. Mixed battlegroups of armour and infantry co-operated closely, with soldiers riding the tanks into contact with the enemy. O'Connor's divisions used a mixture of set-piece attacks and infiltration to work their way through the defences. This was part of a broader range of improved tactics that made the Twenty-First Army Group increasingly effective even as its troops grew more exhausted. These included more flexible programmes of artillery fire that matched barrages to the pace the infantry could move; the establishment of counter-mortar systems designed to locate and destroy German mortar teams; specialized training to accustom soldiers to the fighting in Normandy; and more aggressive use of automatic weapons to deluge suspected enemy positions with fire.¹²³

While 'Bluecoat' was under way, Montgomery and Eisenhower agreed a change of strategy. On 4 August, Montgomery issued orders for a wide envelopment, with Patton's men looping back to the east and the Canadians and British advancing through Falaise to trap the Germans close to the Seine. 'Bluecoat', which had seemed like the right operation a week before, had committed half of Twenty-First Army Group to fighting in the

bocage when it might have been better employed on the drive south from Caen 124

Then Hitler intervened again, ordering von Kluge to attack the US First Army at Mortain in an attempt to cut Patton's lines of supply. The offensive would thrust the remaining German forces still more firmly into the closing Allied trap. Von Kluge assembled four panzer divisions and attacked on the night of 6 August. The Allies had been forewarned by Ultra intelligence, the tactical air forces were ready and the Germans advanced only until the morning sun cleared the mist from the fields. Then, while the Ninth US Air Force fighters ensured that the Luftwaffe would not intervene, the Second TAF's Typhoons attacked the columns heading towards Mortain. Over ten hours, they launched more than three hundred sorties. Altogether, the pilots claimed to have destroyed ninety German tanks and damaged another fifty-nine (which would have been almost every tank that took part in the attack).

When British operational researchers visited the battlefield, however, they could find only seven tanks that had definitely been knocked out by aircraft rockets. In contrast, American anti-tank guns had destroyed nineteen. Nonetheless, British, American and German observers were all convinced that the fighter-bombers had stopped the advance in its tracks. No matter how many vehicles had in fact been damaged, the aerial onslaught had made tank crews seek cover, abandon their vehicles or flee. That didn't stop the Germans continuing their doomed offensive, however. Over the next week it cost them another 11,000 casualties. 126

The next night, the First Canadian Army attacked towards Falaise. The new offensive, Operation 'Totalize', was directed by Lieutenant General Guy Simonds, the commander of II Canadian Corps and a favourite of Montgomery's. He and his staff had been working on a new solution to the deep German defences. This time, heavy bombing and artillery fire preceded a night attack. Guided by radio beams and streams of tracer fired from anti-aircraft guns, British and Canadian troops advanced into the main German position before the enemy could react. The infantry travelled in new armoured personnel carriers known as 'Kangaroos', based on a tank chassis without a turret, that protected them from machine-gun and shell fire. By the middle of 8 August, the attackers were securely established four miles beyond the old front line. They halted to await another heavy bomber strike on what was presumed to be the second German line. The next echelon of the attack, a Canadian and a Polish armoured division, would then break out of the German defences towards Falaise. 127

For once, however, there was no second line. The first attack had broken through, only to halt before an obstacle that wasn't there. German reserves launched a frantic round of counter-attacks that were halted by fire from British tanks and anti-tank guns, and the pause gave the Germans a chance to organize a scratch defence. The second wave of bombing failed to knock this out but mistakenly dropped enough bombs among the Poles and Canadians to hamstring their attack. As the inexperienced tank crews attacked, they ran straight into the new German line. Frustrated, Simonds insisted they keep attacking, worsening their losses. For all its innovation and success, 'Totalize' came up short.

Montgomery had to accept Bradley's plans for a tighter encirclement, with the jaws of the pocket closing near the town of Argentan. The First and Third US Armies would press east, and the Second British Army would push from the north, while the First Canadian Army staged another attack to link up with the Americans. Concerned about the danger of a German counter-attack, Bradley halted US troops at Argentan, then accepted Montgomery's enthusiastic belief that Anglo-Canadian forces were advancing rapidly enough to complete the encirclement and did not get his men to drive on towards their allies. The resultant mix of misconception and lack of co-ordination made it easier for the Germans to try to extricate their almost surrounded forces. 128

While Second British Army kept up its attacks at the top of the pocket, the First Canadian Army launched Operation 'Tractable' on 14 August 1944. 129 Another armoured attack, 'Tractable' was intended to take Falaise and block the German escape route eastwards. The Germans struggled frantically to keep it open; the Canadians and Poles to slam it shut. The Poles made contact with the Americans at Chambois on the 19th, but it was another two days – with the Poles cut off and fighting both for their lives and to inflict as much destruction on the Germans as possible – before the pocket was finally sealed. 130

Ten thousand Germans were killed in the fighting around the encirclement, and 50,000 made prisoner; another 35,000–45,000 escaped. They had had to leave almost all their vehicles and heavy weapons behind. Trapped and with their tanks broken down or out of fuel, crews destroyed their vehicles and tried to escape on foot. The destruction of life was appalling. Faced with a colossal health hazard, Allied troops bulldozed the corpses into mass graves.

During July, the Luftwaffe's attempt to contest the skies over the beachhead faded, and the Allies got their own airfields and fighter control systems established on the ground in France. As a result, they could assign fewer sorties to defensive missions, and more to seeking out and attacking German targets of opportunity behind the front line. Even during July, 55 per cent of the more than 26,500 fighter and fighter-bomber sorties flown by Second TAF had been defensive, with 24 per cent allocated to ground support (whether pre-planned or summoned by a forward air controller), and 21 per cent to 'armed reconnaissance' against German lines of communication. In August, those figures reversed themselves, with 56 per cent of the 25,000 sorties flown as 'armed reconnaissance' and 29 per cent as defensive duties.¹³³

Despite the decline of the Luftwaffe, the August 1944 sorties were some of the most dangerous undertaken by Allied aircrew during the final year of the war. The German shift to mass production of anti-aircraft weapons from 1942 meant that potentially valuable targets were thickly defended with quick-firing guns, so that fighter-bomber pilots had to fly through dense curtains of flak. It was all too easy to become fixated by a target: roaring into the attack at 400 miles an hour, a moment's overconcentration put a pilot at risk of crashing into the ground. 134 The intensity of air operations against the Falaise pocket is indicated by the fact that twenty-one Typhoons were destroyed or badly damaged on 18 August 1944 alone: the greatest losses of that aircraft type in combat on a single day during the war. 135 The tactical air forces chased the Germans that had got away all the way to the Seine, wreaking further havoc as they tried to cross to the far side of the river. Between Falaise and the Seine crossings, Allied investigators would subsequently identify 12,000 German vehicles damaged, abandoned or destroyed, including at least 456 tanks and selfpropelled guns. 136

The fact that a substantial portion of the forces who might have been trapped within the encirclement managed to escape would become a topic of bitter historical debate. ¹³⁷ It should not, however, obscure the damage done to the German military *before* Falaise. In total, the fighting in Normandy cost the Germans between 1,500 and 2,000 tanks, at least 4,000 single-engine fighters, and more than 300,000 servicemen. For the first time since 1941, in August 1944 the Germans lost more men on the Western Front than in the East. The combination of the attritional battle in Normandy and the Soviet offensive, Operation 'Bagration', made it a catastrophic summer for the German high command. ¹³⁸

'THE BATTLE OF LONDON IS OVER'

During August, the Allied advance forced the Germans to abandon the V1 sites south of the Somme. Flying bomb launches fell by about a third. British defences strengthened. RAF Meteor jet aircraft joined the squadrons chasing the V1s, bringing down their first flying bomb on 4 August 1944. The anti-aircraft guns' new position on the coast, meanwhile, allowed them to make good use of two new pieces of equipment: the SCR584 gun-laying radar and predictor set, which tracked the guns on to the target more quickly; and proximity fuses, which used a tiny microwave radar set to explode shells close to their target.

Invented in Britain and passed across the Atlantic in 1940, the new munitions had been developed and brought into mass production in the United States. Instead of firing a box barrage at the estimated height of the plane, anti-aircraft gunners now just had to fire their shells towards the target – something that was much easier with the new radar sets. Though the proximity-fused shells were fitted with a self-destruct mechanism, fears over its reliability limited their employment over inhabited areas. Firing out over the sea removed the problem.

By the end of August 1944, the anti-aircraft gunners were shooting down three-quarters of the flying bombs that approached the coast, and the fighters and barrage balloons were getting nearly all the rest. The number of bombs reaching London plummeted. Of ninety-seven bombs launched on 28 August, only four made it through to the capital. The V1s kept coming, but in much smaller numbers: never enough to overwhelm the protection that London now enjoyed.¹⁴⁰

Air attacks on 'Crossbow' targets continued throughout August, initially against the launch sites, then against production facilities in Germany. Between 6 June and 31 August 1944, the RAF and USAAF had flown 44,236 sorties to locate and attack V-weapon sites, dropping a grand total of 82,000 tons of bombs. These were overwhelmingly British Commonwealth operations: 39,000 of the sorties were flown by the Second TAF, Air Defence Great Britain or Bomber Command. Just under a third of all Bomber Command sorties in this period were flown against 'Crossbow' targets. The extraordinary thing about this huge aerial effort was how small a proportion of total Allied air resources it represented. Altogether, the anti-V-weapon operations represented just 9 per cent of the 480,317 sorties flown in total during this time by Allied aircraft in Northwest Europe. 142

Notwithstanding the vast tonnage of explosive aimed at V-weapon sites, the Germans had still been able to launch 87 per cent of all the missiles that had been made by the start of August. ¹⁴³ In total, however,

they had delivered only 2,340 tons of high explosive to London. Despite the terror they caused, they were never even close to being a war-winning weapon. At most, the diversion of Allied aircraft from involvement on the battlefield or against strategic targets in Germany extended only marginally the lifespan of the Nazi regime.¹⁴⁴

During August, the British also established a clearer picture of the V2 threat. Jones staged another coup at the 'Crossbow' Committee on 10 August, proving that the rocket had a warhead of just one ton. By the end of the month, he had produced a detailed report showing just how small a danger the V2 posed. Given its trajectory and supersonic speed, there could be no defence against it, but the rockets would be relatively few in number and dispersed across a wide area. The fears of an urban apocalypse had been groundless. On 1 September 1944, the War Cabinet decided that the emergency plans drawn up by Morrison's Rocket Committee could be set aside. During the first week of September, the British advance into Belgium brought an end to ground-launched V1 attacks on the UK. On 5 September, the chiefs of staff halted the 'Crossbow' bombing campaign. On 7 September – after Churchill intervened to make sure he could take the credit – Duncan Sandys held a press conference to announce the defeat of the flying bombs and that 'the Battle of London is over'.

NORMANDY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The eight-month air-land-and-sea campaign that culminated in the defeat of the German army in Normandy represented a stunning victory for the Allied democracies. It confirmed the crushing power of the Atlantic production nexus and the abysmal failure of the Nazis high-tech hopes for reversing the tide of the war in the West. It was also a pivotal battle in military historical terms. If the high casualty rates in some infantry battalions and the devastated ground around such bitterly contested features as Hill 112 naturally invited comparisons with the previous war, then the cruise missiles and obliterating but frustratingly inaccurate bombers offered a presentiment of the future. The shades stalking the battlefield spoke not just of Ypres or the Somme, but of Korea and Sinai, the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the Basra Road.

It was also a triumph for the British Commonwealth. Notwithstanding the rising power of America and the approach of exhaustion on the home front, British and Canadian servicemen had played a leading role in the decisive land battle of the war in the West and emerged still able to take part in the advance towards Germany. They had not just outlasted their opponents but outfought them. In Britain, the victory in Normandy confirmed Montgomery's status as a military celebrity and popular hero, and not without reason.

Allied ground casualties in Normandy were about 200,000 men, of which British, Canadian and Polish losses amounted to 16,138 killed, 9,093 missing and 58,594 wounded. Another 8,178 RAF aircrew were killed in operations over the UK and Northwest Europe during the same period. To the end of August, 5,126 Britons had been killed and another 14,712 injured since the start of the V1 attacks. By the standards of Britain's Second World War, this was therefore a bloody period. The volume of Allied mechanical effort, the strategic failure of Germany's missile technology investment, and the concentration of suffering among the relatively small percentage of the army in the foremost rifle platoons, however, all meant that the total number of casualties was relatively small. Indeed, the overall cost in British lives for participation in the crucial moment of the war in the West was remarkably light in comparison to any of the major campaigns between 1916 and 1918: an indicator of just how much advantage the country got from its ability to fight a war of machines.

As they approached the Seine, slightly ahead of schedule despite the long impasse around Caen, British troops travelled as liberators, and with the growing hope that the war might soon be over. With the war apparently about to be won, it went all but unnoticed that London was still within the predicted range of the V2s launched from the north of Holland. Germany was beaten, but the fighting was still far from done. 149

23

'Octagon'

July-October 1944

Shortly before ten in the morning of 11 September 1944, a train drew into Wolfe's Cove station on the outskirts of Quebec. On board were Winston Churchill and a party of British officers and officials on their way to another conference in the city. The train halted alongside the carriages that had borne President Roosevelt and his American delegation north from the United States. Churchill had wanted to arrive early so that he could greet the president, but Roosevelt had turned up first and was already waiting in a car. Churchill disembarked, and they headed into the city.

The prime ministerial entourage had endured a febrile journey across the Atlantic. Stuck in the path of the Gulf Stream, they had sweltered in the sticky heat. Recovering from another bout of pneumonia and running a temperature, Churchill was dosed up on antibiotics and the anti-malarial medication he had been given during his recent visit to Italy. Anxious and sometimes gloom-ridden, he had rowed bitterly with his chiefs of staff. Frequently, he held his sweaty head in his hands, as though it might burst open with the strain. As the prime minister had written to his wife Clementine, the forthcoming conference was 'the most necessary one . . . since the very beginning'. It was billed as the one that would settle the final defeat of the Axis powers – but there were issues to be dealt with that were much more important than that.

Two of these were, as we have already seen, British strategy in the endgame of the war against Japan, and the need to kickstart Britain's postwar economic recovery. The third, as Germany's doom grew closer, was the political future of Europe. All of these would be addressed at Quebec.

'ARE WE GOING TO ACQUIESCE IN THE COMMUNIZATION OF THE BALKANS . . . ?'

The war was turning into a triumph for Communism. The main vector for this victory was the Red Army – now borne forth by resurgent Soviet arms production and copious supplies from the United States. Meanwhile, a combination of ideological inspiration, strict discipline and appeals to workers and peasants even more brutally exploited as a result of the war saw Communist resistance movements flourish throughout Occupied Europe.

At the end of 1943, the South African General Smuts had made a well-publicized speech in London calling for the British Commonwealth to take on a leading role in Western Europe. For Smuts, as for most British ministers and officials, this was a natural response to the growth of American and Russian power. Many European statesmen-in-exile took the same view and looked to Britain to form a bloc based on shared Western European values. Neither Churchill nor Eden seized the moment. Conscious as they were of Britain's relative decline, they believed that the best way to preserve the country's power was to work in concert with Washington and Moscow.

As the Red Army ploughed forward, Stalin shaped the peace. In December 1943, the Soviets signed an alliance treaty with the Czech government-in-exile, securing territory that gave them a land route into Central Europe. Conversations with the Czechoslovakian premier, Edvard Beneš, encouraged Churchill in his belief that Stalin was a reasonable man who would stand by his word. Keen to accommodate the Soviet dictator, Churchill completed the trend of 1943, abandoning Mihailović's Chetniks in Yugoslavia in favour of Tito's Communists. During January, Churchill and the Foreign Office made a sustained effort to get the Polish government-in-exile to accept a revised border for their country in the east, compensated with territory taken from Germany in the west. At the start of March, Stalin told Churchill that the London Polish government ought to be replaced. That only made the London Poles more intransigent. Angry at the Soviets, Churchill looked in vain for American support.³

As Eden reminded the prime minister, however, the British had to work with Russia if they wanted a lasting peace. Such efforts gained fresh urgency as the Red Army advanced towards the Balkans, threatening Britain's position in the Mediterranean. 'Are we going', Churchill enquired of his foreign secretary at the start of May 1944, 'to acquiesce in the communization of the Balkans and perhaps of Italy . . . ?'⁴ With the dark fear of another war often looming in his conversation, Churchill talked repeatedly of a 'showdown' with the Soviets.⁵ What he wanted to know was how they could be stopped.

How better than the bilateral balance of power deal that the Soviets had been pursuing since 1941? Eden proposed a three-month agreement to Moscow, under which the Russians would liberate and administer Romania and the British would do the same for Greece. Molotov accepted, then checked with Cordell Hull that the Americans agreed. The British had not consulted the State Department and there was consternation in Washington. Churchill reassured Roosevelt that the British and the Russians had no intention of agreeing a divided Europe.

'IF IT CAME TO THE POINT HE WOULD ALWAYS SIDE WITH THE UNITED STATES AGAINST FRANCE'

After General de Gaulle became sole head of the French Committee of National Liberation in 1943, the military units of the various French resistance groups were brought under the single umbrella of the French Forces of the Interior (FFI), whose actions the committee co-ordinated. Simultaneously, support for Communist resistance groups in France rose. As in so many other occupied countries, anticipation of a test of strength between conservative and revolutionary versions of 'liberation' became the central political dynamic as the war drew to a close. De Gaulle was determined that there would be no power vacuum into which the Communists might step. During the spring of 1944, as parts of France slipped into civil war between resisters and collaborators, the FCNL began to build a clandestine framework of officials to restore civil government as soon as the Germans left.⁶

There was very little co-ordination between these preparations and Anglo-American plans for the liberation of France. Contrary to earlier dreams of a mass civil uprising, the Allies had ordered a more limited attack on German communications in the run-up to D-Day. With so many other Allied troops to move across the Channel, a single French armoured division, operating as part of the US army, was the only French formation that would join the Allied build-up over the Normandy beaches.

Roosevelt disclaimed any American involvement in the political problems of post-war Europe. As he joked with Churchill by telegram at the end of February 1944:

'Do please don't' ask me to keep any American forces in France . . . I denounce in protest the paternity of Belgium, France and Italy. You really ought to bring up your own children. In view of the fact that they may be your bulwark in future days, you should at least pay for their schooling now! ⁷

Without Roosevelt's backing, attempts to develop detailed plans for a post-liberation government ran into the sand. The president remained reluctant to concede de Gaulle's de facto status as the French national leader, and, despite Eisenhower's and Churchill's best efforts, the FCNL was kept out of the planning of 'Overlord'. The omission made de Gaulle furious. A French government already existed, he insisted: it did not need to wait on recognition from the American president. At Churchill's suggestion, de Gaulle was invited from North Africa to Britain on 4 June, so that the prime minister could personally convey news of the forthcoming invasion. Eden accompanied the general as he walked towards the train on which Churchill, Smuts and Bevin were touring the troops: 'The Prime Minister, moved by his sense of history, was on the track to greet the General with arms outstretched. Unfortunately, de Gaulle did not respond easily to such a mood.'

Instead, the Frenchman kept asking where the Americans were. Without them, he announced, there was simply no point in continuing with the meeting. Churchill explained Roosevelt's refusal to discuss civil affairs and lectured de Gaulle about the need to spend time cultivating favour in Washington. When his guest failed to heed these homilies, the prime minister thought that he was trying to play the British off against the Americans. According to Eden, Churchill:

became increasingly exasperated at what he regarded as the General's obduracy. Finally, Mr Churchill declared that, if it came to the point he would always side with the United States against France. I did not like this pronouncement nor did Mr Bevin, who said so in a booming aside. The meeting was a failure.⁸

Churchill's willingness to allow Roosevelt's peevish attitude to set the pace infuriated British ministers and officials who wanted to build better bonds with the French. Churchill's bald statement of priorities was not one that de Gaulle would ever let the British forget.

'PAYING REGARD TO THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT'S REASONABLE DEMANDS'

In the months after D-Day, a mix of personal sentiment and great power politics moved Churchill down familiar expeditionary paths. Like the British chiefs of staff, he opposed Operation 'Anvil', the amphibious invasion of southern France. Instead, he seized on a plan from General Alexander for an amphibious invasion of Istria and a punch north to

Vienna through the 'Ljubljana Gap' (the col through the Alps). The operation was codenamed 'Armpit'. Encouraged by Macmillan and Smuts, Churchill appealed direct to Roosevelt. He hoped to keep the forces that would otherwise be diverted to 'Anvil' under British command to deliver a mighty return on the Allies' Mediterranean commitment.⁹

The idea of a bloody amphibious landing followed by an improvised mountain dash in the middle of winter appalled Brooke. He regarded it as evidence of Churchill and Alexander's limited strategic grasp. He too, however, was against 'Anvil'. With Ultra decrypts revealing Hitler's insistence that the Wehrmacht defend northern Italy, the CIGS believed there was a chance to cut off and destroy the German armies south of the Alps – but only if the Americans agreed to concentrate on the Italian campaign. As ever, Brooke thought logic was on his side, but Churchill's obsession with 'Armpit' made it even harder to convince the Americans of his case. Marshall resisted another British-led entanglement in the Balkans. Since 'Anvil' had been offered to Stalin at Teheran, he said, it wasn't open to argument. Roosevelt ignored Churchill's appeals.

The prime minister was attracted to 'Armpit' partly because it would get Western forces into Central Europe alongside the Red Army. This did not contradict his hopes of including Stalin in a peace settlement: rather, they were part of the same strategy of containment. Ahead of Soviet forces arriving in the Balkans, Eden put forward more developed plans for a division of Europe. In two papers to the War Cabinet in June and August 1944, the foreign secretary argued that the Soviets would collaborate in keeping the peace, providing Britain wasn't seen to be conspiring against them. 10 Co-operation could be achieved 'by paying regard to the Soviet Government's reasonable demands'. He proposed a permanent extension of his May agreement with Molotov. In this mutual recognition of traditional attachments, the British would reinforce their influence over an inverted T-shape of countries running south from Scandinavia, via the Low Countries and France to the Mediterranean, and encompassing Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece and Turkey. In turn, they would avoid 'any challenge to Soviet interests' in Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia. ¹¹ To ward off Soviet suspicions, Eden emphasized, Britain must show that it intended to impose a tough peace on Germany. 12

While the foreign secretary prepared his colleagues for this accommodation, the chiefs of staff had instructed their planners to consider the military threat from the Soviet Union. They took this danger very seriously. Since the Americans were obviously determined to go

home, they concluded, the only means to defend Western Europe from the Red Army in a future war would be to incorporate German factories and manpower. Stalin's spies in Whitehall duly conveyed these suggestions to Moscow, where they sparked a fierce campaign of counter-propaganda. Eden had to back away from his plans for a Western bloc in case they antagonized the Soviets. Nonetheless, Britain and the USSR were moving closer on a European settlement.¹³

Re-codenamed 'Dragoon', the invasion of Mediterranean France went ahead on 15 August 1944. American troops made up most of the assault force, with a small contingent of British and Canadian paratroopers providing airborne support. They quickly established themselves ashore and were followed by seven French divisions. Aided by the resistance, they took Toulon on 26 August, a week before planned, and Marseilles two days later. Meanwhile the Americans chased the Germans up the Rhône valley.

Unexpectedly, 'Dragoon' proved vital in maintaining the flow of supplies to Allied forces in Northwest Europe. Despite its rapid success in the late summer, 'Overlord' had not captured enough usable ports to sustain its advance. As German garrisons held out along the Atlantic and North Sea coasts, Marseilles became central to keeping Eisenhower's expanding forces equipped, fuelled and fed. Between August and December 1944, the port would handle 40 per cent of all the supplies reaching SHAEF. After the 'Dragoon' invasion forces were combined into his forces on 15 September 1944, Eisenhower had three army groups, comprising seven armies, under his command: four American, one British, one Canadian and one French.

'WE MUST WORK FOR EFFECTIVE INTERNATIONAL CONTROL'

Following the agreement on atomic co-operation reached at Quebec in 1943, the British had set aside the last efforts to make their own bomb and despatched all their most talented scientists to America. Many of them went to the newly completed Los Alamos research facility. In exchange, the British gained knowledge of how the bomb was built. Small in number but significant in influence, British physicists would play an important part in the development of the uranium bomb.¹⁵

In the spring of 1944, those in the know were told that an atomic

weapon would be ready for use in approximately a year's time. In the planning timescales then being employed, that meant that it would be too late for use against Germany. Whereas the atomic project had started as a race to beat the Germans, now policy-makers looked to it to provide an effective weapon against the Japanese.¹⁶

Despite his responsibilities as chancellor, Sir John Anderson retained oversight of the 'tube alloys' programme. Much earlier than Churchill, who still conceived of the atomic bomb simply as a super-weapon, Anderson grasped the revolutionary scientific and financial implications of what was about to occur. He believed that international control of such a devastating piece of ordnance was a moral responsibility. This aligned him closely with the émigré Danish scientist Niels Bohr. Alongside Einstein, Bohr was one of the greatest physicists of the age. He had been spirited out of Denmark to Sweden, and thence to London, at the end of 1943, and appointed the scientific advisor to the Tube Alloys Directorate.

United by their love of science, Bohr and Anderson became friends. When he grasped how far the Allies had come, Bohr told Anderson that they were in a moment of terrible danger and remarkable opportunity. Accepting that the new weapon might have to be used to bring an end to this war, both men looked ahead to the dangers of another conflict. Unless the atomic bomb presaged an era of genuine international co-operation, humanity might find itself caught in a hideous arms race that could culminate in the destruction of the world. Since the Soviet Union possessed the scientists, the raw materials and the single-minded determination to build its own bomb, Bohr and Anderson came to believe that Britain and America must share news of the atomic weapon – though not the secret scientific and technical details – with the Soviets. Only in this way could they establish the trust that would preserve the hard-won peace.

Well aware that Churchill would oppose the idea, Anderson nonetheless supported Bohr as he tried to win support in the United States. This mission eventually resulted in Roosevelt asking Bohr to take his proposals for international controls back to the British prime minister. Briefing Churchill, Anderson insisted that: 'no plans for world organisation which ignore the potentialities of Tube Alloys can be worth the paper on which they are written.' With Cherwell and Smuts' help, Anderson arranged for Churchill to meet Bohr on 16 May 1944.

It didn't go well. Atomic exclusivity had become a vital pillar of Churchill's hopes for long-term Anglo-American co-operation in defence. Faced with prime ministerial bombast, Bohr was unable to get his point

across. Worse, Churchill came away with the mistaken impression that Bohr wanted to share all the secrets of the bomb with Stalin, and that he was therefore a security risk. In contrast, when Bohr met Roosevelt on 26 August 1944, he came away feeling that the president favoured an early approach to the USSR. This view would soon prove to be misplaced.

Simultaneously, Churchill, Anderson and Cherwell discussed how to cement Anglo-American atomic co-operation after the war. The 1943 agreement would cease to apply when hostilities ended. At that point, British scientists would have the know-how to build a bomb for themselves, but not the money or the infrastructure. With the end of the war in Europe drawing into view, they therefore urgently needed to get the Americans to agree to maintain their combined efforts into the peace. Though Cherwell dissuaded him from sharing his views with Churchill, Anderson hoped that this might also provide an occasion to talk about international control.

'ADMIRATION AND ASTONISHMENT AT THE RAPID ADVANCE OF THE RED ARMY'

The Soviet offensives of summer 1944 carried Stalin's military power deep into Eastern and Southern Europe. Operation 'Bagration', launched on 22–23 June, saw the Red Army advance almost 300 miles in just five weeks. With the Luftwaffe withdrawn to defend Germany, the Red Air Force took a significant toll of German ground troops for the first time. The more technologically intense struggle in the West opened the door to a calamitous defeat in the East. As German mobility disintegrated, Hitler insisted that every city be held. Wehrmacht units were repeatedly encircled and destroyed. The bitter fighting cost the Germans only about a third of the armoured fighting vehicles and aircraft they lost during the simultaneous campaign in France, but by the time 'Bagration' finished, the German Army Group Centre had lost 450,000 men and the Soviets were poised to enter the Reich.¹⁸

'Bagration' set the context for two further critical developments on the Eastern Front. On 1 August, as the Soviets advanced into Poland, the Polish Home Army, the resistance movement loyal to the London government-in-exile, launched an uprising in Warsaw. It had not been coordinated with the Red Army, which had not in fact planned to seize the Polish capital. The Germans did not retreat from the city, but fought back

with exterminatory determination. For its part, the Red Army did not drive its way through to relieve the doomed Poles.

Whether or not the Soviets could have done more to reach Warsaw, they plainly felt little need to put themselves at the beck and call of the Home Army. ¹⁹ Initially, the Russians also refused to countenance British and American requests for refuelling facilities so that their bombers could drop supplies to the desperate Poles. Given superior German firepower on the ground, aerial supply was a futile gesture, but it was one on which Soviet intransigence imposed a visible delay. A few very long-range missions from Italy were still able to fly over the city, but even when the Soviets finally agreed to allow Allied aircraft to land, they couldn't drop enough to make a difference.

For two months, the Home Army fought on alone. Warsaw was devastated. The Home Army suffered approximately 22,000 casualties. More than 200,000 civilians were killed. When the last of the defenders surrendered on 2 October 1944, the Germans razed what remained of the city and deported its surviving inhabitants. Meanwhile in Lublin – a Polish town they *had* reached – the Soviets set up an alternative to the Polish government-in-exile, the Committee of National Liberation.

Their helplessness in the face of these events only emphasized to British ministers how little power they had to determine Poland's fate. Churchill entreated Stalin and appealed to Roosevelt over aid flights but was rebuffed by both. For once, he chose to keep quiet — a decision supported by his colleagues in the War Cabinet. However he chose to read Soviet recalcitrance, the catastrophe of Warsaw confirmed the urgent need to reach a more permanent settlement with Stalin. This wasn't the moment to pick a fight about something Britain could do nothing about.

Though anxieties about the post-war world were rising, the Red Army's failure to save the Poles did not spark any great public upsurge of revulsion in the UK. In the last week of July, Home Intelligence's weekly morale report had noted: 'Widespread admiration and astonishment at the rapid advance of the Red Army continues. A great majority hope and expect that the Russians will be first in Berlin . . . "They will show no mercy to the Nazis, as we might".' There were also, however, 'some fears about the Russian attitude in the post-war world', although 'working-class people in Scotland' were reported as saying 'that if we play the game by her, she will play it by us'. Anthony Eden couldn't have put it better himself.

After the Warsaw uprising began, most news reports followed the government line and avoided any commentary on the Red Army's inability

to relieve the Poles. The *Daily Mirror* and the *News Chronicle*, in contrast, criticized the Soviets for deliberately abandoning the Home Army.²¹ At the end of August, Home Intelligence reported: 'People feel great admiration for the Poles . . . and are anxious that they should be helped, but there are amazement and bewilderment at our having to supply them [by air] from Italy when the Russians are only a few miles away.'²² In the first week of September, it was suggested that 'a growing number of people distrust Russian motives; they think the delay is deliberate, and due to political, rather than military, factors.'²³ British propaganda, however, continued to extol the virtues of the Red Army. If the feats of British forces now got much more attention, respect for Russian military achievements remained high – as did the hope and expectation that the 'Big Three' would find a way to work together after the war.

While Warsaw burned, the Red Army's summer offensives continued. From 20 August 1944, it launched a new attack far to the south, across the Dniester river and into Romania. On 23 August, the Romanian King Michael led a coup that deposed the government of Ion Antonescu and took his country over to the Allies. By the end of the month, the Soviets were in Bucharest and all German resistance in Romania had ceased. On 9 September, a Soviet-backed coup in Sofia brought Bulgaria over to the Allies as well. As Axis formations in Greece and Yugoslavia withdrew towards Hungary, they were harassed by partisans and subjected to heavy attacks on railways and roads by the Allied air forces in the Mediterranean.

The speed of the Soviet arrival in Southeastern Europe only intensified Churchill's fascination with Operation 'Armpit'. With Allied strength in Italy reduced by 'Dragoon', he hoped that an offensive by Yugoslav partisans might occupy enough German strength to allow Alexander to attack into Istria and seize Trieste. The plans aroused deep suspicion from Tito, who was already preparing to take the Italian port for Yugoslavia.

In August, Churchill visited the Mediterranean to take matters into his own hands. As Alexander's armies opened a new offensive against German defences north of Rome, the prime minister insisted that planning continued for a lightning strike across the Alps. If the end of the war was imminent, he reassured Smuts, he had instructed Alexander to make a dash for Vienna while the Reich fell apart. Forestalling the Red Army was now central to his obsession with 'Armpit'. If he could get the Americans to leave the landing ships which had taken part in 'Dragoon' in the Mediterranean for a few weeks longer, he'd be able to send Alexander through the Ljubljana Gap.²⁴ Simultaneously, the Soviet entry into Bulgaria made Churchill determined to get British troops into Greece. In

the Mediterranean, General Wilson had assembled three brigades to move into Greece as soon as the Germans withdrew. Churchill badgered Wilson to make sure they were ready to go. They were felt to be enough to defeat any attempt to seize power by EAM/ELAS acting alone. A Communist takeover launched from the back of the Red Army's tanks would be much harder to resist.

'WE CANNOT AFFORD AT THIS STAGE . . . TO FALL OUT WITH MR. MORGENTHAU'

At the start of February 1944, the Foreign Office minister Richard Law had presented the War Cabinet with a list of issues from the Article VII negotiations on which decisions now needed to be made. This included both the main subject of Article VII – commercial policy, including the maintenance of imperial preference and US tariffs versus the liberalization of trade – and the related question of monetary policy, about which John Maynard Keynes and Harry Dexter White had spent the previous autumn arguing in Washington.

White had pushed through a modified version of his plan for an International Monetary Fund as a Joint Statement of Principles to which the British were now required to agree. The new Fund would act as a lender of last resort to prevent balance of payments crises and preserve the flow of global trade. The chaos and fragmentation of the inter-war financial system, now blamed for the Great Depression and the rise of Nazism, was meant to be abolished for ever. The Fund's members would subscribe a quota of gold, securities and their own currency, which would in turn determine how much they could draw out from the Fund to cover a deficit. To avail themselves of these facilities, members would have to make their currencies convertible, with their exchange rates fixed against any currency that could be freely converted into gold. Though the plan did not say so explicitly, this meant dollars. Combined with the convertibility requirement, the formal enthronement of the dollar as the basis of world trade would, in the long term, spell inevitable doom for a financial empire based on sterling.

Though the British still tried to stall for time, Henry Morgenthau, the US treasury secretary, and White were set on getting the Joint Statement of Principles published in London and Washington before summer 1944, so that they could convene an international monetary conference and get their scheme accepted in time to fit in with the American election cycle. They

insisted that the British would now have to start living up to the commitments they had made in the Atlantic Charter and Article VII of the Lend-Lease Agreement. Whitehall supporters of multilateralism, including Law, Keynes, Anderson and Cherwell, readied themselves for a fight with those who still proposed to fall back on imperial isolationism, including the Treasury economist Hubert Henderson and the Bank of England, as well as ministers including Amery and Beaverbrook.

Though the Joint Statement was not what he had wanted, Keynes looked, as usual, for the best. As he had repeatedly pointed out, since there was no way to force the members of the sterling area to hold pounds, Britain had little choice but to collaborate with rising American financial dominance, in the knowledge that a stable, multilateral system that tied in the United States would bring its own benefits, and the hope that Britain could thereby secure the resources it needed to reconstruct its economy. The pool of credit that would be provided under White's scheme was far too small for that, even if Britain could meet the requirements to access it, but at least it represented a positive start. The British thought that they had secured both the right of unilateral withdrawal from the Fund (though whether it would ever be politically possible to exercise this right was not addressed), and the freedom to decide the nature and duration of the transitional period, during which wartime currency controls could continue to apply. White had also agreed that, in the event of a country operating a prolonged payments surplus, the Fund would declare its currency 'scarce', permitting all the others to impose restrictions against it. Keynes hoped that this would prevent a repeat of the inter-war calamity in which gold and dollars had been sucked to the far side of the Atlantic, never to return.

As expected, Law's report provoked a major fight-back from British economic nationalists during the spring of 1944. The Bank of England decried any loss of sovereignty over exchange rates and the disastrous consequences for British finances if sterling stopped being used as a reserve currency. Disagreements between officials gave an opportunity to ministers such as Amery and Beaverbrook, who opposed the whole free trade agenda, as well as the Conservative minister for agriculture, Robert Hudson. They sought to sway undecided members of the Cabinet – including Ernest Bevin, who worried that a return to something like the gold standard would hurt working- class living standards – to their point of view. Advocates of multilateralism hit back: Anderson, backed by Eden and Law, told his colleagues that relying on imperial autarky would require such a level of austerity that they would have to abandon the plans they were currently making for post- war reform. Churchill, trying to avoid

a decision that would arouse the ire of the imperialist wing of the Conservative Party, happily let these meetings descend into shouting matches. Cherwell, however, kept him well briefed, informing the prime minister that there was no realistic chance of the sterling bloc functioning to preserve British power after the war. Both men hoped that economic cooperation with the Americans would pave the way to a stronger transatlantic relationship.

Beaverbrook and Amery's dreams of autarky were dangerous fantasies, but they were right to perceive the US Treasury's plans as a deliberate assault on Britain's financial empire. And just as they were deluded about the possibilities of the Empire going it alone, so British multilateralists deceived themselves that, in return for agreeing to White's scheme, the UK would be able to acquire more freedom over the transitional arrangements, more funding for reconstruction in Europe and more economic support to aid a British recovery. These things might be attained in time, but the British had lost the power to determine the postwar system.

In the United States, White and Morgenthau's plans also aroused opposition, both from Republican nationalists, who were enjoying a political resurgence arguing against American money being used to solve the rest of the world's problems, and from Wall Street, where US banks wanted monetary issues to be solved by private financiers rather than by the state. The resistance they faced at home increased the pressure on the US Treasury representatives to get a deal, but further limited their scope to make concessions to Britain. At the start of April 1944, Morgenthau insisted that Whitehall would have to move forward with the publication of the Joint Statement.

Anderson told Churchill that 'It is clear to me that we cannot afford at this stage either to fall out with Mr. Morgenthau or to risk being saddled with the responsibility for a break-down.' The chancellor therefore decided to separate the two aspects of the Article VII negotiations – pressing on with the monetary proposals and leaving behind the even more tangled issue of commercial policy. As before, because the mechanisms of the international exchange were simultaneously abstruse and fundamental, there was more room for the experts to make headway than on the more politically charged question of tariffs. Beaverbrook was furious to find himself outmanoeuvred yet again. Bevin, always an unlikely ally of the press baron, was persuaded not to oppose Anderson's policy.

The Joint Statement was published simultaneously in London and Washington. Getting the British to agree to US monetary proposals was a

great coup for Morgenthau. As the first American official really to deliver on Roosevelt's hopes of reconstructing the world, his stock with the president rose, antagonizing Roosevelt's other secretaries of state. A month later, the US Treasury issued invitations to forty-four governments to attend a conference on the new International Monetary Fund at the start of July.

Meanwhile, British reactions to the Joint Statement reflected both resentment and hope. Inevitably, Beaverbrook's *Daily Express* condemned the whole thing as a return to the days of the gold standard, while the liberal Manchester Guardian looked forward to the return of free trade. Home Intelligence reported a sense of unease: 'It is felt that an unfriendly attitude towards us is being fostered, and people fear that American postwar plans are going to be very unfavourable to us . . . "America is going to make us pay dearly after the war for the favours she has extended us".'²⁶ When the Joint Statement was discussed in the Commons, on 11 May, MPs were cautious about the details of the plan, but almost instinctively concerned about its instigation by the United States. With scant sense of how dependent the UK was going to be on American aid if it wanted to restore its economy, MPs worried that the government was vielding too easily, and endangering the economically planned imperial bloc on which they thought Britain was going to rely after the war. To the embarrassment of the US Treasury, when the subject came before the Lords on 21 May, Keynes turned these arguments on their head. Engaging fully in the global economy with the support of the Fund, he argued, offered the only means for sterling to continue to be taken seriously as an international currency once the fighting was done.

'THE PROBLEM OF OUR EXTERNAL FINANCE IN THE TRANSITION'

In the period immediately before D-Day, the surge of Lend-Lease materiel into the UK reached its peak. In the first five months of 1944, aircraft supplies worth \$1,474 million arrived in the UK from the United States – almost as much as had been delivered in the whole of 1943, and twice what had come in 1942. During May 1944 alone, Lend-Lease provided British forces in the UK with munitions worth \$594 million.²⁷

Simultaneously, however, American scrutiny of British aid requirements became more intense. From the autumn of 1943, with the

return of the 'five angry senators' and the setting up of Truman's Senate Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program, the political mood in Washington swung towards economic nationalism.²⁸ There was an inevitable effect on the officials who handled Lend-Lease requests. Over the winter, they started to crack down on British orders that couldn't be linked directly to the front line.

At the same moment, the imminent Allied return to Northwest Europe raised questions about what would happen to the war economies on both sides of the Atlantic during Stage II – the period between the defeat of Germany, which everyone was then still planning on achieving by the end of 1944 – and the defeat of Japan. The war against Japan would be technologically intense, but the three great members of the Atlantic production nexus would all be able to scale down their manufacture of munitions. If Britain, however, were simultaneously to fight that war, keep up its obligations to liberated Europe, maintain the living standards of its people *and* rebuild the export industries on which its post-war livelihood must depend, it would have to rely on Canadian and American economic aid. British leaders were confident that they would be able to negotiate another tranche of assistance from the Canadian government. What help they could expect from the Americans was much less certain.

What would happen to munitions production in Stage II, particularly given that America was already doing the lion's share and more in the Pacific? Was the whole combined war effort to be scaled down proportionately, as the British proposed, with everyone making less, but the British getting a relatively higher level of support? Or should Britain have to stick with the principle that had governed Lend-Lease from the outset – as the US War Department planned – that it would make everything that it could for itself, with much-reduced supplies of Lend-Lease military equipment just topping up any gap? In this case, Britain would have to remain more heavily mobilized, while America, with its huge capacity, ran down its war industry and gained even more ground in the world's export markets.²⁹

Some of Britain's military requirements would clearly be met, but supplies of non-military Lend-Lease goods — particularly food and raw materials — were much more vulnerable. They had only been included in Lend-Lease in the first place because the Americans could provide so very few weapons in 1941, and they were already being cut to restrict Britain's dollar reserves. Under the terms accepted in the 1941 Export White Paper, goods provided under Lend-Lease were not meant to be used in manufacturing for reexport. Given its limited capacity for earning dollars,

however, how else could Britain start the tricky transition from war to peace?

These were difficult topics for the British to broach with American officials. They were wary about revealing fully the weakness of their position; still warier lest they spark a departmental squabble or a surge of popular opinion that would turn things against them in the United States.³⁰ The situation was still more complex because any decisions were tied up not only with domestic politics and ongoing trade and monetary negotiations, but also to wider national strategies – including the part to be played by British Commonwealth forces in the Far East, and the hopes that Churchill and Keynes placed in fostering a stronger Anglo-American bond.

From his work on Lend-Lease, Harry Hopkins had a good sense of how far Britain had pushed its economy in pursuit of victory. He also understood that, given the damage done by the war, generous US economic aid would be an essential part of building Roosevelt's new global order. With a network of sympathizers within the State Department and US Treasury, Hopkins worked during spring 1944 to make the case for post-war financial support. He was at this point very unwell, and he spent a lot of time convalescing from the treatment of his stomach disorder. Hopkins also suffered a temporary estrangement from the president when his new wife insisted that they move out of the White House; a departure that Roosevelt regarded as a personal betrayal. The president's advisor was also enduring a personal tragedy: the death of his youngest son, a marine, during the campaign on Kwajalein. Behind the scenes, nonetheless, Hopkins continued to press the case for America using its economic power not only to aid Britain, but also to encourage it to accept the liberalizing Article VII agenda.³¹

In April 1944, Hopkins' protégé Edward Stettinius, a high-flying American businessman with a social conscience, came to London for a visit to mark his new appointment as US under-secretary of state. Stettinius was loyal and easy to get on with. Though he sometimes seemed too enamoured with the ephemeral trappings of statesmanship, he had a record of assisting the UK in his former post as an administrator of Lend-Lease. Without informing Morgenthau, Roosevelt had authorized Stettinius to discuss economic matters. The British had also prepared to take the opportunity of his visit to disclose the severity of their financial situation, and how much worse it would get after the end of hostilities.

Churchill told Stettinius that Britain was going to be the 'debtor nation of the world' when the war finished. Anderson filled in the details. In

subsequent talks with Law and Eden, Stettinius pressed for the Article VII negotiations to be resolved before the presidential election due that November. He also held out the prospect of a massive post-war loan to tide Britain over the problems of the transition. The Foreign Office ministers were excited at the prospect. Churchill was more doubtful, not least about the prospect of getting Parliament to approve the abandonment of imperial preference, but Anderson kiboshed the whole scheme. Foreseeing a welter of problems ignored in Stettinius's vague suggestion – the rate of interest, the tying of the loan to US purchases, the difficulties of repayment – and looking back to the previous war, Anderson argued that owing huge sums of money to the Americans would not improve the transatlantic relationship.³²

As the Treasury reacted to Stettinius's visit, Keynes sounded his strongest warning yet about Britain's future difficulties, in a May 1944 paper for the chancellor on 'The Problem of Our External Finance in the Transition'. As he pointed out, 'the financial problems of the war have been surmounted so easily and so silently that the average man sees no reason to suppose that the financial problems of the peace will be different.' Keynes predicted, however, that over the first three years after the end of the war with Japan, the combination of an export deficit, an excess of foreign spending over income and the need to reduce the sterling balances would all leave Britain with a balance of payments deficit of somewhere between £1.5 billion and £2.25 billion. Everyone to whom Anderson showed these figures was shocked. It meant either much greater dependence on American help, or a much greater level of austerity than anything endured since 1939.

Keynes proposed measures to make things manageable. As the central banker of the Sterling Area, Britain had control over its balances, and it could choose to repay them at 0 per cent interest and over the long term (with an exception for those who accepted British export credits). If Sterling Area members were only allowed to spend as many dollars as they earned, Britain might effectively be able to pay nothing on its sterling loans in the immediate aftermath of the war.

Keynes hoped that a resolute approach to the Americans would allow the British to make full use of Stage II. The United States government must be persuaded to stop cutting away at Britain's dollar reserves, to keep up Lend-Lease at a level sufficient for Britain to start converting its economy back to peacetime production, and to lift restrictions on the use of these supplies. That would allow the British to commence an export drive before Japan was defeated. His aim was to restore as much financial independence as possible before Lend-Lease was cut off. Given that the war in Europe was meant to be finished by the end of 1944, a decision on these issues was very urgent. Since it was presumed that the war with Japan would last at least another year after that, if Britain could get a favourable judgement from the Americans, it might have eighteen months to get ready for peace.

Keynes' paper was simultaneously brutal – cutting through attempts by Amery and Beaverbrook to suggest that Britain could soldier on alone on the back of an imperial economic bloc – and attractive, in that it offered more multilaterally minded ministers a policy that would help Britain out of its economic predicament. In July 1944, the Cabinet authorized preparations for an export drive and early negotiations on Stage II with the Americans.³⁵

BRETTON WOODS

Meanwhile, Keynes had led the British delegation across the Atlantic to join in preparations for the international monetary conference, which would start in the Mount Washington Hotel in the exclusive New Hampshire resort of Bretton Woods on 1 July 1944.³⁶

This was to be the crowning event of Henry Morgenthau's and Harry Dexter White's careers. White set things up to get exactly what he wanted: the appearance of America negotiating with the rest of the world, rather than imposing its will on its impoverished allies, and the whole deal sealed in time for the Democratic convention which would nominate Roosevelt for re-election as president of the United States. Before the conference began, the Americans and British would iron out their issues at a preliminary meeting in Atlantic City. Though there would be plenty for the delegates to discuss at Bretton Woods, the only thing that would really be open for settlement would be the size of each country's 'quota' – its subscription to the Fund and the basis for its overdraft facilities.

It quickly became apparent that the British delegation was too small and too over-worked. Under the strain of fighting the currency scheme through in London, Keynes had become badly tired and his heart was already threatening to give out. Despite the ministrations of his wife, Lydia, he had to take time away from the preliminary negotiations to recover for the conference ahead.

Before his departure from London, Keynes had become increasingly excited about the possibilities of a previously little considered sidelight on

the Monetary Fund proposals: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. It was already plain that the negotiations on the IMF would entail the British acquiescing to American proposals while trying to limit the immediate damage they might cause. In particular, the British were wary of a pincer movement between American determination to restore full currency convertibility and the desire of the largest holders of sterling debt – India and Egypt – to force Britain to unlock their balances so that they could spend them on imports from the United States. Ironically, both the Indian and the Egyptian delegations were led by British civil servants acting on behalf of the respective governments and against, as Keynes saw it, the UK's national interests. From a British perspective, the key thing was to avoid the potentially disastrous combination of full convertibility and the liberation of the sterling balances.

In contrast, the International Bank seemed to provide a positive opportunity. Keynes planned not to have it loan out members' subscriptions, but rather to use them to guarantee commercial borrowing, thus greatly increasing the amount that could be lent. Since the Americans had rejected Keynes' attempts to ensure that the Fund provided enough liquidity to allow a swift transition to multilateral trade, the Bank would have to be built up instead. Keynes' new fascination suited White down to the ground. He put the British economist in charge of the Bank discussions at Bretton Woods, thus ensuring Keynes was too busy to interfere with White's backroom dealing on the Fund.

From Atlantic City, the delegates travelled on to Bretton Woods. As White had anticipated, cramming 730 economists and lawyers from 45 countries into an out-of-season hotel for two and a half weeks, accompanied by 500 journalists, innumerable cigarettes and a sea of alcohol, was not a means to get democratic decisions about the future of the global monetary system. It did, however, generate a colossal amount of talk – long days and longer nights of argument and discussion, most of it in poorly spoken English (alone among the delegations, the French insisted on using their own language throughout).

While delegates made speeches to each other over the size of their quotas, the Americans fixed the details of what each country was allocated in bilateral meetings. Russian participation became a major sticking point. The Soviets wanted their quota increased from \$800 million to \$1.2 billion, to match that of the UK, but, since they refused to pay any more into the Fund, it looked like other countries would have to find the money to make their contribution up. Strikingly, no one expected that the Soviets

were going to embrace multilateral free trade. On the contrary, it was widely presumed that they would just draw down their overdraft with the Fund as quickly as possible with no intention of paying it back. As this suggested, the political value of the conference was at least as important as its financial elements.

Keynes grew steadily more worked up and worn out. Lydia kept him away from the late-night meetings and parties, but he was under immense pressure, not just from the negotiations but also from an acute awareness of just how much the Americans were running the show. His frustrations eventually boiled up into an explosion of temper that badly overstrained his heart and laid him low for the rest of the conference.

In practice, therefore, much of the negotiating work for Britain was done by other economists, including Lionel Robbins and Dennis Robertson (an economic advisor to the Treasury). It was Robertson who stated what everyone else was thinking, and formally articulated to the conference the notion that exchange rates would be pegged to the dollar, as the only currency that could be freely exchanged against gold. This was much more precise a statement of how the new system would work than Keynes had wanted and — as the Fund's critics in Britain had often highlighted — the effect was to put the dollar on the gold standard: an attachment that would cause major problems for the international economy decades down the line. It went unnoticed by Keynes at the time. Even before his collapse, he was too bound up in the negotiations to keep track of everything that was being agreed while the conference was still on.

The British couldn't stop the Americans siting the new institution's headquarters in New York, an inevitable demonstration of who was really in charge. Abetting the Americans did, however, bring advantages: Robbins blocked demands for the conference to consider the sterling balances, which would not have to be made fully convertible before Britain joined the Fund. In the preliminary negotiations, the British delegation also won some more independence over exchange rates and the right for countries to retain exchange controls until 1952 while they transitioned to the rules of the new Fund. They had to fight much harder to get these concessions than the Russians, however, to whose demands the Americans yielded seemingly at every turn. This reflected not just the enthusiasm for Moscow felt by Harry Dexter White – who was in contact with Soviet intelligence while the conference went on – but also the more general desire of the Roosevelt administration to incorporate the USSR into the new world order.

The strategy of engagement seemed to work. Just before the

conference's culminating dinner, the Soviet delegation announced that their country would contribute its full quota. This cleared a path to a final agreement. Keynes, frail but on his feet, appeared at the feast to offer his own benediction on the conference's achievement. To him, as to Morgenthau and White, Bretton Woods seemed like a major step on the path to a better future. With sighs of relief, the shattered delegates signed the conference agreement and departed. No one had time to read the small print – a cause of considerable argument and confusion over the months to come.

Bretton Woods still had to be ratified in London and Washington, but the US Treasury had delivered a major part of its grand design. White and Morgenthau had not only made the dollar supreme, but – with Keynes – they had achieved what were in fact shared objectives: to save international finance from private concerns and to tie the United States into a stable system, with reliable exchange rates, which offered the best hope of widening prosperity for all. They were not wrong to think that this was a major departure from the turbulence of the inter-war years. In retrospect, the structures they had set up would play an important role in allowing the sustained period of growth that occurred in the decades after 1945.

At the time, however, it was a much more uncertain development. Bretton Woods marked an American victory over a British system, but it did not solve Britain's basic financial problem. For all Keynes' optimism, he had not inaugurated a system that would provide the credit to allow Britain to restore its peacetime economy. Even if the UK had been able to meet the criteria to access them at this stage, neither the new Monetary Fund nor the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development could provide the liquidity to rebuild the world shattered by the war. Nor did they offer anything close to an American guarantee on an issue of much more immediate concern to the leaders of Western Europe, including Britain: their post-war security in the face of rising Soviet power.³⁷

'ENGLAND REALLY IS BROKE'

During the summer of 1944, the mood of economic nationalism increased in the United States. As the parties prepared for the election, a Republican campaign against government waste gathered ground. Complaints that the British were exploiting Lend-Lease became more frequent. It didn't help that British dollar reserves were rising, and it didn't matter that this was a

temporary phenomenon, brought about by the flood of US troops through the country before D-Day. Simultaneously, the American military also became more interested in using the economic lever, and floated the idea of using Lend-Lease to coerce more permanent base facilities in the Atlantic and the Pacific while forcing the British to keep their munitions production high if they wanted to participate in the final battles against Japan.³⁸

All of this made it harder for Harry Hopkins to organize assistance for Britain without creating difficulties for Roosevelt. Rather than Anderson being invited to Washington, it was decided that the British would be given an opportunity to present their case to Henry Morgenthau when he visited Europe, with Harry Dexter White, to work out what to do with Germany.

The apparent imminence of victory forced the Americans to confront their lack of planning about how to handle their defeated enemy. On this subject, Morgenthau was a hardliner. An ardent champion of democracy and a Jew, he was driven by a punitive anger at the appalling crimes that the Nazis had perpetrated. When White showed him the schemes the State Department had drawn up, Morgenthau was shocked by how little they talked about pacification. He contemplated a more drastic economic restructuring that would turn the whole German population into peasant farmers, too busy with their smallholdings to worry about going to war.³⁹

Then he visited Britain, where he spotted the split between those who wanted to keep Germany down to stay on side with the Russians, and those who, for exactly the opposite reason, contemplated building the beaten enemy back up. Eden showed Morgenthau the records from Teheran that showed the Allied leaders agreeing to dismember Germany. This was the first the treasury secretary had heard of them. White emphasized to Morgenthau the importance of breaking up the German economy. For some reason, he was even keener to keep the Russians happy than the British foreign secretary.

Anderson gave Morgenthau a lengthy presentation on economic problems, explaining that, if the UK was not to remain dependent on US aid, it must have help during Phase II to allow it to increase its exports by fivefold. Morgenthau indulged in a little power play, revealing that the previous year, Churchill had inadvertently handed over to Roosevelt a briefing note from Kingsley Wood advising the prime minister not to trust Morgenthau, and to use the State Department against the US Treasury in the battle to increase Britain's dollar reserves. If Britain was serious about wanting American help, he said, they'd all have to trust each other.

Nonetheless, he admitted that the country's economic prospects looked dire. A new approach would be necessary to get round the obstructionists in Congress, and he had an idea about how this could be achieved.⁴¹

Since 1940, Morgenthau had overseen a sustained attack on Britain's financial empire, but he had always been an enthusiastic supporter of the UK as a democratic enemy of Nazism. He now thought that the twin problems of British impoverishment and German pacification might be solved simultaneously. Having got what he wanted at Bretton Woods, he would aid Britain's recovery – albeit within a specifically European, rather than a global, context – and, at the same time, guarantee Britain's ratification of the IMF agreement, tie it into a harsh peace settlement for Germany and secure control over future Lend-Lease policies. 42

Returning to Washington, Morgenthau reported to Roosevelt that 'England really is broke'. He then started pushing for a punitive new policy for post-war Germany. Any industrial plant that could be used to make warlike materials would be ripped out and given as reparations to the other Allies. The Ruhr and the Saar regions would be de-industrialized: the coal mines closed up; the land put under the plough. This would not only keep down the Germans, but also please the Soviets, and it would provide the British a means to recover as they took over German coal and steel export markets in Europe. That equation suited Roosevelt. He let Morgenthau's plan run.

On 21 August 1944, the State Department convened the second of the great American international conferences of the summer at Dumbarton Oaks, a Harvard University research centre in a former historic mansion in the leafy suburbs of Washington DC. It was meant to bring together Roosevelt's big four – the USA, UK, USSR and China – to discuss the terms on which the new United Nations organization would operate.⁴³

Roosevelt had made public his aims for the post-war United Nations on 7 June 1944. He set out the scope of a global body that was meant to ensure international co-operation and universal peace, a successor to the League of Nations that would embody the same high standards in world affairs. The Americans had subsequently laid out their plan for how the UN would work: a security council on which the big four would sit as permanent members; a general assembly, every member of which would participate in the organization's aims; and a world court with international jurisdiction. The State Department did not anticipate any great difficulty in getting the other great powers' agreement to its plans.

The British response was ambiguous. Foreign Office diplomats were instinctual internationalists, but they had had enough experience of the

League to be sceptical about how such a body would work. Though the British worked alongside the Americans to put the new organization together, they suspected that US idealism might once more have got ahead of the practical details. Given American attempts to undermine the British Empire, Churchill was for the moment understandably wary. The notion of great powers in the driving seat suited his understanding of global affairs, but he worried lest the mechanisms of the assembly become a means to put colonial rule in the dock. The Soviets shared this anxiety over international scrutiny, and this would become the defining feature of the conference.

Since the Soviets would not meet on an equal footing with the Chinese, the Dumbarton Oaks conference was conducted in two parts, with the British, Americans and Soviets meeting until 28 September, when the Chinese replaced the Soviets until discussions closed nine days later. The central dispute emerged quickly. Still bitter over having been dumped out of the League of Nations by France and Britain in 1940, and suspicious that the Commonwealth nations would side with the UK and the South Americans with the United States, the Soviets demanded that each of the republics of the USSR be given its own seat in the general assembly. They also insisted on an absolute right of veto – even on matters in which they were themselves involved – for all permanent members of the Security Council. This marked out a crucial difference from the Americans and the British delegation, both of whom proposed a much more limited veto and presumed that interested parties would recuse themselves from voting on their own disputes. 44 Roosevelt's best efforts to get the Soviets to change their mind were to no avail. As the conference ground to a halt, the president ordered the discussions to be shut down. He would have to take up these issues personally with Stalin.

With his forces now sweeping through Poland – and the Committee of National Liberation established in Lublin – Stalin was still awaiting confirmation from Roosevelt that the deal they had outlined at Teheran – a free hand in Eastern Europe in return for his co-operation in the establishment of the post-war United Nations – would hold good. In practice, the combination of the deadlock at Dumbarton Oaks, the apparent abandonment of the Warsaw Rising and the setting up of the Lublin Committee – events which caused much more concern in Washington than in London – all made the president more worried about the rapidly advancing Soviets' intentions. That would have important implications for what was decided at the Quebec conference.⁴⁵

'ALL THAT HE COULD NOW DO WAS TO FINISH THE WAR'

The second Quebec conference's codename, 'Octagon', was therefore appropriate: though billed as a meeting on military strategy, it had, in reality, more than one side. The tempo was set by the optimism that had prevailed since the Allied breakout from Normandy. If the war in Europe was going to end very soon, then agreements were needed on what was going to happen next. No sooner had the British delegation left London on the train to Greenock to board the *Queen Mary* than a false rumour came through that Germany had surrendered. While they were at sea, reports from the front suggested that Allied advances were slowing down – though no one knew for how long.

As they prepared to depart, Cherwell had emphasized again to Churchill just how important an agreement on Lend-Lease in Phase II was: 'not only because it will determine the scale of our effort against Japan and the part we play in Europe, but also because our whole economic and political future depends upon the arrangements we make now.'46 The strain hung heavily on the weary prime minister. A couple of days out into the Atlantic, over a six-course dinner, Churchill delivered a mordant monologue on a bleak and austere future for Britain. There were 'dark days ahead', he said, and he 'no longer had a "message" to deliver, and that all that he could now do was to finish the war, to get the soldiers home and to see that they had houses to which to return. But materially and financially the prospects were black . . .' If Labour waited until the euphoria of victory had worn off to break the Coalition, he suggested, he might well be defeated at the ballot box, even though 'the idea that you can vote yourself into prosperity is one of the most ludicrous that was ever entertained.'47

While the *Queen Mary* ploughed west, Churchill fought with the chiefs of staff, insisting that the main task in Europe was to take Trieste, get ashore in Greece and move on Vienna before the Soviets. Over the Far East, he suddenly blew up against the possibility of an imperial task force going to the Southwest Pacific. British troops must advance eastwards from the Indian Ocean. As he would later remind the chiefs, the capture of Rangoon was just the prelude to a major attack on Singapore: 'the Supreme British objective in the whole of the Indian and Far Eastern theatres' and 'the only prize that will restore British prestige in this region'.⁴⁸ Fearing that the military professionals would deny him the

campaigns he wanted, he warned the chiefs against 'fitting up' with their American counterparts. Sounding off in his diary, Brooke alternated between sympathy for a man who he thought could 'no longer keep a grip of things, and is beginning to realize it', and fury at the prime minister's petulance.⁴⁹

'NO SOONER OFFERED THAN ACCEPTED'

The Quebec conference was hosted by the Canadian prime minister Mackenzie King – grateful for the prestige as he struggled with his own domestic problems – but Roosevelt decided the guest list. Despite the great efforts being made by his country, the Canadian premier took part in none of the strategic discussions and joined the president and the prime minister only for dinner. The combined chiefs of staff, however, were all present, including Sir John Dill, acting as strategic interpreter for the last time. Churchill had been allowed to bring Cherwell, and before the conference was over they would be joined by Eden and his Foreign Office permanent under-secretary, Sir Alexander Cadogan. Roosevelt had insisted that Anderson and Lyttelton could not attend. There was to be no formal appearance of the discussion of the economic issues on which they were expert. Determined as ever to follow his own line, the president had not included in his entourage either Cordell Hull or Harry Hopkins – both of whom had pressed him in the days before the conference to use Lend-Lease as a way to get the British to abandon imperial preference. Soon after the meeting began, however, Roosevelt invited a delighted Treasury Secretary Morgenthau to join him in Quebec.⁵⁰

Roosevelt had lost a lot of weight since their Teheran meeting. 'You could have put a fist between his neck and his collar', remembered a professionally concerned Lord Moran.⁵¹ Yet he was still on top of his game and ready to grapple with big problems. He did not want Britain's economic problems to prevent it playing its appointed role within the United Nations. His fears of a resurgent Germany and desire to bring Stalin into his plans for the peace were now balanced by concerns about Soviet intransigence. These did not dissuade Roosevelt from his determination to avoid European entanglements, or from his conviction that he could find a settlement with Stalin, but they did encourage him to find a means to restore Britain's economy. Despite urging from Hopkins and Hull, this would not include forcing the British to make further

concessions on Article VII – as Roosevelt recognized, a difficult political issue for Churchill, and one on which he had himself promised the prime minister that there need be no settlement before the end of the war. He had other conditions he wanted Britain to meet.⁵²

Just before the conference, the president showed an interest for the first time in Churchill's quest for an amphibious move into Istria (necessary, the prime minister told him, to counter the 'dangerous spread of Russian influence in this area'). To Churchill's joy, Roosevelt not only agreed to provide US aircraft to get British troops into Greece, but also approved a 'right hook' by General Alexander's forces into the Balkans, and even across the Alps if the war lasted long enough. At their first meeting, the combined chiefs had already agreed that there would be no further US troop withdrawals from Italy. In an unusual display of generosity, Admiral King agreed to have US landing ships stay in the theatre for the next month so that they would be available to carry troops across the Adriatic.

