

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL



THE  
SECOND WORLD WAR

VOLUME V

CLOSING THE RING



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## CHAPTER XVIII

### CAIRO

*Voyage in the "Renown" - A Stay at Malta - Khartoum an Impossible Meeting-place - We All Gather Round the Pyramids - The President Arrives - I Meet Chiang Kai-shek and His Wife - My Indictment of Our Mismanagement of Military Operations Since Salerno - Unreal Division of Forces and Responsibilities in the Mediterranean - German Mastery of the Eastern Ægean - The Shadow of "Overlord" - The First Plenary Meeting of the Cairo Conference, November 23 - Chiang Kai-shek's Request for British Naval Support - Our Second Meeting, November 24 - Mr. Eden Joins Us after Conference with the Turks - The Question of the High Command - United States Proposal for One Supreme Commander Against Germany - Adverse Memorandum by the British Chiefs of Staff - I Support Them - Our Allies Remain Silent - A Family Party on Thanksgiving Day, November 25 - Off for Teheran, November 27.*

ON the afternoon of November 12 I sailed in the *Renown* from Plymouth with my personal staff on a journey which was to keep me from England for more than two months. With me came Mr. Winant, the American Ambassador, Admiral Cunningham, First Sea Lord, and General Ismay and other members of the Defence Office. I was feeling far from well, as a heavy cold and sore throat were reinforced by the consequences of inoculations against typhoid and cholera. I stayed in bed for several days. My Cabinet colleagues had expressed the kindly wish that my daughter Sarah should come with me, and it gave me pleasure to defer to their request. She was serving in the Air Force, and became my aide-de-camp. We had an uneventful voyage across the Bay, and I was able to go on deck as we passed the Straits of Gibraltar. While we stopped for a few

hours at Algiers on the 16th I had a long talk with General Georges about the French situation in Africa. As darkness fell we resumed our course for Malta, which we reached on the 17th.

Here I found Generals Eisenhower and Alexander, and other important personages. After the conclusion of the Tunisian campaign I had suggested to the King that General Alexander should receive the distinction of the North Africa ribbon with the numerals 1 and 8 upon it, representing the two victorious British armies of the campaign. I felt that as Eisenhower had been the Supreme Commander this was also his by right, and I sought and obtained the King's approval. I had the honour of investing these two Commanders with this unique decoration. They were both taken by surprise, and seemed highly gratified when I pinned the ribbons on their coats. I arrived in Malta quite ill with a new cold and temperature, but I had sufficient strength to attend the dinner at the Governor's war-time palace, the real one being uninhabitable from bombardment.

Although I continued to conduct business without cessation I had to remain in bed all the time I was in Malta, except for a Staff conference and a final tour of the frightfully battered dock-yard, where the whole of the people and workmen gathered with great enthusiasm. At midnight on November 19 we sailed again on our voyage to Alexandria.

A telegram had reached me from the President saying that his security advisers thought that Cairo was too dangerous for the Conference. They feared a German air attack from Greece or Rhodes, and suggested Khartoum instead. Roosevelt of course had nothing to do with this himself, as he was entirely indifferent to his personal safety. Khartoum would have been quite unequal to handling the great staffs we were bringing, amounting altogether to nearly five hundred. I therefore asked Ismay to examine the resources of Malta. He reported that owing to air damage the accommodation was not only inadequate for our considerable gathering, but also extremely primitive. I therefore decided that we had better stick to Cairo, where all arrangements had been perfected. The eight squadrons of British aircraft based on Alexandria would certainly intercept and destroy any German attack. The enclave near the Pyramids which we were to occupy was to be guarded by more than a brigade of infantry, and there were upwards of five hundred anti-aircraft guns hard

by. Accordingly I wirelessly the *Iowa*, which was bringing the President across the ocean:

*Prime Minister to President*

21 Nov 43

See St. John, chapter xiv, verses 1 to 4.

On reading this through more carefully after it had gone I was a little concerned lest, apart from a shadow of unintended profanity, it should be thought I was taking too much upon myself and thus giving offence. However, the President brushed all objections aside and our plans continued unchanged. In the event no German aeroplanes ever came within several hundred miles of the Pyramids.

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The *Renown* reached Alexandria on the morning of November 21, and I flew at once to the desert landing-ground near the Pyramids. Here Mr. Casey had placed at my disposal the agreeable villa he was using. We lay in a broad expanse of Kasserine woods, thickly dotted with the luxurious abodes and gardens of the cosmopolitan Cairo magnates. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and Madame had already been ensconced half a mile away. The President was to occupy the spacious villa of the American Ambassador Kirk, about three miles down the road to Cairo. I went to the desert airfield to welcome him when he arrived in the "Sacred Cow" from Oran the next morning, and we drove to his villa together.

The Staffs congregated rapidly. The headquarters of the Conference and the venue of all the British and American Chiefs of Staff was at the Mena House Hotel, opposite the Pyramids, and I was but half a mile away. The whole place bristled with troops and anti-aircraft guns, and the strictest cordons guarded all approaches. Everyone set to work at once at their various levels upon the immense mass of business which had to be decided or adjusted.

What we had apprehended from Chiang Kai-shek's presence now in fact occurred. The talks of the British and American Staffs were sadly distracted by the Chinese story, which was lengthy, complicated, and minor. Moreover, as will be seen, the President, who took an exaggerated view of the Indian-Chinese sphere, was soon closeted in long conferences with the Generalissimo. All hope of persuading Chiang and his wife to go and see

the Pyramids and enjoy themselves till we returned from Teheran fell to the ground, with the result that Chinese business occupied first instead of last place at Cairo. The President, in spite of my arguments, gave the Chinese the promise of a considerable amphibious operation across the Bay of Bengal within the next few months. This would have cramped "Overlord" for landing- and tank-landing craft, which had now become the bottle-neck, far more than any of my Turkey and Aegean projects. It would also have hampered grievously the immense operations we were carrying out in Italy. On November 29 I wrote to the Chiefs of Staff: "The Prime Minister wishes to put on record the fact that he specifically refused the Generalissimo's request that we should undertake an amphibious operation simultaneously with the land operations in Burma." It was not until we returned from Teheran to Cairo that I at length prevailed upon the President to retract his promise. Even so, many complications arose. Of this more anon.

I of course took occasion to visit the Generalissimo at his villa, where he and his wife were suitably installed. This was the first time I had met Chiang Kai-shek. I was impressed by his calm, reserved, and efficient personality. At this moment he stood at the height of his power and fame. To American eyes he was one of the dominant forces in the world. He was the champion of "the New Asia". He was certainly a steadfast defender of China against Japanese invasion. He was a strong anti-Communist. The accepted belief in American circles was that he would be the head of the great Fourth Power in the world after the victory had been won. All these views and values have since been cast aside by many of those who held them. I, who did not in those days share the excessive estimates of Chiang Kai-shek's power or of the future helpfulness of China, may record the fact that the Generalissimo is still serving the same causes which at this time had gained him such wide renown. He has however since been beaten by the Communists in his own country, which is a very bad thing to be.

I had a very pleasant conversation with Madame Chiang Kai-shek, and found her a most remarkable and charming personality. I told her how much I had regretted that we could not find an occasion for a meeting at the time when we had both been in America together, and we agreed that no undue formalities

should stand in the way of our talks in the future. The President had us all photographed together at one of our meetings at his villa, and although both the Generalissimo and his wife are now regarded as wicked and corrupt reactionaries by many of their former admirers I am glad to keep this as a souvenir.

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During the outward voyage I had prepared what was in effect an indictment of our mismanagement of operations in the Mediterranean during the two months which had passed since our victory at Salerno. I gave this to the Chiefs of Staff, and they, while agreeing in principle, made a number of comments in detail upon it. The final version read as follows:

For a year from Alamein and the landings in North-West Africa the British and Americans have had virtually unbroken success in every theatre, and there is no doubt that our methods of war direction, through the Combined Chiefs of Staff, working under the heads of the two Governments, have enabled our commanders in the field to gain resounding victories and achieve solid results. In all the history of alliances there never has been such harmony and mutual comprehension not only in the high direction of the war but among the commanders and troops in the field. Our combined operations from the beginning of the Battle of Alamein to the end of the Battle of Naples and the deployment of the Army in Italy may well be regarded as an extremely well-managed and prosperous affair.

2. However, since then there has been a change. We have been overtaken and in a sense outrun by our own successes. Certain divergences of view, of emphasis rather than principle, have opened between the British and American Staffs. We must not allow ourselves to be prevented by victories already gained from subjecting ourselves severally and jointly to searching self-examination with a view to improving our methods and giving an increasingly high standard of service.

