

The Lair of the Beast

by IVOR MONTAGU

HOW long will it take to finish off the beast in its lair?

"Southern England," as it is called, with its experience of V1, V2 and possibly other numbers to follow, has certainly good grounds to know the truth of Stalin's dictum that "a wounded beast in its lair does not cease to be a dangerous beast," and to be interested in the answer to this question.

The Allied armies are certainly approaching the very entrances to the lair.

As we write, the Germans have been expelled from the greater part of the territory of the Soviet Union, from most of France, from Belgium, Luxembourg, and Central Italy, from parts of Holland and nearly all Finland, from Rumania, Bulgaria, most of Greek territory, a great part of Yugoslavia and Hungary, the easternmost part of Czechoslovakia and part of Poland.

All the satellites have abandoned Germany and joined their forces to the Allies, except only Hungary, which is tottering in the same direction. On French, Greek and Soviet soil the Wehrmacht clings by its toenails only to the French western ports and eastern frontier, the Greek islands and dwindling pockets of the Baltic coast.

Both west and east, Allied troops actually fight on German soil, rule in German towns.

It is this overall picture which is responsible for the wave of optimism that affected the Allied peoples toward the latter half of last summer.

How far is this optimism justified?

In so far as it relates to the outcome of the war, entirely. Militarily, Germany's position is now hopeless. The factors of superiority that operated

during the campaigns of summer, 1944—two-front war, air supremacy, superiority of production, better troops—will operate likewise in any subsequent campaigns. The Germans have no hidden strength. They tried their utmost to prevent the Allied successes of 1944, and failed. They will fail in the endeavour to prevent future Allied successes.

But, and this qualification needs to be understood, in so far as this optimism relates, not to the outcome, but to the course of the war, expecting rapid and easy successes and a German collapse, it is not justified. The remaining battles will be won only by the same method as those that have gone before, namely, by exerting an effort greater than that of the enemy.

The wave of optimism was at its height with the swift engulfing of the German centre front in the East and the arrival of the Red Army within shooting distance of East Prussia in early summer, together with the sweeping swiftness of the German *debacle* in France.

The illusion was never shared, indeed, it was specifically warned against, by Stalin. Finishing off the beast in its lair, he emphasised before ever the summer 1944 campaign started (May 1 Order of the Day), would be yet more difficult than had been the expulsion of the enemy from Soviet soil, it would tax the combined strength of the Red Army and its Allies.

There is no doubt, however, that there were certain circles in the political and military world in the West whose judgment was momentarily stampeded by the, to them, unexpected scope of the great successes in the West.

There is a certain type of mind among the leading circles of the West that is a "sucker" for Goebbels's propaganda. Without in the least being Fifth Column in intention, often devoted in intention to the Allied cause, it yet believes solemnly all the propaganda of the enemy. The Red Army was underestimated, not only in 1941, but consistently till 1944; the German retreat in the East held to be, at least in part, voluntary, "to shorten the line"; the "Atlantic Wall" and "Fortress Europe" were believed to be, if not impregnable, at least too strong for those who (deep-down) felt themselves military idiots compared to the mighty Wehrmacht; and the French Forces of the Interior were looked on as a useless rabble.

When the event (i.e., Allied military, productive and organising skill—the mulberry ports, the air and airborne divisions, the skilful command and eager courage of the troops) had disproved all these things, such circles jumped to the other extreme and assumed that the enemy was at his last gasp and incapable of continued resistance.

They failed to perceive that now at last the enemy's supply lines had been shortened, in truth and not in mere communiques, while those of the Allies were drawn out. Nor did they fully note the big role played in completing the rout of the enemy, in delaying his concentrations during the first stage of the battle and, in the latter stages, in hampering his retreat and enabling Allied spearheads to speed forward to encircle and annihilate; by the mass scale of the French resistance movement. This role will not be repeated anywhere in the battles on the further route to Berlin.

The front now facing the Allies in the West is not any longer the paper wall along the Atlantic, which the Germans can never have had during the war either time or labour to make

continuously deep, and which was planned mainly as strong-points to be reinforced *after invasion* from an interior reserve situated on hostile territory far from Germany, a reserve which, since the guts were torn out of the total Reichwehr by the Red Army, could never be made numerous enough.

The front facing is now very formidable indeed. Note, for example, that Patton's men, the American Third Army, were forced to remain motionless for months, not at the Maginot and Siegfried lines, but principally at the Moselle, with both these great pre-war-prepared defence belts still intervening before Reich territory is reached.