As their political masters desired, therefore, the chiefs left open the possibility of an invasion of Istria. It remained contingent, however, on the success of Alexander's offensive in Italy, which was already running out of steam. Unless a decision was made to carry out the operation by the middle of October, King's landing ships would head off to the Indian Ocean. Short of a sudden German disintegration, a dash across the Adriatic and over the Alps was still, in practice, very unlikely.⁵⁴

In an apparent turnaround from his previous obsession with Sumatra and Singapore, Churchill opened the discussion on Far Eastern strategy by offering the British fleet for service in the Central Pacific. He also now pressed for a very large force of British heavy bombers to be allowed to join the attack on Japan – not as easy as it sounded, given that the Lancaster lacked the very long range of the B-29, although its reach could be extended with mid-air refuelling. Given the importance, if a generous Lend-Lease settlement was to be achieved, of demonstrating to the American people that Britain was playing a full part in the Pacific, these commitments were unavoidable. As usual, even while arguing bitterly with his colleagues, Churchill had been absorbing arguments that he would subsequently reproduce as his own. Yet the prime minister may also have hoped to have his cake and eat it. Since the Canadian government had already offered one of its army divisions for an invasion of the Japanese home islands, sea, air and Commonwealth power would all allow Britain to do its bit in the final campaigns against Japan. Mountbatten could be left to concentrate on regaining Singapore. 55

Roosevelt responded immediately. 'No sooner offered than accepted',

he said.⁵⁶ The president and his advisors had already agreed that the British must have a place in the Pacific. The Americans were not depending on the reinforcements, but the British would bear some of the heavy losses that could be expected in the final offensive. More importantly, British involvement would demonstrate the Allies' commitment to global cooperation in pursuit of victory – and justify the continuing economic aid that Roosevelt intended to provide. As Churchill went out of his way to state at the end of the first plenary session: 'for the future good relations of the two countries, on which so much depended, it was of vital importance that the British should be given their fair share in the main operations against Japan.'⁵⁷

At the next meeting of the combined chiefs, however, Admiral King objected furiously to the British joining the US Navy in the Central Pacific. When Brooke and Portal countered that the president had already agreed to British participation, King flew into a rage. His well-known Anglophobia notwithstanding, his argument that the Royal Navy, lacking the experience and supply ships for long-range operations, would be a drag on the American fleet, was not at all absurd. Though King had to submit to the president's decision, his apparently uncontrollable anger once again got him what he really wanted: not the exclusion of the Royal Navy, but a commitment that it would operate independently of the American logistics chain. ⁵⁸

Meanwhile, the prime minister had been talking to the president about Lend-Lease. In their private conversations, Churchill, following Cherwell's instructions, emphasized Britain's need for \$7 billion of unrestricted military and civil aid during Phase II. On no account must Roosevelt let decisions about Lend-Lease be left up to the US military. Each time the prime minister got going, the president interrupted with some thoughts about what ought to happen to Germany. Having had his fun, he finally held out another idea to Churchill: 'how would he like to have the steel business of Europe for twenty or thirty years'?⁵⁹ That evening, Morgenthau joined the party.⁶⁰

After dinner was finished, Roosevelt got Morgenthau to set out to Churchill his plan for the de-industrialization of Germany. It was not well received. The prime minister found the idea of punishing an entire people distasteful, and he suspected that, once the passions of war cooled, the British electorate might share his opinion. Morgenthau found himself on the receiving end of 'the full flood of his rhetoric, sarcasm and violence. He looked on the Treasury plan, he said, as he would on chaining himself to a dead German. He was slumped in his chair, his language biting, his

flow incessant, his manner merciless.'⁶¹ Just another night at the office with Winston, as Alan Brooke could have attested. Morgenthau was not cowed. He asked Churchill how he intended to 'prevent Britain starving when her exports had fallen so low that she would be unable to pay for her imports.' The prime minister had no answer.⁶²

Cherwell took the Morgenthau plan away for consideration. He also favoured a harsh peace – all the more so if it tied Britain and America closely together. He advised Churchill that taking export markets from a de-industrialized Germany offered the best chance for a British economic recovery. The next day, when discussions resumed, the prime minister was more accommodating. He dictated a more sonorous version of Morgenthau's draft, in the process introducing a subsequently notorious phrase about turning Germany into a 'pastoral' country. He also, however, subtly modified the scheme, narrowing down the range of industries of which Germany would be deprived. Since Roosevelt agreed soon after that the United States would take the southern zone of occupation, leaving the British in charge of the Ruhr and the Soviets in the east, Churchill may have thought that he would be able to moderate the implementation of the policy still more fully when it came to putting it into practice. 63

At the same time, far from coincidentally, the president settled the details of Lend-Lease, offering a generous settlement that gave the British everything for which they had hoped. The prime minister asked whether the UK would get 'food, shipping etc. from the United States to cover our reasonable needs', as well as military supplies. Roosevelt, as the clipped British official record of the conversation recorded, 'indicated assent'. Churchill sought reassurance that all the roughly \$7 billion of supplies Britain needed would be provided under Lend-Lease. Naturally, responded the president. The prime minister checked to make sure: would America now help Britain start reviving its export industries by lifting restrictions on what could be sold overseas? Roosevelt 'thought this would be proper'. 64

Of course, it would all have to be finalized by a committee in Washington, with Morgenthau and Stettinius in charge, but some form of economic salvation seemed to be in sight. Churchill plainly felt that he had had to do quite enough sacrificing to get it. The following day, when they were meant to be putting their signatures to what had been agreed, Roosevelt made the prime minister wait while he regaled him with political anecdotes. Eventually, Churchill yelped: 'What do you want me to do, stand up and beg like Fala [the president's dog]?' Roosevelt did eventually sign – whatever that was worth.

When Eden found out what Churchill had been cooking up with Morgenthau, he was shocked. No matter its impact on Soviet attitudes, he was far from persuaded by Cherwell's arguments about capturing Germany's export trade. He asked the prime minister where and how large were these supposedly crucial markets for British goods. 'Well, we will get it wherever it is', replied Churchill. As he made clear to the disgruntled foreign secretary: 'the future of my people is at stake, and when I have to choose between my people and the German people I am going to choose my people.'66

The conference broke up on 16 September 1944, but Roosevelt and Churchill were not done. Two days later, they reconvened at the president's home at Hyde Park to talk about the atomic bomb. Both men had now been informed that a viable weapon with an explosive force equivalent to about 20,000 tons of TNT would be ready for use by the following summer. Churchill drafted some words that reflected their joint discussion and which they both signed on the 18th. They agreed that the new weapon might be used, after due consideration, against Japan, and that, after the final victory had been achieved, full atomic co-operation between the two countries would continue unless terminated by mutual agreement. They also agreed not to tell any other countries about Tube Alloys, and instructed that Bohr was to be investigated to make sure that he didn't leak any information to the Russians. Much to Anderson's distress, on his voyage home Churchill proposed imprisoning the Dane in order to make sure that he didn't endanger atomic security. 67

Rather than adopting a new policy for the new weapon, at Hyde Park both Roosevelt and Churchill thought of it as a means to pursue a strategy on which they were already set — in the prime minister's case, fostering a uniquely special Anglo-American relationship; in the president's, as a means to shore up British power and allow it to play a part at the United Nations. The atomic memorandum gave Churchill almost everything he had wanted from his trip across the Atlantic. He returned home much more cheerful, but conscious that there was still work to be done. He needed to get to Russia as soon as possible.

"... AS LONG AS HE AND MARSHAL STALIN UNDERSTOOD EACH OTHER ..."

Early in September 1944, the Allied advances in Northwest Europe and

Italy began to slow. Contrary to the hopes that had been raised in the summer, the Germans proved capable of one last escalatory spasm of resistance. That put paid to Churchill's dreams of landings in the Adriatic and forced a delay in Mountbatten's plans for 'Dracula' in Burma. The disappointment also sparked another round of bickering between British and American generals that contributed to a general deterioration of transatlantic relations over the winter of 1944–5. To understand that, it is necessary, before turning to these autumn campaigns, to follow the European diplomatic aftermath of the Quebec conference.

For all its humiliations, 'Octagon' could be seen as a successful rearguard action. British power was declining, but it was still significant enough to trade for US support. British hopes that their past endeavours would be recognized seemed to have been at least partially fulfilled. Roosevelt had sided once more with Britain, the defender of democracy, endorsing Churchill's strategic adventures in the Adriatic, offering a financial lifeline to pull the UK towards a peaceful shore and agreeing to keep the secrets of the atomic bomb within the transatlantic alliance.

Crucially from a British perspective, however, the president had made no direct commitment of American power to Europe. In this regard, his only concrete intervention at Quebec was destructive – the ill-thought-out pledge to pastoralize Germany. Roosevelt remained set on the great internationalist projects on which he had embarked. Precisely because he needed to secure the support of the American people for these ventures, he was also very clear that the United States would not be hanging around in Europe when the war was done. As in 1940–41, therefore, America might promise to foot the bill, but Britain would have to do the dirty work. For all the apparent generosity of the Lend-Lease settlement, British ministers were by late 1944 well used to Roosevelt's reliability: they'd believe in American economic aid when they saw it. The echoes here of the most difficult period in his premiership were scarcely reassuring for Churchill. With the president apparently backing his approach, however, he moved swiftly to pursue the bilateral division of Europe towards which, in retrospect, Britain and the USSR had been moving since the end of 1941.⁶⁸

A week after the prime minister got back to London, he was off again, accompanied by Eden and Brooke, first to Italy, where they heard news of the slow progress being made by Alexander's offensive in the mud and mountains south of the Po, and then to Moscow, where they arrived on 9 October 1944. To the world, the visit was announced as completing the concert begun at Quebec, with Churchill settling the strategic plans of the Grand Alliance. To the Americans, the prime minister used the explanation

that Roosevelt had given to him so often to avoid a 'big two' meeting – that he wanted to avoid any sign of an Anglo-Saxon stitch-up. In practice, Churchill had come to settle a spheres-of-influence deal. On the evening of his arrival in Moscow, he went to the Kremlin with Eden and got down to business.

Employing the brutal, no-nonsense, men-of-the-world tone that he thought the basis of his relationship with Stalin, Churchill started with the 'most tiresome question' of Poland. He assured the Soviet dictator that, come the end of the war, the British government would back the agreement on Poland's post-war borders reached at Teheran. He was happy to lean on the Polish government-in-exile. If Stalin thought it useful, he had the Polish prime minister, Stanisław Mikołajczyk, 'tied up in an aircraft', and could have him brought to Moscow within thirty-six hours. The leaders of exiled Poland could then be forced to settle with the Lublin government. Stalin acquiesced. ⁶⁹

Churchill turned to matters in Southern Europe. Naturally Russia would play a major role in the future of Romania. 'But in Greece it was different. Britain must be the leading Mediterranean power and he hoped Marshal Stalin would let him have the first say about Greece in the same way as Marshal Stalin about Romania.' When Stalin agreed, the prime minister went on that: 'it was better to express these things in diplomatic terms and not to use the phrase "dividing into spheres" because the Americans might be shocked. But as long as he and Marshal Stalin understood each other he could explain matters to the President.' Churchill told Stalin he accepted the Soviet arguments about the Security Council that had broken up discussions at Dumbarton Oaks. 'Supposing', after all, 'China asked Britain to give up Hong Kong, China and Britain would have to leave the room while Russia and the USA settled the question.' This was not how great power diplomacy ought to work.⁷⁰

Churchill had a better method. He had brought with him a piece of paper on which he had drawn up a list of Balkan countries with the percentage of interest that Russia or the Western Allies could be expected to have in each. He called it a 'naughty document' that they should keep between themselves: 'Marshal Stalin was a realist. He himself was not sentimental while Mr Eden was a bad man.'⁷¹ Churchill passed his scribbled suggestions to Stalin:

Romania: Russia 90%

The others 10%

Greece: Great Britain (in accord with USA) 90%

Russia 10%

Yugoslavia and Hungary: Bulgaria:

50–50% Russia 75% The others 25%

After a moment, the Soviet dictator drew a large blue tick on it and passed it back. Churchill wondered aloud whether it might not be better to burn the evidence. 'No, you keep it', Stalin said.⁷²

Whatever doubts the prime minister had about the propriety of these negotiations, they fitted exactly with both men's sense of international power. The smaller countries on the map were all pieces in play. The conversation turned to the Morgenthau plan. Stalin, who wanted a harsh peace, 'thought that a long occupation of Germany would be necessary'. The prime minister 'did not think that the Americans would stay for very long'. That was the whole point – the two men were settling an Anglo-Soviet compact, away from meddlesome US idealism, that would give Stalin a bulwark against another German invasion, and Churchill control of the Mediterranean and the means to contain the spread of Communism into Western Europe.

It is easy to see the 'percentages' gambit as Churchill's instinctual reaction to the specific military circumstances of autumn 1944. He himself fostered this interpretation, explaining to the War Cabinet that these were strictly temporary wartime arrangements. As both he and Stalin seem to have recognized, however, the division they had agreed would endure into the peace. Percentages of interest were not a useful measure of practical roles, as Molotov and Eden found out as they sought to turn their bosses' compact into a functioning agreement. The Foreign Office still hoped that Britain might have a formal say as part of the combined Allied commissions that would oversee surrendered Axis satellites in Southeast Europe, but Churchill had not negotiated on that basis. Rather, the vague formulations leant themselves to hard facts on the ground — a line stretching up from the Balkans, through Central Europe, and — if Churchill had got his way — encompassing a solution to the tiresome Polish problem as well.

The prime minister stayed on in Moscow for another two weeks, spending most of that time arguing with the representatives of the London Poles. Delivered to the Soviet capital, Mikołajczyk found himself under immense pressure to agree to a settlement on Stalin's terms. He knew that he would never get that past his colleagues in London. When he exclaimed that Churchill was asking him to sign his own death sentence, the prime minister warned him that his selfishness was risking another world war in which 25 million would die. Eventually, pleading his need to consult with

his fellow ministers, Mikołajczyk was allowed to return to the UK. No means to reconcile the London Poles to Soviet territorial ambitions had been found.

24

'Has the war made me vicious?'

September-December 1944

How long should it have taken to end the war in Europe? At the end of August 1944, with Anglo-American armoured columns racing across France and the Soviets running rampant in the East, Western strategists expected to fulfil their plans and defeat Germany by the end of the year. Over the following weeks, however, as German resistance stiffened and the headlong pursuit ground to a halt, disappointment overtook euphoria. The question soon became what had gone wrong. The corrosive query inflamed personal differences, aroused nationalist sentiments, and influenced subsequent historical interpretations, which blamed either poor Allied generalship or inadequately motivated Allied troops for a failure quickly to seize the fruits of victory.¹

What gets left out of such an interpretation is the continuing capacity of the Nazi leadership to influence the shape of the war. Engaged as they believed they were in a struggle for existence, they were determined to hold out for as long as possible. They believed that they had the means so to do. After the coup attempt of 20 July 1944, they thought they had purged the men who had hitherto been undermining Germany's military efforts. The Wehrmacht remained well organized, was retreating on its supply bases, and was determined to defend its home soil. Speer's mass-production reforms having taken effect, German factories were pumping out weapons like never before.

The newly appointed plenipotentiary for total war, Joseph Goebbels, and the Nazi Party leader Martin Bormann pressed through more drastic measures of mobilization to find the manpower to fight the war. The German economic sphere was contracting, and sources of raw materials were cut off, but Speer had stockpiled resources for a long fight. Nazi hopes of survival were placed in a mixture of advanced technology and superior willpower. They believed that the tide would be turned on the battlefield through the use of a new generation of advanced weapons,

including jet fighters, V2 rockets and Type XXI U-boats, which could operate for much longer submerged than conventional submarines of the period. While they waited for these new weapons, the Nazis created a new popular militia, the *Volkssturm*, to inculcate fanatical resistance among the German populace and help the Wehrmacht to turn every town into a fortress. Their passions remobilized, Germans would hold the Bolsheviks in the East, while a massive winter armoured counter-offensive and the V2 bombardment broke the morale of the degenerate democracies in the West. The Western Allies would accept a compromise peace, the Grand Alliance would fall apart, and the Germans would be left to continue their epochal struggle against the Slavs.²

This deluded strategy did not work for many reasons, among them a failure to appreciate the Allies' commitment to victory and their still-increasing military superiority. Yet understanding it poses a different question about the end of the war in Europe: not why did the Allies fail to win quicker, but why did the Germans lose as quickly as they did? The answers to both questions were determined over the final months of 1944.

At its conclusion, as at its beginning, military contingencies set the chronology of the conflict. The length of time it took to defeat Germany shaped much of the end of Britain's war — from the geo-political manoeuvring over the future of Europe, via the rebirth of party politics and the deadlock over domestic reconstruction, to the experience of troops in the front line and the growing anger against an enemy who seemed determined to eke out the suffering for as long as possible. While the Nazis sought to extract still more effort in a desperate battle for survival, the British were already starting to demobilize their society and economy. As the war dragged on, however, they couldn't do it quickly or fully enough.

'THEY DON'T BOTHER ME'

At twenty to seven on the evening of 8 September 1944, the first V2 rocket to hit the UK landed at Chiswick in London, killing three people and injuring ten. All over the capital, people heard the double bang of the rocket descending through the sound barrier, then exploding as it hit the earth. A few seconds later, another landed in Epping. No one was hurt. Over the next ten days, twenty-five more rockets landed in or near the UK, sixteen within the London Civil Defence Region and eight in Essex or immediately off the county's coast. Outside London, most of the rockets fell on farmland. Casualties were light. German propagandists, who had

crowed about the successes of the V1, remained silent. The British government decided to make no public announcement. It was all put down to gas-main explosions.³

The launchers proved extremely difficult to trace; patrolling fighter pilots saw the streak from Holland as the rocket went up, but the location from which the Germans were firing was not tracked down until reports came in from the Dutch resistance. Even once they were found, air attacks on them were left to Air Defence Great Britain. Since the British already knew that the V2s did not pose a serious threat, they did not respond by diverting significant resources from the strategic bombing offensives, nor yet with the retaliatory obliteration with bombs and gas that Morrison and Churchill had pondered over the summer. Unlike the V1s, the V2s did not have an easily targeted infrastructure of fixed launch sites and supply dumps. Their mobile launchers were easily concealed close to Dutch civilian buildings. They were therefore very difficult to hit with heavy bombers, or even with the tactical aircraft that the Allies deployed for the purpose. During October, the rockets also started to be launched at Brussels and Antwerp, and at the end of the month the attacks on the UK were stepped up, with forty-four rockets fired in the space of eight days. On 8 November the Germans finally announced the nature of their offensive. Two days later, Churchill confirmed the German statement to the Commons.

V2 strikes were concentrated in London and East Anglia. As with the V1s, many missed their intended targets and fell on open ground. In urban areas, however, the blast of their one-ton warheads caused widespread structural damage. On awful occasions when they hit crowded city centres, they could cause heavy casualties. On 25 November, in the worst incident of the campaign, a V2 struck the Woolworth's store in New Cross Road, South London, killing 160 people and seriously injuring 108 more. An idea of what a near miss could mean for surrounding houses comes from the list of materials required to carry out repairs after a single V2 strike in Barnet, on the northern side of the capital: 11,000 yards of roofing felt, 100,000 square feet of lathes, 25 hundredweight of nails, 60 cold water storage tanks and basins, 1,250 toilet pans, 25,000 square feet of glass and 4 tons of putty. One hundred and fifty thousand roof tiles had to be relaid 4

Since the rate of attacks was lower than over the summer, and the rockets arrived completely without warning – unlike the V1s, which still occasionally arrived from launch sites in the Low Countries or after airlaunching from German bombers – they had much less impact on morale.

Many people seem to have shared the sentiments of the sixty-year-old man in South London who told Mass-Observation: 'They don't bother me. Not that I want to put on any false bravado, but just that I'm convinced that if my ticket's on it I'll get it and if it isn't what's the use of worrying?'⁵ The rockets did nothing to stop the flow of evacuees returning to London; by January 1945, the capital's population was only 5 per cent below what it had been when the flying-bomb offensive started, and former inhabitants were still arriving back at a rate of 10,000 a week.⁶

The last V2 fell on 27 March 1945. They meant that British civilians kept dying from enemy action almost until the very end of the war in Europe – an earlier strike on the same day destroyed two five-storey blocks of flats in Stepney, leaving 134 dead and 49 seriously injured. In total, V2 attacks killed and injured 9,277 Britons, about 40 per cent of those who had fallen victim to the flying bombs. More rockets fell on Antwerp than on London, where they killed and injured 30,000 people. On 16 December 1944, a rocket that fell on the roof of an Antwerp cinema killed 567 people, including almost 300 Allied servicemen. It was the heaviest death toll in a single V2 attack of the whole war. Beyond limiting the quantity of supplies brought through the Belgian port, however, such terrifying incidents had no appreciable effect on the Allies' ability to prosecute the war – an infinitesimally small result from the immense effort that the Germans had ploughed into the rocket programme.

ANTWERP AND ARNHEM

On 1 September 1944, Eisenhower took over command of the Allied armies in Northwest Europe from Montgomery, who reverted to commanding the Twenty-First Army Group. To ensure this wasn't seen as a British demotion, Churchill arranged for Montgomery to be promoted to field marshal. Montgomery would have preferred to remain in place, and over the following months he and Brooke bitterly criticized Eisenhower's running of the campaign. They argued that with all the other demands on his time, Eisenhower couldn't pay sufficient attention to the land battle and that he was too susceptible to political pressure from home. Though Eisenhower was overloaded with responsibilities and sometimes struggled to control his bickering subordinates, such judgements under-estimated his abilities and failed to appreciate that he was the best option as far as British interests were concerned. With American divisions now making up

the majority of combat troops in Northwest Europe – and increasing in number, while the strength of the British Commonwealth forces declined – only an American general could take command of ground forces. And if it had to be an American, it was much better it was the studiously fair-minded Ike.⁸

As they took over, Eisenhower and his staff had to adapt Allied strategy to the dramatic advances that had taken place since the middle of August. At this point, they had expected to be fighting the decisive battle of the campaign in the centre of France. Instead, they faced the prospect of advancing into Germany – just as the exhilarating breakout was reaching its logistical limits.

Previously, Eisenhower had planned a two-front advance towards the key industrial areas of the Ruhr and the Saar, in the hope that this would draw the Germans into fighting a major battle west of the Rhine, rather than withdrawing behind its natural defences. Now he had to consider how best to exploit the results of German disintegration in France, with Dempsey's Second British Army racing towards Brussels and Antwerp, and Patton's Third US Army heading towards Nancy and Metz over the Moselle. With the German garrisons of the Channel ports still holding out, the French railways wrecked by Allied bombing, and ever more of the petrol that came over the Normandy beaches going to fuel the trucks shuttling back and forth to the front, there weren't enough supplies to keep all the Allied armies moving at the same time.

Montgomery's solution was a single thrust in the north, with all resources concentrated on a powerful forty-division force hurled on the direct, flatter route over the Rhine, into Germany and onwards towards Berlin. Thanks to the way the Allied armies had been located in the UK, this force would be predominantly British and Canadian and under Montgomery's command, although he would need to have a US army transferred to his control to give the attack the requisite weight. Given that it would leave the majority of US troops twiddling their thumbs while Montgomery rode to victory, this proposal was highly problematic in terms of alliance politics. More importantly, though too few Allied generals grasped this at the time, it was also based on a flawed presumption about the weakness of the German military.

The terrible casualties of the summer notwithstanding, the Germans staged a remarkable recovery at the start of autumn 1944. Despite Allied air superiority and the loss of territory in Eastern and Western Europe, German industry was able to replace much of the materiel destroyed in the summer battles. Held together by a mixture of fanaticism and terror, and

defending their homeland, German soldiers remained willing to fight. On 5 September, von Rundstedt was recalled to take command of all the armies in the West, while his brief replacement, Field Marshal Walter Model, took charge of Army Group B in the north. As the Allies outran their supplies and airfields, Model used the respite to stabilize the front. In the second week of September, resistance against the most dangerous Allied advances stiffened. In retrospect, this marked the moment when it became inevitable that another huge set of battles would be required to break into Germany. None of the choices open to Eisenhower would have resulted in a speedy victory in Europe.

With insufficient supplies to keep the Second British and Third US Armies rolling at the same speed at the same time, Eisenhower decided to give priority to the northern advance. Montgomery's men were to capture Antwerp, and then push on towards the Rhine. Bradley was furious. Eisenhower did not, however, insist that he should shut down Patton's thrust south of the Ardennes, nor allocate all the American troops to supporting Montgomery in the north. That left the British field marshal despairing of the lack of grip from SHAEF. While it looked as if he was trying to please everybody, Eisenhower's plan was sensible but overoptimistic. Significantly, though Eisenhower ordered Montgomery to take Antwerp, he did not specify that the Twenty-First Army Group should prioritize bringing the vital port back into operation by clearing the banks of the Scheldt.⁹

While the Second British Army raced through France and Belgium, the First Canadian Army had pushed more slowly up the Channel coast, besieging the German-held ports and forcing back the units that had been positioned against an Allied landing in the Pas de Calais. Cut off from escape to the south, these troops were able to cross the Scheldt by ferry and strengthen the defences of the Beveland peninsula to the east. While they remained in place overlooking the estuary, no shipping traffic could reach the supply-starved Allied armies through Antwerp.

Convinced that Eisenhower was missing an opportunity to end the war before Christmas, Montgomery decided that he must force the pace on his narrow northern thrust. He became even more determined when he learned from Bradley that he was not going to be allocated all the men and supplies he wanted. With the capture of the port of Dieppe, the Twenty-First Army Group acquired enough additional supply capacity to support the Second British Army on an offensive into Germany. Montgomery had already decided that the First Canadian Army would be left to clear the Scheldt. When Second British Army's lead troops entered Antwerp on 4

September, therefore, they did not have clear orders to seal off the Beveland peninsula. Even if they had, the speed of their advance meant that they didn't have the strength to do it. Montgomery's attention was not on the Scheldt but further east, where planning was under way for a daring attack that would bounce the Second British Army over the Rhine.¹⁰

After the Normandy landings, a new First Allied Airborne Army had been formed to take command of all airborne forces in the European theatre. Its generals were desperate to see their elite troops employed in their proper role before the end of the war. During August, five major airborne operations had been planned, then abandoned, outpaced by the speed of the Allied advance. By the start of September, another, Operation 'Comet', was in play, based on dropping one British airborne division and a Polish paratroop brigade into Holland to capture the bridges across the Maas, Waal and Rhine. That was meant to open the path for an armoured spearhead to break into Germany. As German defences strengthened in early September, 'Comet' was replaced by a new operation, codenamed 'Market Garden', which would use a bigger force, including two US airborne divisions, to take the same objectives.¹¹

At a highly charged meeting at Brussels airport on 10 September, Eisenhower approved the plan, not, as Montgomery had hoped, as the prelude to a narrow-fronted drive to Berlin, but rather as a means to establish a bridgehead on the far side of the Rhine before the winter set in. The resulting operation was put together at speed and without enough consultation with the air forces. There was no time to correct faults: Montgomery's desire for decisive action to seize control of Allied strategy, combined with the enthusiasm of the Airborne Army generals, overrode the doubts of those – including Dempsey – who wondered whether it could really be done.

The airborne assault, 'Market', was beset with difficulties. Since there weren't enough aircraft to deposit all the attacking troops at the same time, the first wave would have to hold the landing zones for subsequent arrivals. Schemes for a night-time descent on the bridges were abandoned, and the landing zones were several miles from the objectives — and in the case of the 1st British Airborne Division, which had to take the final bridge at Arnhem, on the far side of the Rhine from the advancing troops with whom they were meant to link up. Though intelligence identified the presence of two SS armoured divisions near Arnhem, they were discounted on the basis that they were still refitting from the battering they had received in Normandy.

The conception of the ground advance, 'Garden', was also

problematic. Montgomery had spent the previous two years schooling his troops in the value of preparation and caution. Now he required Second British Army's XXX Corps to make a headlong advance along a very narrow corridor, across a total of six rivers and canals, in order to reach the bridge over the Rhine at Arnhem before it was recaptured or destroyed by the Germans. In retrospect, the only way this was likely to work was if the German defences dissolved in the same way they had done after the Normandy breakout. By the time 'Market Garden' was launched on 17 September 1944, however, the Germans had been fighting back hard against British troops in the Low Countries for about ten days.¹²

Criticisms of sluggishness by the lead British formation, the Guards Armoured Division, would subsequently become a staple of American accounts of 'Market Garden', but a lack of chutzpah was the least of the obstacles to the operation's success. The initial parachute drops were well clustered, but the Allied airborne commanders did not concentrate their forces sufficiently on capturing the two key objectives on which the operation's success depended: the key bridges at Nijmegen and Arnhem. Elements of 1st British Airborne Division eventually seized the northern end of the Arnhem bridge but, broken up by the defending Germans, the lightly armed British paratroopers ended up fighting a series of desperate, isolated battles against Germans well equipped with armour and artillery. With their radio sets down, and often fighting in built-up areas, the British were unable to get support from Allied fighter-bombers flying at the far end of their range. Strung out along the narrow airborne corridor, meanwhile, and with the Germans refusing to give ground in front and attacking on both sides, XXX Corps' advance was unable to develop any momentum. British and American troops eventually captured the bridge at Nijmegen on 20 September, but could not then reach Arnhem before the pocket at the north end of the bridge was overwhelmed. On 23 September, XXX Corps reached the southern bank of the Rhine, allowing the tattered remnants of 1st Airborne Division to escape across the river two days later.

This was the first time since the dark days of Singapore and Tobruk in 1942 that a whole British Commonwealth division had been destroyed in battle. Though the celebration of the paratroopers' heroic resistance in Arnhem publicly obscured the extent of the defeat, it represented a failure by Montgomery. Bright though the glory of seizing a bridgehead across the Rhine would have shone, the rewards were not worth the risks. The Germans were not about to collapse, and, even if the gamble had come off, the capture of the bridge at Arnhem would not have shortened the war by

any appreciable degree. 13

The Arnhem offensive set the scene for the battles that the Twenty-First Army Group would have to fight during the following months. The Second British Army was left having to defend a narrow salient through Holland to the Rhine, while a depleted First Canadian Army struggled to clear the Scheldt. With Antwerp still out of action, the supply situation deteriorated. Montgomery spent the start of October complaining so vociferously about the quality of command from SHAEF that Eisenhower told him to take his criticisms formally to the combined chiefs. That temporarily shut up the restive field marshal, but he took his time dealing with the Scheldt until Eisenhower ordered him directly to do it. In comparison with his very effective adaptation to the challenge of the fighting in Normandy, this was not a period of the war from which Montgomery emerged with much credit. 14

Meanwhile, the rest of the Allied advance had also ground to a halt. To the south, Patton's drive, deprived of petrol, bogged down outside the fortress city of Metz. It wasn't taken until 22 November. In the centre of the front, the US First Army, having briefly captured the city of Aachen, was forced out by a German counter-attack and spent most of October fighting to retake it. The Western Front coagulated along the German border.

With the Rhine unbroken and the Beveland peninsula still in German hands, Twenty-First Army Group's soldiers were condemned to an autumn of miserable, muddy battles as they fought to clear a pocket of German troops around the Maas, defend the corridor to the lower Rhine and liberate the banks of the Scheldt. This was grim, methodical work in flat, flooded country intersected with dykes and ditches, all of which had been heavily mined. Heavy artillery fire, air support from Typhoons above and specialized armoured vehicles — flame-throwing tanks, Kangaroo and Buffalo tracked landing vehicles — carried the attackers slowly from one objective to another.

In a pattern that would become wearyingly familiar to Allied soldiers from now until the end of the war, some German soldiers surrendered quickly in the face of their opponents' overwhelming firepower. Others, dug-in and well-armed, fought to the last. The struggle for the Scheldt was particularly bitter. More than 12,000 British and Canadian troops were killed or wounded in the battles on each side of the estuary, though they took about twice as many German prisoners. On 8 November 1944, the Germans were finally driven back to the River Maas. On the same day, after repeated failed attacks by the Canadians across the narrow causeway

from the mainland, Walcheren Island, at the head of the Scheldt, was taken by an amphibious landing. The first convoy carrying military supplies arrived in Antwerp on 28 November.¹⁵

BREAKING THE GOTHIC LINE

It was not just in Northern Europe that the armies of the Commonwealth found the hopes of summer dying in the autumn mud. In Italy, Alexander's troops had advanced slowly north of Rome. With forces being drawn off for the invasion of southern France, and the Germans littering every defile and town with booby traps, there was no speedy pursuit. The Germans used this time to strengthen the fortifications of the Gothic or Green Line, a deep defensive position that curved along the northern Apennines. Though Italy had been relegated in importance by the invasions of France, with only about twenty divisions now available to each side, the world seemed to have come there to fight. British, American, Indian, Canadian, New Zealand, black and white African and Polish soldiers were joined by Greeks and Brazilians and assisted by Italian partisans behind the lines. The Germans, meanwhile, mustered assistance from troops of the rump Italian Republic of Salò and a Turcoman division, formed from POWs from the Central Asian republics of the Soviet Union.

Alexander had initially planned to launch his next offensive through the centre of the Gothic Line. ¹⁶ On 4 August, Oliver Leese persuaded him to shift Eighth Army's attack to the Adriatic coast. Out of the mountains, it would be better able to play to its mechanized strengths. It would also mean that Leese didn't have to fight alongside the American General Mark Clark. Alexander gave way. With Churchill encouraging an attack through the Ljubljana Gap, Alexander hoped his forces would break out onto the Romagna Plain to encircle and destroy the German Tenth Army before heading northwards towards the southern border of the Reich. In planning an armoured drive up the coast, however, Leese ignored the lesson of the Cassino campaign – that the mountain flank had to be cleared before any mechanized exploitation could take place. Clark's price for agreeing to the scheme was the transfer of corps from the Eighth to the Fifth Army, thus depriving Leese of a strategic reserve. ¹⁷

The new plan required a huge engineering and logistics effort. Shifting Eighth Army meant moving 52,000 vehicles to the coast.¹⁸ These preparations also used up valuable weeks of good summer weather and

allowed Kesselring to recover from the shock of the landings in the south of France. When the offensive, Operation 'Olive', began on 25 August 1944, Eighth Army deployed more than 1,200 tanks and over 1,000 artillery pieces against an opponent with 83 armoured fighting vehicles, and 9 tank turrets sunk in concrete emplacements in the Gothic Line.¹⁹

Eighth Army rumbled through the German outposts and approached the main defensive line. It was a formidable position of concrete bunkers, anti-tank ditches and barbed-wire entanglements, protected by minefields and approached across a valley floor that had been scrubbed clean of any cover. Rather than the methodical reduction that the Germans had been expecting, between 30 August and 2 September 1944, the Canadian I Corps crashed through the defences in a rush.²⁰ Their success caught Leese, who had put the weight of the assault further inland, by surprise, and he failed to improvise a speedy response. By the time that British armour moved up to exploit the hole the Canadians had made, the Germans had got reinforcements in place to hold their reserve line. Kesselring now wanted to withdraw behind the River Po. Hitler refused to allow him to retreat.

As heavy rains turned the churned-up tracks to mud, the Eighth Army crawled forward through the middle fortnight of September. The whole offensive was overlooked by German positions in the hills, and its soldiers felt as if they were under constant artillery fire. The delay in launching the attack had given the Germans plenty of time to stockpile ammunition south of the Po. What was meant to have been a dynamic armoured thrust turned into another slogging battle of attrition.

Slowly, the defences were bludgeoned apart. The weight of Allied artillery and air support (when the weather allowed) was such that fresh Axis divisions thrown into the fighting were worn out in a couple of days. ²¹ But by the time Eighth Army emerged onto the Romagna Plain at the end of September, it was exhausted. During a month of fighting it had killed 8,000 Germans and captured another 8,000, but at a cost of 14,000 casualties of its own. ²² Clark's Fifth Army had, meanwhile, clambered through the mountains. It too eventually managed to break through the defences of the Gothic Line, and it briefly looked as if it might be about to break out across the Plain. Again, however, the defence held, and Fifth Army's offensive ground to a halt without reaching Bologna.

Rather than easy-driving tank country, the Eighth Army found itself in a flat landscape dissolving into the rain, intersected by rivers, canals and floodbanks, and dotted with farms and vineyards that were ready-made for defence. Far from accelerating towards victory, the advance bogged down. Having stuck his army into this mess, Leese was posted away to take charge of Mountbatten's land forces in Southeast Asia. For all that the prospect of a German collapse had disappeared, the offensive ground on for another two months. Alexander still held out hopes of an amphibious swoop through the Adriatic. To launch a spring campaign in northeastern Italy, his troops needed to capture Bologna and Ravenna. The latter was only taken on 4 December 1944; the former would not fall until April 1945.

Churchill too still hankered after a stab through the Ljubljana Gap. At the Moscow conference in October, Stalin had agreed with his proposals for an Adriatic offensive. Given how close his troops were to Vienna, the Soviet dictator had little worry that the British might get there first. The American joint chiefs, however, rejected the prime minister's plans, and Roosevelt refused to consider a transfer of US troops that would allow the British to pursue them on their own. With the combined chiefs unwilling to approve a reduced plan for landings on the Istrian coast to cut off Kesselring's retreat, Churchill had to accept that, for the moment, all the Allies would do in the Balkans was provide air support to the partisans. At the end of November 1944, the landing ships that he had secured at Quebec were removed to the Far East, ending any possibility of a major operation in the Adriatic. It was probably a lucky escape all round.²³

'A SOLDIER WHO DESERTS DOES SO NOT FROM SIMPLE FEAR OF DEATH OR INJURY'

Arnhem apart, the autumn battles of 1944 are now all but forgotten. Yet there was a gory price to pay for the descent into a second round of attritional warfare. The British army lost almost as many men in combat in September 1944 as it had done in July while embroiled in the bitter fighting in Normandy. By the standards of the rest of Britain's war, the summer and autumn of 1944 cost a lot of lives. With all three armed services involved in heavy fighting, and civilians under attack from V-weapons, approximately 18 per cent of all the Britons killed by enemy action in the Second World War died in the six months from the end of May 1944. Thanks to the number of troops involved in intense combat, the weight of death fell very heavily on the army: 32 per cent of all the 144,079 British soldiers who were killed in action or who died of their wounds during the war lost their lives in this period. Even if no other

service personnel or civilians had been killed, the number of soldiers alone who died would have made this the bloodiest phase of Britain's war.²⁴

90,000 RAF Royal Navy Merchant Navy Army civilians 80,000 70,000 60,000 50,000 40,000 30,000 20,000 10,000 Sept 1940-Sept 1941-Sept 1942- Sept 1943-Sept 1939-Aug 1940 Aug 1941 Aug 1942 Aug 1943 Aug 1944 Aug 1945

Graph 3. British fatalities due to enemy action by year of war

Not coincidentally, the army also had to face the consequences of the shortage of infantry reinforcements that had been looming since the start of 1944. During the year, considerable efforts had been made to find replacements. Men who had fought from Cassino or Normandy sometimes felt that these hastily retrained reinforcements were either reluctant warriors or raw cannon fodder — chewed up by the battle before the cautious survivors had learned their names. The mixture of old hands and new blood meant that the rifle platoons that entered the winter of 1944 were not the same as those that had started the summer campaigns.

Maintaining the supply of infantrymen was hardly a uniquely British problem. After months of intense combat, short- and long-term shortages of soldiers afflicted both sides. By that autumn, the Americans were also running low on infantrymen. When the Canadians found themselves desperately short of reinforcements, it sparked a political crisis as the government moved to compel conscripts to serve overseas.²⁵ The British,

however, had to reduce their commitment in the field. To keep the rest of his formations up to strength, in the autumn of 1944 Montgomery chose to disband two entire divisions. At the end of September, Alexander had to go even further, not only breaking up one division and two brigades, but also reducing all the British infantry battalions in Italy from four to three companies (thus significantly reducing their tactical flexibility as well as their overall strength). Churchill was much displeased. Always fond of a good statistic, at Quebec he had proudly trumpeted the fact that there were as many British Empire as American divisions in action against the enemy in Europe. As British strength dwindled, and the number of American divisions in France grew, this was a subject to which he subsequently returned.²⁶

Combat losses weren't the only drain on manpower. At the start of 1943, the 'Python' scheme had been instituted to allow men with six years' continuous service overseas to return to the UK. Initially, very few troops met this criterion. In November 1944, however, the qualifying period for men in the Mediterranean was reduced to four and a half years. It therefore began to include the much larger number of servicemen posted to the Middle East in 1940 and 1941. Men who opted for 'Python' were eligible, after a period of leave, for reposting to Northwest Europe. To encourage those who might otherwise depart to return to the Mediterranean, an additional 'Leave In Lieu Of Python' scheme was also introduced, which allowed a two-month break back in the UK. In an effort to sustain the morale of men who were not yet eligible for 'Python', those with between three and four years' service overseas could put themselves into a ballot for 'Leave In Addition to Python', which also allowed the lucky winners a brief return home. In an example of the importance that 'fairness' had assumed during the war, the 'LIAP' ballot was run by an equal number of officers and men, none of whom were themselves eligible for home leave.²⁷

Welcome though they were to men who had been out of the country for years, these schemes made it even harder to keep infantry units in the Mediterranean up to strength. That put still more strain on those men who remained. In Italy as in Northwest Europe, the failure of the autumn offensives condemned soldiers to another winter in the field. Though the fighting on the British sectors of both fronts died down between November 1944 and the start of February 1945, the hard grind of life in the line – night-times patrolling and daytimes stuck in freezing foxholes under the incessant threat of snipers, mortars and mines – remained. The supply of army-issue clothing, including blankets and snowsuits, was much better

than it had been during the first winter that British troops had spent in Italy, but soldiers were very conscious that they were less well equipped than the Americans. Shortages of socks meant that men were unable to keep their feet dry and warm, contributing to a rise in cases of trenchfoot.²⁸

Across the British army as a whole, rates of absenteeism and desertion were lower in this period than they had been in 1941–2, when most troops had been at home feeling sorry for themselves and bored out of their minds. The advance to victory helped to restore soldiers' sense of selfworth, but in Italy the rate of those going AWOL or deserting was higher than in any other overseas theatre of war. It rose to a peak over the winter of 1944–5.

Some of these incidents took place in action. That normally meant soldiers running away from the front line, usually only as far as their own unit's rear echelon. Officers and doctors could choose whether to treat such behaviour as desertion, requiring punishment, or exhaustion, requiring treatment.²⁹ The majority of desertions, however, took place while units were out of the front line. A minority fled to a much-mythologized world of black-market racketeering with criminal gangs. Most just missed the truck back from a rest and recreation trip and stayed away from their units until they ran out of money, at which point they gave themselves up to the authorities.³⁰ Reflecting on the crammed detention cells in Naples in late 1944, the infantry subaltern Norman Craig wrote that:

A soldier who deserts does so not from simple fear of death or injury, but from a refusal of the body and spirit to face any longer the endless discomfort and racking dread, day after day. Then a sudden ungovernable reflex can drive him in desperation to flee the horror he can endure no more, regardless of the severity and ignominy of the consequences. 31

Between August and October 1944, a period that included the heavy fighting in the Gothic Line, more than 2,400 men were reported to have left their units without permission. Between November 1944 and January 1945, 3,500 men officially went AWOL or deserted.³² Relative to the number of British servicemen in the central Mediterranean, these numbers were not large, but they were overwhelmingly infantrymen. Ninety-two per cent of those reported to Eighth Army between August and December 1944 came from infantry battalions.³³ Ironically, much of what the army did to keep up its eroding infantry strength – disbanding units, retraining and reposting men, reducing the size of battalions – ate away at what sustained men's endurance – camaraderie, regimental tradition and a rota

of duties that allowed them time to rest. In the absence of the death penalty, those convicted of desertion were usually sentenced to between three and five years' penal servitude, but, after a short period in custody, most would have their sentences suspended and be returned to their units. The army needed them too much to leave them languishing in jail. With a good eye to what really worried soldiers, General Wilson suggested that a better deterrent might be the promise that those caught deserting would be sent out to fight the Japanese.³⁴

Out of the headlines, often stuck with second-class equipment, and conscious that the war was going to end soon whatever they did, men in Italy had good reasons to be fed up and tired. Having endured an autumn of dismal, bloody combat, they were stuck in a dead-end campaign miles from home. Yet despite the morale crisis that plainly swept over British infantry in Italy over the winter of 1944–5, most men continued to accept the army's authority. It helped that victory in Europe was now in sight. Men might be unwilling to get themselves killed in the last months of the war, but at least they could look forward to the end. Belatedly, in response to the crisis, the army stepped up its efforts to maintain material welfare, with supplies of hot food, clean clothes and good medical care, as well as entertainment, newspapers and regular deliveries of mail. At the start of 1945, desertion figures fell, and absentees began to return to their units. They might be sick of the war, but above all they wanted to return home.³⁵ As the authorities in Britain were now discussing, much more would have to be done to maintain servicemen's welfare and morale if they were to be expected to fight through to the finish in the Far East.

'THE RUTHLESSNESS OF THE PLANNERS CAME THROUGH LOUD AND CLEAR'

The nature of the final land battles in Europe was determined by a resumption of the strategic air offensive, which broke the back of the German war economy from the autumn of 1944. The American air commander Carl Spaatz had long justified attacks on the German oil industry as a means to force the Luftwaffe to battle. Though his squadrons were subordinated to SHAEF during the 'Overlord' invasion, from June to September 1944, Spaatz's bombers continued to strike at oil plants in Germany. By September, German automotive fuel production was only a quarter of what it had been before the Americans started their offensive.

Aviation fuel production had plummeted to just 10,000 tons a month. This was about a sixteenth of the bare minimum the Luftwaffe needed to operate. As a point of comparison, an average of 398,500 tons of aviation fuel arrived in the UK every month of 1944.³⁶

In September, the strategic air forces were released from SHAEF's control. In a reflection of the extraordinary growth of American air power, the chief of staff of the USAAF, 'Hap' Arnold, took over the direction of all the US air forces in the European theatre. With Sir Arthur Harris determined to demonstrate his independence, this command structure allowed British and American bombers to resume their different approaches to the air war.

In August 1944, with hopes of a German collapse still alive, British planners had proposed a huge, closely concentrated raid on the centre of Berlin, designed to wreck government offices and shatter confidence in the regime. When it became apparent that the Germans were fighting on, the plans were put aside, but the idea of inflicting a decisive shock on enemy morale persisted. The growth of Allied air power revived fantasies of a knock-out blow, with one last maximum effort forcing the Germans to abandon their doomed defence of the Reich.³⁷

In both the RAF and the US strategic air forces, the oil attacks attracted some ardent advocates, including the director of Bomber Operations at the Air Ministry, Air Commodore Sidney Bufton. The most optimistic saw it as a way for air power quickly to end the war. It was certainly true that, unless raids on oil plants continued, they would probably be repaired, opening the prospect of a German military recovery. Despite improvements in navigational technology and bomb-aiming, oil targets remained difficult to hit, particularly as the weather worsened and the autumn set in. With Ultra intelligence detailing the damage to German fuel supplies, however, over the summer Portal had also been persuaded that the oil offensive deserved support.

Arthur Harris sent his bombers against oil facilities when he was so directed, but he still regarded an attack on any one aspect of the German economy as a mistaken search for a 'panacea'. In command of a force more powerful than it had ever been before, and eager to prove that his strategy had been correct, he wanted to maintain area attacks against German cities. Given the operational constraints of worsening autumn and winter weather, Harris argued that area attacks remained the only realistic option.

Tedder, meanwhile, pressed for the transport campaign to be extended into Germany. Though he could no longer issue instructions to the

strategic air forces, he remained an influential figure, not least because he managed to maintain good relations with all the senior commanders even as the arguments became increasingly partisan. An offensive against transport involved both precision strikes on canals, bridges and viaducts and massed bombing raids on marshalling yards that could be launched even in bad weather. On 13 September 1944, Tedder persuaded the bomber commanders to attack these targets when conditions weren't good enough to hit the oil plants. He also instructed the tactical air forces still under his control to keep attacking transport, including bridges and locomotives. During October 1944, he even convinced Harris to move the aiming point for some of his area attacks from the centre of cities to their railyards.

Tedder was fiercely opposed by some of those who strongly backed an oil offensive. But Tedder – like Portal – was not dogmatic about pursuing one target to the exclusion of others. At the end of October, he engineered a compromise. A new directive was issued to the strategic air forces giving priority to oil and transport, but which allowed Harris to continue with his raids on industrial cities when operational necessity required.³⁸

In practice, though they shifted what they were trying to hit, the Allies tried to bomb everything: oil, transport and cities, as well as providing support to their armies as they fought their way into Germany on the ground. While everyone's attention was focused on the battle in France and the V-weapons, the balance of the air war had moved even more decisively in their favour. Although German factories were still pouring out aircraft, the collapse of aviation fuel supplies made it much harder to put them in the sky or give replacement pilots proper training. The Me-262 jet, in which so much faith had been placed by the Germans, was too late and too unreliable to turn the tide. In a sign of how much more secure the skies were, Bomber Command began to operate regularly in daylight, escorted by long-range Allied fighters.³⁹

Just as the achievement of air superiority by the USAAF had opened the door to dramatic victories on the ground, now the advance of the front line in the land battle allowed Allied aircraft to do much more damage to Germany. The loss of early warning stations in Occupied Europe made it even harder for the Germans to counter bombing raids. Defending fighter controllers had less time to react. The unexpected capture of a German night-fighter equipped with air-to-air radar allowed the British to develop a new range of counter-measures to blind their night-time opponents. With improved navigational aids, including a new British device, Gee-H, both air forces could bomb on an electronic signal even when visibility over the

target was poor. Gee-H had been in use since late 1943 but its range was too short to make it much use over Germany before D-Day. By the autumn of 1944, however, its mobile stations, positioned in liberated Europe, could reach deep into the Reich.

In the final months of 1944 overall loss rates for both British and American bombers plummeted to between 1 and 2 per cent.⁴⁰ The effect on life expectancy for crews and aircraft was dramatic. During the first quarter of 1944, for example, Bomber Command's 7 Squadron lost twenty-three aircraft and their crews, including its commanding officer. In the final quarter, it lost only four: in December, every one of the 146 sorties that the squadron launched came back.⁴¹

Flying over Germany remained a high-risk, frequently terrifying activity. Flak and fighters still on occasion inflicted heavy casualties on the attacking aircraft. In a single daylight raid against its 'jinx target' – the oil refinery at Homburg – in filthy weather on 20 November 1944, for instance, 75 (New Zealand) Squadron lost three out of the twenty-eight aircraft that took part, all 'experienced crews, close to the end of their tours'. The next morning, the news that they would have to attack the same target again was met by a 'stark silence' in the briefing room. Taking off once more from RAF Mepal for the same dreaded objective, according to one pilot, Harry Yates, was 'the most grindingly hard moment' of his whole tour with the squadron: 'The ruthlessness of the planners came through loud and clear.' Watching aircraft go down in flames or explode as they approached the target, he was convinced that some of them must be his comrades. Yet this time the visibility was better, all twenty-one of the squadron's crews that took part got back, and enough damage was done that they didn't have to return. Meanwhile, three other planes from the squadron had taken off for a minelaying operation in the Baltic. One was never heard of again.⁴²

Overall, the decline in loss rates contributed to the acceleration of the bombing offensive. As crews survived longer, they became more proficient with their equipment and developed the experience to drop their bombs with more consistency, and aircraft supplies outpaced losses. The strategic air forces expanded rapidly. By December 1944, the USAAF in Europe could deploy more than 5,000 bombers and Bomber Command another 1,500 (most of them Lancasters, but also including 148 Mosquitos) – a 50 per cent increase on April 1944. The bombload available to Bomber Command increased by 110 per cent over the course of 1944.

With less damage being sustained by more aircraft, the Allies mounted larger, more frequent raids. With the exception of attacks on the fortress

ports and defences in Holland and Belgium, from September 1944 almost all of that bombweight fell on Germany. Thanks to the Lancaster's remarkable carrying capacity, Bomber Command dropped almost 400,000 tons of bombs between September 1944 and April 1945: 15 per cent more than the US Eighth Air Force and 42 per cent of all the tons it dropped over the entire war.⁴⁴ By this point, all Allied ordnance was based on an explosive mixture incorporating powdered aluminium, which greatly increased the force of its blast. The percentage of the total explosive power unleashed during the final assault on Germany was, therefore, even greater than indicated by the increased weight of bombs.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE GERMAN INDUSTRIAL TRANSPORT NETWORK

From the end of October, in line with their new directive, the strategic air forces put more of their effort into bombing oil and transportation targets. As well as these raids, Harris also maintained his attacks against industrial cities, which received half of the bombs dropped by his command in November, and a third of those in December 1944.⁴⁵ In a famous exchange of letters, Bufton, via Portal, suggested that Harris wasn't committing as many resources as he could to the oil offensive. As usual when his authority was challenged, Harris's response was ferocious. He refused to accept that the oil campaign was working and reasserted his belief that area bombing offered a speedy means to end the war.⁴⁶ Notwithstanding his determination to destroy as much of urban Germany as possible, however, there were only ten occasions in the final quarter of 1944 on which Bomber Command might have attacked an oil target when it didn't – in all of them, Harris thought the weather was too bad to make a raid on such a tricky objective worthwhile.⁴⁷

In practice, the differences between what US and British bombers did during these winter months was less than such arguments might suggest. Aside from the synthetic oil plants in the Ruhr, oil facilities were often away from large built-up areas. The Americans put a slightly bigger percentage of their available effort – and hence a lot more planes – into trying to hit them, but four-fifths of all such attacks missed and hit the surrounding countryside. The sorts of transport targets that were attacked by large numbers of heavy bombers, in contrast – marshalling yards, railway junctions and inland ports – were typically in big industrial cities.

Despite its public commitment to 'precision' bombing, nearly all the American raids on transport infrastructure consisted of bombing through cloud with the assistance of H2X (the US version of the British H2S air-to-ground radar) – often with the target completely obscured. Though the electronic aids available by late 1944 made Allied navigation more accurate than it had been three years before, in H2X-only attacks, just one in twenty aircraft dropped their bombs within a mile of the aiming point.⁴⁸

If, on the other hand, a big British area attack hit a city, it might well also damage the transport infrastructure, particularly if it took the nearest marshalling yard as its aiming point. As would become apparent, making more effort than before to strike transport targets mattered because, as with oil-plant attacks, those bombs that hit had a disproportionate effect on Germany's ability to wage the war. Since most bombs missed, however, dropping more bombs on transport objectives also meant killing more civilians and wrecking more buildings, just as surely as Harris's deliberate attempts to do the same thing.

The continued Allied air offensive ensured that German oil production never recovered from the damage done to it in summer 1944. The result was profoundly to restrict German military power. When Luftwaffe aircraft ventured out, their under-trained pilots crashed more often or were mobbed by enemy fighters. Allied air power could be used freely. The German army had to rely on thick cloud as its only form of air cover. It was on this basis that Hitler was already planning for one last great counter-offensive in the Ardennes for December 1944. Hopes of an armoured advance rested not just on capturing Allied supply dumps with large stocks of fuel, but also on the weather staying bad. As soon as the skies cleared, Germany's ability to conduct mobile operations would disappear.

Meanwhile, the offensive against transport had also got under way. Early on, it did a lot of damage. During September, the Allies dropped 17,000 tons of bombs in 70 attacks on German rail hubs. ⁴⁹ On 23–24 September 1944, a raid by Bomber Command Lancasters broke the banks of the Dortmund–Ems Canal, one of the three main waterways out of the Ruhr. During October, the effort ramped up. Over the month, the US strategic air forces dropped 19,000 tons of bombs on marshalling yards, while attacks by the tactical air forces cut rail lines in 1,300 places and destroyed 1,000 locomotives. ⁵⁰ On 14 October 1944, two British thousand-bomber raids hit Duisberg – a major industrial city, but also a rail centre and the inland harbour at the confluence of the Ruhr, the Rhine and the Dortmund–Ems waterway – with a greater tonnage of bombs in

twenty-four hours than the Germans dropped on London during the entire war.⁵¹ On the same day, a USAAF raid on the marshalling yards at Cologne accidentally detonated the German demolition charges rigged on the Cologne–Mülheim Bridge, toppling the major rail link so that it blocked the Rhine below.

Attacks on transport did not immediately cripple German strategic mobility. With special priority given to troops and supplies, it was still possible for the Wehrmacht to gather the forces Hitler wanted for his winter counter-offensive. These involved the movement of about two thousand troop and supply trains between September and December 1944. In a sign of the damage done by the oil offensive, however, these deliveries included less than half the fuel required to power the attack.⁵²

Rather, the damage was to industrial capacity. Within weeks of the transport offensive starting, the damage to the networks connecting German factories threatened a long-term economic crisis. The effect on infrastructure was bad enough. Among other things, efforts to repair railways and canal banks absorbed the efforts of almost a million workers in the autumn of 1944. The confusion on the transport network, as barges and rolling stock got stuck out of sync with production programmes, was just as damaging. Since factories could use up their stockpiles, the immediate impact on munitions production was limited, but it became much harder to unite components made in different places. Among other things, this delayed the construction of the Type XXI U-boats that Hitler hoped would swing the Battle of the Atlantic.⁵³ It also got more difficult to deliver finished weapons to those who were meant to use them. In October 1944, for example, German factories made 20 per cent more 88mm Pak43 antitank guns than they had done in August of the same year, but 55 per cent fewer of them reached the military.⁵⁴

Above all, the destruction of rail and water connections very quickly disrupted the crucial interchange on which the German war economy depended: the movement of coal in and out of the Ruhr. Between September and October 1944, the quantity of coal shipped through the region fell by 60 per cent. As Albert Speer recognized, the breakdown in coal transport would have knock-on effects throughout industry. Once they'd used up their fuel stocks, factories would cease production and power plants would go off-line. Iron and steel output would be particularly badly hit. It was at this point that Speer became convinced that a German defeat was imminent. ⁵⁵

The destruction of the German transport network was not a knock-out blow. It took months for the destruction inflicted in the early autumn to take effect at the front, as the collapse of the railway system stripped the German war economy of its haemoglobin. Despite Tedder's support, Allied targeters, many of them enthusiasts for oil attacks, were not initially convinced that the transport campaign was working. Nonetheless, it was ramped up in November as poor weather inhibited attacks on the oil plants. By the end of December1944, these attacks had resulted in a drastic reduction in rail capacity and broken every waterway out of the Ruhr. ⁵⁶

Between August 1944 and January 1945, shortfalls in deliveries consumed the whole of Germany's national stock of coal. Mined coal sat at the pitheads, immobilized by lack of transport. Electricity and gas plants began to shut down for lack of fuel. By December 1944, arrivals of iron ore at Ruhr smelters were down 80 per cent on the same month in 1943.⁵⁷ As arms production started to fall off, the chaos on the rail system made it even harder for the German armed forces to keep their troops supplied. Their armies had been used to receiving forty-nine trains full of munitions a day. In February 1945, the number was down to eight or nine.⁵⁸

Together, the oil and transport campaigns accelerated the march to victory. With the materially preponderant Allied armies closing in and control of the air forfeited since the spring of 1944, the Reich was in any case doomed to defeat at some point in 1945. Given the stockpiles of raw materials that had been established and the terrified determination of so many Germans to defend their homeland, however, Hitler's war machine might well have been able to stumble on until the late summer, and to make its final immolation even bloodier. As it was, much terrible fighting still lay ahead, but when the Allied armies started their ground offensives again in 1945, they would break through the German defences more quickly, as the under-supplied German forces struggled to shift their reserves quickly enough to contain the assault. Whether the number of lives that were saved by the relatively early end of the war thanks to the Allied air campaigns against German mobility counter-balanced the number lost in the process – including those who died of hypothermia during the three-year-long coal famine created by the transport offensive – is a question which readers should try to answer for themselves.⁵⁹

It is difficult to include the area attacks on which Harris continued regularly to despatch Bomber Command within the same ethical conundrum. Though they demolished factories and killed workers, area attacks that were not aimed at transport centres had little discernible effect on German war production, much of which was either so dispersed or so protected in mountain tunnels that it was all but immune. In the Ruhr, there wasn't much left to burn: by the closing months of 1944, British

bombers were dropping an increased proportion of high explosive bombs because incendiaries had so little effect on the rubble. In the most frequently hit cities, the extraordinary scale of Allied air bombardment made life very miserable for the inhabitants, and the damage done to the bureaucracy of the Nazi Party made it harder for the regime to control the population. Many people decamped to the countryside or remained permanently in air-raid bunkers. Morale undoubtedly declined, but unlike with coal or oil, there was little sign that this shortfall was going to bring the bloodshed to an end.⁶⁰

Yet with the final land battles of the war still to come and the enemy still holding out, there was little inclination to de-escalate the aerial assault. During the first months of 1945, the desire to make certain of victory and the fear of continued resistance, shot through with a willingness to teach the Germans a lesson they would never forget, would see the USAAF and Bomber Command engage in some of the most destructive city bombing of the war. The end was coming, but the dying was not over yet.⁶¹

'DEMOB'

While the Nazis sought a final reckoning in technological and ideological extremes that demanded ever greater efforts from the dwindling Reich, the British prepared for peace. As the pace of the advance towards Germany accelerated and then slowed, so predictions about when the war would end – and progress on demobilization – concertinaed over the second half of 1944. After the front halted before the Rhine, and the Germans demonstrated their determination to fight back in the West, victory in Europe grew more distant. At the end of January 1945, Churchill shared with the War Cabinet the chiefs of staff's advice that the earliest the victory could come was 30 June – and that the war might last until November. Not until 29 March 1945 would the British start planning on the basis that the final defeat of Germany would be achieved no later than the end of May.⁶²

The first part of the defence forces to be moved off their wartime footing was the Home Guard. Though Home Guard units had stood to against the risk of German spoiling raids around D-Day, criticism had been rising for some time about the purposelessness of forcing tired men to attend parades when there was so little prospect of an enemy attack. On 6

September 1944, it was suddenly announced that Home Guard duties were suspended and that all parades would now be conducted on a voluntary basis. A month later, instructions were issued for the Home Guard to stand down at the start of November. After some debate in Whitehall, the men were allowed to retain their greatcoats, uniforms and boots — no minor matter given the prevailing shortage of clothing. On 3 December 1944, a big official parade in Hyde Park, involving 7,000 Home Guards from all over the country, was held to celebrate their service. It was an important symbolic moment that marked both the conclusive end of the crisis of 1940, and the extent to which that crisis was already being mythologized as a defining episode in the history of a new Britain. Disgruntled Civil Defence workers, meanwhile, complained that their contribution on the home front was being left out.⁶³

On 22 September, meanwhile, with the last of that summer's optimism fading at Arnhem, the government published its plan for demobilizing the armed forces when the war finally stopped. The demob plan was very much Ernest Bevin's baby. Like everyone else, Bevin remembered with apprehension the disappointment and anger that had accompanied the release of men from the army after 1918 – with priority given to those who already had promises of jobs to go back to, disadvantaging those who had been in uniform since the start of the war. This time, he was determined to quiet public fears by making sure that the process was easily understood, administratively practicable and fair.⁶⁴

The principle was simple. Ninety per cent of service personnel would be considered as Class A candidates for release. They would be demobilized in a sequence of numbered groups, with the number calculated on the basis of their age and length of service. Officers and men would be treated equally, and using the table provided in the official handbook, Release and Resettlement, anyone could work out for themselves which group they and their comrades would be in. Approximately 10 per cent of service personnel were so important to reconstruction efforts that they would have to be released ahead of schedule, and, for them, a separate category – Class B – was created. These included skilled tradesmen, salesmen and managers, but also the construction workers who would be needed to work on rebuilding the nation's housing stock. Engaged as they were on building munitions factories and airfields, construction workers had often been among the last to be called up – and hence they would be some of the last released under the normal provisions for Class A. Those who believed themselves eligible for Class B could apply to be released early, but they would get only three weeks' paid leave (unlike the eight weeks allotted to those in Class A), and if they left their reconstruction job. they would be liable to be reconscripted. Those demobbed under Class B were going to be serving the country, not jumping the queue. While demobilization would get started as soon as the war in Europe finished, other servicemen would have to go off to the Far East to fight against Japan. To try to maintain their morale, the government announced a further revision of pay and separation allowances, bringing them up to a reasonable level for the first time in the war.

