

# HOW THE DOMINIONS FIGHT

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THE war that half the world wages to-day is not so much a matter of brawn and courage as of brains and guile. Therefore it might be asked whether the British Dominions are not at a certain disadvantage in their participation. During the previous great conflict of their experience, they became noted especially for the primary virtues of the battlefield, for just those qualities which are useless to-day without a liberal superimposition of technical skill and tactical cunning. It was even rumoured in 1917 that the otherwise irresistible Australians had a marked aversion to advancing behind tanks.

Yet it does not require much military intelligence to realize that with physical valour alone the Dominions would have little chance in a world of mechanical and scientific war. Given great numbers, they might be able to overcome such a problematical disability. With their small populations, however, they would only be asking for extermination if they entered modern war with fierce enthusiasm alone. The examples of the fighting in Greece and Crete can be cited to demonstrate this. But the fact of the matter is, fortunately, that the Dominions to-day are already fighting with methods very different from those employed by them during the First German War.

They have fought, and prepared for fighting, under many disadvantages. Dependent before the war upon Britain for their weapons, they have not until lately had an opportunity to train with modern devices. Yet it has become evident in every campaign so far, and in their preparations for campaigns, that Dominion forces have not allowed the tide of technical war to sweep past them. Indeed each Dominion has already contributed some highly original ways and means of combat, perhaps characteristic of each, which have shown decisively that they may continue, in quality, to compensate on the battlefield for their quantitative lack.

Thus the Australians have been particularly successful with artillery. From the superb shooting of the cruiser *Sydney* to the mastery gained by the defenders of Tobruk over the Germans in artillery duels, and the excellent counter-battery work on the road through Syria, the Diggers have won for themselves a new reputation in this department. Many people

realized early in the war that the field-guns of the future must have mobility above all things, a capacity to fire practically on the run. The Australians in Greece showed how this could be accomplished. With their 25-pounder "gunhows," standard weapon of the new British Army, they knocked out tank after tank, then flung the rubbershod weapons back and back to new positions, often over the roughest country, always to stand and wreak havoc again.

Then these sons of the former tank-haters—whose real reason for their aversion to the weapon was their instinctive and sometimes justified distrust of its reliability—have shown themselves repeatedly to be skilled at consolidating positions previously encircled or pierced by tanks. The British armoured division emasculated the Cyrenaican fortresses one by one, but the following Australians captured them. The positions were reversed from the former war, when Australian cavalry did the dashing work. Yet the experience gained in that famous campaign of General Wavell's encouraged the Australian military authorities to proceed at once with the formation of an Armoured Corps, embodying all units of the Imperial Force and Home Defence Force, so that the Diggers might eventually be able to concentrate on their traditional *rôle* once more.

Although it may be invidious to attempt a disentanglement of the individual Dominions' contributions in the air war, a reference must be made to the remarkable service of Australians with the Coastal Command of the Royal Air Force. Flying those mighty Sunderlands, they have taken a leading part in the Battles of the Atlantic and Mediterranean, convoying merchantmen far across the ocean and down the sea, rescuing many castaways, nearly always repelling antagonists most ignominiously. The significance of this service is not merely romantic. For the future protection of Australia, and Australian interests, such long-range, oceanic air-patrols will be particularly needed.

Similarly New Zealand airmen have shown a marked and significant aptitude for naval work, as if realizing that the defence of their own country may ultimately depend largely upon such methods. But the aerial feats of New Zealanders have been wholly disproportionate to the numerical strength of this Dominion among the warring nations. Of all the Dominions, this has done the most remarkable flying work since the war began, especially in proportion to population. The technique of modern aerial interception was first put to the test and modified accord-

ingly by the New Zealand pilot, Edgar ("Cobber") Kain. There has not been a major engagement of the Royal Air Force without its conspicuous New Zealander, always ready with the right improvisation, dogged and practically unbeatable.

The obstinate yet very adaptable character of the New Zealander has been responsible, in the land fighting, for the particular success of troops from this Dominion in anti-tank work. It often appeared in Greece as if the New Zealanders were resolved to find a means of stopping the tank drives at all costs. Although they have not yet had an opportunity to meet tanks on anything like equal terms, always having had to fight hopeless rearguard actions, it is the opinion of many experts that the New Zealanders may eventually make military history in a decisive defeat of the chief German weapon.

South Africa has excelled in yet another respect. The precise facts about that remarkable advance into Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia from Kenya have unfortunately been obscured by the more urgent ones of events elsewhere. But the chief marvel was the speed and efficiency of the advance over the worst kind of country for a mechanical army. The Springboks, as if resolved to maintain and enhance the reputation of their fathers for extreme mobility in rough country, had devised in a few months of war their unique "steel commando", an adaptation of the *panzer* idea to African conditions. They had even invented and built the necessary vehicle for the purpose, a distinctive kind of armoured car. The result was that they were able to accomplish one of the most speedy advances in the history of warfare.

But that success would have been impossible if the Italian air forces had not been previously driven from the East African air by a few young Springboks in rather ancient aircraft, some of them old commercial machines that had been employed on trans-African routes. The South African airman proved himself to be supremely the long-distance jungle and desert flyer, a promising master of his own dangerous continent.

The only reason why Canada has not been placed first in this review is because the Canadian land forces have not been in action yet. If they had been, then undoubtedly this Dominion would have required primary attention; and it may be advanced even now that when they do have their opportunity, the Canadians will astonish friend and enemy alike. As with the South Africans, mobility may be their principal mark, but a mobility

accomplishments of the mutual foe. Batteries of a Canadian artillery regiment recently moved their heavy guns at 50 miles per hour to new positions, unloaded them from giant carriers and began a practice barrage in seven minutes.

After the French fiasco, the Canadians in England concentrated upon the one object, so to improve their speed of manoeuvre that if the enemy did come, they would be able to have the first whack at him. Thus it has been a common sight in the southern counties of England recently to encounter a mechanized column of Canadians moving at incredible speed from one defence sector to another. The avowed intention of the Canadians has been so to increase mobility that their two complete divisions may be moved and deployed for battle over 100 miles in 24 hours, as against the 10 miles covered by their 1918 fathers in the same time. And they have made this possible by a most refreshing adaptability and willingness to experiment with scientific and mechanical inventions. Thus the 2nd. Canadian Divisional Signals was recently the first military unit in the world to use commercial facsimile transmission for military purposes—sending maps, sketches and written or printed matter over regular wire or radio circuits—while in October 1940, Canada was the first Dominion to begin the training of parachute troops. A joint service was established between the Army and Air Force, with members recruited from infantry battalions.

Indeed, the Canadians are the modern soldier-scientists *par excellence*, taking the cue, all ranks downwards, from their distinguished commander, General McNaughton, inventor of many electrical devices. The system of radiolocation, largely responsible for Britain's success in repelling the *Luftwaffe*, is in part the product of Canadian brains. With all this, however, representatives of Canada with the Royal Air Force and the Navy have fought superbly always. The Canadian organization of the Empire Air Training Scheme may well prove eventually the decisive factor in the winning of this war.

So the British Dominions have kept abreast of the times. They have even outstripped other greater nations in their military improvisation, and no one can again accuse them of reliance upon brawn alone. This is a hopeful development, for it has often been proved in the war so far that small, highly-organized forces can defeat, or at least hold at bay, far larger armies. Moreover the Dominions, able to take care of themselves in this way, will be an increasingly important element of stability in the world of the future.