3. Since the successful landing and deployment of the Army in Italy in September the war in the Mediterranean has taken an unsatisfactory course. Both the build-up and advance of the Army in Italy, making allowance for bad weather, must be considered extremely slow. There is not a sufficient preponderance over the enemy in the front line. Many of the divisions have been continuously in action since the landing without any spell of relief. At the same time, two of the best British divisions, the 50th and 51st, which stood in Sicily close to the battlefield, were first stripped of their equipment and have since been



withdrawn to the United Kingdom. It has not been found possible to assist the forward movement of the Army to the extent that might have been hoped by making amphibious scoops along either coast. Some of the vitally needed landing-craft have been sent home, losing heavily from the weather on the way. A large number of others have been withdrawn and assembled in preparation for their homeward journey. These orders have now been arrested till December 15, but this is a useless date for Mediterranean purposes. The landing-craft have done nothing in October and November except assist in bringing vehicles ashore. At the same time the build-up of the Strategic Air Force in Italy has hampered the reinforcement of the fighting front. Thus the whole campaign on land has flagged. There is no prospect of Rome being taken in 1943. . . .

5. Side by side with this we have failed to give any real measure of support to the Partisans and Patriots in Yugoslavia and Albania. These guerrilla forces are containing as many [German] divisions as are the British and American Armies put together. Hitherto they have been nourished only by supplies dropped from the air. It is now more than two months since we have had air and naval superiority in the mouth of the Adriatic, yet no ships with supplies have entered the ports taken by the Partisans. On the contrary, the Germans are systematically driving them from these ports and acquiring mastery of the whole Dalmatian coast. It was not possible to prevent the Germans obtaining Corfu and Argostoli, and they actually hold these islands at the moment. Thus the Germans have weathered the difficulties caused by the Italian collapse and desertion, and with great severity are mopping up many of the Patriot forces and cutting them off from the sea.

6. How has it happened? An imaginary line has been drawn down the Mediterranean which relieves General Eisenhower's armies of all responsibility for the Dalmatian coast and the Balkans. These are assigned to General Wilson, of the Middle East Command, but he does not possess the necessary forces. One command has the forces but not the responsibilities, the other the responsibilities but not the forces. This can hardly be considered an ideal arrangement.

7. Most unfortunate of all has been the Dodecanese and the Ægean. Immediately after the fall of Italy a number of islands held by the Italians were occupied by us with Italian consent. Of these the two most important were Cos and Leros. We did not succeed in getting Rhodes, which is of course the master key to the Ægean. Hitler was not slow to recognise the naval and political importance of the fortress of Leros, which had fallen so cheaply into our hands, and with great stubbornness and tenacity he personally set himself to restore the situation in the Ægean. A very large proportion of the German air forces

which would have been available to fight in Italy was moved into the Ægean theatre, and sea transport was improvised.\* It was evident early in October that attacks on Leros and Cos were imminent, and on October 4 Cos, where we had only one battalion, was retaken by the Germans. In spite of unexpectedly prolonged defence Leros fell on November 16, the British losses in the whole business being about 5,000 and the enemy scoring his first success since Alamein. All this of course is outside the parish of the High North African Command. . . .

9. The Germans are now complete masters of the Eastern Ægean. Although already outmatched in the air in Italy, they have not hesitated to reduce their air-power there, and have transferred to the Ægean forces sufficient to dominate this theatre. Although the United States and British air forces in the Mediterranean have a first-line strength of over 4,000—i.e., practically equal to the whole of the German Air Force—the Germans have been able to reproduce in the Ægean theatre all the old technique of the days of our air nakedness, and with their Stuka dive-bombers have broken down the resistance of our best troops and sunk or damaged our ships. . . .

11. There are two causes for these misfortunes. The first has been mentioned—the artificial line of division between East and West in the Mediterranean, absolving the Western commanders, who have the forces, of all responsibility for the vital interests at stake in the East. The second cause of course is the shadow of "Overlord". The decisions at Quebec were taken before the consequences of the collapse of Italy were apparent and before the surrender of the Italian Fleet and the successful invasion of the mainland of Europe. Nevertheless they have been maintained until a fortnight ago with inflexible rigidity. It has not been found possible to meet together earlier. We are now faced with the prospect that a fixed target date for "Overlord" will continue to hamper and enfeeble the Mediterranean campaign, that our affairs will deteriorate in the Balkans, and that the Ægean will remain firmly in German hands. All this is to be accepted for the sake of an operation fixed for May upon hypotheses that in all probability will not be realised at that date, and certainly not if the Mediterranean pressure is relaxed.

12. Nor must we overlook the discouraging and enfeebling effect upon the whole of the operations in the Mediterranean of the fact that it is now common knowledge in the Armies that the theatre is to be bled as much as necessary for the sake of an operation elsewhere in the spring. The fact of troops and landing-craft being withdrawn from the very battlefield and of units being put under orders for home is in itself injurious. The intense desire to concentrate upon the enemy

\* German records show that during this period their Ægean air forces were increased by nearly three hundred aircraft, while those in Italy were reduced by about two hundred.



which carried us from Alamein and sustained us in Tunisia has been impaired. Yet in the Mediterranean alone are we in contact with the enemy and able to bring superior numbers to bear upon him now. It is certainly an odd way of helping the Russians, to slow down the fight in the only theatre where anything can be done for some months.

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The first plenary meeting of the Cairo Conference (which was given the code-name "Sextant") was held at the President's villa on Tuesday, November 23. Its purpose was to outline formally to Chiang Kai-shek and the Chinese delegation the proposed operations in South-East Asia, as drawn up by the Combined Chiefs of Staff at Quebec. Admiral Mountbatten, with his officers, had flown from India, and he first gave a description of the military plans he had been given and was executing for 1944 in that theatre. To this I added the general naval picture. Owing to the surrender of the Italian Fleet and other naval events of a favourable character a British fleet would be established soon in the Indian Ocean. There would be ultimately no fewer than five modernised capital ships, four heavy armoured cruisers, and up to twelve auxiliary carriers. Chiang Kai-shek intervened to say that he thought that the success of operations in Burma depended not only on the strength of our naval forces in the Indian Ocean, but on the simultaneous co-ordination of naval action with land operations. I pointed out that there was no necessary connection between the land campaign and fleet action in the Bay of Bengal. Our main fleet base would be able to exercise its influence in sea-power from areas 2,000 to 3,000 miles away from the scene where the armies were operating. There was therefore no comparison between these operations and those carried out in Sicily, where the Fleet had been able to work in close support of the Army.

This meeting was brief, and it was agreed that Chiang Kai-shek should discuss further details with the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

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On the following day a second meeting of our Combined Chiefs of Staff was held by the President, without the presence of the Chinese delegation, to discuss operations in Europe and the Mediterranean. We sought to survey the relations of the two theatres and to exchange our views before going on to Teheran. The President opened upon the effect on "Overlord" of any

possible action we could take in the meantime in the Mediterranean, including the problem of Turkey's entry into the war.

When I spoke I said "Overlord" remained top of the bill, but this operation should not be such a tyrant as to rule out every other activity in the Mediterranean; for example, a little flexibility in the employment of landing-craft ought to be conceded. General Alexander had asked that the date of their leaving for "Overlord" should be deferred from mid-December to mid-January. Eighty additional L.S.T.s had been ordered to be built in Britain and Canada. We should try to do even better than this. The points which were at issue between the American and British Staffs would probably be found to affect no more than a tenth of our common resources, apart from the Pacific. Surely some degree of elasticity could be arranged. Nevertheless I wished to remove any idea that we had weakened, cooled, or were trying to get out of "Overlord". We were in it up to the hilt. To sum up, I said that the programme I advocated was to try to take Rome in January and Rhodes in February; to renew supplies to the Yugoslavs, settle the Command arrangements, and to open the Ægean, subject to the outcome of an approach to Turkey; all preparations for "Overlord" to go ahead full steam within the framework of the foregoing policy for the Mediterranean.

This is a faithful record of my position on the eve of Teheran.

