

FIRST TO FIGHT

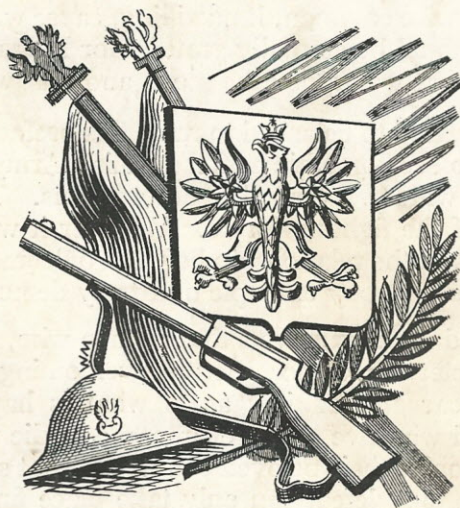
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BY

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Preface by

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PREFACE

THIS excellent little book is both useful and timely. It reminds us of two things. The first is that Poland is still fighting—fighting on land, fighting in the air and fighting on the sea. We get hints, too, of that other great fight which is going on in Poland itself—the sabotage of the German war effort, in which men and women are daily risking and giving their lives with nothing to help them but the burning conviction that Poland will live again.

We have the undying story of the submarine *Orzel*, surely one of the most fantastic exploits of the whole history of the war. We are reminded, too, that the Polish squadrons in the R.A.F. shot down one out of every eight aircraft in the Battle of Britain. That battle, the real turning point of the war, was a near thing in any case. What might have happened without the Poles?

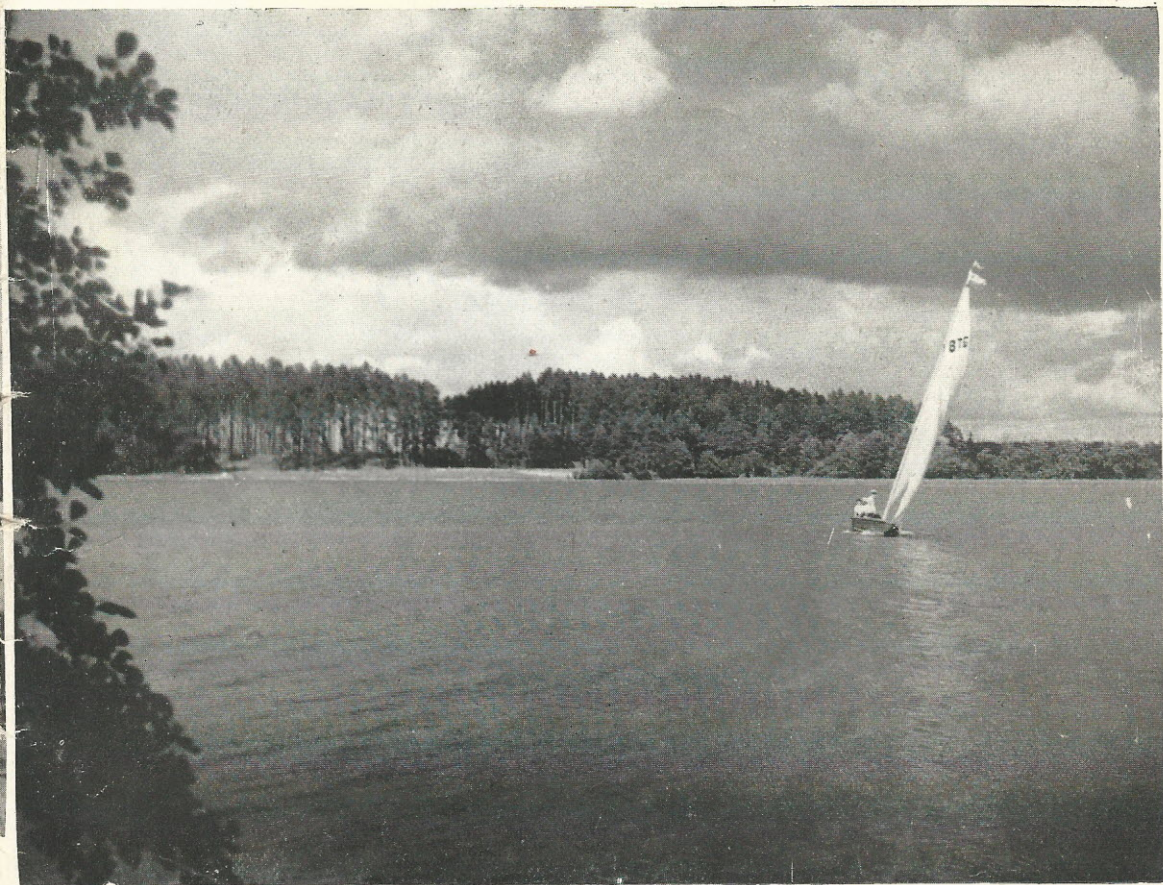
The second thing of which this little book reminds us, is that like ourselves Poland went to war for a principle. There would have been every excuse for her to have done what other Continental countries did, and bow to the inevitable, and make common, if unwilling, cause with the aggressor. Both we and Russia should be eternally grateful for Poland's self-sacrifice, for she gave us both what we needed the most, and that was time.

I am especially pleased to be asked to write this preface because I have just been privileged to see something of the Polish Army and the Polish Navy. I came away with two very clear impressions. The first was the essential democracy of the fighting forces. Whether it was on duty or at a dance which I attended, the relationship between officers and men seemed to me to be a particularly happy example of a truly democratic army.

But my most vivid impression was that of men who, by their courage and strength of character, have succeeded in overcoming all the ordinary human emotions of fear and anxiety as to what is happening to their relations at home, and who live and are prepared to die for one fanatical purpose—the restoration of their beloved country. That spirit reminds us, if we need reminding, that defeat can only take place finally in the souls of men and never on the battlefield.

I sincerely hope that we shall never forget the part which Poland has played in this war, or be unmindful of the example which she has shown us and the world. After the last war, we tended to forget our friends and to placate our enemies. I trust that we shall not make the same mistake this time. Poland is a worthy ally in war. She will be an equally steadfast friend in time of peace.

L. D. GAMMANS, M.P.



THERE was a time when Poland was at peace. There was a good breeze on the Augustow lakes and plenty of sunshine. Poland had much to lose by going to war. The temptation to surrender was no less alluring than it was in other countries. The Germans might have allowed sailing to continue—or so it seemed in 1939, before the Nazis revealed their methods in full light.

Many countries preferred to keep their comforts and sports, or at any rate to imagine that they could keep them at the price of submission.

But Poland did not want to go on yachting and playing. Everybody knew what war would mean, for the memories of 1914-1920 were still fresh in the minds of all except very young people.

The Augustow lakes are very close to East Prussia, the outpost of German militarism, hanging over Warsaw like a perpetual menace. Poles knew that there would be no carefree days at Augustow after they said "No." They knew that they were going to be the first to fight.



GDYNIA was Poland's darling, the newest town in the country, pampered and admired. It was also the biggest port in the Baltic, built in less than ten years on what was still a bare beach in 1923. It was a purely Polish achievement and people were proud of it as a man might be when he sees his child beginning to walk—upright and unaided. But Gdynia was flanked on both sides by German guns: in the west and also in the east, from East Prussia and Nazified Danzig. It was clear to the meanest strategic intelligence that Gdynia would be the first Polish city to be attacked and conquered. The Germans offered to leave Gdynia as a free port for the Poles, if they surrendered to Germany the surrounding country.

The Poles were the first to realize that there could be no compromise with Hitler, and that small concessions would pave the way for greater demands. "All or nothing" was their reply.

POLAND'S PART

There are nations which are fighting this war for a principle and others which fight only in self-defence, since the enemy left them no other alternative. Britain and Poland belong to the first group.

When Great Britain and Poland concluded their alliance in 1939, it was much criticised on the ground that British assistance to Poland was difficult, for geographical and other reasons. As to the Polish assistance to Britain, it was not taken into consideration at all—by the British side at any rate—nor was it regarded as even remotely possible.

It may be interesting and profitable for the future to find out whether Poland's part in this war has really been as purely passive as such views seem to suggest. Was Poland actually only the object of Britain's solicitous protection? Was the "Pact of Mutual Assistance" a misnomer?

The reply to these queries is important, for it may have considerable bearing on the future. If Poland was a mere pawn and a pure liability in this war, she is likely to be so again in the future. If, on the other hand, she contrived to influence to some extent the issue of the present war, it means that the country may be capable of playing a similar part again. In either case, the question is full of practical implications.

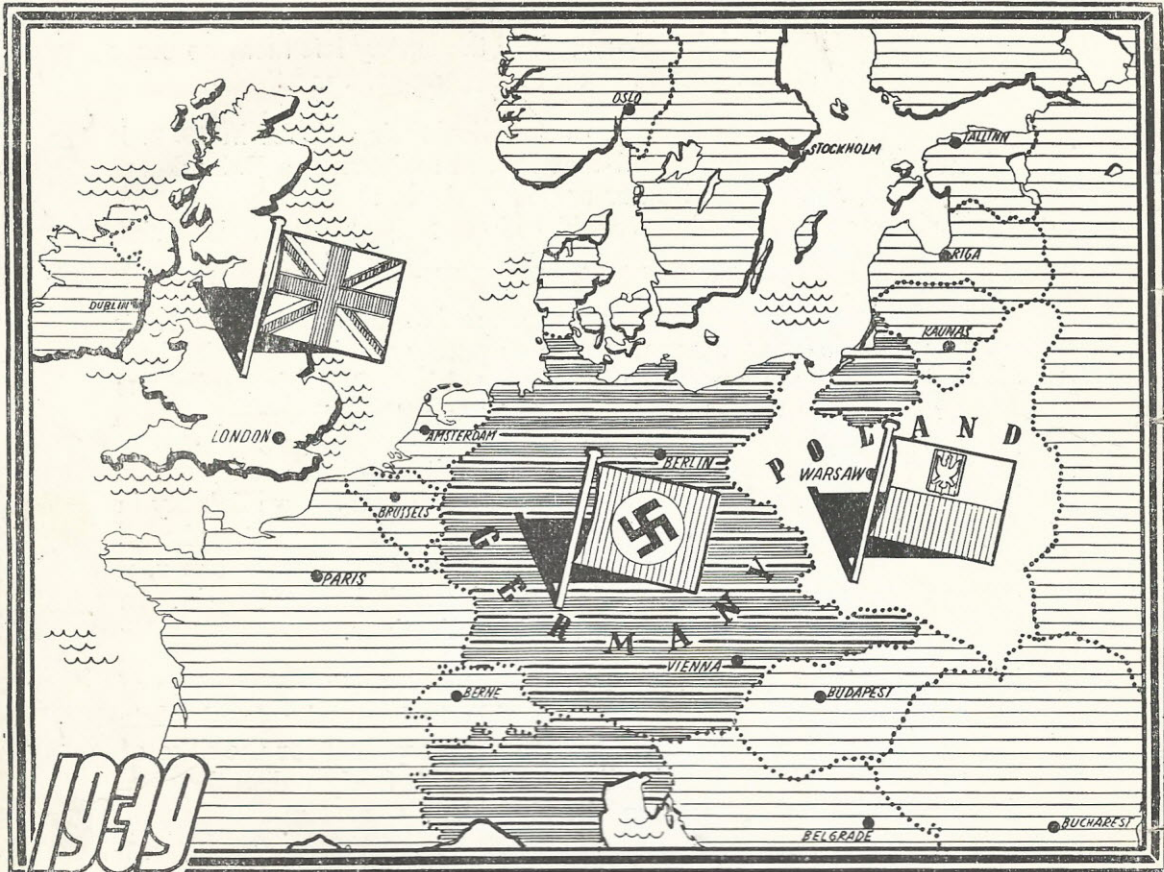
When final victory is won, it will have cost such a stupendous sum of human sacrifice that no country will be able to lay claim to absolute primacy. Many nations have already given all they had for the sake of victory and others will have to give lives and wealth freely unless they are prepared to forfeit all that has been already given.

