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CHURCHILL TO ROOSEVELT  
OCTOBER 1939 - NOVEMBER 1940

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16 October 1939

Telegram Nr. 2061 from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated  
16 October 1939.



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UNCLASSIFIED

EDA

This telegram must be  
closely paraphrased  
before being communi-  
cated to anyone (C & A)

LONDON

Dated October 16, 1939

Received 5:53 p.m.

Secretary of State

Washington

*From W. Churchill*

2061, October 16, 10p.m.

██████████ AND PERSONAL FOR THE PRESIDENT.

"The following from naval person.

It is very odd that SCHEER should have made no other prizes since September 30. As I told you we are taking some pains in looking for him. He may be anywhere by now. We have been hitting the U-boats hard with our new apparatus and on Friday 13th four including two of the largest and latest were destroyed. Sinking of ROYAL OAK was a remarkable episode of which I will write you more fully. It in no way affects the naval balance. Our accounts of Hitler's oil position make us feel he is up against time limits. This means that either he will make vehement attack on us for which we are prepared or that he is being held back by counsellors who see the red light. (?) we propose to see what happens feeling fairly confident that all will be well. We should be quite ready to tell you about our asdic methods whenever you

feel

EDA - 2 - #2051, October 16, 10 p.m. from London

feel they would be of use to the United States Navy and are sure the secret will go no farther. They certainly are very remarkable in results and enable two destroyers to do the work that could not have been done by ten last time. We have not been at all impressed by the accuracy of the Germans air bombing of our warships. They seem to have no effective bomb sights. I have not written as I promised because this and my former cable give all my news."

KENNEDY

RR:DDM

7 May 1940

Letter from Churchill to Roosevelt, 7 May 1940, enclosing  
a report, "The Battle of the River Plate."

Answered by letter from Roosevelt to Churchill, 30 May 1940.



May 7, 1940.

My dear Mr. President,

In view of the interest you displayed in the Battle of the River Plate, I thought you would like to see an advance copy of the official account of the Battle which we shall shortly be publishing.

*Yours sincerely*

*Winston Churchill*

The President of the United States.



# THE BATTLE OF THE RIVER PLATE

AN ACCOUNT OF EVENTS BEFORE,  
DURING AND AFTER THE ACTION  
UP TO THE SELF-DESTRUCTION OF  
THE ADMIRAL GRAF SPEE

Compiled in the Admiralty from despatches forwarded by  
Rear-Admiral Harwood and the Captains of H.M. Ships  
Ajax, Achilles and Exeter