Bevin's plan was greeted with relief. The question of how servicemen would be released had been preying on a lot of minds. Learning their demob numbers off by heart seemed to bring closer the great day when they would be able to go home. The only people who weren't pleased were those in charge of government departments who wanted more workers as soon as they could get them. No one would be compelled to apply for Class B status, and, since Bevin was reluctant to open his scheme up for exploitation, ministers usually didn't get the numbers of exemptions they wanted. Only in April 1945 did the Cabinet agree to a further acceleration in the release of miners: they were desperately needed to address the worsening shortfall in the supply of coal. 66

The uncertainty about when the war would end affected plans to rebuild the civilian economy. In late 1944, the Ministry of Supply had to try to push the production of artillery ammunition and tanks back up, not just because the Germans were holding out, but also because the Americans temporarily decided to keep all US-made tanks for themselves. The Admiralty too had to maintain its workforce as it made haste to prepare vessels for the war against Japan. The Ministry of Aircraft Production was equally reluctant to let war workers go. The result was that less progress was made than had been anticipated in the reallocation of manpower to civil production. With strategy in the Far East so long undecided, it was also very difficult for the British to plan exactly how they would scale back their war effort during Stage II – although it was clear that they would have to put in a lot of work if the welfare amenities for servicemen going into their seventh year of conflict were, as Churchill hoped, to match those available to the Americans. The post-war world was looming over the horizon, but the details were going to have to wait.⁶⁷

'FEELING V. MUCH "LET THEM HAVE IT"'

Somewhere in England, late on in 1944. A party of German POWs is being put to work tidying up air-raid damage. It's the first time they've been seen in this particular town, and the police and the military are both ready for trouble from civilians angered by their presence. But as one of the British soldiers overseeing the prisoners reports to Mass-Observation, they seem to be arousing curiosity as much as hatred:

All through the day there were knots of people watching the prisoners at work and in the children's dinner hour, the kids got out of hand avoiding the guards and coming right up to stare at the prisoners from close quarters. But with . . . very few exceptions . . . the crowd was silent and uncritical. Whatever they said under their breath, there was nothing abusive shouted at the prisoners.

At the end of the day, after the Germans marched off, an old woman sweeping the path of her home had stopped to ask him if they'd gone:

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'... I don't like them there.'

'Oh, they're quite harmless, they won't do anybody any harm.'

'They're Germans aren't they?'

'Yes.'

'I don't like them then. We have had enough trouble from them already, we don't want any more.'
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The longer the war went on, the more likely you were to see a German in Britain. Even as the American presence reduced after D-Day, the limited space available in the initial Allied bridgehead forced the evacuation of German POWs to the UK. The transfer of prisoners continued after the breakout from Normandy. By the spring of 1945, there were 381,632 German POWs in Britain, compared to only 153,799 Italians – an influx of foreign personnel second only to the Americans. At the insistence of the armed forces, these men were fed on higher ration scales than British civilians: a source of considerable disgruntlement in the press at the end of 1944. Though it was some time before most would be put to work, they offered a crucial source of labour. Like the Italians, they would become an important part of the manpower jigsaw during and after the end of the war.⁶⁹

Yet the final year of the European struggle also saw a rising tide of anger. As well as heavy military casualties and the continuing V-weapon campaign, tales of atrocities from the front line and Occupied Europe – encouraged by a Ministry of Information eager to stoke up flagging passions for the final campaigns – helped to create a desire for revenge. Kay Titmuss had left London with her young daughter to escape the flying bombs, leaving her husband, Richard, who was working on the official history of the war's impact on civilian society, behind. Frustrated at their

separation but fretting about whether it was safe to return, she wrote to him half-way through September 1944:

Find I no longer care about bombing of German civilians. Feeling v. much 'let them have it'. Vindictiveness due to what Londoners have had to suffer. We have had to stand a lot on account of bad choice of leaders + why should they escape for the same mistake? Has the war made me vicious? I'm actually rejoicing at the thought of it being carried into Germany. ⁷¹

As the hopes of a quick end to the war were disappointed and frustration grew at the doomed enemy's apparent determination to make everyone suffer for as long as possible, there was a strong sense that Germany had it coming. Yet there was also a continuing reluctance to be taken in by domestic propaganda. In a Mass-Observation survey conducted at the start of December 1944, only 37 per cent of those questioned said that they thought the atrocity stories they'd heard about the Germans were true. One in ten did not believe them at all, and nearly a quarter would express no opinion as to their veracity. Whatever they believed, few had any conception of the scale of Nazism's crimes. They were in for a shock.

'The thought we were doing right'

November 1944–January 1945

On 7 November 1944, Roosevelt was re-elected as president of the United States. Despite rumours of his poor health, and a strong Republican campaign against government waste, Roosevelt matched his record as war leader to an appeal to voters to let him finish the job. He got a smaller percentage of the vote than in 1940, but still won a resounding victory. No one in US history had served three, let alone four, terms as president. Three years later, Congress amended the constitution to make sure no one could again.

The effort Roosevelt had put into the election campaign soon told. His health deteriorated still further, and he paid even less attention to the bureaucratic business of government. For all that illness exacerbated his inconstancy, however, Roosevelt remained set on two goals: creating a post-war United Nations; and engaging the American people with the new organization so that they could not creep back into isolation. Even more than before, that made the president sensitive to popular opinion. This would have important implications for Britain over the months to come.

On 30 October 1944, a week before the presidential election, Sir John Dill suddenly collapsed, his body overwhelmed by the aplastic anaemia against which he had been struggling since the spring. Only at this point was the severity of his condition made plain to his colleagues in London and Washington: Dill himself may never have known how bad it was. In less than a week he was dead. The news left Brooke bereft. 'His loss is quite irreparable', the CIGS noted in his diary. 'Without him there I do not know how we should have got through the last 3 years.' Churchill moved 'Jumbo' Wilson to Washington to take Dill's place, with General Alexander assuming Wilson's role as Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean. General George Marshall oversaw Dill's burial on 8 November 1944, with full military honours, at Arlington National Cemetery, just outside Washington. The joint chiefs of staff acted as

honorary pall-bearers.³ Marshall told Dill's widow that he had lost the dearest friend of his life, and that 'the United States has suffered a heavy loss'.⁴

Not as great as the United Kingdom. Dill had ensured that the British had their say in the great strategic debates - crucially in 1942, diminishingly in 1943, peripherally in 1944, but recognized nonetheless. Dill's friendship with Marshall had lubricated communications between Washington: passing and on information, misunderstandings and sounding early warnings. For the memory of their own 'very special relationship', however, perhaps it was as well that it ended when it did.⁵ By the time he died, the Anglo-American arguments about how to defeat Germany and Japan were over. The approaching end of the war and the precipitate decline in relative British power brought problems that were much more difficult to resolve. Politics, popular nationalism, competing visions of the peace and battlefield dramas were all about to raise a chaotic clamour that would drive the transatlantic relationship to its lowest point of the war.

'HE WANTS TO BE ABLE TO TELL THE NEWSPAPERS THAT THERE WAS NO AGREEMENT'

As soon as the Quebec conference had finished on 16 September 1944, Churchill sent Cherwell to Washington to fix up a deal for US aid in Stage II with Henry Morgenthau. It wasn't to be so easy. Cherwell couldn't produce all the figures that the treasury secretary wanted to assure himself of the state of Britain's finances. Instead, Keynes had to be sent for from the UK. He arrived in Washington on 2 October. It took two weeks for him and the British Treasury team to draw up their proposals to take to the Americans, followed by another six weeks of negotiations in which Keynes and the British ambassador, Lord Halifax, presented Britain's case. In London, frustration at the uncertainty grew — Beaverbrook was attacking the Bretton Woods agreement as a sell out to the United States, and Anderson, Eden and Hugh Dalton were all keen to lift restrictions on British exports as quickly as possible.⁶

Meanwhile, the agreement reached at Quebec had fallen victim to interdepartmental battles in Washington. The US secretary of state, Cordell Hull, was furious that he hadn't been invited to Quebec, and that the president hadn't forced the British to drop imperial preference. Hull

and the war secretary, Henry Stimson, were jealous of the sudden reliance Roosevelt had placed on Morgenthau and opposed his plan for pastoralizing Germany. At the end of September, the Morgenthau plan was leaked to the press.

Its severity appalled US commentators and gave a final boost to delighted Nazi propagandists. With the election imminent, Roosevelt dropped the plan, denied all knowledge of it and cast Morgenthau out of his inner circle. Since British approval was now unnecessary, the unarticulated quid pro quo for extending Lend-Lease went out the window too, while the disappearance of a quick victory in Europe removed the pressure on the Americans for a speedy aid settlement for Britain. Morgenthau remained in charge of the Lend-Lease negotiations and wanted to honour the agreement made during 'Octagon', but he was under pressure from the State Department and out of touch with the president. Roosevelt's advisors, Admiral Leahy principal among them, told him to abandon the economic commitments settled at Quebec.

Old and frail, Cordell Hull was also fading fast. After Roosevelt was re-elected, he began to be replaced by his eventual successor, Edward Stettinius. A former Lend-Lease administrator, Stettinius had written a book lauding the financial mechanism's achievements. Having fallen into the State Department's clutches, however, he told Roosevelt that America should delay any further promises of aid until the British had clarified their commercial policy. Stimson and the War Department, meanwhile, argued that Lend-Lease, a fundamentally wartime measure, was inappropriate to address the problem of Britain's economic recovery. Leahy told the president that the quantity of aid the British wanted would cause problems with Congress.

Under this influence, Roosevelt became still more reluctant to make guarantees he might later come to regret. Without the pressure for a solution he had felt before Quebec, he could keep more options in play. As Morgenthau explained to the committee overseeing the Stage II talks, Roosevelt 'doesn't want to give anything to the British, he doesn't want any publicity, he wants to be able to tell the newspapers that there was no agreement'. The outcome of the talks would become just 'a recommendation to him, and he can take it into consideration'.⁷

In this atmosphere, Lend-Lease began to be used much more explicitly to attack British resistance to American economic policies. The British had already been threatened with problems if they signed the beef contracts they were negotiating with Argentina, which the US was embargoing because of its pro-Fascist, anti-American government. Told to stall a deal

that was about to go through, the British ambassador to Buenos Aires ended up hiding in his toilet so that the Argentines couldn't hand over the paperwork. On 25 November 1944, Roosevelt wrote to Churchill – in a telegram handed over in person by Ambassador Winant in London – to let him know that if the British didn't cede air access rights across the Empire to US airlines. Congress would probably reject any Lend-Lease agreement. Coming as it did alongside a fierce American drive to secure access to Middle Eastern oil, these demands made the British increasingly bitter.

Keynes and Halifax therefore negotiated in an atmosphere much more hostile than that which had prevailed at Quebec. When the results of their discussions were announced on 30 November 1944, however, it appeared that the British had got almost everything for which they had asked: \$2.8 billion of military equipment and \$2.6 billion of non-military supplies, from a total opening bid of \$6 billion. Morgenthau also found another \$250 million of goods that would otherwise have had to be paid for in dollars, as a gesture towards the recovery of Britain's dollar reserves, now depleting again thanks to the departure of American troops.

What the British didn't get, contrary to Roosevelt's promises at Quebec, was the lifting of restrictions on what they could export. The presidential paper trail was as sparse as ever: nothing signed; no guarantee of how long Lend-Lease would last; no definite commitment to the delivery of supplies. From now on — and with the war with Germany continuing — everything would be down to the discretion of US officials. Their scrutiny of British requests became more stringent over that winter.

'HIGH TIME WE TOLD THE WORLD AND BLOW OUR OWN TRUMPET'

Trying to sell Lend-Lease to the American people, the British publicized their own contribution to the Allied war effort. On 24 November 1944, simultaneously with the president's most recent report on Lend-Lease, the British government published a White Paper on 'Mutual Aid' (otherwise known as Reverse Lend-Lease). Both documents presented the same case – that despite its smaller economy, Britain had, through the supply of equipment, food and accommodation to US forces, made a significant contribution to the war effort of the United States. Among other things, the British report highlighted that the UK had provided 31 per cent of all the supplies delivered to US units in the European theatre of operations up

until June 1944. Four days later, the British published another White Paper, 'Statistics Relating to the War Effort of the United Kingdom', which sought to demonstrate the extraordinary degree to which the nation had worked in the pursuit of victory. No other country, it claimed, had mobilized itself so fully for the war effort.

British propagandists in the United States repackaged it as a pamphlet – 50 *Facts about Britain's War Effort* – a list of manpower and casualty figures and production achievements that was meant to show Americans just how much their ally had done. As the pamphlet's introduction made clear, it was all about those past sacrifices on which the British still hoped to trade in their discussions of post-war aid:

No one could have foreseen how a whole people could lower its living standards, give up so much of the comforts of food, clothing and home life, and yet remain so cheerful and optimistic . . . It has been a struggle in which a whole people gave everything needed in terms of possessions and comfort to defend the one thing they would not sacrifice – their freedom. 9

Allied war production had been a combined effort, but an argument about what Britain deserved meant representing it in distinctly national terms. The resulting documents would leave a lasting legacy on British histories of the war.¹⁰

Attempts to promote British achievements had, however, little effect on opinion in the United States. As they triumphed on the battlefields in Europe and the Pacific, the Americans knew very well who was doing most to win the war. With the traditional suspicion of British wiles encouraged by the presidential campaign, Americans were more worried about being taken for a ride by their ally than appreciative of what Britain had provided for their soldiers overseas. As 70 per cent of respondents consistently told US pollsters, the British ought to be made to repay Lend-Lease.

For the British, on the other hand, the revelation of their own endeavours, as relayed to them from the White Paper by their newspapers and the BBC, came as a very welcome fillip. '[P]eople are pleased to know what they have achieved', reported Home Intelligence, but, 'they are even more delighted at the prospect of the rest of the world learning about it.' It was ' "high time we told the world and blow our own trumpet" . . . '¹²

'THERE WILL BE A TIME NOT MANY YEARS DISTANT WHEN THE AMERICAN ARMIES WILL GO

HOME'

In the final months of 1944, the Soviets and the British put the agreements reached at Moscow into effect. Contrary to Foreign Office hopes that the 'percentage' deal might mean a toehold in Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria, the Soviets excluded Allied missions from these countries. They began brutally to tighten their political grip, rounding up opponents and preparing to deport potentially dissident minorities. After further pressure from Churchill to agree a deal with the Soviets and the Lublin Poles, the Polish premier Mikołajczyk resigned in November. Communications between Poland and the UK were cut off. As the Red Army drove across Central and Eastern Europe, the British backed away from diplomatic confrontations. Officials comforted themselves that Stalin was bent on building national security rather than spreading Communist dictatorships, and that, despite the violence of the Soviet arrival, some form of pluralist political system would eventually be allowed to emerge. ¹³

Churchill was happy with the wider implications of the Moscow deal – that Britain would not meddle in the expanded region controlled by the Soviets, and the British would have a free hand to stabilize their own bloc. He saw Stalin as the solution to, rather than the source of, the Communist threat to Western democracy. ¹⁴ Co-operating with the Soviet leader was the means by which the forces of conservatism would prevail. Britain and the USSR drew noticeably closer together in the months after the Moscow talks, including enthusiastic praise for Britain's military efforts in the Soviet press. Following his return to London, Churchill made sure that Britain returned former Red Army POWs, captured fighting for the Germans, to the Soviets; pooh-poohed Smuts' fears of the human consequences of relocating 6 million Poles; and insisted that Stalin would have to be awarded the Manchurian naval base at Port Arthur in return for participation in the war against Japan. As the prime minister pointed out, supporting Soviet claims in the Far East might mean Soviet backing for British resistance to US demands for the return of Hong Kong to China. ¹⁵

Meanwhile, the British got on with securing their own sphere. British troops landed in Greece on 13 October 1944. Churchill believed that Britain's willingness to use military force was now the only barrier to a Communist revolution. Involvement in Greece, however, was only part of a burst of British activity across Europe. Eden reassured the Turks that the British would protect them from the Russians, while Churchill brokered the formation of a transitional government between partisans and Chetniks

in Yugoslavia and expressed new interest in helping the Fascist dictatorships in Spain and Portugal against Communist threats. ¹⁶ In Italy, where a new government was being formed after the fall of Rome, Churchill insisted there must be no post for Count Sforza, a liberal aristocrat for whom he had developed a strong personal dislike. This would spark a diplomatic crisis, not with the Soviets, who remained notably quiet in the face of Britain's battening down of European hatches, but with America, where Sforza had strong links with the Italian emigrant community. Churchill's intervention in the Sforza affair was reported in the United States at the very end of November 1944, just as Stettinius formally replaced Cordell Hull as secretary of state.

In the most striking instance of how Churchill's thinking developed after the Moscow conference, the prime minister put his antipathy to de Gaulle aside and sought to strengthen the relationship with France. Despite the help of Allied special forces from the summer of 1944, French resistance groups had played little part in the victory in Normandy. De Gaulle, however, swiftly got to the beachhead to have his personal authority legitimized by popular acclaim. This allowed him to present the Allies with a fait accompli that even Roosevelt had to acknowledge. On 11 July 1944, he recognized the provisional government formed by the FCNL and led by de Gaulle. On 26 August 1944, after French armoured units arrived to support an uprising in Paris, de Gaulle staged a triumphant arrival in the French capital. He was as determined as ever to rebuild his country's prestige and to forestall the menace of Communism. ¹⁷

The landing of French troops over the 'Dragoon' beaches in southern France meant that the new government already had an army in the field, albeit one largely composed of North African soldiers and worn out after months of heavy fighting in Italy. Like the leaders of provisional governments across liberated Europe, de Gaulle sought to demobilize the Communists by standing down and disarming the resistance and amalgamating its fighters into the regular army. The French made space for them by sending colonial troops back to North Africa. The rebirth of the French army meant a new demand for weapons and materiel from the United States. In return, de Gaulle offered Allied generals a fresh source of manpower. During the autumn, the French First Army under General Lattre de Tassigny fought its way towards the German border on the southern flank of Eisenhower's advance.¹⁸

The French had long been keen to send forces to SEAC in preparation for a return to Indochina, a move that Roosevelt had opposed. On his return from Moscow, Churchill decided that a French military mission

should be despatched to join Mountbatten. It was the opening salvo of a diplomatic offensive. On 11 November 1944, he visited de Gaulle in Paris for a joint commemoration of Armistice Day. It was an emotional occasion for the prime minister. As the two men walked down the Champs-Elysêes to the reviewing stand where they would watch the great parade, they were surrounded, as Cadogan noted, by an 'Enormous, enthusiastic and goodhumoured crowd who, most of the time, chanted Chur-chill!'. ¹⁹ In Paris and during a subsequent visit to the French front outside Strasbourg, there were plentiful occasions for him to employ his execrable French.

Churchill had, by their standards, friendly discussions with de Gaulle. Even so, the Frenchman could not resist the chance to pay the British back a little for the months of uncertainty before D-Day. Had Roosevelt mentioned his plan to establish US bases abroad, he asked Churchill. 'Dakar?' asked the prime minister. 'Yes. And Singapore', de Gaulle replied.²⁰ Even that exchange, however, indicated their strong mutual interests – restoring empires, resisting Communism and finding a means to make the post-war occupation of Germany work. Here too, fresh French manpower was crucial to British concerns. As the prime minister explained to Roosevelt, de Gaulle had emphasized that France must be given a zone of occupation of its own, and he in turn had 'expressed my sympathy with this, knowing full well that there will be a time not many years distant when the American armies will go home and when the British will have great difficulty in maintaining large forces overseas.'21 As the 'Big Three' contemplated another conference, Churchill tried to get an invitation for de Gaulle. Roosevelt refused ('such a debating society would confuse our essential issues'), but he did express sympathy with the prime minister's desire to see France 'meet her post war responsibilities'.²² Before long, this new Anglo-French special relationship would be disrupted by continued disputes over the fate of the Levant and de Gaulle's usurping attempt to forge France's own treaty with Stalin. The geostrategic trend, however, continued: Britain was now working actively to get a strong France included in the European peace settlement.²³

In contrast to the Anglo-Soviet pursuit of a post-war division of the Continent, in the Middle East, two concurrent developments foreshadowed trouble in the future. Iran was the only place where British and Soviet occupation forces were for the moment in contact, but it was not included in the Moscow Agreement. The arrival of 30,000 US logistics troops to open the trans-Caucasus Lend-Lease route, and a growing American desire – strategic and commercial – to control global oil supplies meant that Iran also became of growing interest to the State Department, which planned to

turn the country into a strong, modern, independent nation that would ally itself with the United States. When the Soviets requested the right to establish oil wells in northern Iran, the Iranian government, under American pressure, refused. In line with long-running imperial concerns, the British worried about the implications of Soviet influence for the defence of India and the Middle East. At Moscow, Eden tried to talk about everyone pulling their troops out of Iran earlier than planned; Molotov wouldn't countenance such a discussion. Despite repeated British efforts, the Soviets and Americans never got around to talking about how the three of them ought to arrange matters in Iran. The absence of an agreement would have important consequences.²⁴

Almost unnoticed among the great power manoeuvring in Europe, Churchill had to alter the direction of policy on Palestine. On 6 November 1944, the British minister resident in the Middle East, Lord Moyne, was shot dead in his car in Cairo by members of the Stern Gang, a minor group of extreme Zionists who were committed to acts of terror as the only means of establishing a Jewish state. They had killed Moyne not only because he was a British office-holder, but also because he had opposed demands to lift controls on Jewish immigration into Palestine. Frustrated, like other British officials, at what he saw as the exploitation of Jewish victims of Nazism by American Zionists with their own political axe to grind, Moyne had pointed out publicly that forcing Palestinian Arabs to submit to Jewish majority rule would be a violation of the Atlantic Charter.²⁵

Notwithstanding difficult questions about international trusteeship and the British Empire, Churchill had hoped that once the presidential election was over, he could abandon the Chamberlain government's 1939 White Paper, de-restrict Jewish immigration and lay the path to the creation of a Jewish state. Moyne's assassination put all that on hold. The Stern Gang had killed one of his friends, and Moyne's murder made it impossible to adopt a new policy without its seeming that Britain had yielded to terrorism. Without Churchill's backing, the moderate, pro-British Zionism of Chaim Weizmann lost its claim to be making headway in Whitehall. As the momentum passed to the extremists and the war in Europe drew to an end, British policy on Palestine went into a holding pattern. American supporters of Zionism grew increasingly frustrated.

'WITH BLOODSHED IF NECESSARY'

While Churchill was meeting with de Gaulle in Paris, tensions rose in Belgium. There, too, the interim coalition government of Prime Minister Hubert Pierlot had asked resistance groups to hand over their weapons, disband and re-enlist individually in the army. With the support of Major General George Erskine, the British head of the SHAEF mission to Belgium, Pierlot pushed this measure through against opposition from Communist members of his government. The Communists resigned, strengthening Pierlot's conviction that they were on the verge of an armed uprising. When Erskine made it clear the Allies would support the government, the majority of Communist resisters gave in their weapons, but a few dissident groups refused to comply. The British rushed supplies of Sten guns to the Brussels police, while the Communists denounced the Pierlot administration with still greater violence. 26

On 25 November 1944, during a Communist protest march through Brussels, someone threw a grenade, and the police fired shots to disperse the crowds. Three days later, amid rumours that the Communists were marching on Brussels, Pierlot appealed to Erskine, who put British tanks and troops on to the streets. In fact, the Communist leaders were already backing down, and the incipient revolution never materialized. After much confusion, the few fighters who had gathered were dispersed by their own leaders or disarmed and driven home by the police. Support for the Communists collapsed. Before long, most of their remaining weapons had been surrendered to the government.

A few days later, a much more serious crisis erupted in Greece. Following the withdrawal of German forces, British troops had arrived in Athens on 14 October. Close behind them came the government-in-exile, led by Georgios Papandreou. King George II was to remain in Egypt until a plebiscite could be held on the country's constitution. Almost without exception, the Greeks welcomed the arrival of British soldiers: representatives of a great democratic power who would help them to secure the future.²⁷

The British could not deploy enough troops to take control of the country. Across much of Greece, Communist ELAS units took over after the Germans withdrew. ELAS's fighters thought they were in a powerful position to shape the next government, while Greek right-wingers, including those who had collaborated with the Germans, flocked behind the Papandreou government as their only safeguard against a Communist takeover. As Churchill suspected, the Greek Communists were committed to a revolution by violence if necessary, but their leaders had already been instructed by Moscow not to start trouble with Papandreou. Their caution

occasioned disputes within EAM and ELAS. Papandreou struggled to keep his coalition in one piece. In this situation, and in the aftermath of a horrendous occupation, a colossal investment of time, resources and effort might have kept the opposing forces in uneasy balance and allowed a peaceful, functioning democracy to emerge.

Churchill, however, was in no mood to compromise. He had fought to achieve a 'showdown' with the Communists, and he was determined that it should be seen through. As he explained to Eden on 7 November 1944:

having paid the price we have to Russia for freedom of action in Greece, we should not hesitate to use British troops to support the Royal Hellenic Government . . . British troops should certainly intervene to check acts of lawlessness . . . I fully anticipate a clash with EAM and we must not shrink from it, providing the ground is well chosen. 28

Churchill and Rex Leeper, the British ambassador to Athens, regarded attempts to reach a settlement with EAM/ELAS as a form of appearement. Their conviction that an uprising was imminent became a self-fulfilling prophecy, shutting down the always-dim possibility that liberation would end, rather than provide further opportunities for, extreme political violence.

Churchill's colleagues in the War Cabinet didn't use the same incendiary language. They despaired of the prime minister's apparent determination to re-install King George. Essentially, however, they shared the same perspective on what was happening in Greece: EAM might appear a progressive popular front but was in fact the cover for an anti-democratic, Communist threat to Britain's strategic interests in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Significantly, the left–right divide in Greece was not replicated between Conservative and Labour ministers in the War Cabinet. Having spent most of their political lives battling Communism at home, the Labour leaders loathed those who would seek to impose it overseas by force.²⁹

Papandreou and Leeper planned to disband the resistance and remuster a new Greek army. Only the royalist mountain brigade would remain in existence. This was not acceptable to EAM/ELAS: no one in Greece wanted to be left without some armed protection from their political opponents. On 2 December 1944, EAM ministers resigned from the government, and called for a mass demonstration in Athens the next day, followed by a general strike.

Shortly before eleven on 3 December, the huge but peaceable protest march entered Syntagma Square, in the centre of Athens. Greek police opened fire, killing at least ten unarmed demonstrators and injuring another fifty. British soldiers in armoured cars stood by. That evening, the incident was described in detail by the BBC's correspondent in Athens, John Nixon, in his war report for the nine o'clock news. The next day, it was in all the papers. Journalists noted how young the demonstrators were, and that the police had continued to shoot at those trying to carry away the wounded. ELAS fighters began to attack police stations across Athens.

Convinced that British troops would shortly face a major uprising, on the 4th Eden and Churchill talked deep into the night. After the exhausted foreign secretary retired to bed, Churchill composed his instructions to Lieutenant General Ronald Scobie, the commander of British forces in Greece, telling him to act in the recently liberated Allied capital 'as if you were in a conquered city where a local rebellion is in progress . . . We have to hold and dominate Athens. It would be a great thing for you to succeed in this without bloodshed if possible, but also with bloodshed if necessary.' Sending this message via Alexander's headquarters, Churchill's private secretary, Jock Colville, forgot to add the critical designation 'Guard', to indicate that it was for British eyes only. Instead, it was seen by American staff officers, who duly sent it on to Washington. ³⁰

'THE NEXT TIME WE GET A V1 OR A V2... WELL, I SHALL THINK WE DESERVED IT'

As Scobie refused Papandreou's pleas to resign and Churchill pressed him to stand up to the Communists, British troops were thrust into the middle of a chaotic urban civil war. Both Greek sides rounded up civilians they suspected of working with the enemy, tortured prisoners and mutilated the dead. Thanks to SOE, the country was awash with small arms, and all the Greek combatants were dressed in a mixture of pre-war uniforms with Axis equipment, British battledress and civilian clothing. In its desire to take on ELAS, the Greek government re-mobilized the 'security' battalions raised by the Germans.³¹

Within a week of the Syntagma Square shootings, the British were being heavily attacked by ELAS. Contrary to Churchill's expectation that harsh military action would swiftly crush any opposition, they found themselves outnumbered and poorly deployed to meet the scale of attack. The British had armoured vehicles and some well-trained paratroopers, but they were facing experienced guerrilla fighters, fighting in their own local area. Before long, the British were forced back into an area of the city less

than two miles square. Armoured convoys to an airfield five miles away were the only means of resupply. Soon, ELAS cut off the electricity and water, and the British began to run out of ammunition. All they could do was hold on. Rather than a couple of days of 'bloodshed', the battle for Athens would stretch on for weeks.

Meanwhile, the world reacted to reports of the crisis. The day after the Syntagma Square incident, the State Department released a message from Stettinius, emphasizing that all liberated countries had the right to form their own independent governments. Originally intended as a slap at Churchill's interventions against Count Sforza in Italy, this was easily adapted to apply to Greek politics too. Churchill complained bitterly to Roosevelt. He thought he was doing what the president had wanted at Quebec. Roosevelt told him that it was his fault for not consulting with Washington before opposing Sforza. Then Admiral King upped the ante, insisting that American ships would not be used to move essential British supplies to Greece. Once again, the British had good reason to be grateful to Harry Hopkins. Restored to a position close to Roosevelt, he got King's inflammatory instructions cancelled.³²

Back in the UK, events in Greece prompted a public outcry, which was only strengthened by the evidence Stettinius had provided of American disagreement. Progressive opinion, including (but not limited to) the leftwing of the parliamentary Labour Party and the trade unions, was outraged by Churchill's apparent desire to crush a popular democratic movement in favour of right-wing authoritarians. Those who saw the whole war as an anti-Fascist struggle stretching back to the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s were convinced that British soldiers were now fighting on the wrong side.³³

The *News Chronicle*, the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times* criticized the government especially fiercely. Journalists pointed the finger directly at Churchill. With the war nearly over, he was deemed to be going back to his old-fashioned imperialist roots. Since *The Times* was simultaneously advocating a pragmatic acceptance of Soviet domination in Poland, Churchill was furious at its hypocrisy. Many Conservative MPs, dismayed at the paper's leftwards swing during the war, shared his anger.³⁴

On 8 December 1944, rebellious Labour MPs, backed by the Common Wealth leader Sir Richard Acland, moved an amendment to the ritual motion approving the 1944 King's Speech, regretting the absence of an 'assurance that His Majesty's Forces will not be used to disarm the friends of democracy in Greece and other parts of Europe'. ³⁵ As usual when faced

with such dissidence, the government called a vote of confidence. Facing the House, Churchill engaged in a lengthy defence of British actions. 'The last thing which resembles democracy', he told MPs, 'is mob law, with bands of gangsters, armed with deadly weapons . . . endeavouring to introduce a totalitarian regime with an iron hand.'³⁶

I say we march along an onerous and painful path. Poor old England! Perhaps I ought to say 'Poor old Britain'. We have to assume the burden of the most thankless tasks and in undertaking them to be scoffed at, criticised and opposed from every quarter; but at least we know where we are making for.³⁷

In Belgium, Churchill argued, soldiers from 'hard-worked Britain', had halted a 'putsch' against the lawfully constituted government.³⁸ In Greece, the British were ensuring the delivery of aid supplies and giving 'these unfortunate people a fair chance of extricating themselves from their misery and starting on a clear road again'.³⁹

Churchill's speech contained the basis of what might have been an effective defence: Britain as the liberal democratic policeman, operating more in sorrow than in anger.⁴⁰ Eden struck the same pose much more effectively as he closed the debate. Not for the first time, the problem with the prime minister's speech was the tone. Even the prim record in Hansard makes it quite clear that Churchill revelled in the occasion, safe in the knowledge of the government's majority, mocking such longterm irritants as Bevan and Shinwell, and playing for laughs with his ironic descriptions of how the 'reactionary, undemocratic' Britain described by his opponents was sacrificing itself for the future of the world.⁴¹ Rather as during the 'Quit India' movement, his glee missed the mood of the House. Of course, the government won the vote – by 279 votes to 30 – but the prime minister's words further infuriated the Labour Party.⁴²

Many Britons, on the other hand, continued to trust the prime minister, particularly when he said their soldiers were fighting foreign extremists. As a sixty-year-old working-class man, interviewed by a Mass-Observation investigator at the start of December, put it: 'I'll warrant the Government knows what it's doing . . . They've pulled us through the war this far without mishap. The Greeks want to be put in their place. We wouldn't waste our time fighting 'em unless it was necessary.' Others couldn't see why intervening in Greece should be Britain's problem. In the words of a fifty-year-old woman: 'All I know is, our boys were taken to fight the Germans, not to fight our allies and interfere in another country's civil war.' Listening to a conversation at a taxi drivers' canteen in London, another observer overheard a heated discussion:

M45D: 'Seems the countries we've liberated get nothing but civil war. But the countries Russia liberates don't get any trouble at all.'

'What about Poland?' interrupts another.

'Every country has a right to work out its own salvation in its own way, and our people aren't letting them' says M50C. Noises of agreement.

M35D: 'The Government has gone forward and forced civil war on Greece and never asked anybody else's opinion.'

'That's right,' says a chorus of voices. 'America's against it. Russia's against it.'

M45D: 'It was Churchill 'isself. He's in favour of the royalty and he never asked Parliament 'ow 'e should act.'44

With British sacrifices for the Allied war effort much under discussion, it all seemed a bit disreputable, as this forty-year-old woman explained to a Mass-Observer on 16 December 1944:

It's just the sort of thing we've always blamed Hitler for doing . . . And that's not what we're fighting this war for – not the way I always understood it. The next time we get a V1 or a V2 round these parts, well, I shall think we deserved it . . . It makes you feel ashamed of your country. And we've felt so proud of ourselves . . . that's what's kept us going, really, – the thought we were doing right. 45

'THE LABOUR MOVEMENT WILL HAVE TO LEARN TO RIDE THE STORMS OF LIFE'

The popular reaction came as a nasty shock to the government. Given the Labour Party's concerns about continuing the Coalition, it posed a particular problem for Labour ministers; even more so because the crisis coincided with Labour's annual conference. In summer 1944, the Labour leadership had gratefully seized the excuse of not wanting to disrupt pre-D-Day transport to postpone the conference and sidestep a confrontation with restive members. In a bruising accident of timing, it was re-scheduled to open on 11 December 1944.

Despite the usual hubbub of comradely greetings, NEC elections and party resolutions, this was a really important event at which several trends suddenly came together. Labour members were in a ferment: incensed at the slow pace of reconstruction, resentful of the tough line taken by Labour ministers over Regulation 1AA against the incitement of strike action, and suspicious of a Conservative revival. Distressed by the sight of British troops battling the guerrilla warriors in whom they had placed so much faith, and worried their party was being shackled to Churchill's reactionary foreign policy, they tabled resolutions condemning the government's actions. The issue threatened to unite a broad coalition of Labour moderates and the radical left against the party leaders. ⁴⁶ The

resolution that party managers let the conference debate was far more anodyne. Regretting the conflict in Greece, it looked forward to a peaceful, democratic settlement.

Attlee persuaded Bevin to speak in support of the motion. It was the first time that the minister of labour had taken a leading role in public over foreign affairs. Stressing Labour ministers' commitment to the government's policy in Greece, he urged members to accept the responsibility of power:

if we win at the next election, as I hope we will, we shall find that we cannot govern this world by emotionalism; hard thinking, great decision, tremendous willpower will have to be applied, and the Labour Movement will have to learn to ride the storms of life as these great issues arise from time to time.⁴⁷

Over heckles from the floor, Bevin insisted: 'These steps which have been taken in Greece are not the decision of Winston Churchill, they are the decision of the Cabinet.' They thought they had reached an agreement with all the parties on the need to deliver food, and to hold a free and fair general election followed by a plebiscite on the monarchy. It was ELAS who had gone back on that. 'What did Churchill think?' someone interrupted from the floor. 'I do not care what Churchill thought, or what anybody thought,' Bevin bellowed, 'that is what I thought when the signature was put on and I believe in honouring signed agreements.'⁴⁸ He had already made sure that the union block votes were in place to guarantee the resolution was passed, by 2,455,000 votes to 137,000.

The party's restive mood also became apparent over domestic policy. In response to a motion from the platform that called for state control of economic policy but did not mention public ownership, Ian Mikardo, the future parliamentary candidate for Reading, moved a resolution from the floor calling for all key industries, including iron and steel, to be nationalized. It was passed by overwhelming acclamation.⁴⁹ Morrison, who unveiled his new 'national plan' to the conference to a standing ovation from delegates, rode this party mood back onto the NEC, where he was put in charge of the committee charged with finalizing Labour's policies and campaign strategy for a general election. Morrison would oversee the completion of the new Labour manifesto, 'Let Us Face the Future'. He would play a major role in shaping the course of political events over the coming months.⁵⁰ Aneurin Bevan, who had led the criticisms of Churchill's Greek policy in the Commons and who launched a bitter attack on Bevin's speech – 'garbled and inadequate when it was not unveracious' – was also elected to the NEC at his first attempt.⁵¹

News of political divisions in Britain heightened American suspicions that something was going grievously wrong in Greece. Images of Lend-Lease-equipped British troops defending an unpopular monarchy against freedom-loving republican rebels aroused all of the American public's prejudices, not only against the Empire, but also against the European violence from which they had escaped into isolation at the end of the previous war.⁵² During the autumn of 1944, US opinion pollsters had tracked a growing unhappiness with European politics, as Americans reacted against the fate of the Warsaw Rising. Events in Italy, Belgium and Greece deepened this grim mood, and public opinion turned very sharply against the British. Even worse, on 12 December 1944, the Washington Post published a leaked copy of Churchill's 'conquered city' telegram. Disillusioned Americans felt a mockery was being made of their wartime generosity. At the end of December 1944, the State Department reported to the president that a third of Americans were now dissatisfied with cooperation between the 'Big Three'. Of them, 54 per cent blamed Britain and 18 per cent Russia.⁵³

The rising mood of public cynicism concerned Roosevelt much more deeply than whatever the British were doing in Greece. As he wrote in a generally supportive telegram to Churchill on the 13th, he could not publicly support him, because of 'the mounting adverse reaction of public opinion in this country . . . Even to attempt to do so would bring only temporary value to you and would in the long run do injury to our basic relationships.' ⁵⁴At least the Soviets stayed silent, Stalin having decided to stick by the arrangement he had made with Churchill at Moscow.

The strain on the prime minister was beginning to tell. As well as keeping up with events in Athens, being pestered by Brooke to lay down the strategic law to Eisenhower, and feeling betrayed and concerned at the rift that had opened up with the United States, Churchill also had to defend the government in the Commons. A hastily composed statement to Parliament on Poland on 14 December inadvertently indicated not only that a territorial deal with the Soviets had already been done, but also that it had the support of the American government. That sparked further outrage in the United States. It particularly antagonized American opponents of Communism, the one group of people who had been pleased to see Churchill taking a strong stance over Greece. Two days later, the Germans took the Allies by surprise with their winter offensive on the Western Front, blasting their way through American positions in the Ardennes.

BATTLES OF THE BULGE

Even before the German offensive struck, the slowing down of the Allied autumn offensives had driven Montgomery and Brooke into another round of criticisms of Eisenhower. Pushing once more for a concentrated offensive in the north, Montgomery made what he thought was a reasonable proposal. Since it was so important to have an American in charge, General Omar Bradley should take the role of land commander under Eisenhower. Montgomery would happily serve under Bradley, and this would mean that his Twenty-First Army Group could be reinforced by Patton's Third US Army. Since this would have put Montgomery in command not only of the principal Allied offensive into the Reich, but also of the bulk of the armoured divisions on the Western Front, it was another ill-concealed and enraging attempt to maximize his place in the campaign.

At the end of November 1944, Brooke tried to persuade Churchill to insist that the Americans reopen discussions about strategy in Northwest Europe. By the time the prime minister responded, on 6 December, tensions were running high over Greece. Churchill's attempts to interest Roosevelt fell on stony ground. Eisenhower did his best to keep everyone happy, proposing a reshuffle of formations so that, when the spring came, Montgomery could lead a major attack in the north while Bradley led another further south. Bradley stymied that by refusing to have his army group broken up. On 12 December, Eisenhower came to London with Tedder to discuss future strategy against Germany with the chiefs of staff and Churchill. The prime minister's mind was on Greece. As Brooke sought to argue Eisenhower around, he was frustrated to realize that Churchill was supporting the American. Reacting against the optimism engendered by the Allied victory in Normandy, Eisenhower reported that he did not think that he would be able to get his forces across the Rhine until May 1945.

Four days later, the German winter offensive struck Bradley's Twelfth US Army Group in the Ardennes. The offensive was timed to coincide with the worst of the winter weather, which was meant to protect it from air attack. It aimed to split the Allied armies and drive north across the Meuse to take Antwerp. Hitler expected that the combination of a stunning defeat in the field and the loss of their key supply port would force Britain and America into a compromise peace that would leave Germany free to concentrate on the Soviet menace in the East.⁵⁵

A range of deception operations, including a communications blackout,

the lack of photo-reconnaissance flights due to the winter weather, and a strong element of Allied complacency all ensured that when the Germans attacked on 16 December they caught their opponents unawares. Three huge German armies smashed into the six US divisions spread out across what was meant to be a quiet sector among the steep ridges and thick forests of the Ardennes. With Allied airpower limited by atrocious weather, including snow and fog, the weight of forces soon told. By the end of the first week, the Germans had advanced sixty miles across a forty-mile front, creating the distinctive 'bulge' that gave the battle its name.

Despite the initial setback, the US army's response showed how far it had come since 1942. The onrush of the panzers sparked panic among some of the defenders, but US resistance was strong enough to slow the German seizure of the important town of St Vith and to prevent the capture of the vital road and rail hub at Bastogne. When they realized the scale of the German attack, Eisenhower and Bedell Smith at SHAEF coordinated their forces to maintain control and prevent a breakout. Deciding that the size of the salient made it impossible for Bradley to command the forces on both sides, they transferred the First and Ninth US Armies temporarily to Montgomery's Twenty-First Army Group. Bradley was predictably furious. As troops were rushed in front of the German advance, to the south, Patton turned his Third US Army through 90 degrees and counterattacked. To the north, Montgomery stabilized the front – with a sensible caution that had American commanders condemning his lack of aggression – and moved British XXX Corps to cover the crossings over the Meuse. The American armies under his command then also began to counterattack.

The Bulge was a titanic battle: the largest in the history of the US army. Nearly six hundred thousand American troops, from twenty-nine divisions, were involved. Almost ninety thousand of them became casualties, including nineteen thousand who were killed. About half a million Germans, from twenty-eight divisions, fought in the winter offensives. About 130,000 of them became casualties. British involvement was very much smaller: roughly 55,000 troops, who suffered 1,400 casualties, of whom about 200 were killed.⁵⁶

What was really striking about this million-man struggle, however, was how quickly it was decided. After a week of fog and snow, on 23 December 1944 the weather lifted enough for the Allied air forces to come fully into operation. Over the next five days they flew 16,000 sorties. On Christmas Eve, the US Eighth Air Force used more than 2,000 bombers, escorted by 800 fighters, to attack German airfields and communications

targets behind the front line, while the US Ninth Air Force flew another 2,400 medium-bomber and 1,100 fighter-bomber missions against German units in the 'Bulge'. Second Tactical Air Force contributed another 1,200 sorties, and, that night, Bomber Command sent 500 of its heavy bombers to bomb rail and road junctions in the Ardennes. As ever, many of these attacks missed, but enough hit their targets to stop the German offensive in its tracks. The weight of the air attack was such that the Germans could not get the limited fuel supplies they had forward to the tanks. Forced to confront better-trained and more experienced Allied fighter pilots in the sky, the Germans lost more than 460 pilots in the first two weeks of the battle alone.⁵⁷

On 1 January 1945, the Luftwaffe devoted a major effort to a surprise attack, with almost a thousand planes striking at airfields in France and Belgium. So rare had German raids been that they caught Allied aircraft lined up in close ranks around the runways. Though some attackers were caught by British and American anti-aircraft fire, they destroyed at least four hundred planes on the ground.⁵⁸ Many of these, however, were non-operational aircraft awaiting repair. Aircrew losses were much lighter. In Second TAF, at most five squadrons were put out of action until they could be resupplied with aircraft, and pilot losses were no worse than on a normal day of operations in the air.⁵⁹

Significantly, despite the surprise they achieved the Germans also suffered heavy losses. These included at least thirty planes shot down by their own anti-aircraft gunners, as unused as everyone else to seeing so many Luftwaffe planes overhead at a time. Others crashed or ran out of fuel after pilots got lost. Altogether, the Germans lost 271 fighters destroyed and another 65 damaged, and 234 aircrew dead, wounded or taken prisoner. In a sign of the intensification of the air war since 1940, that was about a fifth of their total aircraft losses in the three months of the Battle of Britain, suffered in the space of less than twenty-four hours. It was a meaningless victory. Winter storms in the Atlantic made it hard quickly to replace all the aircraft the Allies had lost, but their margin of air superiority was such that Operation 'Bodenplatte' made no difference to their control of the skies. The scale of German losses meant that this was the Luftwaffe's final significant action of the war.

By that point, the ground offensive had been defeated, but fighting persisted through January as the Germans attempted to withdraw from the salient they had driven into the Allied lines. For the first week of the New Year, they got some respite from the air attacks as bad weather closed in

and the Allies licked their wounds. Then the skies cleared again and the Germans were exposed to the same sort of devastating aerial bombardment they had undergone as they departed Normandy. Contrary to Hitler's hope that it might save the Reich, the offensive used up German resources to no gain. Without the ability to contest control of the air, Germany was no longer able to fight the sort of campaign that it had done with such success earlier in the war.

The very fact that the Germans were still capable of launching an offensive came as a blow to Allied morale. Brooke and Montgomery had been taken as much by surprise as everyone else, but they both felt that the enemy's initial successes showed the inadequacy of Eisenhower's command arrangements. Though both were pleased that more American troops had now been put under British command, Brooke advised Montgomery to keep quiet. Bearing in mind that the Americans had just defeated the largest German offensive in the West since 1940, some British humility was indeed in order. Instead, Montgomery's attitude became still more insufferable. When he told Eisenhower that the only solution was for him to take command of all ground forces, Eisenhower responded by writing, but not immediately despatching, a 'him or me' cable to the joint chiefs in Washington. Before it was sent, Montgomery's loyal chief of staff, de Guingand, stepped in, winning time to persuade his boss to back down or lose his job. Finally realizing that he had gone too far, the British field marshal wrote a grovelling apology. The next opportunity he got he'd try to pay fulsome public tribute to Ike. 63

'THE METHODS OF THE FIGHTING OF THESE PEOPLE ARE OF THE LOWEST, AND THAT I DO NOT LIKE ONE SCRAP'

While the fighting was still at its peak in the Ardennes, the British secured their position in Athens. Here, too, air power proved key. The RAF brought in more soldiers and supplies – making sure that the British could feed themselves and Greek civilians – patrolled over the city, strafed ELAS units as they formed up to attack British positions and forced the insurgents to take cover. Macmillan and Alexander, despatched to get a grip on the Greek capital, blamed Scobie for the setback and brought in a corps commander from Italy to take charge of operations on the ground. From 17 December 1944, the British launched a counter-offensive to

secure the centre of Athens and take the port at Piraeus. Scobie insisted that, as soon as they gained control of areas of the city, the British provided food and aid in an effort to re-establish civilian support.⁶⁴

The British were by now able to deploy several squadrons of fighter-bombers, as well as artillery and naval gunfire. Alexander explained to Churchill that one of the reasons ELAS couldn't be driven out more quickly was that the British were unable to use the full weight of their firepower for fear of the civilian casualties that would result. Though they didn't turn Athens into Monte Cassino or Caen, let alone Warsaw, this was only a relative restraint – buildings identified as ELAS headquarters were shelled from field guns located on the Acropolis and by ships offshore, and attacked by aircraft using cannon and rockets. As ELAS seized civilian hostages – many of whom would subsequently be killed or die of neglect – the British and the Greek army and police interned more than thirteen thousand Athenians – some of them guerrillas, most just guilty of being in the wrong place at the wrong time or having been misidentified by their neighbours as Communist sympathizers.

By the end of December, British and Greek government units had seized the initiative. As ELAS was driven back to its strongholds or into more open ground outside the city, the British stepped up the intensity of the air attacks. Meanwhile, they rushed in reinforcements – by the middle of January 1945, the equivalent of four divisions, more than seventy-five thousand soldiers, were deployed around Athens and Salonika. Factoring in RAF, naval personnel and logisticians makes the calculation difficult, but there were probably more British Commonwealth personnel engaged in fighting ELAS than there had been trying to stop the German drive on the Meuse. In total, 237 British servicemen would be killed, and another 2,100 wounded, during this phase of operations in Greece.⁶⁵

In retrospect, there was something premonitory about the intervention. This was not the last time in the 1940s that the British would find themselves, under the gaze of the world's media, facing off against urban guerrillas who had been politically radicalized and armed to the teeth as a result of the war. Although much of the military power in which the British had invested so much was useless in these circumstances, in Athens, as elsewhere, Britain could still deploy sufficient front-line strength to defeat such opponents in a pitched battle. Since this was never enough to end the conflict, the problem was what would happen next.

Macmillan and Alexander told Churchill that, having acquired the military upper hand, a political solution was essential. Since King George II remained an obstacle to any settlement, they wanted to appoint the archbishop of Athens, Damaskinos Papandreou, as regent in his stead. As the one man who seemed to command respect from both sides, Archbishop Damaskinos had long been the hope of those who wanted a compromise. They hoped that he could hold an all-party conference that would lead to a truce.

In London, Churchill and Eden riled each other over Greece. The foreign secretary, sensitive after committing Commonwealth forces to a disastrous Greek expedition in 1941, and jealous of Macmillan, was seized by his periodic determination to be a great international statesman. With the backing of the rest of the War Cabinet, he argued for making the archbishop regent. Eden wanted to go to Athens and sort it out personally. Churchill – justifying all those concerns about his emotional attachment to defunct monarchs – refused to contemplate the idea. After yet another rambling performance by the prime minister was capped by the warning that the archbishop might become a religious dictator, an increasingly frustrated Attlee snapped that he hadn't presented 'a scintilla of evidence' to support his case. Suddenly, Churchill decided that he would go off and grapple with the issues himself. Eden would have to go along too. They arrived on Christmas Eve.⁶⁶

Riding in armoured cars through bullet-flecked streets, readying himself to shoot it out in case of an ELAS ambush, holing up in the still-besieged British Embassy: for Churchill this was the ideal adventure holiday. Having encountered Damaskinos in person, he executed another astounding U- turn, deciding that the archbishop would be an ideal regent and chairing a tense meeting of party representatives to foster reconciliation. While the archbishop continued the negotiations, on 28 December Churchill was persuaded to return to London to make sure that the Greek king accepted the deal. Here, as in Yugoslavia, Churchill proved pretty ruthless in abandoning Mediterranean monarchs when it came to getting Britain out of a hole. King George was told that if he didn't give way, the British government would recognize the regent in any case. When the king bowed to this logic, Damaskinos was able to form a new government in Athens, led by the right-wing republican General Plastiros.

Much concern had been expressed that British soldiers would resent being made to fight ELAS, and Churchill brought back with him censors' reports on the troops' letters to share with the War Cabinet. The selection did not suggest an entirely uncritical attitude to those who had ordered the expedition in London. 'If the people at home who are running this thing think they can smash it with armed force', wrote a sapper, 'they have another think coming; it might kill a few thousand, but that won't stop

them.' He thought it should have 'been settled in a civilized way between us and the parties here before it got too big'. A letter from an NCO gave an impression of how miserably savage the conflict was:

Army life has made me a lot harder than I was when I left home, but believe me all this has increased my feelings in this respect. To me now the talk of the beauties of Greece do not mean a thing, because if I had my way there wouldn't be any in a very short while. The methods of the fighting of these people are of the lowest, and that I do not like one scrap . . This is part of it I will never forget.

There was no suggestion, however, of soldiers being unwilling to fight. Some had arrived in Athens uncertain and suspicious that they were being used to re-assert royal rule, but their confrontation with ELAS had created its own dynamic. Having been greeted as liberators, they felt that they were being attacked by a vicious minority with no concern for civilians. They saw evidence of atrocities, and rumours ran riot that ELAS was working hand-in-hand with stay-behind parties of Italians and Germans. Soldiers were angry with newspapers that they thought were misrepresenting them to their families, and furious with politicians passing judgements from the safety of home. '[W]hen one stops to think over some of the things the MPs say about things they know nothing about', wrote a private in the 4th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, 'I begin to think some of them would make better "Road Sweepers".' In the words of an NCO:

Churchill's vote of confidence was a great pleasure to us. He is to blame, I think, for upholding the King and therefore putting us all in a position with regard to Greece, but I realise now that he knew a sound thing from a bad one and was right about EAM.

Or as an officer put it: 'I have not met anyone here who does not think that Churchill is taking the only step possible – and they are a long way from being 100 per cent Government supporters generally.'⁶⁷

'ONE DEGREE MORE READY TO BELIEVE THAT THE ONLY RELIABLE HELPING HAND IS SOVIET RUSSIA'

The chutzpah of Churchill's trip to Athens recovered some public support, but it didn't still the controversy about Greece. Labour constituency and trade union groups continued to pass resolutions critical of the prime minister. A BIPO poll conducted in January 1945 showed that while 81 per cent of those asked approved of 'Mr Churchill as Prime Minister', only 43 per cent approved of his 'attitude on the Greek question', with 38 per

cent disapproving and 19 per cent unwilling to express an opinion.⁶⁹ These were the lowest popularity ratings on an issue directly associated with Churchill at any point in his premiership.

Nor did the prime minister's visit halt the war of words between the British and American press. For all that they had criticized Churchill at the start of the Greek crisis, British journalists rallied to their country's defence when the Americans accused them of grasping imperialism. US complaints about British policy in the Mediterranean aroused a set of wellestablished prejudices among the British elite about their powerful but naive ally. These were expressed succinctly in an anonymous editorial in The Economist on 30 December 1944. A serious-minded weekly magazine, part-owned by Brendan Bracken, The Economist was then, as now, read by an internationally minded liberal elite on both sides of the Atlantic. As the year ended, it called out American double standards. Persistent US press claims that Britain wasn't playing its full part would have been bad enough from anyone, but 'from a nation that was practising cash-and-carry during the Battle of Britain, whose consumption has risen through the war years, which is still without a national service act – then it is not to be borne'. How dare the Americans, busy promising the Jews a homeland in Arab-majority Palestine, claim that Britain was abandoning the Atlantic Charter? How long should the British keep giving way, when each instance of US hypocrisy just made 'the ordinary Englishman . . . one degree more cynical about America's real intentions of active collaboration and one degree more ready to believe that the only reliable helping hand is Soviet Russia.'70

The article had been written by the magazine's editorial assistant, Barbara Ward, an Oxford-trained economist and Catholic campaigner against totalitarianism, whose work on Christian ethics in wartime, *The Defence of the West*, had led to regular appearances on the BBC's *Brains Trust*. Articulating attitudes that had often remained unspoken, it attracted a lot of attention in Whitehall and in Washington, and it was soon quoted and republished by newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic. American correspondents replied by praising the earlier sacrifices of the British people, but condemning their attachment to an empire that was all they had left.

One spur to Ward's article had been US newspaper complaints that British troops weren't bearing their fair share of the fighting in the Ardennes. British journalists responded with glee when the reporting blackout was lifted and news of Montgomery's appointment to command the northern flank of the 'Bulge' was announced on 5 January 1945.⁷² Two

days later, Montgomery gave a press conference at which he explained his role directing operations against the German drive towards the Meuse. Seeking to make amends to Eisenhower, Montgomery included a warm testimonial: 'I am devoted to Ike. We are the greatest of friends.' In front of journalists eager for a story, however, and without the guiding hand of de Guingand, who had been hospitalized with appendicitis, Montgomery couldn't help but talk up his own brilliance and the performance of British troops. The impression he gave was readily summed up by the next morning's *Daily Mail* headline: 'MONTGOMERY FORESAW ATTACK. HIS TROOPS WERE ALL READY TO MARCH. ACTED "ON OWN TO SAVE DAY". '73

Reports of what the British field marshal had said infuriated every American who read them. After Bradley made clear that Montgomery's command over US forces was strictly temporary in his own press conference, the tensions that had riven the generals in private moved into the open. British newspapers revelled in the fight between their country's foremost military celebrity and the arrogant Americans. Poor Eisenhower had to spend even more time smoothing Bradley's ruffled feathers. No American officer, he told Churchill, wanted to serve under the British field marshal. For a commander who was meant to be looking out for his country's national interests, it demonstrated very poor judgement on Montgomery's part. Though it further stoked up his reputation back home, the Americans would never forget or forgive this particular bit of witless self-aggrandizement.

Military childishness only contributed to the public din that now sound-tracked the Anglo-American alliance. From Roosevelt's perspective, however, a far more serious development had in the meantime taken place in Eastern Europe. On 1 January 1945, the Soviets announced that they were recognizing the Lublin Committee as the new provisional government of Poland. In London, reaction was muted. The British could not renounce their own commitment to the London Poles, but ministers and officials had already essentially written Poland off to the Red Army's advance. In Washington, in contrast, the Soviet démarche was greeted with deep gloom. Public reaction was much more negative than in the UK. The State Department tried to plan a response, but Roosevelt was no more interested than before in a precise new set of foreign policies. As the 'Big Three' settled the details of their next conference, which would take place in the Crimean resort of Yalta from 4 February, the president's focus sharpened. After the events of the winter, Yalta became a place not just to argue out the post-war international settlement, but also to win over the hearts and minds of the American people.⁷⁴

As the delegates began to prepare for their departure to the Crimea, the fighting in Greece came to a halt. On 11 January 1945, following Britishled military successes, the partial disintegration of EAM and negotiations begun by Archbishop Damaskinos, a truce was signed, which came into effect over the whole of Greece during the following days. A week later, with his case much bolstered by the apparent achievement of peace and the evidence of ELAS barbarity, the prime minister made a staunch defence of British actions to the Commons, castigating *The Times* to the delight of the Conservative backbenches. In the meantime, Churchill agreed to a Labour proposal for a trade union delegation, led by the general secretary of the TUC, Sir Walter Citrine, to tour Greece and report back.

Like Bevin, Citrine was a patriotic, responsible union leader who had worked alongside the government to ensure the smooth mobilization of wartime industry. He was also a tough critic of Communism who commanded a lot of respect within the Labour movement. At the start of February, having seen mass graves filled with brutally murdered bodies and listened as troops were given the chance to speak freely, the trade union delegation returned to the UK. In a series of newspaper articles and a radio broadcast, as well as the delegation's official report, Citrine backed the official version of events. Importantly, he emphasized that as far as British soldiers in Greece were concerned, they had been doing the right thing in fighting ELAS.⁷⁵

Shortly afterwards, on 12 February 1945, the Greeks negotiated the Varkiza Agreement, under which EAM agreed to stand down its fighters, surrender their arms, and take part in a British-sponsored referendum on the future of the monarchy and a future general election. Before long, however, hopes of a lasting peace would be disappointed. Rather than reunifying his country, the new premier, General Plastiros, preferred a brutal campaign of reprisals against the Greek left. Instead of a path to peaceful democracy, the Varkiza Agreement turned into a stepping-stone towards further bloody episodes of repression and, in little over a year, to another civil war.⁷⁶ All of that would have important implications for Britain's foreign and defence policies after 1945.