Northward, where these defences are less strong, we have seen from the stubbornness of the fighting around Aachen, from the German success at Arnhem, from the difficulty of winking the enemy out of Southern Holland up to the Maas—with innumerable further water obstacles, including three or more mouths of the Rhine, intercepting any outflanking move—the complexity of the obstacles ahead.

Allied supremacy in man-power, in morale, in air-power, in weight of material, is such that the enemy front certainly *can* be broken at any point, but only at the time-cost of first assembling that superiority in position. With only Cherbourg, and possibly Rouen, to depend on as entry ports, with supply lines and pipe lines necessarily extending hundreds of miles, that accumulation could not be accomplished in a day, a week or even a month.

The German disaster, with its loss of the 7th Army and some half million men, was grandiose. But the garrisons left isolated in the coastal areas behind the Allied lines were not, as some hastily ill-judged, an evidence of German errors, but an offset to the triumph. Long after the loss of Paris and

Brussels the Nazis held (they still hold at the moment of writing) the western ports, Lorient, St. Nazaire, the approaches to Bordeaux, and Dunkirk, and it is only a short time since their expulsion from Brest, the other channel ports and the Scheldt mouth.

At the cheap cost of these garrisons an immense delay has been imposed on the development of the Allied onslaught against the German frontier from the West.

A lot of comparably misleading nonsense has been written (not from the Soviet side) purporting to show it as typical Fuehreresque military intuition that the Wehrmacht has for so long clung to the Baltic coast.

Certainly we need not see in this any military triumph; the German command did not desire to see its troops here repeatedly cut off and steadily ground down, and the ultimate price in badly-needed soldiers will be higher here for Hitler than that of holding on to the ports in the West; but none the less, the refusal of Hitler to start a panic pull-out here to avoid or escape from encirclement, the decision to hold out here to the last, has imposed a cramping delay of months on the Red Army right wing.

Survey the Eastern front as a whole, the task facing the Red Army after its swift victories of early summer.

The Germans here, though of course diminished in quality, are still huge in quantity. The figures revealed by Stalin on November 6 this year showed that 180 German divisions still face the Red Army, one more than the figure operating here in 1942. Certainly internal divisional strength must have declined, but this fact, that after all its losses the Wehrmacht in the East still numbers more divisions than in the year that it reached Stalingrad should make people appreciate the finishing-off job that still has to be done.

On the central route to Berlin the Red Army had reached the Vistula and Warsaw. But this was not the Dnieper, the Germans were hundreds of miles nearer their production bases, the Red Army hundreds of miles further away from theirs, and the battered railways that intervened included many of a gauge imposing complete reconstruction. The Dnieper, in any case, imposed a halt before Kiev could be taken. But here, not only was a proportionally longer time required for accumulation, but the position of the Germans to the north meant that any premature central blow exposed a flank to a riposte.

Immediately to the north East Prussia thrust out eastward. Here, although the Red Army stood on the frontier, are situated the strongest defensive positions in all Europe. Starting with natural features of lake and marsh, they have been steadily strengthened ever since the last war, not over a period of the duration of the present German emergency, but over thirty years. The several belts succeed each other for a depth of from 75 to 100 miles, continuously from the east frontier to Koenigsberg, with every village a strongpoint and every contour saturated with defences.

Any premature attempt to remove this outflanking threat from any centre advance would itself have been outflanked by the German 6th and 12th Army positions northward to the Gulf of Finland. To clear the way to Berlin, the Red Army has had to strike still further north, put Finland out, isolate the German positions in the Baltic States and patiently gnaw them away. The fact that, after the whole autumn campaign and the recovery of Esthonia, Riga, all Lithuania but Memel, the German troops surviving in Latvia still hold, with the tip of Oesel, access to the Gulf of Riga, and still number 30 divisions (forty per cent. on this one sector, of the entire

strength engaged by the Allies in the West), together with the fact that as yet only the outermost belt of East Prussian defences has been penetrated, gives an idea of the obstacles that have been overcome, and still remain to be overcome before the lair of the beast can safely be invaded from the Warsaw direction.

The southern flank of the German centre was guarded by the Carpathians, and anyone who recalls the difficulties encountered by the British and U.S. forces in northern Tunisia, near Etna and clambering up the spine of Italy will appreciate the obstacle constituted by a chain far sterner than the Apennines. The campaign by which this has been turned, overshadowed for the western public by the freeing of France, represents one of the most extraordinary feats of the Red Army during the whole of the war.