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Mr. Eden had now joined us from England, whither he had flown after his discussions in Moscow. His arrival was a great help to me. On the way back from the Moscow Conference he and General Ismay had met the Turkish Foreign Minister and other Turks at Cairo. At these talks Mr. Eden pointed out that we had urgent need of air bases in the south-west of Anatolia. He explained that our military situation at Leros and Samos was precarious, owing to German air superiority. Both places had since been lost. Mr. Eden also dwelt on the advantages that would be derived from Turkey's entry into the war. In the first place, it would oblige the Bulgarians to concentrate their forces on the frontier, and thus would compel the Germans to replace Bulgarian troops in Greece and Yugoslavia to the extent of some ten divisions. Secondly, it would be possible to attack the one target which might be decisive—Ploesti. Thirdly, Turkish

chrome would be cut off from Germany. Finally, there was the moral advantage. Turkey's entry into the war might well hasten the process of disintegration in Germany and among her satellites. By all this argument the Turkish delegation were unmoved. They said, in effect, that the granting of bases in Anatolia would amount to intervention in the war, and that if they intervened in the war there was nothing to prevent a German retaliation on Constantinople, Angora, and Smyrna. They refused to be comforted by the assurances that we would give them sufficient fighters to deal with any air attack that the Germans could launch and that the Germans were so stretched everywhere that they had no divisions available to attack Turkey. The only result of the discussions was that the Turkish delegation promised to report to their Government. Considering what had been happening under their eyes in the *Ægean*, the Turks can hardly be blamed for their caution.

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As I had heard no more about the plans for the combined command of "Overlord" and the Mediterranean I assumed that the British view had been accepted. But on November 25, during our stay in Cairo, the proposal for one "overall Supreme Command" was presented to us by the American Chiefs of Staff in a formal memorandum. From this it was apparent that the President and the American High Command felt strongly that a Supreme Commander should be appointed to command all the United Nations' operations against Germany, both from the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. They still wished to see a commander for North-West European operations, a commander of the Allied forces in the Mediterranean, and above both a supreme figure who would not only plan and conduct the war in both theatres, but move the forces from one to the other as he might think best. It must be remembered that we not only had at that time, and were bound to have for many months to come, a very large superiority in all the forces, Army, Navy, and Air, but also that with Alexander's and Montgomery's victories in Tunis and the Desert our reputation stood high.

The American memorandum immediately encountered strong opposition from the British Chiefs of Staff. Both they and I recorded our views in writing. The rejoinder of the British Chiefs of Staff was as follows:

COMMAND OF BRITISH AND UNITED STATES FORCES  
OPERATING AGAINST GERMANY

MEMORANDUM BY THE BRITISH CHIEFS OF STAFF

25 Nov 43

The British Chiefs of Staff have given careful consideration to the proposal put forward by the United States Chiefs of Staff that "a Supreme Commander be designated at once to command all United Nations operations against Germany from the Mediterranean and the Atlantic". This proposal has immense political implications, and is clearly a matter for the most earnest consideration of the United States and British Governments. Nevertheless the British Chiefs of Staff must say at once that, from the military point of view, they profoundly disagree with the proposal. Their reasons are set out in the paragraphs that follow.

Total war is not an affair of military forces alone, using the word "military" in the widest sense of the term. There are political, economic, industrial, and domestic implications in almost every big war problem. Thus it seems clear that the Supreme Commander for the war against Germany will have to consult both the United States and the British Governments on almost every important question. In fact, it boils down to this, that he will only be able to make a decision without reference to high authority on comparatively minor and strictly military questions, such as the transfer of one or two divisions, or a few squadrons of aircraft, or a few scores of landing-craft, from one of his many fronts to another. He will thus be an extra and unnecessary link in the chain of command.

There is no real analogy between the position of Marshal Foch in the last war and the position now contemplated for the Supreme Commander against Germany. Marshal Foch was responsible only for the Western Front and the Italian Front. His authority did not extend to the Salonika Front, the Palestine Front, or the Mesopotamian Front. Under the arrangements now contemplated the Supreme Commander will have not only "Overlord" and the Italian Front under his authority, but also the Balkan Front and the Turkish Front (if this is opened). There must be some limit to the responsibilities which Allied Governments can delegate to a single soldier, and the sphere now proposed seems to exceed these limits considerably.

The United States Chiefs of Staff propose that the decisions of the Supreme Commander should be "subject to reversal by the Combined Chiefs of Staff". If the main object of this new arrangement is to ensure rapid decisions, it looks as though the above proviso will lead to deplorable consequences. Instances will occur in which the Supreme Commander has issued orders and the troops have marched in accord-



ance with these orders, only to be followed by a reversal of the order by the Combined Chiefs of Staff and consequent confusion. Again, it may happen that the British Chiefs of Staff agree with a decision taken by the Supreme Commander, while the United States Chiefs of Staff totally disagree with it. What happens then? Or, again, the Combined Chiefs of Staff may wholeheartedly support, on military grounds, a decision taken by the Supreme Commander, only to find that one or other of the Governments concerned is not prepared to ratify it. Then what happens?

If the Supreme Commander is going to exercise real control he will need to assemble the whole paraphernalia of Intelligence, Planning, and Administration on an unprecedented scale. This staff will merely be a great pad between the theatre commanders and the Combined Chiefs of Staff. . . .

If the well-tried machinery that has led us safely through the last two years has failed in the smaller problems, it would be better to examine that machinery and see how it can be speeded up and adjusted, rather than to embark upon an entirely novel experiment, which merely makes a cumbrous and unnecessary link in the chain of command, and which will surely lead to disillusionment and disappointment.

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The American Chiefs of Staff were impressed by the arguments used. They realised that their proposal meant virtually the end of Combined Chiefs of Staff control, since the Super-Supreme Commander would to a large extent take the authority from their hands. They therefore dropped the subject from the Staff discussions on the understanding that it must be settled between the heads of Governments.

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I warmly approved of the Chiefs of Staff paper, and developed the arguments still further in a note which I wrote the next day.

#### SUPREME COMMANDER OF ALL OPERATIONS AGAINST GERMANY

NOTE BY THE PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF DEFENCE

26 Nov 43

The difficulties and shortcomings in our conduct of the war since the Battle of Salerno have arisen from divergences of view between our two Staffs and Governments. It is not seen how these divergences would be removed by the appointment of a Supreme Commander working under the Combined Chiefs of Staff and liable to have his



decisions reversed by them. The divergences, which are political as much as military, would still have to be adjusted by the present methods of consultation between the Combined Staffs and the heads of the two Governments. Thus the Supreme Commander, after being acclaimed as the World War winner, would in practice find his functions restricted to the narrow ground between the main decisions of policy and strategy, which can only be dealt with by the present methods, and the spheres of the two chief regional commanders.

2. This would certainly not be sufficient to justify arousing all the expectations and setting up all the apparatus inseparable from the announcement of a "Supreme Commander for the defeat of Germany".

3. On the other hand, if the power of decision is in fact accorded to the Supreme Commander the work of the Combined Chiefs of Staff would be virtually superseded, and very great stresses would immediately arise between the Governments and the Supreme Commander. Without going into personalities, it is greatly to be doubted whether any single officer exists who would be capable of giving decisions over the vast range of problems now dealt with by the heads of Governments assisted by the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

4. The principle which should be followed as far as possible between allies of equal status is that the command in any theatre should go to the ally who has the largest forces deployed or about to be deployed there. On this it would be natural that the command in the Mediterranean should be British and that the command of "Overlord" should be American.

5. If the two commands are merged under a Supreme Commander the British would have available against Germany in May [1944] decidedly larger forces than the United States. It would therefore appear that the Supreme Command should go to a British officer. I should be very reluctant, as head of His Majesty's Government, to place such an invidious responsibility upon a British officer. If, on the other hand, disregarding the preponderance of forces involved, the Supreme Command was given to a United States officer and he pronounced in favour of concentrating on "Overlord" irrespective of the injury done to our affairs in the Mediterranean, His Majesty's Government could not possibly agree. The Supreme Commander, British or American, would therefore be placed in an impossible position. Having assumed before the whole world the responsibility of pronouncing and being overruled by one Government or the other, he would have little choice but to resign. This might bring about a most serious crisis in the harmonious and happy relations hitherto maintained between our two Governments.

6. It is not seen why the present arrangement should not continue,

subject to any minor improvements that can be suggested. Under this arrangement an American commander would conduct the immense cross-Channel operation and a British commander would conduct the war in the Mediterranean, their action being concerted and forces assigned by the Combined Chiefs of Staff, working under the heads of the two Governments. . . . More frequent meetings of the Combined Chiefs of Staff should also be arranged, and possibly monthly visits of one week's duration by the chairman of each Chiefs of Staff Committee alternately to London and Washington.

