

Following is script of broadcast by Rt. Hon. R.G. Casey,
Minister of State, Middle East, after the 9 o'clock news
to-night:-

In the last six months that I have been in the Middle East a great deal has happened. Perhaps you will let me give you a short account of it all as I have seen it.

May and June were bad months, as you will remember, during which we went back from in front of Tobruk to the Alamein position, only a little way from Cairo and Alexandria.

Plans and arrangements for getting our own back began almost at once - at the same time as the plans for the British and American landings in North West Africa were being made. It was arranged that our attack in the Western Desert of Egypt should be co-ordinated with the North West Africa landings, although our Western Desert operation was to start about a fortnight earlier so as to allow enough time for the Eighth Army to break through the hard crust of the enemy's desert positions and be ready to move forward in step with the other operation 2,000 miles or so to the westwards.

The Middle East preparations took some time - as not only had the very strong enemy positions at Alamein to be broken through - but we had to prepare for a subsequent advance of over 1,500 miles.

While all these preparations were going on, the Royal Air Force and the Navy were working and fighting by day and by night, striking at the enemy's supply lines across the Mediterranean and on land. Malta was gallantly fighting on, with a constantly tightening belt.

In due course all was ready and at 10 o'clock on the night of October 23, the 8th Army attacked at Alamein. A cloudburst of artillery fire and air bombing descended on the enemy. Then followed ten days of very hard fighting to penetrate the maze of enemy minefields and wire - and to get through into the open country beyond - you know the rest of the incredible story of the 8th Army's westward advance of 1,500 miles which is still going on - and will go on until the 8th British Army of the Nile - and the 1st British Army - of Tunisia - join hands - when all of North Africa will be in our possession.

Many things have been learnt in the Middle East in the course of the last few months. High amongst these things is the fact that the Royal Air Force and the Army have achieved a degree of co-operation that I don't think has ever been reached before. The degree of consistent and close support that the R.A.F. have provided for the Army reached a new high level in recent months that will be a model for the future.

The forces in the Middle East come from the United Kingdom, America, India, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa - as well as contingents of Poles, Free French, Greeks and others of our Allies. It is very difficult to give public recognition to the troops from each of these countries in a way that reflects the respective parts that they have played in any operation - without giving away information to the enemy. At one time the public gets the impression that Dominion troops are bearing the greater part of the burden - and at another time that United Kingdom troops are fighting the whole battle. Neither is true. On the whole the heat and burden of the day - and the achievements - have been fairly distributed all round.

You know, I have the impression that people in the rest of the world haven't got a very clear picture in their minds of the Middle East. I think it would not be unfair to say that most people's knowledge of the Middle East is derived from the Bible - and from the fact that a most attractive young woman called Cleopatra came from there. Believe me, there is a lot more to the Middle East than this. It is a vast area - about the same size as Australia or America and with a population of over 60 millions - ruled by a dozen different Governments. It is the area where three great religions of the world had their beginnings - religions to which more than half of the population of the earth now adheres.

The Middle East is the ancient land bridge between Europe and Asia over which went the caravan routes as far as China. In our modern civilization it is a most important area through which, amongst other things, will pass the great world air routes after the war.

It is an area of stark and dramatic contrasts - barren deserts and areas of great fertility and productiveness - almost side by side. It contains untold reserves of petroleum. It is the buffer between our two principal enemies - Germany and Japan. It is principally for this reason, and from its importance as a great oil producing area, that it derives its great strategic importance.

The importance of the Middle East from the point of view of the war is now beginning to be publicly realized. It is quite possible that the war can be won from the Middle East as a springboard. On the other hand, I believe that the war could quite possibly have been lost in the Middle East, if things had gone badly.

In this regard the impression in the Middle East is that 1943 is going to be a year that will long be remembered with dread by the Italians. It will be the year in which they will pay a heavy price for having kicked France when she was down. Only one thing can save the Italian people - and that one thing they will not have the courage to do.

