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THE WAR · WEEK — Commentary on Current Events

Land and Weather Against Allied Forces In March Toward Rome

Two questions which for months have intrigued, or frequently disturbed, the mind of the average American are why the Allies have been so slow in opening a Western front, and why are we making such little progress against the Germans in the march toward Rome, says the Argonaut, San Fransisco.

The two famous reputable correspondents, Ernie Pyle in Italy, and William Philip Simms in Washington, have given the answers to those questions.

Simms says that weather is holding up the invasion of France. "It is a known fact that from now until the end of March the weather in northern France and the Low countries is abominable. When Marshal von Hindenberg faced the necessity of picking the opening date for his final campaign in that region he chose March 21, which was as early as that old gambler dared chance it. It may be, of course, that General Eisenhower will pick an earlier time to establish a bridgehead on the 'invasion coast,' but those who know the terrain best don't believe he will. Both ground and air are too full of water."

Invasion Time Set

Nearly every military strategist agrees with this logic, and Simms further says: "The Yanks and British will first have to cross the English Channel. They must carry tanks and guns and all the rest of their equipment with them. They must get ashore in the face of deadly resistance along the world's most powerfully fortified coast. They must climb up on the beaches and hold them as they did at Salerno and Tarawa, but on a vastly larger scale and at far greater cost. And they must keep on advancing, and keep on by sea. To falter might be fatal. To be defeated might cost us the war."

That, the Argonaut believes, is why the Big Four—America, Britain, Russia and China—agreed on a single program of strategy for the invasion, and selected General Eisenhower to execute it at a definite time, under definitely preagreed upon conditions and circumstances.

War in Italy Tough

Ernie Pyle, explaining the slowdown in the Allied drive on Rome, bluntly says this: "The war in Italy is tough. The land and the weather are both against us. It rains and it rains. Vehicles bog down and temporary bridges wash out. The country is shockingly beautiful, but just as shockingly hard to capture from the enemy. The hills rise to high ridges of almost solid rock. You can't go around them . . . so you have to go up and over. A mere platoon of Germans, well dug in on a high-rock-spined hill can hold out for a long time against tremendous onslaught.

"Having come from home so recently, I know you folks back there are disappointed and puzzled by the slow progress in Italy. You wonder why we move forward so imperceptibly. You are impatient for us to get to Rome. Well, I can tell you this—our troops are just as impatient for Rome as you. They all say such things as this: 'It was never this bad in Tunisia.' 'We ran into a new brand of Krauts over here.' 'Every day we don't advance is one day longer before we get home.'

"Our troops are living in a way almost inconceivable to you in the States. The fertile black valleys are knee deep in mud. Thousands of the men have not been dry for weeks. Other thousands lie at night in the high mountains with the temperature below freezing and the thin snow drifting over them.

"They dig into the stones and sleep in little chasms and behind rocks and in half caves. They live like men of prehistoric times, and a club would become them more than a machine gun. How they survive the winter misery at all is beyond us who have the opportunity of drier beds in the warmer valleys.

Path Is Tedious

"It is not the fault of our troops, nor of their direction, that the northward path is a tedious one. It is the weather and the terrain and the weather.

"If there were no German fighting troops in Italy, if there were merely German engineers to blow up the bridges in the passes, if never a shot was fired at all, our northward march would still be slow.

"No one who has not seen this mud, these dark skies, these forbidding ridges, and ghost-like clouds that unveil and then quickly hide your killer, should have the right to be impatient with the progress along the road to Rome."

Weather Will Break Soon

And we do not believe that anyone who has not suffered that mud and squalor, which held up the great Allied drives to victory in World War I, should be too impatient, either. Within a few weeks the weather will break in Italy, and with clear skies and drying terrain the Allies will move forward, into Rome ,and on to the Brenner Pass!

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VOICE OF THE PRESS

HUMAN PASTURAGE

Parsley, spruce bark and lawn grass are hailed by a chemist as valuable sources of Vitamin C. All right, we'll make the effort and eat that stuff they sprinkle on our boiled potatoes, but we'll be darned if we'll cut the lawn with our teeth or go out in the woods and gnaw trees.

—Windsor Star.