In the immediate aftermath of the agreement, however, a fragile peace did seem to have been achieved. The intervention in Greece, which had so suddenly erupted as the major political issue in late 1944, disappeared just as quickly from the British domestic agenda. A combination of ministerial firmness and effective party management meant that, despite its disagreements, Labour had been able to suture back together fierce divisions. As the fight against Hitler moved into its final weeks, the party

was pulled on by a new dynamic - the excitement of the general election which its members hoped would follow the end of the war.

26

'A wound in the mind'

February-April 1945

The planes carrying Roosevelt and Churchill to their conference with Stalin had touched down at the Crimean airfield of Saky just after midday on 4 February 1945. After seven hours in the air, they had to traverse another hundred miles of road before they reached the Black Sea resort of Yalta, where the conference was to be held. The first two and a half hours of the car journey were the worst. The Crimea had been the site of two bitter campaigns, and, to begin with, the cars crawled along cratered roads amid a blasted countryside. At 200-yard intervals on each side for the entire length of the journey stood Red Army soldiers, male and female, who sprang to attention as the cars passed. In Churchill's car, the occupants fortified themselves from a bottle of vintage brandy. As they climbed into the Taurus Mountains, the views improved but the pace did not. On they drove, into gathering darkness, the suddenly rigid figures of the sentries still punctuating their path. There was a long way to go yet.¹

For some time, it had been obvious that the leaders of the Grand Alliance needed another meeting. Much had been left undecided at Teheran or put off subsequently ahead of some future summit. The approach of victory in Europe required decisions to be made about their beaten enemy, and posed the question of whether — as Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill all hoped — they could continue to co-operate after their common enemy had been defeated.

Suggestions about where the three might meet had been bouncing back and forth since October 1944. Since Stalin refused to leave the USSR, the choice settled on Yalta. The temperate climate of the Black Sea riviera had made it a favourite with Tsarist nobles, Bolshevik apparatchiks and Nazi generals before it was recaptured by the Red Army in 1944. As the Soviets restored the palatial villas and made sure the listening devices worked, the British and American delegations had begun their epic journey, breaking for a brief preliminary meeting at Malta – from 30 January to 4 February –

before heading on to the Crimea.

Yalta was to be a multi-layered conference. The combined chiefs of staff would meet in session with their Soviet counterparts to talk through a co-ordinated strategy. The British, American and Soviet foreign ministers convened to do the diplomatic heavy lifting. And at the plenary meetings, the three men who had determined the course of the war would talk about how to sort out the peace.

Pinning down an agenda proved very difficult, but what the participants wanted to achieve was fairly clear. After the events of the winter, there was a strong shared need for a show of alliance unity. With the failure of the 1919 peace conference in mind, they wanted to make the post-war world before the fighting on Notwithstanding Roosevelt's pledges at Teheran, the Soviets wanted firm signs that the Americans, like the British, accepted their primacy in Eastern Europe. The British, though they recognized that the Polish problem must be resolved, looked further west: to Germany, and particularly to French involvement in its occupation. The Americans did not wish to get embroiled in European complexities that might further disenchant domestic opinion. They wanted to resolve the issues left over from the Dumbarton Oaks talks to allow the new United Nations Organization to come into being, and to guarantee that the Red Army would take on the Japanese in East Asia.

For Churchill, the approach of another great conference was an ambiguous affair, as any such meeting had to be after Teheran. Against the excitement of another encounter between great men was his own frustrated awareness of the dreadful diminishment of British power that had taken place during his premiership. He remained committed to the Moscow Agreement, but the winter of 1944–5 had made him even more doubtful of Britain's ability to bear the cost of leading and defending the West. Churchill was eager to rescue the Anglo-American relationship from the nadir to which it had sunk by the start of 1945. The Roosevelt administration's strong reaction to the establishment of the Lublin government raised his hopes of arraying America alongside Britain to hold back Communism in Europe without driving Stalin into irrevocable hostility.

With German armour committed to the Ardennes and to fighting a Soviet invasion of Hungary, the Red Army launched its winter offensive on the Eastern Front in January 1945. Blows in East Prussia and near Krakow soaked up German reserves before the main attack began just south of Warsaw. The Germans, running short of men, equipment and fuel,

soon cracked, and the Soviet generals unleashed their tanks across eastern Germany. By the end of January, they had established bridgeheads on the far side of the Oder river and were within sixty miles of Berlin. To the west, the Allies were still planning how to close up to the Rhine. At the end of December 1944, Eisenhower had sent Tedder to Moscow to open his own strategic connection to Stalin and ask him to keep the Germans busy in March, when SHAEF hoped finally to cross the river. The Soviet dictator readily offered his support. He was fascinated to hear about the devastation unleashed by the Allied air forces, and the critical effect they were having on German oil production.²

Everyone was worried about how the war would end. Stalin, with his habitual paranoia, feared the British and Americans stitching up a deal with the Germans. British Ultra decrypts showed leading Nazis exploring whether the Japanese could help them broker a separate peace with Stalin. Even assuming the Grand Alliance held together, it looked as if the final campaigns would be long and expensive. Following the failure of the Ardennes offensive, the Germans began to transfer forces eastwards to resist the new Red Army attack. In the West, the colossal effort required to get across the Rhine might be only the start of a brutal fight to complete the defeat of Germany. From the start of 1945, SHAEF intelligence analysts grew increasingly concerned that diehard Nazis were planning to retreat to a 'National Redoubt' in the mountains of Bavaria and Austria. There they would hold out to the bitter end, killing as many Allied soldiers as possible.

The prospect of the war dragging on was awful for the Soviets, now running out of men in the vicious struggle in the east, and for the Americans, already eager to get out of Europe and transfer their soldiers to the Pacific. It was even worse for the British, with their relative strength declining, their European commitments piling up, and the reconversion of their economy barely getting under way. In expectation of a long fight to the finish, the British and Canadians prepared to scale back operations in Italy and transfer a quarter of a million men north to provide the reinforcements for the final German campaign.

British fears spurred more debates about strategy and another scheme to reconfigure the high command. Determined to redeem himself, Bradley wanted to keep attacking until he had eliminated the 'Bulge'. He drove his armies forward through terrible weather and difficult terrain. Further south, a subsidiary German attack had sparked another Alliance squabble when the French refused to withdraw from newly liberated Strasbourg. There, too, fierce fighting continued over the winter. Meanwhile

Montgomery planned twin offensives in the north to pinch out the thick defences on the near side of the Rhine north of Dusseldorf. Operation 'Veritable' would drive south from the salient formed during the Arnhem battles, while Operation 'Grenade' struck north from the Roer. With a secure position on the left bank, the Allies would be able to assault across the Rhine. To launch his offensive, Montgomery needed the US First Army to carry out 'Grenade', and a promise of the supplies to keep his armies moving as they drove into Germany. As far as he was concerned, that meant closing down Bradley's operations to the south, so that the American armies could prepare themselves to exploit his own successful attack.

Under pressure from his squabbling subordinates, Eisenhower tried to balance their competing demands. As far as Montgomery and Brooke were concerned, this meant repeating his earlier errors: allowing American strength to waste away in fruitless battles and dispersing Allied forces along the whole west bank of the Rhine. Montgomery kept his counsel with Eisenhower — while venting his complaints to the CIGS — but Brooke's frustration led him to go along with a new Churchillian manoeuvre to replace Tedder with Alexander as the British deputy supreme commander at SHAEF. Having accepted the drawing down of Commonwealth forces in Italy, the prime minister didn't want to see his favourite general languishing in the Mediterranean. As a soldier, he speculated, Alexander might provide Eisenhower with better advice. At the end of December 1944, with Tedder absent in Moscow, Churchill sounded out Ike, telling him that he wanted the airman for an important job back in London. Air Chief Marshal Portal was not impressed.

Strategy and command were on the agenda for discussion at Malta. Roosevelt timed his arrival to ensure that he couldn't hold any in-depth talks with Churchill, so the prime minister was left waiting in bed aboard a British cruiser. The combined chiefs, however, took the chance to approve Mountbatten's plans to move on to Malaya after Burma, and to disagree about Eisenhower and the defeat of Germany.

Ike had prepared an assessment of the situation that bore out British fears that he was dissipating Allied efforts: Brooke came ready to blow it out of the water. Eisenhower, however, sent his thicker-carapaced chief of staff, Bedell Smith, to explain SHAEF's strategy. Bedell Smith made clear that priority would be given to Twenty-First Army Group, while Bradley prepared another, more easily supplied attack further south. Once across the Rhine, this would drive north through Frankfurt to link up with Montgomery's advance on the far side of the Ruhr. The plan gave the

British much of what they wanted, without giving up the opportunities that were opening up as the Soviet winter offensive charged forward in the east. Brooke tried to tie things down more precisely, but the Americans did not yield to his entreaties. Churchill showed little interest in the disputes when he and the finally arrived Roosevelt met with the chiefs. With little time left for anything other than pleasantries, he had other things on his mind.³ From Malta the two delegations flew on to the Crimea.

'WE HAVE WITHIN REACH A VERY GREAT PRIZE'

As at Teheran, the great men circled round each other at Yalta, sniffing the air, sending out signals and trying to establish where the others stood. Churchill got the first meeting with Stalin, before the Soviet dictator passed on for a talk with Roosevelt. Once again, the president tried to show there would be no Anglo-American ganging up by disparaging the British. When the principals held their first plenary meeting, they discussed the strategic situation, and Stalin emphasized the heavy price paid by the Soviets for victory. That evening, at the first conference dinner, he took offence when Roosevelt informed him that the Western leaders called him 'Uncle Joe'. Churchill rushed to fill the uncomfortable silence with an over-wordy toast.⁴

The next day, they talked about what to do with Germany, confirming the details of the terms on which they would accept a surrender and the delineation of the three occupation zones that their forces would control. Roosevelt rejected Churchill's appeals for France to be given an equal role. Stalin was disappointed that the British and Americans would not immediately agree to Germany being permanently dismembered, or accept a Soviet plan to extract \$20 billion of reparations over the following ten years (half of which would go to the USSR), taken in kind via the confiscation of industrial machinery and manufactures. Roosevelt agreed that Germany should be harshly punished but was non-committal about the means. Churchill opposed demands that would impoverish the densely populated British occupation zone, leaving London paying to feed starving Germans while they worked to redeem their war debts to the USSR.⁵

From the British point of view, the conference was going badly. Roosevelt appeared uninterested. The president chaired all the plenary sessions, but he was plainly very ill: his face cadaverous and sometimes blank, he interjected only when Hopkins passed him a note. With

Roosevelt apparently content to let the Soviets have their way, Churchill was forced to mark out his differences with Stalin. The prime minister's seeming solicitude for the Germans re-pricked Stalin's fears for the solidity of the alliance.

On the following day, the plenary turned to the topics on which Roosevelt and Stalin really wanted progress. The Soviet leader stalled a discussion on the United Nations with complaints about small nations being allowed to criticize great powers. He wanted to see what the Americans were going to offer on Eastern Europe. Roosevelt conceded changes in Poland's borders, but stood up for its independence, calling for a broad-based provisional government to replace the Lublin Poles. This was a significant departure from his previous reluctance to involve himself in European affairs.

Churchill, spotting the opportunity, piled in behind, insisting that Polish autonomy — in domestic, if not in foreign affairs — must be guaranteed. For once, Stalin was forced on to the defensive. That evening, Hopkins helped State Department officials draft a letter for the Soviet leader, proposing that he invite a representative delegation of Polish politicians to Yalta. They would form a presidential council to agree an interim government. Asked to comment, the British happily wrote in the names of three London Poles who would have to be included. The letter went off to Stalin.⁶

Faced with American hard bargaining, at the next plenary session on 7 February, Stalin proposed an enticing deal. He and Molotov accepted the US proposal for voting rights in the UN and agreed to attend the founding conference, now scheduled for April in San Francisco. They offered to involve the British and American ambassadors in the selection of a new Polish provisional government, which would include politicians from non-Communist parties. Roosevelt and Churchill expressed their delight. Meeting with Roosevelt separately before the next session the following day, Stalin agreed to bring Soviet forces into the war against Japan three months after the conclusion of hostilities against Germany. The president agreed expansively to Stalin's demands for territory and ports in the Far East, at the expense of China as well as Japan. Having settled this agreement, the American and Soviet leaders then gave it to Churchill, who had otherwise not been consulted, to add his signature as well.

Then they moved on to the formal discussion. Churchill followed up the American approach of the previous two days, proposing a new Polish government be constructed from scratch. Stalin counter-attacked, contrasting Soviet polices in Poland with what the British had done in Greece. To Churchill's surprise, Roosevelt suddenly withdrew from his earlier tough line and said that the main thing was free elections in Poland. Stalin assured him these could be held in a month's time. That was good enough for the president. He was ready to move on.⁸

Having got what they wanted over the United Nations, the Americans seemed to retreat even faster over the next couple of days: abandoning the presidential council, accepting that all the ambassadors would do was modify the existing Lublin government, and ditching plans for Western observers to monitor the Polish elections. Roosevelt did, however, put forward a public statement – the Declaration of Liberated Europe – which committed all three governments to re-establish peace, organize emergency relief and form representative governments that could hold free elections. Binding America as it did to post-war European outcomes, this too was potentially a remarkable new step. Roosevelt, however, allowed Molotov to denature it, stripping out the requirement that democratic structures ought to be set up straight away.⁹

Churchill, exposed as he tried to stand up for the Poles, endured bruising comments from Stalin. Queries about democracy in Egypt joined the barbed comments on Greece. On 9 February, poorly prepared for a discussion of United Nations' trusteeships, Churchill mistakenly assumed that Stettinius meant them to include the whole of the British Empire. He blew up spectacularly, to Stalin's delight. 'After we have done our best to fight in this war and have done no crime to anyone', the prime minister declaimed, 'I will have no suggestion that the British Empire is to be put into the dock and examined by everybody to see that it is up to their standard.' Or as one of the American minute-takers noted down: 'Never, Never, Never . . . Every scrap of terr. over which the British flag flies is immune.' 11

Not so much as Churchill wished. In the adjournment that followed Churchill's outburst, the State Department official Alger Hiss (another Soviet spy) composed a quick note of what had already been agreed with the Foreign Office. This was quickly agreed by the president and prime minister. The United Nations would not, as Churchill feared, take the whole British Empire into trust, but it would become responsible for former enemy colonies and the League of Nations mandates. That meant that the British administration of Palestine would be subject to international scrutiny. If Churchill's expostulations were awkward, his instinct – that the Americans wanted to open both the British and the Soviet empires to judgement – was ultimately well founded. Still riled, he again missed the point later in the same session, when Roosevelt presented

the Declaration of Liberated Europe. Outraged, the prime minister launched into a lengthy explanation of why the Atlantic Charter did not apply to the British Empire. The president was plainly irritated as well as bored.¹³

At the end of the plenary on 10 February, the president suddenly announced that everything needed to be wrapped up quickly because he was leaving the following afternoon. Concerned at criticism from Zionist supporters in Congress, he'd already arranged a series of meetings with the monarchs of Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Ethiopia to discuss how to accommodate Europe's Jews. It wouldn't do to keep the kings waiting. This left very little time to draw the conference to a conclusion, let alone to keep going with negotiations that Churchill felt were half-finished. 'Franklin, you cannot go,' he said. 'We have within reach a very great prize.' Pleased that the Americans were involving themselves in the future of Europe, the British were disappointed that the president had backed down so completely to Soviet demands.

Roosevelt was 'behaving very badly', the prime minister complained to his doctor. Looking at the president's empty stare and hanging mouth, Moran diagnosed arteriosclerosis in the brain and thought he had only a few months to live. Eden was also struck by Roosevelt's 'failing powers'. In retrospect, however, he argued (perhaps more perceptively) that while illness might have affected the president's behaviour, it hadn't diminished his control over the conference. 17

Roosevelt was persuaded to delay his departure by a night to make sure that the final communiqué could be assembled. Changing his mind, he agreed to British requests that France be given an occupation zone in Germany. Stalin swiftly followed suit. Taken together with the agreement on the United Nations and Poland, this meant that the British too could depart in optimistic mood. His faltering health notwithstanding, Roosevelt had got what he had come for: a Soviet promise to take part in the United Nations (albeit, somewhat embarrassingly, with three General Assembly votes), an agreement on elections in Poland and the Declaration of Liberated Europe, and a firm commitment to the war against Japan. The Soviet Union had been cemented into the international system he wanted in place before the end of the war. He could present the American people with an attractive vision of Europe moving towards freedom, independence and democracy. 19

This was a long way from the reality of tightening Communist rule in Eastern Europe, but the dichotomy between the intentions of the Soviet

government and the desires of his own people was not one that Roosevelt had at any point chosen to confront. Since Stalin had rolled back from concrete commitments over Poland, the British and Americans had simply to hope that the Soviets would keep their promises. As Stalin, Molotov and Churchill all to some extent recognized, however, the Soviets' acceptance of Roosevelt's high international diction mattered. It set a high public standard against which their behaviour could be held to account. That the Soviets nonetheless signed up to the Polish Agreement and the Declaration of Liberated Europe shows just how important Stalin felt it was to maintain the unity of the Grand Alliance right through until the end of the The president's improvisations would have further-reaching consequences than anyone at Yalta anticipated. He had created a linkage between American and European politics. Over the months and years to come, this connection would overturn past expectations and create remarkable opportunities, not least for that fading imperialist, Winston Churchill.²⁰

'A MADNESS TAKES OVER, DRIVING YOU ON'

On 8 February 1945, Montgomery's First Canadian Army began Operation 'Veritable', the first part of the pincer movement to secure the west bank of the Rhine. It was a difficult landscape to attack: wooded ridges intersecting low-lying farmland, much of it flooded, and blocked to the north with the dense forest of the Reichswald. Thawing snow and rain coated everything in mud. Through this, the Germans had constructed the Siegfried Line: three thick defence belts of earthworks, pillboxes, antitank ditches, minefields and barbed wire. Every farmhouse had been turned into a miniature fortress, many of them daubed with slogans urging on defiance: 'Victory or Siberia', 'Better Death than Tyranny'.²¹

To break into this position, British Commonwealth troops employed the usual mix of intense firepower and armoured engineering. Five hundred bombers dropped more than 2,000 tons of bombs. Then a thousand pieces of artillery and twelve 32-barrelled rocket launchers opened fire. Anti-aircraft guns, tanks and anti-tank guns, mortars and machine guns deluged the German lines in a 'Pepperpot' designed to exhaust the defenders. Ground attack aircraft added their cannon and rockets to the din.

Watching the bombardment, Stanley Whitehouse, a lance corporal with the Black Watch, found it eased his fears about the resistance they might meet. As Whitehouse's unit moved forward, however, the smoke shells that were meant to screen their advance fell among them instead. Whitehouse had been in action almost since D-Day. He 'hugged the ground, paralysed with fear. How could they miss me? It was among the most terrifying experiences of my life.'

Before the attack entered the forest, a man nearby was killed by misdirected fire from another platoon. Whitehouse's corporal lost a foot to a mine. The platoon couldn't find the anti-tank ditch that was their objective. Behind them, company headquarters was hit by a shell. To his disgust, the two new recruits in Whitehouse's section held their weapons the wrong way and played no part in the attack. Nonetheless, the assault went on, into the darkness of the shattered forest, up a rise, then into a firefight with the defenders:

'Keep going, keep going' urged our platoon commander . . . what else could we do? In these circumstances, a madness takes over, driving you on. Fear is no longer a foe, being somehow pushed into the background, to re-emerge only after the action is over.

The Germans ran and the British dug themselves in to the soft forest soil. The two new men had vanished: perhaps taken by a German patrol, Whitehouse thought, more likely had run off towards the rear.²²

As artillery fire and hundreds of armoured vehicles reduced the roads to quagmires, 'Veritable' became a muddy, close-quarter infantry battle. Bad weather hindered air support. Troops fought their way through wrecked towns. Some Germans were very ready to surrender; others were determined to hold on even when their pillboxes were attacked by flamethrowing tanks. British armour got bogged down. Infantrymen slogged their way forward through the trees and rubble. Reinforcements sat shivering in carriers on the traffic-jammed tracks behind, hoping they wouldn't be caught by German mortars. On 23 February 1945, Montgomery ordered the US Ninth Army to open its offensive, Operation 'Grenade', in the south, while Canadian and British troops continued the 'Veritable' attacks in the north. It took them until 10 March to clear the way to the Rhine. Forty thousand Germans had been killed or wounded and another 50,000 taken prisoner, for the loss of 15,500 British and Canadian casualties. The ugly, ferociously intense battle showed how close the Allies were coming to victory.²³

Meanwhile, Eisenhower saw off the attempt to install Alexander at SHAEF. On 22 February 1945, he wrote to Brooke explaining that, though the British could appoint whoever they liked as his deputy, if they brought in Alexander he would be employed not as a land forces commander, but

to organize issues of civil administration. With Marshall's backing, and 3 million US soldiers compared to 1 million British and Canadians under his command, Eisenhower had no intention of strengthening his critics. A relieved Tedder stayed where he was.²⁴

'MERE ACTS OF TERROR AND WANTON DESTRUCTION'

Given the fears of prolonged German resistance, there seemed no reason to scale back the strategic bombing campaign. On the contrary, weakening defences meant air attacks could be stepped up. With a weapon of unprecedented strength at their disposal, Allied air commanders hoped further hammer blows would speed the end of the war. During the first four months of 1945, Bomber Command and the US Eighth Air Force dropped 368,976 tons of bombs – a total divided almost equally between them and only slightly less than that of all the ordnance dropped by the strategic air forces operating from the UK between the start of the war and March 1944.

On 13 and 14 February 1945, they hit the German city of Dresden, in what was subsequently to become the most infamous bombing raid of the war. Dresden had previously not been subjected to heavy bombing, mainly because it was so distant from Allied bases, but also because, although it had plenty of war-related industries, none of them featured particularly highly on the list of priority targets. At the start of 1945, however, Dresden became a key rail hub in front of the Soviet armies advancing from the east, and through which German forces might be moved towards the mythical National Redoubt.²⁷

Dresden was part of a pattern, not an aberration. Before the Yalta conference, Churchill was keen that Allied bombers should help the Red Army. He pushed the Air Ministry for plans to attack cities in the path of the Soviet advance. Harris was instructed to prepare raids on Berlin, Chemnitz, Leipzig and Dresden, while Tedder drew up a new campaign plan incorporating these city attacks. They were aimed at morale as well as transport and they were meant to cause high civilian casualties. The cities were known to be flooded with refugees fleeing from the Red Army westwards. This made them more attractive targets: the presence of so many civilians would worsen the confusion and increase the strain on German communications. The raids were promised to the Soviets during

the military meetings at Yalta, and during February 1945 all the target cities were hit by British and American bombers.

In good weather, and with minimal disruption from anti-aircraft fire or night-fighters, the main force of 796 Lancasters that attacked Dresden on the night of 13–14 February achieved an unusually close concentration of bombs. The result was a firestorm that destroyed much of the city centre. The column of fire and smoke rose 15,000 feet in the air. The best estimate was that 25,000 people were killed. The next day, the Americans tried to hit Dresden's marshalling yards. Bombing through the thick cloud of ash still over the city, they succeeded only in hitting more areas of civilian housing.

At the time, largely accidentally, Dresden was marked out as different. On 16 February, an RAF officer at SHAEF gave a news conference in which he discussed in unusually direct terms, and seemingly without expecting a stir, the way in which the civilian population was being targeted by both Allied air forces. An Associated Press report of this conversation, treating the news that the Allies were now pursuing a strategy of 'deliberate terror bombing' as a revelation, got past the censor and was widely published in the American press. Since the USAAF had always presented its operations as precision attacks, this sparked a debate about bombing policy in the United States. Goebbels responded swiftly to the raid, releasing details of horrendous civilian suffering to the neutral press, including the figure that 250,000 Germans had been killed. In Britain, the AP wire report was suppressed, but news from overseas about 'terror bombing' soon made its way into the public sphere. Before long, British critics of bombing on moral grounds were quoting Goebbels' figure of casualties as fact.²⁸

The bombing raids continued. Ten days after Dresden, 380 British bombers hit the city of Pforzheim for the first and only time. Eighty-three per cent of the city was destroyed and almost 18,000 people, one in four of the inhabitants, killed. Relative to the city's size, it was the most lethal British raid of the whole war. During March 1945, Bomber Command dropped more than 30,000 tons of bombs on city targets – almost 50 per cent more than it had done in the month of the Dresden raid. The already badly bombed cities of Cologne and Essen were hit again in attacks that did little more than rake over the rubble. Against Dortmund on 12 March, 1,087 British aircraft dropped 4,851 tons of bombs, a record for a single raid. Meanwhile a series of smaller German cities – Würzberg, Hildesheim, Paderborn and Plauen – were subjected to devastating attacks, none of them subsequently nearly so well remembered.²⁹

On 28 March, Churchill wrote to Portal querying the city-bombing strategy, noting that 'the destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing', and demanding 'more precise concentration on military objectives . . . rather than on mere acts of terror and wanton destruction, however impressive'. 30 It was easy to interpret this as Churchill putting a wise-after-the-event spin on the documentary record, and Portal insisted that the prime minister rewrite the minute. For all the ferociousness with which he had spoken of the bombers as Britain's salvation in 1940, however, Churchill had always been ambiguous about their use, suspicious of claims that aerial bombardment alone was going to win the war and even – at the other end of the emotional spectrum that saw him calling for retaliatory gas attacks after the V1 offensive – doubtful that the 'beastliness' of bombing could be justified. Putting his concerns about Dresden into writing indicated a striking change in his priorities. By the end of March, unlike at the beginning of February, the Western Allies were over the Rhine and charging into Germany.

Rather than the opening battles in a long campaign to cross the Rhine, Operations 'Veritable' and 'Grenade' were the last highly organized defensive actions that the Germans fought in the west. As in Normandy, Hitler's determination not to yield ground meant that when the front finally broke, there wasn't much behind. With artillery ammunition as well as fuel running short, and German forces shuttling east to stop the Russian drive on Berlin, Eisenhower's troops were about to burst through the crust of German resistance. On 7 March 1945, soldiers from the US First Army seized the bridge at Remagen intact: Bradley's Twelfth Army Group was across the Rhine. Further south, the US Third and Seventh Armies advanced quickly towards and over the river. On 22 March, Patton's soldiers formed another bridgehead at Oppenheim, southwest of Frankfurt.

In contrast, Twenty-First Army Group's planners staged another setpiece offensive to get across the Rhine. An amphibious assault, Operation 'Plunder', was accompanied by airborne landings, Operation 'Varsity': another demonstration of overwhelming mechanical might, involving 32,000 vehicles, more than 3,000 guns and 10,000 aircraft.³¹ With Brooke and Churchill watching, the attack went ahead on 24 March. It was a complete success, but the time it had taken to assemble and launch meant that, far from taking the lead into Germany, the British now lagged behind the Americans. By 27 March 1945, with all Eisenhower's armies on the eastern side of the Rhine and poised to advance against a disintegrating enemy, the momentum was with the US generals. As the western offensive picked up speed, the Soviets accelerated their plans for a final attack

towards Berlin. At last, the end really was in sight, but the agreements reached at Yalta were already starting to unravel.

'ARE THEY TO BE MASTERS IN THEIR OWN HOUSE?'

During the second half of February, the American press reacted ecstatically to the image of their president bringing democracy to the world. Soviet newspapers cheered, cautiously, the demonstration of Allied unity. British newspapers, reflecting a strong briefing from the government, were also very positive. On his return to London, Churchill reported back, with guarded optimism, to the Cabinet. The political parallel inherent in rearranging Eastern European borders was obvious, but not, he thought, informative. 'Poor Neville Chamberlain believed he could trust Hitler. He was wrong', he told ministers, 'But I don't think I'm wrong about Stalin.' While he remained in power in the Kremlin, 'Anglo-Russian friendship could be maintained'.³²

It was clear that a small group of Conservative backbenchers would speak out against the fate being inflicted on Poland. By 20 February 1945, Churchill and Eden decided that they would ask the Commons to divide over whether to approve the Yalta agreements, turning the decision into another vote of confidence. Expressions of disquiet about Poland must be matched with a demonstration of faith in the government's competence.³³ Meanwhile, there was further news of Communist brutality in Poland, where opponents of the Lublin regime were being arrested, deported and killed. Simultaneously, Soviet officials flexed their muscles in Romania, where – on 27 February 1945, the same day that the prime minister was due to open the debate on Yalta - a coup established a Communistdominated government. Conscious of the charge that he was yielding to Stalin, Churchill wanted to defend the Yalta settlement and do what he could for the Poles. He also, however, saw a chance to pursue his longdesired transatlantic partnership. In committing his country to a democratic future for Poland, Roosevelt had inadvertently handed the prime minister an alternative to the strictly European deal he had been forced to accept at Quebec and Moscow in the autumn of 1944. Without yet abandoning the Moscow Agreement, Churchill could use the questions left unresolved at Yalta visibly to align the United Kingdom more closely with the United States. The prime minister was about to do something disruptive.

Asking MPs to endorse the Yalta declarations, Churchill gave a generally approving speech, explaining the decisions reached over

Germany and the United Nations and strongly defending the redrawing of Poland's borders as a policy of 'broad justice'. His tone was stern, rather than triumphant. Acknowledging the difficulties of reaching an international settlement, he emphasized that the Yalta deal was the best that could be done in the circumstances. Several Conservative MPs spoke against the government, including the right-winger Victor Raikes and Chamberlain's former parliamentary private secretary Lord Dunglass (later to become prime minister as Sir Alec Douglas-Home). Some of the rebels put up an amendment regretting the imposition of territorial changes and forms of government on liberated countries against their will. When the House divided on the amendment, it was defeated by 396 votes to 25, and the original motion approved by 413 votes to nil.³⁴

The really significant feature of this debate, however, was not the echoes of appeasement, but rather the way that Churchill, the first of the 'Big Three' to speak publicly about what had been agreed in the Crimea, chose to define their agreements. While the Americans lauded Roosevelt's democratic achievements, and the Soviets Stalin's unifying leadership, Churchill talked up the problem at the heart of the Yalta accords. Of course Poland's borders must be moved, he told the House:

The home of the Poles is settled. Are they to be masters in their own house? Are they to be free, as we in Britain and the United States or France are free? Are their sovereignty and their independence to be untrammelled, or are they to become a mere projection of the Soviet State, forced against their will by an armed minority, to adopt a Communist or totalitarian system? Well, I am putting the case in all its bluntness . . . Where does Poland stand? Where do we all stand on this? 35

It was not a question that either Roosevelt or Stalin really wanted anyone to ask. The American president had written high aspirations into the Yalta communiqué. Churchill left no doubt whose fault it would be if they broke down:

I know of no Government which stands to its obligations . . . more solidly than the Russian Soviet Government. I decline absolutely to embark here on a discussion about Russian good faith . . . Sombre indeed would be the fortunes of mankind if some awful schism arose between the Western democracies and the Russian Soviet Union, if all the future world organisation were rent asunder, and if new cataclysms of inconceivable violence destroyed all that is left of the treasures and liberties of mankind. 36

Speaking so 'honestly' ran the risk of incurring American disfavour. Yet the potential benefits were clear. By pointing out the mismatch between ideals and practice, the prime minister could put the Soviets on their mettle and perhaps secure better treatment for the Poles. No matter how the Soviets responded, moreover, insisting on democratic obligations put Britain and America in the same 'Western' camp. Here was a very great difference between Churchill and 'poor Neville Chamberlain': not just the gambler's instinct and the revelling in confrontation, but the creation of a concrete American commitment connecting the politics of Washington to the affairs of Eastern Europe.

'THE HANDS OF COMRADESHIP IN THE FUTURE GUIDANCE OF THE WORLD'

Roosevelt's attention was now centred on the inaugural conference of the United Nations, which he expected to chair in San Francisco from 25 April 1945. It was to be the culmination of his wartime presidency and the best chance of engaging the American people with the future of the world. On 1 March 1945, finally back in Washington, he gave his State of the Union Address. He tried to damp down unrealistic expectations, but also reemphasized the universal democratic values embodied in the Yalta declarations. The president did not want a dispute with the Soviets that might undermine the mood but building up Yalta in this way played into British hands. Both Downing Street and the Foreign Office had realized what a useful diplomatic tool the Declaration of Liberated Europe really was. Since the Soviets would never measure up to the standards Roosevelt had set, the British could use it to lever American backing.

The Soviets reacted cleverly to Churchill's public discussion of his doubts. Molotov suddenly stopped helping the British and American ambassadors to check on the activities of the Polish government. The Soviet press began to criticize British conduct in Greece. This response was sufficiently subtle not to require a response from Roosevelt. From March through to the start of April 1945, as the tally of Communist abuses rose – including the disappearance of sixteen leaders of the Polish Home Army who had been invited to Moscow for talks – the prime minister subjected the president to a barrage of telegrams proposing a joint message of protest to Stalin. Leahy and the State Department, responding in Roosevelt's name and with his approval, rejected these appeals and sought to calm the clamour from Europe.

Given their Yalta commitments, however, the Americans could not invite the still-unreformed Lublin government to send a representative to San Francisco. Stalin, seeking to reassert the quid pro quo he plainly thought had been established in the Crimea, refused to let Molotov attend. This proved a much more direct challenge to the president's equilibrium

than anything then happening in Poland. At the end of March 1945, Roosevelt informed Churchill that he would protest to Moscow. Simultaneously, Churchill wrote to Stalin criticizing Soviet intransigence and warning him 'not to smite down the hands of comradeship in the future guidance of the world'.³⁷

Then Stalin received intelligence of secret negotiations taking place in Switzerland between Allied representatives and a German general who had promised to surrender the armies in Italy. The talks went nowhere, but the fact that Soviet envoys had not been included provoked his suspicions. He wrote in blunt terms to Roosevelt, accusing him of lying and the British of trying to go behind his back. Churchill stirred the pot, warning the president that Stalin's anger might 'foreshadow some deep change of policy', and insisting they must take a stand together. 'If they are ever convinced that we are afraid of them and can be bullied into submission', he wrote to Roosevelt, 'I should despair of our future relations with them and much else.'³⁸

At the same time, the balance of military momentum between the Western and Eastern Fronts underwent a dramatic change. The British and American armies surged out of their bridgeheads on the Rhine, advancing rapidly against fracturing resistance. Incredibly, their pace made it appear that they could reach Berlin before the Soviets, then still readying their final offensive. This was not a chance that Eisenhower was willing to take. On 28 March, he contacted Stalin directly to inform him that he would not march on Berlin, and that he would concentrate his drive towards Leipzig instead. It was already clear that Eisenhower's troops would move beyond the boundaries of the Soviet occupation zone as agreed at Yalta. Since the Red Army was already positioned to take the German capital, Eisenhower could see no military reason to fight for it. On the contrary, he was much more concerned about the need to prevent the Nazis defending the National Redoubt. Marshall supported the supreme commander.

Eisenhower's decision not to head for Berlin had important implications for the national contingents under his command. Until this point, Twenty-First Army Group's place on the left of the Allied line, on the most direct route towards the Ruhr and Berlin, had made its own case for the British being given the primary role in the advance. Now they began to be left behind. At the end of March, the First and Ninth US Armies (the latter now detached from the Twenty-First Army Group) surrounded the Ruhr, encircled more than 300,000 German troops in a huge pocket, and removed a major threat from the north to Bradley's Twelfth US Army Group in its drive across central Germany. Over the

next two weeks, the Ninth, First and Third US Armies raced eastwards. While the Canadians cleared starving Holland, the British advanced quickly towards Hanover and Bremen. They had been relegated to guarding the American flank.

The Joint Intelligence Committee in London did not agree with SHAEF's assessment of the risk of a last-ditch German stand to the south. Montgomery, Brooke and Churchill all thought Eisenhower was trying to make sure that the Americans got the credit for victory. There was certainly a mood of satisfaction at SHAEF at Montgomery getting his just desserts. Quite aside from Berlin, Churchill thought that Western forces ought to be taking territory that could be bartered with Stalin at a future peace conference. On 5 April 1945, he wrote to Roosevelt to ask him to overrule Eisenhower and the joint chiefs and get Western troops as far east as possible.

The president, his health worsening, had retired to the resort at Warm Springs to recuperate before San Francisco. Leahy replied in his name, rejecting Churchill's request. He reassured the prime minister that the Allied armies would soon be in a position to take a 'tougher' stance with the Soviets. Churchill was encouraged, but in one of the few telegrams that Roosevelt drafted himself after his arrival at Warm Springs the president shied away from any confrontation. Problems with the Soviets ought to be minimized, he told the prime minister on 11 April, since they seemed 'to arise every day and most of them straighten out . . . We must be firm, however, and our course thus far is correct.' The next day, shortly after one o'clock in the afternoon, Roosevelt died of a massive cerebral haemorrhage.

In Britain, news of his death came as a dismal surprise. There was a sense of tragedy that a great Allied leader should not have survived to see the moment of final victory. In the Commons, wrote James Chuter Ede, the Labour junior education minister, in his diary, the news came as

a terrible shock . . . The PM speaking under deep emotion, which made every individual word sound like a separate effort, moved that the House should at once adjourn. This was at once accepted and the House rose at 11.7. The House has never before adjourned as a mark of respect to a person not a British subject. 40

There was genuine sorrow at the loss of a man who was known to have helped Britain survive the darkest hours of the war. As a forty-year-old working-class woman interviewed by Mass-Observation explained:

I don't know where we'd be if it wasn't for Roosevelt sending us food and munitions on that Lend-Lease plan . . . Yes, he made his countrymen agree to it . . . The others where I work, they're terribly grieved . . . I expect the strain and worry finished him. We've

She went on:

I expect Churchill will go next. They say he drinks a lot. I liked Roosevelt better, he was a man of the people. Churchill's an old trollope [sic] . . . – doesn't care for anybody except his own class. 41

'And now I suppose we've got to learn about Truman', a middle-class man in his thirties told the interviewers. 'He sounds a very ordinary type. And he <u>looks</u> a very ordinary type.'⁴²

In background, manner and character, Harry Truman was indeed very different from his predecessor. Midwestern striver rather than Hudson Valley patrician, Truman lacked Roosevelt's slippery stardust, but exuded common-sense solidity. Characteristically of Roosevelt's administration, the vice president had been completely excluded from discussions of foreign affairs and strategy and had to be briefed at speed on his predecessor's policies. He was keen to stamp his authority but was feeling his way, with Roosevelt's great international project unfinished and the post-war relationship between the great powers in flux.

Eager as ever to reinforce the Anglo-American relationship, Churchill wanted to fly over for Roosevelt's funeral and meet his successor. Eden, however, was already scheduled to depart for the United States for the San Francisco conference. Looking forward to acting as a statesman in his own right, Eden tried to persuade the prime minister that they shouldn't both be out of the country at the same time. Churchill stayed at home, where he lachrymosely led the obsequies to Roosevelt in Westminster Abbey and the House of Commons while the foreign secretary joined the mourners in Washington.⁴³

In retrospect, Churchill regretted a missed chance to get to know the new president. At the time, he was pleased with the more assertive approach that Truman adopted towards the Soviet Union. More straightforward by nature than Roosevelt, Truman interpreted the agreements on Poland and Liberated Europe signed at Yalta as treaties that had to be met. Sounding out the new administration, the Soviets reversed direction and sent Molotov to America, first to Washington, and then on to San Francisco after all. On their first meeting, Truman gave the Soviet foreign minister a stern talk about the need to honour agreements. Unlike his predecessor, however, the new president respected the views of the joint chiefs. Marshall reminded him that the Americans were relying on the Red Army defeating the Japanese in East Asia. Notwithstanding his down-home insistence on keeping promises, Truman, like Roosevelt,

wanted the Soviets to save American lives.

The change at the top had no effect on Allied strategy on the Western Front. On 13 April 1945, troops from the Ninth US Army established a firm bridgehead on the far side of the River Elbe. Berlin was just sixty miles away. The army's commander, General Simpson, was desperate to attack. Bradley's offensive across central Germany had cut the remnants of the Reich in two. Since no new instructions were forthcoming, Eisenhower determined his own plan. On 15 April he issued a new directive. American forces would halt along the line of the Elbe, while the Third and Seventh US Armies advanced southwards, towards the Danube to meet up with the Soviets, and into Bavaria and Austria to ensure that the Nazis could not organize a defence of the National Redoubt. Eisenhower was not, however, immune from Churchill's insistent warnings about Soviet intentions in Europe. As a result, Montgomery's Twenty-First Army Group was now required not only to clear Holland and the German North Sea coast, but also to cut across to Lübeck on the Baltic and to liberate Denmark, in order to forestall the Soviet armies that would shortly be racing across from the east. To Montgomery's irritation, British Second Army had to spread itself thinner and thinner as it sped through northern Germany.

'THERE, YOU BASTARDS, THAT PAYS YOU BACK A LITTLE'

On the same front page that carried news of Roosevelt's death, the *Daily Express*'s star war reporter, Alan Moorehead, described what it was like to enter the Fatherland.

It is the most difficult front in the world to comprehend and work on since there is in reality no front. Bowling down the road 50 miles behind the spearhead, you suddenly find yourself being shelled by a self-propelled gun . . . The German bands concentrate on the main roads and the big river crossings. They have no supplies or men to look after the smaller side roads. Seventy per cent of the enemy we have met through the past week have been either youths under 20 or tired adults over 45. And while they hold in the centre, we slip around the side and come in on the flank, and then they die, or surrender, or flee. 44

British soldiers were entering a land of bizarre contrasts. Some parts had been bombed flat. Elsewhere, immaculate civic buildings stood unmarked and pristine houses were better appointed than those they had grown up in back home. The people were alternately cowed and aloof. Everywhere, people were on the move: refugees from the east, escaped slave workers,

prisoners of war - a tide of humanity that the Nazis had sucked into the Reich.

This was another period of rapid movement, as the Second British Army dashed through what was still enemy territory. For all that German resistance was disintegrating, some units and individuals fought very hard. In these final weeks, the British deployed a new tank, the British Leyland built Comet. Reliable, manoeuvrable, well-armoured and equipped with a cut-down version of the 17-pounder gun, the Comet showed that British industry could build a really good armoured fighting vehicle – just in time for the end of the war. The fighting, however, had taken on a new complexion: sudden encounters in which a few fanatics with anti-tank grenades were as dangerous as the odd German tank that was still in operation. Forewarned about Nazi resistance movements, and confronting local defence units in a mixture of civilian and military dress, few British soldiers were willing to take any risks. They relied even more heavily on artillery and airpower to reduce any obstacle in their path.⁴⁵

During the first weeks of April 1945, Bomber Command kept up an intense effort, but the pattern of bombing attacks changed. In the revised minute that Churchill sent after Dresden, he pointed out that destroying shortly-to-be-occupied cities was not a helpful policy. The chiefs of staff agreed. From 6 April Harris scaled back raids on German cities. Bomber Command continued, however, to launch heavy attacks on Kiel, where the German U-boat fleet was believed to be assembling for a death-and-glory venture into the Atlantic. On 14-15 April 1945, two days before the Soviets started their offensive against Berlin, Bomber Command staged its last major attack of the war. Five hundred Lancasters and twelve Mosquitos raided Potsdam, just southwest of the German capital – the first time they had entered the Berlin defence zone since March 1944 – with the aim of destroying military barracks and railway yards. 46 Many of the bombs fell in the city's ornamental lakes, but the raid wrecked the railway station and killed about 1,700 people. Four days later, a baffled Churchill, his mind now firmly on occupation, asked, 'What was the point of going and blowing down Potsdam?'47

By then, Portal had already issued a new directive, instructing Harris to concentrate on supporting Allied armies on the battlefield. There were few targets left. Ironically, given everything that had gone before, by the end of April, British bombers were being employed as angels of mercy, flying low-level operations to drop food parcels to the starving population of German-occupied Holland and repatriating British POWs liberated by the Allied advance.

Most of the British POWs who had fallen into German hands over the course of the war were freed during April 1945. Some had been on the move for months, as the Germans marched them out of work camps and mines in the east ahead of the Russian advance. Once they left their camps, the system of Red Cross deliveries that had kept them fed for most of the war broke down. As columns of malnourished, sickening, hypothermic prisoners trudged westwards, strafed intermittently by Allied fighterbombers, men collapsed by the roadside, were shot by guards, or snuck away to seek shelter in barns or farmsteads. As the clock wound down on the Third Reich, the survivors arrived in already overcrowded camps further west, overwhelming scarce supplies of food and fuel. The divisions that the Germans had maintained between prisoners of different nationalities broke down, and some camps threatened to descend into anarchy. When the liberating Allied armies arrived, hungry prisoners fell eagerly on their rescuers' rations, revenged themselves on brutal German guards, or sat bewildered at the prospect of life beyond the wire. For soldiers who had been captured at Dunkirk and were now flown back to the UK, the culture shock was intense: speeded home on their first trip in an aircraft, they were borne back to a country transformed by the war.⁴⁸

Neither their cultural background nor their experience of the war predisposed British troops to treat German civilians with the systematic brutality evident as the Red Army raped and murdered its way towards Berlin. Yet they would have to have been saintly not to be tempted by revenge. A Canadian officer serving with a British machine-gun battalion recalled the behaviour of an NCO whose house had been destroyed by a V1:

His family was safe, but everything he owned was lost. When he came back, he went AWL [sic, Absent Without Leave] from the reinforcement unit and hitch-hiked his way back up to us . . . I learned later . . . that as soon as he had a chance, when we were stopped near a rather opulent German house, he'd quietly taken an axe off the back of his carrier, gone into the house and systematically smashed every stick of furniture he could find. His remark was reported as being 'There, you bastards, that pays you back a little.' Nothing more was said. ⁴⁹

Few British troops felt any compunction about plundering the conquered. Soldiers relieved to have survived seized the spoils they felt their comrades had earned in blood. The sapper Frank Wooldridge recorded in his diary for 7 April 1945 that he had spent the past week

with the airborne and in a spearhead advance from the Rhine to the Weser. Loot has been the main object and we have had no casualties. I've had plenty of food which we took from the Civilians, they are dead scared of us and think they will be shot. We take their watches and cut the jewellery off the dead with a chopper or knife, very callous but true. Thursday morning a German Civilian shot a guard of the airborne and threw a phosphorous bomb on their lorry. Two were burnt out. The lads could not find the fellow and were very angry so they went about the little town knocking the windows out and were about to burn the village down when the MPs [military police] stepped in and stopped them. In my opinion they should not as they are two faced and they are ready to slide a knife in your back. 50

'THE THINGS IN THIS CAMP ARE BEYOND DESCRIBING'

A few days before, forward elements from 11th Armoured Division had met two German officers seeking to arrange a truce. They warned the British that they were approaching a large concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen, and that there was a risk that if the prisoners escaped in the course of the fighting, they might start a typhus epidemic. The British agreed to take responsibility for the camp, but fighting remained heavy for the next two days and it was 15 April 1945 before it was passed by British tanks. Shortly afterwards, the first soldiers approached its perimeter fence. The smell made them vomit.⁵¹

A concentration, rather than an extermination, camp, Belsen had originally been a place to stash Jews whom Himmler sought to trade with the Allies. Over the previous months, it had become steadily more crammed with men and women force-marched from camps in the east ahead of the advancing Soviet army. Between 40,000 and 50,000 people were packed into this condensation of brutality and suffering: all starving, many wracked with dysentery, typhus and typhoid, and surrounded by corpses, since the administrators had given up on filling the mass graves.

The British were completely unready for what they found. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, the international body set up under American and British auspices in November 1943 to provide aid to war-ravaged European countries, had not planned to deal with the liberation of the camps. The British army had been concentrating on fighting a still-determined enemy, rather than what it might find after the Germans withdrew. Officers did their best to rush in supplies and medical care, but 13,000 people who were in the camp when it was liberated died in the weeks that followed.⁵²

Notwithstanding everything that had gone before, British soldiers were shocked and horrified by Belsen. Most were very angry. They also worried that the evil was so extreme that people back home would not believe them. Conscious as they were of the propaganda value of the camps, the

military authorities and the British government were determined that they should be recorded and witnessed – for those back home, for the trials that would follow and for history – in such a way that there could be no doubt about their veracity. Journalists, photographers and film cameramen, led by the BBC correspondent Richard Dimbleby, were soon reporting the appalling scenes. They too expressed anxiety that they would not be believed. Soldiers not involved in the relief operation were taken to Belsen by officers eager not just to motivate them for the final battles, but also to ensure that they saw the camp with their own eyes. A cross-party delegation of MPs travelled out from Westminster to observe Belsen for themselves. There was meant to be no room to claim that the horror had been fabricated.⁵³

Like Chamberlain's announcement of the outbreak of war, Churchill's speeches in 1940, or the D-Day landings, the newsreels from the camps became another great shared moment of the conflict as Britons gazed, horrified, at images of what their enemies had done. There was an almost universal sense not just of revulsion, but of revelation. Even after six years of war, Belsen was still beyond most Britons' imagination.

Yet what they were shown was only a part of the whole. There was little sense that Belsen was only a shadow of the extermination campaign that had taken place further east. The most shocking photographs made available by SHAEF were not published in the newspapers, and the compressed form of the newsreels meant they did not include all the footage from the camps. There were what in retrospect look like grotesque juxtapositions: a titillating focus on the female camp guards, a parochial concentration on the story of the very few British prisoners, and the screening of newsreels within programmes of 'shorts' that included Disney cartoons. Perhaps most surprising to modern eyes was the infrequency of references to Jewishness. At least half of those liberated from Belsen were Jewish, but, as they had done throughout the war, the British struggled to match a liberal desire not to make an issue of religion with an accurate description of what the Nazis had done. Much more emphasis was placed on national identities – the camp as an atrocity perpetrated against all the peoples of Occupied Europe – rather than as merely an outlying part of a specific attempt to exterminate Jews.

Those who saw Belsen at first hand clearly felt a new sense of what the war had been about. In the words of a British gunner filmed for British Movietone News: 'The things in this camp are beyond describing. When you actually see them for yourself you know what you're fighting for here . . . We actually know now what has been going on in these camps and I

know personally what I am fighting for.'⁵⁴ Contrary to what eyewitnesses feared, Britons overwhelmingly accepted that reports from the camps were genuine. According to Mass-Observation, 81 per cent of those surveyed on 18 April 1945 – before the newsreel footage taken at Belsen was released – thought they were true. For all the limitations of the reporting, and people's own difficulties in fully conceiving the horrors perpetrated under Nazism, the revelations struck hard. It had left, wrote the journalist James Lansdale Hodson, 'a wound in the mind'.⁵⁵

There was a widespread fury. Asked her opinion of the Germans, a fifty-year-old middle-class woman responded: 'just at present, I think they're a plague spot.' A working-class man of the same age said the Germans were 'vermin crawling over the earth and they ought to be put out of existence – they're not fit to live.' In her diary for 27 April 1945, Louie White, whose husband and brother-in-law had both been killed on air operations over Germany, expressed the same sentiment: 'I have felt awful this last week over the Germans. They should all be exterminated. Every man, woman and child, because they never will be told. They are the most loathsome, vilest beasts on the face of the earth, and I hope I have a hand in it.' As one young man had pointed out to Mass-Observation, all Germans had to share the responsibility: 'They were all for it when victory was going their way; as for this ignorance act it's all just nonsense.' Sh

For a short while, the new knowledge of Nazi crimes led some Britons to treat Germans more brutally, both in POW camps back home and in freshly occupied Germany. The liberation of the camps spurred another wave of public discussion about how to solve the 'German problem'. Yet the first surge of anger was brief. Anti-German antagonism persisted, but talk of 'extermination' faded. As they gazed out at a ravaged Europe from their much-disrupted isle, most people were more than ready for the killing to stop.

In Italy, the last Allied offensive opened on 9 April 1945. Notwithstanding the withdrawal of British and Canadian troops to Northwest Europe, the American General Mark Clark implemented the plans bequeathed to him by Alexander's staff, in the hope of wrapping up the German troops whom Hitler had ordered to hold their ground before the Po. Despite his best efforts, and his disdain for its new commander, Lieutenant General Richard McCreery, Clark proved unable to sideline the British Eighth Army: its position on the easier terrain of the coastal plain meant that it would have to play a big role in any breakout. Eighth Army's mobility had been much improved by the delivery of US-made Buffalo

tracked landing vehicles, which could carry troops safely across flooded areas and through coastal waters to outflank the defending Germans.

With the US Fifteenth Air Force no longer needed over the Reich, the offensive was supported by a massive bombing effort that blasted a hole in German positions and blocked their routes of withdrawal. While the Indians, New Zealanders, Poles and British of the Eighth Army drove up the coast, Clark's Fifth Army cut west through the mountains and turned back round Bologna. By 21 April, the German armies in Italy were in full retreat. They suffered appalling losses to Allied air attacks as they attempted to escape across the Po before they were encircled by the ground offensive. On 28 April, Mussolini, attempting to flee the collapse of the rump Republic of Salò, was executed by Italian partisans. The next day, as another Allied offensive broke through their defences in the north, German commanders in Italy agreed to give up. On 2 May 1945, Alexander accepted the surrender of almost a million Axis servicemen. By that point, British troops were racing towards Trieste, where they would face off against Yugoslav partisans for control of the strategic port.

In Germany, the Red Army had begun its final offensive against Berlin on 16 April. Nine days later, it had encircled the city, made contact with US units across the Elbe and begun to fight its way into the centre of the German capital. It was a ferocious battle, in which more than 360,000 Red Army soldiers became casualties. In comparison, the whole of the Northwest European campaign cost the British army only 30,000 dead and 100,000 wounded. Having come so far, the Soviets were not to be denied. On 30 April 1945, Hitler committed suicide and Grand Admiral Dönitz, at his headquarters in the port of Flensburg, became head of state. Two days later, the commander of the Berlin garrison surrendered.

To the north, the British took Bremen on 26 April. Three days later they were over the Elbe, just as the third stage of the Russian offensive accelerated between Berlin and the Baltic. On 2 May 1945, British troops took Lübeck and Wismar, sealing off the Danish peninsula. They had beaten the Red Army by about twelve hours. To the south, American units drove frantically to get themselves into the Alps in front of the expected German retreat. Yet there was nothing for them to stop. Nazis were not retiring to the National Redoubt. It had never been much more than a propaganda myth, a distracting conflation of Nazi lies and SHAEF intelligence officers' nightmares. Instead, with Bradley's advance bisecting Germany and the Soviet offensive forcing them back from Berlin, the largest remaining portion of the German armed forces were forced north and west, and into the Twenty-First Army Group's area of

operations.

PART FOUR

Resolutions

May 1945–December 1947

27

'This is your victory'

May 1945

Late in the afternoon of 4 May 1945, a crowd of war correspondents packed into the huge marquee that had been erected at Montgomery's tactical headquarters. They watched as the field marshal, seated at a trestle table topped with an army blanket, laid out the terms of surrender to a delegation of defeated German officers. At 6.30 p.m., they signed the surrender document, using a Utility pen provided by the army stores. On Twenty-First Army Group's front, hostilities would formally cease at eight o'clock the next morning. Britain's war in Europe was coming to an end.¹

It was a personal triumph for Montgomery. Not only had he kept a Commonwealth army group in action right the way through to the end of the war in Europe, but the American wild-goose chase towards the National Redoubt had inadvertently put him in the right place to take the surrender of the bulk of the remaining German armed forces. These included 1.5 million men, the U-boats still operational in the Atlantic, and the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht in Flensburg. A more modest man than Montgomery would have found it hard not to milk the moment.²

The German delegation travelled on to SHAEF to complete the surrender. Desperate to get as many men as possible westwards and out of Russian hands, the Germans stalled until the early morning of 7 May. The agreement then reached gave them two days to disarm their troops (and escape the Red Army) before the war officially ended. The Allies planned to announce this information simultaneously on 8 May 1945. When the Germans broadcast it to their forces on the afternoon of 7 May, London and Washington had to rush to announce that the morrow would be Victory in Europe Day. Churchill was ready to take to the airwaves that evening. Complaining they'd been left out, however, the Russians insisted that the instrument of surrender be renegotiated and signed in Berlin. With 8 and 9 May 1945 already declared a public holiday, the prime minister was all for pressing on regardless. Leahy, down the scrambler phone from

Washington, told him firmly that Truman preferred to take his timing from Stalin.³ Victory arrived, therefore, with a splutter: the end of the war announced on 7 May 1945, but the prime minister and the king speaking on the radio the following afternoon and evening, which was celebrated as VE Day, even though peace didn't officially break out until the following morning.

Eisenhower despatched Tedder to Berlin to make arrangements with the Soviets. So that all the major Allies would be represented at the final surrender, Tedder took with him Carl Spaatz and the commander-in-chief of the French army, General Lattre de Tassigny. Early on 8 May, their aircraft descended at Tempelhof airport. The whole of Berlin was covered in an acrid yellow cloud of dust and smoke. The negotiations dragged on. Tedder insisted that he, Lattre and Spaatz should all sign as well as Marshal Zhukov. No one had a French tricolour to appear at the surrender ceremony. Finally, the Russians announced they had found one amid the ruins. They presented a distinctly unamused Lattre with a Dutch national flag.⁴

With everything settled, the defeated Germans were rushed in. The journalists went wild, climbing on the tables to get better shots. True to form, the Russians staged a huge banquet, which lasted until half past five the following morning. Tedder managed to pour the SHAEF delegation into their staff cars for a tour of the wrecked city before they took off again from Tempelhof. As they flew back westwards, their Soviet fighter escort turned victory rolls in the sky.

'I'M GLAD OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO RELIEVE MY PENT-UP FEELINGS'

On 4 May 1945, as soon as they heard about the ceasefire, British troops started to celebrate. Some grabbed whatever drink they could liberate and held wild parties, lighting bonfires and loosing off flares while searchlight beams careered round the sky.⁵ Others sat quietly, dulled by months of violence, or worried about what would happen next. At Montgomery's headquarters, someone doused a tree with petrol and set light to it. The field marshal was persuaded to have one glass of champagne before taking his customary early night.⁶ Many soldiers were still at work, keeping the army administered, healthy and fed, guarding prisoners, or watching for stray Germans who hadn't heard the war was over.⁷ In the background, for

all of them, lay the threat of further service in the Far East.

Back in Britain, people had been thinking about this moment for a long time. In March 1943, the BIPO had asked respondents: 'What do you most look forward to doing on the day the war ends?' The top five answers were:

18.5% – celebrating, going wild, dancing in the streets

11.8% – don't know

9.4% – tearing down blackout, putting on the lights

9% – relaxing, taking well-earned rest, taking day off, staying in bed doing nothing

8.6% – having a family reunion, having back near relatives now evacuated or in Forces

This turned out not to be a bad guide to what they did do when the fighting finally ceased. In the words of a working-class woman in her forties, spoken to by Mass-Observation on VE Day itself:

I merely cried when I heard the news. I can't grasp that it's all over. We've been bombed out twice, and we've got no roof over our heads, only a tarpaulin. My boy's home on leave, after being away for nearly five years, but for tonight I don't care what happens. I'm going to be really happy. I'm glad of the opportunity to relieve my pent-up feelings. And after this, I'll be ready to get on with the second part of the job.⁸

Dreams seldom matched realities. Frank Waddington, an RAF navigator who had been shot down over Germany and taken prisoner at the start of 1944, was released from his POW camp in the final days of the war in Europe and flown back to RAF Cosford on 7 May 1945. He was completely disorientated. Met by a Women's Voluntary Service reception committee with cakes and sandwiches, he had a bath, was given a new uniform without rank badges and medals, and just had time to send a telegram to his family before boarding an overcrowded train. Breaking his journey in Birmingham, he went out to the pub with some other repatriated prisoners. Waddington remembered being

absolutely lost. There were all these girls drinking and you know, it was the eve of VE day I think and the next day was a day off and everybody was getting all tanked up and we had about half a pint each and I really couldn't face it any more, I really couldn't, I never felt like speaking to anybody because you're in this uniform with nothing on it, nobody knows who you are, you look absolutely nameless somehow, so we went to bed. 9

In Leeds, Louie White, whose husband and brother-in-law had both been killed in bombers over Germany, wrote up her diary and remembered those she had lost: THE WAR IS OVER IN EUROPE. Everyone in suspense. I am not bothered. Worked over. At 9.0, the news was given that it was over in Germany and tomorrow will be VE Day. At this moment someone is singing 'None but the Weary Heart'. How appropriate for me just now. ¹⁰

The news of victory reached Attlee and Eden in San Francisco, where, as Attlee later wrote: 'the Japanese War was nearer and of greater concern to the citizens than the European contest and we were sorry not to be home for the celebrations.' The city imposed a ban on alcohol sales, but Eden acquired some bottles with which the British delegation toasted their achievements. His son, a sergeant in the RAF, was still in action, in a crew flying supply planes over the Burmese jungle.

On the far side of the Pacific, Private J. L. A. Hardy was a POW in a work camp in the Japanese city of Osaka. If anyone told him what had happened in Europe, he didn't note it down on the scraps of paper on which he was keeping a sporadic diary. For the prisoners, heavy US bomber raids provided the only indication of the course of the war. At the start of May 1945, Hardy wrote:

For three years and six months we have been keeping up the same old drag day in and day out. What enjoyment is there, not much. The day's toil finished at 5 o'clock, maybe a card game, singing or reading, the same games, the same songs, the same books. To bed at 7.30 up again in the morning . . . When will we ever see our homes again, our fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters or wives to be.

Obsessively, he thought of the feast he would have on his return – roast pork, potatoes and Brussels sprouts, bacon, fried chicken and bowls of spices, bowls of trifle, bananas and custard and 'a gleaming bottle of sherry':

Your people and friends gathered around, yourself, in the seat of honour, not a dim vision of the past, but a bright vision of the future, something to grasp on to, something to look forward to, and something we all hope for in the near future. 12

'A SURGE OF GRATITUDE FOR THIS GREAT DAWNING OF PEACE'

Back in the UK, many people spent 7 May 1945 awaiting the big announcement and preparing decorations. At the Brook Motors factory in Huddersfield, the machinists garlanded their workbenches with the flags of the Allied nations, a banner declaring 'There'll Always Be An England' and a life-size cut-out of Montgomery.¹³ In Ipswich, engineer Richard

Brown decided to use two half-inch dowel rods he'd squirrelled away to make flags for his children: 'Hope they duly appreciate my sacrifice', he noted sardonically in his diary, 'but we must unbend somehow.' Pubs and cinemas hung out the bunting and organized their staff. Tomorrow was going to be busy.