The part played by every nation and its importance are not to be measured by the size of the country and the number of its soldiers alone. A sentimental estimate could seldom be impartial or accurate, though it is a fact that the moral contribution of different nations has not been at all equal. As to Poland, my object will be to demonstrate what she has contributed to victory, especially by averting early defeat.

The time for weighing the cost of victory has not yet come, nor are we willing to haggle over it. But we do know that there have already been several occasions when the war could have been lost—but for the intervention of a country, or a man. Whatever may happen yet, nothing will ever detract from the merit of those who saved the world from disaster.

Greater deeds may be done before the battle is over, *but they would not be possible if it had not been for those who did their part well when all hung by a thread.*

A VITAL DECISION



WHEN Mr. Neville Chamberlain extended to Poland on March 31st, 1939, the guarantee of His Majesty's Government, most people thought that he was making a generous step and a wise one. Others suggested that generosity is better kept within reasonable bounds. Soon afterwards, a formal Treaty of Alliance was initialled by the Foreign Ministers of the two countries. Some emphasis was laid at the time on the fact that the treaty provided for *mutual* assistance, that is Polish assistance to Britain as well as British assistance to Poland. This provision, however, was regarded at the time—by some people at any rate—as having little relation to political realities.

Many Englishmen, unaware of the direct menace to their own country, looked upon the treaty—while approving it on the whole—as an expression

of a quixotic spirit. It was taken for granted that Britain extended a helping hand to another "small country," but no assistance was expected from the "small country."

It was generally realized that Britain could not give much effective help to Poland in the event of a German invasion, and a certain section of public opinion even doubted whether the treaty would ever be carried out.

By concluding the treaty with Britain, Poland deliberately undertook to bear the brunt of the attack. From that moment Poland became a doomed nation and the Stock Exchange was quick to draw the conclusion.

From the point of view of Germany, the British-Polish alliance was a major diplomatic defeat, for it necessitated the conclusion of the pact with Soviet Russia, which would otherwise have been unnecessary. The Polish decision of standing fast was described by the Germans as the height of folly—probably because it compelled them to revise their whole plan of world conquest.

In order to realize the tremendous importance of the British-Polish treaty and of the decision it entailed on the part of Poland, let us consider what would have been the development of events if the treaty had never been concluded and the Chamberlain guarantee never given.

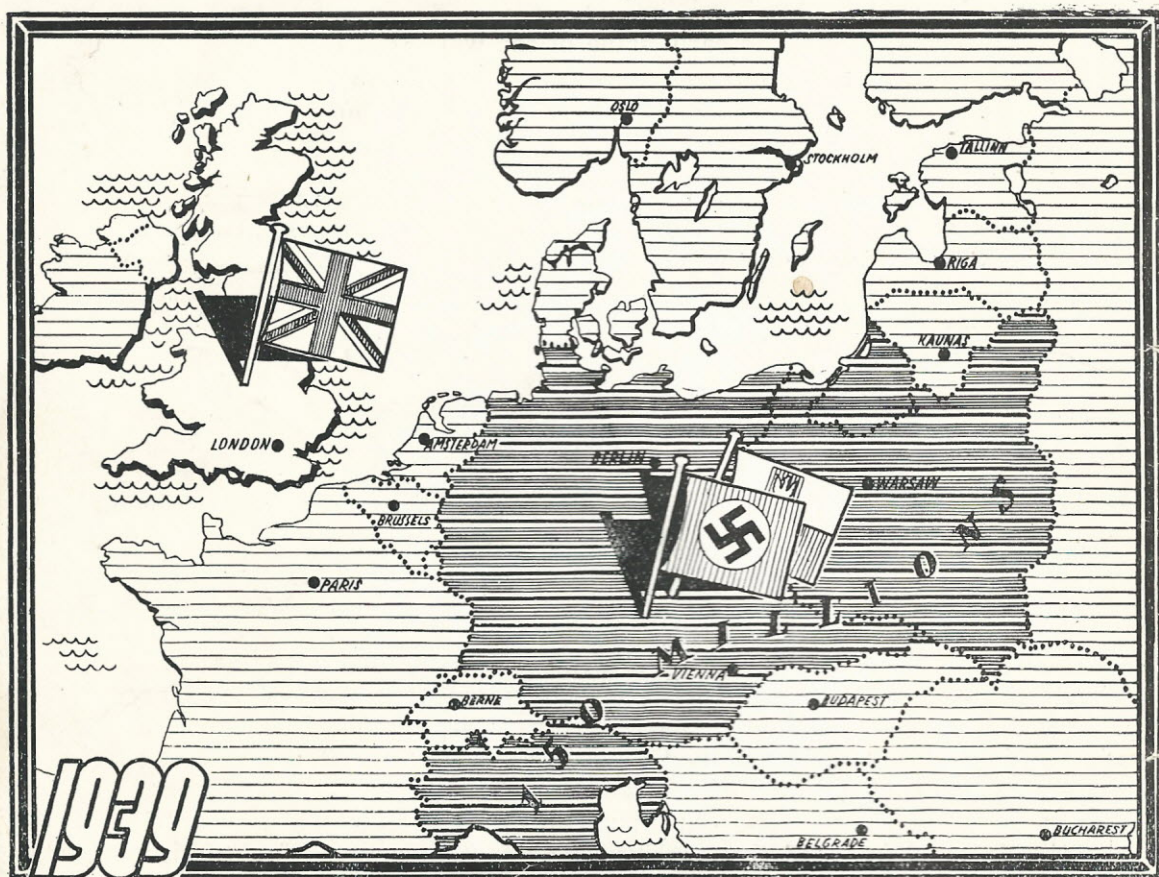
There are pacts and political events the absence of which would make very little difference to the course of history. In fact most of them come into that class.

It may be interesting to try to apply the test to various treaties and agreements. Suppose the Anglo-German naval agreement of 1935 had never been concluded. The Germans probably would have gone on breaking their Versailles obligations all the same. The indirect effect of the naval treaty, however, was considerable, for it sapped French morale and prepared the way for other surrenders. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to claim that the conclusion of that agreement had decisive influence on world affairs, for better or for worse.

Let us now apply the test to the Polish-British alliance and assume, for the sake of argument, that it never existed.

When the alliance was concluded, it caused some surprise. The assumption that it might have never seen the light of day does not therefore appear particularly far fetched.

THIS MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED



IF there had been no British alliance, Poland might have given way. There would have been nothing very surprising in such a development. It is the fact that Poland *did* resist and fight that appears rather remarkable, when one considers the enormous disparity of forces between Germany and Poland, and the impossibility of receiving quick help from Britain.

Only by considering this eventuality can we appreciate in its true proportions the part which Poland played by refusing to collaborate with Germany.

If Poland had submitted to the German demands—probably against a promise of compensation in the east—the European situation would have

been radically changed. Germany would have gained another satellite, more important than the others by its geographical position. The Polish army, fully mobilized and equipped with German weapons, would have been at least twice as strong as it was on the September 1st, 1939, when it was taken by surprise before mobilization was completed.

That army would probably not have been required to go into action at all—at least not in the early stage of the war; that is, not in the war against the West. It would have been merely asked to hold the eastern frontier of Poland, guarding the German rear against the unlikely contingency of a Russian attack.

It is very doubtful whether Russia would have taken the initiative and attacked Germany—or rather Poland—first. The Germans would, of course, have lavished on the Russians assurances of friendship and peaceful intentions.

The entire armed strength of Germany could, therefore, have been concentrated in the west. Thanks to the presence of motor roads and more numerous railways, a concentration in the west could have been even more sudden and unexpected than one in the east. Having secured their rear by a pact with Poland, the Germans would have been ready to attack in the early summer of 1939. It was a moment when their relative superiority, especially in the air, was probably at its highest.

In June or July 1939, Hitler would have struck on the slightest excuse, or perhaps even without any pretence or challenge. He deliberately deceived Poland until the last moment, pretending to make offers which he did not either expect or desire to be accepted.

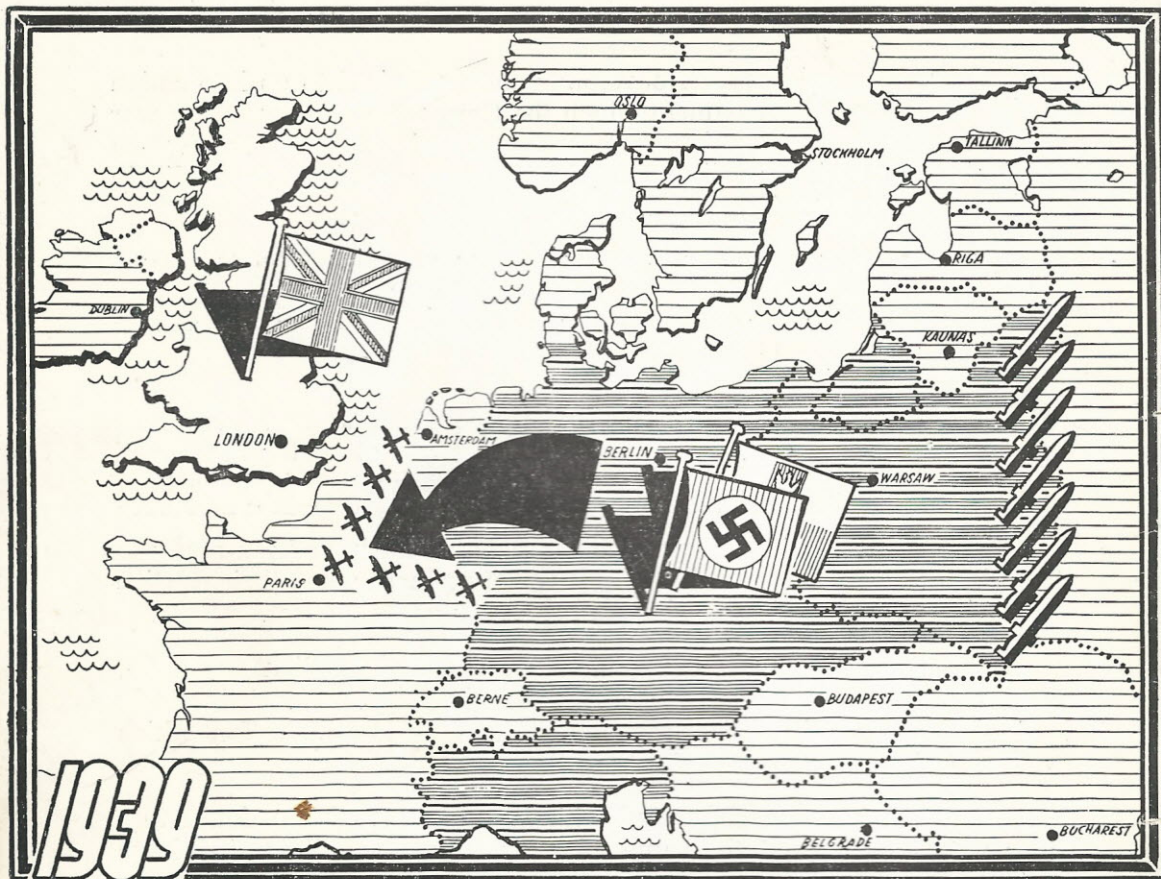
If he had not been concerned with Poland, there is no doubt that Hitler would have used the same trick with France. He would have continued to negotiate; there would have been various offers and counter-offers. There might even have been appearances of a conciliatory attitude, intended to lull the French into a sense of false security.

