

FRENCH FLEET

L.T. Sunco - Thurs., July 4, 1940

All day today, the news ^{*poured in -*} ~~came~~ the news of one of the most astounding events ^{*all*} in history, the naval battle between the British and French. I doubt whether anything remotely like it has ever happened in the history of the European nations, any precedent for the British attack on French warships in the ^{*North African*} Port of Oran, ~~North Africa~~. Here in the United States, as we celebrate our ~~xxxxxx~~ Independence Day, we can only gasp at what occurred on the other side ~~xxx~~ of the Atlantic.

Ever since the downfall of France two weeks ago, the world has wondered - what about the French Fleet? When the Government of Marshal Petain surrendered to Nazi Germany, the armistice terms provided that the Navy of the defeated republic should be interned in French harbors. One stipulation of the armistice was - Germany and Italy promised not to use the warships of France against Great Britain. The British, on their side, protested loudly that the French Government had promised solemnly never to let the French Fleet fall into German hands. And Britain, through the mouth of its Prime Minister, ~~xxx~~ made mock of the Nazi promise not to use French warships, cried jeeringly that Hitler's word could never be trusted. ^{*R*} But where

were the warships of France? That remained a secret. It seemed astonishing that the fourth largest navy in the world was a mystery, its whereabouts unknown. The world at large had no inkling of where those ^{great sea} ~~ponderous~~ squadrons of France might be.

Today the secret was disclosed, and in what dramatic fashion: ^{to the} ~~disclosed with an~~ accompaniment of cannon fire, ~~the~~ crashing ~~of~~ torpedoes, and the sinking of French warships. ^{Here} is the solution of the mystery:— The French Fleet was divided into three sections, one in British harbors, one in the French North African Port of Oran, and the other at British controlled Alexandria in Egypt. It was said that Great Britain could not allow the French Fleet to fall into German hands, if Britain could possibly prevent it.

Meanwhile, it appears that the French Government of Marshal Petain ~~xxx~~ was issuing orders to the French warships to return to ~~xxx~~ home ports in France. What would Great Britain do about it? ^{And that's the question which} ~~That question~~ was answered today by the news of ~~today's~~ ^{astounding events.}

In British ports were two French battleships, the two ~~xxxxx~~ oldest. Also two light cruisers, eight destroyers and

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two hundred smaller craft, including some submarines. At a pre-arranged signal, all these French warships were boarded by the British and taken over. There was no resistance, no bloodshed - save in one instance. One of the ships seized was the French submarine Surcouf, the largest undersea craft in the world. When the British Naval party ~~xxx~~ went aboard, there was a fight, which the British say was due to a ~~misunderstanding~~ misunderstanding. One British sailor and one French officer were killed. Three Britishers and a French officer were wounded. In the case of the other vessels, London ~~xxxx~~ declares that a majority of the French officers were opposed to the armistice with Germany, and ~~wanted to continue the war.~~ The men of the crews, however, thought different. If they were to ~~git~~ fight on the side of the British, harm might befall their families in France.

At Oran, in North Africa, French Morocco, were ~~xxx~~ three French battleships and a number of cruisers and destroyers. A British squadron, consisting of three battleships, an airplane carrier and other craft, steamed into port, and presented an ultimatum ~~to the French Admiral.~~ The ~~xxxxxx~~ French were given

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a series of alternatives - join the British in the war against Germany, or surrender their ships to the British, or sink them. Or the French squadron might sail to the West Indies and there be demilitarized. And still another choice, and this will have an interesting sound to American ears. Today, Prime Minister Chamberlain put it in these words - "The French ships might perhaps be entrusted to the United States to remain ~~xxxx~~ safe until the end of the war." That would have been an unusual thing on our part - to be custodian of the French Fleet, keeping it out of the hands of Germany. However, none of these many alternatives was accepted. The French Admiral rejected the ~~British~~ ultimatum, ^{which} ~~The Ultimatum~~ had a time limit, and when this expired, the British opened fire.

Berlin reports, quoting French sources, that the warships of France were not ready, did not have steam up - and they were in harbor and could not manœuvre. Yet they returned the British fire, and fought it out as well as they could. One French battleship was sunk. Berlin reports that it struck a magnetic mine dropped by a British plane. Another French battleship was heavily damaged, and ran aground. Two destroyers

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and an aircraft carrier were destroyed by the British shells.