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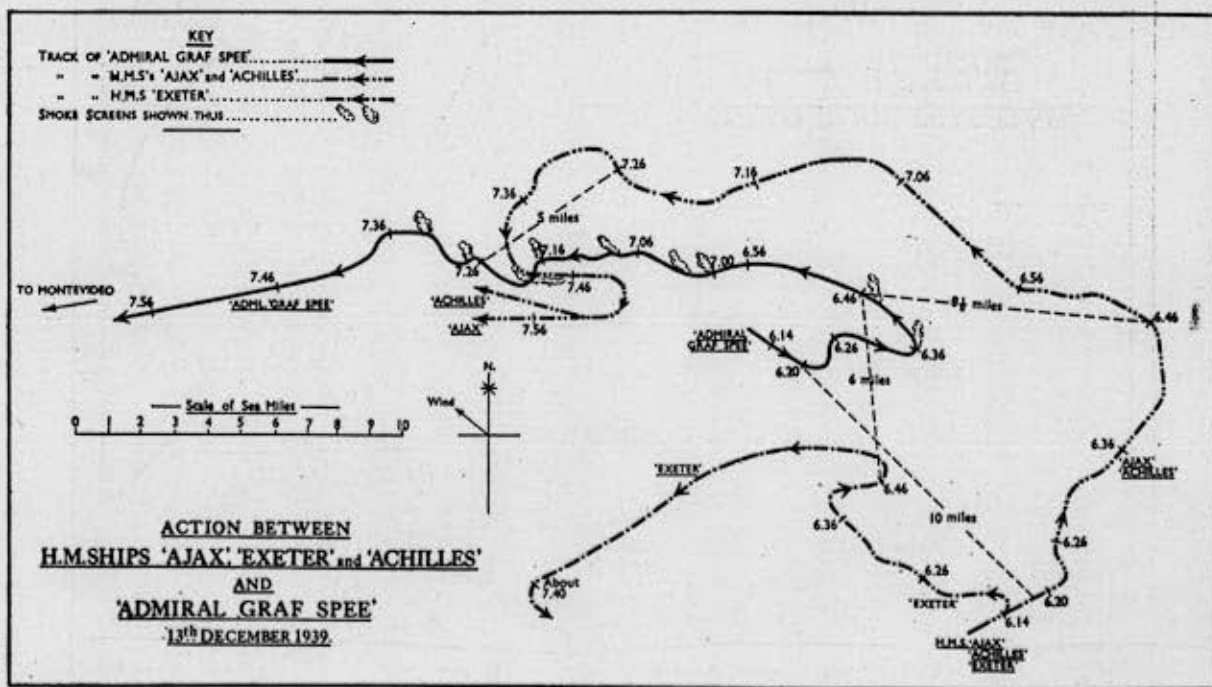
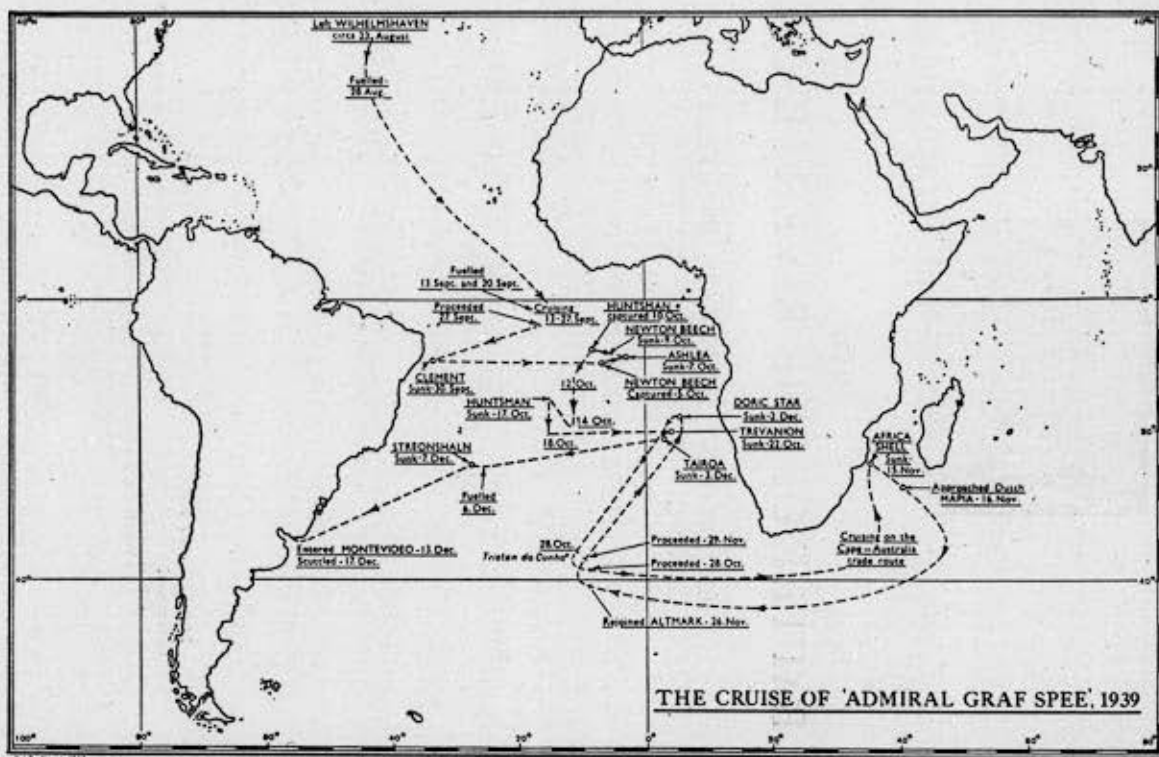
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## THE BATTLE OF THE RIVER PLATE.