If this was done even after war was declared, how much easier it would have been in time of peace.

In the summer of 1939 Hitler would have sent his technicians to Paris to build a German pavilion for the next Exhibition, scheduled for 1942. Astute political writers would have deduced, after considerable deliberation, that there could not possibly be a war before that date.

And then, without warning, Stukas would have swooped down on France, at dawn. They might have even smashed the German pavilion for the next Exhibition—the little of it that would have been ready by the summer of 1939.

GERMANY STRIKES



WE all know what happened when France was invaded in 1940, after eight months of mobilization, after a B.E.F. had arrived, after Holland and Belgium had prepared their inundations and other defences.

Can we imagine what would have been the result of a surprise attack in June 1939, when the French army was not mobilized and there was not one British soldier on French soil?

If the term "collapse" is commonly used to describe the events of 1940, it is hard to imagine any word in the language that could give an idea of the effect of a German surprise attack on France in 1939. Unmobilized, inadequately equipped, practically devoid of air cover, the French army would have been even more completely overwhelmed than it was in 1940. The invasion of 1940 was the second example of the new

German technique of war, with eight months in which to prepare defences against a method which could not be unknown after the experience of Poland. But in 1939 France would have been the first country to be so attacked and the result would certainly have been shattering.

Within very few weeks the Channel ports and Paris would have been in the hands of the enemy. No valour would have availed against the crushing superiority of armament which the Germans could have brought to bear in 1939 even more than in 1940.

With France utterly defeated, Britain would have been faced with a situation similar to that of August and September 1940, but with three weeks' warning instead of nearly a year's. The superiority of the Luftwaffe over the R.A.F. was greater in 1939 than in 1940, for although the first year of the war may not have been used to the best advantage in all branches of production, the importance of making fighters was fully realized.

How many fighters were there to defend Britain in the summer of 1939? How many anti-aircraft guns? How many modern tanks?

There are many official documents to prove that Britain was practically defenceless at the time of Munich. The situation in the summer of 1939 was better, but not very much better. And yet Britain might have had to repel a German invasion in the summer of 1939—if Poland had not taken the first blows.

The spirit of Britain would not have flagged. British people would have fought on the beaches, in the streets and in houses. But could they have won, attacked by surprise, morally and physically unprepared?

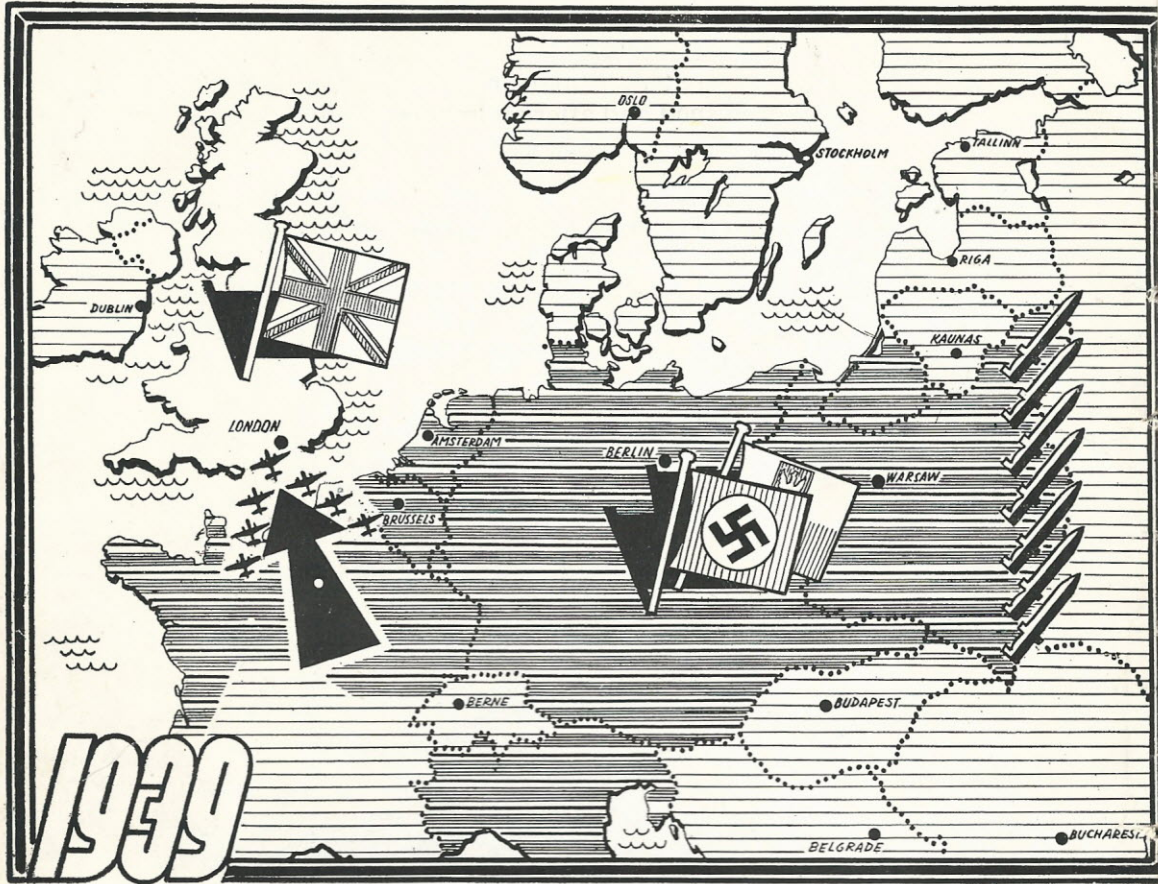
That was the great German design, a plan for certain mastery of Europe and then of the world. The condition for its success was surprise—political and strategic.

The defiant attitude of Poland robbed Hitler of the element of political surprise and forced him to show more of his hand than he had meant Britain to see. The military resistance of Poland, however brief, robbed him of strategic surprise, by giving France and Britain many months of warning. Those months may have been insufficiently used, especially in France, but they nevertheless meant, as far as Britain was concerned, the difference between disaster and victorious survival.

Nothing could have saved France—except herself. Heedless of the example of Poland, she suffered in 1940 the fate which the Germans had meant to inflict on her in 1939.

But Britain made better use of the year of grace earned by the sacrifice of Poland. The Spitfire and Hurricane eight-gun fighters were in existence in 1939, but there were not very many of them. In 1940 there were more—and there were more pilots to handle them, too.

WHO KNOWS ?



ABOUT the beginning of August 1939 France was conquered and the invaders turned northwards. . . .

So a later historian might write, if Poland had submitted to the demand of Germany and had become partner in a three-cornered Axis.

In the summer of 1939, when British public opinion was still blissfully unaware of the danger, when people still talked about the forthcoming "disruption of the Nazi regime from within" and "German bankruptcy", imagine fifteen armoured and motorized divisions and fifty infantry divisions, under Keitel, Brauchitsch, Rundstedt, Bock, Reichenau and List occupying the Channel ports. The four air fleets of the Luftwaffe, commanded by Goering, Kesselring and Lohr would also have been there—

a force of 5,000 first-line aircraft—Heinkel 111, Dornier 17, Junkers 87, Messerschmitt 109—very modern machines still in 1939. If a Battle of Britain had been fought then, who can tell what would have been its outcome?

The Battle of 1940 was won by a narrow margin indeed. It was fought after the R.A.F. had been at war for a year, after many of the earlier illusions had been shed and after an important, nay, historic change of national leadership.

Would the Germans have committed in 1939 the fantastic blunder of 1940 and failed to attempt an invasion immediately after the fall of France? Even had they done so, the air battle would eventually have been fought—either in August or in September 1939 and its issue would have decided the course of history for many years to come.

There would have been no Polish Squadron 303 in *that* Battle of Britain. But the Germans would have had all the pilots they later lost in the Polish, Norwegian and French campaigns—enough to make many good squadrons.

The disparity between the Luftwaffe and the R.A.F. was probably greater in 1939 than at any time before or since. It was, from the German point of view, the ideal moment for attack. Superiority in the air, coupled with surprise, guaranteed almost certain success—if anything can be certain in war.

The strength of the anti-aircraft artillery and of the A.R.P. services in Britain in the summer of 1939 is no secret today. It was no secret to the Germans at the time. That is why they wanted to fight *their* Battle of Britain in 1939.

