

FIELD ABCA

A weekly discussion sheet published for 21 Army Group by the Army Bureau of Current Affairs

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN TO TELL US

At intervals since last autumn, ABCA has been publishing, in *Current Affairs*, articles about "What you'll find in Europe." Though they were written from the best information available at the time, those articles couldn't be anything more than forecasts. Now that you've actually arrived, you're in a position to compare the forecast with the reality ; and it's worth recalling the gist of what those articles tried to say.

1. WERE WE RIGHT ABOUT THAT BILLETING FAMILY ?

We said that the Europe to which you'd be going would be quite different from anything which history had known. We said that the first European family with whom you came in contact would be likely to have several of its members missing ; to have been living for four years without proper news of the way the war was going ; to have been short of clothes, cigarettes, and (in the towns) of food.

Discussion points :

Well, that was a general forecast. How does it tally with your own particular experience ? What was the condition of the first family you encountered ? Translate their condition into terms of a British family living under a German occupation of England and Scotland ; and see how it sounds.

2. HOW MUCH MUD HAS STUCK ?

We said that German propagandists and their Quisling collaborators had been hard at work for four years trying to persuade the French, Belgians, Norwegians, Dutch and the rest, that their trials and sufferings were the fault of the British, who first let them down on the battlefield, and then proceeded to blast them from the air. Further, that Europe's quislings were predicting that the Allied occupation would be neither milder nor more disinterested than the German one, and that the farmer's chickens and the nation's monuments would be treated much more harshly than they had ever been before.

Discussion points :

Do you see any traces of any of this slung mud having stuck ? Do you remember this suggestion in the pamphlet on Holland and Belgium :—"The main thing is to avoid saying or doing anything which might make some people think that the Germans had hit a nail on the head" ? Well, can you think of practical instances of what the Germans would like your unit to be saying and doing now ?

In ten years' time will people be saying in the local café : "When the English arrived, we offered them eggs and they wouldn't take them. They said : 'You wait until food starts getting through before you give eggs away.' And by God we needed those eggs" ? Or will they be saying something quite different ?

3. WHAT DO THEY RECKON TO DEMOCRACY ?

We said that the supreme Nazi-Fascist contempt for Democracy was expressed on the score that the democracies did not know how to conduct that most sublime of human activities—the fighting of a totalitarian war. Well, here you are. The local people will probably be convinced by now that you can fight a totalitarian war. Many of them will be relieved if they see for themselves that, in the process, we have not ceased to be a democracy—that we can fight without a dictatorship, without the assistance of a Gestapo.

Discussion points :

How can we make it clear to them by the way we act that we are not only efficient invaders—the Germans were that ; or well-behaved individuals—the Germans were that, too, at first, in Denmark and in Paris ? How can we also make it clear to them that we are emissaries of a practising democracy, who are bringing with us not, like the Nazis,

a form of government which we consider will be good for them, but the right for them to choose their own future once again ?

4. WHICH ARE THE RESISTERS ? WHICH THE QUISLINGS ?

We said that in the four years during which the worst that had happened to most of us was that we had got, at times, browned off, the people of Europe had been going through something which we can scarcely imagine. But we affirmed that they had not been passive, they had not taken this treatment lying down, they had not stood apart from the war.

We said that you would be received by many people in Europe not as liberators, but as allies who had succeeded in joining up with the guerrillas ; and that the people you met would have fought the same battle as you had, only they'd have seen it from a different viewpoint.

Discussion points :

What evidence and traces of resistance have you come across in your district ? Which particular form (underground newspapers ? sabotage ?) did resistance to the Germans take in your part of the world ? What is the name of the party which collaborated with the Germans in the country where you find yourselves now ? What were the names of its leaders ? What was its badge and colours and uniform ?

In what ways do the local members of the resistance movement take a different view of the war to your own ? Do any of them seem to feel that you've arrived on the late side ; that, if you'd come earlier, brother Jacques and cousin Fernand wouldn't have been dragged off to slave labour in Germany ? And what's the answer to that ?

5. CAN YOU TELL US THE NEXT GERMAN PROPAGANDA LINE ?

We said that until the whole of Germany itself was in Allied hands, the Germans would still be able to use their own radio, as well as airborne pamphlets and underground rumours to confuse and mislead Allied opinion, with three main objects in view :—

- (i) to split the Allies in the hope of securing an easier Peace ;
- (ii) to lay the seeds of future wars ;
- (iii) to show that democracy wouldn't work.

Discussion points :

Can you anticipate, and think out in advance, half a dozen propaganda lines that the Nazis are likely to try out ? Isn't it quite likely, for instance, that the Nazi radio will address to the people of the country in which you are fighting urgent warnings that the Allies are wilfully destroying mines and factories in order to get rid of a trade rival, while at the same time they address to yourselves leaflets warning you that you are being swindled by the local population ? Any other suggestions ?

6. WHAT SORT OF AMBASSADORS ARE YOU ?

Finally, you may remember—as far back as August, 1943—that A. A. Milne wrote in *Current Affairs* :—

“ At the end of 1938 England's reputation on the Continent was probably lower than it had ever been in her history. By 1941 it stood higher than it had ever stood. For a whole year, from June, 1940 to June, 1941, there was only one word in all the enslaved countries of Europe which meant Hope, only one word which could be made to spell Deliverance—**England**.

“ Since those days two other mighty Deliverers have arisen, Russia and America ; but it was ‘ England,’ the British Empire, which saw Europe through ; it was in England that her people found Sanctuary.

“ . . . the British people have never quite regarded themselves as part of Europe. Millions of them had never set foot on the mainland of Europe. Millions of you to-day will be going into every corner of Europe . . . Seeing you, millions of Europeans will be seeing, for the first time, not the few moneyed travellers and careless holiday makers, but the real British people.

“ To them at first you will just be England ; the England of their dreams ; the deliverer. But, as they get to know you, you will become people like themselves, but different because you are ‘ English,’ the people of Britain. By you they will judge whether the verdict of 1938 or 1941 was the true verdict. By you they will know the Britain of the years to come . . . ”

Discussion points :

Any comment about that ? Is it just a piece of high-flown rhetoric ? Or is it just a plain statement of fact ? If so, what lines of action does it call for on your part ?