But some of the French fighting ships managed to break through the British line of attack and get away. One of them, a giant battle ~~xxxix~~ cruiser. London states it was either the Dunkirk or the ~~Strass~~ Strassburg, both of them powerful sea battlers of the latest type. The escaping capital ship was torpedoed by the British but still it got away. Together with several other warships, the battle-cruiser, either the Dunkirk or the Strassburg, fled across the Mediterranean and reached the French Naval fortress of Toulon.

Today in the House of Commons, Prime Minister Winston Churchill stated that he feared the French loss of life had been heavy - because of the courage with which the French fought and because of the power of the British attack. What about British losses? Two men wounded - so says a late dispatch. And one airplane missing. Churchill paid tribute to the British Commander, Admiral Somerville, and he added this mordant detail. Admiral Somerville had previously distinguished himself at Dunkirk, in the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force and sections of the French Army. The Admiral saved a hundred thousand

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Frenchmen during the evacuation of ~~Bunkirk~~ Dunkirk - and today's news pictures him blasting and sinking French warships.

At Alexandria are one French ~~xxx battleship~~ battleship, four cruisers and some smaller craft. They are being held by the British. In addition, there are some other French units at sea. ^{These} ~~They~~ will be relentlessly pursued by the British Fleet, said the British Prime Minister today.

The Battle of Oran is today's bitter ~~and~~ ironic story of the Allies, those two famous Allies, Great Britain and France. France ~~was~~ beaten in the war, and the British refused ^{ing} to take Hitler's word. Therefore, British guns sank French warships. The story was told today in the House of Commons, and Winston Churchill told it. He spoke, fighting against the emotion that filled him. His voice choked up, and at times he was in tears. It was a hard tale for Winston Churchill to relate. As for the justice of the British attack, he cried:- "I leave it to the world and history."

The Germans, on their side, are calling it - "an act of piracy" and today Berlin was saying that the Battle of Oran would help to discredit Great Britain in the eyes of neutral nations. That of course meant mostly - the United States. The British House of Commons cheered the event, ~~xxx~~ but Winston Churchill did not respond joyfully to the cheers. At one point as he told the story, he seemed about to break down. When he ended, he slumped back into his chair - in tears. Then later he ~~xx~~ mumbled strange words - "I spy strangers." Yes, those do sound like strange mad words, but really they were only a regular ~~x~~ formula in the House of Commons. "I spy etrangers" - that's the traditional signal to clear visitors out of the galleries, as the House of Commons goes into secret session. So this evening the members of Parliament were secretly debating the British attack upon the warships of France.

What will France do about it? London considers it a sure thing that the Petain government will break relations with Great Britain. Here's the latest - it is reported that

the French government has ^{just} given orders to attack any British ship approaching the French coast. There's some surmise¹ that France may declare war. ~~But~~ that is considered unlikely - at least for the present. ^{however} ~~But~~ London ^{does} believe that France now will ~~may~~ help Germany, ~~willingly, even eagerly~~. Of course, it has been clear all along that France would have to coöperate in the attack on Great Britain, cooperate reluctantly, sullenly. But, now, after the Battle of Oran, ~~London~~ London thinks that France will go fully to the Nazi-Fascist side. One expectation is that France may line up ~~in~~ in a grouping of Latin powers - Italy, France and Spain. ^{It} All of this hard story is in the brutal logic of events. Britain's only weapon against Nazi Germany is the blockade. And it's now a case ~~of~~ of blockading France as well as ~~Germany~~ Germany. If Britain is to starve Germany out, France too will starve. Yes, a bitter logic, which is made the more inevitable by the Battle of Oran.

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VATICAN

The British have promised not to bomb the Vatican.

An authoritative statement issued in Vatican City today states that the British Minister to the Holy City has given formal assurance to ^{the} Pope, ~~Pius the Twelfth~~. The British will not do any bombing that might possibly damage the tiny independent state consisting of the Vatican and St. Peters. The pledge, in fact, seems to include the entire city of Rome.