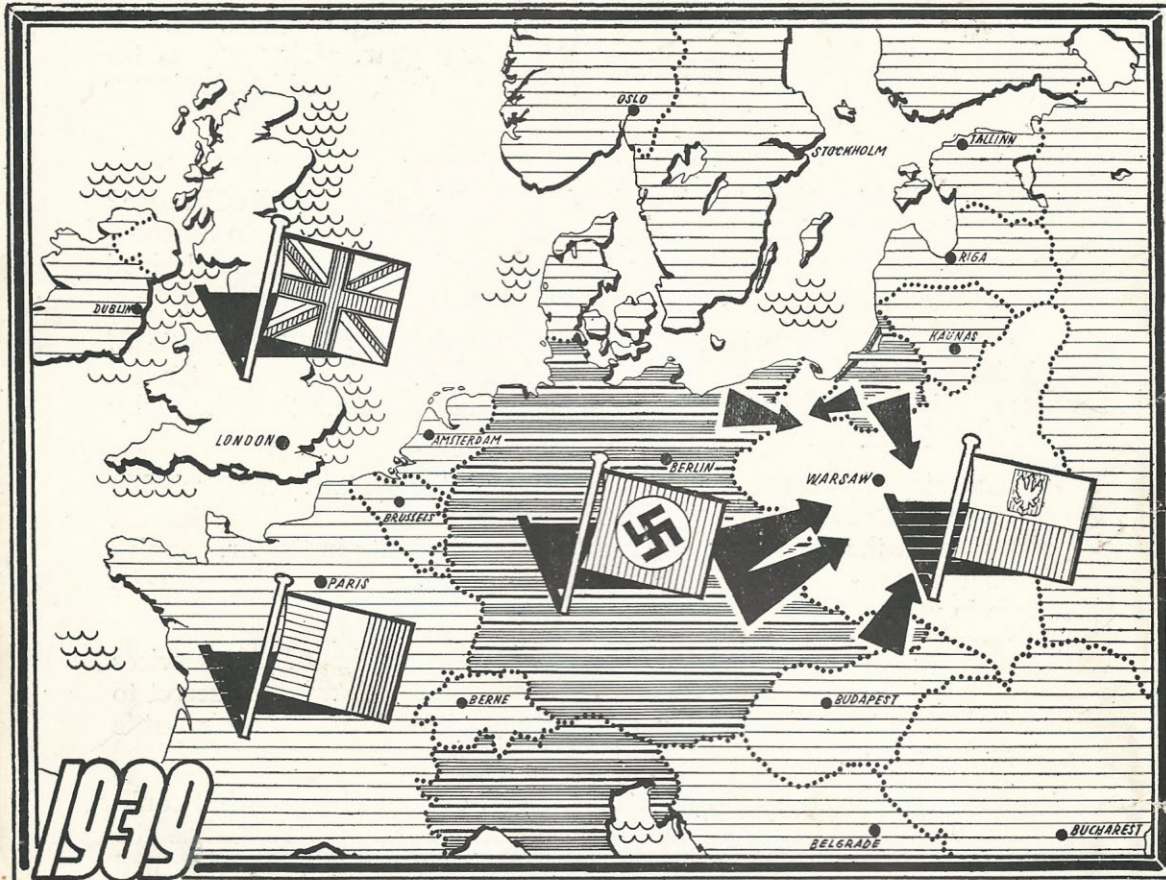
The Royal Navy would have been there, of course. But what could it have done if the enemy mastered the air? It could have made the Germans pay a terrible price for invasion, but could it have turned the scales against a Luftwaffe ruling the sky over the Channel and the coast?

Britain lived through hours of peril in 1940 and survived them, saved by the few "to whom so much was owed by so many." If the attack had come in 1939 instead of 1940, they would have been fewer still, and God only knows whether they could have held out or not.

In the summer of 1939, however, the four Air Fleets of the Luftwaffe, commanded by Goering, Kesselring and Lohr, were not based in northern France, but in East Prussia, Pomerania, Silesia and Slovakia. Their five thousand aircraft had only the Vistula to cross, and only a handful of obsolete Polish fighters to oppose them.

Poland was paying the price of the time needed by Rolls-Royce to make Merlins and by Vickers to make Spitfires for the Battle of 1940.

THE ORDEAL



POLAND'S decision was made. Actually there had never been the slightest possible doubt as to what action Poland would take, but that fact detracts nothing from the value of the sacrifice. Too many things are often taken for granted. It is true that it was morally impossible for Poland to act in any other way than she did, but her decision was nevertheless freely made, in full knowledge of all that it implied. There is some difference between being run over by a bus and deliberately giving one's life for a great cause. Unless we visualize other alternatives, Poland's suffering takes on the aspect of an unavoidable, almost accidental affliction. It was and is an act of courage and faith, not of mute, passive endurance.

On September 1st the German forces, commanded by General Brauchitsch, invaded Poland from the north, the west and the south.

Poland's general mobilization, which was to have taken place on August 29th, was delayed for two days, until August 31st, owing to the diplomatic pressure of France and Britain. The governments of Paris and London were anxious not to offer provocation to Germany, and Poland followed their guidance.

Consequently, the dawn of September 1st found Poland on the second day of mobilization with effectives of less than 800,000 men in the field. On that day thirty infantry divisions, four independent brigades, eleven cavalry brigades and two motorized brigades were operationally available.

Against this force Germany had an army of 48 infantry divisions, 15 armoured and motorized divisions and four Air Fleets, with about 5,000 aircraft.

The Northern Group, commanded by von Bock, was composed of seventeen infantry divisions, one cavalry brigade and five armoured divisions, assisted by Air Fleet No. 1, under Kesselring. The old German invasion base of East Prussia, hanging like a perpetual menace over Warsaw, gave to von Bock an overwhelming strategic advantage, apart from his superiority in numbers and armament.

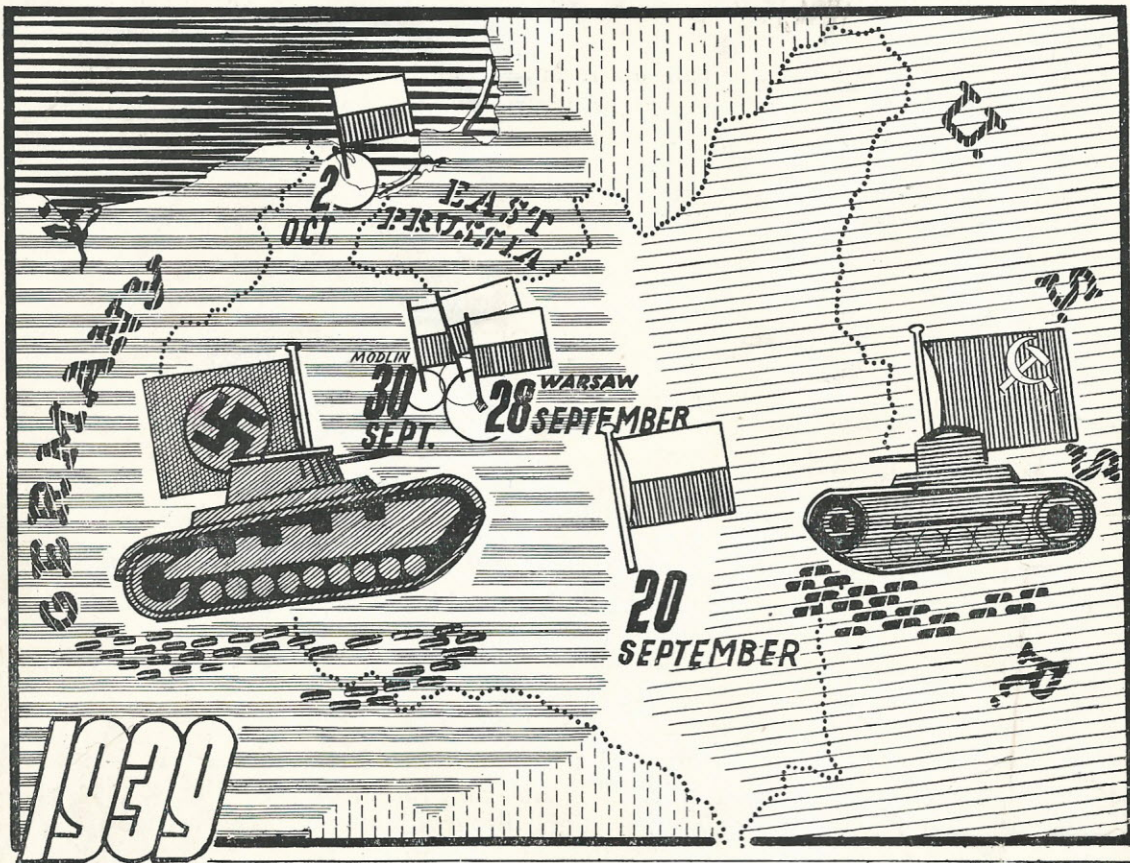
The Southern Group, commanded by von Rundstedt, was even stronger. It comprised thirty infantry divisions and nine armoured and motorized divisions, supported by the Air Fleet No. 4, under General Loehr. The Germans had, moreover, ten divisions of immediate reserves and two more Air Fleets, Nos. 2 and 3, under Goering himself.

Slovakia played in the south exactly the same part as East Prussia in the north. Poland was encircled even before a single shot had been fired.

Unlike France, Poland had no permanent fortifications. It was impossible to fortify a frontier of a thousand miles, especially a frontier with the weird shape devised in Versailles, with the big excrescence of East Prussia ruining in advance the hope of any effective defence against Germany. In any case, the usefulness of fortifications in modern war seems to be open to doubt, unless they are backed by a mobile force of sufficient strength—that is an armoured and motorized army.

For three days Poland fought the Reich alone. Then, on September 3rd, Britain and France declared war. It was a day of rejoicing for the Poles, although German bombs were raining on towns and villages. Everyone realized that nothing could save Poland from disaster, but it was a comfort to know that the sacrifice had not been in vain.

TRAPPED



THE invasion of Poland was the first example of a full-scale motorized campaign. That is why it struck the world as an unexpectedly rapid rout. Subsequent events proved, however, that the resistance offered by the Polish forces was remarkably stubborn and effective, considering the circumstances.

The tremendous strategic advantages conferred on Germany by the possession of East Prussia and Slovakia were used to the full. Gdynia was cut off from the rest of Poland almost immediately, but its garrison continued to fight, without hope of relief, to the last shell and the last cartridge.

The whole of Poland was actually in a position similar to that of Gdynia: cut off from friends and surrounded by enemies. Many great

armies have surrendered in less desperate plight, but the Polish army fought single-handed for several weeks.

As the battle progressed, the Germans threw fresh reserves into action. On September 14th 58 German infantry divisions and 15 armoured and motorized divisions were identified on the Polish front.

Poland could hardly call up reserves, for the whole country was incessantly bombed from the air and the resulting dislocation of transport crippled the Polish war machine long before the army was defeated in the field.

All the forces that could be mustered in the eastern provinces were, however, sent to the front. Eastern Poland was stripped of troops, as it was believed to be out of immediate danger. The pact of non-aggression between Poland and Soviet Russia had been recently confirmed and people had so much confidence in it that they sent their children eastwards, hoping that they would be safe near the Soviet border.

On September 17th the Soviet Government informed the Polish ambassador in Moscow that henceforth it proposed to regard the pact of non-aggression as null and void, in view of the "disappearance of the Polish State." At the same time Russian troops entered the country from the east, acting in agreement with the Germans. Since the eastern provinces of Poland were practically defenceless, the Russians could advance quickly, meeting with relatively little opposition.

By September 20th Poland was almost entirely overrun by German and Russian armies. The fortress (if that name can be properly given to a few concrete gun positions and dugouts) of Hel was still holding out against German onslaughts by land, by sea and from the air.

Modlin and Warsaw, too, were fighting. The defence of Warsaw, a city without fortifications and with only a small garrison of regulars, was an epic that has seldom been equalled before or since.

Although the main Polish forces had been ground and crushed by the panzers and dive bombers west of Warsaw, there was a part of the country still under Polish control—between the advancing German and Russian waves.

The Russian action frustrated the plan of holding the south-eastern corner of Poland, contiguous to Rumania. The campaign was virtually over, but fighting went on. No armistice was asked for or negotiated.