The next morning, things took a while to get going. ¹⁵ In London, it drizzled. There was heavier rain across the north of the UK, soaking the larger-than-normal queues that had formed outside the food shops in search of something for a victory tea. For a lot of housewives, it wasn't going to be a day off. Others took the chance of a lie-in. As the morning church services finished, the bells rang out and the holiday got under way in earnest. Older men headed straight to the pub. Others gathered wood for bonfires or wired up lights or loudspeakers. In the centre of big cities – around Trafalgar Square in London, in Albert Square in Manchester and George Square in Glasgow – crowds gathered. People came to enjoy the spectacle, happy enough to be part of the crowd without abandoning themselves completely to the revels. Passing through the same part of London, the writer and Mass-Observation diarist Naomi Mitchison, her feet aching because she'd decided to wear her smart shoes, noted:

Of course there were Americans and young ATS girls making whoopee, and indeed I have seldom seen so many ATS girls so much drunk on so little! A lot of hats were worn . . . most were rather silly . . . There were huge queues for ice cream so we never got any. 16

Similar scenes took place in the middle of other big cities, but further out, the mood was different. The Manchester artist L. S. Lowry caught the mood in his picture *VE Day 1945*: a cityscape festooned with flags, the big squares and small closes packed with crowds, but the roads between the terraces and factories emptier. Some people dance in a circle or sit down to a street party: others walk the dog. At the centre of the painting, four tiny figures have scaled a roof to try to get a sense of the spectacle.¹⁷

At three o'clock, Churchill spoke from the Cabinet Room in 10 Downing Street, his words picked up on radio sets in homes and pubs, and crackling out from public address systems across the land:

After gallant France was struck down we, from this Island and from our united Empire, maintained the struggle single-handed for a whole year until we were joined by the military might of Soviet Russia, and later by the overwhelming power and resources of the United States. Finally almost the whole world was combined against the evil-doers, who are now prostrate before us. ¹⁸

The prime minister's speech concluded, BBC outside broadcast units brought the audience 'Bells and Victory Celebrations' from across the

country. Those who didn't want to imagine the festivities in their mind's eye set off to enjoy the holiday. Often, that meant the cinema. In his diary, William Paton, a miner in the village of Stoneyburn in West Lothian, Scotland, recorded: 'The village was gay with flags and so were some of the men when they came out of the 1st house of the pub [i.e. before it shut for lunch] as they started to parade up and down and had a singsong at the Institute.' He 'went down to Bathgate in the afternoon and went to the Regal pictures with Jean and Bell. The programme was interrupted at 9 pm so that the audience could hear the king speaking.' 19

The king began with the words that his father had used to describe the end of the previous war. 'Today', he told his people, 'we give thanks to God for a great deliverance' (the number of 'g's, a problematic letter for the stammering monarch, resulted in a hesitant delivery). He asked them to remember the dead, praise the living who had carried their 'many burdens . . . unflinchingly and without complaint', and consider what 'has upheld us through nearly six years of suffering and peril – the knowledge that everything was at stake, our freedom, our independence, our very existence as a people, but the knowledge also that in defending ourselves we were defending the liberties of the whole world.' The film finished, William and Jean headed back to Stoneyburn, stopping off at the great bonfires that were now burning around the village, before joining the Victory Dance that had been put on at the Welfare Hall. ²¹

After years of darkness, VE-night was a festival of illumination, even along the coast, where the blackout remained in place until every U-boat had been accounted for. Public buildings were floodlit for the first time since the coronation in 1937. Children who had grown up with the blackout were taken to see familiar landmarks picked out, except in York, where, after an ill-tempered spat among councillors, it was decided that illuminating the Minster was neither appropriate nor financially possible.²² In more profligate Huddersfield, there were fairy lights in the trees in the park, the war memorial was floodlit and a huge V for victory shone from the front of the Town Hall, where a long queue formed to gain entry to a Victory Dance.²³

In the centre of London, some of the most famous moments of VE Day were forged that evening. The crowd called for Churchill, and the prime minister addressed them from the balcony of the Ministry of Health building in Whitehall. 'This is not a victory of a party or of any class. It's a victory of the great British nation as a whole', he told them. 'We were all alone for a whole year. There we stood, alone. Did anyone want to give in?' 'No!' they roared back. Churchill went back inside to have a few

drinks with Lord Camrose, the owner of the *Daily Telegraph*, get angry at a disrespectful cartoon in the *Daily Mail* and worry about the Russians.²⁴

If most people weren't part of the big knees-ups in the city centres, they could always catch up with the detailed accounts in the papers the next day, or the newsreel footage in the cinemas.²⁵ Besides, there was another day off to enjoy tomorrow – to sleep off the hangover, or to go back to the cinema (Ingrid Bergman in Technicolor in For Whom The Bell Tolls for William Paton), or to have the party they'd organized to mark the outbreak of peace.²⁶ In Ipswich, Richard Brown and his neighbours spent the morning putting the finishing touches to a big tea for all the children in their street, rigging up a radio, moving a piano and stuffing an effigy of Hitler which they were going to burn to mark the end of the war. Inside, he tucked two blank .303 rifle cartridges that had somehow escaped the demob of the Home Guard. That evening, they watched the fire lick up the legs and take hold of the torso, before the blanks exploded and the guy flew apart with a bang.²⁷ Whatever they had been fighting for, most British people had always understood the war as a struggle against Hitler. Now that monster at least was gone.

'EXTENDED CAPITAL'

While the endgame of Hitler's war played out in Europe, Allied forces fought bloody campaigns against Japan. In Southeast Asia, neither Slim nor Mountbatten wished to give up on the pursuit of the Japanese army defeated at Imphal. In September 1944, the supreme commander secured permission from the combined chiefs to launch his two campaigns into Burma – 'Capital' over land from the north, and 'Dracula' from the sea to the south.

With Indian bases fully developed, and the road and pipeline connection through Assam much improved, the British were in a better position than before to sustain an offensive from northern Burma. Nonetheless, air support and supply would be crucial to success. Just as before, they had to compete with Nationalist China for access to valuable transport aircraft. Over the winter of 1944–5 the whole theatre moved rapidly down the Americans' priority list as they lost faith in Chiang's regime, and the weight of their war shifted away from building a base in China and towards the recapture of the Philippines and an assault against Japan directly from the islands of the Pacific. There were still substantial

Japanese ground forces in Burma – and, crucially for the British, some imperial prestige to be regained – but the Japanese homeland was now so cut off from Southeast Asia that the theatre had no significance for the outcome of the war.

Slim's troops resumed their advance beyond the Chindwin in November 1944.²⁸ By the end of the year they had emerged from the jungle onto the flatter expanses of the Shwebo Plain. The Japanese withdrew behind the Irrawaddy river, from where they would mount their main defence of central Burma. Slim's Fourteenth Army lacked the bridging equipment to put all its divisions across the Irrawaddy at the same time. Nor, reliant on a lengthy supply line and limited air transport, could it keep its main strength between the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy indefinitely. If the whole of Burma could not be taken and Rangoon opened before the arrival of the monsoon, Slim would have to withdraw.

From February 1945, under a daring new plan – 'Extended Capital' – he launched an alternating double punch. His XXXIII Corps put bridgeheads across the river each side of Mandalay, convincing the Japanese to concentrate against what appeared to be the main attack. Meanwhile IV Corps looped from left to right and crossed the Irrawaddy further south. The 17th Indian Division had been re-equipped, with two of its infantry brigades put in armoured personnel carriers and the third made completely air-transportable, and it advanced rapidly on the Japanese communications and supply hub at Meiktila, which was captured on 3 March 1945. Resupplied wholly by air, the town then had to be held against fierce counter-attacks as the Japanese tried fruitlessly to retake it.

With Meiktila gone, the whole Japanese position in central Burma disintegrated. To the north, XXXIII Corps broke out across the Irrawaddy and took Mandalay. Amphibious landings by XV Corps captured the islands of Akyab and Ramree, with their vital aerodromes, and the Chinese captured Lashio, the starting point of the Burma Road. Demands for Nationalist units to be airlifted back to China to rebuild Chiang's crumbling armies threatened to absorb precious transport planes. Mountbatten, with Churchill's help, pushed the joint chiefs to leave the aircraft with SEAC until Rangoon was captured – provided this could be accomplished before the onset of the monsoon.

Slim readied his troops for a race to the Burmese capital. It was a calculated risk: maintaining the momentum in a month-long three hundred-mile charge through the disorganized Japanese, in the expectation that Rangoon could be taken before the Fourteenth Army's supply chain broke down. Slim's mechanized units led the drive south. At the start of

May, as they reached Pegu, forty miles north of Rangoon, the rains broke early, slowing the advance. The Japanese had already begun to withdraw from the city. On 1 May 1945, SEAC launched Operation 'Dracula' to take Rangoon from the sea. Indian troops advanced into the city almost without opposition; on 6 May they joined up with the foremost elements of the Fourteenth Army.

The advance on Rangoon trapped large numbers of Japanese soldiers between the Irrawaddy and Sittang, in a region called the Pegu Yoma. During July 1945 the Japanese attempted to break out. Informed of what was about to happen by captured plans, the British prepared to meet them with artillery fire and fighter-bomber attacks. What resulted was more a slaughter than a battle. Of the more than seventeen thousand Japanese who attempted to break out, fewer than six thousand reached the far side of the Sittang. Ninety-five Commonwealth servicemen died. The imbalance between the two sides' concern for their soldiers could not have been more clear. ²⁹

'TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT ME, YOU'LL NOT BE SEEING ME FOR A LONG TIME'

In stark contrast to the defeats of 1942, the final phase of the war in Burma saw a decisive victory for the very modern, highly competent forces of the British Empire. They employed armour, air power and naval support in ways that the Japanese simply could not match — not just to kill enemy soldiers on the battlefield, but also to achieve a level of mobility that put them consistently ahead of the Japanese, just as they had been so catastrophically behind in Malaya and Burma three years before.

Compared to the lavish resources available to Twenty-First Army Group in Europe, Allied Land Forces South East Asia (ALFSEA) operated on a shoestring. Even in 1945 they were at the end of the queue for the most modern equipment, much of which still had to come along the long overland supply line through Assam. Nonetheless, they enjoyed a very substantial technological advantage, thanks not least to the flood of American Lend-Lease aircraft, tanks, trucks and jeeps that reached the theatre in the final stages of the war. For all the expansion of the Indian armaments industry during the conflict, the most complex bits of kit were still being produced in the UK, the USA and Canada. Pre-war expectations of Western mechanical superiority were finally fulfilled: not because the

Japanese were racially inferior, as some had presumed, but because they were unable, under the strain of war, to turn their newly expanded empire into the integrated, developed economy required to compete militarily with the United States.

It wasn't just that Commonwealth troops had more and better weapons. Malaria remained the leading cause of illness in the Fourteenth Army, but a rigorous campaign of DDT dusting, and the enforcement of strict rules on taking Mecrapine, meant that rates of infection fell by about three-quarters during the first quarter of 1945. Treatment for battle casualties also improved, with new treatments for wounds infected by jungle debris, the arrival of penicillin and the large-scale use of air ambulances. Of the 8,178 men wounded between January and March 1945, 95 per cent survived. In contrast, as their supply lines and medical provision collapsed, Japanese troops got sicker and sicker. By the time Rangoon was reached, about half of all the soldiers captured by the British were infected with malarial parasites.³⁰

It was a very Indian triumph. At the start of 1945, SEAC had about 400,000 British officers and other ranks, about 250,000 of whom were serving with the army, and about 1,790,000 Indian servicemen.³¹ With insufficient reinforcements reaching the front line to keep them up to strength (thanks in part to the leave schemes for men with long service overseas), two of the three British divisions in Burma had to be withdrawn to India after the capture of Mandalay. For the same reason, the strength of the British battalions in the Indian divisions also diminished.

From the crossing of the Irrawaddy to the capture of Rangoon, 'Extended Capital' involved one British, two African and seven Indian divisions. In the key final battles, the Indian formations took the lead, and each of these divisions became more reliant on Indian and Gurkha infantrymen as the campaign went on. The only tank formation in Burma was an Indian armoured brigade; twenty-seven warships of the Royal Indian Navy supported the amphibious attacks; and seven squadrons of the Royal Indian Air Force were committed to the skies. Indians drove the trucks that carried troops towards Rangoon and the landing craft that delivered them ashore. At platoon, company and battalion level, they increasingly ran the battle in the front line as well. Although the majority of the officers in Indian units were still British, the Indian officer corps had grown fifteen-fold since the start of the war, to a total of 8,000 men, while the ratio of British to Indian officers had fallen from ten to one to four to one.³² Many Indian officers combined a professional determination to defeat the Japanese with a strong belief in Indian nationalism. In the words

of Kodendera Subayya 'Timmy' Thimayya, the only Indian to be promoted to command a brigade during the war, 'the consensus' among the Indian officers 'was that we should help the British defeat the Axis powers and deal with the British afterwards'.³³

Once the Fourteenth Army was past the Irrawaddy, razorback jungle ridges gave way to plantations and paddy fields, but there were still sweltering marches on short rations and vicious fights against an enemy who had to be blasted out of camouflaged bunkers and usually refused to surrender. Reflecting on his experiences in Burma just after the campaign had finished, Private George 'Geordie' Stevens wrote to his father about the changing scenery:

The towns and villages were dominated by countless picturesque pagodas but the countryside in places was like Blighty. Of course, it was warmer, but I felt at times that I was just driving my car on a pleasure run at Home, and suddenly I would smell something with which I am now very familiar, I would look to the sides of the road and see stiff Japs and equipment scattered around. But for some reason or other one feels no pity, to us they seem like dead animals.³⁴

Even with the defeat of the Japanese breakout attempt across the Sittang, no one thought that the war was about to come to an end. On the contrary, it seemed certain that the men who had just fought their way through Burma would have to do the same thing again in Malaya. The forces tried to improve the lot of those servicemen who would have to remain: better medical care and postal deliveries, a theatre newspaper, *SEAC*, and even the despatch of film units that gathered together men from a particular area and encouraged them to record brief messages for screening to an invited audience back home ('It's a bit difficult to speak here – I can't think what to say'; 'Take a good look at me, you'll not be seeing me for a long time'; 'Keep the bed warm till I get home and we'll get up them stairs').³⁵

Nonetheless, the food, entertainment, and educational and welfare facilities in the Far East all remained dire compared with what was standard in the UK and Europe. News of the VE Day celebrations in Britain only reinforced men's sense that they were far away and probably forgotten. It said a lot for Slim and Mountbatten's efforts to sustain morale that, for all of that, there was little sign of their British troops refusing to go on. Maybe the sense of isolation helped. What was there to do but keep on fighting and killing Japanese? That didn't stop them thinking of home. As 'Geordie' Stevens told his father:

As for my comrades in arms, if you speak to an I[ndian] O[ther] Rank he will not discuss the weather or politics but will tell you that the particular place where one is at the time is

not to be compared with the Punjab, Nepal or where ever he comes from. He will tell you the women are not nearly so beautiful, he will tell you about his Bibi and the number of chicoes he has at home.

The conversations he had with British soldiers covered similar ground:

What do the B[ritish] O[ther] R[anks] talk about, mostly Demob and Repat. Very few have talked to an ordinary white girl as they knew for over three years. Some talk about their wives, their wonderful children and how they are growing up. Some talk about their girl friends and a good many have lost them, married Americans and so forth. The young chaps wonder what their chances are of getting girls when they get home, they wonder about their chances of getting jobs and what the Brave New World will be like. 36

As the Commonwealth armies moved south through Burma, Burmese and Indian nationalists who had sided with the Japanese plotted their own paths. The retreating Japanese treated the Burmese with increasing viciousness, but the collaborationist government of Ba Maw sought to persuade people that victory was still on the cards. Having tried to save Rangoon from a last-ditch battle, Ba Maw fled alongside the Japanese. Held together by Subhas Chandra Bose, units of the Indian National Army fought on until he ordered them to retreat into Thailand and Malaya. Bose still believed that he had a part to play in achieving Indian independence, perhaps working with the Soviet Union. That summer, however, he was killed when the Japanese plane on which he was a passenger crashed in Formosa.³⁷

The nationalist leader Aung San, whose Burmese Defence Army had fought against the British when the Japanese invaded in 1942, launched a rebellion against the Japanese on 27 March 1945. Disillusioned when Japanese promises of independence turned sour, Aung San had started to make secret approaches to the Allies in 1943. The following year, the Burmese Defence Army agreed to form a new Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League with the Burmese Communists. SEAC persuaded them to put off any revolt until the Allied offensive had made serious progress into Burma. By the spring of 1945, with the Japanese beaten and the prospect of an imperial army liberating the whole country growing closer, Aung San told the British that he was going to launch his uprising in any case.³⁸

Mountbatten now had to handle the complex politics of a colonial world blown apart by the war. Senior British officers and colonial officials were reluctant to offer any support to Aung San, whom most regarded as a traitor. Adaptable as ever to the realities of power, Mountbatten's sympathies lay with the nationalists. To his staff, he compared Aung San to Jan Smuts — a great rebel who might yet become an international statesman. With a rebellion coming anyway, he insisted that it would be

far better for the British to support the AFPFL than to have it crushed by the Japanese – or take control of Burma for itself. The British officers of Force 136 – the SOE in Southeast Asia – provided weapons and advice to the BDA. When the British pushed south from Meiktila, Aung San's forces fought a guerrilla war against the Japanese from the Burmese countryside. It was Indian soldiers, rather than Burmese, who really destroyed the Japanese army, but as Slim recognized, the uprising intensified the confusion and tied down enemy troops – an important contribution, given the pressing need to get his spearhead through to Rangoon.

When the Japanese retreated from Rangoon in April 1945, a garrison of Indian National Army soldiers remained behind to protect the city's Indian community. They surrendered to a group of newly released British officer POWs, who then co-operated with the INA soldiers to take charge of Rangoon. Simultaneously, the BDA inaugurated an independent Burmese government. The two sides were engaged in a tense stand-off when SEAC got its troops into Rangoon. An army full of men looking forward to Britain getting out of India had completed the recapture of a colony that no longer mattered to the Japanese, assisted by an independence movement determined to free Burma from colonial rule. The Raj's greatest military victory was also going to be its last.

'WITH ADMIRATION AND AT THE SAME TIME, IT MUST BE ADMITTED, WITH ENVY'

While Slim's men were advancing to the Irrawaddy, the Americans opened a new offensive in the South China Sea and the waters around Japan. US bombers struck at port facilities and aircraft factories, submarines preyed on merchant ships and carrier aircraft attacked convoys. Unable to keep pace with the destruction of its merchant fleet, Japan was cut off from its supplies of oil, coal, iron ore and aluminium. War production plummeted.³⁹ Unable to fight off US assaults, Japanese strategists stopped trying to win the battle for the Pacific islands and concentrated instead on making each American advance as costly as possible, while preparing an all-out defence of the home islands. They hoped that the immense human costs of such an operation would coerce the Allies into offering more lenient peace terms.⁴⁰

On 9 January 1945, General MacArthur's men landed on Luzon. As

US troops retook the other islands in the Philippines, the Australians landed in Borneo. In the Central Pacific, Admiral Nimitz's forces captured the Japanese islands of Iwo Jima (19 February–26 March 1945) and Okinawa (1 April–22 June), securing new bases that were much closer to Japan. All these campaigns followed a similar pattern. As the invasion fleets approached, Japanese kamikaze pilots attempted to destroy Allied ships by flying their bomb-laden planes straight into them. Marines and soldiers landed almost unopposed on the islands but were then drawn into bloody battles further inland as Japanese soldiers fought to the last man.

US losses were heavy. Unlike in Burma, where Slim could fight a campaign of deception and manoeuvre against an enemy who eventually withdrew, on Iwo Jima and Okinawa the Americans had to slug it out until the last Japanese position was destroyed. Ninety-three per cent of the 100,000 Japanese troops involved in the defence of the two islands were killed, but they caused about 75,000 American casualties in the process – roughly the same as the total number of British (not including Indian or African) servicemen who became casualties while fighting against the Japanese during the entire war.⁴¹ Another 60,000 American personnel became casualties in the Philippines. Civilian losses were still higher. At least 100,000 Filipino civilians died in Japanese atrocities or were caught in the crossfire in Manila. Even more Okinawans died: killed by the American bombardment or massacred or persuaded into mass suicide by the Japanese.⁴²

At the same time, the USAAF built up a huge force of very-long-range B-29 bombers in the Mariana Islands and escalated its bombing campaign against Japan. When their attacks on Japanese industry failed to produce dramatic results, US General Curtis LeMay took the most sophisticated bombers in the world down the path that the RAF had pursued in 1942: destroying cities in the hope of damaging the enemy's ability to prosecute the war. In low-level night attacks, the B-29s rained napalm on urban areas filled with wooden housing. Between March and August 1945, these attacks killed half a million Japanese civilians. Convinced that fighting on was the only way to assure national survival, the militarists in the Japanese government showed no sign of wanting to give up. The suffering of the Japanese people under air bombardment was only a foretaste of the bloodbath they intended to unleash if the Allies got ashore on the Japanese home islands. 44

Off Okinawa, the British Pacific Fleet took part in US operations for the first time. The British fleet had arrived in Freemantle on 4 February 1945. Well before his ships arrived, the Pacific Fleet's commander, Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, had put a lot of work into building good relations with the Americans. Fraser had spent most of the war in positions of immense responsibility but scarce action – first as third sea lord (in charge of procurement), then in command of the Home Fleet. Churchill had tried to appoint him first sea lord on Admiral Pound's retirement, but Fraser demurred on the grounds that he hadn't yet commanded his fleet in battle: a shortcoming solved when he led the destruction of the *Scharnhorst* in December 1943. He was well aware of the importance of his Pacific mission. Not only was it vital that Britain should be involved in the final offensive against Japan, but the Royal Navy must have the chance to practise the sort of long-distance naval air war that the Americans had raised to an art form.⁴⁵

Fraser would sit behind a desk in Australia, with operational command of the fleet exercised by Vice Admiral Sir Bernard Rawlings. To get personal experience of the operations in which his ships would be involved, Fraser accompanied the US fleet during the invasion of Luzon. On 6 January 1945, he was on the bridge of the battleship USS *New Mexico* when debris from a kamikaze attack sliced through it, killing the ship's captain and twenty-nine others, including Fraser's secretary. The admiral survived unhurt.⁴⁶

As his fleet assembled, Fraser insisted that the British fit in with the Americans. That meant adopting US communication procedures and codebooks, and Royal Navy crew wearing khaki uniforms rather than tropical whites. It also meant visibly learning from the Americans, including improving welfare amenities and copying US tactics for dealing with the kamikaze threats. American officers responded with enthusiasm, eagerly visiting their new comrades to share their experience. Their readiness to assist their ally was entirely unrelated to the fact that the Royal Navy, unlike its American counterpart, allowed alcohol aboard its warships.

During operations against Okinawa, the British Pacific Fleet consisted of up to five large aircraft carriers and two battleships, escorted by six cruisers and eleven destroyers, including ships of the Royal Australian and New Zealand Navies. This was the largest carrier fleet ever assembled under the white ensign. An associated train of store ships, tankers and replenishment aircraft carriers stayed back to resupply the front-line vessels. Most of the British aircraft were US-built: Grumman Avenger bombers and Grumman Hellcat and Vought Corsair fighters. A smaller number of Supermarine Seafires proved too short-ranged for operations in the Pacific. The US Navy designated the British Pacific Fleet as a 'task

force', but the smaller aircraft capacity of British carriers meant that it had only about two-thirds the planes of a smaller US task group, four or five of which together made up the American fast carrier task force operating in the Pacific. Despite the British fleet's small size, such was the damage being done by the kamikaze pilots that Nimitz and his subordinates were genuinely pleased to have these reinforcements.⁴⁷

The Royal Navy struggled to sustain itself in the long-range campaign towards Japan. Its ships lacked the storage space and maintenance facilities to remain in action for lengthy periods, its crews had little experience of resupplying at sea and there was much less standardization of parts than in the US Navy, which made it even harder to carry enough spares or undertake repairs. No British ship was fitted with air conditioning. In the sweltering heat, every activity became an exercise in prickly, sweaty exhaustion. Despite Admiral King's insistence that the British would have to look after themselves, American officers proved generous with supplies – particularly of radar and radio components, which were sometimes swapped for British bottles of booze – and allowed the Royal Navy to use its maintenance facilities on the island of Manus. Without this help, British participation in the campaign would have almost certainly have petered out in a damp squelch. 48

During 26 March, 20 April and 4 and 25 May 1945, planes from the British Pacific Fleet attacked Japanese airfields in the Sakishima Islands and Formosa. They were meant to protect the flank of the US landings – and to learn on the job. Limited stowage space meant that the British ships had to go into action for two or three days, then pull out to resupply while new planes flew in from replenishment carriers. With fewer planes aboard each carrier than on the American ships, maintaining the tempo of defensive patrols and airfield attacks was particularly tiring for Commonwealth pilots. When the Japanese battleship *Yamato* ventured out against the invasion fleet, the American carriers barely broke stride before launching a 380-plane strike 250 miles that sent the giant ship to the bottom. As Vice Admiral Rawlings wrote, the British could only look on 'with admiration and at the same time, it must be admitted, with envy'. ⁴⁹

Off Okinawa, the aircraft carriers HMS *Indefatigable*, *Illustrious*, *Victorious* and *Formidable* were all hit by or suffered near misses from kamikaze strikes. Even though they had practised anti-kamikaze drills, the outlandishness of enemy aircraft deliberately flying into their ship took sailors and airmen by surprise. With their armoured flight decks, the British carriers were able not only to survive these attacks, but also usually to return swiftly to action, with dents and holes in the deck repaired with

quick-drying concrete and smoothed over so that aircraft could land and take-off again. Whatever they lacked in creature comforts, British sailors took pride in their ships' ability to shrug off attacks that forced less well-protected American vessels to withdraw for repairs. While the death toll soared on Okinawa, total British casualties amounted to forty-one aircrew killed or missing, and another forty-four men killed and eighty-three wounded in the attacks on the ships.⁵⁰

With the second phase of operations against Okinawa ended, those British ships in need of repair and restocking returned to Sydney.⁵¹ New aircrew came aboard the carriers and sailors headed off for some much-needed rest and recuperation. Their enthusiastic reception reflected the continuing attachment many Australians felt to the Empire despite Britain's previous absence from the Pacific War. After frantic work in the Australian dockyards, the British Pacific Fleet, now labelled Task Force 37, joined the American Third Fleet on 16 July 1945, just in time to participate in a new offensive against the Japanese island of Honshu.

The US commander, Admiral 'Bull' Halsey, was won over by Rawlings' enthusiastic desire to operate as part of his fleet. Halsey planned to use his ships' speed to launch a series of surprise attacks along the Japanese coast. Despite improvements to the British supply systems, they would have found this extremely difficult if Halsey hadn't allowed them to replenish from US ships. Over the next month, British carriers and battleships were able to take part in a bombardment that was more sporadic, but more intense, than they had undertaken during the Okinawa campaign. ⁵²

On advice from his staff, however, Halsey excluded the British from the air attacks that sank the last remaining major warships of the Imperial Japanese Navy, immobilized for lack of fuel, at Kure on 24 and 25 July. While the Americans would get the satisfaction of revenging Pearl Harbor, the Royal Navy would never pay the Japanese back for the destruction of Force Z.⁵³ Yet the fact that British Commonwealth ships and aircraft were there at all was in itself a sort of triumph. Rather like Montgomery in Europe, if by rather different means, Fraser and Rawlings had made sure that the armed forces of the Commonwealth were in at the death in the decisive theatre of the Far Eastern war.

'AN OUTRAGEOUS CROWN AND CONCLUSION TO ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED'

The shift to a war against Japan alone moved Anglo-American economic relations into a new phase. Stage II formally came into being on 8 May 1945. It was then still expected to last until the end of 1946. The Combined Boards remained in operation, but it was already plain that the flow of Lend-Lease supplies to Britain was not keeping up with the agreements reached the previous autumn at Quebec. Since Roosevelt had never formally approved his undertakings on Lend-Lease, they could be interpreted or discarded as American officials saw fit.

Immediately after VE Day, the Americans cancelled all aircraft deliveries, except those destined for Southeast Asia or the Pacific. With all allocations subject to the approval of the joint chiefs, British dependence was made sharply apparent. On 28 May, Churchill wrote to Truman to clarify the position. For the next seven weeks, he received no reply. At the end of June, only 20 per cent of what the British thought they needed to fight the war against Japan had been delivered.⁵⁴

If Lend-Lease was not going to equip the occupation forces in Germany or the Middle East, the British would need to purchase spare parts for the American equipment they already had. In the summer of 1945, it was estimated that the dollar cost of maintaining these occupation forces alone for the next year would be about \$300 million to \$400 million – or about a quarter of the UK's currency reserves. As so often, the signals from Washington left the British alternating between hope and despair. On 30 June 1945, Congress approved the sixth Lend-Lease appropriation bill, which included a \$3 billion allocation for non-munitions supplies to the UK. Five days later, Truman instructed US government officials to release Lend-Lease munitions solely for the war against Japan.

These difficulties were nothing compared to those that would lie ahead in Stage III. On 18 March 1945, Keynes had prepared a paper on 'Overseas Financial Policy in Stage III', which went before the War Cabinet on 15 May. It explained that at the end of 1944 Britain had accumulated about £3 billion of external liabilities. The vast majority of these were sterling balances, which might reach a total of £3 billion by themselves by the time Japan was defeated. When peace came and Lend-Lease stopped, and Britain had to service this debt while buying the exports it needed from America, the balance of payments deficit would amount to about \$8 billion. How could the country respond? ⁵⁶

Keynes set out options in order to dismiss them. There was 'Starvation Corner' — withdrawal into a state of semi-autarky, with bilateral trade deals, no Bretton Woods, much more austerity and none of the domestic reforms to which the government was committed. Or Britain could choose

'Temptation' – accepting a loan on commercial terms from the US to cover its dollar expenditure during reconversion to a peacetime economy. If an \$8 billion loan were added to the £3 billion of debt (the equivalent of \$12 billion), Britain would be left at the end of the war owing the same amount that the Soviets were trying to claim that all the Allies ought to take from the Germans in reparations. Keynes thought that this would be 'an outrageous crown and conclusion to all that has happened'. He left out that the Germans didn't get to control the rate of interest and repayment on three-fifths of the reparations, as the British did for the sterling balances, not to mention how very much more Britain's war would have cost without \$30 billion of Lend-Lease aid since 1941.

Instead of 'Temptation', Keynes proposed 'Justice'. The Americans should give the UK the money they would have had to spend if they had come properly into the war from the start – in other words, everything the British had spent in the US before the introduction of Lend-Lease. This would clear the decks for post-war reconstruction and ensure that the British could participate fully in the new world of multilateral trade. Keynes also proposed a settlement of the sterling balances. They had only risen so high, after all, because of wartime inflation. Britain would therefore be justified in writing them down by at least a third to more closely reflect the true cost of the war.

Persuading the Americans that it was they who owed money to Britain, rather than the other way around, would plainly be difficult. When Keynes wrote his paper, he thought that the British should turn that problem over to Roosevelt. Even if he had still been alive, however, it is impossible to imagine that he would have magicked away Britain's post-war financial problems in the manner Keynes advocated. Even as a negotiating position, Keynes' view of what was 'just' did not reflect well on his understanding of the dynamics now shaping Anglo-American relations. His vision of a fair post-war settlement proved very beguiling, however, for British ministers, not least because it fitted so well with their sense of their country's part in the Allied victory.

Less than a week after Keynes' paper went before the War Cabinet, however, the Coalition came to an end and the parties began to campaign in a general election. No further work would take place on the subject of Britain's Stage III finances before the new government was in place. Assuming that the war with Japan was going to stretch on until the end of 1946, however, there would still be time to establish a policy and win over the Americans before Britain had to confront a future completely without Lend-Lease.

'THE STRONGEST FORCES AVAILABLE TO CARRY OUR CAUSE TO FINAL VICTORY AND PEACE'

To understand why Britons went to the polls so soon after Victory in Europe we need to step back to the start of 1945. After the flurry of White Papers produced by autumn 1944, the pace of progress on reconstruction slowed. Having established the limits of what was possible under the Coalition, ministers needed new leverage before they could carry on. At the start of 1945, Morrison pressed the Reconstruction Committee with demands for the nationalization of key industries, starting with the creation of a public corporation to take over the generation of electricity. These proposals aroused strong resistance from Beaverbrook, but 'Rab' Butler admired Morrison's manoeuvring: starting argument nationalization in an area where state investment was sorely needed, making a case that was hard to resist and strengthening his claims for the Labour leadership.⁵⁷

In January 1945, Attlee wrote an unusually wordy letter to Churchill, telling him off for holding up reconstruction by his erratic behaviour in Cabinet. An enraged prime minister had to be talked down by Clementine from responding with a lengthy tirade.⁵⁸

In the time left before the end of the war in Europe, the Coalition managed two more pieces of reconstruction legislation. With Lyttelton's support, Hugh Dalton produced a Distribution of Industry Bill that allowed the government to promote economic development in areas of high unemployment. Against fierce opposition from Conservative MPs, it only passed the Commons because it made no commitments on future policy. The less divisive Family Allowances Bill also began the move into law (it passed onto the statute book under Churchill's caretaker administration after the Coalition dissolved). A major plank of the new welfare system, and the result of a long crusade by anti-poverty campaigners, it brought into being universal child benefit. A cross-party revolt by female MPs, including the Conservatives Mavis Tate and Nancy Astor, as well as the Labour MP Edith Summerskill, overturned an initial decision to pay the allowance to fathers rather than mothers. Concerns about cost, however, saw the proposed allowance reduced to five shillings a week, three shillings below the subsistence level recommended by Beveridge.

All the political parties were now readying themselves for a general election. The Labour Party was in a volatile mood: suspicious of Churchill's policies in liberated Europe, fretting about government

restrictions on civil liberties, concerned at a revival of the far right, but hopeful that the leftward swing of public opinion would open new opportunities at the ballot box. With the NEC having committed the party to ending the Coalition, and Herbert Morrison taking charge of campaign planning from the start of 1945, Labour members got ready for an election they wanted to fight.

During the first months of the New Year, Morrison oversaw the completion of Labour's new manifesto, 'Let Us Face the Future'. Just as in London in the 1930s, Morrison intended to appeal to the middle ground, with a particular effort to capture lower middle-class voters – the 'workers by brain as well as by hand' – who lived in the crowded suburbs of Britain's great cities. The programme was radical, but its presentation was determinedly non-revolutionary. Labour was presented as the sensible choice for the patriotic voter who wanted expertly planned state action to ensure full employment, improved welfare and industrial efficiency. Introducing 'Let Us Face the Future' at the end of April 1945, Morrison explained that it was based not on dogma but 'the practical facts of the situation'. Well before the European war ended, Labour had a clearly worked out, apparently pragmatic set of policies to take into any general election.

Its position relative to smaller left-wing parties was increasingly strong. While Labour respected the electoral truce, Common Wealth continued to offer by-election voters a proxy vote against the Conservatives – a feature last seen at Chelmsford on 26 April 1945, when the Common Wealth candidate, Wing Commander Ernest Millington, a Bomber Command pilot with a DFC, won the seat from the Conservatives with 58 per cent of the vote. Common Wealth hit its peak membership of 15,000 over the winter of 1944–5, but its finances were already in severe trouble. As Labour prepared for the election, it looked to strip away the party's support and absorb local activists.⁶⁰ Further to the left, the Communist Party abandoned its successful wartime strategy of factory recruitment to concentrate on winning parliamentary seats. Membership slumped, just as the party was thrown into confusion by new instructions from Moscow to keep a Churchill-led coalition going. Local parties had been readying themselves for a general election: suddenly they were told not to put up candidates.⁶¹

The excitement of an imminent contest spurred efforts to revive the Liberal Party, which still had a substantial regional presence despite its national decline since the First World War. The Liberal Party had not done nearly as well out of its participation in the Coalition as Labour, partly

because its leader, Sir Archibald Sinclair, concentrated on his job as air minister rather than battling for party advantage. More radical Liberals called for progress on reconstruction before the end of the war and compelled the party leadership to state, in March 1944, that it would fight the next election outside the Coalition. There was no conciliation between the Liberals and National Liberals during the war, despite occasional encouragement from Churchill, who had long wished to see the schism between the wings of his former party resolved. Over the winter of 1944–5, the Liberals were encouraged by the recruitment of Sir William Beveridge, who became Liberal MP for Berwick in October 1944. Beveridge pursued a hyperactively busy schedule in the spring of 1945, meeting and inspiring local Liberal associations with the belief that they might re-establish themselves as a significant political force. 62

The Conservatives also girded themselves for battle. Though they started later than the Labour Party, they had the weight of what had been before the war a wealthier, better-organized national vote-winning machine. A new party chairman, Ralph Assheton, was appointed in October 1944 and set about reviving Conservative Central Office and moribund constituency associations. Applications were put in to release Conservative agents from the forces, and new staff appointed. All of this fostered a mood of excitement. Contrary to subsequent legend, the Conservatives didn't think in 1945 that they were too worn down to win. Many wanted to go to the polls as quickly as possible, to capitalize on Churchill's status as the man who had won the war. Compared to Labour, however, the Conservatives' post-war programme was much less well developed. Butler was one of the few Tories who warned Churchill against going to the country too early. Beaverbrook told him to keep his mouth shut if he wanted to be a minister in the next government. 64

Assheton was much impressed by *The Road to Serfdom*, an antiplanning polemic written by the economist Friedrich Hayek and published in March 1944. *The Road to Serfdom* was a counter-blast to what Hayek saw as the new orthodoxy of state control as an essential part of national economic life. All such interventions, he argued, were the start of a morally corrupting slope towards totalitarianism. Assheton thought that this was an idea that could underpin the Conservative message during the coming electoral campaign.

The Road to Serfdom spoke to a libertarian strand of Conservatism that was different both to Butler's stabilizing vision of social reconstruction and to the welfarism of the Tory Reform Group. Thus far, it had not been very vocally expressed in public, but it reacted fiercely against the idea

that a new age was being ushered in by the war. Again contrary to subsequent legend, Hayek was not opposed to all forms of social security. On the contrary, he argued that they played an important role in modern life. Indeed, it was *The Road to Serfdom*'s combination of support for limited improvements in welfare provision and outright opposition to central planning and public ownership which appealed to many Conservatives, including the prime minister.⁶⁵ The tract also provided intellectual heft against Labour jibes about the supposedly Fascist tendencies of Conservatism, as recently expressed during the debacle in Greece. On the contrary, Hayek charged, the evils of socialism and Nazism sprang from the same source.

It's not clear if Churchill read *The Road to Serfdom*, or just a digest of its argument, but its influence was clear when he spoke to the Conservative Party conference, from a speech drafted by Assheton, on 15 March 1945. In the national cause, he told the Tories, they had 'endured patiently and almost silently many provocations from that happily limited class of Left Wing politicians to whom party strife is the breath of their nostrils'. With the war ending, the other parties were forcing the break-up of the Coalition, and:

Our Socialist friends have officially committed themselves – much to the disgust of some of their leaders – to a programme for nationalizing all the means of production, distribution and exchange . . . sweeping proposals, which imply not only the destruction of the whole of our existing system of society, and of life, and of labour, but the creation and enforcement of another system . . . borrowed from foreign lands and alien minds. 66

As well as test-firing slogans for an imminent confrontation, Churchill emphasized his attachment to a 'national' government that could rally 'the strongest forces available to carry our cause to final victory and peace'. Often dissatisfied with the limitations of the party system and aware of the challenges that lay ahead, he was genuinely reluctant to return to the partisan dogfight if he could remain in power as a 'national' leader. He was also, however, attempting the same sort of political positioning at which Stanley Baldwin had excelled a decade before. A Conservative-dominated right-wing 'national' coalition would be the responsible choice for all voters who wanted to keep out the socialists.

Churchill's speech rallied the Tory faithful, but he was hardly speaking the language of Coalition, as the reactions recorded by a Mass-Observer in Dorking, Surrey, suggested. According to a sixty-year-old clerk: 'It was a wonderful speech . . . it's no good trying to force changes on the people. That is what these Labour party men want to do, just an excuse to have a kind of dictatorship.' A forty-five-year-old pub landlord, however,

explained that 'Ever since Churchill became PM people have been saying to me that he is the one and only man for the job, but they hope he goes a month before the Armistice.'67

Nor did it go down well with his colleagues. A week later, Eden recorded in his diary, Churchill treated the War Cabinet to a disquisition on the dangers of breaking up the Coalition: 'Labour men didn't respond much. E.[rnest] B.[evin] complained that W[inston] had accused them of going back on nationalisation. This he showed he resented.' Eden was also unhappy. The BIPO's recent polls had indicated not only that nearly half of voters favoured the continuation of a coalition between the major parties, but also that he was a more popular choice than Churchill – let alone Attlee, Bevin or Morrison – to lead a post-war government. ⁶⁸ As he told his colleagues:

I said my conviction was unchanged that if country could express itself we should go on as we were until end of Jap war. W. agreed. H.[erbert]M.[orrison] said real difficulty was in domestic legislation where our differing views on State & private enterprise were causing delay & difficulty. But even that isn't quite true because if we once made up our minds to go on together we could work out a programme, compromising no doubt on that. 69

'WHEN HE TURNS INTO THE LEADER OF THE TORY PARTY . . . HE JUST BECOMES A CROOK'

Speaking to Labour's Yorkshire Regional Council on 7 April 1945, Bevin declared his 'profound admiration for the Prime Minister as a war leader – unfettered. I gave him my loyalty in that position: I never gave it to him as leader of the Conservative Party.' He insisted that 'It is not for me to belittle what one man in the coalition Government has done – but I assure you this has not been a one-man Government.' As for the prime minister's criticisms of economic controls, Bevin confessed to

the feeling that this desire to get rid of controls is coupled with a desire to get rich quickly at the expense of the community. At the end of the last war we saw this sorry spectacle of profiteering immediately the war was over . . . The Labour Party is as anxious as anybody to get rid of personal restrictions . . . but not at the expense of the nation. 71

Bevin had made it clear that, while he had no intention of deserting the Labour movement, he did not feel that this was the moment to send the country to the polls.⁷² He was riled not just by Churchill's attempt to blame Labour for breaking the government, but also by the Beaverbrook papers naming him as a possible member of a reconstructed coalition.

Bevin was not about to let the Conservatives sow further dissention in the ranks. As he privately put it to Dalton, Churchill was 'all right as a National leader, but when he turns into the leader of the Tory Party, you can't trust him an inch. He just becomes a crook.'⁷³

As the party machines revved up, expectations of an election developed their own momentum. There might yet, however, have been reasons to pull back from the brink. The final campaign against Japan was still expected to take another eighteen months. It would plainly be a time of tremendous difficulties. All the major party leaders shared Churchill's sense of the growing dangers from the rise of Communism.⁷⁴ For all of them, the hard policies required to navigate the months ahead might well be easier inside the Coalition.

For Labour in particular, there were good reasons for postponing a contest. Almost everyone still assumed that the likeliest outcome from a quick election was a Conservative victory. Tory by-election defeats since 1942 were dismissed as evidence of voters letting off steam. A series of BIPO polls between June 1943 and April 1945, in which 37 to 42 per cent of respondents indicated their intention to vote Labour, as against 23 to 31 per cent for the Conservatives, were presumed to be inaccurate – indicators perhaps of a 'swing to the left' in public opinion, but not a guide to the result of a general election. Memories of Lloyd George's success at the 'khaki election' of 1918 were very strong. Almost certainly, the Conservatives would have a much-diminished majority, but the scale of their head start in the Commons made it seem very unlikely that they could be displaced.

Attlee had already suggested to his Labour colleagues that the election ought to be delayed for a few months after victory in Europe had been attained. That would also allow a full revision of the electoral roll to take account of voters who had come of age since 1935 and wartime changes of address (both of which were expected to favour Labour). Given the strong possibility that the Conservatives would win, staying in the Coalition might have offered the surest means for Labour to embed the reforms it had secured via its participation in government. There was enough consensus on welfare measures to get them onto the statute book – as the Bill showed – and Churchill was Family Allowances insurmountable barrier to measures of social improvement. Bearing in mind the angry state that the Labour Party had got itself into over the winter of 1944-5, corralling members behind a continued Coalition would have posed tremendous problems of party management, but none more daunting than those Attlee would face if he fought an immediate general election and lost.⁷⁵

It was a dangerous moment to be out of the country. When he left for San Francisco, Attlee deputed Bevin to represent him in any discussions about an election with Churchill. Bevin was to keep in touch through Morrison with the NEC. Attlee also got Churchill to promise he wouldn't dissolve Parliament without him. No sooner had the war ended, however, than the hunt for advantage began. Gazing out from his Californian skyscraper as his comrades celebrated VE Day, the Labour leader was desperate to get home.

On 11 May 1945, Bevin and Morrison met with Churchill. Offering them the chance to prolong the Coalition until the end of the Pacific War, he told them that he was under pressure from his own party to fight an election straight away. Bevin was willing to be persuaded to keep the Coalition going. Morrison told them, correctly, that the Labour Party was unlikely to accept. Labour would prefer an October election, he explained, but was ready to fight one earlier if required. Churchill made it clear that a delay until the autumn was unacceptable: Morrison left him no choice but an early break. 77

Attlee got home on 17 May. With the Labour Party conference about to convene in Blackpool, the time for manoeuvre was limited. Nonetheless, he and Churchill sought to cobble together an agreement to keep the Coalition going until Japan was defeated. To secure that, Churchill was willing to make a public commitment that concrete progress would be made on the government's programme of social insurance and full employment.

Attlee took this proposal to the NEC meeting in Blackpool before the Labour conference. He ran straight into a head-on assault from the men who had spent the war complaining about his failure in government — Morrison, Laski, Shinwell and Bevan. Defeated, Attlee had to write to Churchill to suggest the parties stay together till October: an offer all involved already knew would be rejected. Morrison therefore played a key role in ensuring that a general election followed swiftly on the end of the European war. Shortly beforehand, however, he had also prepared a route back into office for whoever was in charge of Labour after the election was over, getting the NEC to agree (in Attlee's absence) that the party leader would then be free to decide by himself whether to enter any future coalition. Even by Morrison's standards, this was a sneaky trick: trapping Attlee into fighting an election he had hoped to postpone and might well lose, laying a path for Morrison to seize the leadership and, if necessary, take a strengthened Labour Party back into a re-formed coalition.

Morrison's speech to the Labour conference was a barnstormer. Full of calls for socialism and nationalization, it received a prolonged standing ovation from the delegates. Attlee responded to this challenge with impressive speed and resilience, accepting the defeat and committing himself fully to taking the fight to the Tories. He was not finished yet.

On 23 May 1945, Churchill went to see the king to request the dissolution of Parliament. As the Labour ministers prepared to leave office, Churchill assembled a new administration — still 'National' in name, even if more Conservative in appearance — to carry out the business of government. The election would be held on 5 July, with the result, delayed to allow the collection and counting of votes from men and women serving overseas, to be declared three weeks later, on 26 July.

'Mind you I think he was ideal for the war'

May-August 1945

The car driving up and down the Broadway had a loudspeaker on top: 'I have much pleasure in telling you that Winston Churchill will be speaking in Walham Green soon after 5 o'clock. I call upon the people of Fulham to give Winston Churchill a big reception when he comes in about an hour's time.' It was 2 July 1945. On the railway bridge between Chelsea and Fulham, someone had been chalking slogans. 'VOTE CHURCHILL' had been crossed out and replaced with 'UP THE REDS' and 'GIVE WINNIE A TASTE OF THE DOLE'. On the Broadway, a crowd was gathering. Women with shopping bags. Old men. Mothers with prams. As the number of people grew, snatches of conversation could be overheard: 'mind you I think he was ideal for the war'; 'He's late – I wonder what's happened to him. I expect he's been mobbed on the way'; 'Whether his politics are yours or not, you've got to hand it to him'. 3

At five, the prime minister had still not arrived. The sitting Conservative MP, Bill Astor, began his speech, promising an urgent solution to the housing problem and warning his audience that Churchill's warnings about the dangers of socialism were just as prescient as his warnings about Nazi Germany before the war.⁴ In the crowd, a fifty-year-old working-class woman turned to her friend: 'We should stand by him. It's no good throwing him out in the middle of the war. They're perfectly right.' Behind her, an older man: 'These buggers have been in for 9 years, what's wrong with letting the other poor sods in for some time and see if they'll raise the old age pensions?'⁵

Then Churchill arrived, looking weary, in a black coat, muffler and very wide-brimmed hat. The crowd cheered and clapped. Explaining the tremendous tasks that his government still had to discharge – victory over Japan, getting servicemen home, building houses for the bombed out – he

declared: 'I would not like to quit the helm until the ship is safe in harbour.' At Astor's prompting, the crowd gave him three cheers. A group of Labour supporters began to boo. Walking away, two working-class women in their twenties chatted: 'Who're you going to vote for?' 'Ooh, I dunno – nobody knows what to do where I live – I don't think Churchill's got anything to do with who you vote for.'

'ANY TIME THAT TOOK THEIR FANCY THEY COULD MARCH ACROSS THE REST OF EUROPE'

It said something that the least of the post-VE crises with which the British had to deal was the end of the French empire in the Levant. The British had tried to broker an accommodation between the nationalist groups and the Paris government, but the arrival of French reinforcements in June 1945 sparked violent protests in Syrian towns. The French responded by shelling Damascus and other cities, triggering uproar across the Arab world. The British intervened to halt the attacks and force French troops back to barracks. They would have to remain in Syria until the French withdrew in 1946.⁹

On the Adriatic, meanwhile, a new conflict looked like it was going to break out in Venezia-Giulia, an Italian province claimed by the Yugoslavs. In February 1945, the British had agreed an occupation deal with Tito to divide the region between them. The British retained control of Trieste, which they intended to return to Italian control. The US State Department insisted that the whole area should be subject to Allied military government until its fate could be determined in the final peace settlement. ¹⁰

During the spring of 1945, Tito abandoned co- operation with the Yugoslavian monarchists, and Churchill became convinced that he was part of the wider Communist threat. Motivated more by nationalism than by Communism, Tito widened his territorial ambitions, moving to seize Trieste and threaten the Austrian province of Carinthia. As in Greece, Churchill was ready to fight, and hoped to get American help. Truman initially backed him but faced resistance from the US War Department, which suspected another British attempt to embroil them in the Balkans.

As Alexander tried to control hundreds of thousands of German prisoners, and secure Trieste without using American troops, his soldiers were spread very thin. Tito, at the head of the most powerful partisan army

in Europe, insisted that he was going to take the whole of Venezia-Giulia. During the first weeks of May 1945, while British and Yugoslav generals ordered each other to withdraw, the State Department came to see extravagant partisan demands as part of a wider totalitarian danger. Truman too now decided to take a firmer stance.

Churchill was delighted. Horrified by the president's insistence that US forces would withdraw to the German occupation zones agreed at Yalta, he warned Truman – in the first use of a famous phrase – that an 'iron curtain' was about to descend on Communist-controlled territories from Lübeck to Trieste. Tito also upped the ante, carrying his demands to the brink of war. Truman, much more cautious, appealed to Stalin for assistance. The Soviet leader told the Yugoslav to back down. On 9 June 1945, the partisans withdrew – and Venezia-Giulia was divided into two zones, much as under the original occupation agreement.

The Axis forces that had surrendered to the Eighth Army included about 42,000 'Russians' – in fact mainly Cossacks who had served under German command in Italy and the Balkans. They included about 11,000 women and children and another 4,000 long-term émigrés who had left Russia after the civil war. Under an agreement reached at Yalta, and keen to ensure that Allied prisoners of war in Eastern Europe were returned, the combined chiefs of staff had instructed that all captured Soviet citizens be delivered to the Red Army. Though the British carefully framed their orders to avoid returning Balts or Poles, they did not exclude the Cossacks, who were forcibly handed over to the Soviets. Some, knowing what lay ahead, committed suicide. The rest were executed, imprisoned or sent to the Gulags.¹¹

Simultaneously, Croat and Slovene soldiers and their families, the remnants of the puppet Croatian state set up by the Nazis, tried to fight their way westwards to surrender to the British in southern Austria. Worried that the refugees would block their strained lines of communication if fighting broke out with Tito, British commanders, following Alexander's orders, turned these groups back at the border or handed them over to the partisans. Tens of thousands of them were massacred over the following days. It was an inglorious end to the Mediterranean war. If there was little sympathy in abstract at the time for those who had worn Axis uniforms (and perpetrated horrendous crimes themselves during the occupation), such detachment was not a luxury afforded to British soldiers who had to force women and children into the hands of their enemies. They were grim reflections not just of the allies Britain had made, but of the moral compromises it was going to have to

make if it wanted peace.

Truman's reluctance to offer more aggressive military support in Southeast Europe deepened Churchill's gloom. Relations with de Gaulle had sunk to a new low, and other Western European governments had grown sceptical of British leadership. Faced with epic humanitarian and food-supply problems, they too looked to the United States for help. But the Americans were already leaving. By the summer, 400,000 GIs would be heading back across the Atlantic every month. Meanwhile, the Soviets ensconced themselves in Central Europe and massed their troops on the Greek border. Though his fears of a Communist tide engulfing the Continent were deepening, Churchill had never abandoned the percentages agreement, and he retained some faith that he could work with Stalin. He pressed for a fresh three-power meeting, but also asked the chiefs of staff to examine Britain's prospects in a war with the Soviet Union.

The codename for this planning exercise, Operation 'Unthinkable', said it all. As Brooke told Churchill, even with full support from the Americans, and German divisions pressed back into service on the side of the Western Allies, there was no hope of getting any further than the Wehr-macht had done in 1941. At best, they would be doomed to an endless war deep in the Soviet interior. When the prime minister asked the chiefs to look at what would happen if the British had to defend Europe alone, the news was just as grim. The Red Army had ended the European war 11 million strong and unequalled in its operational art. Having swept their way to the Channel, British planners predicted, the Soviets would use captured V2 technology to unleash a devastating bombardment of the UK. To fight back against the missile launchers, the British would have to deploy 530 squadrons of fighters and bombers: about 10 per cent more than the entire strength of the RAF at its peak in June 1944. 12

Fighting the Soviets without the Americans really was 'Unthinkable'. Two days after the chiefs considered the impossibility of a war with Stalin, Churchill treated his Cabinet to

a long and very gloomy review . . . The Russians were further West in Europe than they had ever been except once . . . At any time that took their fancy they could march across the rest of Europe and drive us back into our island . . . The quicker [the Americans] went home, the sooner they would be required back here again etc, etc. He finished up by saying that never in his life had he been more worried by the European situation than he was now. 13

Truman was picking out his own path with Moscow. Lend-Lease deliveries to the USSR had been halted as soon as Germany surrendered, but he quickly reversed that decision before the Red Army's deployment

against Japan. During June 1945, Soviet soldiers began to be moved eastwards ready to start a new campaign in Manchuria – a step that calmed British anxieties about the immediate future in Europe.

Keen to meet Stalin in person, Truman proposed a two-power summit. The British were only invited because Stalin, re-insuring as usual, issued a direct invitation to Churchill. On 29 May, the prime minister agreed to join Stalin and Truman in the Berlin suburb of Potsdam in mid-July. Everything should be wrapped up in time for the British delegation to return home for the announcement of the general election result.

Truman had despatched Harry Hopkins to Moscow to resolve the problem of Soviet intransigence over the UN. When the president backed away from a strict interpretation of the Yalta accords, the Soviets made cosmetic changes to the Polish government so that it could be recognized by the Americans. The British had to follow suit. Having achieved success at San Francisco, Truman remodelled his cabinet. James Byrnes replaced Stettinius, an exhausted Hopkins resigned and Morgenthau was pushed out. On 19 July, the US Senate ratified the Bretton Woods agreement, and – shortly afterwards – the UN Charter too. The United States was taking up its place within a new global order: Roosevelt's vaulting ambitions seemed on the brink of realization. Stalin too was satisfied. The Grand Alliance had stayed together during the defeat of Germany, and he had won a free hand in Poland. Churchill was the least happy of the three. As the electioneering began, he looked through a glass darkly at a country unable to shape its circumstances and a continent doomed to another war.

'DISAVOW IT BECAUSE IT WAS NOT ACCEPTED AT THE TIME'

There was no comfort to be found in the Empire. Stafford Cripps' 1942 offer of Dominion status at the war's end had set the clock ticking on Indian self-government. Ever since Cripps' return, Leo Amery, secretary of state for India, had nagged for early progress in the hope of keeping an independent India within the British orbit. Churchill had repeatedly put these proposals aside.

As Wavell grew into his role as viceroy, he too grappled with the problem of Indian self-government. From the autumn of 1944, he promoted a Cripps-ian plan: bring the Indian political parties into a reformed Executive Council (effectively a national government) and let them work out the transfer of power. Amery proposed the opposite: grant

India Dominion status, then invite the political parties into government to work out what they'd do with it. Churchill fobbed them both off, ignoring Wavell's requests to be allowed back to London to state his case before the Cabinet.

Wavell was finally permitted to return in March 1945, only to wait again. The India Committee – meeting as usual without the prime minister – was unable to agree on his proposals. The old India hands packed in by Churchill – James Grigg, Butler and Lord Simon – nagged away at the details. Attlee was reluctant to hand over power to the Indian middle class. Behind the scenes, Amery and Cripps worked towards a draft that everyone could endorse. On 24 April 1945, they agreed with Wavell that all three would resign if Churchill rejected a new appeal to the Indian parties. The prime minister remained as obstructionist as ever. Wavell mourned the time lost in which to make progress before the end of the war. The ending of the Coalition, however, gave him the whip hand: no one wanted him to resign during an election campaign. During four Cabinet meetings on 30 and 31 May 1945, Churchill flip-flopped back and forth before finally accepting the new proposal as his own. 16

Returning to India, Wavell ordered that the Congress leaders be released from jail. They had been waiting even longer than he had for the British government to work out that Congress had to be part of a solution. Negotiations opened on a new Executive Council, with equal numbers of Hindu and Muslim representatives nominated by the parties. At the end of June 1945, a conference to discuss the plans convened at Simla, the summer home of the government of British India.

There was no room for agreement. The Congress was willing to accept equal numbers of Hindu and Muslim ministers — a big concession — but insisted that it should nominate Muslim as well as Hindu representatives. Jinnah was adamant that only the Muslim League could pick the Muslim members of the Council. The conference broke down.

Wavell's hope that Britain could regain the initiative proved no more realistic than Churchill's desire to perpetuate British rule. The factors shaping India's course – militarization, political polarization and economic change – were already pushing towards calamity. The lack of constitutional progress exacerbated the tensions that would shortly lead to the bloody break-up of the Raj.

AGREEING TO THE BOMB

While the fighting dragged to an end in Europe, the most astonishing weapon of the war moved towards completion. Enough fissile material was now being produced in America to manufacture complete atomic bombs. Two weapons were in preparation — one based on enriched uranium and the other with a solid plutonium core. The scientists were certain that the trigger for the uranium bomb would work, but the system required to detonate the plutonium weapon was sufficiently complex that a test run was required. This test, scheduled to take place at the Alamogordo site in New Mexico on 16 July 1945, would also provide the first real evidence of the explosive power of an atomic bomb. ¹⁷

Already, the Truman administration was grappling with the political questions of employing the bomb. The memorandum that Roosevelt and Churchill had signed at Hyde Park had specified that the British should be involved in these discussions. Instead, the Americans took the key decisions by themselves. Aware that something was going on, Sir John Anderson got Field Marshal Wilson to test the atomic waters in Washington. As Wilson soon discovered, no one there had heard of the Hyde Park agreement. The American copy of the document had been misfiled. The British quickly supplied a replacement, but Roosevelt's death had put them in a dangerous position. American politicians, scientists and soldiers who had always sought to cut the British out of the 'Manhattan Project' now had an opportunity to set aside the inconvenient commitments entered into by their late leader.

Appreciating the risk, on 2 May 1945 Anderson asked Churchill to remind Truman of Britain's right to be heard. The prime minister replied that he did not want to press the president too hard. He was content that shared systems of control would eventually emerge. At the start of June, Truman approved the decisions that the bomb be used against Japan as soon as it was ready, against an industrial target in a city and without prior warning. Three weeks later, the Americans decided that, at the upcoming Potsdam conference, the president should inform Stalin of the bomb's existence. In both cases, the British were asked to endorse choices that had already been made. Lord Halifax in Washington, Wilson and Anderson all recognized that they were being asked to rubber stamp a policy that was out of their hands. The chancellor wrote to Churchill with the details of US policy, recommending he give his approval, but wondered whether the prime minister might insist on a discussion with the president. On 2 July 1945, however – the same day that he was cheered and booed in Fulham – Churchill simply put his initials on the memorandum to demonstrate his assent and returned it to Anderson. After all the effort he had put into getting atomic concessions from Roosevelt, it was an astonishingly casual gesture. ¹⁸

During June 1945, the political decision to use the bomb fed into American strategic discussions on the defeat of Japan. An invasion, commanded by MacArthur and codenamed Operation 'Downfall', was being planned in two parts: Operation 'Olympic', against Kyushu, the southernmost of the Japanese home islands, scheduled for November 1945; and Operation 'Coronet', the invasion of Honshu, the main island, in March 1946. Truman, worried about high casualty levels, sought the advice of the US joint chiefs. They were split on whether an invasion was really necessary: Leahy believed that so much damage had been done already that the Americans could just blockade Japan into surrender; Marshall argued that only an invasion could guarantee the quick victory needed to maintain public support. Truman accepted the chiefs' recommendation that American forces undertake 'Olympic', while continuing to attack Japanese shipping and bombing Japanese cities, including the use of atomic weapons when they became available. He reserved a decision on 'Coronet'. 19

The prospect of heavy losses on Kyushu shaped how the joint chiefs responded to a British request to take part in 'Coronet'. The Americans had already accepted the participation of a French corps and a Canadian division in the invasion. 'Jumbo' Wilson and Halifax had both warned London that Britain needed to be seen to do more in the Pacific. Now the British chiefs suggested that as well as the British Pacific Fleet and the RAF's heavy bombers, they should offer a joint British-Indian-Dominion corps of their own. On 4 July 1945, they met with Churchill to discuss their plans. He was so tired from the electoral campaign that nothing seemed to be going in. Nevertheless, he agreed they could send their proposal to the Americans.²⁰

Marshall was happy that someone else would pay part of the blood toll for the ground campaign. He gave the final say to MacArthur. Worried about supply problems, MacArthur insisted that British troops would have to be fully re-equipped with US weapons and equipment. He rejected the Indian troops: speciously on language grounds, but in fact because he was determined that the invasion would reassert white racial supremacy. To Mountbatten's great delight, when the two of them met in Manila on 12–14 July, MacArthur was adamant that he wanted no soldiers from SEAC: instead, British soldiers would be shipped from Europe, through America, to the Pacific in time, if it was ever approved, to take part in 'Coronet'.²¹

THE WARTIME ELECTION

Perhaps it wasn't the best time to be fighting an election. The first task was hastily to update the roll of voters. There were numerous complaints about the inaccuracy of the lists eventually compiled.²² Almost eight million voters had come of age since the last general election in 1935 and were now eligible to cast a vote for the first time. These were also the people most likely to have been called up into the forces or industry.

The residential qualification date for civilian voters was 31 January 1945 – but as the war ended, the population was in flux. Some of those who had gone away to escape the Blitz, or been bombed out, or for munitions work, were coming home while others stayed put, were called up, or moved out. Parts of the country had experienced dramatic population growth since 1939. In others, the bomb-shattered streets could not house the same number of inhabitants who had lived there before the war. Things could have been still more disrupted. In the ten English and thirteen Scottish constituencies where polling day would otherwise have clashed with the traditional 'Wakes Week' industrial holiday – when most families took off for the seaside – voting had to be delayed until the middle of July.