—o—

NO JAP HUMANITY

Japanese airmen are not provided with parachutes or other means for seeking safety, in the event of disaster in the air. The Jap is just as ruthless with his own fighters as he is with the enemy. Humanity as we know it finds no place in the Japanese heart.

—Chatham Daily News.

—o—

VERBAL MONSTROSITY

A news-reader on C.B.C. pronounced Christmas as "Xmas." Written out, Xmas has no place in decent society. Pronounced as abridged it is a verbal monstrosity which comes oddly from an agency intended to promote, among other things, culture and good speech.

—Ottawa Journal.

—o—

FRANKLIN'S WAY

Benjamin Franklin defended "yf" as a natural and perfectly understandable way of spelling "wife." Although Ben was yz in most things, he was yd of the mark on that one.

—Fort Erie Times-Review).

—o—

FUTILE EFFORT

Why should a man try to hide behind a woman's skirts when a woman herself cannot do it nowadays.

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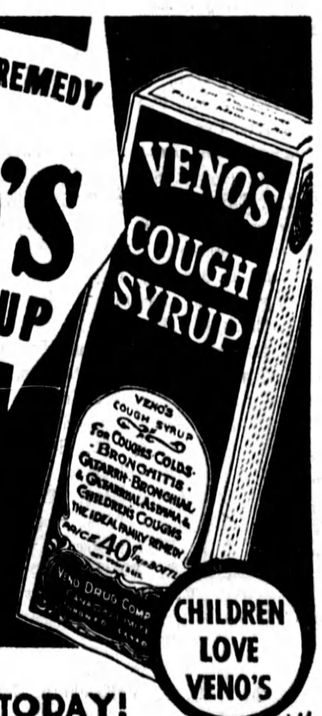

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1-44

THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA ANNUAL MEETING

Morris W. Wilson, President, says any degree of political freedom impossible under wholly planned economy. Challenges socialists to show how public would benefit by state monoply of banking.

Sydney G. Dobson, Vice President and General Manager, reports bank business at unprecedented levels. Assets reach new peak of over $1,500,000,000.

The threat to the personal liberty of all Canadians, inherent in the plans of the socialists for the nationalization of Canadian industry, was emphasized by Morris W. Wilson, President of The Royal Bank of Canada, at the bank's Annual Meeting.

Mr. Wilson reviewed the tremendous role Canada had played in this mightiest war of all time and the manner in which workmen and enterprisers alike had cooperated in it. "Despite this fact," he said, "we are being told by all the publicity methods revolutionary partisans can devise, that in order to win the peace we must change our entire economic system and launch out into new and untried paths, under new and inexperienced leaders. The theorists and visionaries who preach these doctrines of an economic revolution may be thoroughly honest and sincere. But the fact remains that the principles they advocate can only lead, as a final and inevitable result, to a completely regimented economy, and on this point I cannot do better than quote the Editor of the London Economist, a well-known writer of liberal views:

". . . A wholly planned economy "is incompatible with any degree "of political freedom. The possibil-"ity of a man's earning his living "in his own way, without let or "hindrance, is the essential condi-"tion of there being any freedom "of discussion, any freedom to op-"pose. If more than a fraction of "the electorate come to depend for "their livelihood upon the tempor-"ary masters of the mechanism of "the State—that is, upon the poli-"ticians—then democracy is at an "end."

"I am more convinced than ever that the menace of socialistic teaching is one which closely affects everyone in Canada in both his business and private life.

"These advocates of a new order have an astounding scheme, which will result in nothing less than complete regimentation of Canada. As you know, one of their principal objectives, and the first plank in their platform, is to nationalize the banks.

SOCIALIST MENACE

"Naturally, we are interested in preserving our business, in which so many shareholders have invested, and to which so many depositors have entrusted their savings. But even more as citizens than as businessmen, we deplore the rise of this creed, because we firmly believe that implementation of the socialist plan would ruin this generation and set Canada back centuries.

"It is as a citizen as well as a banker that I put before you some further considerations to which I hope you will give your earnest thought.

"The course of the socialist party in Canada has been charted for us in several books which make clear that nothing short of complete socialization of the means of production and finance will satisfy the party. That means domination of every phase of economic life, including agriculture, labour and capital. Therefore, because we all fall into one or other of the classes, it means domination of every individual.