"In this sombre dark winter . . . the brilliant action of the Plate . . . came like a flash of light and colour on the scene, carrying with it an encouragement to all who are fighting—to ourselves and to our allies."—First Lord of the Admiralty when welcoming H.M.S. *Exeter*, 15th February, 1940.

The action which led to the defeat and subsequent self-destruction of the German "pocket battleship" *Admiral Graf Spee* was made up of four distinct phases. First there were the preliminary movements which made the victory possible. Secondly there was the main battle. Thirdly there was the long shadowing action while the enemy was running for the safety of neutral territorial waters. Finally there was the long watch of the River Plate Estuary, with the *Admiral Graf Spee* hourly expected to make a dash for the open sea.

In the following account of the action, which has been compiled in the Admiralty from despatches forwarded by Rear-Admiral Harwood and the Captains of H.M. Ships *Ajax*, *Achilles* and *Exeter*, all the times given are the ships time kept by the Squadron. This was two hours slow on Greenwich Mean Time.

### THE FIRST PHASE.

It had been known since the S.S. *Clement* was sunk on September 30th that a German "pocket battleship" was at large in the South Atlantic Ocean, and the fact that four ships on the Gibraltar to South Africa route were overdue had indicated that this ship was raiding commerce on the eastern side of the South Atlantic. In mid-November, however, the sinking of the S.S. *Africa Shell* at the southern end of the Mozambique Channel proved that there was a German commerce raider in the southern part of the Indian Ocean. Whether this was the same raider as had been operating in the South Atlantic Ocean was not definitely known at that time. In any case, vigilance in the South Atlantic could not be relaxed.

Apart from the forces concerned in a systematic search of other areas, there were in the western part of the South Atlantic four cruisers of the South America Division under the command of Commodore H. H. Harwood. Early in December it had been necessary to detach H.M.S. *Cumberland*, the largest and most powerful of the force, to the Falkland Islands to carry out a self-refit, remaining at short notice. Upon the three remaining ships devolved the gigantic task of watching and defending the immensely valuable trade routes off the South American continent. This they had to do, knowing that there was at large an enemy raider more powerful than their combined strength—even if they were able to bring their combined strength to bear upon the enemy at the moment of contact.

The British cruisers of the South America Division immediately available were:—

H.M.S. *Ajax* wearing the Broad Pendant of Commodore Harwood, a 7,000 tons cruiser armed with eight six-inch guns.

H.M.S. *Achilles*.—A cruiser of the same class as H.M.S. *Ajax*, 7,000 tons and armed with eight six-inch guns. This ship had been detached from the New Zealand Division and was manned largely by New Zealanders.

H.M.S. *Exeter*.—A cruiser of 8,400 tons armed with six eight-inch guns.

There was little doubt that the German raider was one of the so-called "pocket battleships"—a vessel of rather more than 10,000 tons with a main armament of six eleven-inch guns and a secondary armament of eight 5.9 inch guns. Moreover, the "pocket battleships" are protected by armour



against which 6-inch gun fire could not be expected to be fully effective at long ranges. The German raider, therefore, had a considerable advantage in armament. Her *secondary* armament was the equal of the total armament of one of the smaller British cruisers, and the weight of metal and explosive which she could fire in one broadside was 4,700 pounds. The total weight of the broadsides of all the three British cruisers combined was only 3,136 pounds.

Against the serious inferiority in armament, the British cruisers could put an advantage of about six knots in speed and, possibly, a greater handiness.