It was a campaign exceptional in its political as well as military execution, and matching in both its strategic conception. Rumania and Bulgaria were switched against Hitler; a half million German troops engulfed on the way, another German army group thereby cut off hopelessly in the Balkans, admitting moderate British contingents into an emptied Greece,* and the way cleared for a drive over thousands of miles of what was formerly hostile territory into the Reich through Budapest.

Without the political policy that has brought to the surface the democratic forces in Rumania and Bulgaria, the operations now pressing the Germans on the Danube and Tisza would have been quite impossible.

* Here, too, note the hindrances imposed on Allied movement by the German continued maintenance of Germans in the Aegean islands which would require diversion of considerable forces to reduce them.

This wonderful campaign has multiplied by a fourth the difficulties of the Wehrmacht, imposing upon it a threat as immediate, and requiring as intense concentration in defence, as those on the Rhine, the Vistula and the Baltic. But it should not be supposed that further progress—at such a huge extended distance from base—will be any easier to make preparations for than on any of the other three sectors.

So far we have concentrated on depicting the military-positional strength remaining to the German armed forces. This picture would be wholly one-sided if it did not at the same time emphasise their *basic* rottenness and weakness.

This weakness derives from the complete exhaustion of reserves, both of morale and material.

All the strength of Germany is in the periphery of its defences. The super-total mobilisations have kept the divisions in the contracting outer ring at full number, but there is nothing more to scrape from the bottom of the pot. The Volkssturm of defeated Germany in a fifth year of war cannot compare in vigour to the Home Guard or partisan detachments formed by peoples in their fresh rage of recovery from initial German successes. The industry which is already outmatched by U.S. production and hindered by loss of resources and bombing from the air can only fall further behind. No inventive malevolence of V1s, V2s, or the whole arithmetical series to Vn, can redress the balance. No matter the haphazard murder these weapons wreak in London, they can have no more effect in arresting the ultimate march of the encircling armies than if they fell in Timbuktu. Whatever the obstacles facing the Allies, there is nothing within Germany's power to do that can prevent the Allies from overcoming them. The German armies that could not hold the Leningrad defences, the Carpathians, the Dnieper,

or prevent the Western Allies from entering France, cannot hold any defences that the Allies are resolved to burst open; their best effort can only magnify the effort needed by the Allies, it cannot thwart it.

And this material fact is the basis of the exhaustion of morale. The Germans, leadership and people, know by now that they cannot win, that they cannot prevent the victory of the Allies. Hopes of splitting the Allies, since the Teheran and Moscow Conferences, since the defeat of Dewey and his appeaser backers, since the fiasco of the crime of General Bor, have faded to unreality. The appeal now, when it is not a simple threat of execution for disobedience, is entirely

mystical, to "destiny," to "God's love for Germany," which providence cannot abandon. A mysticism that the reality ahead will jolt to pieces.

Truly German fascism is at last on the brink of the abyss. But, as Stalin wrote to the Red Army last February: "Never in the history of wars has there yet been a case of the enemy jumping of his own accord into the abyss." To win the war one must push him into it. He will struggle yet with the fury of the doomed. His position is not so weak that it will not require an almighty shove to get him over the edge. This must be understood. But it is in the power of the peoples of the United Nations to give that shove, and it is not in the power of the enemy to prevent it.

The Labour Party Conference

by P. G. BARSTOW, M.P.

ON December 11 the most important conference since 1939 will be held at the Central Hall, Westminster, and decisions of far-reaching importance will be arrived at. This conference will be followed with the closest interest not only by the citizens of this country but by those who have felt the weight of the Nazi yoke in the formerly occupied countries of Europe. During the war years political controversy has been comparatively slight, and the political truce has maintained the relative strength of the main political parties, so that with the end of hostilities in Europe we shall be in the same position as in 1939, provided that the conference endorses the Executive's decision to fight the next election as a separate political force.

The Conservatives are reorganising their political machine and many of their old diehards will be replaced by young candidates from the forces. Similarly, the Liberal Party is endeavouring to stage a come-back and

they have a fairly large number of candidates in the field. Despite the adhesion of Sir William Beveridge, the Liberals are not likely to cut any ice in the final result, and the struggle will be between the right and left in politics.

In an educated, politically conscious democracy there would be no doubt about the outcome of the struggle, but taking things as they will be, with the Conservatives claiming they were the main part of the rock of salvation, and at the end of six years of hard work and preparation as far as the working section of the population is concerned, we shall require to mobilise all our resources if we are to succeed in overthrowing the gang who not only led the people to the edge of the abyss in 1939 and who are now using their majority in the House of Commons to bolster up the interests of the class they represent. They, of course, have their superficial differences on details of policy, but as a party they can be relied upon to stand together when circumstances demand it.