This paper I handed to the President before we left for Teheran, and I was not aware during the Conference at Teheran what his answer would be. I understood from private sources that the American Chiefs of Staff realised fully the clash of authority that might arise between our Combined Staff organisation and the new supreme general, and that after weighing our arguments they were by no means wedded to the plan. Neither the President nor any of his immediate circle referred to the matter in any way on the occasions, formal and informal but always friendly, when we came into contact. I therefore rested under the impression that General Marshall would command "Overlord", that General Eisenhower would succeed him in Washington, and that it would fall to me, representing His Majesty's Government, to choose the Mediterranean commander, who at that time I had no doubt would be Alexander, already waging the war in Italy. Here the issue rested till we returned to Cairo.



Thanksgiving Day, which fell on November 25, is a feature in American life. Every soldier in the American armies is supposed to eat turkey on that date, and most of them did in 1943. Ample supplies of turkeys for all the United States Staffs at Cairo had been brought out in the President's ship. Mr. Roosevelt invited me to join him at dinner in his villa. "Let us make it a family affair," he said. So Sarah was asked too, and also "Tommy" (Commander Thompson), to whom he had taken a great liking. The President's guests included his personal circle, his son, Elliott, his son-in-law, Major Boettiger, and Harry Hopkins and his son Robert. We had a pleasant and peaceful feast. Two enormous turkeys were brought in with all ceremony. The President, propped up high in his chair, carved for all with masterly, inde-

fatigable skill. As we were about twenty, this took a long time, and those who were helped first had finished before the President had cut anything for himself. As I watched the huge platefuls he distributed to the company I feared that he might be left with nothing at all. But he had calculated to a nicety, and I was relieved, when at last the two skeletons were removed, to see him set about his own share. Harry, who had noted my anxiety, said, "We have ample reserves." Speeches were made of warm and intimate friendship. For a couple of hours we cast care aside. I had never seen the President more gay. After the meal was over we returned to the big room in which we had held so many conferences. Dance music—from gramophone records—began to play. Sarah was the only woman present, and she had her work cut out, so I danced with "Pa" Watson (Roosevelt's trusted old friend and aide), to the delight of his chief, who watched us from the sofa. This jolly evening and the spectacle of the President carving up the turkeys stand out in my mind among the most agreeable features of the halt at Cairo.

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At last all the puzzles had been solved. The difficulties of the American Constitution, Roosevelt's health, and Stalin's obduracy, the complications of a journey to Basra and the Trans-Persian railway, were all swept away by the inexorable need of a triple meeting, and the failure of every other alternative but a flight to Teheran. So we sailed off into the air from Cairo at crack of dawn on November 27 in perfect weather for the long-sought meeting-place, and arrived safely by different routes at different times.\*

\* I have not broken the thread of the narrative to insert a domestic matter which was a this time causing me concern. The question of the release of the Mosleys is dealt with in Appendix F (p. 635).

## CHAPTER XXI

### TEHERAN: THE CRUX

*My Sixty-ninth Birthday – I See Stalin Alone – Earnestness of Our Preparations for “Overlord” – The Effect in the Mediterranean – The Supreme Command – Everything Turns on Landing-craft – The Forces Gathered for “Overlord” – A Great Battle Impending in Italy – Stalin Emphasises the Need for “Overlord” – He Offers a Russian Offensive in May or June – The President’s Luncheon for “Three Only” – Russia’s Claim to Warm-Water Ports – The Third Plenary Session, November 30 – The Main Military Decisions Taken – A Communiqué Agreed – Dinner at the British Legation – Compliments All Round and Many Speeches – General Brooke’s Rejoinder to Stalin.*

NOVEMBER 30 was for me a crowded and memorable day. It was my sixty-ninth birthday, and was passed almost entirely in transacting some of the most important business with which I have ever been concerned. The fact that the President was in private contact with Marshal Stalin and dwelling at the Soviet Embassy, and that he had avoided ever seeing me alone since we left Cairo, in spite of our hitherto intimate relations and the way in which our vital affairs were interwoven, led me to seek a direct personal interview with Stalin. I felt that the Russian leader was not deriving a true impression of the British attitude. The false idea was forming in his mind that, to put it shortly, “Churchill and the British Staffs mean to stop ‘Overlord’ if they can, because they want to invade the Balkans instead.” It was my duty to remove this double misconception.

The exact date of “Overlord” depended upon the movements of a comparatively small number of landing-craft. These landing-craft were not required for any operation in the Balkans. The

President had committed us to an operation in the Bay of Bengal. If this were cancelled there would be enough landing-craft for all I wanted, namely, the amphibious power to land against opposition two divisions at a time on the coasts of Italy or Southern France, and also to carry out "Overlord" as planned in May. I had agreed with the President that May should be the month, and he had, for his part, given up the specific date of May 1. This would give me the time I needed. If I could persuade the President to obtain relief from his promise to Chiang Kai-shek and drop the Bay of Bengal plan, which had never been mentioned in our Teheran conferences, there would be enough landing-craft both for the Mediterranean and for a punctual "Overlord". In the event the great landings began on June 6, but this date was decided much later on, not by any requirements of mine, but by the moon and the weather. I also succeeded when we returned to Cairo, as will be seen, in persuading the President to abandon the enterprise in the Bay of Bengal. I therefore consider that I got what I deemed imperative. But this was far from certain at Teheran on this November morning. I was determined that Stalin should know the main facts. I did not feel entitled to tell him that the President and I had agreed upon May for "Overlord". I knew that Roosevelt wanted to tell him this himself at our luncheon which was to follow my conversation with the Marshal.

The following is founded upon the record made by Major Birse, my trusted interpreter, of my private talk with Stalin.

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I began by reminding the Marshal that I was half American and had a great affection for the American people. What I was going to say was not to be understood as disparaging to the Americans, and I would be perfectly loyal towards them, but there were things which it was better to say outright between two persons.

We had a preponderance of troops over the Americans in the Mediterranean. There were two or three times more British troops than American there. That was why I was anxious that the armies in the Mediterranean should not be hamstrung if it could be avoided. I wanted to use them all the time. In Italy there were some thirteen to fourteen divisions, of which nine or



ten were British. There were two armies, the Fifth Anglo-American Army, and the Eighth Army, which was entirely British. The choice had been represented as keeping to the date of "Overlord" or pressing on with the operations in the Mediterranean. But that was not the whole story. The Americans wanted me to undertake an amphibious operation in the Bay of Bengal against the Japanese in March. I was not keen about it. If we had the landing-craft needed for the Bay of Bengal in the Mediterranean we should have enough to do all we wanted there and still be able to keep to an early date for "Overlord". It was not a choice between the Mediterranean and the date of "Overlord", but between the Bay of Bengal and the date of "Overlord". However, the Americans had pinned us down to a date for "Overlord" and operations in the Mediterranean had suffered in the last two months. Our army in Italy was somewhat disheartened by the removal of seven divisions. We had sent home three divisions, and the Americans were sending four of theirs, all in preparation for "Overlord". That was why we had not been able to take full advantage of the Italian collapse. But it also proved the earnestness of our preparations for "Overlord".

It was vital to get an early decision on the appointment of the Commander-in-Chief. Up till August we British were to have had the Supreme Command in "Overlord", but at Quebec I had told the President that I would agree to the appointment of an American, while we should have the Supreme Command in the Mediterranean. I was content with this because the Americans, although equal in numbers to the British when we landed, would soon have a preponderance, and their stake would be greater after the first few months. On the other hand, as the British had the preponderance in the Mediterranean and I had my own ideas about the war there I considered it right that we should have the Supreme Command in that theatre. The President had accepted this arrangement, and it now rested with him to nominate the Commander-in-Chief for "Overlord". As soon as the President did so I would nominate the Mediterranean Commander-in-Chief and other commanders. The President had delayed the appointment for domestic reasons connected with high personages, but I had urged him to decide before we all left Teheran. Stalin said that was good.

I then turned to the question of landing-craft, and explained

once again how and why they were the bottle-neck. We had plenty of troops in the Mediterranean, even after the removal of the seven divisions, and there would be an adequate invading British and American army in the United Kingdom. All turned on landing-craft. When the Marshal had made his momentous announcement two days before about Russia's coming into the war against Japan after Hitler's surrender I had immediately suggested to the Americans that they might find more landing-craft for the operations we had been asked to carry out in the Indian Ocean, or that they might send some landing-craft from the Pacific to help the first lift of "Overlord". In that case there might be enough for all. But the Americans were very touchy about the Pacific. I had pointed out to them that Japan would be beaten much sooner if Russia joined in the war against her, and that they could therefore afford to give us more help.