The two essentials to successful action against the enemy were, therefore, concentration of the British forces prior to action being joined, and the employment of tactics which would exploit the advantage in speed and handiness of the British forces. These were problems not easy of solution, because the immense area to be guarded made it necessary for the British forces to be dispersed—a factor which precluded the frequent practising of squadron tactics.

On December 3rd, 1939, the three British cruisers were scattered over two thousand miles.

It was on the afternoon of that day that a report was received from the British S.S. *Doric Star* that she was being attacked by a German "pocket battleship" on the eastern side of the South Atlantic about midway between Sierra Leone and the Cape of Good Hope. The *Doric Star* had sent out the wireless message in spite of the fact that the German raider was firing on her in an attempt to prevent her from using her wireless.

Commodore Harwood correctly anticipated that the raider, knowing that she had been reported by the S.S. *Doric Star*, would leave that area and probably cross the South Atlantic. He estimated that the raider could reach the Rio de Janeiro area by the morning of December 12th, the River Plate area by that evening or the following morning, or the Falkland Islands area by December 14th.

There was nothing to indicate which of these three areas—separated from one another by more than 1,500 miles—was the raider's objective. Commodore Harwood decided, however, that the most important area to be defended was the local area of the large and very valuable trade off the River Plate. He therefore ordered his squadron to concentrate 150 miles off the River Plate Estuary. He also made arrangements to ensure that his ships would not be short of fuel when they arrived at the rendezvous. All this was done in one short signal, after the transmission of which no wireless communication was used, since this would have indicated the movements of British forces to the enemy.

Accurate navigation led to the concentration of the British cruisers at the expected moment—7 a.m. on December 12th.

The greatest use was made of that day. Commodore Harwood explained to his Captains the tactics which he proposed to use in the event of contact being made with the powerful raider. These tactics were then exercised by the squadron. It is noteworthy that the final words of Commodore Harwood's instructions to his Captains were to act "without further orders so as to maintain decisive gun range".

Wednesday, December 13th, dawned fine and clear, with extreme visibility. There was a fairly strong breeze from the south-east, a low swell coming from the same quarter, and a slight sea. The British cruisers were steaming east north east at fourteen knots. They were in single line ahead in the order H.M.S. *Ajax*, H.M.S. *Achilles*, H.M.S. *Exeter*.

At 6.14 a.m. smoke was sighted on the horizon just abaft the port beam, and H.M.S. *Exeter* was ordered to investigate. Two minutes later H.M.S.

*Exeter* reported "I think it is a pocket battleship". The enemy was in sight. Contact had at last been made between British naval forces and the raider which they had been hunting for more than two months.

#### THE SECOND PHASE.

At the time of the sighting of the smoke, the *Admiral Graf Spee* and the British cruisers were steering converging courses. As soon as the smoke was identified as that of the German raider, the ships of the British squadron began to act in accordance with the tactics practised on the previous day. All ships increased speed and began to work up to full speed as rapidly as possible. The eight-inch gun cruiser, H.M.S. *Exeter*, the most powerful unit of the British squadron, made a large alteration of course to the westward, while the two six-inch gun cruisers, H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles* forged ahead to the north-eastward, altering course slightly in order to close the range rapidly. These manoeuvres were carried out so that the "pocket battleship" should be simultaneously engaged from widely different angles. This would force him either to "split" his main armament in order to engage both units, or to leave one of the British units unengaged by his eleven-inch guns.

At 6.18 a.m. only four minutes after the first sighting of smoke, the *Admiral Graf Spee* opened fire with her main armament of six eleven-inch guns. She had "split" her main armament, and one turret fired at H.M.S. *Exeter* and the other at H.M.S. *Ajax* and *Achilles*. The range was very long, but it was being shortened rapidly by all three of the British cruisers.