THE LAST BATTLE

BATTLE OF KOCK **2-5 OCTOBER 1939**



ADMIRAL Unrug and his men held out in Hel until October 2nd, 1939. Warsaw was forced to surrender on September 28th, when it had no more ammunition, food or water.

The story of Warsaw requires a chapter to itself. It was very different from that of Paris, but not unlike those of Tobruk, Stalingrad or Bataan. No other city of that size, however, and no other capital offered such resistance. The record of Warsaw is unique in history. There were sieges of capitals that lasted as long, or longer, but they were not carried out by forces comparable to those of the modern German army and air fleet; nor were they as ruthless.

More people were killed in Warsaw in the three weeks of siege than in the whole of Great Britain in three years of air raids.

Modlin was taken on September 30th. When the Germans entered the forts, they found there only 219 officers and 5,000 men, with 58 guns and 183 machine-guns, but without ammunition. That was the force that had resisted German attacks for about three weeks.

But in the east a small Polish group was fighting still, commanded by General Francis Kleeberg. Fully aware of the situation of the country, he gave battle on October 2nd, near Kock. In spite of the great superiority of the Germans, the battle lasted three days and Francis Kleeberg did not capitulate until October 5th, when Soviet armoured forces encircled his rear. The German communique issued after that last battle of the Polish campaign claimed the capture of 1,234 officers, 15,600 men, 20 guns, 180 heavy machine-guns and 5,000 horses. Such was the size of the last army which went on fighting, faced by 75 German divisions operating on that date in Poland and menaced at the rear by 52 Russian divisions.

Even after October 5th many groups of Polish soldiers carried on guerilla warfare for several months. But October 5th was the date of the last regular battle engaging important enemy forces.

Thirty-five days is a long time. From September 1st until October 5th Poland resisted Germany, giving France and Britain time to mobilize their forces.

It was too late for an offensive in the West. Besides, the German weapons were blunted by five weeks' fighting. The German casualties, as reported by the neutral press, amounted to 91,278 killed, 63,417 seriously injured and 34,938 slightly injured. According to the same source 559 German tanks were destroyed, but the actual figure was probably much higher—probably about 1,400. Moreover, 2,600 tanks required complete overhaul.

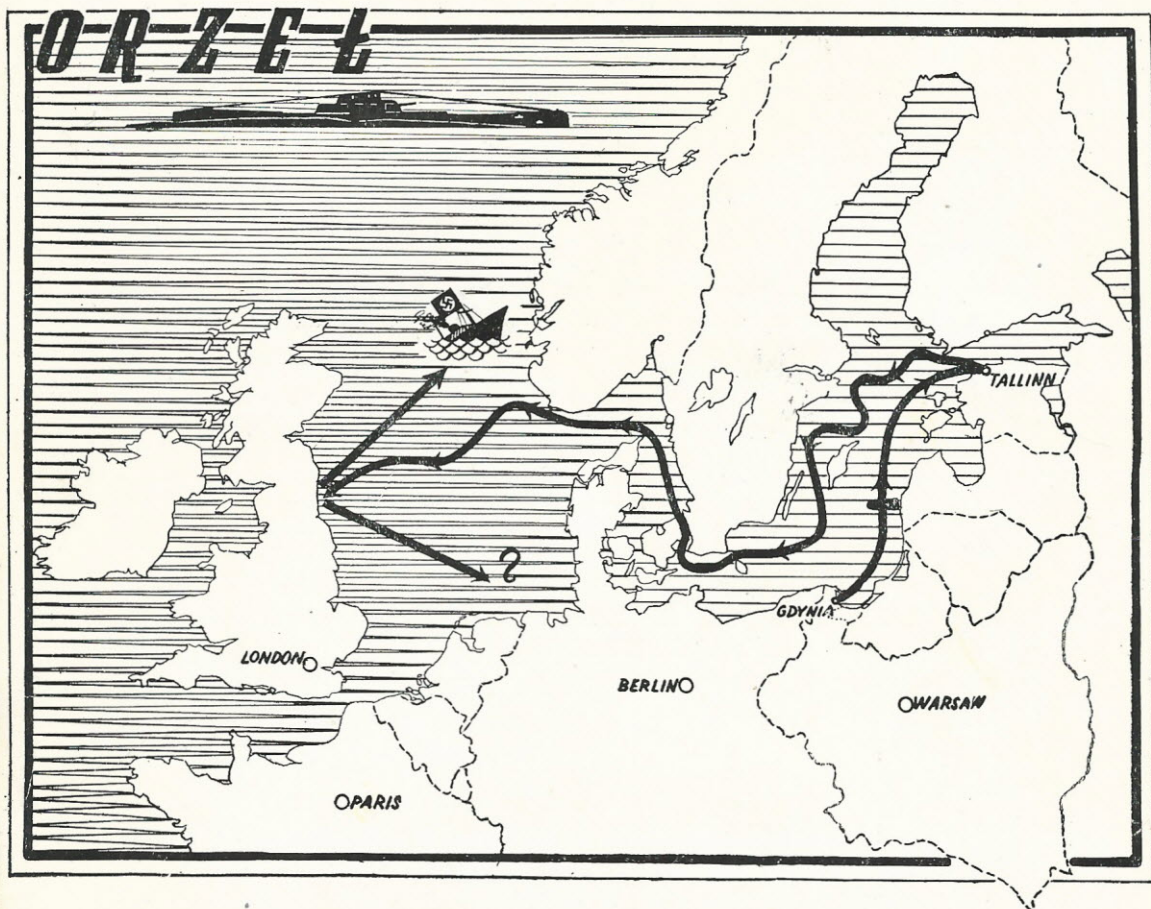
The Luftwaffe had lost about 1,000 aircraft; and the wear and tear of five weeks' continuous action, mostly from emergency aerodromes, made numerous overhauls and replacements necessary. The Germans could not contemplate another major offensive in 1939, especially as winter was approaching.

France and Britain were spared the most dangerous alternative of all—invasion in 1939.

Poland's losses were immense. The casualties, both military and civilian, were very heavy. The country was devastated and occupied by foreign powers. The army was smashed and the government had to leave the country. It was another Partition.

But the war of the Allied Nations against Germany was not lost in 1939—*one of the few moments when it could have been lost.*

A NAVAL ODYSSEY



THE small Polish Navy, composed of some destroyers, submarines and minelayers, could not play an important part in the campaign—if only because its base, Gdynia, was flanked by German territory on both sides and completely insecure.

Most of the Polish ships, except the submarines, received orders to leave the Baltic before the German attack. They joined the Royal Navy and have been serving with it ever since. The Polish merchant fleet was also directed to British ports, so as not to fall into German hands. But the submarines remained and were charged with attacking German shipping in the Baltic.

One of them, the *Orzel*, made a particularly adventurous voyage. The commander was suddenly taken very ill while the submarine was cruising in the Baltic. It was decided to call at Tallinn and take him to

hospital there. Violating international law, at the request of the German consul, the Estonians took away the torpedoes and navigating instruments of the *Orzel* and posted guards to keep it in port. As soon as the commander was safe on shore, the Polish crew kidnapped the guards and slipped out of the harbour, crash diving under strong fire.

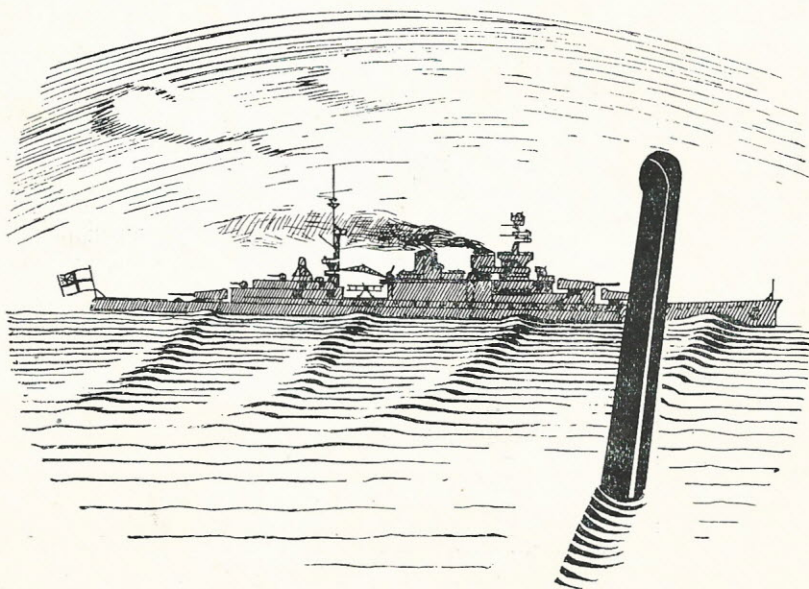
Lt. Grudzinski was determined to get to Britain, although the Estonians had taken his charts as well as his ammunition. After playing hide and seek with the German navy for weeks, the Polish submarine, navigating without maps, by instinct, slipped through the Danish straits into the North Sea. It was an incredible feat of seamanship. Reaching Britain was relatively simple after such a performance.

The *Orzel* then took part in the attempt to prevent the German invasion of Norway and sank the troopship *Rio de Janeiro*, carrying about 4,000 German troops, most of whom were drowned. After many other patrols, the *Orzel* left a British port and never returned—like so many other submarines. But its epic escape will never be forgotten.

One other Polish submarine, the *Wilk*, also reached a British port, while the others had to go to Sweden, where they were interned.

At any rate no Polish man-of-war was captured by the Germans and only two were sunk—by bombs in Gdynia, on September 1st.

The Polish Navy was the only fighting service of Poland that carried on the fight without interruption since the first day of the war.



PHOENIX



AFTER the smoke of the battle of Kutno had settled down, nothing but a heap of ashes remained on the fields over which Stukas had been raining death for days on end.

Like the Phoenix, a new army was rising from the wreck of the old. By May 1940 General Sikorski had organized in France an army of nearly

70,000. The training camp of Coetquidan, in Brittany, became the largest military camp in France. New divisions were formed there.

Unfortunately the Polish airmen did not get in France adequate facilities and no Polish squadrons were formed. When the invasion came, some Polish pilots finally obtained a few French fighters, but they could not achieve much with obsolete equipment, dispersed throughout the French Air Force and somewhat hampered by its weakness. For Polish airmen it was a second terrible frustration. Once again they saw Stukas ruling the sky, unable to do much about it. They stored up in their hearts reserves of hate and mortified pride, which were to be released a few months later, over British soil, with results which we all know. During the French campaign, Poles shot down 55 German aircraft.