Millions of potential electors were in the forces and away from home. They had to register for a separate postal or proxy vote. The first attempts to encourage such registrations, in summer 1944, resulted in only about 40 per cent of those eligible signing up. In spring 1945, however, with the tempo of operations in Europe slowing and the election seemingly imminent, the rate of registration increased. By the start of July 1945, just under two-thirds of service personnel old enough to vote had registered. About two-thirds of those would ultimately cast their ballot – or have it cast on their behalf.²³ Since the age of majority was twenty-one, none of the more than half a million eighteen- to twenty-year-olds in the forces was allowed a say in who was going to run the country they were serving – unlike in 1918, when every man over seventeen in the military had been given a vote just for the first election after the war.²⁴

Table 6. UK counties and boroughs by service vote as percentage of total registered voters

Twenty highest percentages	Service voters as percentage of total
Portsmouth	15

Plymouth	14
Great Yarmouth, West Ham, Barking, Rochester	13
Kingston-upon-Hull, Dagenham, Hythe, Leyton, East Ham, Walthamstow, Romford, Tottenham, Bromley, Aberdeen, Ilford, Grimsby, Wimbledon, Woodford	12
	Service voters as percentage of total
Dudley, West Bromwich, Wolverhampton, Brecon and Radnor, Denbigh, Accrington, Rotherham, Derby	7
Montgomery, Cardigan, Carmarthen, Coventry, Carnarvon, Orkney and Zetland, Worcester, Dumbarton, Wednesbury, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Smethwick, Barrow-in-Furness	6

Capturing, as it did, not just differences in rates of military participation, but also the way in which the civilian population had moved around since 1939, the official tally of service voters across the country provides further evidence of the war's varied regional impact. There were clear similarities between those areas where the percentage of service voters was relatively high: heavily bombed port cities, where civilians had left but which disproportionately large numbers of servicemen still counted as home; and the eastern and southern suburbs of London, where low rates of reserved occupations meant high levels of conscription, and the Blitz and the V-weapons had destroyed hundreds of thousands of houses. 25 The areas with the lowest percentages of service voters – in west Wales, the big war industry centres in the Midlands, in Dunbartonshire on the Clyde, and at Barrow – also shared some characteristics. Though some had been badly bombed earlier in the war, others had escaped enemy action entirely. All had sent fewer men into the forces. The industrial cities had also drawn in workers to their booming shipyards and factories.

If who voted where was shaped in part by the conflict, so too was the day-to-day grind of the campaign. It was an austerity election, with leaflets and posters printed on poor-quality wartime paper, party workers busy with other voluntary duties, petrol for touring round rural constituencies hard to come by and meeting space in big cities reduced by bomb damage to schools and church halls. In an era when fighting for a seat was still based on stumping up support in the streets and encountering the electorate face-to-face, inexperienced candidates and out-of-practice agents, generally untroubled since 1935, found their work made even more difficult by the lingering effects of the war.²⁶

On the other hand, the fact that the United Kingdom could launch into a general election with such relative ease marked out how unique its domestic experience was compared to that of the other European combatants or large parts of its own Empire. There were no guerrillas to be disarmed, no campaigns of revenge against collaborators to be got out of the way and no expulsion of entire ethnic groups from their homes. A new constitutional settlement did not have to be negotiated: the legitimacy of Parliament and the structures of the state had been reinforced, rather than shattered, since 1939. Britain was scarcely immune from the wider tides sweeping Europe in the conflict's aftermath, but it remained a stable, democratic country — albeit one that was about to deliver an almighty shock to its political class.

According to a BIPO survey conducted before the party campaigns got under way in 1945, 84 per cent of electors had already decided which way they were going to vote.²⁷ To that extent, all the electioneering probably didn't determine who was going to form the next government. The election campaigns, however, not only revealed a great deal about the way that British politics had shifted during the war, but also decided the margin of defeat and victory. Given that 1945 was going to be crucial to the mythologies that guided the Labour and Conservative parties over the years that followed, how they fought the election really mattered.²⁸

'MR CHURCHILL'S DECLARATION OF POLICY TO THE ELECTORS'

In terms of practical possibilities, very little separated the major parties as they went to the electorate. The consequences of a decade of conjoined international crises — economic mobilization, massively over-extended global liabilities, Labour's entry into the Coalition and the consequent commitment to reconstruction — all severely limited the options available to whoever formed the next government. Whatever they said on the campaign trail, incoming ministers would have little choice in the short term but to retain existing controls, including rationing and military conscription, re-convert the economy, find the means to rebuild homes, schools and factories, and see through an overhaul of health and welfare provision. The question was really whether these were temporary trends or indicators of a new political reality. Could there be any going back to the world before the war?

Labour had a well-developed manifesto. The break-up of the wartime Coalition was announced while Labour delegates were still at their conference in Blackpool, and they quickly voted to approve and fight on 'Let Us Face the Future'. Harking back to the economic turmoil that had followed 1918, it claimed that this time only Labour stood for 'order, for positive constructive progress as against the chaos of economic do-asthey- please anarchy'.²⁹ It would plan the future for the people who had won the war.

In contrast to the months of drafting that had gone into 'Let Us Face the Future', the Conservative manifesto was much more hastily thrown together. It was entitled, rather traditionally, 'Mr Churchill's Declaration of Policy to the Electors', and it positioned the prime minister as the head of a 'National' government (comprising the Conservatives and their few Liberal National and National Labour allies) that would subsume partisan interests for the patriotic good. Voters were asked to do their bit by supporting Churchill while Britain finished the war in the Far East. In return, they were promised reduction in wartime controls, tax cuts and a 'four year plan' to improve social services and build hundreds of thousands of new homes.

Significantly, there was no mention of the Conservatives, or their successful domestic record before the war. Instead, voters were asked once again to put their trust in the prime minister, as they had done in 1940, in pursuit of a national cause. At the suggestion of Beaverbrook and Bracken, Churchill had accepted the recommendation of the party chairman, Ralph Assheton, that the government fight on the basis of reestablishing 'freedom': the removal of controls and the reduction of taxation. These would allow an economic revival that was the prerequisite for, and must therefore take priority over, any improvements in the welfare system. Churchill hoped the promise of 'freedom' would appeal to Liberal supporters put off by their party's shift to the left during the war. If the money was there, he wanted to improve social services as well, but his 'four year plan' did not exist in more than notional form. 31

Between them, Churchill and Eden had effectively decapitated the Conservative Party on the home front. No really powerful figure had been able to push the party to agree a concrete reconstruction programme of its own, and the policy-making machinery that had served it so well during the 1930s – the Conservative Research Department and its contacts with a network of paid constituency agents – had fallen into disrepair since 1939. There was a lot of talk about the post-war world, but no clear line, and no pressure from the top to force Tories to craft together an appeal to the widest possible swathe of the electorate. The commitments to reconstruction in the 'National' manifesto were drawn straight from the government's White Papers, but there was a mismatch between the talk of

fiscal orthodoxy and removal of controls and the promises of improved social services.

Contrary to the impression sometimes given, the problem with the 'National' manifesto was not that it was so repellent that no one would vote for it. The combination of Churchill and 'freedom' was attractive to large numbers of traditional Conservative supporters, including the majority of middle-class voters. Bearing in mind the ways that politics had shifted since the late 1930s, however, it was a very poor way to try to win back those who had turned against the Conservatives in 1940, or to appeal to the new middle ground.³²

In the end, a lot of this was Churchill's fault. He sometimes complained that he had no 'message' for the voters, but in comparison with Roosevelt he had paid extremely little attention to popular opinion during the final years of the war. A more ruthless leader might have devoted more effort to staying in power, and less time gratifying his obsession with the fighting of a conflict over which he had decreasingly little control. Churchill might have learned from Baldwin's success that being 'National' helped you win, but that required a leader who could tack towards the middle, co-opt different segments of opinion and guide the popular mood.³³ Throwing together an election campaign at the last minute, relying on Beaverbrook's judgement of what the public were thinking and trusting to his own celebrity were not enough. As Alan Brooke had been telling him for a very long time, victory wasn't something you could improvise.

Signs of what the Conservatives might have achieved with a different emphasis came from Preston, where Churchill's son, Randolph, was standing for re-election. Randolph was a terrible candidate: often absent, sometimes drunk and frequently rude to local party workers. He was also, however, a daring showman with a famous name and a valiant war record serving alongside Yugoslavian partisans. He fought on a very individual platform that mixed entertaining publicity stunts with promises of social reform. By the standards of his party in 1945, this was a successful strategy, since it kept the swing to Labour much lower than the national average. Randolph lost his seat nonetheless.³⁴

'HELP HIM FINISH THE JOB'

In some places it was weeks before the rival campaigns really got going. In

the absence of the punch-ups and platform-wreckings that had characterized an earlier era of politics, commentators wondered whether the contest had really fired the imagination of the electorate. For all that many voters were preoccupied with their own difficulties, however, it is hard to argue that this was an election characterized by disengagement, if only because of the effort that went in to listening to all sides make their case.³⁵

Twenty-six party political broadcasts went out in the month before the votes were cast, more than in any previous election. National and Labour had ten each, the Liberals four, and Common Wealth and the Communist Party of Great Britain one apiece. Each consisted of a talk of up to thirty minutes by a single speaker after the nine o'clock news on the BBC. In a remarkable demonstration of dutiful democratic doggedness, the audience on each occasion amounted to around 45 per cent of the adult population of the UK: a higher proportion of the listening public than tuned in for almost any programme apart from *It's That Man Again* or the most celebrated speeches by the prime minister or the king.³⁶

Churchill got a slightly higher audience than anyone else. Almost every other adult in the country was listening on 4 June 1945 when he gave the first of his four election broadcasts. Explaining that socialism was incompatible with democracy, Churchill declared that a Labour government would have to 'fall back on some form of Gestapo' in its quest to assert state power. At the time, many listeners felt that struck the wrong note. A serviceman recording his reaction for Mass-Observation thought the broadcast 'a lot of nonsense, and very cheap compared with the great speeches he made as a national leader'. In his diary, Leo Amery noted that Churchill had 'jumped straight off his pedestal as world statesman to deliver a fantastical exaggerated onslaught on Socialism'. Furious, the Tory chief whip, James Stuart, rang up 10 Downing Street. Churchill could fight in this way if he chose, he said, 'But it is not my idea of how to win an election.'³⁹

The problem was not that Churchill had compared Labour to the Nazis. Six weeks after the liberation of Belsen, both left and right spent a depressingly large proportion of the election castigating each other as incipient totalitarians. ⁴⁰ As a working-class man in his fifties told a Mass-Observer: 'I suppose they have to say bad things about each other. But I think they go a bit far, some of the mud and slush they throw.' Churchill's error was rather that his violent language didn't fit with his 'National' claims. The next night, in his first broadcast of the campaign,

Attlee dryly picked up on the mistake, thanking his opponent for making clear the great difference 'between Winston Churchill, the great leader in war of a united nation, and Mr Churchill, the party leader of the Conservatives'.

The gaffe notwithstanding, Churchill remained the dominant figure of the National campaign, his three further broadcasts interspersed with those of other speakers, including Eden, Sir John Anderson and 'Rab' Butler. Struck low by a gastric ulcer and distressed by the return of partisan politics, Eden played little part in the election. His broadcast took a very different line to that of his party leader:

The National Government stands for free enterprise and for the encouragement of individual initiative here at home, but these tendencies must not be allowed to develop in a way that conflicts with the public interest. Do not imagine that the choice before you at this election lies between complete State socialism . . . and an anarchy of unrestricted private enterprise. Private enterprise and government control can and should exist side by side . . . 42

Labour's radio campaign consisted of a speech each from Attlee and Morrison dealing with the whole election, bookending eight expert talks on different aspects of Labour's manifesto. The comparison with the Conservatives bore out a lesson on the value of central planning.⁴³

As well as addressing voters over the airwaves, politicians from all the major parties toured the country to try to rally support for their cause. The Labour leaders travelled round different regions before coming together for a big rally in the Albert Hall on 23 June 1945. Beveridge circled England and Wales on a journey round the Liberal periphery. In the final two weeks of the campaign, Churchill undertook a celebratory tour that started in Glasgow and descended through the provinces towards London.

Churchill was also the central image of the National publicity campaign, staring determinedly out from posters with the slogan 'Help him finish the job'. Electoral propaganda was another aspect of the campaign in which the Conservative Party was caught behind. For the previous eighteen months, Labour's publicity team, staffed by professional designers and advertising executives, had been working hard on an ambitious programme with large numbers of leaflets, mobile publicity units and posters carefully designed to put across the party's message. Labour led with a series of nine posters drawn by the *Daily Mirror* cartoonist Philip Zec.⁴⁴ Most of them featured the face of a single ordinary Briton and the reason they'd choose the party: the housewife who 'couldn't make a home until she's got one', the worker who wanted 'No more dole queues', the white-collar worker who had 'brains, and doesn't

want them wasted'. Another depicted three servicemen, one from each of the armed forces, and the slogan – in neat counterpoint to Churchill's plea – 'Help them Finish *Their* Job! Give them homes and work!'. With their stylish portrayal of the determined citizens of a new Britain voting Labour to get their reward from years of wartime sacrifice, Zec's posters embodied a vision that party strategists had never been able fully to realize in the late 1930s. Reaching out beyond its traditional heartlands, Labour must be seen to represent everyone who needed a more stable, equal country to fulfil their modest desire for a better life.

'FRAUDS, CHEATS, WRIGGLERS SEEK POWER'

The one daily paper that explicitly backed Labour, the TUC-owned *Daily Herald*, had a good war, its rising circulation a demonstration of the Labour movement's growing strength. During the election campaign, it deployed a series of bruising headlines designed to rally Labour supporters: 'A VOTE FOR CHURCHILL IS A VOTE FOR FRANCO (with, in tiny letters above, 'This is the Election Cry the Tories Fear'); 'MORE BABIES DIE UNDER TORY RULE'; and 'FRAUDS, CHEATS, WRIGGLERS SEEK POWER'. 45

Two other popular dailies, the *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Mirror*, and the *Mirror*'s stablemate, the *Sunday Pictorial*, also maintained their strongly anti-Tory line. The *Daily Mirror* never explicitly endorsed Labour, but its own election campaign – 'Vote For Him', which urged those at home to cast their votes in line with the wishes of soldiers overseas – was strikingly similar to Labour's poster campaign: unsurprisingly since, according to Herbert Morrison, they had both been inspired by the same letter, which he'd read on one of his frequent visits to the newspaper's editor.⁴⁶

For the first time at an election since the introduction of universal adult suffrage, the combined sales of the anti-Conservative press – more than five million copies on average a day – roughly balanced those of the newspapers that supported the Tories: the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Sketch* and, the biggest of them all, the *Daily Express*. The *Express* was the one paper that welcomed the election. It began the contest by giving plenty of coverage to speeches by Beaverbrook promising not only that the National government would abolish all state controls, but asserting that the main economic priority was higher wages rather than increased exports.⁴⁷

After the prime minister's first electoral broadcast, the Express

splashed with 'GESTAPO IN BRITAIN IF SOCIALISTS WIN: THEY WOULD DICTATE WHAT TO SAY AND DO, EVEN WHERE TO QUEUE'. Ten days later, Harold Laski responded to Churchill's suggestion that Attlee should attend the Potsdam conference (a genuinely 'national' gesture to make sure that they'd both be party to the decisions) by insisting publicly that it was Labour's NEC, not the party leader, who would determine future foreign policy. The *Daily Express* declared that this was a bid for power by a shadowy party apparatchik, 'Gauleiter Laski' (in Harold Macmillan's phrase), the 'Red Professor' who had pledged himself to violent revolution. As the *Express* told it, only Churchill could save the country from the Laski menace.⁴⁸

Some of this seems to have worked. In the final weeks of the campaign, the BIPO polls – still discounted by most commentators – suggested that the Labour lead over the Conservatives had narrowed rapidly to the lowest it had been since 1943: a still whopping 47 to 41 per cent. This was in fact fairly close to the final result. Whether it was the prime minister's grand tour, the Laski scare, or simply that the Conservatives were making a serious political effort for the first time since 1935, some voters backed away from Labour at the last minute.

'I THINK . . . THE LIBERAL PARTY WILL STRIKE THE HAPPY MEDIUM'

A total of 1,683 candidates stood for 640 seats: 624 'National', 604 Labour, 307 Liberals, 23 Common Wealth-ers and 21 Communists, with the remainder made up of Independents, Independent Labour Party-ers, and Scottish, Irish and Welsh Nationalists. A sample of Conservative and Labour candidates suggested some common characteristics. They were overwhelmingly male (fewer than 5 per cent were women) and relatively young (the average age was forty-six). About half had seen military service in this war or the last, with the Conservatives rather more likely to have been in uniform.⁴⁹

Hopeful of a national resurgence, the Liberals recruited a lot of new candidates at short notice. Their men were younger than those of the other two major parties, and an even higher proportion of them had been in the forces. They were the progressive sons of the professional middle classes, eager to espouse a middle way.⁵⁰ Some voters found this an attractive stance – such as this young middle-class woman, interviewed during the election by Mass-Observation in Labour-held Willesden West: 'I'm a

Liberal by conviction. I think the Conservatives have got the wrong end of the stick and Labour likely to retain a hold on controls, and the Liberal party will strike the happy medium.'51

In this constituency, however, as in 331 others, there was no Liberal to vote for. Shortage of funds and time meant that the Liberals stood in less than half of the seats. In the more than three hundred seats that they *were* contesting, meanwhile – twice as many as in 1935 – the Liberals spread their activists and funds very thin. Even if they won all of them, they would have too few MPs to form the next government. As a generation of older Liberal voters died off, their children became less likely to stick with earlier party alignments, and more likely to offer their vote to a party that had a real chance of attaining power.⁵²

Across the country in 1945, 800,000 more people voted Liberal than had done so a decade before, but because they were spread out over so many more constituencies, the party ended up with half as many seats. Whether the increased number of three-way contests damaged Labour or the Conservatives more is open to dispute, but the pattern of tactical voting seems to have favoured Labour.⁵³ The inability to mount a serious national challenge meant that the Liberals didn't split the progressive vote. For Britons who wanted a change of government, Labour was really the only choice.

Since neither the Communists nor Common Wealth could mount a countrywide campaign, Labour faced no serious competition from parties further to the left. In some constituencies Common Wealth and Communist activists worked alongside Labour members to try to get the Conservatives out. This ability to absorb the hopes of the wider left reflected the mix of responsibility and radicalism that Labour sustained during the war. The same duality was apparent during the contest. Labour's national campaign trod a carefully moderate line, but in an era when constituencies were subject to relatively little central control, some candidates spread the socialist gospel in much fierier terms. That only heightened Labour's appeal to left-wing opinion as a whole.

Having failed to catch the public mood with their national campaign, the Conservatives also lost key constituency battles. Despite party efforts to rebuild, candidates often had to depend on inexperienced or aged staff. Their canvassing efforts were particularly poor, which helps explain why they remained convinced that they were heading towards victory.⁵⁴ Conservative organizational decline evened the financial playing field. Historically, Labour had always been substantially outspent by the Conservatives at election time. This time, the wartime surge in trade union

membership and the cessation of electoral activities for the duration meant that Labour had built up a large war chest. It spent half as much again, accounting for inflation, as it had done in 1935.⁵⁵

In contrast, though the Conservatives still spent about a third more per candidate, declining membership meant their total real-terms spend was less than it had been a decade before. Inadequate local intelligence, moreover, meant that much of this money was wasted in areas where it made little difference to the outcome. In contrast, Labour strategists focused their efforts where they thought they could win. The Labour leaders spent weeks in the Midlands, East Anglia, Lancashire and Cheshire – all directed by Herbert Morrison from Transport House. Simultaneously, Morrison ran Labour's campaign in London, spearheading the charge to win over the capital's suburbs. Grasping the electoral potential of the metropolitan lower middle class, Morrison led from the front, leaving his former constituency in South Hackney to become a candidate for East Lewisham. Labour had never previously won the seat, but it was exactly the sort of area Morrison believed that the party needed to capture if it was to achieve power. ⁵⁶ This was a brave step, but not quite a gamble. East Lewisham's population had been swelled since the last election by the addition of two huge council estates, packed with probable Labour voters. Morrison could bring a lot of electoral firepower to bear: he outspent his Conservative opponent by almost two to one, the greatest Labour spending superiority anywhere in the country.⁵⁷

On 4 July 1945, the eve of the election, Churchill passed through Lewisham at the tail end of his grand tour, just as Morrison made one last big effort to get out the Labour vote. Both loudly blamed the other for the area's high toll of flying-bomb fatalities. It was a fitting end to a vicious campaign.⁵⁸

'IT'S NO GOOD BEING A WORKER AND VOTING FOR SOMEBODY WHO'LL STAND FOR THE BOSSES'

The war provided Labour with an opportunity to do something it had never managed before: assemble an election-winning majority of voters. If much of the political disruption that made this possible had occurred before 1945, Labour's achievement during the election was to make sure that it benefitted from the resultant realignment, to secure the political centre ground against a Tory fightback, and to convert a shift in popular opinion

into an overwhelming parliamentary victory. Any advantage Labour got from its superior preparations would not have produced a victory without the legacy of public anger against the 'Guilty Men', wartime shifts in social attitudes and the years of hard work by party leaders and activists that had gone before.⁵⁹

The reputational damage inflicted on the Conservative Party by its association with pre-war appeasement and the disaster of 1940 should not be under-estimated. Labour's approach to the challenge of the dictators had for a long time been even more inadequate, but the failure of Conservative ministers (albeit within a National government) to protect national security continued to reverberate in 1945. Ironically, the very attacks on the Chamberlain government made by Churchill's allies, above all Beaverbrook, in order to strengthen the new prime minister's position in 1940, made it much harder for his party to win an election five years later. Attempts to foreground Churchill did not win round voters who were still furious with his predecessor.

Enoch Powell, for instance, a self-described innate Tory who had hardly been converted to socialism by the war, told his father to cast his proxy vote for whichever candidate opposed Churchill (which in practice meant voting Labour). Powell did this partly because he thought that the Coalition necessary for the war was inappropriate for the peace, partly because he disliked the prime minister's 'erratic' nature and willingness to kow-tow to the Americans, but above all because he was still incandescently angry about the Conservatives' pre-war record of appeasement: they were 'every bit as nasty traitors as the Labour party'. 60

The lingering determination to get the Tories out might have been a necessary precondition for Labour's success, but it should not obscure the ways in which Labour had become a more attractive party for voters since the last general election in 1935. Compared to previous contests, it was now seen much more fully as the workers' party: not just of those toiling in heavy industry, but of those working on the production assembly lines and in the fields. Though the working classes had hardly been forged into a single enduring whole, one consequence of wartime experience was that more people identified as 'workers' and believed that Labour was the party that best represented their interests. Almost four in five industrial wage earners voted for Labour – and just over half of workers in other sectors of the economy.⁶¹ As a working-class woman in her twenties explained to a Mass-Observer: 'Well, Labour's for the workers and it's no good being a worker and voting for somebody who'll stand for the bosses.'⁶²

An older woman expressed her choice in terms of solidarity and

stability: Labour represented 'the views of the average working man. Certainly it wants things put in order.' In 1945, unlike in earlier elections, this was a crucial part of Labour's appeal. Since 1918, female voters had consistently favoured the Conservatives over a Labour Party that was portrayed as aggressively male. This time, the majority of Labour voters were still men, but marginally more women voted Labour than Conservative.

Wartime mobilization notwithstanding, Labour propaganda placed women firmly in a domestic setting: wives and mothers voting for absent servicemen. Labour's pledges of fair shares for all, however, resonated strongly with working-class housewives who had often bought in more heavily than their husbands to the patriotic collectivism of the war years. In Conservative pledges of economic deregulation, they saw a return to rapidly rising food prices, worsening shortages and uncertain employment.⁶⁴

At least three million working-class voters cast their ballot for the Conservatives in 1945, however, so the alignment of class and politics was hardly monolithic. Significantly, however, Labour also managed to secure the support of a portion of the lower middle classes – clerks, laboratory assistants and draughtsmen – with an admixture of progressive professionals too. According to one estimate, about 30 per cent of salaried workers voted Labour.⁶⁵ Since their pay had usually gone up much less than that of engineering workers or miners, they were concerned about a post-war slump. Their economic vulnerability attracted them to the universal benefits promised by Beveridge. Sharing working-class dissatisfaction with vested interests, they were often much more frustrated about the entrenched hierarchies and ingrained snobbery that stopped them getting on, and had made up a large part of the audience for the plethora of wartime publications calling for radical reconstruction. Around London in particular, Labour enjoyed substantial success in winning over this group, with an average swing from Conservative to Labour of about 20 per cent.

The majority of servicemen who cast their votes also seem to have favoured Labour. The reasons for this went beyond the fact that the military was disproportionately composed of the sorts of young men who were voting Labour in civilian life. Nor, contrary to Conservative suspicions, was it that the Army Bureau of Current Affairs indoctrinated men with left-wing views: at most, it had helped to crystallize opinions that had been forming in any case. There was a strong and widespread desire for a 'better' and 'fairer' Britain among the troops, and Labour was seen as the party most likely to bring it about. A vote for Labour was also

a means of getting back at the Tory-officered institutions that had dominated men's lives since call-up. With victory in Europe already achieved, many men cast their ballots with two fingers stuck in the air.

Most servicemen didn't vote, however, and the votes of those who did were spread across the country in such a way that they probably didn't affect the results in more than a handful of constituencies. Much more significant was the extent to which non-military voters were influenced both by the views of absent servicemen and the belief that Labour could be trusted to look after the interests of those servicemen when they returned home. The scale of the country's military endeavour during the war had been such that the ideas of fairness and mutual obligation inculcated by service became an influential factor once 'normal' electoral politics resumed. 66

Were Labour voters socialists?⁶⁷ A few were devotees of planning, economic and urban, and saw in it the route to a better world. Most were broadly in favour of nationalizing failing industries, though outside the coalfields it was seldom their political priority. After a war in which the state had controlled so much, a lot believed that the government should make things fairer. If the vast majority simply saw in Labour the best chance of getting jobs and homes, these were scarcely apolitical topics in 1945. On the contrary, the question of how they would be delivered encapsulated the differences between the party platforms.

'PEOPLE WON'T THROW OUT W CH – SELF PRESERVATION'

For three weeks after polling day, while the votes of overseas servicemen were gathered, the result of the election remained unknown. It was generally presumed that Churchill had won. Conservative Central Office estimated a majority between fifty-six and eighty; Beaverbrook insisted to the prime minister that he'd have an advantage of a hundred seats. More disquieting rumours floating among Conservatives suggested that the party might have failed to gain a majority.⁶⁸ The Labour leaders expected that, at best, they might have won enough seats for a minority government.⁶⁹ Bevin was so certain that the Tories would be back in that he'd booked a holiday cottage in Cornwall at the end of July so that he could take a well-deserved break.⁷⁰

Churchill left straight away for a holiday at Hendaye in France. He

spent a week painting, basking on the beach, drinking a lot of claret and not reading the briefing papers ahead of his conference with Truman and Stalin. Just as at Yalta, he would rely on his great experience to pick things up as he went along.

The lack of preparation infuriated Eden, but in truth, both men were shattered. Churchill's years of war strain had been compounded by the physical and emotional efforts of his electoral tour. Eden had been struck by a much more grievous tragedy. On 27 June 1945, the same day that his election address was broadcast on the radio, Eden was told that his beloved son Simon was missing. The RAF plane in which he was a navigator had failed to return from a supply mission over Burma. Devastated, Eden soldiered on, convinced that he must settle a European peace.

On 15 July 1945, Churchill flew from Bordeaux on his way to the Berlin suburb of Potsdam, and what was going to be the final conference of the war. It was a more pleasing location than Yalta. Dotted with well-appointed palaces and parks, the city had largely escaped the destruction visited upon Berlin. Housed comfortably in villas decorated with looted German furniture, the delegates were tightly guarded by their Soviet hosts. Stalin took his time arriving, so the British and Americans had a day to tour the wreckage of Berlin. Helped by Soviet soldiers, they picked up souvenirs: a box of medals, a pendant from a chandelier, a chunk from Hitler's marble-topped desk. For days afterwards, their nostrils tingled with the dust of powdered buildings and burnt flesh.

At noon on 17 July, Truman and Stalin had their first face-to-face meeting. Sorting out the order of business, they speculated about the British election and agreed that Churchill had probably won. As Stalin put it, according to the staccato American note: 'people won't throw out W Ch - self Preservation'. Mischievously, but not inaccurately, he speculated about whether the British would really do their bit in the Far East: 'peculiar mentality – bombed by Ger – not Japan war over for them – these feelings may work vs PM. US people – give power to finish task – can Brit ask that – they believe war over – little interest in war vs Japan . . . '71 Stalin told Truman that he'd attack Japan in just under a month's time. The satisfied president recorded in his diary: 'Fini Japs when that comes about.' The Soviet leader also said he'd demand the Allies take action against Franco (who had sent a Spanish division to fight with Axis forces on the Eastern Front) and divide up the Italian colonies around the Mediterranean. All this, Truman noted, was 'dynamite – but I have some dynamite too which I'm not exploding now'. 72

At the same time, the US war secretary Henry Stimson was lunching

with Churchill. He told him that the atomic bomb test at Alamogordo in New Mexico the day before had been a complete success. The prime minister was, according to Stimson, 'intensely interested and greatly cheered up' (and still against disclosing news of the project to the Soviets), but he was by no means carried away.⁷³ He knew the bomb had worked, but not yet just what enormous power it had unleashed.⁷⁴

The combined chiefs had already started their discussions, settling the details for British participation in the invasion of Japan. The negotiations were well mannered, but the Americans rejected British attempts to secure a share in the command of Allied forces in the Pacific, and put off any talk of the combined chiefs continuing after the war. They had just started cutting back further on munitions deliveries to the British under Lend-Lease.

'THE MELANCHOLY POSITION OF GREAT BRITAIN'

Potsdam was not meant to be a peace conference, but it was supposed to prepare for the peace deal to come. Aware of the mistakes made in 1919, all three leaders wanted to put the key elements of the post-war order in place before they convened a larger international free-for-all. Many of the issues were left over from previous discussions: the Yalta Declaration and its application across Europe; the trial of war criminals; and, above all, the conjoined questions of German reparations and the western border of Poland.

There had been no formal agreement at Yalta about how much German territory Poland should receive in compensation for land ceded to the Soviet Union. One proposal was that it might get everything east of the Oder and Neisse rivers — a definition complicated by the fact that the Neisse had eastern and western branches, between which lived several million people. Since the whole area fell within the Red Army's zone of occupation, the Soviets had simply implemented the change by themselves, handing over more than 40,000 square miles of territory, including the valuable coal mines of Silesia and most of it ethnically German, to the administration of the Communist Polish government.

The advance of the Red Army had already pushed huge numbers of Germans westwards over the new border. The Soviets and the Poles drove out any who remained. At the same time, German communities were also forced out of Czechoslovakia and what was now Soviet territory to the east. Altogether, more than thirteen million people were displaced as a

result, in one of the great population movements of modern European history.

The Americans and British objected to the Soviets settling the new boundaries of Eastern Europe by themselves, but what really worried them were the implications for what remained of Germany. The Soviets were still demanding that the Allies extract \$20 billion of reparations, half of which should go to them to help repair the devastation caused by the prolonged campaign in the east. Neither the British nor the Americans favoured such a punitive approach. By unilaterally ceding so much land to Poland, the Soviets had already removed a chunk of German resources to a client Communist regime. If they tried to render reparations from all of what remained, at the same time as chasing starving Germans westwards, the British and Americans would end up paying to feed refugees while the Soviets carried away valuable industrial resources from the western occupation zones.⁷⁵

In the end, these disputes would deadlock the conference, but it took time to reach the impasse. The three leaders referred tricky issues to their foreign ministers, who met first each day. The plenipotentiaries met in the afternoon — Truman, business-like and keeping the talks moving as chairman; Churchill, discursive as ever, having to be called to time; Stalin, quiet but intense, drawing doodles of wolves and scrawling the word 'reparations' on his papers again and again. Early on, they agreed a programme of meetings for a Council of Foreign Ministers, starting that September in London. For the moment, all three were thinking in terms of future co-operation. Over the next few days, the discussions moved over questions of reparations, the control of Germany and the fate of its remaining fleet, and the composition of the Polish government. When the British pressed the Soviets on free elections, Stalin demanded intervention against Franco. He was showing what was to the British a very unwelcome interest in the strategic balance around the Mediterranean.

On 18 July 1945, two months after Keynes' warning of the need to tackle Britain's Stage III economy, Churchill used a private lunch with Truman to broach the subject of Lend-Lease. The prime minister laid out the 'melancholy position of Great Britain'. Having fought 'all alone for the common cause', it would end the war with half its foreign investments sold off and owing £3 billion to the Sterling Area. Given these sacrifices, it was only fair that the Americans kept the flow of civil and military aid going while the British reconverted their economy. When Truman acknowledged the 'immense debt' America owed Britain for 'having held the fort at the beginning', Churchill thought he had recognized that this

case was just. As a relieved prime minister noted to the Cabinet, the president had said that the United States should regard 'these matters as above the purely financial plane'.⁷⁶

For Churchill, this was a major development, the first step in the construction of a relationship with a new president. As both men knew, however, what mattered was what could be sold to the American people, and Truman offered no guarantees. The prime minister may have taken his polite affirmations as a more concrete commitment than was intended. When Churchill pushed again about the combined chiefs, American officers interrupted to remind their boss that he needed to be off. It had been a really enjoyable lunch, the president told the prime minister, but now he had an appointment with Stalin.

Truman was indeed enjoying himself, but if he had just promised to continue Lend-Lease aid, he made no mention of it in his diary. Instead, with new evidence from Alamogordo about the scale of the atomic blast, Truman recorded his increasing excitement about the implications for Japan. 'Believe Japs will fold up before Russia comes in', he wrote. 'I am sure they will when Manhattan appears over their homeland.' For Truman, the significance of his meeting with Churchill was that the prime minister, in a sharp turnaround, had agreed that they should share with Stalin news of the atomic bomb.

On 21 July 1945, the plenary meeting turned back to future elections in Poland. Eden had tried to write in guarantees about free reporting. When Stalin tried to remove them, Truman explained that he couldn't ignore the views of the Polish community in the United States. When he complained about the redrawing of the Polish border, Stalin insisted that there was no issue about a German population living east of the Oder–Neisse line. What about the nine million Germans who had lived there? asked the president. They had all gone, Stalin replied (towards western Germany, as the British knew all too well). Churchill insisted that the Poles had no right to create a famine by flooding Germany with refugees. By now, it was clear that the conference was not going to be over before the general election results were announced. Instead, the British politicians flew back to London on the 25th.

'NOW WE HAD A NEW VALUE WHICH REDRESSED OUR POSITION'

On the morning of 22 July 1945, Stimson had shared with Churchill the first detailed report on the results of the Alamogordo test. For the prime minister, it was an atomic revelation. The awed accounts of observers at the test site made clear that this was not just an extra-large explosion, but the opening of a new era. Truman had seen the report the day before. The prime minister told the war secretary that he now understood why the president had suddenly been so firm. 'Stimson', he proclaimed, 'what was gunpowder? Trivial. What was electricity? Meaningless. This atomic bomb is the Second Coming in Wrath.'

Conscious though he had long been of the bomb's military potential, Churchill suddenly grasped its significance as a source of diplomatic power – as Brooke discovered the next day when he was treated to an exposition of new horizons:

It was no longer necessary for the Russians to come into the Japanese war, the new explosive alone was sufficient to settle the matter. Furthermore we now had something in our hands which would redress the balance with the Russians! The secret of this explosive, and the power to use it, would completely alter the diplomatic equilibrium which was adrift since the defeat of Germany! Now we had a new value which redressed our position (pushing his chin out and scowling), now we could say if you insist on doing this or that, well we can just blot out Moscow, then Stalingrad, then Kiev . . . etc etc. And now where are the Russians!!!

Brooke 'tried to crush his over-optimism . . . and was asked with contempt what reason I had for minimising the results of these discoveries.' As the CIGS later admitted, Churchill had the more acute sense of the atomic bomb's significance — though no great appreciation of how the new weapons would be made or carried to their targets, let alone what would happen if the Russians got them too.

Churchill saw in the atomic weapon the answer to his geo-strategic problems. In the Pacific, the bombs would end the war quickly without a prolonged ground campaign on the Japanese islands that the British could ill afford. As the joint trustees of the new device, America and Britain would be drawn together. He and Truman could halt the Communist threat. Eastern Europe, as he had long accepted, was gone, but the West at least would be saved.

In the plenary sessions that followed, Churchill stepped up his verbal sparring with Stalin, challenging the change to the Polish border. Stalin responded by staking a Soviet claim to the conquered Italian colonies on the southern shore of the Mediterranean. As far as Churchill was concerned, he and Truman still had something up their sleeve. After the plenary session of 24 July 1945, he watched excitedly as the president took Stalin aside and explained briefly about the atomic bomb. Truman kept it

low key: he was keeping Stalin informed, not offering to share the new weapon. Churchill would later remember Stalin's innocent response: 'A new bomb! Of extraordinary power! Probably decisive on the whole Japanese war! What a bit of luck!'80

Comparing notes, Truman and Churchill were convinced that Stalin had no idea of the importance of what he had been told. They could not have been more wrong. Well informed by his spies of the progress of the Manhattan Project – and judging his allies' intentions by the honesty of their disclosures – Stalin became certain that the Americans' failure to offer atomic partnership indicated a willingness to use the bomb against the USSR. He became still more suspicious of US intentions and determined to drive on the Soviet atomic development programme, a quest made much easier by the flow of secret information from Los Alamos to Moscow.⁸¹

The next day Churchill met, at Stalin's suggestion, with representatives of the Polish government. Set on seizing the territory up to the western Neisse, they declared that they would only have to clear out another million and a half Germans. At the last plenary before his departure, the prime minister reported that the issues were intractable. As he correctly diagnosed, the difficulties – the Polish border, the movement of peoples, the occupation of Germany and reparations – were all joined up. Unless they could find a means to break the logjam, the conference would end in failure. As he and Stalin traded jibes, it didn't seem that an agreement was any closer. The Soviet leader asked Churchill what he was moaning about:

He was not accustomed to make complaints but he pointed out that the Russian situation was still worse than that of the British. They had lost over five million men in this war. He was afraid that if he started complaining Churchill would burst into tears so difficult was the situation in Russia . . .

Churchill said that the British position would be more difficult after the war than it had been during the war although it might be less deadly. Stalin observed that as they had tackled the war properly they'd be able to tackle the peace.⁸²

'A DISPLAY OF BASE INGRATITUDE, AND RATHER HUMILIATING FOR OUR COUNTRY'

On their return to London, Churchill, Eden and Attlee discovered that Labour had secured a landslide. It had won 393 seats: the Conservatives and their allies 213. A slew of Tory frontbenchers, including Macmillan, Amery and Bracken, lost their seats. So did Ralph Assheton. The Liberals

won just 12 seats of the 306 they contested. Both Beveridge and Sinclair, the Liberal leader, had been defeated. The Communists won two seats; Common Wealth one. Having taken seats in rural areas in Scotland, Wales and East Anglia, as well as a host of provincial cities and large swathes of the lower-middle-class suburbs, Labour could genuinely claim, for the first time since its foundation, to be a national party, chosen by people across the country to form a majority government.

If the first-past-the-post electoral system exaggerated the result — Labour had won 48 per cent of votes cast, and the Conservatives 40 per cent — it indicated accurately the significance of the change. The unexpectedness of the result indicated how difficult it had been to envisage a Labour government under the political conditions prevailing during the previous decade. Three and a half million more people had voted Labour than in 1935. The swing to Labour candidates across the country was, on average, 12 per cent. The scale of the win opened a new era in which, with the two-party system having reasserted itself, Labour and Conservatives would compete to form a single-party government.

Conservatives were aghast. There was no question of a prolonged transition. It was a very personal blow for Churchill, just as he had been vouchsafed the deliverance of the atomic bomb. On 26 July he wrote to Attlee admitting defeat and went to Buckingham Palace to tender his resignation to the king. Conservative voters to a man, the senior officers and civil servants who had struggled with him through the war couldn't believe it. As Cadogan put it in his diary, the result was both 'a terrible blow to poor old Winston . . . a display of base ingratitude, and rather humiliating for our country.'⁸³

Eden was returned with one of the largest Conservative majorities in the country. Four days previously, his son's death had been confirmed. He welcomed some time out of the public eye. In his journal, Eden confessed himself surprised at the size of the Labour victory rather than the result. He had a good idea of whom to blame: 'while there is much gratitude to W as war leader there is not the same enthusiasm for him as PM of the peace. And who shall say that the British people were wrong in this?' Perhaps a different Conservative would do a better job of winning them over next time around.

Labour supporters were joyfully astonished. At last, they thought, the people had come into their own and seen the light. Across the country, first-time Labour candidates found themselves elected. In London, having overseen the most astonishing victory in his party's history, Herbert Morrison prepared to leap for the premiership.

As the first results came through on 25 July 1945, Morrison told Attlee that Labour MPs ought to be given a chance to choose their new leader. He would be putting his name forward for election. Bevin was furious. When Churchill's letter admitting defeat arrived at Labour headquarters the next day, Morrison and Laski told Attlee to inform the king that the party would delay forming a government until a leadership contest could be held. Morrison secured Cripps' support, and with Attlee and Bevin apparently acquiescent, went off to Labour's victory rally in Westminster Central Hall.⁸⁵

While Morrison had been out of the room getting Cripps' agreement over the phone, however, Bevin had told Attlee to go straight to the palace. As Morrison shook hands and slapped backs therefore, Attlee got into his car – driven, as throughout the campaign, by his wife Vi – and went to see the king. Shortly afterwards, Vi drove him back to the victory rally, where Attlee announced from the stage that he had just accepted His Majesty's invitation to form a new government and had therefore become prime minister. The next day, Morrison tried again to insist on a ballot, but was firmly squashed as Bevin introduced Attlee to a meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party as their victorious leader.

Over the next two days Attlee made his key Cabinet appointments swiftly so that he and his new foreign secretary could get back to Potsdam. Morrison wanted the post, but Attlee made him lord president, giving him oversight of the home front and putting him in charge of implementing the reforms in 'Let Us Face the Future'. The post made brilliant use of Morrison's talents as an administrative fixer and kept him very busy. Bevin had expected to be chancellor, but, since he and Morrison had to be kept away from each other, Attlee appointed Dalton to the Exchequer and made Bevin foreign secretary. Cripps became president of the Board of Trade. Like Morrison, he and Dalton would have their hands full dealing with the economic problems confronting the country.

On 28 July, Attlee and Bevin flew back to Germany to resume negotiations with the 'Big Two'. The Soviets and the Americans were as surprised as everybody else at the contest's outcome. Since Attlee had been sitting in on all the plenary meetings at the conference, however, and Bevin had long-since demonstrated that he shared the same strategic perspective as Churchill, the British delegation picked up almost exactly where they had left off.

Truman thought the Labour men were better delegates than their predecessors: at least they read their papers properly. Churchill had misunderstood the president. Though the bomb had bolstered Truman's

confidence, he did not intend to use it as the foundation for a new anti-Soviet commitment in Europe. On the contrary, he wanted to get Potsdam finished as soon as possible so that he could be back in Washington when the first atomic bomb was dropped on Japan. While the British were gone, he'd given James Byrnes the job of sorting the European mess out.

The secretary of state saw that he could trade American concessions on the Polish border for Soviet agreement on German reparations. In the absence of the British, he'd already worked out a deal with Molotov, in which the Soviets got the Oder—Neisse line in return for admitting Italy to the United Nations and accepting that their \$10 billion of reparations would come predominantly from their own occupied zone. Given the limited resources of the Soviet sector, this would be topped up with a tithe on the industry of the British-occupied Ruhr. Bevin tried to bargain hard for the ground between the Neisse's two branches, but in the end he had few cards in his hand. With agreement finally reached, the conference concluded on 1 August 1945.

In some ways, it had been a great success. Despite their very different views on what European peace should involve, the Allies had found an accommodation that did not precipitate another war. The massive and brutal population transfers and takeovers of territory endorsed at Potsdam had appalling human consequences, but they solved some of the problems bequeathed by the peace-makers of 1919. Byrnes' deal imposed a temporary division of Germany that would in fact last for decades. Unintentionally, it not only addressed the mismatch between German ambitions and capabilities that had proved so dangerous over the previous thirty-one years, but also represented the logical culmination of the division of Europe that Churchill and Stalin had agreed at Moscow. The order they had sought to create had been broken by Roosevelt at Yalta, but the territorial delineation they had lain down remained.

In retrospect, therefore, Potsdam brought an uneasy equilibrium that would define the shape of Europe for years to come. In the short term, it did little to ease British concerns. On the contrary, despite Churchill's best efforts, Truman had found a means to extricate America from Europe. The Americans had put off disputes about Germany and its Axis satellites to the first meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, making the space in which to continue their withdrawal from the troublesome Continent. Most worrying of all to British eyes, the Americans had shown no concern about the rising Soviet interest in the Mediterranean. With the Moscow order broken, it was here and in the Middle East that rising Soviet and fading British power would butt up against each other over the year that followed.

'ATOMIC BOMB IN USE AGAINST JAPS – TOTAL RUIN SOON'

The bank holiday weekend of 4–6 August 1945 felt a lot like 'wartime' was ending. After so many summers of barbed-wire clogged beaches and 'holidays at home', people wanted fun. In baking heat, they set off for the seaside, joining the patient, practised queues for railway tickets, or hitchhiking in delivery trucks and service lorries. In Blackpool, much to the landladies' horror, there were beds going spare on Saturday night, but the beaches were full at Bridlington and Scarborough, where 10,000 Corporation deckchairs were in use as visitors staked out their little family encampments in the sand.⁸⁷

Cold rain swept through the north of the country on that Sunday. A transport strike led to train delays and stranded thousands of servicemen on leave from the British Liberation Army on either side of the Channel.⁸⁸ From overcrowded naval transit camps in Glasgow and Portsmouth, complaints reached the press of miserable food, bug-infested beds and washrooms where new fixtures were no sooner put in than ripped out to disappear onto the black market.⁸⁹

Over southern England, Bank Holiday Monday was humid. In Brighton, almost a hundred cyclists had gathered to take part in the 'Grand Victory Cycling Marathon', the brainchild of a rebellious Wolverhampton rider called Percy Stallard who wanted to introduce continental-style mass-start road racing to the UK. ⁹⁰ What was effectively the first Tour of Britain would race from Brighton to Glasgow over the next five days. The British participants — young, internationally minded, and political as well as sporting radicals — were joined by eleven riders from the French Communist sports federation, two Belgian soldiers and a Polish airman. In a successful bid to attract press attention, but slightly belying their revolutionary reputation, the racers stopped off at Buckingham Palace to deliver an illuminated address to the king. ⁹¹

A day earlier, just after 6 p.m. on Sunday in the UK, a US B-29 bomber had taken off from Tinian Island in the Marianas, carrying the uranium-based atomic bomb towards the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Released on schedule just after eight o'clock in the morning local time, the bomb exploded in a blinding flash. A deadly wall of blast, then fire, swept through the city. At least 66,000 people were killed and another 69,000 injured by the effects of the initial explosion. Within seconds, about two-thirds of the buildings in Hiroshima were destroyed or severely damaged.

The first report of the attack reached the British public eighteen hours later, on the BBC's six o'clock news. The next morning, it was on all the front pages. The headlines summed up a mixture of marvel, horror and hope: 'BRITISH AND US SCIENTISTS HARNESS BASIC POWER OF THE UNIVERSE: ATOMIC BOMB IN USE AGAINST JAPS – TOTAL RUIN SOON', ⁹³ 'THE BOMB THAT HAS CHANGED THE WORLD', ⁹⁴ 'THE ALLIES INVENT THE MOST WONDERFUL WEAPON OF ALL'. ⁹⁵ In a statement written by Churchill before he left office and released by Attlee after the bomb was dropped, the former prime minister explained that the atomic project had begun in Britain. He sounded a stern note of warning: 'This revelation of the secrets of Nature, long mercifully withheld from man, should arouse the most solemn reflection in the minds and conscience of every human being capable of conscience.'

Over the days that followed, press commentary split along very modern lines. On one side, the development of atomic power was a scientific marvel which, harnessed for civil purposes, might make everyone's lives better ('ATOM SCIENTISTS MAY TURN BRITAIN INTO A LAND OF SUNSHINE' speculated the *Daily Mirror*). On the other, it was a devastating weapon that might end civilization. At the end of a war in which both sides had lobbed around conventional munitions with such enthusiasm, it was not difficult to imagine such a cataclysm. 98

Two days after the bombing of Hiroshima, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan. On 9 August 1945, as the Red Army tore through Manchuria, the Americans dropped a second, plutonium-based atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki. The explosion killed 39,000 people and injured another 25,000.⁹⁹ This time, two British observers in another plane were meant to have watched. Group Captain Leonard Cheshire, VC, a celebrated master bomber, and Dr William Penney, a physicist whose work on implosion was crucial to the plutonium weapon, had been sent to Tinian to gain an impression of what it took to launch an atomic assault. The US military prevented them joining the Hiroshima mission, but they were allowed onto a plane that would shadow the second attack. Their pilot, however, failed to rendezvous with the aircraft carrying the bomb. As the sky lit up with a great flash, Cheshire and Penney knew that the second bomb had been dropped, but they were too far away to see the explosion for themselves.¹⁰⁰

Even under the blows of Soviet belligerence, a second atomic strike and continued conventional attacks by B-29s, Japan's military leaders refused to surrender. The shock, however, allowed more moderate politicians, backed by the emperor, to bid for peace. They offered Japan's surrender if the emperor could remain on the throne. Providing he was made subject to MacArthur, the Allies eventually agreed. Despite an attempted coup by the diehards, on 14 August 1945 the Japanese government accepted the Allied offer. In a pre-recorded broadcast at noon the following day, the emperor told his countrymen to lay down their arms.

While they readied themselves for the end, the Allied navies off Japan had continued to launch air raids against targets ashore. At four o'clock in the morning of 15 August, the British Pacific Fleet launched its final strike force of the war: six Avenger bombers escorted by eight Seafires. Intercepted by fourteen Japanese fighters, they shot down four for the loss of two British aircraft. By the time the last surviving British plane returned to the carriers, orders had been received from Admiral Nimitz to cancel offensive operations. The war was about to end.

Meanwhile, the pilot of one of the two damaged British aircraft, Sub Lieutenant Fred Hockley, had bailed out of his Seafire and come to earth on Japanese soil. Local civil defenders handed him over to an army unit. Four hours later, following the emperor's surrender broadcast, no transport had arrived to pick Hockley up. When the Japanese commander rang up his superior to find out what to do, he was told to dispose of his captive. As dusk fell, Hockley was taken outside to a newly dug grave, shot and then stabbed to death. He had survived the cessation of hostilities by about seven hours. ¹⁰¹

Two and a half weeks later, on 2 September 1945, a Japanese delegation came aboard the battleship USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay to sign the formal instrument of surrender. General MacArthur led the representatives of the Allied powers. Admiral Fraser signed on behalf of the UK. Arthur Percival, the former British commander of Malaya, had been rescued from a Manchurian POW camp by an American intelligence team and was carefully positioned behind MacArthur as he read out the terms of the Japanese surrender. Later, the American general gave him the pen he had used to sign the peace treaty. Percival's war, if not his reputation, had come full circle.

'THE KNOWLEDGE OF WORK WELL DONE'

Just like VE Day, VJ Day arrived messily. Rumours of a Japanese surrender offer meant some people started celebrating prematurely on the night of 9–10 August, setting off factory hooters and sirens and hurling

ticker tape and documents out of office windows in the West End. A party of Americans shot fireworks and pistols into the air. The final confirmation of the Japanese surrender, however, came in a broadcast by the new prime minister at midnight on 14 August 1945. Declaring that 'the last of our enemies is laid low', Attlee announced that the next two days would be a brief holiday:

Here at home you have a short rest from the unceasing exertions which you have all borne without flinching or complaint for so many years . . . When we return to work on Friday morning we must turn again with energy to the great tasks which challenge us. But for the moment let all who can relax and enjoy themselves in the knowledge of work well done.

Some of those who had stayed up late to hear the broadcast, or had it piped to their night shift, started celebrating straight away – rousing their families, lighting bonfires, trying to spread the news. In Gillingham, in Kent, a crowd of servicemen and civilians marched through the streets banging dustbin lids. In London, a giant conga line, led by a Scotsman in a kilt, weaved its way from Marble Arch, through Grovesnor Square to Piccadilly. Exhausted GIs dozed in doorways. On Clydeside, star shells shot up from merchant vessels, while warships at Greenock flashed victory Vs from their searchlights into the sky. In South Shields, which had lost more merchant seamen than any other port in the UK, ships' horns and rockets announced that peace had arrived. The mayor gave a triumphal speech in his pyjamas. Across the Tyne in North Shields, revellers boarded a minesweeper and accidentally fired an anti-aircraft gun towards the shore. An eleven-year-old girl, Mary Glass, was killed. In Leeds, a crowd gathered in the expectation that the Town Hall would be floodlit to celebrate the victory. No one could be found to turn on the lights. 103

Despite all the palaver, plenty of people didn't hear the news. They set off for work as usual the next morning, only to learn what was happening on the bus or at the factory gates. By then, they were too late to join the huge queues that had gathered from dawn outside the food shops. At least this time, everyone knew what to expect. At ten in the morning, in response to shouts of 'We want Clem' from the people already packed in Whitehall, Attlee, followed by Bevin and Morrison, went out on the balcony of the Ministry of Health. He reminded them again that, 'after we have had this short holiday we will have to work hard to win the peace as we have won the war'. The crowd roared for Churchill. He wasn't there. 105

Again, the crush built up in the big cities, the bonfires were laid, the children's teas prepared. That evening, the parties got going once more on village greens and city squares. In Piccadilly, more than two hundred

people were treated for minor injuries from fireworks. In Leeds, there was a beer shortage, but the Town Hall at least finally got lit up. ¹⁰⁶ In St Albans, there was a minor scandal when the dean, the Very Reverend Cuthbert Thicknesse, turned the Corporation away at the last moment from the abbey, refusing to hold a service of thanksgiving for a victory that he said had been won 'by an act of wholesale indiscriminate massacre'. ¹⁰⁷

Well before the lasting effects of post-blast radiation were appreciated, the opening of the atomic age had resparked debates about the morality of strategic bombing, but Thicknesse was in the minority. For all the anxiety about the future, there was pride and gratitude that it was the Allies, rather than the Axis powers, who had built and dropped the bomb; no small feeling that the Japanese had got what they deserved; and – above all – relief that the war was finally over.

The State Opening of Parliament went ahead as scheduled on 15 August. In London, the streets were lined to watch the royal family process in carriages, open-topped despite showers of rain, to meet the Lords and Commons. Here too, in the pomp and circumstance of the ceremony, the King's Speech announcing Labour's initial legislative programme, and Attlee's victory address to the monarch, were sources of national pride. A socialist government had entered power not through a revolution but via the ballot box, and the Tory half of the country, despite its fears, accepted the result.

For George VI the war had been a triumph: his diffident determination that his family share in the common sacrifice reinforcing the image of devoted service that was such a crucial element of the Windsor brand. That evening, he spoke to the country in a more fluent, forceful performance than he had managed on VE Day. 108 'I doubt if anything in all that has gone before has matched the enduring courage and the quiet determination which you have shown during these last six years', he told his listeners:

great as are the deeds that you have done, there must be no falling off from this high endeavour. We have spent freely of all that we had: now we shall have to work hard to restore what has been lost . . . We have our part to play in restoring the shattered fabric of civilisation. It is a proud and difficult part, and if you carry on in the years to come as you have done so splendidly in the war, you and your children can look forward to the future, not with fear, but with high hopes of a surer happiness for all. 109

The Post-war Disorder

August 1945–December 1947

Just as Britain's war started well before September 1939, it remained unfinished in August 1945. Victory had been achieved, but the war could hardly be considered over when so many men, women and children were still away from their homes, so many wartime struggles still unfinished and the consequences of the conflict still so uncertain. All those who experienced the Second World War underwent this period of aftermath. For some individuals and countries around the world, it involved a prolonged struggle with the practical implications and emotional reverberations of violence, collaboration and defeat. In the case of the UK, however, the period was relatively brief. Between 1945 and 1947, it moved from the country it had been during the war to the one it would be for about three decades afterwards. This 'short' post-war was a time of confusion and uncertainty, in which wartime hopes, plans and fears met post-war realities.

As during the war, the pace of events was set by international struggles for power. Roosevelt's new world order, born amid deteriorating great power relations, atomic nationalism and the beginnings of the Cold War, was divided and shaped by competing national interests from the start. For millions of people around the world, whether by choice or compulsion, variants of socialism and Communism seemed like viable alternatives to capitalism. Across the Middle East and Asia, nationalist movements supercharged by the war challenged the Western empires, forcing them into a struggle to leave on the best terms they could or to fight back in conflicts rendered still more brutal by the experience of the war.

These developments determined the creation of a new Britain in the years immediately after 1945 which was different from the country of the 1930s. It was nationalized and centralized, with new systems of economic and financial control developed during the war as well as more public ownership and more extensive social welfare. It was also militarized in

new ways, with peacetime conscription and a commitment to building its own atomic bomb.² It had lost a large part of its Empire, but it could not abandon its international role, and it was therefore embroiled from the start in the new conflict between the former members of the Grand Alliance. Eventually, it would secure substantial assistance from a United States committing itself to rebuilding Western Europe as part of its own open economic world.

'SUBSTANTIAL AID FROM THE UNITED STATES ON TERMS WHICH WE CAN ACCEPT'

Compared to the rest of the European combatants, Britain got off remarkably lightly from its second dose of total war in the space of a generation. Its territorial boundaries and system of government remained unchanged; it was not occupied by enemy armies; and its systems of food supply remained sound. Unlike the vast movements of refugees, epidemics and starvation that characterized Eastern, Central and Southern Europe, it entered the peace in a condition of stability and prosperity. Approximately 360,000 Britons had died as a result of enemy action, about 60,000 of them civilians and the rest service personnel. This grim figure was about 1 in 125 of its pre-war population. In comparison, France lost one in seventyseven, and the figure was one in eleven in the USSR, one in eight in Yugoslavia and one in five in Poland. With the exception of Germany, its armies destroyed on every front, the UK was the only European country where military deaths significantly outnumbered those of civilians. This reflected the absence of invasion and genocide, the degree to which the British had relied on imperial manpower, and the relatively good health and plentiful food that had been enjoyed by the UK population during the war. Nonetheless, the problems of reconstruction were extensive. Half a million houses had been destroyed or rendered uninhabitable by bombing, alongside 75,000 shops, 42,000 commercial properties and 25,000 factories. Another 4 million houses were damaged. Army bases, airfields and huge stocks of munitions needed to be decommissioned. There was an enormous pent-up demand for accommodation, clothing, consumer goods and the higher quality foodstuffs that had been absent during the war, all of it threatening the sort of inflation that so many wartime economic measures had been designed to avoid.³

The country would also have to recover from a profound economic

imbalance. Lend-Lease had allowed Britain to run down its export industries in favour of the production of military power. It now needed a dramatic expansion of export production (at a time when many of its former export markets lay in ruins) not just to pay for what it needed to import, but also to make up for the loss of invisible earnings from the £1 billion of foreign investments sold off to pay for the war and the reduced size of the merchant fleet, and to cover the period before important prewar sources of foreign earnings, particularly Malayan tin and rubber production, recovered their former output. The accumulated £3.5 billion of overseas debts - principally the sterling balances of Sterling Area countries – loomed over the balance of payments. Domestic economic recovery would require manpower, which made it all the more important to start getting the 5 million men and women in uniform back to their homes. That would also reduce the almost £800 million a year that the government was spending overseas on military deployments in 1945 and which was contributing significantly to the balance of payments deficit.⁴

The senior ministers of the new Labour government were unprepared for the parlous state of Britain's international economic position. Ironically, given the party's commitment to planning, they did not have a plan for what to do about it, or a sense of how it would constrain their other ambitions. The result was that they were repeatedly engulfed by unanticipated economic crises that threatened to derail their policies and erode public support, and to which they struggled to work out how to respond.⁵

The first of these came very quickly. On 13 August 1945, Keynes, in a paper on 'Our Overseas Financial Prospects', warned ministers that they would have to confront a £2.1 billion hole in Britain's balance of payments. This was currently being filled by £1.35 billion of Lend-Lease aid and £700 million of borrowing from the Sterling Area. Over the next three years, it might be eliminated by expanding exports, drastically cutting overseas expenditure, and 'substantial aid from the United States on terms which we can accept'. Until this was secured, once Lend-Lease ended a 'virtually bankrupt' country would face 'a financial Dunkirk'. Reduced to the status of a second-class power, it would have to impose still more stringent austerity on its citizens and abandon any thought of reconstruction. Urgent though the problem was, Keynes thought there was time to work out a solution. He anticipated that Lend-Lease would continue in some form until the end of 1945.⁶

Preliminary negotiations between Keynes and Will Clayton, the US assistant secretary of state, had indicated both sides' views of what

'substantial aid' might mean. Keynes proposed a grant of \$5 billion over three years. In return, the British would agree to write off some of the sterling balances (a blow to their financial credibility, though a rather greater blow to those to whom the balance was owed), so that US aid would not be spent on paying off imperial debts. The rest of the balances would be made convertible in instalments, so that they could be spent on dollar imports without emptying London's reserves. Otherwise, Keynes threatened, the British would have to step up their protectionist barriers, abandon Bretton Woods, and seek a bilateral deal with the United States. Clayton told Keynes he was asking for more than Congress would approve. The most on offer would be an interest-bearing credit of \$3 billion, for which the British would have to make sterling fully convertible and remove tariffs on US imports.⁷

On 20 August 1945, without any prior warning, British ministers and officials were told that President Truman had decided to end Lend-Lease with immediate effect. They were shocked, humiliated and very worried. Churchill, shaken that 'so great a nation . . . would proceed in a rough and harsh manner to hamper a faithful Ally', agreed to Attlee's request that the Commons should not debate the subject while negotiations with the Americans were being set up.⁸

Halifax and Keynes led the British delegation. No one thought their task would be easy. Desperate to keep senior ministers positive, Keynes held out the hope of a grant without onerous conditions or commitments on trade. They quickly convinced themselves this was a realistic outcome. Keynes then set off for Washington without either a fall-back plan to manage a 'financial Dunkirk' or the trade experts who would have demonstrated a serious engagement with US commercial policy. Well aware of his own mortality after his wartime exertions, he wanted an agreement that would keep the grand project constructed at Bretton Woods going. Pessimistic about the pace of industrial reconversion, he ruled out a devaluation of sterling to deal with the balance of payments. Nor would he countenance a smaller, shorter-term dollar loan to play for time until the nature of the post-war international system had become more clear. This left little room for manoeuvre. During three months of talks in Washington between September and December 1945, Keynes and Halifax had little choice but to recommend taking whatever the Americans were willing to offer.