Two minutes later, at 6.20 a.m., H.M.S. *Exeter* opened fire with her two forward turrets—four eight-inch guns. The range was then  $9\frac{1}{2}$  sea miles. Her two after guns opened fire as soon as they would bear, two and a half minutes later. This eight-inch gunfire seemed to worry the enemy almost from the beginning. After shifting target rapidly one or twice, the *Admiral Graf Spee* concentrated the fire of all six of her eleven-inch guns on H.M.S. *Exeter*. The *Admiral Graf Spee*'s first salvo fell short of H.M.S. *Exeter*. The second was over, and the third straddled the cruiser.

Meanwhile H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles* had opened fire with their six-inch guns. H.M.S. *Achilles* opened fire at 6.21 a.m. and H.M.S. *Ajax* two minutes later. These two six-inch gun cruisers immediately developed a high rate of fire, combined with great accuracy. The despatch of H.M.S. *Achilles* states that "fire appeared to become rapidly effective," while the despatch of H.M.S. *Ajax* states that "effective fire developed immediately."

At 6.23 a.m. an eleven-inch shell burst just short of H.M.S. *Exeter*, abreast the middle of the ship. Splinters from this shell killed the torpedo tubes crews, damaged the communications of the ship, and riddled the funnels and searchlights. One minute later H.M.S. *Exeter* suffered a direct hit from an eleven-inch shell. This shell struck "B" turret, putting that turret and its two eight-inch guns out of action. Splinters from that shell swept the bridge. All the bridge personnel except the captain and two others were either killed or wounded. The wheel-house communications were wrecked.

Momentarily, the ship was out of control. Good training, however, came to the rescue. As soon as it was realised in the lower conning position that communications with the wheelhouse had ceased to function, that lower position took over the steering. Even so, the ship had begun to swing to starboard, and there was danger of the after guns becoming unable to bear on the target. This was noticed by the torpedo officer, who, on his own initiative, succeeded in getting an order through to the lower conning position which resulted in the ship being brought back to her course.

The captain of H.M.S. *Exeter* was at this time making his way aft. With the bridge out of action, he had decided to fight his ship from the after

conning position. When he reached that position, however, he found that all communications from the after conning position had been destroyed. The steering was therefore changed over to the after steering position, and communication established with that position by means of a chain of messengers. H.M.S. *Exeter* was controlled in this way until the action was broken off. It would be difficult to overestimate the difficulty of controlling a ship by this means during a fierce action, with personnel exposed to eight-inch gun blast as well as heavy fire from the enemy.

During this time H.M.S. *Exeter* received two more hits forward from 11-inch shells, and also suffered some damage by splinters from shells bursting short.

Meanwhile H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles* were making good and rapid shooting with their six-inch guns, and they were closing the range rapidly and drawing ahead on the enemy. That this six-inch gunfire was causing the enemy trouble was shown by the fact that at 6.30 a.m. the *Admiral Graf Spee* again "split" her main armament, switching over one eleven inch turret to engage the six-inch gun cruisers. This temporarily reduced the volume of heavy fire to which H.M.S. *Exeter* was subjected.

The secondary armament of the *Admiral Graf Spee*—5.9-inch guns—had been alternately engaging H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles*, but without effect, although some salvos had fallen close. These guns continued to fire at the six-inch gun cruisers.

At 6.32 a.m. H.M.S. *Exeter* fired her starboard torpedoes at the enemy. These torpedoes went wide, because the *Admiral Graf Spee*, apparently finding the British gunfire too hot, turned 150 degrees away under cover of a smoke screen before the torpedoes reached her.

By 6.36 a.m. the six-inch gun cruisers were doing 28 knots. This rapid increase of speed—the ships had been doing 14 knots only 20 minutes previously—reflects great credit upon the engine and boiler room personnel.