The issue between myself and the Americans was in fact a very narrow one. It was not that I was in any way lukewarm about "Overlord". I wanted to get what I needed for the Mediterranean and at the same time keep to the date for "Overlord". The details had to be hammered out between the Staffs, and I had hoped that this might be done in Cairo. Unfortunately Chiang Kai-shek had been there and Chinese questions had taken up nearly all the time. But I was sure that in the end enough landing-craft would be found for all.

Now about "Overlord". The British would have ready by the date fixed in May or June nearly sixteen divisions, with their corps troops, landing-craft troops, anti-aircraft, and services, a total of slightly over half a million men. These would consist of some of our best troops, including battle-trained men from the Mediterranean. In addition the British would have all that was needed from the Royal Navy to handle transportation and to protect the Army, and there would be the metropolitan Air Forces of about 4,000 first-line British aircraft in continuous action. The American import of troops was now beginning. Up till now they had sent mainly air troops and stores for the Army, but in the next four or five months I thought 150,000 men or more would come every month, making a total of seven to eight hundred thousand men by May. The defeat of the submarines in the Atlantic had made this movement possible. I was in favour of launching the operation in the South of France about the same

time as "Overlord" or at whatever moment was found correct. We should be holding enemy troops in Italy, and of the twenty-two or twenty-three divisions in the Mediterranean as many as possible would go to the South of France and the rest would remain in Italy.

A great battle was impending in Italy. General Alexander had about half a million men under him. There were thirteen or fourteen Allied divisions against nine to ten German. The weather had been bad and bridges had been swept away, but in December we intended to push on, with General Montgomery leading the Eighth Army. The amphibious landing would be made near the Tiber. At the same time the Fifth Army would be fiercely engaged holding the enemy. It might turn into a miniature Stalingrad. We did not intend to push into the wide part of Italy, but to hold the narrow leg.

Stalin said he must warn me that the Red Army was depending on the success of our invasion of Northern France. If there were no operations in May 1944 then the Red Army would think that there would be no operations at all that year. The weather would be bad and there would be transport difficulties. If the operation did not take place he did not want the Red Army to be disappointed. Disappointment could only create bad feeling. If there was no big change in the European war in 1944 it would be very difficult for the Russians to carry on. They were war-weary. He feared that a feeling of isolation might develop in the Red Army. That was why he had tried to find out whether "Overlord" would be undertaken on time as promised. If not, he would have to take steps to prevent bad feeling in the Red Army. It was most important.

I said "Overlord" would certainly take place, provided the enemy did not bring into France larger forces than the Americans and British could gather there. If the Germans had thirty to forty divisions in France I did not think the force we were going to put across the Channel would be able to hold on. I was not afraid of going on shore, but of what would happen on the thirtieth, fortieth, or fiftieth day. However, if the Red Army engaged the enemy and we held them in Italy, and possibly the Turks came into the war, then I thought we could win.

Stalin said that the first steps of "Overlord" would have a good effect on the Red Army, and if he knew that it was going to take

place in May or June he could already prepare blows against Germany. The spring was the best time. March and April were months of slackness, during which he could concentrate troops and material, and in May and June he could attack. Germany would have no troops for France. The transfer of German divisions to the east was continuing. The Germans were afraid of their Eastern Front, because it had no Channel which had to be crossed and there was no France to be entered. The Germans were afraid of the Red Army advance. The Red Army would advance if it saw that help was coming from the Allies. He asked when "Overlord" would begin.

I said that I could not disclose the date for "Overlord" without the President's agreement, but the answer would be given at lunch-time, and I thought he would be satisfied.

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After a short interval the Marshal and I separately proceeded to the President's quarters for the luncheon of "Three Only" (with our interpreters) to which he had invited us. Roosevelt then told Stalin that we were both agreed that "Overlord" should be launched during the month of May. The Marshal was evidently greatly pleased and relieved by this solemn and direct engagement which we both made. The conversation turned on lighter subjects, and the only part of which I have a record was the question of Russia's outlet upon the seas and oceans. I had always thought it was a wrong thing, capable of breeding disastrous quarrels, that a mighty land-mass like the Russian Empire, with its population of nearly two hundred millions, should be denied during the winter months all effective access to the broad waters.

When Marshal Stalin raised this question of warm-water ports for Russia I said there were no obstacles. He also asked about the Dardanelles and the revision of the Treaty of Sèvres. I said that I wanted to get Turkey into the war, and this was an awkward moment for raising the question. Stalin replied that the time would come later. I said I expected Russia would sail the oceans with her Navy and merchant fleet, and we would welcome her ships. At this Stalin remarked that Lord Curzon had had other ideas. I said that in those days we did not see eye to eye with Russia.

The President said that the Baltic should be free to all nations for merchant shipping. There should be free zones in the ports,



and trustees should be appointed for the Kiel Canal, while the Dardanelles ought to be free to the commerce of the world. Stalin asked whether this would apply to Russian commerce, and we assured him that it would.

Stalin then asked what could be done for Russia in the Far East. I replied that Russia had Vladivostok, but he pointed out that the port was ice-bound, and also depended on the Straits of Tsushima. At present the only exit that the Russians had was Murmansk. I answered that I wished to meet the Russian grievance, because the government of the world must be entrusted to satisfied nations, who wished nothing more for themselves than what they had. If the world-government were in the hands of hungry nations there would always be danger. But none of us had any reason to seek for anything more. The peace would be kept by peoples who lived in their own way and were not ambitious. Our power placed us above the rest. We were like rich men dwelling at peace within their habitations.

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After a brief interval the third plenary session began as before in the Russian Embassy at four o'clock. There was a full attendance and we numbered nearly thirty.

The President said he was very happy to inform the Conference that agreement had been reached on the main military problems.

Sir Alan Brooke said that, after sitting in combined session, the United States and British Chiefs of Staff had recommended us to launch "Overlord" in May, "in conjunction with a supporting operation against the South of France, on the largest scale permitted by the landing-craft available at that time."

I then emphasised the need for the combined United States and British Staffs to keep in closest touch with the Soviet military authorities, so that all operations on the Eastern as well as the Western and Mediterranean Fronts were concerted. By this means the three Great Powers would close in on the wild beast so that he was engaged on all sides at the same moment. Very detailed Staff work would be necessary to launch "Overlord", which was the biggest combined operation ever planned.

Stalin said that he understood the importance of the decision taken by the Staffs and the difficulties inherent in carrying it out. The danger period for "Overlord" would be at the time of



deployment from the landings. At this point the Germans might transfer troops from the east in order to create the maximum difficulties for "Overlord". In order to prevent any movement from the east of any considerable German forces he undertook to organise a large-scale Russian offensive in May.\*

The President remarked on the importance of the timing of operations in all theatres. Now that the three Staffs had got together he hoped they would keep together. He had already informed Marshal Stalin that the next step was to appoint the Commander for "Overlord". After consultation with his own Staffs and with me, it should be possible to make a decision within three or four days. Now that the main military decisions had been taken, it seemed right for the British and American Staffs to return to Cairo as soon as possible to work out the details. To this Stalin and I agreed.

I added that now that the supreme decisions had been taken every effort must be bent to find the ways and means to get more landing-craft. With five months still to go before the launching of "Overlord", and with all the resources of America and Great Britain at our disposal, it should be possible to do this. If "Overlord" was to be done it must be done with smashing force, and I hoped that the Staffs would find ways and means of increasing the initial assault forces.

I asked if there would be any difficulty in the three Staffs concerting cover plans. Stalin explained that the Russians had made considerable use of deception by means of dummy tanks, aircraft, and airfields. Radio deception had also proved effective. He was entirely agreeable to the Staffs collaborating with the object of devising joint cover and deception schemes. "In war-time," I said, "truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies." Stalin and his comrades greatly appreciated this remark when it was translated, and upon this note our formal conference ended gaily.

I then suggested that the Staffs should draft a short communiqué to cover the military talks for submission to the President, Marshal Stalin, and myself. The note to be sounded was brevity, mystery, and a foretaste of impending doom for Germany. The following communiqué was therefore framed and agreed to by all:

\* The main Russian attack began on June 23.

... Our Military Staffs have joined in our round table discussions, and we have concerted our plans for the destruction of the German forces. We have reached complete agreement as to the scope and timing of the operations which will be undertaken from the east, west, and south.