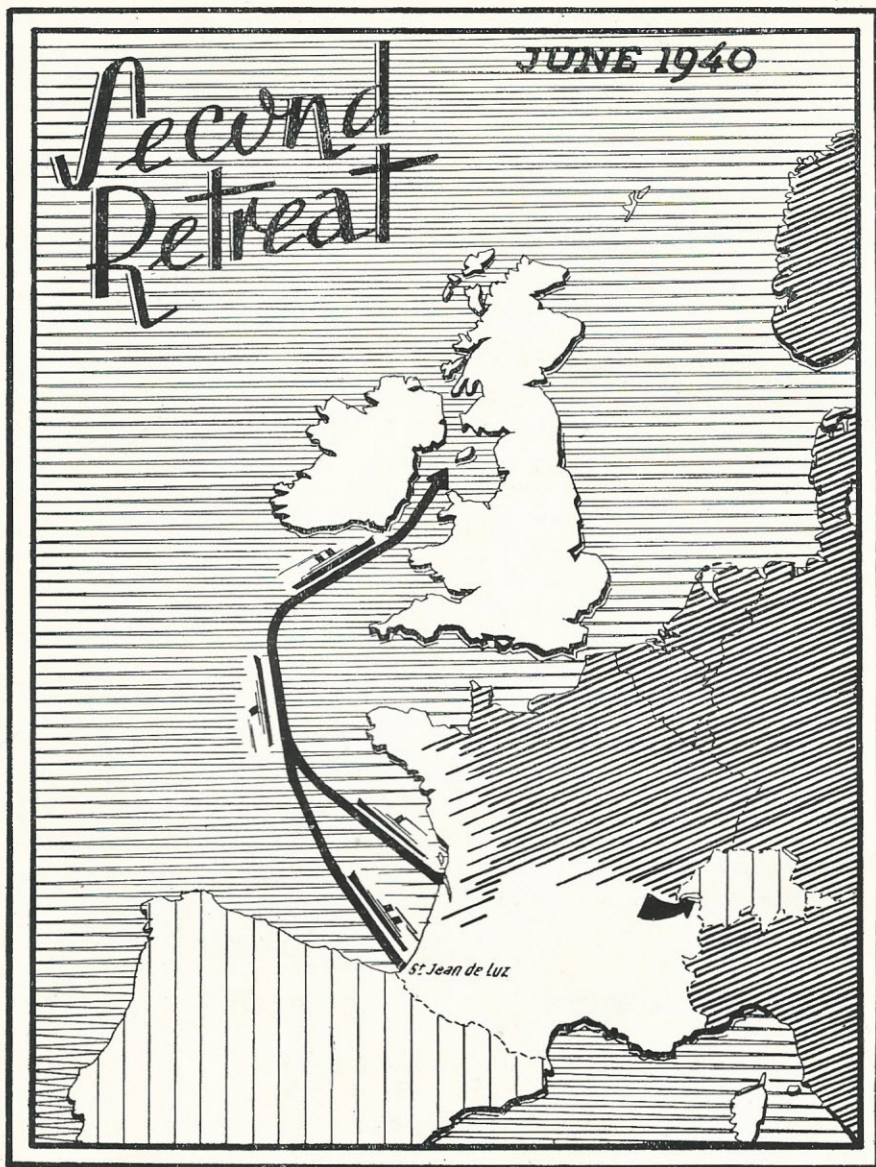
The soldiers were more fortunate, for they could fight under national colours, in purely Polish divisions and brigades. Two infantry divisions and one motorized brigade took part in the fighting near the famous "gap." They did well and scored some local successes, but they could not reverse the general course of the campaign. When an armistice was sought by the French, the Poles took the view that it did not concern them and went on fighting. Very soon, however, they were surrounded by the enemy. When the situation became hopeless, General Sikorski ordered the 1st division to fight its way to Switzerland. The French commanders in the field, however, begged the Poles to cover their retreat and General Duch chose the harder way, remaining absolutely loyal to Poland's ally. The majority of the soldiers of the 1st division did not reach either Switzerland or Britain, but they carried out their duty to the end. The 2nd division, fighting near the Maginot Line, retreated into Switzerland, to avoid surrender to the Germans.

Actually the first Polish unit to go into action outside Poland was the Podhale (Highland) Brigade, which started fighting in Norway on May 17th and took part in the capture of Narvik. The brief Norwegian campaign was a severe test, but the Podhale Brigade did well. The Podhale Brigade returned to France too late to take part in the French campaign on a large scale and most of its soldiers eventually found their way to Britain.

The Polish Navy was the only fighting service of the Republic to continue action without a break. While the Army was being reorganized and the airmen chafed in enforced idleness in France, Polish destroyers and submarines were working steadily with the Royal Navy. They were in Norway and they were at Dunkirk. It was at the outset of the Norwegian campaign that the Polish submarine *Orzel* sank the German troopship *Rio de Janeiro*, with several thousand fully armed soldiers. They were drowned—a small retribution for the death of hundreds of thousands of Poles.

No one who saw the catastrophic defeat of 1939 would have believed it possible for the Polish Army and Air Force to take part in the campaigns of 1940. And yet there were Polish divisions fighting in France and in Norway, there were Polish men-of-war patrolling the North Sea and—later in the year—there were Polish Spitfires over the Channel.

NO SURRENDER



THE Polish forces in France went on fighting even after Petain had proclaimed the Armistice. But they were isolated and could not continue their resistance. One thing was certain—no Poles would surrender to the Germans.

The 2nd division, which had been fighting near Belfort, moved southwards and eventually crossed the Swiss frontier, with full armament and in perfect order. The Polish 2nd division not only brought to Switzerland all

its arms, to save them from capture by the Germans, but it also brought with it some German weapons taken in the course of its former battles.

The Swiss authorities, acting in accordance with international law, interned the Polish soldiers until the end of the war. They lost their freedom, it is true, but they handed their arms to a neutral and honourable nation, instead of capitulating before a brutal and ruthless enemy.

The 12,000 men of the 2nd division are still in Switzerland. They find their idleness irksome, but their lot is far better than that of prisoners in German hands. Many of the soldiers of the 2nd division were young boys, who did not even have time to matriculate when the war started. There were also many university undergraduates. Many courses, ranging from high school to university standard, have been organized for their benefit and the time spent by these young Poles in Switzerland will not be entirely wasted. Their greatest worry is to be unable to fight the Germans, but they know all about the progress of the war, thanks to London broadcasts and to the newspapers which they are publishing.

Many Polish soldiers were killed or wounded in the brief but fierce battles of the French campaign. Some were cut off and could not escape. But a large proportion of them managed to get away again, in spite of all. Owing to the fact that they were fighting on sectors more distant from the coast than those of the British forces, they could not embark with them at Dunkirk. They had to go farther west and south to find ports which were not yet in German hands.

The skill in slipping through enemy lines acquired in the first escape from Poland served them well. One Polish general, accompanied by his chief of staff and several officers, went across the whole of France, from the north, where his brigade was smashed, to Vichy itself. They walked at night, hiding by day in barns, vineyards or forests. Frenchmen helped them everywhere at the risk of their lives. They finally arrived in unoccupied France still wearing their Polish uniforms and with automatics in their holsters. It was their ambition to remain armed and uniformed combatants throughout, even though France had surrendered.

The Carpathian Brigade, which was being formed in French Syria, crossed the frontier of Palestine after the armistice, in order to continue fighting on the British side. Later, it distinguished itself in Libya and at Tobruk.

General Sikorski went by bomber to London at the time of the collapse of France and arranged with Mr. Churchill the transfer of the Polish Army to Britain. It never occurred either to him or to any Pole to side with Pétain France. The position of Britain at the time was extremely precarious and Hitler boasted that he would be in London by September. But Britain was the only country still fighting the Germans and she was Poland's ally.

So Polish soldiers sailed for Liverpool from Saint Jean de Luz and other French ports. Polish airmen, who had little chance to fly in France, were particularly eager to go, for they knew that a job of work was waiting for them in England and they dreamed of flying Spitfires in air combat.

TWO CAMPAIGNS



30 INF. DIVISIONS

TIME TO MOBILISE — 24 HOURS

HELPED BY — NO ONE

**FOUGHT 35 DAYS, NO ARMISTICE
SIGNED**



100 FRENCH DIVISIONS

TIME TO MOBILISE — 8 MONTHS

HELPED BY —

BRITAIN	10	DIV.
BELGIUM	20	DIV.
HOLLAND	12	DIV.
& POLAND	2	DIV.

**ARMISTICE AFTER 37 DAYS'
FIGHTING**

1939
and
1940

A DIFFERENCE OF MORALE

UNTIL July 1940 Poland's defeat was considered by many people, including some Poles, to have been an ignominious one. But the events of the summer of 1940 in France brought about a radical revision of that view. Comparison was easy and the conclusion obvious.

France had a favourable strategic position. It is true that the Maginot Line did not reach far enough, but at any rate it limited the zone exposed to attack to little over a hundred miles.

Poland's frontiers were open along a thousand miles and there was no Maginot Line of any kind. East Prussia and Slovakia allowed von Brauchitsch to encircle Poland before a shot was fired.

France had a larger and better equipped army than Poland. A comparison of the financial resources of the two countries makes it clear that Poland could never afford armaments on the French scale. France had stronger armoured forces and a bigger air force than Poland.

Besides the initial advantage of size and armament, the French army had the inestimable benefit of having had eight months in which to mobilize and prepare defences. Poland had little more than twenty-four hours for mobilization, while the actual attack was made without declaration of war and was a complete surprise.

At the time of the German invasion, France had on her soil an important British Expeditionary Force. The Belgian and Dutch armies, fully mobilized, were there to take the first shock. The assistance of the R.A.F. against the Luftwaffe was an invaluable help. Finally there were even two Polish divisions and a motorized brigade fighting on the French front.