At 6.37 a.m. H.M.S. *Ajax* catapulted her aircraft. Orders to get the aircraft into the air at the earliest possible moment had been given as soon as the alarm was sounded, and the catapult had been prepared and the engine of the aircraft warmed up. The operation of preparing to catapult the aircraft was carried out with great coolness, in spite of the fact that the personnel, and particularly the pilot and the observer of the aircraft, were subjected to severe gun blast from the guns of the two after turrets, which were firing on a forward bearing. The aircraft itself was whipping about badly owing to the gunblast. As soon as the aircraft was in the air it took up a position on the disengaged bow of the six-inch gun cruisers.

At about 6.38 a.m. H.M.S. *Exeter* made a large alteration of course to starboard in order to bring her port torpedo tubes to bear on the enemy. As she was turning she received two more hits from 11-inch shells. One of these hit the foremost turret, putting the turret and its two eight-inch guns out of action. The other entered the hull, did extensive damage and started a fierce fire between decks. The observer in H.M.S. *Ajax*'s aircraft reported that "she completely disappeared in smoke and flame and it was feared that she had gone. However, she emerged, and re-entered the action."

H.M.S. *Exeter* had, indeed, suffered severely from the much heavier metal of her adversary. Two of her three turrets were out of action, and the only two guns still in action were aft. All her compass repeaters had been smashed, and the captain was conning the ship with the help of a small boat's compass. What little internal communication was possible was done by messengers. Some compartments were flooded, and a serious fire was raging in her hull. Nevertheless she was resolutely kept in action. Her port torpedoes were fired as soon as the tubes were brought to bear on the enemy. A minute or two later H.M.S. *Exeter* altered course to port—that

is, towards the enemy—and hauled round so that she was on a course approximately parallel to that of the *Admiral Graf Spee* and able to continue to engage the enemy with her two remaining guns. By this time H.M.S. *Exeter* had a seven degree list and was down by the bow, but was still steaming at full power.

At 6.40 a.m. an 11-inch shell burst just short of H.M.S. *Achilles*, in line with the bridge. Splinters from this shell killed four ratings in the main gunnery control position and stunned the gunnery officer, as well as slightly wounding the captain and the chief yeoman of signals on the bridge. Fortunately these splinters did not put the director out of action or damage any important instrument. Nevertheless, the main control position was momentarily out of action through these casualties. The gunnery efficiency of H.M.S. *Achilles* was not, however, impaired. The secondary control position immediately took over the control of the ship's armament, and continued the action until the main control position was ready to resume control some minutes later. The greatest gallantry and fortitude was shown by the surviving personnel of the main control position. A sergeant of Royal Marines remained uncomplainingly at his post and carried out his duties until the end of the action although he was seriously wounded. A seaman boy behaved with exemplary coolness despite the carnage around him and continued his duty of passing information to the guns. He was at one time heard denying most vigorously a report of his own death which had spread round the ship. These were but two instances of gallantry in a fierce action memorable for the bearing of the personnel of the British cruisers.

After 6.40 a.m. the action became virtually a chase. The *Admiral Graf Spee* had turned away to the westward under cover of a smoke screen, and the two six-inch gun cruisers were hauling round to the north-westward in pursuit, accepting the fact that this entailed being unable to bring the after guns to bear on the enemy. They were by now doing 31 knots and still increasing speed. H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles* were fine on the starboard quarter of the *Admiral Graf Spee*, and H.M.S. *Exeter* was rather before the enemy's port beam, still in action with her two remaining guns.

At 6.56 a.m. H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles* altered course to starboard in order to bring all their guns to bear again. This greater volume of fire from these two cruisers appeared to have an immediate effect on the enemy, for the *Admiral Graf Spee* at once altered course away from the cruisers, and at 7.0 she laid a smoke screen in an attempt to throw off the British gunfire. From this time onwards the *Admiral Graf Spee* made frequent alterations of course and great use of smoke screens in her efforts to escape further punishment.

At 7.10 a.m. the range of the enemy from H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles* was still eight miles. Commodore Harwood decided to alter course towards the *Admiral Graf Spee* in order to shorten the range as rapidly as possible, even though this meant that the after guns would once again be unable to bear on the enemy. The British cruisers were now steaming at their utmost speed.