~~It is to be recalled that~~ The Italian Government, the moment it went into the war, declared Rome an open ~~and undefended~~ city and moved all warlike agencies away from those ancient banks of the Tiber. The purpose ^{being} ~~of this was~~ to preserve the venerable monuments of the Eternal City from destruction by bombs.

~~Apparently the British say okay.~~ Today's story states that British aviation forces have been ordered, in the words of the British Minister - "to respect the sacred character of Rome."

~~(It is pointed out that the city as a whole can almost be considered a religious monument.)~~ Rome has more than three hundred and fifty churches, most of them ancient, and innumerable other mementoes of Christianity ~~(from the past.)~~ So apparently it's agreed on all sides ⁵ that the City of the Caesars and the

Popes is not to be bombed. Well, anyway, it's hard to think of British aviators blasting the Coliseum, in which innumerable romantic British couples have sat in the moonlight.

But one wonders about the City of London — London with its Westminster Abbey, its historic St. Paul's Cathedral, its Tower, its Christopher Wren churches and hundreds of other places? Will the Italians reciprocate and get the Nazis to do likewise? The drone of hundreds of bombing planes may soon give us the answer to that.

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It appears now that young ~~George Earle~~ George Earle will not join the British Air Force. His father is the United States ~~xxx~~ Minister to Bulgaria, and used to be Governor of Pennsylvania. Remember Governor Earle, who made a lot of New Deal history as Chief Magistrate of the Keystone state? Naturally, there was quite a bit of interest when it was announced the other day that the son of an American diplomat abroad, a Minister accredited to a foreign capital, was going to join the armed forces of a nation in the European war.

How did that square with the ~~xxxxx~~ American Neutrality Law? ~~It didn't - that's the point of the story today.~~ Minister Earle cables that his son George has given up the idea of fighting with the British, because ~~the State~~ ^{our} State Department in ~~Washington~~ issued word that this would be a Neutrality Law violation.

The State Department confirms this, and explains just what kind of violation. It's a bit of a twister. The only way young Earle could get to Great Britain from Bulgaria would be on a British ship. And it's against the Neutrality Law for an American citizen to travel on a vessel of a belligerent nation.

As a result of all this, the son of the American Minister to Bulgaria, instead of enlisting with the British, is going to return to the United States.

BOMB

There was a vicious bomb outrage late this afternoon at the New York World's Fair - a criminal attempt against the British Pavilion. The bombers missed their mark. The explosion did not occur inside the British Pavilion. The bomb had been removed, when it blew up - and ^{two}~~three~~ detectives were killed.

This afternoon thousands were in the Fair grounds, celebrating the holiday of Independence. The British Pavilion was crowded. Then, somebody noticed - a ~~xxxxxxx~~ suitcase. It had been left in the Pavilion, and it looked suspicious. The police were called, and detectives of the bomb squad carried the suitcase away. They took it to an open area between the Polish Pavilion and the Venezuelan building. And there it exploded. ^{Two}~~Three~~ detectives lost their lives, and one was seriously injured.

No clue to the outrage is reported thus far. But the inevitable surmise is - Fifth Column plotters doing their villianous work on the Fourth of July.

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President Roosevelt celebrated the Fourth of July in appropriate fashion today. At his Hyde Park estate he turned over to the Federal Government the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, built to contain papers and documents pertaining to his political career. It's a two hundred and fifty thousand dollar structure and will be crammed with records and historical material - for the political career of Franklin Delano Roosevelt has ~~xxxxxx~~ been a long one and covers some of the most important years in American history. It's easy to imagine what a mine of treasure

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these archives will be for the historian of the future. (with the wealth of material dating back to the days when young Franklin D. Roosevelt became Assistant Secretary of the Navy *In those days he* in the World War. ~~He~~ [^] was the custodian of important secrets.

~~these~~ Then think of the Rooseveltian place in subsequent ~~xxxxxxxx~~ politics - his long championship of Al Smith for the presidency; And then his own presidency.)

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There was one bit for the record which the President might have added today - but he didn't. Some surmised that he might take the occasion to declare himself on the subject of a third term. That would have been appropriate indeed. But nothing of the sort. The President made an address, talked enthusiastically about the library - but no mention of a third term. *And a-l-u-t-m.*

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