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Hitherto we had assembled for our conferences or meals in the Soviet Embassy. I had claimed however that I should be the host at the third dinner, which should be held in the British Legation. This could not well be disputed. Great Britain and I myself both came first alphabetically, and in seniority I was four or five years older than Roosevelt or Stalin. We were by centuries the longest established of the three Governments; I might have added, but did not, that we had been the longest in the war; and, finally, November 30 was my birthday. These arguments, particularly the last one, were conclusive, and all preparations were made by our Minister for a dinner of nearly forty persons, including not only the political and military chiefs, but some of their higher staffs. The Soviet Political Police, the N.K.V.D., insisted on searching the British Legation from top to bottom, looking behind every door and under every cushion, before Stalin appeared; and about fifty armed Russian policemen, under their own general, posted themselves near all the doors and windows. The American Security men were also much in evidence. Everything however passed off agreeably. Stalin, arriving under heavy guard, was in the best of tempers, and the President, from his wheeled chair, beamed on us all in pleasure and goodwill.

This was a memorable occasion in my life. On my right sat the President of the United States, on my left the master of Russia. Together we controlled a large preponderance of the naval and three-quarters of all the air forces in the world, and could direct armies of nearly twenty millions of men, engaged in the most terrible of wars that had yet occurred in human history. I could not help rejoicing at the long way we had come on the road to victory since the summer of 1940, when we had been alone, and, apart from the Navy and the Air, practically unarmed, against the triumphant and unbroken might of Germany and Italy, with almost all Europe and its resources in their grasp. Mr. Roosevelt gave me for a birthday present a beautiful Persian porcelain vase,

which, although it was broken into fragments on the homeward journey, has been marvellously reconstructed and is one of my treasures.

During dinner I had a most pleasant conversation with both my august guests. Stalin repeated the question he had posed at the Conference, "Who will command 'Overlord'?" I said that the President had not yet finally made up his mind, but that I was almost certain it would be General Marshall, who sat opposite us at no great distance, and that was how it had stood hitherto. He was evidently very pleased at this. He then spoke about General Brooke. He thought that he did not like the Russians. He had been very abrupt and rough with them at our first Moscow meeting in August 1942. I reassured him, remarking that military men were apt to be blunt and hard-cut when dealing with war problems with their professional colleagues. Stalin said that he liked them all the better for that. He gazed at Brooke intently across the room.

When the time came I proposed the health of our illustrious guests, and the President proposed my health and wished me many happy returns of the day. He was followed by Stalin, who spoke in a similar strain.

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Many informal toasts were then proposed, according to the Russian custom, which is certainly very well suited to banquets of this kind. Hopkins made a speech couched in a happy vein, in the course of which he said that he had made "a very long and thorough study of the British Constitution, which is unwritten, and of the War Cabinet, whose authority and composition are not specifically defined". As the result of this study, he said, "I have learnt that the provisions of the British Constitution and the powers of the War Cabinet are just whatever Winston Churchill wants them to be at any given moment." This caused general laughter. The reader of these volumes will know how little foundation there was in this jocular assertion. It is true that I received a measure of loyal support in the direction of the war from Parliament and my Cabinet colleagues which may well be unprecedented, and that there were very few large issues upon which I was overruled; but it was with some pride that I reminded my two great comrades on more than one

occasion that I was the only one of our trinity who could at any moment be dismissed from power by the vote of a House of Commons freely elected on universal franchise, or could be controlled from day to day by the opinion of a War Cabinet representing all parties in the State. The President's term of office was fixed, and his powers not only as President but as Commander-in-Chief were almost absolute under the American Constitution. Stalin appeared to be, and at this moment certainly was, all-powerful in Russia. They could order; I had to convince and persuade. I was glad that this should be so. The process was laborious, but I had no reason to complain of the way it worked.

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As the dinner proceeded there were many speeches, and most of the principal figures, including Molotov and General Marshall, made their contribution. But the speech which stands out in my memory came from General Brooke. I quote the account he was good enough to write for me.

"Half-way through the dinner," he says, "the President very kindly proposed my health, referring to the time when my father had visited his father at Hyde Park. Just as he was finishing, and I was thinking what an easy time I should have replying to such kind words, Stalin got up and said he would finish the toast. He then proceeded to imply that I had failed to show real feelings of friendship towards the Red Army, that I was lacking in a true appreciation of its fine qualities, and that he hoped in future I should be able to show greater comradeship towards the soldiers of the Red Army!

"I was very much surprised by these accusations, as I could not think what they were based on. I had however seen enough of Stalin by then to know that if I sat down under these insults I should lose any respect he might ever have had for me, and that he would continue such attacks in the future.

"I therefore rose to thank the President most profusely for his very kind expressions, and then turned to Stalin in approximately the following words:

"Now, Marshal, may I deal with your toast. I am surprised that you should have found it necessary to raise accusations against me that are entirely unfounded. You will remember that this morning while we were discussing cover plans Mr. Churchill

said that "in war truth must have an escort of lies". You will also remember that you yourself told us that in all your great offensives your real intentions were always kept concealed from the outer world. You told us that all your dummy tanks and dummy aeroplanes were always massed on those fronts that were of an immediate interest, while your true intentions were covered by a cloak of complete secrecy.

" 'Well, Marshal, you have been misled by dummy tanks and dummy aeroplanes, and you have failed to observe those feelings of true friendship which I have for the Red Army, nor have you seen the feelings of genuine comradeship which I bear towards all its members.' "

As this was translated by Pavlov, sentence by sentence, to Stalin I watched his expression carefully. It was inscrutable. But at the end he turned to me and said with evident relish, "I like that man. He rings true. I must have a talk with him afterwards."

At length we moved into the ante-chamber, and here everyone moved about in changing groups. I felt that there was a greater sense of solidarity and good-comradeship than we had ever reached before in the Grand Alliance. I had not invited Randolph and Sarah to the dinner, though they came in while my birthday toast was being proposed, but now Stalin singled them out and greeted them most warmly, and of course the President knew them well.

As I moved around I saw Stalin in a small circle face to face with "Brookie", as I call him. The General's account continues:

"As we walked out of the room the Prime Minister told me that he had felt somewhat nervous as to what I should say next when I had referred to 'truth' and 'lies'. He comforted me however by telling me that my reply to the toast had had the right effect on Stalin. I therefore decided to return to the attack in the ante-room. I went up to Stalin and told him how surprised I was, and grieved, that he should have found it necessary to raise such accusations against me in his toast. He replied at once through Pavlov, 'The best friendships are those founded on misunderstandings,' and he shook me warmly by the hand."

It seemed to me that all the clouds had passed away, and in fact Stalin's confidence in my friend was established on a foundation of respect and goodwill which was never shaken while we all worked together.



## TEHERAN: THE CRUX

It must have been after two in the morning when we finally separated. The Marshal resigned himself to his escort and departed, and the President was conveyed to his quarters in the Soviet Embassy. I went to bed tired out but content, feeling sure that nothing but good had been done. It certainly was a happy birthday for me.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### CAIRO AGAIN. THE HIGH COMMAND

*Anglo-American Discussions in Cairo – The Andaman Islands Plan – No Agreement on This at Our First Plenary Meeting, December 4 – The President Decides to Abandon the Plan – Our Joint Telegram to Premier Stalin, December 6 – Question about the Number of Troops Asked for by Mountbatten – Staff Discussion on the Strategy to be Pursued against Japan – Our Conference with the Turks at Cairo – Outline Plan for Aiding Turkey – The Turks Will Not Commit Themselves – President Roosevelt Appoints General Eisenhower to Command “Overlord” – The President and I Visit the Sphinx.*

ON December 2 I got back to Cairo from Teheran, and was once more installed in the villa near the Pyramids. The President arrived the same evening, and we resumed our intimate discussions on the whole scene of the war and on the results of our talks with Stalin. Meanwhile the Combined Chiefs of Staff, who had refreshed themselves by a visit to Jerusalem on their way back from Teheran, were to carry forward their discussions on all their great business the next day. Admiral Mountbatten had returned to India, whence he had submitted the revised plan he had been instructed to make for an amphibious attack on the Andaman Islands (Operation “Buccaneer”). This would absorb the vitally needed landing-craft already sent to him from the Mediterranean. I wished to make a final attempt to win the Americans to the alternative enterprise against Rhodes.

The next evening I dined again with the President. Eden was with me. We remained at the table until after midnight, still discussing our points of difference. I shared the views of our Chiefs of Staff, who were much worried by the promise which the President had made to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek before Teheran to launch an early attack across the Bay of Bengal. This

would have swept away my hopes and plans for taking Rhodes, on which I believed the entry of Turkey into the war largely depended. But Mr. Roosevelt's heart was set upon it. When our Chiefs of Staff raised it in the military conferences the United States Staffs simply declined to discuss the matter. The President, they said, had taken his decision and they had no choice but to obey.