At 7.16 a.m. the *Admiral Graf Spee* made a drastic alteration of course to port under cover of smoke. She was then steering almost directly for H.M.S. *Exeter*, and it seemed that her intention was to finish off that damaged cruiser. Four minutes later, however, the effective support of H.M.S. *Exeter's* consorts obliged the *Admiral Graf Spee* to make another large alteration of course. She hauled round to the north-westward until all her 11-inch guns would bear on H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles*, and at once opened fire on the small British cruisers. The range at that time was  $5\frac{1}{2}$  miles. H.M.S. *Ajax* was straddled by 11-inch salvoes, but she was not hit. The



enemy was also firing with her secondary armament of 5.9-inch guns, but their fire had by this time become inaccurate and ragged.

At 7.20 a.m. H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles* had turned to starboard to bring all guns to bear on the enemy. Rapid and accurate shooting was maintained, and a fire was observed amidships in the *Admiral Graf Spee*.

At this time it appeared to Commodore Harwood that the *Admiral Graf Spee* intended to neglect H.M.S. *Exeter* and to close the six-inch gun cruisers on a north-westerly course. Thinking that the enemy was likely to remain on this course for some time, H.M.S. *Ajax* swung to starboard at 7.24 a.m. and fired her port torpedoes at a range of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles. The enemy probably saw these torpedoes being fired, for the *Admiral Graf Spee* at once made a large alteration of course, turning away some 130 degrees to port and at the same time laying a smoke screen. Although the *Admiral Graf Spee* altered back to her north-westerly course three minutes later, this large alteration of course was sufficient to avoid the torpedoes from H.M.S. *Ajax*.

At 7.25 a.m. H.M.S. *Ajax* was hit by an 11-inch shell. This shell put X turret out of action, and, by a stroke of bad luck, it also led to the jamming of Y turret. Thus this one shell robbed H.M.S. *Ajax* of the use of four of her guns, besides causing a number of casualties.

It was at about this time that the pilot of H.M.S. *Ajax's* aircraft, which had been spotting the fall of shot for the six-inch gun cruisers, decided to approach the *Admiral Graf Spee* in an attempt to discover the extent of damage that ship had received. As soon as the aircraft came within range of the enemy's anti-aircraft guns, these opened fire. As the primary and most important duty of the aircraft was spotting the fall of shot for the control of the British cruisers' gunfire, the aircraft retired out of range of the enemy's anti-aircraft guns.

H.M.S. *Exeter* had been dropping gradually astern, as she had been forced to reduce speed owing to the damage forward. She still continued in action, however, engaging the enemy with her two remaining guns firing in local control under the direction of an officer standing in an exposed position on the searchlight platform. At about 7.30 a.m., however, H.M.S. *Exeter's* remaining turret ceased to operate due to flooding. Thus H.M.S. *Exeter* could no longer engage the enemy nor keep up with the action. Reluctantly, therefore, she was forced to break off the action, and at about 7.40 a.m. she turned to the south-east and steamed away at slow speed, starting to repair damage and make herself seaworthy.

That H.M.S. *Exeter* was still afloat and capable of making long sea passages is a tribute to the design and construction of British warships. For the fortitude and resolution of the personnel no praise could be too high. In spite of severe casualties and the almost complete destruction of internal communications, H.M.S. *Exeter* had been kept in action so long as a gun would fire, while fire and repair parties fought to minimise the effects of damage.

At 7.28 a.m. H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles* hauled round to a westerly course in order to close the range still further. Three minutes later H.M.S. *Ajax's* aircraft reported "Torpedoes approaching. They will pass ahead of you". Commodore Harwood, however, decided to take no chances, and the cruisers made a large alteration of course towards the enemy in order to avoid the torpedoes. This alteration of course had the effect of closing the range very rapidly. At this time H.M.S. *Ajax* had only three guns in action, as an accident prevented one gun of B turret from being fired, while both X and Y turrets were out of action as a result of the 11-inch shell hit sustained at 7.25 a.m. Nevertheless, the enemy did not relish the fire of the small British cruisers. The *Admiral Graf Spee* turned

away to the westward almost immediately, making much smoke and zig-zagging in an attempt to throw out the British gunfire.

