

THE ARMY EXPECTS AN AIR RAID

BY HENRY J. TAYLOR

LARGE sections of the public may not believe that German bombers can or will attack us on the American mainland. But America's high army authorities are convinced that the Nazis will strike. What's more, many of them are eager that the American people should know this. The morale and strategic purposes of such a raid, they explain, can be defeated if the public understands clearly what it is all about.

Where will the enemy strike? "We look for them first over Washington and New York," I was told, "although none of the large Eastern and Midwestern centers can be considered immune."

When? "Any time. They'll come over. Make no mistake about that!" Important air officers, top commanders, the men who must stop the enemy, gave me this blunt answer.

They urged the need for a better understanding by ordinary

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Americans of what such raids would aim to accomplish. That is why I have written this article. That is why THE AMERICAN MERCURY is co-operating to obtain the widest attention for it. Unless air raid wardens, nurses' aids, civilian defense workers and the people at large recognize the danger — not so much in the raid itself as in its effects on public opinion — the Nazis may succeed in attaining their primary objective.

There is a feeling among our most important air staffs that when the enemy comes there may be loud and dangerous shouts of "Another Pearl Harbor!" There may be panic pressures to keep more airplanes at home. There may be a wave of apprehension. None of these things need be — and none of them will be if the facts are more widely known and understood in advance.

As one who has seen Nazi bombers attack from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, over London, Gibraltar, Egypt and the Middle East, I know that any frenzied shouts of

"Pearl Harbor" would be unfair to the army and to the top officers involved. More important, it would be unfair to the American cause since it would play right into the enemy's hands.

Recently I visited vital U. S. Army Air Corps Interceptor fields from Florida to New England. Previously, I had been abroad with many of the same American staff officers who now command those fields. We had been together during their training periods in England, and while they were taking our planes into action elsewhere. The settings on this side are different — no ack-ack fire every night, no blazing shafts of wandering searchlights, no quick commands for fighter squadrons to take the air. But the men are the same.

I asked them how they could expect to do in the United States what is not done any place in the world; namely, develop a shut-out against enemy attack. Their answers were specific enough. "We can't do it. And the Nazis, of course, know we can't. There simply is no way to stop a scattered air raid."

And that's the central fact which the public needs to know. It is impossible to mass enough interceptor planes and anti-aircraft batteries to keep off every Nazi at-

tacker. To attempt to do that, all our fighting production would have to be retained at home, *where the enemy would like to have us keep it*, and even then bombs would fall.

The Nazis cannot attack in force and they cannot maintain sustained raids. Hitler's Luftwaffe at this stage cannot really hurt our war effort. Yet there are several first-rate reasons why they may and probably will come. While the amount of physical damage they could do would be trifling in relation to the total set-up, they would hope to work an immense amount of moral havoc in our midst.

Nazi bombs could start a great hue and cry among us about inefficiency, lack of preparedness and vulnerability. Nazi bombs could pin down here more of our war equipment and fighting men than are actually needed. That would add up to significant military achievements by the Nazi mission. If the raid succeeded in getting our public sufficiently excited and worried, Hitler and Goering and Goebbels would consider it worth the heavy investment.

Furthermore, the Nazis would thereby please the Japs by offering a friendly retaliation for our raids on Tokyo. As far as the German people are concerned, Nazi propaganda would have a wonderful dish

to serve with headlines of "Washington burning! White House wrecked! New York a shambles!" This would be the Goebbels description of the first wisp of smoke, no matter how small. Now that Allied bombings are increasing over Germany, it would mean a lot to Hitler to print such exaggerations. It is inconceivable that the Nazi mind has overlooked the advantages of a raid, however costly and however limited in its physical effects, in terms of its psychological consequences inside Germany and inside the U.S.A.

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Goering knows how to get planes here. When it is over, we are not likely to know exactly how it was done—any more than the Japs knew exactly how Doolittle and his boys managed the job.

A squadron can hop from Germany to the barren stretches of Labrador, let us say, with the greatest of ease. From such a hiding place it could come down along our seaboard, drop its load of explosives, and return. Such a trip is readily within Nazi bomber range. Both the *Graf Zeppelin* and the *Hindenburg* in their day surveyed and charted the air currents around Labrador and the Germans had

weather stations in the Far North continuously until expelled by American and Canadian forces.

Or miscellaneous planes can be catapulted at sea. The Nazis have done a lot of pioneer work with catapult devices. Germans experimented with this in Long Island harbor, using their catapult *Friesenland* and *Schwabenland* regularly off our shores, before the war began. Their new sea-raiding cruisers carry planes and aircraft carriers may also be sneaked out.

There may be other ways of doing it. The answer in army circles to queries about the how of it is simple. "Of course they can do it. Why not?"

We would, of course, be warned by highly scientific radio devices and by spotters. It is the Interceptor Command's task to meet attackers in the air. But when single planes are diffused over a wide area, no intercepting operation can meet them all. The few that get through would suffice for Goering's main purposes. As the sirens scream, the civilian defense forces spring into action, police cars screech down the streets and searchlights stab the sky, as the ack-ack fire breaks out with a thundering roar and throws a barrage of high shrapnel, the people of the city under attack cannot know

that only a few scattered enemy planes are overhead. The external excitement and action are as intense against a skeleton raid as against massed air might. Generally the planes are so high that nobody can see them anyhow.

Where does our anti-aircraft figure? Well, it discourages the enemy from the target, tends to keep him high and often drops him when he ventures within range. But it has to work in closest relation with the interceptor forces, for when defending planes are in the air the anti-aircraft must shut down or it will hit our own planes. This takes hair-trigger timing and the most intimate co-operation.

For obvious military reasons, armies withhold details of damage after any raid. Wisely, the censorship lid goes down tight on what the enemy has accomplished or failed to accomplish. Inevitably, therefore, the rumor factories start production. In all the confusion and drama and noise — in our case

heightened enormously by the novelty of the experience — the raid seems effective when it really may have been a dismal bust.

From the enemy's standpoint it would be enough. Enough for exploitation at home to raise the sagging morale in Germany. Enough to stimulate protests and bickering in America. Enough to cause local and Congressional demands for more anti-aircraft and planes and other equipment to make every one of our myriad population and industrial areas invulnerable.

Our air defense officers are good, their interceptors and detection apparatus are good, their anti-aircraft is good. They are fully prepared, on the alert, and entirely able to repulse any concerted attack and to make it far too expensive for the Nazis to stage large scale raids. But they can't stop raids by scattered planes. It isn't possible and it isn't worth it.

The role of the public is to avoid hysteria.



LITANY

BY CHARLES ANGOFF

WHEN the sun rises on another day
Of broken hopes, vain yearnings, and futile waiting,
And hearts get a little colder
And love more distant than the most distant star
And even sleep begins to lose its small solace —
O Lord, remember us.

When the vast unreason of the immemorial sequence,
Strife and peace and more strife,
Engulfs us with such calm and mocking disregard,
And all dreams and aspirations
Lose their ultimate comfort —
O Lord, remember us.

When the smiles of children, the final support,
Recede and join the independent throng,
Leaving us with the one certainty
That they too will soon
Wait for answers that never come —
O Lord, remember us.

When death comes with false friendliness,
Bringing an end to nothing
And no future intimations
Save the repetition of this life
But on the scale of a worm —
O Lord, remember us.