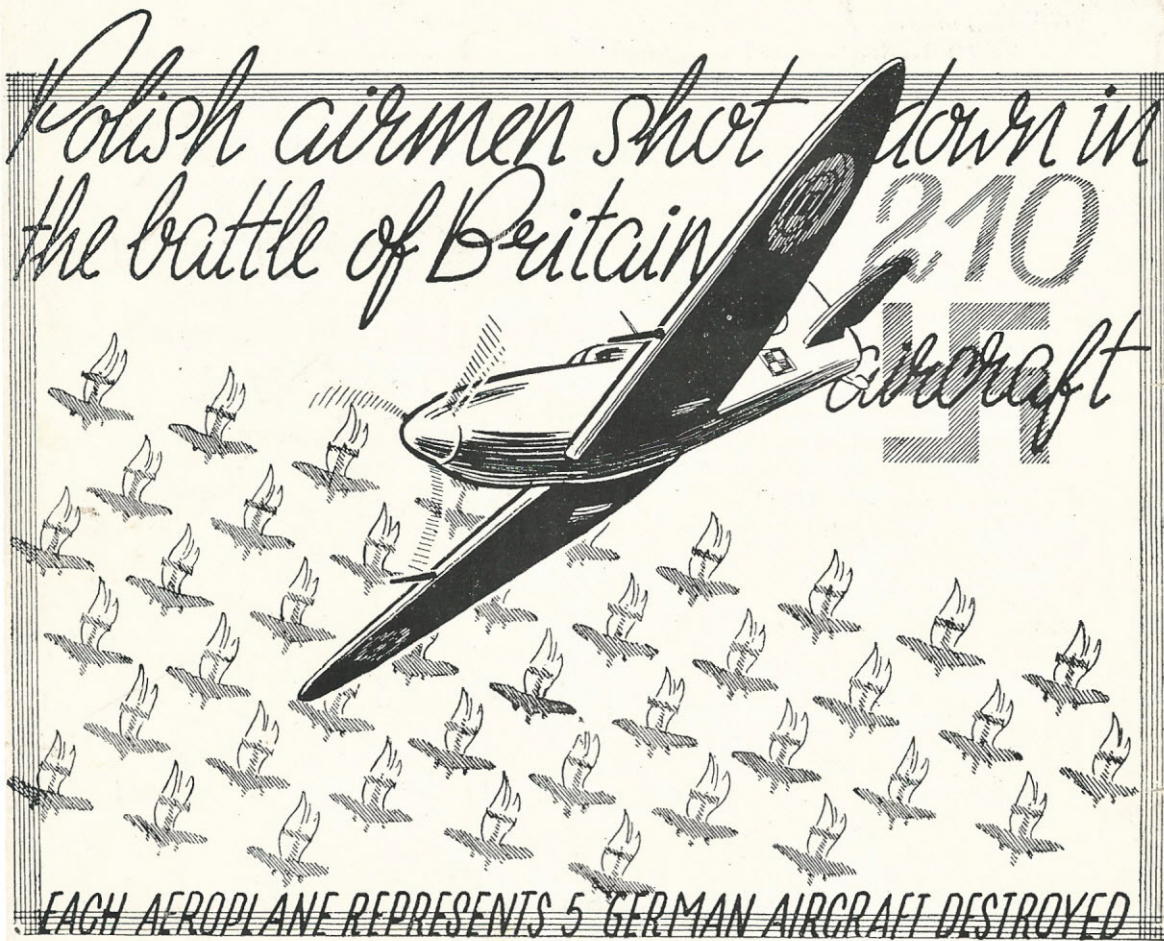
In Poland there were no French divisions, in fact not a platoon of foreign troops, to help the Polish army.

The rear of the French army was quite secure and the opportunities for retreat, by land or sea, were excellent—especially thanks to the Royal Navy. The Poles were fighting with their backs to the wall—a kind of wall that dropped bricks on the heads of people leaning against it.

The French had the lesson of the Polish campaign to profit by. The Poles were the first to experience a full-scale blitzkrieg. The Spanish war provided only a very incomplete hint of what was coming—and, besides, the French knew more about it than the Poles.

And yet the Germans had a harder task in Poland than in France. They never forced the Poles to surrender.

“ NEVER IN THE FIELD OF
HUMAN CONFLICT ”



EACH AEROPLANE REPRESENTS 5 GERMAN AIRCRAFT DESTROYED

ON the last day of August 1940, on the eve of the anniversary of the invasion of Poland, the first Polish fighter squadron of the R.A.F. went on its first patrol. By the end of September the squadron's score was 108 Germans shot down for certain.

So much has already been said and written about the Battle of Britain that little remains to be added. It was the second moment—after the autumn of 1939—when the war might have been lost.

Among the "few to whom so much was owed by so many" were the Polish fighter pilots of Squadron 303 and later those of other squadrons. "Its contribution to the Battle of Britain, in its most vital stage, during September," writes Arkady Fiedler, "was undoubtedly magnificent. Its

bag of Germans shot down was three times as high as the average of all the other squadrons. Yet its losses were only one-third of the average."

The official historian of the Battle of Britain, George Saunders, writes: ". . . Conspicuous among them are the Poles. Their valour is tremendous; their skill bordering on the inhuman. They have done great service. They are still doing it and they will go on doing it until victory, triumphant and complete, lights up their wings. We are beginning to understand the Poles."

It is a fact that the contribution of the Poles was out of proportion to their numbers.

On the most vital, decisive day of all—September 15th—the Fighter Command used about 20 squadrons. Only two of them were Polish, and yet when the record bag of 178 Germans shot down by fighters was counted at the end of the day, one in every seven of them was shot down by Polish pilots. The Poles were the fewest of the few—and yet they accounted for 26 German aircraft on that one fateful day.

There were other days when their share in the burden of the defence of Britain was even greater. For instance, on September 26th, when the total bag of Fighter Command was 31 Germans shot down, the Poles alone had destroyed 15 of them—nearly 50 per cent. On September 11th, another hot day, the Poles shot down 19 out of 80 German aircraft—nearly one in every four. But their performance on these days was not exceptional, nor was it just a frantic burst of fighting followed by inaction. The ratio of Polish victories to those of the whole R.A.F. in September 1940 was 1:7.2. It means that the handful of Polish fighter pilots accounted for practically one out of every eight German aircraft shot down in the Battle of Britain.

The Polish fighter squadrons did not rest on their laurels after the battle. They went on and the score of Squadron 303 stands today (September 28th, 1942) at 186½ certain victories, and 34 probables. Squadron 303 began its operational work on the last day of August 1940. It would be interesting to know the scores of other fighter squadrons over the same period. Very few, if any, have equalled the score of the Poles.

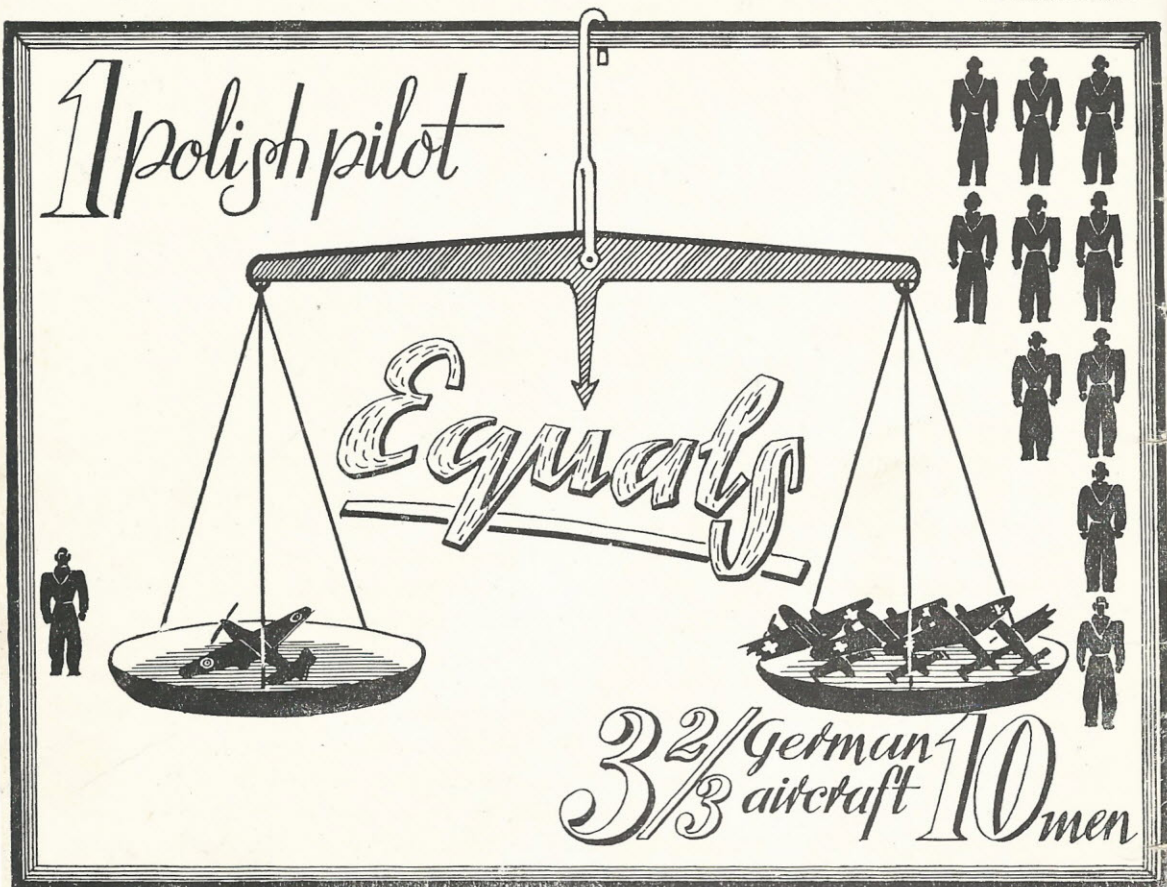
In the air fighting over Dieppe, the Polish fighter pilots shot down 16½ enemy aircraft—that is about 18 per cent of the total bag of the R.A.F. on that day—although the number of Polish fighters engaged over Dieppe was only about 9 per cent of the R.A.F. force sent across the Channel. The odd fractions mean that a German was shot down by several pilots pursuing him simultaneously.

The number of Polish fighter squadrons in the R.A.F. has increased and their total combined score now stands at over 600 German aircraft shot down (January 1944).

The Kosciuszko Squadron 303 remains, however, the top scoring squadron of the Polish Air Force and perhaps—if we take into account scores for the corresponding period—of the R.A.F. as well.

Such comparisons are, however, always rather misleading, because no two squadrons were fighting in identical conditions. Some theatres of war offer better opportunities for spectacular achievements than others.

THE VALUE OF ONE LIFE



THERE are many ways of keeping accounts in the grisly business known 'as war, but they all boil down to one question: can you kill as many of the enemy's men as he can of yours?

Nowhere is that question more important than in air warfare, in which the human element plays a predominant part. A soldier or a sailor generally does not know how many of his opponents he may have killed with his fire, but a fighter pilot does. That is why his personal efficiency is more easily measured than that of other fighting men.

Up to November 1942 the Polish fighter pilots in the R.A.F. had shot down for certain 500 enemy aircraft and probably a further 250. We shall take into account, however, only the officially confirmed victories.

The casualties of the Polish fighter force over approximately the same period amounted to 99 killed and 54 missing, of whom 17 are prisoners.

If we deduct the latter from the total, we have a net loss of 137 Polish lives. This is an ample estimate, since some of the missing pilots may still be alive.

It means, however, that for a loss of 137 pilots, the Polish fighter force destroyed 500 enemy aircraft. The ratio is roughly $3\frac{2}{3}$ enemy aircraft shot down per every Polish pilot killed in air combat. As about half of the enemy airmen killed or put out of the fight by every Polish pilot before he gave his life would be probably even much higher than $3\frac{2}{3}$ —anything between 8 and 10.

This means that the Polish fighter force is not a body of daredevils and crazy boys—as popular opinion would have it—but one of the most efficient fighting machines this war has so far produced.

I do not know the exact corresponding figures for other Air Forces, nor for the whole of the R.A.F., but I have good reason to believe the efficiency of the Polish fighter pilots, expressed by the shooting down of 500 enemy aircraft for a loss of about 137 men, to be quite outstanding.

It is important to note that this is not a freak performance achieved over a short period of time, or during the Battle of Britain alone, when the opportunities of mounting up high scores were of course greater than at other times. It is the average over a period of two years, including many sweeps over enemy-occupied territory, where the ratio of victories to casualties cannot be as favourable as on home ground.

For every Polish fighter they killed, the Germans had to pay with the loss of at least ten of their own airmen.