On the afternoon of December 4 we held our first plenary meeting since Teheran, but made little headway. The President began by saying that he must leave on December 6, and that all reports should be ready for the final agreement of both parties by the evening of Sunday, December 5. Apart from the question of the entry of Turkey into the war, the only outstanding point seemed to be the comparatively small one of the use to be made of a score of landing-craft and their equipment. It was unthinkable that one could be beaten by a petty item like that, and he felt bound to say that the detail *must* be disposed of.

I said that I did not wish to leave the Conference in any doubt that the British delegation viewed our early dispersal with great apprehension. There were still many questions of first-class importance to be settled. Two decisive events had taken place in the last few days. In the first place, Marshal Stalin had voluntarily proclaimed that the Soviet would declare war on Japan the moment Germany was defeated. This would give us better bases than we could ever find in China, and made it all the more important that we should concentrate on making "Overlord" a success. It would be necessary for the Staffs to examine how this new fact would affect operations in the Pacific and South-East Asia.

The second event of first-class importance was the decision to cross the Channel during May. I myself would have preferred a July date, but I was determined nevertheless to do all in my power to make a May date a complete success. It was a task transcending all others. A million Americans were to be thrown in eventually, and five or six hundred thousand British. Terrific battles were to be expected, on a scale far greater than anything that we had experienced before. In order to give "Overlord" the greatest chance of success, it was thought necessary that the descent on the Riviera ("Anvil") should be as strong as possible. It seemed to me that the crisis for the invading armies would come at about the thirtieth day, and it was essential that every possible step should be taken by action elsewhere to prevent the Germans

from concentrating a superior force against our beach-heads. As soon as the "Overlord" and "Anvil" forces got into the same zone they would come under the same commander.

The President, summing up the discussion, asked whether he was correct in thinking that there was general agreement on the following points:

- (a) Nothing should be done to hinder "Overlord".
- (b) Nothing should be done to hinder "Anvil".
- (c) By hook or by crook we should scrape up sufficient landing-craft to operate in the Eastern Mediterranean if Turkey came into the war.
- (d) Admiral Mountbatten should be told to go ahead and do his best [in the Bay of Bengal] with what had already been allocated to him.

On this last point I suggested that it might be necessary to withdraw resources from Mountbatten in order to strengthen "Overlord" and "Anvil". The President said that he could not agree with this. We had a moral obligation to do something for China, and he would not be prepared to forgo the amphibious operation except for some very good and readily apparent reason. I replied that this "very good reason" might be provided by our supreme adventure in France. At present the "Overlord" assault was only on a three-division basis, whereas we had put nine divisions ashore in Sicily on the first day. The main operation was at present on a very narrow margin.

Reverting to the Riviera attack, I expressed the view that it should be planned on the basis of an assault force of at least two divisions. This would provide enough landing-craft to do the outflanking operations in Italy, and also, if Turkey came into the war soon, to capture Rhodes. I then pointed out that operations in South-East Asia must be judged in their relation to the predominating importance of "Overlord". I said that I was surprised at the demands for taking the Andamans which had reached me from Admiral Mountbatten. In the face of Marshal Stalin's promise that Russia would come into the war operations in the South-East Asia Command had lost a good deal of their value, while, on the other hand, their cost had been put up to a prohibitive extent.

The discussion continued on whether or not to persist in the

Andamans project. The President resisted the British wish to drop it. No conclusion was reached, except that the Chiefs of Staff were directed to go into details.

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On December 5 we met again, and the report of the Combined Staffs on operations in the European theatre was read out by the President and agreed. Everything was now narrowed down to the Far Eastern operation. Rhodes had receded in the picture, and I concentrated on getting the landing-craft for "Anvil" and the Mediterranean. A new factor had presented itself. The estimates of the South-East Asia Command of the force needed to storm the Andamans had been startling. The President said that 14,000 should be sufficient. Anyhow, the 50,000 men proposed certainly broke the back of the Andamans expedition so far as this meeting was concerned. It was agreed for the moment that Mountbatten should be asked what amphibious operations he could undertake on a smaller scale, on the assumption that most of the landing-craft and assault shipping were withdrawn from South-East Asia during the next few weeks. Thus we parted, leaving Mr. Roosevelt much distressed.

Before anything further could be done the deadlock in Cairo was broken. In the afternoon the President, in consultation with his advisers, decided to abandon the Andaman Islands plan. He sent me a laconic private message: "'Buccaneer' is off." General Ismay reminds me that when I told him the welcome news cryptically on the telephone that the President had changed his mind and was so informing Chiang Kai-shek I said, "He is a better man that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." We all met together at 7.30 p.m. the next evening at the Kirk villa to go over the final report of the Conference. The Southern France assault operation was formally approved, and the President read out his signal to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, informing him of the decision to abandon the Andamans plan.

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I now worked out with the President a joint summary of our decisions to be sent to Stalin.

*Prime Minister and President Roosevelt to  
Premier Stalin*

6 Dec 43

In the Cairo Conference just concluded we have arrived at following



decisions as to the conduct of war in 1944 against Germany additional to the agreement reached by the three of us at Teheran.

The bomber offensive against Germany, with the objective of destroying German air combat strength, the German military, industrial, and economic system, and preparing the way for a cross-Channel operation, will be given the highest strategical priority.

We have reduced the scale of operations scheduled for March in the Bay of Bengal to permit the reinforcement of amphibious craft for the operation against Southern France.

We have ordered the utmost endeavours to increase the production of landing-craft in U.K. and the U.S.A. for the reinforcement of "Overlord", and further orders have been issued to divert certain landing-craft from the Pacific for the same purpose.

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In informing the South-East Asia Command of our decisions I did not conceal from Mountbatten the shock which the estimates of his advisers which he had endorsed had been to me.

*Prime Minister to Admiral Mountbatten (Delhi)*

9 Dec 43

You will have seen the President's telegram to the Generalissimo about the abandonment of "Buccaneer", with which, as you know, I am in entire agreement. This arises from the decision at Teheran to concentrate everything on "Overlord" and a simultaneous operation against the South of France.

Everyone here has been unpleasantly affected by your request to use 50,000 British and Imperial troops, of which 33,700 are combatant, against 5,000 Japanese. I was astounded to hear of such a requirement, and I cannot feel sure you are getting competent military advice. The Americans have been taking their islands on the basis of two and a half to one, and that your generals should ask for six and a half to one has produced a very bad impression. Even the detailed figures with which I have been furnished do not remove it.

I hope that preparations will now go forward for Sumatra after the monsoon. However, while such standards as those you have accepted for the Andamans prevail there is not much hope of making any form of amphibious war.

Mountbatten replied that the United States in their recent landings had deployed a superiority of troops varying from between three to one to over six to one. The larger figure applied when cover from shore-based aircraft was not possible. For taking the Andamans he would have carrier-borne and not shore-based aircraft, and their effort was likely to be expended after four

days. It was therefore essential to capture the Andamans airfield within that time. The resources already allotted to him would enable him to carry the 50,000 men proposed. Of these however only 9,000 could be landed by the first two waves. He did not therefore feel he was asking for an undue superiority in order to ensure quick success. He cited the American landing at Munda, where with an even higher ratio of superiority only very slow progress had been made.

I remained unconvinced. But the following post-war comment from the War Office should be printed in order that the point at issue may be fairly presented.

Operation "Buccaneer", an assault on the Andaman Islands, involved transporting our forces 1,000 miles from the nearest base, and the force included all troops required for the development of facilities, the building of airfield and strips, and for work in the docks. It was estimated that 16,000 would be non-fighting troops, and included in the balance of "fighting" troops were all headquarters, engineers, and anti-aircraft units. The enemy was considered to have air superiority in the area. Admittedly the "teeth" part of the force outnumbered the estimated Japanese garrison by about four to one, but this was not much greater than what was at that time accepted as a desirable preponderance for an assault landing. It cannot be overlooked that we had been uniformly unsuccessful against the Japanese for the previous twelve months. Lord Mountbatten undoubtedly wished to make his first assault a success, if only for the sake of theatre morale.