The only real negotiation came between Keynes and ministers in London, whose expectations had been raised unrealistically high. Believing that the Americans would finally recognize the need to

recompense Britain for its wartime sacrifices, the Cabinet initially turned down a US offer of a \$5 billion loan, repayable at 2 per cent interest over fifty years. Faced with a 'financial Dunkirk', they then accepted a \$3.75 billion loan on the same terms. Britain's remaining obligations for the Lend-Lease supplies on which it had been subsisting since August were settled for another \$650 million, which was added to the debt. The loan was conditional on Britain ratifying Bretton Woods, including negotiating the eventual ending of imperial preference. Repayments would start in 1951, with intermissions allowed in the event of economic difficulties. The Americans also imposed a more rigid requirement: the British must make sterling fully convertible one year after the loan agreement was ratified, three years ahead of the gradual transition agreed at Bretton Woods. The loan was meant to tide Britain through any resultant instability. The sterling balances were untouched – those accumulated before sterling became convertible would remain locked until Britain chose to release or repay them.

Many British politicians regarded these terms as a humiliation. Early convertibility, in particular, seemed likely to cause severe problems, and it was resisted, fruitlessly, by the Cabinet. The British Parliament would have to ratify the loan agreement as it stood before it was put in front of Congress: this made the UK's status as supplicant very clear. The shift from negotiators to legislators moved the loan out of the sphere of finance and economics and into that of politics and international relations.

Parliament debated the loan in December 1945. For the British, the arguments focused on the Empire, Anglo-American relations and the meaning of the war. Opening the debate in the Commons, Hugh Dalton explained that the deal fell 'short of what we should have desired, and of what we strove for through the long negotiations', particularly because there was no recompense for 'the fact that we had held the pass alone for more than a year, when all our European allies had been overrun, and the United States of America and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics were still neutral'. But what was the alternative? If the loan were rejected 'grave shortages would very soon set in . . . we should have to undergo greater hardships and privations than even during the war; and all those hopes of better times, to follow in the wake of victory, would be dissipated in despair and disillusion.' ¹¹

A small group of mostly left-wing Labour MPs voted against the loan to stand up to American imperialism. A much larger group of Conservative MPs and peers, led by Amery and Beaverbrook, were just as resentful at an over-hasty capitulation to American pressure. As usual, they favoured

falling back on the resources of the British Empire.¹² Churchill, despite doubts about the terms, welcomed the agreement as part of the developing Anglo-American relationship. Eager to avoid concerted opposition from the Tory majority in the Lords, he instructed Conservative MPs to abstain in the Commons. Seventy-one of them ignored him and voted 'No' instead. The loan was approved by 345 votes to 98; Bretton Woods by 314 to 50.

Five days later, defending the government's resolution in the Lords, Keynes insisted that the Americans were more interested in Britain's future role as a pillar of a liberal world economy than in its 'past performance . . . or present weakness'. 'Men's sympathies and less calculated impulses', he told his fellow peers, 'are drawn from their memories of comradeship, but their contemporary acts are generally directed towards influencing the future and not towards pensioning the past.'13 Keynes mocked Beaver-brook's desire 'to build up a separate economic bloc', consisting 'of countries to which we already owe more money than we can pay, on the basis of their agreeing to lend us money they have not got and buy from us . . . goods we are unable to supply'. 14 Eight peers opposed the resolution. Ninety voted in favour. At the start of 1946, the Canadian government, in line with the scale of its wartime mobilization and its desire to be seen as an independent actor within an Atlantic 'big three', provided a \$1.25 billion loan of its own on similar conditions. The total size of the debt that the UK would take on to try to manage the period of reconversion was, therefore, much as Keynes had expected, even if the terms were rather more onerous. 15

The arguments at Westminster plainly cut through to the public. In a BIPO survey of January 1946, 72 per cent of respondents claimed they had been following discussions of the loan. Seventy per cent of them said that they approved British acceptance (the main reasons for objection were classified by the researchers as 'unnecessary, should be independent'). Opinion was more divided on whether Britain could, by keeping up austerity, have gone it alone, but 47 per cent, the majority of those who gave an answer, thought it could not.¹⁶

The negotiations had exhausted Keynes. A trip across the Atlantic in March 1946 for discussions about the foundations of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank was the final effort. He died at home at his farm at Tilton on 21 April 1946. At that point, the loan agreement still had to be approved by Congress in the USA. There, as Keynes had predicted, its reception was to be conditioned by the present rather than the past.

'SOMETHING NEW AND CONSTRUCTIVELY REVOLUTIONARY'

Britain under its first majority Labour government managed to be both divided and united. Divided because a landslide win for an avowedly socialist party was a shocking and exciting thing, which aroused strong anxieties among some traditional Conservatives and the right-wing press and a mood of triumphalism among Labour supporters. Whatever the underlying consensus on some kind of reform, many of Labour's policies were controversial, and the day-to-day business of politics remained as partisan and vituperative as it had been during the election campaign — much to the disdain of the moderate majority of the electorate who yearned for statesmen to rise above such petty squabbles.

Beneath the party divide, however, there was a strong degree of unity. Partly it was the widespread patriotic pride at having won the war and the sense that Britain was still a great power treading a path of its own. Partly it was the shared values: the importance of democracy, duty, respect for property and the rule of law, but also the shared experience of a collective endeavour that, however much it had crumbled at the edges, had relied on people doing their bit and given them a sense of common purpose. It helped that Labour was in practice a very moderate party, its leaders rooted in a Christian tradition of Victorian social reform rather than of revolutionary violence, with no real desire to overturn the pillars of established life. Their rather busy-body air was reinforced by a relentless domestic propaganda effort that harped on about the need to work for the common good and produce for the export market, and which repeatedly attempted to summon up the memory of 1940 as a talisman of voluntary, collective sacrifice for the nation's sake. References back to Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain and the Blitz still found an emotional hook, but they were so commonplace that audiences began to tune them out.¹⁷

During its first eighteen months in office the Labour government undertook a major legislative programme that moved about a fifth of the economy into the public sector and laid the foundation for the welfare state. By the middle of 1947, the Bank of England, cable and wireless communications, civil aviation, the coal industry, electricity, the railways and road transport had all been nationalized, with gas and steel still to follow, and the Industrial Injuries Bill, the National Insurance and National Health Service Acts passed, enacting Beveridge's welfare state. The passage of the New Towns Act in 1946, and a new Town and Country

Planning Act in 1947, were meant to allow wartime plans for urban reconstruction to be brought into effect.

The pace of these changes owed a lot to the work of Herbert Morrison as lord president of the Council. Like his wartime predecessors, as lord president Morrison oversaw the whole of the peacetime home front, trying to co-ordinate all the ministers with domestic responsibilities and keep an eye on everything from the disposal of war surplus to increases in railway fares. Since many of Labour's junior ministers lacked government experience, he had to do a lot of hand holding. Morrison took charge of planning out all the legislation needed to implement the bulk of the 1945 Labour manifesto in the space of a single parliament. It was an extraordinary effort of drafting, redrafting and scheduling that was meant to underpin a step change in the life of the nation. During the first session of the new parliament alone, Labour passed 83 statutes totalling 1,390 pages of legislation.¹⁸

Part of this was the programme of nationalization, in which Morrison also played a major part. Up to the end of 1946, the first phase of nationalizations was carried out quickly and with relatively little controversy. In the provision of services there were strong continuities from the public corporations established by the Chamberlain government in the 1930s. Coal nationalization went much further than anything proposed during the war, but generous compensation helped to still any opposition from private shareholders. Morrison's pre-war writing on nationalization provided the model for the organization of the newly nationalized industries, which were set up as public corporations, run by technocratic boards, independent of interference from vested interests. That included trade unions, which meant that the new bodies tended to replicate the divide between distant owners and workers that had characterized their private predecessors. In the coal industry, in particular, a lack of prior planning, and party political pressure to nationalize quickly, resulted in an over-centralized system with weak regional boards and little accountability for management or workers at individual mines. A lot of this was the fault of the new minister of fuel and power, Emanuel 'Manny' Shinwell, who as chair of Labour's relevant reconstruction committee had failed to draw up any practical scheme for coal nationalization. In this case, Attlee's strategy of bringing wartime rebels into his government created practical problems for the future.

The other thing that Morrison was meant to do as lord president was to lead a triumvirate of ministers, with Stafford Cripps at the Board of Trade and Hugh Dalton at the Exchequer, responsible for economic development

and planning. As with nationalization, the belief in planning as a panacea had not been backed up by much detailed consideration of how it would actually work. In practice, the room to construct any effective plan was limited by Labour conceptions of political economy that had been strengthened by the experience of the war. The party's commitment to parliamentary democracy meant that planning took place within a traditional Whitehall framework, overseen by ministers often unable to surmount the day-to-day pressures of politics. Similarly, the government's pursuit of a tripartite consensus between business and trade unions, while it gave much more formal say to organized labour, acted against any radical departure from existing practice in how the economy was directed or organized. Labour ministers knew that the continued imposition of wartime controls over civilian labour on any large scale would be politically unacceptable. In the absence of directing workers, the only lever available to them to move labour around the economy would have been a wages policy designed to attract workers into key industries. The majority, however, were unwilling to interfere with the operation of trade unions in any way, including any encroachment on their powers of free collective bargaining. This made it very difficult to create a voluntary system that would replicate the degree to which Sir John Anderson had been able to move manpower around the economy in the final years of the war. Finally, Labour's use of public boards to run the nationalized industries made planning much more difficult - since it placed them in the hands of independent experts who were reluctant to subordinate themselves to any national plan. 19

Morrison, by nature a politician not a statistician, was personally unsuited to the role of planning supremo, and so overloaded with other duties that he never got to grips with it. He lauded democratic planning as Labour 'something new and constructively practised under as revolutionary which will be regarded in times to come as a contribution to civilisation as vital and distinctly British as parliamentary democracy under the rule of law.'20 In fact, in the first years after the war, Labour ministers used what they could of the control system built up during the war to address the most urgent economic problems as they occurred. Licensing for raw materials and new construction were maintained in order to direct resources to priority sectors. Food subsidies and rationing were kept up to ensure fair allocation and keep down inflation. This was not a comprehensive economic plan, and to most Britons it just seemed like a continuation of the red tape and restrictions to which they had been subject since the start of the war.

Most people had expected that life would get a little bit better soon after peace came. But not much changed. Britain's continuing worldwide commitments, and the government's desire to control the rate of release of personnel to minimize unemployment, meant that the rate of military demobilization was initially very slow. Eighty per cent of men serving on VE Day were still in uniform on 1 January 1946, including many young men with long service overseas, passed over in the first waves of releases in favour of older, more highly skilled men who were needed to restart the economy. Much to the irritation of those stuck in the services, civilian workers were released much more quickly from wartime constraints: with industries rapidly converting back to peacetime production and desperate for manpower, it didn't take them long to find a new job. Away from their families, often in dire accommodation, and put back onto spit-and-polish regimes by officers eager to revive pre-war standards, bored servicemen soon became even more resentful of those at home. 22

Some of those who did return came back to community parties, welcoming families and the relief of civilian life. Others found themselves ignored, struggled to adapt to wives and children they barely knew, or – thoroughly institutionalized by the forces – unable to leave behind their habits of bellowed orders, bolted food and the expectation of instant obedience. Families had changed a lot in five or six years: parents and older relatives had died, siblings grown up and households reformed – all in the absence of men who might at best only have been back on a few intermittent weeks of leave. For the wives of those 55 per cent of servicemen who were married, the war had been a mixture of independence and perseverance. The accumulated exhaustion of years of managing on their own could make it hard to get excited by the return of men who were either frustrated by home or desperate for refuge in the confines of a domesticity that women had in the meantime long outgrown. Children too struggled to readjust, some because they too were returning from wartime journeys as evacuees, others because they had got used to life with just their mothers and resented the eruption of what amounted to strangers into their homes. The post-war increase in the divorce rate, from 12,314 in 1944 to 60,190 in 1947, barely reflected the extent of the disruption to family life. To a remarkable degree, the difficulties of demobilization would be either overcome or concealed in families that stayed together, however miserable the result.²³

The blackout had gone, and the dance halls, theatres and cinemas were packed, but the shops were just as empty and the queues just as long: not least outside the housing offices, as families brought back together by the

war's end sought somewhere to live of their own. As Britons left barracks and work hostels, or lost their lodgings when their landladies' servicemenhusbands returned, they were terribly short of homes.²⁴

From the start of 1946, the food that was available started to deteriorate, thanks to a combination of global shortages and the government's efforts to reduce dollar expenditure. The number of calories available to Britons held up well, especially compared to the desperate hunger that was by then stalking large parts of Europe and Asia, but there were cuts in the meat, egg and fat rations that made what was eaten much less palatable. The government's decision, in February 1946, to end the importation of dried egg removed a staple replacement for those unable to secure eggs-in- shell. From this point on, food shortages became a major topic of public concern in a way they had not been since 1941. Things were not much better when it came to consumer goods. New supplies of clothing, footwear and household items for the civilian market in 1945 were about half what they had been before the war. Despite substantial increases over the next two years, such goods remained well below levels for the late 1930s. What was available did not come close to meeting the demand for replacements built up during the conflict.²⁵

As a reward for this continued austerity, the government still guaranteed 'fair shares for all' and held out the promise of the better world to come. From the start, however, the 'New Jerusalem' was constrained by the practical politics of reform and the difficult economic choices of austerity. Having made his reputation as an opponent of the government, Aneurin Bevan did a remarkably effective ministerial job to set up the National Health Service, recognizing the need for compromises if the vested interests of the medical world were to be brought round to the scheme, winning a Cabinet fight with Morrison to keep control of hospitals out of the hands of local authorities, propitiating the heads of the specialist royal colleges who would help to broker a deal with recalcitrant doctors, and effectively abandoning previous Labour plans for a national network of government-run health centres. Nonetheless, the time taken buying off the medical profession delayed the inauguration of the new NHS into 1948.

Not least because he was spending so much time on the health service, Bevan did, to begin with, a much less impressive job on housing – the other part of his portfolio. Lack of central government funds and local government commitment meant that there were rapid post-war retreats from the more ambitious wartime promises and election pledges. Shortages of labour and materials meant that fewer than 15,000 houses

were built across the UK in 1945, of which about two-thirds were the 'prefabs' that had been supposed to provide a temporary fix. ²⁶ After Attlee took a personal interest, there was a dramatic acceleration of new building during 1946, but still nowhere near enough to meet the needs of those who had been bombed out years before. During the summer of 1946, a popular squatting movement gathered momentum among families desperate for accommodation. Some moved en masse into the disused military camps that now dotted the country: eventually 40,000 people had occupied the abandoned huts rather than continue without a home. Others, assisted by the Communist Party of Great Britain, occupied empty hotels and mansion blocks in the middle of London.

The demands of industry, healthcare and homes meanwhile competed with the construction required to see through the wartime educational reforms. To the disappointment of those within the Labour Party who wanted genuinely comprehensive schooling, the new minister of education, Ellen Wilkinson, fully backed the tripartite system envisioned in the 1944 Education Act. Her main initial achievement, however, was to push forward the measures required to raise the school-leaving age to fifteen. This required a major increase in the number of teachers, provided through a scheme of shortened teacher-training for demobilized servicemen, and the expansion of teaching accommodation that could only be achieved by providing schools with prefabricated huts. To the dismay of educational specialists, about half of the anticipated additional 400,000 pupils who remained in class when the leaving age was raised in 1947 would be taught in these temporary buildings, which would go on to be a feature of many schools for decades to come.²⁷

Here, as elsewhere, the realization of the optimistic reconstruction projects drawn up during the war was conditioned by the era of austerity in which they were implemented. It helped that they did not require extensive overseas spending: like other measures of social security, they were funded primarily by transfers of money within the United Kingdom.²⁸ They were, however, heavily dependent on the economic stability and growth that rested, by the spring of 1946, on the dollar loan being approved by the US Congress. To understand its fate, we need to return to the international arena, and the deterioration of great power relations in the aftermath of the war.

'MR. BEVIN POINTED OUT THAT RUSSIAN SPHERE EXTENDED FROM LÜBECK TO PORT ARTHUR'

Before the 1945 election, everyone thought that, if Labour got into power, it would be able to take a different approach to international affairs.²⁹ Speaking at the last Labour conference before the election, Hugh Dalton (then still expecting to be foreign secretary) told delegates that 'A British Labour government would be more likely to create more quickly a state of confidence between London and Moscow than any alternative government in this country.'30 In his speech to the same conference, Ernest Bevin warned of the problems of post-war diplomacy, but held out the prospect that fair dealing on all sides could build a lasting peace. He had a message for 'my Russian friends – I hope they are my friends': 'You cannot settle the problem of Europe by long-distance telephone calls and telegrams. Round the table we must get, but do not present us with faits accomplis when we get there . . . the cards should be on the table – face upwards. 31 Most politicians were also aware that a significant portion of public opinion still regarded the Soviet Union as morally sounder than the USA, and that a much greater majority wanted to place their faith in international co-operation as the world's best chance of peace.

As foreign secretary, Bevin displayed the same clever, emotional, bullying qualities he had displayed as minister of labour. Those Foreign Office mandarins resilient enough to adapt to the new regime liked him a lot, mainly because he wielded a lot of influence in government. Bevin's outlook combined internationalism and patriotism. He shared his officials' belief that Britain should continue to act as one of 'the three World Powers', despite its relative wartime decline, by offering leadership to the Commonwealth and Western Europe. Being a world power required acting like one: taking up the responsibility for rebuilding a Western order (whether by occupying Germany or backing the return of pre-war colonial regimes in Southeast Asia); preserving Britain's strategic interests across the world; and asserting the right to act independently. As Bevin told General Ismay on his first arrival at the Potsdam conference: 'I'm not going to have Britain barged about.'³²

Unlike Attlee – a long-time sceptic about the value of Britain's position in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, who was inclined to accommodate Soviet demands to take over the former Italian colonies of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania as UN protectorates – Bevin took a more conservative view of the strategic importance of a region for which, during the war, so much Commonwealth blood had been shed. With the support of the chiefs of staff, he determinedly opposed any suggestion that the Russians might be allowed to establish themselves 'right across the throat' of the British Empire. ³³ Like Attlee, however, Bevin started off committed

to working through the UN and hopeful that wartime co-operation with the USSR might survive into the peace. Uncertain about Stalin's ultimate intentions, and concerned by American isolationism and commercialism, Bevin was instinctually inclined to stand up to any challenge, but worried that an outright Anglo-Soviet confrontation would end the possibility of co-operation or alienate the Americans.³⁴

At Potsdam, the Allies had established the Council of Foreign Ministers, with representatives from the USSR, UK, USA, France and China, to agree the peace treaties that would finally end the war. The Council's discussions were expected to be difficult, not least because of the mass of conflicting agreements that had been made during the war. Its first meeting, in London in September 1945, broke up in deadlock after Bevin and James Byrnes, the US secretary of state, refused to recognize the Communist regimes the Soviets had set up in Romania and Bulgaria. Striking though this was to a public used to the platitudinous communiqués of wartime summits, it was a temporary interruption, not a complete breakdown. All sides still badly wanted the peace treaties resolved.

While Bevin readied himself for another round of talks with Molotov and Byrnes, Attlee spearheaded an effort to get US political opinion behind the American loan. In November 1945, he travelled to the United States to deliver an address to Congress that was meant to persuade his audience to trust a socialist government with their money. Explaining that Labour, for all its collectivist approach, was part of a shared Anglo-American heritage of ancient liberties and respect for the rule of law, Attlee looked forward to an 'ever closer friendship' between the UK and the USA. Of the three bursts of applause that punctuated his speech, the loudest came when he mentioned Churchill.³⁵

The other reason Attlee had come to Washington was to talk about atomic technology with Truman. Having quickly grasped the revolutionary implications of the atomic bomb, he saw that the inevitable proliferation of the new weapon posed a fundamental threat to the security of the UK. The only safety would lie in a British atomic deterrent. Attlee also understood, however, that the same reasoning would apply to all the great powers, and that they could be driven to use their new weapons to catastrophic effect in any future war. Like Sir John Anderson, he therefore came to believe that the best route to safety was to submit the atomic bomb to international supervision. He hoped for an Anglo-Canadian-American agreement to put atomic technology under the control of the United Nations.³⁶

Neither of these insights was easy to put into practice, not least

because in practice they conflicted with each other. As Churchill privately warned his successor, even the idea of diluting the bilateral knowledgesharing agreements established during the war risked undermining a key element of the Anglo-American relationship. Attlee already had concerns about whether the Soviets could be trusted. In practice, the Truman administration was attracted to the principle of international regulation – provided that it did not have to share the technological secrets of how to construct a bomb with anyone else. Unfortunately for Attlee, that included the British. In Washington, Truman, Attlee and the Canadian prime minister, Mackenzie King, issued a joint statement expressing their willingness to share the most basic scientific information. But Attlee was left in limbo when it came to the US providing any of its technical knowledge to the UK. The Anderson-Groves agreement, signed at the same time, expressly removed the wartime right of consultation between the British and Americans before the other used an atomic bomb. The outcome of the visit was therefore a reduction in the UK's atomic influence.

As Attlee spoke in Washington, Anglo-Soviet tensions were rising. As the Soviets pushed for an oil concession from the Iranian government, the Red Army retained a strong presence in its temporary occupation zone in northern Iran and supported a coup by left-wing Azerbaijani and Kurdish separatists who wanted to join their compatriots in the USSR. At a special US–USSR–UK meeting in Moscow that December to address the impasse over Romania and Bulgaria, the Soviets countered complaints about Iran by demanding the removal of British forces from Greece. Molotov pressured Turkey to cede control over the exit from the Black Sea and the eastern provinces of Kars and Ardahan. A new Soviet propaganda campaign expressly targeted British imperialism.³⁷

To many of Bevin's advisors, all this appeared to be a calculated campaign of Soviet aggression towards an area of critical British interest. In fact, Soviet actions were driven by a mixture of diplomatic, economic and security concerns, complicated by local nationalisms. As far as Stalin was concerned, Anglo-American irritation just reflected how unwilling his former allies were to recognize, let alone reward, the colossal part that the USSR had played in winning the war.³⁸ At their meeting in Moscow on 24 December 1945, according to the Soviet record, Stalin told Bevin he was just claiming his due: 'he naively understands that Indonesia and the countries located around India belong to the British sphere. America has Korea and Japan, while Soviet Union has nothing.' The British record caught the response: 'Mr. Bevin pointed out that Russian sphere extended

from Lübeck to Port Arthur.'39

The British ambassador in Teheran, Sir Reader Bullard, told Bevin that Soviet encroachments threatened the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and British-controlled oil wells in Iraq. The Foreign Office's Eastern Department gathered evidence that the Soviets wanted to install friendly governments in Ankara and Teheran. Events in Iran interested Britain's new chargé d'affaires in Moscow, Frank Roberts, as he shifted from thinking that Soviet actions were the result of misunderstandings and security concerns to a belief that they were motivated by an expansionary imperialism.⁴⁰

Bevin did not accept immediately that this was the case. Preferring not to engage in a test of strength, he tried to set up a joint commission on Azerbaijani autonomy. Instead, in an indication of the unexpected consequences of the new organizations Roosevelt had created during the war, the Iranian prime minister made a formal protest to the United Nations Security Council at its inaugural meeting in London in January 1946. Neither Bevin nor Byrnes had wanted this, because they feared that it would result in a great power fight. When the Soviet delegates responded with protests about British behaviour in Greece and Indonesia, the meeting descended into a bitter Anglo-Soviet row. Shortly afterwards, a Soviet economic blockade resulted in a change of government in Teheran. The new administration, led by Prime Minister Qavam al-Saltanah, relied on support from Iranian Communists. The Soviets thought his government would be more amenable and they got the Security Council to agree to bilateral Iranian—Soviet negotiations. 41

To Bevin's disgust, Byrnes had stood aside from the argument in London. In the USA, however, there was great disappointment at the apparent failure of international co-operation. The Soviets had already missed the deadline to announce that they would be joining the Bretton Woods system. During February 1946, the revelation that Soviet spies had been operating inside the Manhattan Project and Stalin's public assertion that Communism and capitalism were 'incompatible' further darkened the mood. Truman wanted to stand up to the Soviets. Byrnes, in the doghouse because he was seen to have given up too much to Stalin at the Moscow conference, wanted to follow the president's lead. Churchill, currently on holiday in the USA before a speaking engagement in Missouri, would help them do it.

'AN OVERWHELMING ASSURANCE OF SECURITY'

Most people assumed that the election defeat would bring Churchill's political career to a close. He was seventy-one, he had just been soundly rejected by the voters, and he was exhausted. A long painting break in Italy in September 1945, however, gave him enough recuperation to make up his mind that he would stay on as Conservative leader. He retained both a very powerful conviction in his role as 'man of destiny', and a fierce determination to win a general election in his own right. Anthony Eden, whom most younger Conservatives considered the party's only hope of returning to office in the next parliament, once more lacked the ruthlessness to organize a coup. Instead, he relied on the Conservative Party to do the dirty work for him. This was to prove a mistake. Both Conservative Central Office and the parliamentary party were in a state of shock at their defeat, morale was low and those Tories who remained were either manoeuvring for advantage or looking for a way out. Despite considerable irritation at Churchill's continued lack of attention to the party, they were not going to get rid of him.⁴²

In October 1945, Churchill received an invitation, endorsed by Truman, to speak in the president's home state of Missouri, at Westminster College in the tiny city of Fulton. Happy at an opportunity to make personal contact with the president, Churchill had agreed, with the date eventually settled for 5 March 1946. He left the UK on 9 January and spent the intervening seven weeks on a long holiday in the United States. Significantly, it started with a press conference at which he explained the reasons for which he supported the Anglo-American loan. A strong body of opinion in the United States was against lending any money to Britain. Churchill's abstention in the Commons vote had been understood by some Americans as meaning that he was opposed to it too. On the contrary, he believed so strongly that it was in the national interest that he wanted to make sure that it passed Congress. He also wanted to make an intervention of his own in international affairs. ⁴³

Having spent some time in Miami and paid a visit to Cuba, during which he was showered with gifts of cigars, Churchill turned to business. On 10 February 1946 he met Truman and Byrnes at the White House to discuss his forthcoming speech. He offered them a welcome opportunity to reshape public debate. Informed that Churchill would warn the American people that the Soviets wanted to dominate the world, Truman agreed with him that the speech's main subject should be 'the necessity for full military collaboration between Great Britain and the United States'. Over the next few weeks, Byrnes sent a succession of telegrams to Moscow protesting about Soviet behaviour in Central and Eastern Europe and in Iran.⁴⁴ In

between these sallies, Byrnes went with Churchill to see the former prime minister's friend, the financier Bernard Baruch, who had been threatening to oppose the loan. Churchill brought him round.⁴⁵

On 5 March 1946, with Truman sitting next to him on the stage, Churchill delivered his address in Fulton. He opened with a vision of the stricken world:

The awful ruin of Europe, with all its vanished glories, and of large parts of Asia glares us in the eyes. When the designs of wicked men or the aggressive urge of mighty States dissolve over large areas the frame of civilised society, humble folk are confronted with difficulties with which they cannot cope. For them all is distorted, all is broken, even ground to pulp.

Churchill contrasted those horrors with the security that could be delivered through the United Nations and by the British and American peoples, in a 'fraternal association' of shared weapons research and military bases. He warned of the 'shadow' cast by 'Soviet Russia and its Communist International organisation', with its 'expansive and proselytising tendencies'. 'From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic', he told his audience, 'an iron curtain has descended across the Continent', behind which Communist parties 'have been raised to pre-eminence and power far beyond their numbers and are seeking everywhere to obtain totalitarian control'. Comparing the situation to the threat from Nazism in the 1930s, Churchill insisted that the only means to deter the Soviets from seeking 'the indefinite expansion of their power and doctrines' was an overwhelming display of Anglo-American strength behind the principles of the United Nations. Then there would be 'no quivering, precarious balance of power to offer its temptation to ambition or adventure. On the contrary, there will be an overwhelming assurance of security.'46

Churchill's outspoken tone caused international consternation, but it did not in itself do much to change public opinion. In the USA, there was much criticism of his attempt to start another war just to get aid for the British Empire. Truman and Byrnes denied any foreknowledge of what he was going to say. In the UK, ninety-three Labour MPs tabled a motion of censure on the basis that Churchill was trying to wreck good relations with the USSR. Eden, left behind to mind the Conservatives, was aghast at his self-indulgent buccaneering.⁴⁷ Back in the USA, Churchill continued his lobbying work on behalf of the American loan, meeting key senators and congressmen whom he persuaded to trust the Labour government.⁴⁸

The Fulton speech, meanwhile, set the terms in which Americans perceived the continued diplomatic manoeuvring over Iran. With US support, the new Iranian prime minister brought the complaint against the

USSR back to the UN Security Council. Byrnes took the lead in putting the Soviets in the dock. For unrelated reasons, the Soviets then altered course and made Qavam a better deal, which he accepted. The secretary of state, however, pursued the matter until Red Army troops withdrew as originally planned. His actions were widely applauded by an American public that saw using the United Nations to defy a totalitarian threat as a fulfilment of Roosevelt's promise of a better-run world after the war. ⁴⁹ In turn, that shaped the debate over the Anglo-American loan in the US legislature. Its passage owed much less to any sense of gratitude for Britain's sacrifices in the war than to a desire to support a democratic Truman against a dictatorial Stalin. ⁵⁰

The crisis of early 1946, therefore, had a profound effect. The Soviets were furious with the 'warmonger' Churchill for his call to arms against the USSR – all the more so because it represented a successful replay of the strategy he had pursued with less effect in spring 1945. The harder American line towards the Soviet Union became an established part of the Truman administration's foreign policy. That included a secret decision to deny the Soviets hegemony in Europe by supporting the British Commonwealth. Before long, the Soviets responded with a tougher approach of their own against the USA, a more threatening approach to Turkey, a consolidation of political power in Eastern Europe and a drive to mobilize public opinion against the 'Anglo-Saxon bloc' to the west.⁵¹

The crisis was important for British foreign policy as well. Bevin, who loathed James Byrnes, definitely did not share Churchill's romanticized view of Anglo-American partnership, but he saw Soviet behaviour in much the same way.⁵² The crisis over Azerbaijan encouraged him to take on board more of his civil servants' advice about the need to confront and contain Soviet expansionism. He became even more convinced about the strategic importance of maintaining Britain's presence across the Middle East.⁵³

British bitterness at the ending of Lend-Lease ran deep. The new firmness in American policy was as yet unmatched by overt action or any sign that it would ease Britain's burdens. However, on the same day as the Fulton speech, the British and Americans signed a secret intelligence-sharing agreement that harked back to their wartime collaboration. To Attlee's disappointment, however, there was no sign of any atomic secrets being offered across the Atlantic.

THE ONLY WAY TO PUT IT RIGHT IS TO GET THE

GERMANS "IN ON IT" THEMSELVES'

As negotiations over the peace treaties in Europe continued, the emergent Cold War action had been focused in the Near East – a region to which the Americans had made no concrete commitment. The next stage of the developing conflict, however, took place in the heart of the old war, as the British challenged the Potsdam settlement on the future of Germany. Allied plans prepared during the war had concentrated on ending the strategic threat of German militarism. They imagined taking over a functioning state, which would be divided between the four occupying powers. They would undertake the essential work of disarmament, denazification and the collection of reparations in concert, working together through the Allied Control Council set up in 1945.

In practice, such preparations bore little relationship to the situation that developed in Germany during and after its defeat. The Allies took control of a country in chaos — its cities and infrastructure wrecked, its food economy broken, filled with former combatants, displaced victims of Nazism and German refugees and in which systems of central and local government had essentially collapsed.⁵⁴ In the words of General Gerald Templer, the director of civil affairs for the Twenty-First Army Group: 'There was no local authority with whom to deal. Devastation was often on a prodigious scale. There were no communications, no power. Fields were deserted . . . Everything was at a standstill.' Unable to agree a shared policy, the occupying powers ended up running their zones separately.

In the British Occupied Zone, a lot was left to the military – first under a military government, then under the British Control Commission. Not until October 1945 was a minister appointed in London with responsibility for the occupation. Left to govern an area half the size of the UK with 20 million and rising people in it (in Schleswig-Holstein, the smallest region under British control, the population increased by 67 per cent between 1939 and October 1946),⁵⁶ senior officers fell back on military procedures and a shared language of Christian civilization and imperial trusteeship. To begin with, the focus was on completing the defeat of a dangerous enemy, with whom no fraternization at all could be permitted. Very quickly, however, as it became apparent that the main threat was not continued German resistance but social collapse, including attacks by 'displaced persons', starvation and disease, British policies became more positive. In September 1945, Montgomery, as military governor, issued a new

directive that emphasized the need to rebuild society and reconstruct industry. Montgomery wanted to create stability by giving the Germans in the British zone order, food and jobs.⁵⁷

One of the reasons that the British had secured the northwest portion of Germany was the density of industrial development. Some of this factory plant was to be dismantled for reparations and sent to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Other, expressly military industrial sites, including the Blohm and Voss shipyards in Hamburg (where the Bismarck had been built), were blown up by the British to prevent their ever being put back into use.⁵⁸ What remained, however, particularly in the Ruhr, would be important for the future of any post-Nazi Germany and for the rest of Europe. Keen to establish an independent world force, separate from both the USA and the USSR, Bevin had pursued the idea of creating a 'third power' - a European imperial bloc, led by Britain and France, which would have a global presence and distinctly social democratic values.⁵⁹ As part of the European reconstruction that such a project would entail, the French wanted to split the Ruhr off from Germany, and combine it into a group of Western European states. Privately, Bevin was initially keen on nationalizing the industries of the Ruhr and integrating them economically into such a 'Western Union', perhaps as a separate republic. Worried, however, that this would mean internationalizing control of the region and letting in the Soviets, he held back from any decision over the winter of 1945–6.⁶⁰

The concentration of people and industry in the British Occupied Zone was also its greatest problem. Unable to supply itself, the Ruhr was heavily dependent on food imports, not least to fuel the physical labour of its coalminers. Efforts to revive agricultural production within the British zone, including the release of 300,000 surrendered German service personnel in summer 1945 to gather crops, could not provide enough food to keep the zone going. The Soviets did not provide supplies from the more agricultural east, where, given the devastation, there was in any case scant surplus. From the summer of 1945, the maximum ration the British could provide to a 'normal' German adult consumer (one not engaged in industrial work) was 1,550 calories a day. In March 1946, this was reduced to 1,014 calories.⁶¹

With the output of German industry limited not just by wartime damage but also by agreement between the occupying powers, Britain had to pay for food imports to feed its former enemies. Because of the global food shortage immediately after the war, these were very expensive. During 1946–7, the estimated civil bill for the British Occupied Zone was

£80 million, or about \$350 million, about £70 million of which went on food. To the fury of the Germanophobic Dalton, the cost of feeding Germans would eat up Britain's precious dollars. This was not recompensed by the limited reparations that the British secured from their zone, largely in the form of specialized machinery and equipment.⁶² It didn't help that British bureaucrats, sensitized to the risks of supply breakdown during the war, insisted on maintaining large stockpiles. In summer 1946, their reluctance to risk any interruption to UK deliveries while wheat and flour were supplied to Germany resulted in bread rationing being introduced, completely unnecessarily, in Britain.⁶³

In fact, British consumers would keep up their consumption of bread under a generous ration. From the spring of 1946, however, Germans in the British zone were starving, sick and desperate. Absenteeism increased and industrial output slumped. British leaders felt that this could become a fertile ground for Communist infiltration. As Montgomery put it to Bevin as his time as military governor came to an end:

the whole country is in such a mess that the only way to put it right is to get the Germans 'in on it' themselves . . . If we do not do these things, we shall drift towards possible failure. That 'drift' will take the form of an increasingly hostile population, which will eventually begin to look east. Such a Germany would be a menace to the security of the British Empire. 64

A Germany weakened by the removal of the Ruhr would, the British worried, be vulnerable to Communist subversion and Soviet takeover. Instead, the British now sought to build the region back up, greatly increasing the permitted level of industrial production not just to reduce their own costs, but to embed the Ruhr as part of a revived Germany. They wanted to put economic unity above the Soviet determination to extract reparations and keep Germany down, not least to remove the burden of occupation costs from the UK. Bevin still believed that a firm approach might allow an accommodation with the Soviets to be achieved, but, if it were not, he was willing to abandon the principles of Potsdam and accept a permanent division of Germany that would at least confine Communism east of the Elbe. So doing would require a degree of finesse with the Western Europeans, and depend on securing the support of the Americans, whom the British still did not trust to stand up to the Soviets.⁶⁵

The issue came to a head at the next Council of Foreign Ministers meeting, in Paris, between April and July 1946. After weeks of skirmishing, Bevin threatened to divide Germany if the British didn't get what they wanted. To Molotov's disgust, Byrnes stated that the USA was

willing to co-operate with any other occupier to achieve German economic unity. As far as the Soviets were concerned, this was another betrayal of Potsdam and of their wartime suffering. It laid, however, the first step towards the unification of the British and American zones (an entity known as 'Bizonia'), which was formalized in January 1947. The British hoped that this would also involve the Americans bearing a disproportionate part of the expenditure on occupation. Wary of American backtracking, in the months before the next foreign ministers' meeting, in Moscow, Bevin's officials drew up plans to demand the Soviets defray British occupation costs as a condition for the resumption of a four-power approach to the occupation of Germany. They knew this would be unacceptable, but they hoped to blame their former allies when the talks broke down. ⁶⁶

'THE THOUGHT THAT ENGLAND ALLOWS THEM TO LIE IN ENEMY TERRITORY'

Occupied Germany was a strange posting for British servicemen and administrators. Initially, there was all the excitement of a conquering army, but there, as elsewhere, it didn't take long for the military to revert to a peacetime regime of 'bullshit and blanco', endless form-filling and polishing to keep bored men occupied on their bases. For some men, the work they did in trying to rebuild Germany – restoring infrastructure or rekindling the democratic spark – was the most purposeful thing they did in uniform. Others just waited for their demob, or enjoyed the high life of healthy, resource-rich young men in a desperate and hungry land.

There was a thriving black market in food, medical supplies and cigarettes – sent from home or bought in British canteens, then resold to Germans at a profit of about 300 per cent.⁶⁷ Jewellery and other precious goods could all be picked up cheaply for chocolate or fags. During the second half of 1945, in a reversal of the usual wartime trope, the British press stirred a 'fratting' scandal about British soldiers betraying their wives and girlfriends with sensuous German women – a mini-moral panic that seemed to be borne out by the exponential increase in the rate of VD infection among British soldiers in Northwest Europe, from 199 per 100,000 troops in February 1945 to 1,064 per 100,000 a year later.⁶⁸ As epidemics and diseases of privation gnawed away at the German civilian population, German doctors complained that precious antibiotic supplies

were being used up treating VD-ridden Tommies.⁶⁹ What really shocked the British soldiers, however, particularly in Berlin, was the brutal behaviour of the Russians to German civilian lives and property. In November 1945, Mass-Observation found that 'stories told by returning soldiers' were playing a minor part in a growing disapproval of Russia. As a thirty-five-year-old woman explained:

The boys that come home on leave seem to think pretty badly of them, and if anybody knows, they do. They say it's just frightful, the way they roam about, looting and raping and murdering innocent people – they seem to think they're worse than the Germans. 70

The privileges enjoyed by British personnel separated them off from the German population – physically in the case of the first-class railway carriages reserved for their exclusive use – but few men could avoid some contact with their former enemies. In billets, workshops or offices they had to interact with Germans, despite the no-fraternizing orders, just to get things done. Disproportionately, those they met were women, children and the elderly – all people whom it was hard to blame for the war. Around 10,000 men married German women, something that required considerable effort because it was only made legal in July 1946, and then it required the permission of a usually reluctant commanding officer.⁷¹

This was probably the most intermingled Anglo-German moment in the twentieth century, because, after the war, hundreds of thousands of former German servicemen were brought to the UK to work. In May 1945, there had been about 250,000 German prisoners of war in camps in the UK. Those who were taken prisoner as a result of the mass surrenders at the war's end were classified as 'Surrendered Enemy Personnel' – a definition that not only captured their status as former combatants for a state that had ceased to exist, but allowed their captors to apply the Geneva Convention more selectively, particularly with regard to work, rations and movement out of the theatre in which they had become prisoners. Some were released in Germany after screening, others brought back to the UK.

In September 1946, the German prisoner population peaked at just over 400,000, spread over almost 500 camps across the UK. More than 370,000 of them were put to work building houses and roads, but above all on the land. In August 1946, they represented (together with the small number of Italian former prisoners then still present) almost 2 per cent of the total British civilian labour force, and, between 1944 and 1947, they averaged about one in eight of those working in agriculture. They were a valuable resource for an economy hungry for manpower. In 1946 and 1947, German prisoners contributed about 1 per cent of total British GDP

– about £85 million in monetary terms in the latter year. Here, too, initial repugnance from the British civilian population softened as they got to know Germans, both as individuals and as a valuable rural asset. With British demobilization largely complete by the end of 1946, during 1947 the Germans started to be returned. By summer 1948 they were almost all gone.⁷²

The punishment of the guilty was affected by the same lack of manpower and concerns about costs. Only reluctantly had the British signed up to the American desire to put senior Nazis on trial, mainly because of legal worries about prosecuting individuals for the actions of a state. Nonetheless, the British War Crimes Executive played a significant role in the running of the drawn-out International Military Tribunal trial at Nuremberg between 1945 and 1946 at which twenty-two German leaders were prosecuted, both for their individual responsibility for the regime's crimes and as representatives of criminal state organizations. For a mix of political and ideological reasons, the French and Soviets wished to stage a second such trial that would put German industrialists in the dock. The British were less keen, partly because of the cost, partly because they doubted that the prosecutions would succeed, and partly because of their desire to resurrect the German economy. They backed the Americans in arguing that further prosecutions should take place within individual occupation zones. In their own zone, the British tried to put as few Germans as possible through their own courts operating under the Royal Warrant, and instead put most of those suspected of less grievous wartime crimes through German denazification courts. The exception were the prosecutions of staff at the Belsen, Ravensbruck and Neuengamme concentration camps and those Germans who had murdered British servicemen.⁷³

The Belsen trial, from September to November 1945, showed up many of the difficulties of retrospectively collecting testimony from and conducting cross-examinations of the terrified and traumatized victims of the camp in the chaos that was defeated Germany. In their efforts to stage a fair trial, the British treated witnesses with grotesque insensitivity. Fourteen of those who had served as guards at the camp were acquitted because the prosecution could not prove their crimes. The rest of the defendants were found guilty; eleven were executed and the rest imprisoned.⁷⁴

A combination of the pressures of the emerging Cold War and a lack of money and manpower meant that this was not the start of an avalanche of prosecutions. In total, only just over a thousand Axis nationals and collaborators were put on trial in British military courts in Europe. There was a great deal of opposition to prosecuting senior German army officers for the crimes of troops under their command. Most of the budget and time of the War Crimes Investigation Unit went into tracking down those who had killed fifty of the airmen who had tunnelled out of Stalag Luft III in the 'Great Escape' of March 1944. In the end, even the remainder of these investigations would be closed down in 1948 as the British sought to reintegrate Germany into Western Europe.⁷⁵

Locating and identifying the British dead was no easier. More than forty thousand British airmen had died on missions over German territory, some of it now occupied by the Russians. There was much bitterness from relatives when it was announced that the government intended to bury those whose remains could be located in four large cemeteries on German soil, in Berlin, Hamburg, Hanover and Xanten, rather than repatriate them or move them across the border into what had been Allied nations. 'It is unbearable', one woman wrote to The Times, 'that those who mourn the loss of their heroic dead should have their hearts wrung by the thought that England allows them to lie in enemy territory.' Even finding and identifying the bodies, however, was very difficult. To save money and scarce resources, British servicemen had been issued with pressed fibre identity discs, which burnt along with their aircraft or were destroyed by the process of decomposition. The graves recovery and investigation units were badly undermanned, and the Soviets sometimes blocked access to areas in the east. When the search effort was wound up on 30 September 1948, seven thousand of the dead were still untraced. ⁷⁶

'IN THE FAECES OF SEDITION WE BECAME BESMIRCHED'

As great power relations faltered, the British government grappled with the consequences of a cascading loss of imperial control. At the centre of this were events in India. Labour came to power committed to Cripps' 1942 pledge that India would be free to decide its own future after the war, but in 1945 what exactly this would mean was still unclear. Labour ministers expected a lengthy period of negotiation that would end with India remaining within the Commonwealth. As would soon become apparent, the schedule for departure was no longer under British control.

The problem was demonstrated by the arguments over the fate of

Indian National Army soldiers taken prisoner in Burma and Malaya at the end of the war. The British wanted to put all those accused of physically abusing fellow Indians who had refused to join the INA on trial. The Indian National Congress, however, seized on the men as symbols of a united India's struggle for independence.⁷⁷ Realizing that many Indian soldiers now regarded the INA men not as traitors but as unfortunates who had taken the only available choice, the British allowed most of them to return to India, where they were feted as heroes. Prosecutions proceeded, however, against three INA officers. They quickly turned into a nationalist triumph. The men were convicted and sentenced to transportation for life, but, faced with the overwhelming Indian public support they enjoyed, Auchinleck, as commander-in-chief in India, soon decided they would have to be released instead. An attempt to settle wartime accounts became a propaganda coup for those trying to end British rule.⁷⁸

Events in India were closely watched in Burma, where the fragile alliance between the British and Burmese nationalists swiftly broke down. The returning British governor, Reginald Dorman-Smith, prioritized the return of international business and an older generation of political fixers, including the former prime minister U Saw, to create the prosperous stability he hoped would eventually allow transition to Dominion status. Abandoning his command of the Burmese National Army to enter politics as leader of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, the Burmese nationalist leader Aung San demanded participation in a national government that would determine an immediate transfer of power. To Dorman-Smith's fury, Mountbatten backed Aung San. The Karen, Shan, Kachin and Chin minorities, meanwhile, welcomed the British return as a release from the persecution they had endured from the Japanese and Burmese nationalists since 1942. Newly armed and interested in their own independence, these minority groups were regarded with intense suspicion by the AFPFL.⁷⁹

Further east, SEAC forces returned to Singapore and Malaya in September 1945. The British had established a truce of sorts with the largest of the wartime resistance groups, the Communist Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army, which was raised principally from among the Malayan Chinese. In the interregnum between the Japanese surrender and the British return, however, the peninsula was wracked by inter-ethnic violence. MPAJA supporters settled scores with those who had collaborated with the Japanese. Other armed groups tried to defend their communities or fought back. The new British Military Administration faced a mammoth task of relief, reconstruction and the restoration of law

and order. Well supplied but staffed by inexperienced officers, often with commercial connections to the old colonial regime, it soon became the centre for corruption on an epic scale.⁸⁰

The British had planned a progressive overhaul of the patchwork prewar administration into a modern, multiracial state, the Malayan Union, which would allow political and social as well as economic development. In practice, though many pre-war luxuries were absent, the colour-barred club life, exploitative labour practices and petty squabbles of colonial society were soon restored. Taking up the quid pro quo it thought had been part of MPAJA's deal with SEAC, the Malayan Communist Party stepped up its activities, gathering support from young Chinese men and women radicalized by the war. Food shortages and the reimposition of contract labour encouraged the growth of Communist-backed trade unions, which launched paralysing general strikes and clashed with security forces at the end of 1945. Meanwhile Singapore hauled itself back upright as the British sought to turn it into a genuine fortress from which they could continue to exercise power in the East. Filled with foreign troops shipping out to new colonial conflicts, the city felt even more corrupt and dissolute than it had done in 1941.81

On 15 August 1945, as the Americans planned for the occupation of a suddenly defeated Japan, SEAC had been handed responsibility for southern Indochina, Thailand and Indonesia. At a stroke, its area of operations doubled in size, to 1.5 million square miles, and quintupled in population, to 128 million people.⁸² Both its manpower resources and its transport resources were subjected to enormous strain. In the French and Dutch colonies, SEAC was instructed to take the surrender of Japanese troops, liberate prisoners of war and internees, and restore order. Ministers in London and officers at SEAC headquarters were equally wary of being dragged into other people's conflicts, but 1942 had taught the British that the defence of Malaya and Singapore relied on regional security. That meant giving the French and Dutch colonial regimes a chance to return. In Indochina, Major General Douglas Gracey allowed released French internees access to the arms with which they staged a successful coup against a nationalist Viet Minh government on 23 September 1945. Before long, his Indian soldiers were embroiled in an armed confrontation with the nationalists, defending French colonists who treated them as racial inferiors and exacted brutal reprisals on Vietnamese civilians.⁸³

To the south, SEAC's attempts to co-operate with the new Indonesian Republic broke down in the face of violence from the *pemuda* – radical young nationalists – and deliberately heavy-handed Dutch attempts to

reassert colonial control. In the port city of Surabaya at the end of October 1945, a mixture of British incomprehension and incompetence resulted in a brigade of Indian troops being attacked and almost overwhelmed by Indonesian regulars and *pemuda*. Dutch civilians and their Indian escorts were murdered and mutilated, and the British brigade commander, attempting to make contact with his isolated soldiers, was killed in the crossfire. Horrified and determined to punish 'crimes against civilisation', the British despatched the whole of the 5th Indian Infantry Division to the city. Supported by naval gunfire and RAF fighter-bombers, between 10 and 28 November 1945, it fought its way methodically through Surabaya. In the largest and most brutal set-piece battle since the war, about six hundred British and Indian soldiers became casualties, and somewhere between ten and fifteen thousand Indonesians were killed. Crowds of refugees and a wave of pride in national defiance surged out across the new republic.⁸⁴

Over the next year, the British adopted a strategy of securing the area around the capital, Jakarta, while trying to push the Dutch into an accommodation with the nationalists. From the spring, the Dutch began to move in large numbers of their own troops. Up almost to the very point of British departure in November 1946, they did their best to delay any agreement. British and Indian troops fought a prolonged campaign that ranged from pitched battles with Indonesian army units to isolated patrol duties and sniper attacks. Soldiers who had survived Kohima and Imphal lost their lives in a struggle whose purpose they could not discern. Shocked as they were by the atrocities committed by the nationalists and the Dutch, they also employed the routine violence of colonial repression, rounding up male civilians for screening, executing prisoners and destroying villages in retribution for Indonesian attacks. As one put it: 'in the faeces of sedition we became besmirched.'

As in Europe, in Southeast Asia the British made extensive use of the manpower provided by their former enemies. At the end of the war, the Japanese government sought to find a form of words that would allow its troops to avoid breaching military regulations by allowing themselves to be taken prisoner. The classification that was settled on was 'Japanese Surrendered Personnel'. This allowed the Allies to employ Japanese troops in ways they would not have been able to do with prisoners of war. Across Southeast Asia, JSP were put to work, usually in poor conditions, clearing harbours and minefields, building runways and barracks and repairing civil infrastructure. They were also used as security forces: imposing order in Malaya, guarding the Burma—Thailand railway, and fighting alongside the

British, French and Dutch in Indochina and Indonesia. Sometimes, Japanese sympathetic to nationalist movements avoided confrontation, passed over weapons and ammunition, or even volunteered to fight the returning colonial powers. In other cases, Japanese units fought with such tightly disciplined aggression that British officers tried to recommend their new colleagues for medals. Some British and Indian servicemen swapped war stories with the Japanese. Others were disgusted to find themselves fighting alongside their former enemies.⁸⁸

'BEGINNING TO FEEL THE STRAIN BADLY'

Nonetheless, the scale of the imperial commitment in Southeast Asia was unsustainable. It was not just the cost of keeping so many troops supplied and equipped, but the political difficulty of relying on increasingly reluctant servicemen to restore the Empire. At the start of 1946, a wave of military strikes broke out among British personnel from the Middle East to Southeast Asia. First came incidents of mass indiscipline at RAF bases. Supporting SEAC's dispersed forces had placed huge strain on groundcrew who had been looking forward to demobilization. Irritated by a return to peacetime discipline, and organized by Communist trade unionists, at one point as many as fifty thousand men across twenty-two RAF stations were involved, often with the tacit support of junior officers who shared their disgruntlement. The disturbances died down after conditions were improved, but the RAF did everything it could to hunt down and prosecute those it could identify as ringleaders. In May 1946, more than 250 men from 13th Battalion The Parachute Regiment, sent to 'rest' in a dire tented camp in Malaya after a tour in Java, went on strike when their new commanding officer tried to institute more frequent parades. Most of them were found guilty of mutiny and sentenced to periods of penal servitude or ignominious discharge. There was an uproar over their treatment, with tens of thousands of people signing petitions demanding their sentences be repealed. Irregularities were found in the trial that allowed the sentences to be suspended, then quashed, but the battalion was sent to Palestine, declared surplus to requirements and broken up – in the end, the military hierarchy always won.⁸⁹

Even during the war, poor conditions had sometimes been enough to encourage protests from men who increasingly regarded adequate welfare as a reciprocal obligation on the military state.⁹⁰ With the Axis powers

defeated, many of them plainly did not regard the retention of the colonial empire as worthy of continued personal sacrifice. As one airman put it: 'our paybooks showed that we had joined for "DPE" – the Duration of the Present Emergency. And to us the emergency was over . . . It was time to get back to Britain and then into civilian life.' Some were politically opposed to imperialism; others saw the official attachment to the Empire standing between them and going home and getting a job. Any repressive reaction from senior officers put the government into a position from which it was bound to back down, since public opinion was so firmly on the side of the troops. 92

Even more serious, given what a key part it played in garrisoning the Empire, was Britain's sudden inability to rely on Indian manpower. After Congress insisted that their countrymen should not be used to put down fellow movements of national liberation, Wavell asked publicly in October 1945 that Indian soldiers be brought home as quickly as possible. The INA trials had already left the British worrying about whether they could still count on Indian soldiers. In Indonesia, they fretted as their *jawans* were targeted by pro-nationalist and pan-Islamic propaganda.

In February 1946, there was a major mutiny in the Royal Indian Navy. Wartime expansion had left the RIN full of new, under-trained recruits, commanded by inept British officers without the linguistic skills to communicate properly with their men. On 18 February, ratings at the signal school RINS *Talwar* went on hunger strike after their British commander called them 'black bastards' and 'sons of bitches'. They demanded better food, equal pay with the Royal Navy, improved behaviour from their officers and faster demobilization. Within a few days, strikes and demonstrations had spread to around ten thousand men across sixty-six ships and shore establishments, and involved everything from the flying of Indian flags alongside British ensigns to major riots in Bombay and Karachi, during which organized criminal gangs targeted government grain stores.⁹³

The dispersed nature of the mutineers made it relatively easy for the British to contain the sailors and force them into surrender. Together with the ongoing INA trials, however, the mutiny helped to convince senior British officers that they'd lost their grip over the Indian armed forces. The leaders of Congress, meanwhile, worried about a breakdown in military discipline just as they were about to take power. While the Indian Communist Party tried to seize the opportunity for revolution, Congressmen allowed the mutiny to be suppressed. They were already thinking like a future government.⁹⁴

Between December 1945 and March 1946, the 41 million Indians who were eligible to vote had gone to the polls in the elections that Wavell had called after the breakdown of the 1945 Simla conference. The contest forced politicians who had got used to arguing with each other to appeal directly to the voters. The Congress Party won 60 per cent of the seats and more than 90 per cent of the votes in non-Muslim constituencies. It formed eight out of eleven provincial legislatures and dominated the central legislature. The Muslim League, appealing to Muslims across India to cast their votes in pursuit of 'Pakistan', won seats throughout the country – but was not able to dominate the legislature in the key multi-ethnic province of the Punjab.

The results demonstrated the political impact of the war. Congress was the majority party and must form the basis of any interim government, but the League could legitimately claim to represent Indian Muslims. Any constitutional settlement must take its views into account. From the moment that the results were announced, at the end of March 1946, British rule at the provincial level started to disintegrate. As local politicians and administrators took office, they looked forward to a future without the British. The communal divides deepened by electoral campaigning grew into chasms when parties defined by religious difference began to exercise power. Conscious of their imminent departure, the British stopped spending money on the infrastructure of imperial rule. From the war interior province was a second to the province of the political province was a second to the province of the

Keen to leave India as quickly as possible, but uncertain how to do it, in March 1946 London despatched a Cabinet delegation led by Cripps to agree a route to the transfer of power. Yet British ministers no longer even had the influence to forge a compromise. After weeks of secret negotiation failed to get the Indian politicians to agree their own settlement, the delegation announced its own solution: a three-layered federation with provincial blocs defending communal interests. It was a clever scheme that would allow 'Pakistan' to exist as a notional entity within a unified India. Just as it looked as if both the Congress and the League might be persuaded to give their support (albeit on totally different understandings of what the plan offered), Gandhi killed the deal. He was unwilling to contemplate a compromise that diluted the purity of his vision of India. Disappointed, the British delegation headed home in June. Wavell then formed an interim government. Based on the election results, it was dominated by Congress ministers but included representatives of the Muslim League. They could co-operate on the day-to-day business of government, but not on a new constitution.⁹⁷

The failure of the Cabinet mission stoked the fires of communal

animosity. On 16 August 1946, demonstrations for Direct Action Day called by Jinnah as a means to demonstrate Muslim support for a separate Pakistan – resulted in a horrendous outbreak of violence in Calcutta. Muslim and Hindu militias had both been readying themselves for a coming battle. Rival gangs stabbed, bludgeoned and burnt their way through different quarters of the city. After three days, at least four thousand people were dead and more than ten thousand injured.⁹⁸ British and Gurkha troops were brought in to restore order, but they brought only a veneer of calm. As the spur to violence shifted from political party to religious identity, the horror spread quickly to other parts of northern India. Within weeks, tens of thousands of people had been killed and hundreds of thousands had witnessed violence or the flight of refugees. British officials and Indian leaders were overwhelmed. They began to talk vaguely of partition as the only way to avoid a civil war. Wavell, by now 'tired of dealing with these impossible people' and 'almost for the first time in my life . . . really beginning to feel the strain badly', could see no means to bring the Indian politicians together. 99 Fearing a complete disintegration of the country, he drew up a 'breakdown plan' in which the British would withdraw from one province to another, holding on only long enough for soldiers, civil servants and their families to escape before they were evacuated to the UK.

By that point, the breaking point seemed to have arrived in Burma as well. During 1946, Aung San had stepped up his challenge to British rule. Dorman-Smith, frustrated and seriously ill, wanted to arrest the Burmese leader for a murder committed during the Japanese invasion. Worried he would wreck the mission to India, Cripps put a stop to that. As tensions rose in Burma and the police started shooting at AFPFL protestors, Dorman-Smith was recalled to London and sacked. The pre-war politicians he had tried to build up as an alternative to Aung San remained. In the interval between Dorman-Smith's departure and the arrival of his successor, Hubert Rance, the situation deteriorated still further. Looking to India, Burmese nationalists asked why they had been given neither democratic elections nor a Cabinet visit. As disorder reigned in the Burmese countryside and labour disputes wracked its towns, the AFPFL demanded a definite date for independence. A general strike, called in September 1946, threatened famine and economic collapse. Aung San was desperate to avoid any further suffering for the Burmese people, but only major concessions from the British would allow him to keep control of the nationalist movement. 100

'AS MANY AS POSSIBLE OF THE NON-REPATRIABLE JEWS'

Of all the crises afflicting the British Empire in the years after the war, Palestine was the most interconnected with all the others, above all the difficulties of Anglo-American relations. To the frustration of British ministers, there was no easy way out. The war had left tens of thousands of Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) from Eastern Europe in British and American refugee camps in the West. Their conditions were wretched, and they were desperate to leave the Continent behind. The combination of the war and the failure of their more moderate predecessors to secure a Jewish homeland had also driven on more radical forms of Zionism, both in Palestine and in the USA. By summer 1945, American Zionists were very clear that the way to solve the problem of the DPs was to lift the Palestine immigration restrictions imposed by the British. Rather than the 1,500 licences that the British were granting each month, they wanted the way clear to let 100,000 Jews enter Palestine straight away.

Following the murder of Lord Moyne in 1944, Churchill had lost interest in supporting Zionist claims, which he no longer believed would do much to support the British Empire. Roosevelt, with his usual legerdemain, had both promised his support to the Zionists and given his pledge that the Arabs would be given a final say in any decision over Palestine. Truman, with a focus on domestic politics, had sent his own rapporteur to investigate the condition of the DP camps in Europe, who had recommended support for the 100,000 figure. At the end of August 1945, he had written to tell Attlee that 'as many as possible of the non-repatriable Jews, who wish it' should be evacuated to Palestine. Significantly, the president preferred this option to changing the highly restrictive American immigration quotas to bring more of the survivors of Nazi genocide to the USA. Opening the doors of Palestine to the remaining Jews of Europe was, however, a course of action to which the British government was strongly opposed. ¹⁰¹

It represented a substantial shift from Labour Party policy. In 1944, Dalton had publicly committed the party to allowing free entry to Palestine to all those who wanted to establish a Jewish national home. Now that they were in power, however, Bevin and Attlee were forced to confront the question of Jewish immigration as part of Britain's position in the Middle East as a whole. Most British strategists wanted Britain to remain the dominant power in the region because of its oil, communications, and

military, air and naval bases. In line with the general tenet of post-war colonialism, they hoped to encourage general social and economic development through the continuation of the Middle East Supply Council, and to get the soldiers currently garrisoning the theatre home and demobbed as quickly as possible. Yet they faced numerous problems: US commercial penetration, disagreements with the French over the Levant, and the rising assertiveness of the Arab states. In Egypt, in particular, nationalist anger at the wartime presence of British troops had led to demands either to enforce or renegotiate the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. Frustration at the continuing cost of garrisoning resentful populations for marginal strategic benefits was part of Attlee's repeated suggestion that Britain should depart from the Middle East immediately. Not least as a result, however, he had no desire to antagonize Arab opinion by letting in more Jews. ¹⁰²

Wanting to win Jewish votes for the Democratic candidate in the New York mayoral race, on 29 September 1945 Truman told journalists that the British were stalling his efforts to allow 100,000 European Jews into Palestine. Bevin was furious, but with American criticism threatening the dollar loan, he hit on the idea of setting up an Anglo-American commission of inquiry into immigration to Palestine. ¹⁰³

Established in November 1945, the commission travelled from Washington to London, through Europe and to the Middle East interviewing DPs, Arabs and Zionists. In April 1946 it produced its report, which settled on a partial compromise: 100,000 Jews should be admitted, but Palestine should remain 'binational'. More immigrants should not mean the setting up of a separate Jewish state. The British civil servants who considered the report thought that its implementation would have 'disastrous effects' in the Middle East without appeasing Zionists in the USA. Quite aside from the massive housing and development costs involved, they feared it would spark an Arab uprising that would require British reinforcements to suppress. They recommended the report's rejection unless the British could get the Americans to offer financial and military support. Bevin asked the Americans to delay publication until the two governments had discussed the report. 104

On 30 April 1946, without warning the British, Truman publicly endorsed the commission's recommendation of the 100,000 figure. This breezy politicking once more infuriated Attlee and Bevin. In a dramatic escalation of the violence that had been simmering in Palestine, Jewish terrorists had killed seven British soldiers in a very close-range gun attack in a car park in Tel Aviv four days before. In his statement on the report,

Attlee tersely insisted that all such gangs must be disarmed before any progress could be made on immigration. Bevin poured fuel on the flames of transatlantic discord when he told the Labour Party conference in June that the Americans supported such extensive immigration to Palestine because 'They did not want too many Jews in New York.' This sort of language convinced many in the US that Bevin was motivated by anti-Semitism. American newspapers equated him to Hitler and New York dockers refused to handle his luggage. ¹⁰⁵

Nonetheless, with the dollar loan and US co-operation over Germany still in play, Bevin tried to draw the Americans into practical discussions of how the two countries could implement the commission's report. The State Department worked with the British to produce a set of compromise proposals aimed at achieving the 'binational' Palestine recommended by the commission of inquiry. Simultaneously, the British came under new pressure in Egypt that had implications for Palestine as a base. In February and March 1946, demonstrations against the continued British presence in Cairo and Alexandria resulted in significant outbreaks of violence, during which two British military policemen were murdered. British forces began to be withdrawn to the huge base area in the Canal Zone. If agreement on the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty could not be reached, their numbers would have to be sharply reduced.

