

SPEED—THE NEW FACTOR (Continued)

mand under the operational control of the Admiralty for work in that theatre of war. For, apart from the fighting in Africa, the other great fight against the United Kingdom lines of sea communication is continuous by submarine, aircraft and surface mine-layer. Moreover, there is a tremendous length of coastline to be covered on the Continent from the North Cape (now shrouded in perpetual night) to the basin of St. Jean de Luz.

But the outcome of this war will *not* be decided by the Battle of North Africa, nor will it be decided solely by the German blockade of the United Kingdom. The outcome of this war will be decided by the British Air Arm more than by any other factor, and the size of the Royal Air Force must be commensurate with our needs when the time comes for its concentration against Germany and everything German. Without that concentration of air power all other forms of power will fail. Until the wings of the Royal Air Force far outshadow those of the *Luftwaffe* we shall not be within measurable distance of defeating Germany.

Eliminating Italy

We have chased the Italians out of Western Egypt, and have entered the equally barren desert of Eastern Libya. This notable military victory will help to redress the British disproportion in armaments and men *vis-à-vis* the Axis Powers by the ratio of Italy's greater loss through defeat than our loss through the price of victory. But there are no tangible assets, like those acquired by Germany through the defeat of the European nations whose territory the Nazis now control.

Britain must still rely upon her own pre-war resources and those she can muster in America and the rest of the world which is still free from the Nazi-Japanese yoke. The full value of Italy's reverse can be obtained only by knocking Italy right out of the war. To do so quickly must be the British aim. To achieve that aim we must make the Italian peninsula feel the war.

The Coastal Command of the Royal Air Force is one of the branches of the British Air Arm, part of which could be employed to place a strain upon the Italian peninsula without detracting from the air action which must be maintained against Germany without cessation. But there are many other calls upon the resources of the Coastal Command—calls which cannot be ignored. To take but one example, the Admiralty is bound to request that aircraft of the Coastal Command be used for purposes of naval war, the convoy escort, the anti-submarine patrol, the anti-submarine depot raid, reconnaissance of enemy coasts and ports, attacks against enemy shipping and the thousand and one routine duties which always afflict the Navy when we are at war. When the devil drives there is at times no option but to travel along the only avenue that appears to offer a means of escape.

And since the fall of Norway and France the toll taken by the submarine has risen. After the transfer of the fifty American destroyers, the only remedy next to hand which offered immediate amelioration of the situation was the Coastal Command of the Royal Air Force. It will be interesting to see whether naval control of this miniature air force—for it is nothing less than that—will bring about a reduction in the losses of our Merchant Navy.

IN this article Captain Macmillan voices his fears that the demands of the Army and the Navy may weaken the effectiveness of the Bomber Command in action against Germany. His plea for more independent action by the R.A.F. is understandable, but unfortunately our supplies of aircraft are not unlimited, and we must trust the Prime Minister to see that they are applied where most needed.



Already, since control was taken over by the Admiralty, something has happened. Flying boats no longer pass the same spots as they did before. That is to be expected. The Admiralty method of working patrols will necessarily involve changes of this kind. But how great these changes are cannot be known until the war is over.

Meantime, the Royal Air Force Bomber Command has lost a valuable ally. For there have been times in the past when Coastal Command aircraft have raided targets which now will have to be raided by the Bomber Command or not be raided at all unless the Admiralty gives its consent. The latter method is almost certain to be too slow for the swift needs of air war, when perhaps seconds count.

Since this loss must be borne by the Royal Air Force, does the converse also hold good? There have been times in the past when purely naval targets, such as enemy ships, have been attacked by the Bomber Command. Think of the raids on Kiel, Wilhelmshaven, the Channel Ports, Brest, Lorient and other places (as well as ships), all of which are primarily of naval interest. Is raiding of this kind now to be carried out by the Coastal Command under the direct Operational Orders of the Admiralty? Or is the Bomber Command still to work for the Navy as it has done in the past?

Weakening the R.A.F.

How much are the demands of the two older Services upon sections of the still-independent Royal Air Force causing a diminution of the air blockade of Germany? To what degree will they diminish the striking power of the Royal Air Force in the future? Would the Air Staff have furnished the Coastal Command with all the types of aircraft it now possesses if it had thought that it would lose operational control over this section of its force?

Important questions these, which will affect the welfare of every citizen of the country, perhaps of the Empire. But, in wartime, there is no answer. Parliament is told to ask no searching questions, to probe not into Service secrets. Well, all past wars have had their skeletons hidden in the Service cupboards. Some are still embedded in the grim walls of Whitehall. Some have stalked forth like ghosts, clanking their chains. Some have been unpleasant spectras. Let us hope that this one, which has been murally interred, will come forth in due course a happy wraith.

Let us hope that the aim of the Cabinet will be now to expand the independent Royal Air Force so that, freed from the routine demands of Navy and Army, those responsible for the strategy of air war can concentrate on the vast chequer-board of targets on the Continent a far more formidable array of bombers than it was in Britain's power to employ in 1940.

This would enable our bombers to be concentrating on the Northern area of Italy, to destroy its industrial importance altogether before the Nazis decide to occupy