It seems that the value of a Polish life high up in the air is much greater than it is on the ground—if we are to judge by the amount of newspaper space devoted to the execution of a few hundred Poles and that of a dozen members of any of the western nations. The atrocities in Poland have become so much of a commonplace that people are no longer interested and they take the death of hundreds of thousands of Poles for granted. It is certainly not the effect of any callousness, but rather of a geographical perspective, which does much to reduce in our eyes the horror of anything that happens far away. It is even more noticeable with regard to China.

Although the value of a Polish life has slumped heavily in newsrooms and is not thought highly of by sub-editors, the quotation in the air is still ten Germans to one Pole.

Of course, the losses of Polish bomber crews have been heavy, and it is impossible to estimate what price *they* make the Germans pay for each of their men. But even if we should take the bombers into account, the balance would still be weighed heavily in favour of the Polish Air Force against the Luftwaffe.

The Germans are beaten this time by sheer fighting efficiency, confirmed by cold figures.

9,000,000 LBS. OF BOMBS

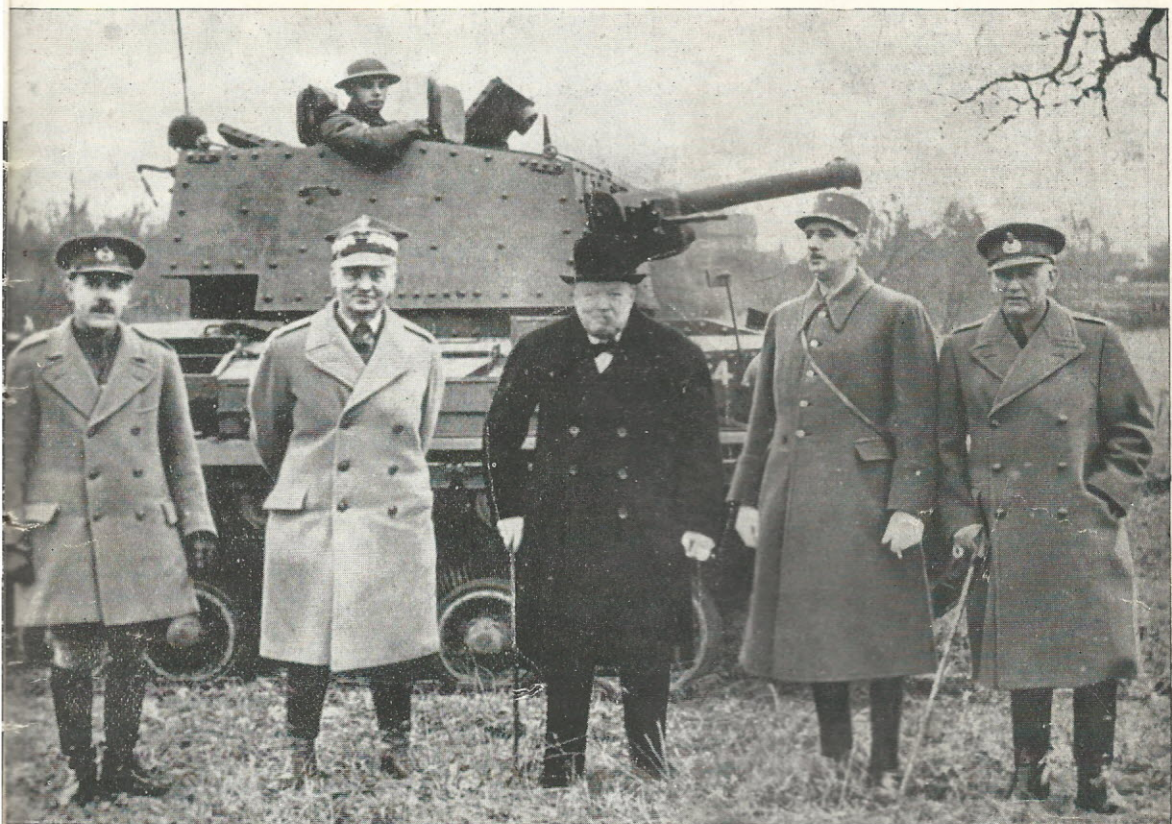


WHEN the Germans attacked the defenceless towns and villages of Poland in September 1939 they hardly expected that the Poles could bomb in return Berlin, Cologne or Bremen. The Polish Air Force had very few bombers at the time and they were all employed against the Panzers.

But the Polish Air Force in Britain has more bombers today than it had in Poland. They are bigger and better bombers, too.

A time will come, perhaps soon, when the total weight of bombs dropped on Germany by the Polish squadrons will exceed the weight of destruction rained on Poland by the Luftwaffe. But the Polish bomber crews will go on and try to double and treble the amount. So far they have dropped nine million pounds.

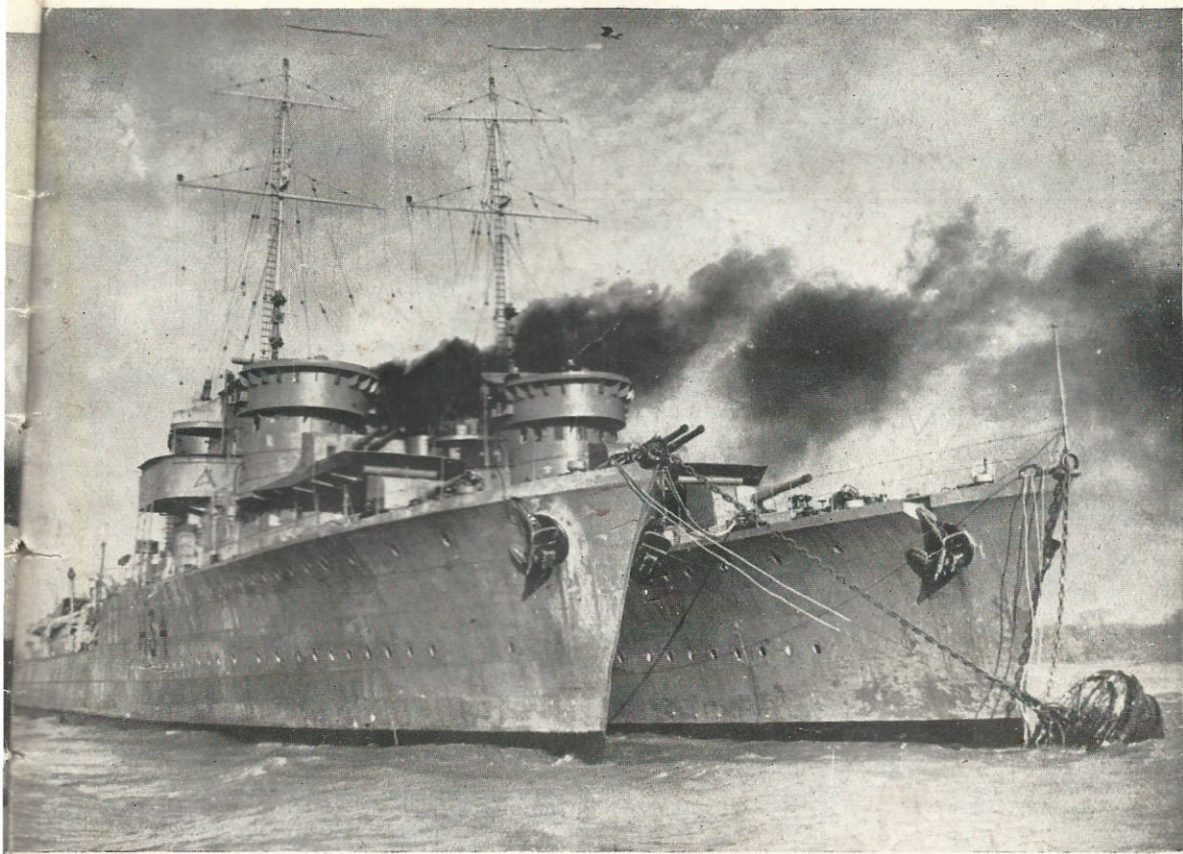
To see heavy bombers with Polish colours, or at any rate to feel their blows, must be a painful shock for those Germans who declared the Polish armed forces to be "totally annihilated" three years ago.



AS soon as General Sikorski brought his men to Britain, Mr. Churchill promised him that they should have the best weapons. He kept his promise and Poland has to-day stronger armoured units than ever before. These three men—Winston Churchill, Wladyslaw Sikorski and Charles de Gaulle—represent the will to victory of three great nations. Britain's great leader found at his side, in his country's darkest hour, men who wanted to share with him the hazards of war rather than surrender. Poles and Fighting Frenchmen came to this country at a moment when the prospect of victory was still remote and danger loomed ahead. Today they can visualise their triumphant return. But they will never forget the hospitality they found in Britain, the country which they trusted to win even when it was alone and besieged by a powerful enemy.



THE Poles did not come to Britain to be mere spectators. Very soon after their arrival they took an active part in the defence of the British Isles. For the first time in this war they had weapons worthy of their skill—British fighters. Only two Polish squadrons participated in the Battle of Britain, but their contribution was important. Today there are many more Polish fighter squadrons in the R.A.F. There are also bomber and army co-operation squadrons. The Polish Air Force serving with the R.A.F. is stronger than the Polish Air Force of pre-war days. It is the fourth strongest Allied Air Force in Britain, second only to the R.A.F. and the American and Canadian Air Forces, but stronger than the Fighting French, Belgian, Czechoslovak, Norwegian and Dutch Air Forces combined, It is still growing. Polish pilots who left their country in 1939 on foot, because they had not enough planes to fly, will return in the finest machines that British and American factories can build. Not all of them will return, for some have already given their lives in the defence of Britain and freedom.



LIKE the Air Force, the Polish Navy is stronger today than it was before the war. The ships lost in service were replaced by British shipyards and new units were added. Polish destroyers are doing convoy work in the Atlantic and on the northern route to Russia. Polish submarines are sinking enemy shipping in the North Sea and the Mediterranean. The Polish Navy is but a fraction of the great Royal Navy, but it shares its hardships—and some of its glory.

Polish sailors have received, up to January 1944, 32 per cent of all the British decorations (D.S.O., D.S.C., D.S.M.) awarded to members of the Allied Navies.

All Polish sailors live for the day when they will be able to drop anchor off Gdynia and return to the old Polish port of Danzig.



THE Polish Army, unlike the Air Force and the Navy, is much smaller than it was before the war—although it is the sixth strongest of the Allied armies. Naturally it cannot be compared in size with the first four—China, Russia, the British Empire and U.S.A., but it happens to be larger than the armies of the remaining 25 Allied nations. It is also the army which has been fighting in this war for a longer time than any other.

Here are Polish soldiers marching in Scotland: the wiry, gay, reckless troopers that held Westerplatte and Warsaw, that fought at Kutno and Kock, surrounded by enemy armour—and then escaped in disguise, through forests and mountains, to go on fighting in France. They are the men who crossed many frontiers and seas to be able to wear the uniform of Polish infantry. They never surrender, whatever the odds. They march on—it is a long road, but the end is in sight.