"What would the socialists achieve by nationalization of the banks? Their book on social planning says that they will form one board of directors for the national bank monopoly instead of the ten boards which now operate the competitive chartered banks.

"Socialistc literature suggests that access to the books of the bank and a consequent rupture of the confidential relationship that now exists between bank and depositor, would be of inestimable value in determining taxation policies. But would this appeal to the depositor?

"Furthermore, as we are organized today, a prospective borrower may go from one bank to another if he fails to convince the first banker of his probity, ability and prospects; under the socialistic system, unless the prospective borrower could convince the state bank of the soundness of the project for which he sought to borrow money, and also that the transaction to be financed was in harmony with socialist party objectives, he would be turned down and would have no other bank to look to for a loan. Do you think that such a system would assure the borrower of as fair treatment as he now receives?

"I believe the answer to these two questions, affecting depositors and borrowers, is a positive 'No.' On the contrary, history and experience lead us to expect that such a government monopoly of banking would lead to favouritism of party adherents. At the same time, we should witness a spread of that sterility of ideas and enterprise which tends to accompany every human activity that finds itself in a position of unchallengeable power."

PRIVATE BANKING BEST

Mr. Wilson suggested that it was not simply due to chance that banking the world over had continued in private hands, but that the people and the Governments had considered it advisable from every point of view that banking should be free of political and partisan influences. He reminded his audience that Canadian banks were already effectively controlled by the Bank of Canada and that further intervention by the Government in the banking business would, in his belief, be superfluous and would not be welcomed by the majority who deal with the banks.

Mr. Wilson again urged business to speak up on its own behalf. "Business will have only itself to blame if, through inaction, it vacates or fails to occupy fields of activity into which it later finds that public opinion has forced the Government to enter."

Mr. Wilson saw no reason for approaching the post-war era with any defeatist attitude and declared that the same energy, initiative and selflessness which had developed in the war years, could be used for constructive purposes after the peace.

In all plans for the rehabilitation of devastated countries the United States and Canada would be looked to as leaders, he said.

POST-WAR REHABILITATION

"I personally believe that large outright gifts of food, raw materials, finished goods and machinery to backward and devastated countries will in the long run, and even from the most selfish point of view, not only contribute most to human welfare, but both in the short and long run be in the best interests of those nations which ca afford to make the gifts.

"If this is too much to expect of human beings in their present stage of development, the alternative must be loans on a very large scale on long and easy terms, or probably a combination of both loans and gifts."

GENERAL MANAGER'S ADDRESS

Sydney G. Dobson, Vice President and General Manager, in reviewing the bank's Balance Sheet said that the volume of business passing through the bank's books had been unprecedented during the past year. Total assets now exceeded $1,500,000,000, an all-time high in the history of the bank.

He reviewed at length the part played by the banks in assisting the country's war financing.

"There appears to be a misconception in the minds of some people that the banks purchase a substantial portion of the Government public issues and increase their earnings in this manner. This is not the case. During 1943 two Victory Loans were issued, realizing $2,692,000,000. The 4th Victory Loan floated in May last was purchased by 2,669,000 subscribers and the 5th Victory Loan in October, by over 3,000,000. In neither loan did the banks buy bonds for their own account. While there is naturally some change in the holdings of the original subscribers, relatively only an unimportant amount found its way into the banks.

"In common with the other banks, we have done everything possible to make these Victory Loans a success. Managers have encouraged customers to subscribe or to increase their subscriptions. All depositors considered capable of subscribing for an amount of $50 or more have been written to and advertisements have been inserted in the press urging depositors to subscribe to the full extent of their ability."

EARNINGS MODEST

Despite the tremendous increase in the business of the bank, earnings were modest, said Mr. Dobson. "I think that any fair-minded person will agree that the $2,100,000 paid to shareholders last year was a very modest amount to be paid to the proprietors of the bank, when we consider the size of the organization and the tremendous amount of business it is necessary to handle in order to earn that amount. Any other type of business working with assets of one and a half billion dollars would have been able to earn for shareholders a considerably larger return. If we consider this yield in relation to our two main earning assets, loans and investments, we find that the dividend paid to our shareholders was less than 1/5th of one cent on the dollar on the total of these two items, a very trifling handling charge, to say the least. I have never heard the claim made that Canadian banks are not efficiently run, therefore the answer must be that the profit in banking is small."