The enemy - principally Germany - has long recognised the importance of the Middle East in the world struggle for which they had for so long been preparing. They devoted a vast amount of effort and money to an attempt to undermine the Middle East - to make it Axis minded - in the ten years before this war. They failed - because their propaganda was false and self-interested. Their wireless propaganda, however, continues and I can only say that I hope that nothing will happen to stop it. From our point of view it is a gift from heaven - or from somewhere - as the Arab people have found out that it is false. There is a primitive weapon in Australia known as the boomerang which, if you're not careful come back and hits the thrower. Evidently the Germans haven't heard of the boomerang.

It is a remarkable thing - but it is true to say that after three years of war, there is no serious shortage of any essential food, clothing or supplies amongst our troops, or the European or native populations of any country of the Middle East. The fact that one can make such a sweeping statement is remarkable, considering the shipping position and general war conditions - and remembering that the Middle East in peacetime imported about five million tons a year of civil supplies.

This state of affairs has not come about by chance, but by reason of a very great deal of work and foresight and collaboration between an organisation of ours called the Middle East Supply Centre working with the various Governments and the British Embassies and Legations in the Middle East. It has been a job of house-keeping on the grand scale.

The Middle East Supply Centre - what I may call the Head Housekeeper - is rapidly becoming an Anglo-American body by the welcome addition of a growing group of able Americans added to the British staff - an example of what I hope I may call successful Anglo-American Co-operation that I have been most glad to foster and encourage.

Another point of interest is that, when the war eventually ends, the presence of British forces in large numbers in the Middle East will have resulted in the creation of roads, railways, aerodromes and port and harbour works on the grand scale - in other words, in very much improved communication facilities throughout this great land.

/And now

And now just a word to you about what the troops are thinking and talking about. I have endeavoured in many ways to keep in touch with this aspect of things. Apart from their own personal war surroundings the answer is - first and foremost - their families at homes - and - secondly - what sort of a place the world is going to be after the war. They are interested in the way the minds of those in authority at home are moving as regards post-war conditions - and quite naturally, as to how they themselves, as individuals, are likely to be able to fit into the pictures. The recent Beveridge report has aroused the greatest interest. The men are interested in the personalities and capabilities of their leaders from top to bottom, and these are discussed freely and without reserve - from the Platoon Commander to the Prime Minister. The Platoon Commander is usually called Mr. so-and-so whilst the Prime Minister is - I suppose I should say very wrongly - called by his Christian name.

The troops of course are discussing many other matters. They are discussing religion. They are discussing politics. The United Kingdom troops are meeting Americans and Australians and other dominion and colonial and foreign troops for the first time - and they are discovering that those other fellows are human beings. Their minds and their contacts and experiences are being widened, and they will be the better and the more tolerant for these opportunities when they come back.

A great many of the troops are anxious to have more news and information from home. They want to read articles of opinion - what the prominent people at home and abroad are saying and writing on current world problems. The Government is aware of this and is doing everything possible to meet the need.

Women are playing a considerable part in the war effort in the Middle East. Probably about 10,000 of them are engaged full time in one way or another - A.T.S., W.R.N.S., or W.A.A.F.S., or as Nursing Sisters or Typists.

My wife spends most of her time visiting badly wounded men in the Military hospitals in the Middle East. They are splendidly looked after and they have the best possible medical and nursing attention - but they seem to like talking to a woman who is fortunate enough to have time to sit down beside them and listen - or talk. She finds out what they want - and, to my surprise, she tells me that in a very great many cases, they want - not the obvious things, cigarettes or sweets or food - but flowers - and those she brings them, and also helps them write to their families at home.

And to you Mothers and Father and Wives and relatives I would say this - that the men - your men - of our forces in the Middle East are hard and fit, well fed and well looked after. They now have the best weapons in the world and they have faith in their leaders. They are men doing the supreme job of men - fighting for their country and for a cause in which they believe.

They don't believe in any fairy stories like "homes for heroes" after this war. They know that the world can't suddenly become a bed of roses after the colossal destruction of this war. But they do hope that it's going to be a fairer world, with no permanent shortage of work and one in which those who work hardest will get most - and that all those who work will get a fair deal.

As regards the calibre of the men - I can only say that if you want your faith in human nature restored - come out, if you can get, to the Middle East.