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The Combined Chiefs of Staff also discussed among themselves the British share in the strategy to be pursued against Japan, and presented their recommendations to the President and me in their final report of the Cairo Conference. In summary, they proposed that the main effort of the South-East Asia Command should be in Burma. After the defeat of Germany an Army and air contingent, with air resources all based on Australia, should be sent to co-operate with General MacArthur. The British effort by sea should be mainly in the Pacific, and not in the Bay of Bengal. The British Chiefs of Staff, like myself, recoiled from the idea of a strenuous and wasteful campaign in North Burma for the sake of building a road to China of doubtful value. On the other hand, they accepted the fact that Admiral Mountbatten could not carry out any large-scale amphibious operations until six months after a

German collapse. The plan of reinforcing the Pacific could be begun much sooner. They therefore endorsed the American view. In their final report both Staffs stated that they "had agreed in principle as a basis for further investigation and preparation" the overall plan for the defeat of Japan. This plan contemplated the dispatch of a detachment of the British Fleet which was provisionally scheduled to become active in the Pacific in June 1944. The President and I both initialled this document, but in the pressure of more urgent business and of the President's imperative need to return to the United States no occasion was found when we could discuss these long-term schemes either with our own advisers or between ourselves. We however felt sure there would be time to review the whole position later.

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One of the main purposes of our Cairo meeting had been to resume talks with the Turkish leaders. I had telegraphed President İnönü on December 1 from Teheran suggesting that he should join the President and myself in Cairo. It was arranged that Vyshinsky should also be present. These conversations arose out of the exchange of views between Mr. Eden and the Turkish Foreign Minister in Cairo at the beginning of November on the former's journey home from Moscow. The Turks now came again to Cairo on December 4, and the following evening I entertained the Turkish President to dinner. My guest displayed great caution, and in subsequent meetings showed to what extent his advisers were still impressed by the German military machine. I pressed the case hard. With Italy out of the war the advantages of Turkey's entry were manifestly increased and her risks lessened.

On December 6 I drafted a memorandum to the British Chiefs of Staff setting forth in detail the policy and action which would be necessary if, after all, Turkey came in on our side.

*Prime Minister to General Ismay, for C.O.S. Committee*

6 Dec 43

#### OPERATION "SATURN"

After the Cairo Conference the Turkish Government will state that their policy is unchanged, and use all precautionary measures to allay enemy suspicions.

2. Nevertheless it is necessary that the preparation and protection of the Turkish airfields should proceed at full speed without a day's delay, and that all necessary personnel, in mufti, and materials should

be sent in. A period of six or seven weeks should suffice for this, the British squadrons being ready to fly in to the airfields at any time after February 1, the exact date to be fixed in consultation with the Turkish Government and in relation to the move of the enemy. A margin of a fortnight may be allowed for this, during which time further supplies and personnel will be introduced at full speed.

3. In the lull following the expected capture of Rome in January it is desirable that three groups of medium bombers should be placed under the command of the A.O.C.-in-C. Middle East and posted in Cyrenaica for "softening" action against enemy airfields and shipping and to cover the fly-in of the British fighter squadrons. The action of these bombers can begin irrespective of any decision taken about the fly-in. But if the enemy are quiescent it would be better to reserve their action to cover the fly-in and the events immediately following it. The details of the employment and timing of the movement of this force should be worked out by the Commander-in-Chief.

4. By February 15 the fly-in should be completed, and from that moment onwards a very considerable degree of protection against air attack will have been secured to Turkey.

5. Once established in the airfields the British squadrons, in consultation with the Turkish Government, will begin their operations in the Ægean, being supported at the same time by the medium bomber groups from Cyrenaica. Under this air cover British naval forces in the Levant, strengthened as may be necessary, will attack enemy shipping and convoys engaged in supplying the islands.

6. All preparations should meanwhile be made for Rhodes. For this purpose a first-class British division should be used for the assault, a lower category division being held ready to garrison the island, thereby setting free the British division for further operations in Italy. Rhodes of course depends upon the landing-craft being available. This operation should take place before the end of February, all landing-craft thereafter being prepared for "Anvil".

7. What action should be expected from the enemy? Evidently it is the Allied interest to delay this as long as possible. Therefore the Turkish Government should continue to the last moment in relations with Germany and Bulgaria, and should reply diplomatically to any protest they may make, while continuing their preparations. If Bulgaria adopts a threatening attitude to Turkey she should be notified by the Russians that if she delivers an attack at Germany's orders the Russian Soviet Union will immediately declare war on Bulgaria. It is for consideration whether the Bulgarians should not also be told that for every ton of bombs dropped by the Germans or by them upon Constantinople or Smyrna two or three tons will be dropped on Sofia.



Should the Russian armies be continuing their victorious advance in South Russia and should the Anglo-American armies prosper in the Battle of Rome it seems most unlikely that Bulgaria will attempt to invade Turkey. She may however withdraw her nine divisions from Greece and Yugoslavia and make a concentration opposite the Turkish front in Thrace.

8. Meanwhile it is also possible that, under the increasing pressure of events, Bulgaria will endeavour to make a separate peace with the three Great Allies. It is not suggested that Turkey should declare war at any stage; she should continue her protective re-equipment and await the enemy's actions.

9. Meanwhile, as soon as the sea passage from Egypt to Turkey has been opened by the British and naval domination of the Ægean achieved every effort will be made to pass supplies and support into Smyrna, and if possible through the Dardanelles, so that the further equipment of the Turkish Army and the feeding of Constantinople can proceed as fast as possible.

10. After the fly-in of the British squadrons has been completed the Turkish Government should facilitate the secret passage into the Black Sea of six or eight British submarines, together with the necessary stores. As no depot ship can be made available base facilities should, if possible, be arranged at Ismet. These submarines should suffice to take a heavy toll of any Roumanian and German evacuations from the Crimea, and also assist any Russian descent on the Roumanian shore which the Roumanian political attitude might render possible. Such a movement would however be dependent on Russian wishes.

The Turks departed to report to their Parliament, and it was agreed that in the meantime British specialists should be assembled to implement the first stages of Operation "Saturn". And there the matter rested.

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In all our many talks at Cairo the President never referred to the vital and urgent issue of the command of "Overlord", and I was under the impression that our original arrangement and agreement held good. But on the day before his departure from Cairo he told me his final decision. We were driving in his motor-car from Cairo to the Pyramids. He then said, almost casually, that he could not spare General Marshall, whose great influence at the head of military affairs and of the war direction, under the President, was invaluable, and indispensable to the successful conduct of the war. He therefore proposed to nominate



Eisenhower to "Overlord", and asked me for my opinion. I said it was for him to decide, but that we had also the warmest regard for General Eisenhower, and would trust our fortunes to his direction with hearty goodwill.

Up to this time I had thought Eisenhower was to go to Washington as Military Chief of Staff, while Marshall commanded "Overlord". Eisenhower had heard of this too, and was very unhappy at the prospect of leaving the Mediterranean for Washington. Now it was all settled: Eisenhower for "Overlord", Marshall to stay at Washington, and a British commander for the Mediterranean.

The full story of the President's long delay and hesitations and of his final decision is referred to by Mr. Hopkins' biographer, who says that Roosevelt made the decision on Sunday, December 5, "against the almost impassioned advice of Hopkins and Stimson, against the known preference of both Stalin and Churchill, against his own proclaimed inclination." Then Mr. Sherwood quotes the following extract from a note which he had from General Marshall after the war. "If I recall," said Marshall, "the President stated, in completing our conversation, 'I feel I could not sleep at night with you out of the country.'"<sup>\*</sup> There can be little doubt that the President felt that the command only of "Overlord" was not sufficient to justify General Marshall's departure from Washington.

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At last our labours were finished. I gave a dinner at the villa to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, Mr. Eden, Mr. Casey, and one or two others. I remember being struck by the optimism which prevailed in high Service circles. The idea was mooted that Hitler would not be strong enough to face the spring campaign, and might collapse even before "Overlord" was launched in the summer. I was so much impressed by the current of opinion that I asked everybody to give his view in succession round the table. All the professional authorities were inclined to think that the German collapse was imminent. The three politicians present took the opposite view. Of course, on these vast matters on which so many lives depend there is always a great deal of guesswork. So much is unknown and immeasurable. Who can tell how weak

<sup>\*</sup> Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins*, pp. 802-3.

the enemy may be behind his flaming fronts and brazen mask? At what moment will his will-power break? At what moment will he be beaten down?

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The President had found no time for sightseeing, but I could not bear his leaving without seeing the Sphinx. One day after tea I said, "You must come now." We motored there forthwith, and examined this wonder of the world from every angle. Roosevelt and I gazed at her for some minutes in silence as the evening shadows fell. She told us nothing and maintained her inscrutable smile. There was no use waiting longer.

On December 7 I bade farewell to my great friend when he flew off from the airfield beyond the Pyramids.