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The Second World War

★★★

THE
Grand
Alliance

Winston S. Churchill



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PREFACE

THIS VOLUME, like the others, claims only to be a contribution to the history of the Second World War. The tale is told from the standpoint of the British Prime Minister, with special responsibility as Minister of Defence for military affairs. As these came directly to some extent into my hands, British operations are narrated in their scope and in some detail. At the same time it would be impossible to describe the struggles of our Allies except as a background. To do full justice these must be left to their own historians, or to later and more general British accounts. While recognising the impossibility of preserving proportion, I have tried to place our own story in its true setting.

The main thread is again the series of my directives, telegrams, and minutes upon the daily conduct of the war and of British affairs. These are all original documents composed by me as events unfolded. They therefore constitute a more authentic record and give, I believe, a better impression of what happened and how it seemed at the time than any account which I could write now that the course of events is known. Although they contain expressions of opinion and forecasts which did not come true, it is by them as a whole that I wish my own share in the conflict to be judged. Only in this way can the reader understand the actual problems we had to face as defined by the knowledge then in our possession.

Space would not allow, nor indeed in many cases have I the right, to print the replies, which very often took the form of lengthy departmental memoranda. I have therefore been careful to avoid, so far as I can, throwing blame on individuals. Where possible I have endeavoured to give a summary of replies to telegrams. In the main however the documents which are printed tell the tale.

We are again dealing with war on the giant scale, and the battle on the Russian front involved as many divisions on both sides as were engaged in the Battle of France. At every point along a far longer front the great masses engaged, with slaughter incomparable to anything which occurred elsewhere during the war. I cannot attempt to do more than refer to the struggle between the German and the Russian Armies as the background of the actions of Britain and the Western Allies. The Russian epic of 1941 and 1942 deserves a detailed and dispassionate study and record in the English language. Even though no facilities for foreigners to narrate the Russian agony and glory might be accorded, the effort should be made. Nor should this impulse be chilled by the fact that the Soviet Government have already claimed all the honour for themselves.

Hitler's invasion of Russia brought to an end the period of almost exactly a year during which Great Britain and her Empire stood alone, undismayed, and growing continually in strength. Six months later the United States, violently assaulted by Japan, became our ally for all purposes. The ground for our united action had been prepared beforehand by my correspondence with President Roosevelt, and it was possible to forecast not only the form of our operations but also their sequence. The effective combination of the whole English-speaking world in the waging of war and the creation of the Grand Alliance form the conclusion to this part of my account.

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

CHARTWELL

January 1, 1950



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I MUST AGAIN ACKNOWLEDGE the assistance of those who helped me with the previous volume, namely, Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall, Commodore G. R. G. Allen, Colonel F. W. Deakin, and Sir Edward Marsh, Mr. Denis Kelly and Mr. C. C. Wood. I have also to thank the very large number of others who have kindly read these pages and commented upon them.

Lord Ismay has continued to give me his aid, as have my other friends.

I record my obligation to His Majesty's Government for permission to reproduce the text of certain official documents of which the Crown Copyright is legally vested in the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office. At the request of His Majesty's Government on security grounds, I have paraphrased some of the telegrams published in this volume. These changes have not altered in any way the sense or substance of the telegrams.



MORAL OF THE WORK

In War: Resolution

In Defeat: Defiance

In Victory: Magnanimity

In Peace: Good Will



T H E M E O F T H E V O L U M E

*How the British fought on
with Hardship their Garment
until
Soviet Russia and the United States
were drawn
into the Great Conflict*

Publisher's Note

The following changes in the text were received too late for inclusion in the first edition, but will appear in their proper places in future editions:

Page 48, line 13

for: On Saturday, May 10

read: On Sunday, May 11

Page 48, 3 lines from bottom

for: Duke of Hamilton's estate in Scotland

read: Duke of Hamilton's estate west of Scotland

Page 50, lines 20 and 21

for: There was the Duke of Hamilton. He had met him at the Olympic Games.

read: There was the Duke of Hamilton who had been known to the son of his political adviser Karl Haushofer.

Page 159, line 21

for: March 18

read: March 4

Page 160, lines 1, 2, 3 from bottom

for: When the returned Ministers laid before the Yugoslav Cabinet the text of the pact three colleagues resigned,

read: Even before the returned Ministers laid before the Yugoslav Cabinet the text of the pact, three colleagues had resigned,

Page 194, line 12 from bottom

for: was valid against Russia.

read: was not valid against Russia.

Page 254, line 8

for: Emir Abdul Illa,

read: Emir Abdul Ilah,

Page 356, line 27

for: shortly after Prince Paul had made his secret visit to Hitler at Berchtesgaden

read: as soon as the Yugoslav Ministers made their submission in Vienna,

Page 507, lines 2 and 3 from bottom

delete: especially Air Marshal Harris, the head of Bomber Command,

Page 535, line 11 from bottom

for: On December 6

read: On December 5

Page 620, last line

for: On the 12th

read: On the 11th

Page 744, line 1,

for: destroyers, maps

read: destroying maps



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Book One

GERMANY DRIVES EAST

1

The Desert and the Balkans

The Onset of Events in 1941 — A Secure Foundation — The Hinge of the War — False Dawn in the Desert — My War Appreciation of January 6 — A Firm Flank at Benghazi — The Campaign in Abyssinia — The Spanish Riddle — Vichy Obscurities — Threat of German Air Power in Sicily — Overriding Danger in the Balkans — The Need to Support Greece — Our Main Task — Hitler's New Year Thoughts — His Letter to Mussolini, December 31, 1940 — Coincidence of Our View About Spain — Hitler's Conclusions About Russia and Africa — Mr. Eden's Anxieties — Need to Limit Our Desert Advance — General Smuts' Telegram of January 8 — Directions to General Wavell of January 10 — Wavell Flies to Athens — My Telegram to Wavell of January 26 — My Reply to General Smuts of January 12.

LOOKING BACK upon the unceasing tumult of the war, I cannot recall any period when its stresses and the onset of so many problems all at once or in rapid succession bore more directly on me and my colleagues than the first half of 1941. The scale of events grew larger every year; but the decisions required were not more difficult. Greater military disasters fell upon us in 1942, but by then we were no longer alone and our fortunes were mingled with those of the Grand Alliance. No part of our problem in 1941 could be solved without relation to all the rest. What was given to one theatre had to be taken from another. An effort here meant a risk there. Our physical resources were harshly limited. The attitude of a dozen Powers, friendly, opportunist, or potentially hostile, was unknowable.