Mr. Dobson reported that the progress made by the bank's South American branches had been particularly gratifying and that its foreign branches were in a position to be of practical aid in promoting post-war trade.

The General Manager remarked on the efficient manner in which the bank's staff had dealt with tremendously increased business and provided new wartime services despite enlistments, and paid tribute to the enthusiasm and ability of the many young women who have joined the bank since the war began.

2,123 ENLISTMENTS

"The voluntary response of our staff to our country's call has been magnificent", said Mr. Dobson, "and there are now 2,123 men in the armed forces. Of this number 2,009 were employed in Canada, which is equivalent to 69% of our Canadian staff of military age at the outbreak of war.

"To these men the bank pays a portion of the difference between their bank salary and service pay. They retain their membership in the Pension Fund Society, and the bank pays their group insurance premiums. We shall welcome them when the time comes for them to return to their duties in the bank.

"Unhappily the number of casualties has doubled since I last reported to you; 67 of our young men have now given their lives in the cause. Their names, which we hold in honour, appear in the printed record of this meeting, and we extend our heartfelt sympathy to their families."

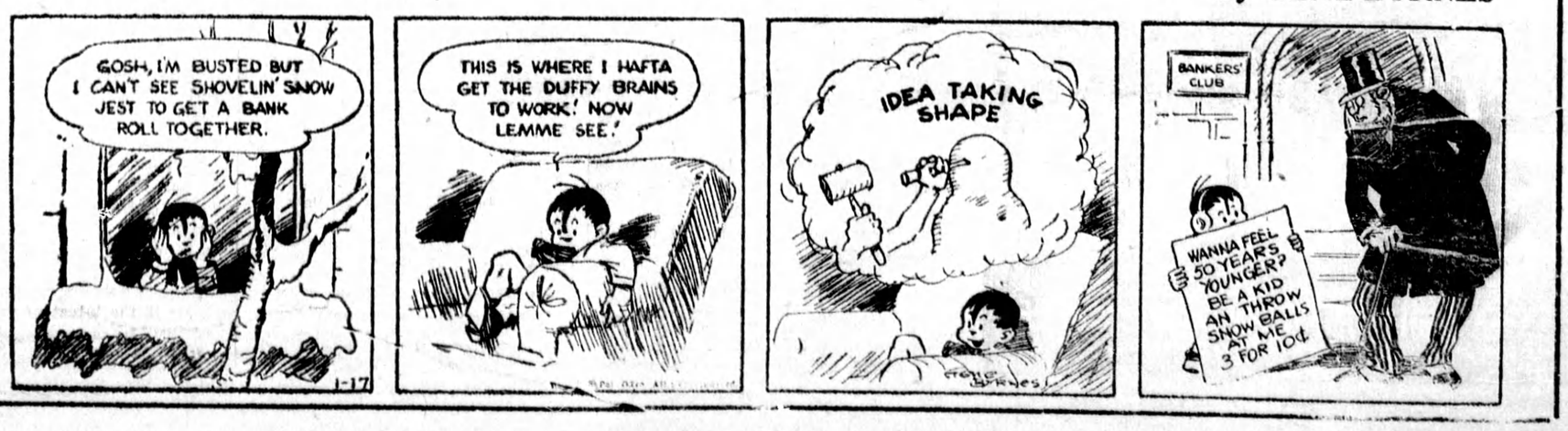
Tiny Atlantic Isle Is Strategic Spot

A pinpoint of land in the South Atlantic, less than 38 square miles in area, was disclosed by the United States Army as one of the most vital spots in Allied strategy. It has served as a funnel for shipping 5,000 planes to Africa.

The War Department lifted the veil of secrecy from the role played by tiny Acension Island, a dot on the plane ferry route between South America and Africa.

Ascension is only one stop on one route which the air transport command uses in its trans-Atlantic operations, but the department declared that probably no base has such strategic significance.

Construction of Wideawake field on Ascension was started March 30, 1943, when a detachment of Army engineers moved in and started working day and night on the pile of volcanic rock, cinders, dirt and one oasis of vegetation on the mountainside. The work was completed in three months amid the greatest secrecy.

Since war began, Great Britain has spent $6,660,000,000 in the United States on supplies of all kinds.

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