During May and June 1946, Zionist groups stepped up their attacks on British troops in Palestine. They were designed to provoke a violent reaction: the aim was to turn the Mandate into a 'glass house' in which any British use of force would be put under international scrutiny and used to win the battle for minds in the United States. 106 In turn the British chiefs of staff worried that 'similar incidents to the recent Tel Aviv outrage might produce a strong reaction in the behaviour of our forces which might not be possible to prevent.' Convinced that firm action was necessary to take control of the situation, Montgomery, newly installed as CIGS, persuaded the Cabinet to authorize an operation on 29–30 June to seize the headquarters of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem and arrest about two thousand of its members. Though this secured some evidence of complicity with the terrorist gangs, it played into the hands of the Zionists. On 22 July 1946, Zionist paramilitaries blew up the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, killing ninety-one soldiers and civilians. Ordering a complete ban on commerce with Jewish settlers in response, the British commander, General Sir Evelyn Barker, insisted his troops would be 'punishing the Jews in a way the race dislikes as much as any, namely by striking at their pockets'. The instruction, promptly leaked to the press, caused an

international outcry that overshadowed the bombing. 108

The 'binational' proposals developed by the British and Americans, the so-called 'Morrison-Grady' plan, were produced at the end of July 1946. Opposition from American Zionists to a leaked version of the plan led Truman to reject that too. The British, increasingly desperate for a resolution, decided to go it alone with a conference to persuade Arab and Jewish leaders of the benefit of the Morrison-Grady solution. The Jewish Agency participated because the plan offered a route towards partition, which, with the British military now exerting increased control in Palestine, it now saw as the only means to secure a Jewish state. The conference started on 9 September, but the three sides were so far apart that it took weeks for the talks to get going. Just as it looked as if progress might be made, Attlee was informed that Truman, once more with an eye to the Jewish vote, was about to endorse the partition of Palestine and call for an immediate start to immigration. The prime minister asked the president to wait. Truman refused and went ahead on 4 October 1946. That doomed any chance of Britain by itself determining Palestine's fate. 109

'WELL, WHAT HAVE THEY DONE FOR US? IT'S ALL QUEUING UP'

During 1946, the reconversion of the British economy went better than anyone had expected. Between June 1945 and the end of 1946, 7 million men and women left the armed forces or munitions manufacturing. Five million of them had re-entered the civilian workforce, which had expanded in the space of eighteen months by 40 per cent. Unemployment was under 2 per cent. Inflation was held in check, with a rise in consumer prices of just 3 per cent. As the world recovered from the war and with many of Britain's former competitors laid low, exports were twice those in 1945; by the end of 1946, the level of exports exceeded that in 1938. The balance of payments deficit was calculated at half the figure that Keynes had anticipated in the summer of 1945. With the American loan finally secured, Britain looked well on the way to recovery. 110

That wasn't how it looked to those still queuing for their shortened rations, reading about the soldiers killed in Palestine, or crammed in with resentful relatives while they waited to move up the list at the housing office. Perhaps it wasn't surprising that they reacted half-heartedly to the government's plans for a Victory Parade in London on 8 June 1946. When

it was announced, a middle-aged veteran told Mass-Observation he was 'all in favour of a pageant . . . it's an opportunity for the population to pay homage to the rank and file, and it's certainly an opportunity for me to attend a parade, having missed the VE and VJ day celebrations because I was in Burma.' Most of the women the Observers spoke to were distinctly less enthusiastic: 'I don't see what they have to celebrate for anyway. There seems to be just as many squabbles going as there were before the war. It almost seems it wasn't worth fighting for – I lost two cousins . . . I don't really see why now', said one twenty-three-year-old. 'Damn silly I call it. An absolute waste. It isn't as if there's anything to eat either', said a middle-class woman in her forties, while an older working-class woman explained: 'I don't mind the children having their tea parties or other forms of amusement, but I don't want to see the parade myself because it don't help us people who have been bombed out and have nowhere to live.' 111

The parade nonetheless attracted huge crowds. It started with a mighty mechanized column, which travelled right round central London before going past the royal family in a saluting base on the Mall. Led by police motorcycle outriders preceding the heads of the armed forces, it seemed to include an example of every single vehicle in use by the military, from pre-heater vans for aircraft engines and civil defence decontamination units, via Churchill and Comet tanks, to earth excavators, with a mobile laundry bringing up the rear. Then a vast march past of servicemen and women from across the Commonwealth and Empire was followed by a parade of industrial workers, while squadron after squadron of RAF planes flew overhead. That evening, the Thames was floodlit for a series of water displays and a night-time fly-past, and the king was saluted with searchlights and aerial maroons. To finish it all off, a bank of five hundred loudspeakers blared out the National Anthem. As swansongs went, it was pretty noisy. 112

Three weeks later, the new minister of food, John Strachey, announced that bread rationing would be introduced from 22 July 1946. Reactions to the prospect of this change were strongly negative, particularly among British housewives. The ration cuts at the start of the year had already turned many of them away from Labour. What annoyed them now was less rationing itself — which still enjoyed a good reputation with most people as a fair response to scarcity — than the suspicion that supplies of bread would be interrupted or inadequate. For middle-class women in particular, the idea of spending still more time in queues at the behest of bolshy shop assistants seemed to epitomize just how much their standard of living had been eroded by the war and its aftermath. Much of their

antagonism was directed through a new protest organization, the British Housewives' League. Established in the summer of 1945, the BHL differed from other successful women's organizations of the time because its leaders publicly opposed instructions from the government. Though it benefitted from the boosting of the right-wing press in the spring of 1946, and was wrongly attacked by Labour supporters as a Tory front, it captured a lot of non-partisan fury from women who thought that their patriotic willingness to endure was being exploited by shopkeepers and bureaucrats. By the middle of July, it had presented two petitions with 300,000 signatories opposing bread rationing to the Commons and the Ministry of Food. 114

This impressive act of political mobilization did not, however, turn into much. Ministers refused to reverse course, even when Strachey decided that rationing was probably unnecessary. This was partly because they did not want to let down Labour women who had defended bread rationing to feed the Germans as an example of British humanitarianism, but mainly because they feared a public-relations backlash in the United States if this new measure of austerity was abandoned so soon after the securing of the dollar loan. Once it became apparent that the bread ration was substantial and reliable (and with an option to swap unused bread points for alternative rationed foods), it became much less unpopular, particularly with working-class housewives. The BHL tried to consolidate its success with a nationwide programme of organization and activities, but its leaders allowed it to be taken over by a wealthy right-wing megalomaniac, Dorothy Crisp. Her attempts to turn the League into a militant force with parliamentary representation degenerated into farce and infighting during 1947. Such political activities were deeply antipathetic to most of those who had signed petitions the previous year: women who thought of themselves as coping with whatever life threw at them without making too much of a fuss. 115

The protests against bread rationing suggested growing weariness with continuing austerity and increasing regulation, particularly among some of the middle-class voters who had supported Labour in 1945. In the three by-elections held at the height of the bread-rationing protests, Labour saw single figure swings to the Conservatives in the more working-class constituencies of Battersea North and Pontypool, but held middle-class Bexley – a key suburban win in 1945 – much more narrowly after an 18 per cent increase in the Conservative vote. The Conservative Party was in a terrible state, its local organization at its lowest ebb since the advent of mass democracy, but even so it managed to win back 262 council seats

from Labour in the November 1946 local elections. Nonetheless, the electoral coalition that had brought Labour to power continued to hold together surprisingly well — partly because the government remained strikingly moderate in its policies, and partly because it continued to enjoy the support of many working-class women who saw continued rationing as the way to keep their families fed.

Wartime collectivism was not extinguished by the austere monotony of peace, but it was certainly eroded. Some simply sought to strike out for new homes elsewhere. Between 1946 and 1948, more than 340,000 emigrants left the UK, most of them heading to the 'white' Dominions. A significant number were following up their experiences of these countries – particularly Canada, South Africa and Rhodesia – during the war, when they had appeared as bounteous, welcoming alternatives to a dreary motherland.¹¹⁷ Others decided to bend or break the rules. By May 1946, the then minister of food, Ben Smith, lamented that controls on food were 'generally being ignored and evaded more frequently now than at any time during the war'. 118 The Ministry itself believed that the post-war period had seen an increase in offences not just because black marketeers started to operate on a larger scale, but because the public saw less reason to abide by regulations that they knew were impossible to check. 119 The forgery of ration coupons boomed. 120 As during the war, most breaches occurred in the 'grey market' between neighbours and friends and in illicit dealings by conventional businesses, but this was also the period in which the 'spiv' – a petty black marketeer, dressed in a wide-brimmed trilby and a doublebreasted 'American Look' suit, moving amid the city crowds, selling coupons or stolen goods – became a familiar figure in British popular culture. In fact, most people continued to obey the rationing rules most of the time even once the war was over – but they certainly enjoyed the second-hand thrill of reading about spivs in the newspapers or watching them on the cinema screen. In the space of fourteen months between 1947 and 1948, British production companies released nine films featuring spiv anti-heroes, from Dancing with Crime, via Brighton Rock, to Noose. 121

The growing exhaustion with austerity and frustration with regulation reflected the thirst for glamour, independence and consumer goods that had developed alongside the collectivist mood during the war. Once the Conservatives figured out that they needed to combine a commitment to the post-war national state with the promise that these aspirations could be realized, they would have a route to political recovery. Wartime experiences therefore underpinned not only Labour's post-1945 moment,

but also the decade of Conservative electoral dominance that would follow.

'WE'VE GOT TO HAVE THE BLOODY UNION JACK ON TOP OF IT'

Notwithstanding its real achievements in reconverting the economy, eighteen months after its election, the Labour government was still struggling with all the other problems of adapting to a turbulent peace. Even after the main wave of demobilization was completed, the UK maintained very substantial armed forces all over the world. Young men continued to be conscripted, and, at the end of 1946, 1.5 million Britons were in uniform. Defence spending was at 18 per cent of Gross National Product. 122 At home, shortages of manpower were limiting output in textiles, agriculture (hence the importance of all those Germans) and coalmining. Britain had been unable to find solutions that would allow it to pull out quickly from Palestine or India. The intervention in Indonesia was finally drawing to an end, but the expectation that the British would be able to withdraw the few thousand troops they still had in Greece, where they were maintaining an uneasy peace, was dashed by the renewal of the civil war. This seemed bound to entail still more expenditure to build up the Greek armed forces and secure the government in Athens. Bevin's strategy of trying to involve the Americans in the defence of British interests seemed to have been undercut by the American elections of November 1946, in which the Republicans took control of both Houses of Congress. Despite their concerns about the international spread of Communism, their main aim was a reduction in US government spending. The continuing commitment of American troops and dollars overseas seemed increasingly in doubt.

Over the winter of 1946, Attlee took a more direct role to push unresolved issues of national strategy and imperial withdrawal to a conclusion. Typically, he did this in a compartmentalized fashion that allowed him to maintain maximum control while placing a lot of reliance on Cripps and Bevin. With Cripps, Attlee got Nehru and Jinnah to come to London in December 1946 for direct talks on a future Indian constitution. When these got stuck, Cripps took the lead in reframing the problem, persuading his Cabinet colleagues that Britain should now set a definite date for departure within the next year to eighteen months. This would

create the momentum that would force the Indian politicians to deal with each other: if it did not, Britain would leave in any case.

When Bevin, newly back from a depressing Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in New York, tried to oppose an early withdrawal, Attlee pushed him into line by asking what alternative policy he had. The decision formed the basis for a draft White Paper that set the deadline for withdrawal at 1 June 1948. Attlee had by now decided to retire Wavell, and Cripps canvassed alternative viceroys with Nehru. They decided on Mountbatten. Attlee agreed. It was easy to see why. The former supreme commander was a dynamic, charismatic figure who had done the jobs Churchill had given him with aplomb. Though plenty of clever politicians looked down on him, Mountbatten's time at SEAC had shown that he had understood the significance of the wartime rise of Asian nationalism.

Wavell was kept in the dark about this decision until just before it was announced, just ahead of the publication of the White Paper on 20 February 1947. In the meantime, that January Attlee and Cripps met with Aung San – part of a package of concessions to the Burmese nationalist that included a promise of a general election on a full franchise and gave him the political capital to survive the Burmese Communist Party's angry departure from the AFPFL. Attlee agreed with Aung San that Burma too would become independent in one year. Wary of encouraging the sort of violence that had broken out in India, the British simply abandoned their allies among the hill peoples and ceded control of the ethnic minority areas to the new Burmese state. Aung San talked of its being a multiracial federation. He seemed determined to avoid another calamitous descent into violence. 123

The prime minister resumed his pressure on Bevin and the chiefs of staff to consider withdrawing British forces from the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. 124 Attlee had long argued that British resources were so overstretched – and the Middle East so vulnerable to a Soviet attack – that it would be better to draw back on the African empire. Despite Bevin and the chiefs' insistence on the region's strategic importance – not least as an airbase in any future war with the Soviets – Attlee returned to the attack on 5 January 1947, urging the foreign secretary not to give in to the services' 'strategy of despair' if he could still improve relations with the USSR. This aroused a fierce response from Bevin, who argued that Britain had to hold as much as it could for as long as it could if it wanted the Americans to take it seriously, and he warned Attlee that giving way in the Middle East would encourage Soviet leaders to greater aggression in the same way that appeasement had encouraged

Hitler. The chiefs threatened to resign. Attlee backed down. 125

Simultaneously, however, Bevin had been seeking a solution to the problem of Palestine. In January 1947, he and the colonial secretary, Arthur Creech Jones, got the Cabinet to agree that, if another conference of Jews and Arabs in London failed to reach agreement on a transition of power, the question of Palestine's future should be put before the United Nations. The conference was hamstrung from the start by the decision of the World Zionist Congress in December 1946 to withhold co-operation, though Creech Jones arranged for members of the Jewish Agency to be available in London for consultation. When Creech Jones and Bevin proposed a five-year transition to an independent binational state, both sides rejected it. On 14 February 1947, Bevin therefore announced that the British would be referring Palestine to the United Nations. 126

This might have looked like a good way to make the international community bear the opprobrium that Britain had been attracting since 1945, but it did not offer much hope of a speedy escape, not least since the United Nations General Assembly was not scheduled to meet again until that September. In fact, the decision to go to the UNGA reflected Britain's incapacity. It could not deflect American interference or bear the costs of imposing its own solution, but nor could it for the moment take the decision to evacuate such a strategically important position. The failure to establish a clear route out was very evident in comparison to India and Burma. Palestine had once more defeated both Bevin and Attlee.

Ever since the resumption of the Greek civil war, the chancellor, Hugh Dalton, had been pressing Bevin to give up Britain's commitment to Greece, arguing that the drain on Britain's dollar reserves was too great and that, without British financial and military aid, the Greek government would be forced to stand on its own feet or to seek American help. Here, too, Bevin had been determined that Britain should stand its ground, but his suggestion to Byrnes that the USA might like to help had been met with vague expressions of goodwill but no practical assistance. With Attlee also determined that British troops and aid had to be withdrawn to save money, on 18 February 1947 Bevin had to give way. He and Dalton agreed telegrams to Athens and Washington, announcing that all British support for the Greek government would be withdrawn at the end of March.

To Truman, his new secretary of state, General George Marshall, and crucially to Republican leaders in Congress, this seemed like a decisive moment. Primed by protests against Communist-rigged elections in Poland the previous month to see the Soviet Union as abandoning the agreements

made at Yalta and Potsdam, they were convinced that they had to step in. On 12 March 1947, Truman told Congress that he was committing the USA to the defence of democracy in Greece and Turkey against 'subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure'. With a speed Bevin appears not to have anticipated, the Americans had replaced the UK as the strategic guarantor of the security of the Eastern Mediterranean. It was not an outcome that had been apparent when the British had been fighting in Athens at Christmas 1944.

The decisions taken during the winter of 1946–7 represented a clear step away from Empire. Churchill, when he could spare the time from writing the first volume of his massive history of the Second World War, threatened to turn them into a party political issue by pointing this out. Charging the government with 'scuttle' across the whole range of its activities, he led a Conservative attack that focused, in particular, on the government's abdication of its moral responsibility to maintain good order in India in the face of communal meltdown. This in turn elicited from Labour, and Attlee in particular, a defence of withdrawal that focused on the fulfilment of a long-term liberal imperial mission. For decades, the British had been saying that they would hand over government when their imperial charges were ready: it was to their credit that this moment had already been reached in India and Burma, but that did not entail any rapid departure from the rest of the Empire. 128 It was easy for Attlee to make this case because he believed it to be fundamentally true, but it was also true that Britain's ability to maintain control had run out. To that extent, his determination to cut and run was highly pragmatic and ruthless - two attributes that, for all Attlee's generosity of spirit to his fellow citizens, were also absolutely characteristic of his personality.

Moreover, at just the same moment that he attempted to draw a line under unsustainable imperial commitments, the prime minister was also setting Britain on the route to building its own atomic bomb, a measure he viewed as crucial to national power in the modern era, and which he hoped would provide a much cheaper means of greatness than the maintenance of garrisons all over the world. In summer 1946, the US Congress had passed the McMahon Act, prohibiting the US government from sharing information about nuclear technology with other powers. This only slightly anticipated what the Truman administration had in any case by that point decided to do in order to maintain its control over atomic weapons. Attlee was determined that —not least to demonstrate its independence — Britain should go ahead without American assistance and construct its own atomic bomb. At a Cabinet meeting on 25 October 1946, however, Cripps and

Dalton argued strongly against the expenditure involved, including the £30–£40 million required to build a plant to manufacture uranium. They were unmoved by Bevin's argument that 'We've got to have this thing over here whatever it costs . . . We've got to have the bloody Union Jack on top of it.' Unwilling to risk the argument spilling out into public, Attlee simply circumvented his awkward colleagues, setting up a secret committee consisting of himself, Bevin and the minister of defence, Albert Alexander, which met only once – on 8 January 1947 – to approve the start of work on Britain's own bomb project. It would give them a means of defence independent from the United States.

In the meantime, however, a military-professional agreement of which Attlee may not even have been aware had resulted in another important atomic development. In June 1946, Carl Spaatz and Arthur Tedder, now elevated to the heads of the USAAF and the RAF respectively, met in the UK for talks about American access to British bases in the event of an international emergency. Tedder agreed that the RAF would prepare four or five East Anglian bases for potential American use. This would include lengthening runways so that they could be used by B-29 bombers and preparing facilities to support the deployment of American atomic bombs. Though the first atomic bombers would not arrive until 1949, the bases were ready from 1947. During that year, USAAF planners visited their British counterparts, outlined their developing atomic strategy, and opened discussions about the role of British bases in the UK and the Middle East in any future nuclear war with the Soviet Union. Well before the British had a bomb of their own, the close military relationship – fostered by the men who had run the decisive air campaign against Germany in 1944 was integrating the country as a junior partner in an atomic alliance. 130

Echoes of wartime internationalism therefore remained. But the shift from India to the atom bomb was part of a wider trend towards specifically national power that would mark out Britain after 1947 from the pre-war country. In April 1947, to make up for the loss of the Indian military manpower that had supported Britain's world role, the government passed the National Service Act. Revised and extended the following year, this introduced military conscription for young men in peacetime for the first time in the country's history (with the exception of a very brief period before the Second World War). Later in the same year, the passage of the Agriculture Act similarly represented the perpetuation into peacetime of measures employed during the war. Aiming to keep the people fed while minimizing imports by increasing domestic production, the Act provided farmers with guaranteed prices and markets for most of their produce,

grants to modernize their machinery and free scientific advice. So far from nationalizing land ownership, as it had promised before 1945, Labour paid for a dramatic increase in UK food production with massive subventions to large landholders, in ways that allowed them to exploit even more completely the agricultural working class.¹³²

In early 1947, however, the shortage was not grain but coal. That winter was the coldest of the twentieth century. In the UK, the worst of the weather lasted from the end of January to the middle of March, with the peak of the freeze in the middle of February. The weather would have been bad enough by itself, but it coincided with and greatly worsened a fuel crisis caused by a mixture of under-manning and absenteeism in the coal mines. The coal industry was in a worse state than it had been during the war, with fourteen thousand fewer miners than in August 1945. In the course of 1946, Shinwell had granted the miners an impressive package of wage guarantees, a five-day week and a fortnight's paid holiday. Neither this nor the nationalization of the mines resulted in any improvement in output, and Shinwell failed to react to the warning signs in the autumn of 1946. With snow blocking railways and roads, the result was a prolonged fuel shortage, which was miserable to experience and had dire consequences for the economy. With no coal reaching power stations or gas plants, electricity supplies to factories and homes had to be suspended for all or part of the day, with users caught breaching the new regulations punished by fines. Food and household goods ran out in the shops. Under layers of clothes, huddled in a new blackout, Britons told each other it was worse than during the war. As factories closed for lack of fuel, at the height of the crisis 2 million workers were laid off. Production slumped badly but unevenly, with steel output particularly hit. Even after the thaw had arrived, restrictions on domestic consumption endured until April. 133

The bad weather caused an economic setback not just in the UK, but across Europe. British exports fell 25 per cent, reversing the 1946 improvement in the balance of payments. During the first months of 1947, it looked as if the whole Continent was in dire straits. Under the snow, however, the foundations had already been laid for a remarkable economic recovery. Already ahead of its war-ravaged competitors, the UK would benefit from the effects of this boom, which would bring the balance of payments back into balance by the end of 1948. But there was another problem, more immediately severe but less anticipated: the strength of the post-war dollar. Since the United States was the only country in the world capable of supplying the machinery and materials needed for recovery, there was a global shortage of dollars. As Britain

spent money in the US on food (not least for hungry Germans), films, and the plant it needed to increase industrial productivity, it sped its way through the dollar loan much more quickly than anticipated.¹³⁵

Hugh Dalton had been warning his colleagues since July 1946 that they needed to cut their dollar expenditure, but the severity of the implications of this imbalance in the terms of US trade only really became apparent to the Treasury after the start of 1947. That March, he warned them that the whole loan might be used up by February 1948. But the difference between sterling and dollar prices was still expanding, wearing away at the loan that was meant to cushion the UK's shift to full convertibility on 15 July 1947. British reserves had gone down by \$580 million in the second half of 1946, but in the first half of 1947 they fell by \$1,840 million. As the day approached, an overwhelmed Treasury faced both a balance of payments crisis and a run on the pound.

'IT IS FOR INDIA HERSELF NOW TO MAKE HER DESTINY'

As the crises gathered pace in London, India raced towards independence with unexpected speed. Mountbatten had arrived on 22 March 1947 and took over as viceroy two days later. By then, the Punjab was aflame. Cities were scarred with riot debris and burnt-out buildings. Sikhs, furious at the idea that they might be absorbed into Pakistan, prepared for battle and started to call for partition as a way to carve out their destiny for themselves.

Mountbatten brought optimism, a can-do attitude and an almost complete lack of knowledge of Indian affairs. He took office still believing that a settlement on the lines of the Cabinet Mission was possible. It didn't take many meetings with Indian politicians or reports of the bloody killings in the Punjab to persuade him that it was not, and that the country must be partitioned into two. As he told London, it was 'madness' but the only route out of communal violence. 'The most we can hope to do', he explained, '. . . is to put the responsibility for any of these . . . decisions fairly and squarely on the Indian shoulders in the eyes of the world, for one day they will bitterly regret the decision they are about to make.' 137

The fate of Bengal and the Punjab would be a key problem for any such partition. For reasons of cultural heritage and economic strength, Jinnah wanted both provinces wholly within Pakistan. Both had strong regional identities of their own that militated against any internal subdivision. Both also had large areas where Muslims were in the minority, including some with no religious majority at all. Keeping them together appeared no longer possible, but nor was there any safe way quickly to pull them apart.

Mountbatten's first solution was to let everyone select their own path, with every province free to join India, or Pakistan, or to become an independent state of its own. Each of the Princely States — the client kingdoms whose populations made up a quarter of the Indian population — would also be able to decide between the same choices. Bengal and the Punjab could be divided up on religious grounds, if that was what their elected representatives wanted, or remain whole and separate from the new nations being formed around them. Not for nothing was this known as 'Plan Balkan'. At the start of May 1947, it was approved by the Cabinet in London.

Nehru and the Mountbattens had soon established a rapport, based in part on the viceroy's respect for the Congress leader and in part on the strong mutual attraction between Nehru and Lady Mountbatten. Granted an early sight of the new plan, however, Nehru was appalled at the threat to a unified India. After a hasty redraft, the viceroy accepted a new version in which most provinces were assigned to India or Pakistan, with Bengali and Punjabi legislators left to decide how to split, and the destination of the Princely States left deliberately uncertain. Granted an early transfer of power for a coherent Indian state, the Congress leaders were willing to recognize that this would be made easier if both new nations became members of the Commonwealth. Whether or not the Muslim League would accept was far from clear: it would get Pakistan, but in a form that Jinnah had already dismissed as 'moth-eaten': economically and geographically incoherent, without the whole of Bengal or the Punjab, and with its eastern and western portions 2,000 miles apart. 139

On 18 May, Mountbatten returned to London to put this new plan to the government and opposition. Attlee and the Cabinet were ready to accept any solution that got Britain out of India as quickly as possible. Churchill was temporarily won over by the incorporation of India and Pakistan into the Commonwealth and encouraged Jinnah to give his assent. The government was therefore able to push the legislation creating two new Dominions through Parliament before the summer recess.

Back in Delhi, Mountbatten presented the new plan to a carefully stage-managed meeting of Congress, Sikh and Muslim League leaders on 2 June 1947. The following morning, having secured their acquiescence,

he put before them the programme for the transfer of power, to be completed by 15 August 1947 – more than a year earlier than they had been anticipating. That afternoon, the plan was announced on All-India Radio and in the Commons in London. In India, the main response was confusion. Were the British really going to leave? Was partition a permanent arrangement? What did it mean for Sikh holy sites in the Punjab or for Muslim League supporters living in what would become India? 'Self-rule', 'Pakistan' and 'partition' had been powerful but vague concepts. Now they were going to be made real at dizzying pace, but a settlement born out of the desire for resolution at the highest levels of British and Indian politics bore scant connection to the fears, aspirations and entanglements that were driving local violence. ¹⁴⁰

The choice of date was Mountbatten's, but the accelerated timetable suited British needs very well. The pressure of time would convince everyone of British seriousness and override the manoeuvring and filibustering in which both Gandhi and Jinnah had specialized in the past. The Raj would be wrapped up quickly, and the 11,000 British service personnel in India swiftly brought home before they became embroiled in an incipient civil war. Given how far Britain's ability to control the subcontinent had already declined, once the decision about how to leave had been taken, there was a pragmatic argument for getting out as quickly as possible. The very limited window of preparation fitted much less well with the moral obligation to protect the millions of people who were at this point still subjects of the Indian Empire. Their fate would be in the hands of the nascent Indian and Pakistani states, whose relationship would in turn be defined by the communal politics of their disputed borders. The line of their exact demarcation was for the moment unknown.

The last ten weeks of British rule were a period of frantic effort to reorganize and divide the machinery of imperial government. Under pressure from Mountbatten and the Congress leader Vallabhbhai Patel, most of the Princely States agreed to join India. Bureaucratic resources, from filing cabinets to wastepaper baskets, were painstakingly split 80:20 between India and Pakistan. Units of the British Indian army, one of the most extraordinary success stories of the war, began to be split up on ethnic lines: a process that was drawn out and painful, both to the soldiers and to their British officers, who would also divide themselves between the two new states. ¹⁴¹

After Bengal and the Punjab voted for partition, the British judge Cyril Radcliffe was assigned to adjudicate the lines on which they would be divided. To ensure good relations during the handover of power, his decisions would not be released until 17 August 1947. With 3,800 miles of border on which to decide and the clock counting down, Radcliffe worked away in a closed office from outdated information. There was no time or means to investigate the intricacies of physical or cultural geography on the ground.

During July, inter-communal violence worsened. Lahore and Amritsar burned. As the British prepared to depart, however, there was neither the will to crack down on the perpetrators nor an army on which they could rely to impose order. Despite warnings from the governor of the Punjab, Evan Jenkins, that the partition of his province would create a refugee crisis, the British did nothing to prepare for the movements of population that were an inevitable consequence of the plan. At best, these were presumed to be something that would happen peacefully and over time. At worst, they would be the responsibility of the new states carved out of the Raj. The lack of prior planning for a foreseeable catastrophe harked back to the dark days of 1942 and bore out the collapse of imperial power. Conservative complaints about the moral abdication involved were wholly accurate, but would have had more force if they hadn't so transparently looked to perpetuate British control. 142

At midnight on 14 August 1947, India and Pakistan came into being as Dominions within the British Commonwealth. In Delhi, the following day, amid much pomp, Mountbatten was installed as governor-general of India. Ecstatic crowds surrounded the dignitaries, cheering Mountbatten and Nehru. The last viceroy had completed his mission: getting Britain out of India fast, and in such a manner that its departure could be celebrated as an achievement rather than a defeat. As the Pathé newsreel announcer put it to audiences back in the UK: 'Britain has fulfilled her mission. It is for India herself now to make her destiny.' ¹⁴³

Two days later, as British soldiers began to board the troopships home, Radcliffe's boundary decisions were announced. Predictably, they sliced absurdly across the grain of infrastructure, culture and terrain. Confusingly communicated to anxious populations, the new borders became a locus of contestation and ethnic cleansing as newly rival communities on both sides sought to establish control or overturn the Radcliffe line. In the Punjab, in particular, the result was to drive communal violence between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims to new levels of atrocity. Mass killing, mutilation and rape escalated rapidly, as did the flight of those terrorized out of their homes. Somewhere between 250,000 and 1 million people were killed as a result. By just November 1947, 8 million had become refugees. The catastrophe had a lasting effect on the creation of Indian and Pakistani

national identities.¹⁴⁶ Thrust into crisis at their birth, the following year, the new states would go to war over the disputed region of Kashmir.

Though it scarcely registered compared to the suffering of Partition, one of the other consequences of the speed with which India and Pakistan became independent was a quick agreement on the sterling balances (of which imperial India had been by far the largest holder) which favoured Britain. Though they never accepted Churchill's demands for a counterclaim for the costs of defending India, Attlee and Dalton had maintained Keynes' line that some of the debt ought to be cancelled. In May 1947, in a speech in London, Dalton called them 'an unreal, unjust and unsupportable burden', which were beyond 'all limits of good sense and fair play'. At independence, British India's sterling balance was divided between India and Pakistan, with the overwhelming majority allocated to the new Indian state.¹⁴⁷

In contrast to other holders of sterling debt, the Indians had a weak negotiating position. Unlike countries outside the Empire, their balances were very large and unprotected against any devaluation in the pound – so there was no incentive for the British either to sell off investments to clear the debt, as happened with Argentina, or to accept a long-term loan for repayment, as they did with the Portuguese. Nor did the Indians have much leverage to get the British to release the blocked balances quickly, unlike the Egyptians, the other holders of a very large sterling balance, who could always threaten that they would demand payment for current British military expenditure in dollars. Concerned about cancellation, before and after independence Indian negotiators accepted a below market rate of interest on the remaining sterling balance and agreed the capitalization of government pensions and payment for the transfer of equipment on terms that were generous to Britain. 148

The British did not cancel the debt, but as Keynes, before his death, had anticipated, their control over the release of the balances meant that they could allow themselves substantial 'concealed cancellation'. High rates of inflation and low interest payments ate away rapidly at the value of the sterling balances in the years after the end of the war, even before the British devalued sterling in 1949. Altogether, and depending on the means of calculation, these wiped out between 30 and 60 per cent of what India's sterling balance had been worth in 1945. The value of Egypt's sterling balance was eroded in similar fashion, though less substantially because Cairo got more of the debt released for expenditure at an earlier date. Recognizing the risks, the Indians too spent as much as they could. This largely meant purchasing imports from the UK, which boosted

Britain's economic recovery. The remaining sterling balances would dog the UK's relationship with its colonies and former imperial possessions through the 1950s. Despite complaints about the accumulation of postwar liabilities, however, the cost of fighting an imperial war had been borne disproportionately by some of those who were least able to pay. The 'scuttle' from India ahead of the descent into inter-communal carnage was not the only way in which the rhetoric of shared wartime endeavour and lasting imperial responsibility rang hollow after 1945. 149

Nor were the horrors of Partition the only example of the violence with which the British Empire was now moving towards its end. In Rangoon on 19 July 1947, men dressed as Burmese soldiers and armed with Sten guns pushed their way into the room where the Executive Council was sitting. They killed five people, including Aung San. Suspicions of British involvement ran high. In fact, Dorman-Smith's old ally U Saw had planned the attack, probably with the assistance of corrupt British officers. Aung San's replacement as leader of the nationalists, the Buddhist socialist Thakin Nu, made the final agreements with the British ahead of Burmese independence on 4 January 1948. Over the year that followed, Burma descended into chaos, wracked by uprisings by Communists, Karens and other ethnic minorities, some of them inspired by the creation of an independent Pakistan. 150 In Malaya, where the British remained, an attempted Communist revolution resulted in an official state of emergency that lasted for the next fifteen years and became one of the bloodiest fronts in Britain's imperial cold war. 151

In Palestine, meanwhile, Britain continued to bear the cost and the casualties of trying to maintain law and order and restrict Jewish immigration while it waited for the United Nations to make a judgment about the mandate. At the end of July 1947, while a UN Special Committee considered its report, two British sergeants were taken hostage, then hanged and their bodies booby-trapped, in retaliation for the execution of Zionist terrorists. The wave of public anger this aroused in the UK shaped the discussion about what to do with a boatload of 4,493 Displaced Persons who were being shipped across illegally to Palestine. When the British refused them entry and returned them to their holding camp in Germany, there was an international outcry. With the expense of keeping garrison forces in Palestine still rising, on 20 September 1947 the Cabinet agreed to an announcement that Britain was going to surrender the mandate and withdraw its troops, regardless of whether a peaceful settlement could be achieved. The immediate context was an economic crisis that made it impossible to justify the expense of occupying Palestine, but underlying it was a loss of political will to keep fighting such a profitless war. Even so, it was May 1948 before British troops finally left. In the meantime, the UN General Assembly had decided for partition. Shortly after its creation, the new Jewish state would be attacked by its Arab neighbours.¹⁵²

'TODAY, WE ARE ENGAGED IN ANOTHER BATTLE OF BRITAIN'

As Britain's Asian empire disintegrated, the USA decided to address Europe's dollar shortage. During the first half of 1947, officials in Washington had become increasingly concerned about the condition of Europe. Gazing at the ruins of the Continent, they feared that it might never regain its role in the world economy, leaving European countries prey either to autarkic protectionism or Communist takeover. Policymakers, including the under-secretary of state, Dean Acheson, argued for a programme to match the Truman Doctrine that would support Europe's economic recovery, allow it to pursue multilateral free trade, and maintain a market for American manufacturers. The US would pump in dollars: the Europeans must increase production to help themselves close the dollar gap.

George Marshall spent five weeks in Moscow in March and April 1947 at another Council of Foreign Ministers meeting. As he and Bevin argued Molotov to a standstill over the future of Germany, Marshall had plenty of time to get to grips with what now looked like a lasting division between East and West. When the conference ended, negotiations had broken down completely. On 5 June 1947, in a well-publicized speech at Harvard University, Marshall proposed that European countries devise their own co-operative plan for recovery that the US could support, with the aim of closing their dollar deficit by 1951–2. This was the basis of what would become known as the Marshall Plan.

Bevin, hearing the BBC report of Marshall's speech on the radio in London, immediately grasped the potential of the programme. Together with the French foreign minister, Georges Bidault, he took the lead in organizing the European response to Marshall's venture. They met in Paris on 17–18 June, then issued a statement welcoming the initiative and inviting the Soviets to a conference on the 28th. Marshall had expressly not excluded the USSR and its satellites from American assistance, but

part of the cleverness of his strategy was that it placed the Soviets in a position where they could either accept capitalist interference in the economies of Eastern Europe or bear the responsibility for rejecting Marshall's proposals. Despite this obvious pitfall, the Soviets took the idea of rebuilding war-shattered economies seriously and they came to the Anglo-French conference ready to explore how they could take part. They baulked, however, first at the British and French insistence that all participants must agree a co-ordinated economic programme, then at the possible economic revival of Germany. These obstacles then influenced Soviet interpretations of the Marshall Plan, which they perceived as a plan to form a US-led Western bloc, including Western Germany, which would be directed against the Soviet Union. That encouraged the Soviet decision to abandon diplomacy over Germany and Eastern Europe. To this extent, the Marshall Plan was a highly divisive concept.

While these negotiations were going on, the crisis point of sterling convertibility approached rapidly. Dalton tried to put a bold face on things in public, insisting on 8 July 1947 that the financial markets had already priced in convertibility. Instead, the drain of dollars accelerated. Between 1 July and 23 August 1947, \$970 million of the American loan vanished. By 30 July, Dalton had to warn the Cabinet not only that the dollar loan would soon be exhausted, but that Britain's reserves of gold and dollars wouldn't last much longer after that. On 11 August, Attlee, Dalton and Bevin agreed to send a Treasury Mission to Washington to explain the need to put sterling back behind its currency controls. Over that week, \$183 million went out of the UK. Had convertibility not, after some frantic negotiations, been suspended, the dollar loan would have been used up entirely by the end of September 1947, with Britain's reserves – and with them its ability to operate the Sterling Area – lasting at most only about three months beyond that. 155

What had happened? The UK had failed to cut its overseas expenditure quickly enough to save its borrowed dollars (Dalton lamented their squandering on 'Strachey's food, Shinwell's fuel and Bevin's Huns'). ¹⁵⁶ For months, the chancellor had been telling colleagues that they needed to give up garrisoning the world and bring troops home, where they could help fill the manpower shortages. In practice, however, given the political and geo-strategic consequences of hastier departures, it is far from clear how this could have been done. Similarly, the idea that Dalton might, in the austere post-war context, voluntarily have limited the import of consumer 'luxuries' such as cigarettes or films, seems far-fetched. Combined with the global dollar shortage, however, all this expenditure

had made it plain to outside observers that convertibility would be a temporary measure – something the British government did not admit until it had to. Wanting scarce dollars, residents of Belgium and Sweden, members of the 'transferable account area' who could earn convertible sterling before 15 July 1947, started to transfer large capital sums before the deadline arrived. This accounted for the extraordinary and unanticipated speed with which Britain's position collapsed.¹⁵⁷

No minister exactly shone in the crisis, but a lot of the blame rightly fell to the chancellor. In early 1947, when there might still have been room for manoeuvre, Dalton had been too optimistic about how long the dollar loan would endure. Despite a growing dread as the deadline crept up, he didn't take evasive action. One reason for this was that he believed that any plea for help in advance of a crisis would either get short shrift in the United States or require the agreement of still more onerous conditions. Another was that he was so set on making sure that Labour continued with its reform programme that he wilfully ignored the warning signs that Britain's stash of borrowed dollars was rapidly disappearing. ¹⁵⁸

Opening a two-day debate on the national situation on 6 August 1947, Attlee tried once again to summon up a collective memory of the war:

I am appealing to all the people of this country to co-operate whole heartedly with the Government just as they did in the war. To win through we require the same qualities displayed during those long years . . . In 1940 we were delivered from mortal peril by the courage, skill and self-sacrifice of a few. Today, we are engaged in another battle of Britain. This battle cannot be won by the few. It demands a united effort by the whole nation. 159

Despite being delivered with Attlee's usual lack of charisma, such pleas did still seem to have an effect. Even so, Britain's failure to manage convertibility was humiliating, above all to the politicians who were left so helpless. It was the consequences, however, that struck most people hardest. Austerity tightened. Import restrictions meant a reduction in the meat ration and decreased availability of cigarettes and tobacco. Supplies to Germany were also reduced. The miners' five-day week was suspended to drive up production. The basic fuel ration was cut. The nationalization of the steel industry was delayed, much to the anger of Labour backbenchers. The programme of building new towns was set back, as was the construction of desperately needed houses.

Forewarned by Bevin, in September Attlee dealt with his customary despatch with an attempted putsch by Morrison, Dalton and Cripps – giving Cripps a new job as minister of economic affairs, with a big chunk of Morrison's powers, and giving the disappointed lord president the task

of leading the party in the Commons. When Dalton accidentally leaked details of the budget to a journalist that November, he had to resign. Cripps took over as chancellor of the Exchequer as well. He was to prove a brilliant appointment, an admired figure despite his embodiment of austerity, under whom physical control planning would increasingly give way to Keynesian demand management at the Treasury. There were further crises to come, but the second phase of Labour's rule would see continued economic recovery, driven by exports and supported by the funding provided under the Marshall Plan.

When it came to negotiating such aid, the Americans made it clear that they would treat the British like any other part of Europe. What they wanted the Europeans to produce was a plan of their own, directed towards much closer economic integration, and designed to include Western Germany. Such integration would include a customs union and the intraconvertibility of European currencies. Combined with a temporary injection of American cash, this would produce the lasting prosperity that would keep Western Europe out of the hands of Communism. This emphasis on European action would also help to convince a sceptical Republican Congress to support the Marshall Plan. 160

The British, highly sensitized to the global shortage of dollars after the experience of July-August 1947, had a different view of what was needed to stimulate lasting economic prosperity. They desperately wanted American aid, which would help them to escape the worst of the austerity that they were now enduring. They did not believe, however, that closer European integration would solve the short-term problem afflicting the whole world: a lack of scarce hard currency. They therefore kept insisting that the Americans would have to provide more dollars. Again because of their recent experience, the British did not want to be involved in any system of European free currency exchange. London had to maintain substantial dollar reserves to allow the dollar pooling mechanisms of the Sterling Area, now restored to its role as a discriminatory economic bloc, to work. It could not afford to let Belgium draw off those dollars as it wished. The British delegation to the committee drafting the European plan for Marshall aid, led by the former academic philosopher turned wartime head of the Ministry of Supply, Sir Oliver Franks, kept pushing a version of the future that would have been very familiar to Keynes. If America wanted to benefit from global prosperity after the war, it would have to stump up even more cash for reconstruction. 161

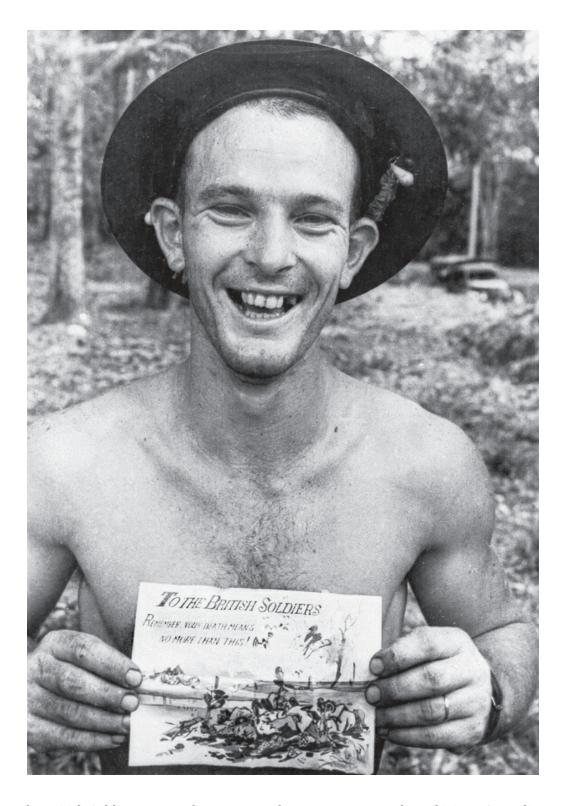
The Americans would not do this, not least because of the impossibility of getting an even more generous plan through Congress.

That meant that huge though it was, Marshall aid wouldn't, when it was approved in 1948, wholly rebalance the Western economy. Marshall became irritated at 'Brit wish to benefit fully from a European program . . . while at the same time maintaining the position of not being wholly a European country'. Much though they welcomed and depended on support and enthusiastically American financial supported reconstruction of Western Europe as a counter to Soviet expansionism, in the late 1940s the British were wary of the risks, both to their role as banker of the Sterling Area, if they accepted the integrationist impulse, and of being locked out of a European trading bloc if they did not. They therefore sought to promote a more limited form of European political association that would allow the UK to reconcile its global and its regional objectives. 162

In a celebrated speech to the Commons on 22 January 1948, Bevin announced that 'the free nations of Western Europe must now draw more closely together'. Western Europe, he emphasized, was not just a geographic entity but a global presence, its empires, stretching across the Middle East and Southeast Asia, now bound together by the same desire for planning and development. Bevin celebrated 'Our common sacrifices during the war, our hatred of injustice and oppression, our Parliamentary democracy, our striving for economic rights and our conception and love of liberty are common among us all', and declared that:

If we are to preserve peace and our own safety at the same time we can only do so by the mobilisation of such a moral and material force as will create confidence and energy in the West and inspire respect elsewhere, and this means that Britain cannot stand outside Europe and regard her problems as quite separate from those of her European neighbours. 163

Behind this bold rhetoric, however, was a more cautious approach that sought to avoid the costs of choosing between Europe and the Commonwealth and Empire. Britain, as part of its developing Cold War alliance with the USA, would lead on European security co-operation, but not on the integration of the European economy. For good or ill, its entry into the new world created by the Second World War would be defined by the legacies of the past.¹⁶⁴



1. 'To the British Soldiers: Remember Your Death Means No More Than This': an Australian soldier holds up a Japanese propaganda leaflet in Malaya, January 1942.



2. Aboard one of the last troop convoys to reach the 'fortress'. Indian troops on their way from Bombay to Singapore, February 1942.



3. With Brooke (*right*) and Tedder (*left*) behind them, Churchill and Smuts contemplate the fate of the Middle East, British Embassy in Cairo, 5 August 1942.



4. Herbert Morrison tells Clement Attlee that what the Labour Party needs is a really strong leader, early 1945.



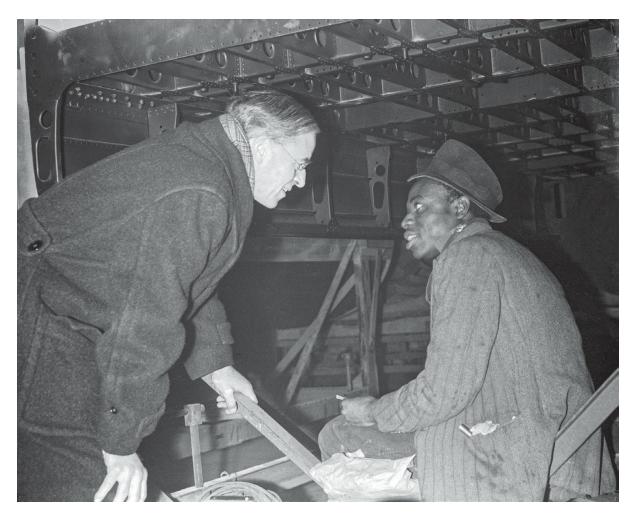
5. In typically positive mood, John Maynard Keynes looks at his library of rare books, 1940.



6. General Marshall and Harry Hopkins outside No. 10 Downing Street, during the first period of Anglo-American strategic wrangling over a 'Second Front', 10 April 1942.



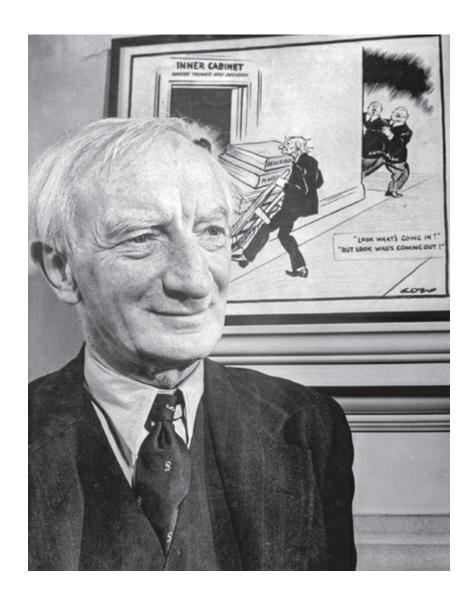
7. Lord Louis Mountbatten enjoys inspecting Indian sailors on the troopship *Empire Pride*, off Greenock in Scotland, 14 June 1943.



8. 'Good morning, comrade': Sir Stafford Cripps speaks to an aircraft-factory worker during his time as Minister of Aircraft Production. This man may have been one of the approximately 1,000 engineers from the West Indies who came to work in British factories during the war.



9. 'A triton among minnows': William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury, prepares to speak to a congregation of clergy and city workers on a London bombsite, September 1944.



10. Sir William Beveridge enjoys his reputation for having delivered a turning point in the war. Behind him is a framed David Low cartoon depicting the arrival of his report and the departure of Sir Stafford Cripps from the War Cabinet.



11. Atlantic air power: a US-built Kittyhawk, flown by a Canadian, in an RAF squadron, taxis at the airfield at Gambut. Armed with a 250lb bomb for a ground attack mission, this aircraft failed to return during the Battle of Gazala, 4 June 1942. Its pilot, Pilot Officer E. Atkinson, was killed.



12. 'OUR AIM TUNIS': soldiers from British 6th Armoured Division during the final advance on Tunis, 6 May 1943.



13. Stoker J. Browlie from Coatbridge, Glasgow, holds a model of a submarine made from the wreckage of a U-boat destroyed by a depth charge. One of a series of photos taken to celebrate the return home of Escort Group B7 after sinking two U-boats in the North Atlantic, Londonderry, 7 November 1943.



14. Montgomery tells an audience of Canadian troops that everything is going according to plan, Sicily, 11 July 1943.



15. Two ATS telephone operators at a mixed anti-aircraft battery site in 1942. This photograph, taken to document what women were doing in AA command, shows the exhausting mental as well as physical work required to serve the guns.



16. Keeping a close eye on what might be available, women queue for potatoes at a greengrocer's shop in London, 1945. Though average household incomes went up, keeping the domestic economy going got more burdensome as a result of the war.



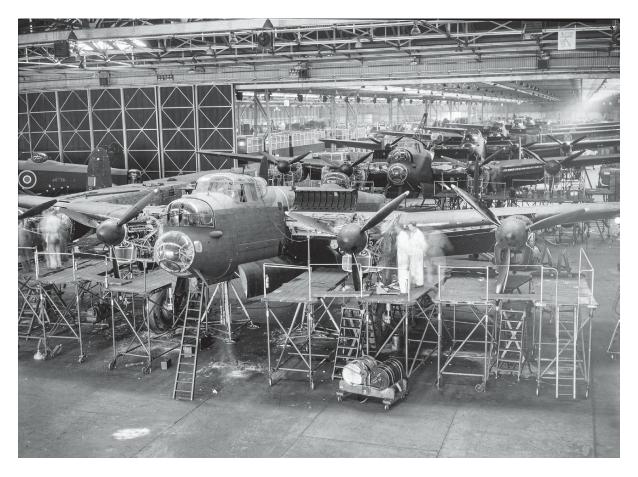
17. In this official photograph, a woman worker salvages a typewriter from the rubble of a bombed out factory, 'somewhere in England' in the second half of the war.



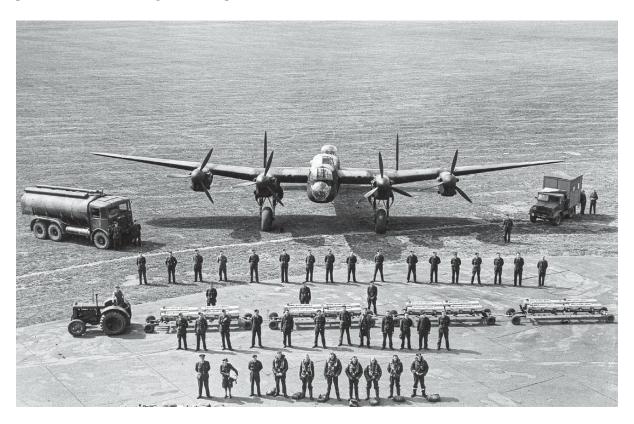
18. Around USAAF airbases in the east of England, the exciting presence of the Americans became a fact of life. Three girls from the nearby village of Hockering (*left to right* Janet Townsend, Tessa Grant and Gloria Grant) help the 466th Bomb Group celebrate its one hundredth mission, Attlebridge, 18 August 1944.



19. Two black GIs engaged in railway construction work in Britain, 7 October 1943. The presence of black GIs in the UK resulted in anger at violent American racism but also encouraged the expression of British racist prejudices.



20. Engineers in white overalls inspect a Lancaster bomber approaching the end of the assembly line at A. V. Roe's factory at Woodford in Cheshire, 1943. The photograph gives a sense of the precision manufacturing and mass production that built Britain's bomber force.



21. In a graphic depiction of the human effort involved in the strategic bombing offensive, this photo shows the 7 aircrew and 38 groundcrew required to send one Lancaster on a sortie. RAF Scampton, Lincolnshire, 11 June 1942. The parachute packer and tractor driver are WAAFs.



22. This oblique aerial photograph shows the early stages of the British landing on 'Gold' Beach on D-Day, 6 June 1944. Above the smoke from burning buildings, tanks can clearly be seen on the beach.



23. Amphibious DUKWs carry supplies ashore and up a newly made road, as the British 'Mulberry' harbour comes into operation off Arromanches, 12-15 June 1944. The photograph gives a good sense of the speed and volume at which supplies were brought into the Normandy beachhead.



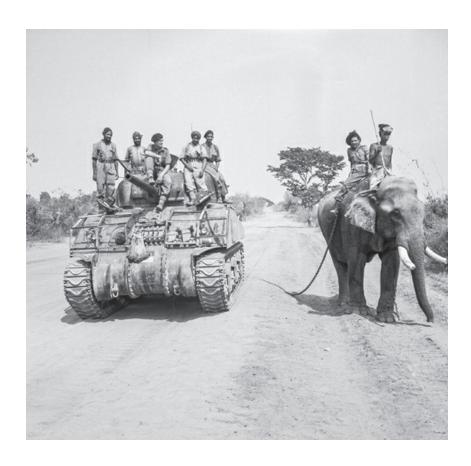
24. A paratrooper from 5th (Scots) Parachute Battalion observes an Athens street during fighting against ELAS, 18 December 1944. The British intervention in Greece was highly controversial.



25. Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin prepare to be formally photographed in the grounds of the Livadia Palace during the Yalta Conference, 8 February 1945. The British participants at Yalta all remarked on Roosevelt's physical deterioration. As Anthony Eden pointed out, it didn't affect the president's grip on the conference.



26. A still from the film *The True Glory*, an Anglo-American co-production about the victory campaign in Europe, catches official cameraman Sergeant Mike Lewis as he films the burial of the dead at Bergen-Belsen. Contemporary witnesses were determined to record what they saw in the liberated camp.



27. A tank from 9th Royal Deccan Horse, with a British commander and an Indian crew, examine a newly liberated elephant on the road to Meiktila, Burma, 29 March 1945. The final campaign in Burma was won by a highly effective, well-commanded, predominantly Indian army very different from the forces defeated in 1942.



28. Fighters from HMS *Implacable* fly over Chiba Prefecture, Japan, 17 July 1945. These aircraft were part of the British Pacific Fleet, which represented the British Commonwealth during the US Navy's final campaign against the home islands of Japan.

Acknowledgements

Writing a book such as this requires a lot of help. I am very thankful to the librarians and archivists who helped me locate or access material in the course of my research. I am also grateful to the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum, for permission to publish material in their Sound Archive and Documents collection; to the Syndics of Cambridge University Library, for permission to publish material from the Templewood Archive; to the Masters and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge, for permission to publish material from the papers of Rab Butler; to Hull University Archives (now at the Hull History Centre) for permission to publish material from the Forbes-Adams Papers; and to the BBC for permission to publish material from its Written Archives Centre. I am particularly grateful to Brian Williams, son of Louie Williams, for permission to publish material from the diary kept by his mother, and to the family of Len Waller, for permission to publish material from his memoirs, both of which are now held by the IWM. Sources from Mass-Observation are used with permission of the Curtis Brown Group Ltd, London, on behalf of the Trustees of the Mass-Observation Archive and are copyright ©The Trustees of the Mass-Observation Archive.

A new history of Britain's Second World War would not have happened without the extraordinary vision of Simon Winder, who not only commissioned and oversaw the project but maintained throughout the fascination of a true historian in unpicking and understanding the past. At OUP, Tim Bent, too, appreciated the power and potential of what I was trying to do. With this volume, as with its predecessor, the move from manuscript through to production depended on Richard Duguid's calm professionalism and skill. My copyeditor, Charlotte Ridings, grappled with the mammoth text, spotted errors I had missed and pushed me to be a more dynamic writer. Annabel Huxley has done a wonderful job of introducing both volumes to the world. None of this would have happened without the belief, support and guidance of my agent, Natasha Fair-weather, and the help of her assistants, particularly Max Edwards and Matthew Marland. I will always be grateful to Natasha, not only for launching me on this path

but also for appreciating what was best for me – and for these books – from the beginning and throughout.

While writing both volumes I was also serving on the academic advisory boards for the Imperial War Museum's redesign of its First and Second World War galleries. It was a privilege and an education to hear other historians crystallize their understanding of these total wars. Watching museum colleagues grapple with the problems of conveying complex stories through physical artefacts taught me a lot about how history can be told. I am grateful to Nigel Steel, James Taylor, the late Terry Charman, Vikki Hawkins, Bryn Hammond, Kate Clements, Paul Cornish, Lucy Noakes, David Reynolds, Yasmin Khan, Richard Overy, Deborah Thom, David Olosuga and Hew Strachan for letting me share their deliberations, and particularly to David Stevenson, whose insistence on the importance of understanding when, why and how the first great war ended has influenced a lot of my thinking about the second.

I am also fortunate to be part of a wider historical support network that has helped to shape my ideas, given me a chance to blow off steam and been patient with me when the Second World War got in the way of other things. Jonathan Boff, Tim Cook, David Edgerton, Marcus Faulkner, Jenny Macleod, Jessica Meyer, Marc Milner, Catriona Pennell, Pierre Purseigle and Gary Sheffield will all recognize things that we have talked about in this book, and I am grateful to them. As fellow grizzled veterans of big Second World War books, Alan Allport and Jonathan Fennell knew what I was talking about in terms of both historical themes and personal endurance and said the right things at key moments. I regret that I did not talk enough about this project to Alex Danchev while there was still time; he showed me a lot about the appropriate mindset with which to approach the writing of history, and I hope he would have found the ideas in this book interesting.

The School of History at Queen Mary University of London has been a good academic home to me for nearly two decades now. Several cohorts of undergraduate and postgraduate students have passed through while I was writing *Britain's War*. Their excitement and dedication to their own research inspired me throughout and it has been an enormous privilege to work with them. I have also been blessed with the support of a succession of enlightened Heads of School: Virginia Davis, Miri Rubin, Colin Jones and Julian Jackson. Only now that I am trying to live up to their example do I realize what a hard job they had. Without the tireless efforts of Emma Yates and her team in the History Office to make the School run smoothly, research, writing and editing would have been impossible. Colleagues who

kept me going on the journey and provided sage advice at different stages included Helen McCarthy, Catherine Merridale, Chris Sparks, Kim Wagner and Amanda Vickery, who also provided useful feedback on the chapters on men and women at war. James Ellison and Patrick Higgins read the whole manuscript, corrected lots of errors and pointed me in new directions. This wouldn't be the book it is without them, and the mistakes that remain are all my own.

In the introduction to the first volume of *Britain's War*, I wrote about the stories my grandparents told and didn't tell about the war. Reflecting at its end, I look back to the things they passed on while I knew them. Fred's determination, Toddy's good humour and Dorothy's enthusiasm for learning are all part of my story. I was lucky to have them as grandparents, more fortunate still in my parents, whose love and support have been with me throughout this project, but I've been blessed above all by the new family that built itself while the books were being written. Alex, my wife, and I have walked the road to 1947 together, and our love, her understanding and the insight she has taught me have all been crucial to us reaching this goal. I am so glad that our children, Agatha and Harriet, have joined us on that journey. They have filled me not only with a boundless love but also with a sense of wonder at the range and possibility within each human being. I will be happy, however, if they never read these books. They should be protected for as long as possible from thinking about the awfulness of war, and the past holds no lessons they will not figure out for themselves: life is complicated, things seldom work out as planned, but there is power in thinking about the future nonetheless.

Essex, 2019

Notes

ABBREVIATIONS

AWM Australian War Memorial ANZ Archives New Zealand

BIPO UK Data Service, 'British Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup) Polls, 1938–

1946, http://discover.ukdataservice.ac.uk/catalogue?sn=3331

BUFVC British Universities Film and Video Council, London, News on Screen

Archive, http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/about

CSO Central Statistical Office
CUL Cambridge University Library

HC Deb Hansard, House of Commons Debates: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/

HIWR Home Intelligence Weekly Reports

HL Deb Hansard, House of Lords Debates: http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/

HUA Hull University Archives, Hull History Centre

IWM Imperial War Museum, London

IWMSA Imperial War Museum Sound Archive

LHCMA Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, London

MOA Mass-Observation Archive, Brighton, University of Sussex

MOA, FR Mass-Observation Archive, File Reports

ODNB Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford, 2004)

TCC Trinity College, Cambridge

TNA The National Archives, Kew, London

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20. 'BEING PAID A MILLION A DAY . . . '

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23. 'OCTAGON'

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