At this stage of the action the shooting of the six-inch gun cruisers appeared very accurate. H.M.S. *Achilles* was making excellent practice with her eight guns, while H.M.S. *Ajax* was making very good use of her three remaining guns. At 7.36 a.m. the *Admiral Graf Spee* turned to the south-westward in order to bring all her heavy guns to bear on the British cruisers in an attempt to fight them off. The two small British cruisers stood on, however, and by 7.38 a.m. the range was down to 4 miles.

It was then reported to Commodore Harwood that so many rounds had been expended during the continuous periods of rapid firing that there was some danger of running short of ammunition, if the action was prolonged without reaching a decision. This led Commodore Harwood to adopt an immediate change in tactics. He considered that by breaking off the day action and shadowing the enemy till nightfall, he would have a better chance of closing to a range at which his lighter armament and torpedoes would have a decisive effect.

Accordingly, at 7.40 a.m., Commodore Harwood turned H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles* away to the eastward under cover of a smoke screen. Just as the ships began to turn, an 11-inch shell from one of the *Admiral Graf Spee's* last salvos brought down the main topmast of H.M.S. *Ajax*. The bursting of this shell caused some casualties, and the falling of the mast destroyed the wireless aerials. Spare aerials were, however, soon rigged.

The *Admiral Graf Spee* made no attempt to follow the British cruisers, but continued to steam to the westward at a speed of about 22 knots.

After opening the range by steaming to the eastward under cover of a smoke screen for six minutes, Commodore Harwood again turned his ships to the westward and ordered them to take up positions for shadowing the enemy.

That the two small six-inch gun cruisers had not suffered more severely in the close action was undoubtedly due to the speed and skill with which the ships were handled. The engine and boiler room personnel played a most important part in the action, steaming the ships at full power under difficult action conditions with the ships under almost constant use of helm. In the boiler rooms, gun blast caused the flames to leap about a foot out of the fronts of the furnaces, yet the stokers, many of them youngsters, never paused in their work or moved back from the boilers.

#### THE THIRD PHASE.

The situation at 8.0 a.m. on December 13th was that the *Admiral Graf Spee* was continuing her flight to the westward; H.M.S. *Ajax* was shadowing on the enemy's port quarter and H.M.S. *Achilles* on the enemy's starboard quarter, both cruisers being about 15 miles from the *Admiral Graf Spee*. H.M.S. *Exeter* was out of sight, drawing away to the south-eastward at slow speed.

At 8.07 a.m., and every hour thereafter, the British cruisers broadcast the position, course, and speed of the German raider, so that British merchant ships in the vicinity would keep out of danger.

Just before 9.15 a.m. H.M.S. *Ajax* recovered her aircraft. The conditions were difficult, but the operation was carried out with great skill and—what was so important—without loss of time.

Commodore Harwood's objective remained the destruction of the enemy in close action after nightfall, but he had to take steps to deal with the situation which might arise if the *Admiral Graf Spee* succeeded in eluding night action. He could not risk further prolonged day action with his

superior adversary owing to the weakening of his force by the departure of H.M.S. *Exeter* and the quantity of ammunition remaining in his six-inch gun cruisers. It was necessary, therefore, to secure reinforcements so that nothing should be left to chance. The nearest British warship was the 10,000 ton 8 inch gun cruiser H.M.S. *Cumberland*, at the Falkland Islands. At 9.46 a.m. Commodore Harwood ordered her to proceed to the River Plate area at full speed. H.M.S. *Cumberland* had, however, picked up jumbled messages which indicated that an action was in progress to the northward, and she had already left the Falkland Islands on the initiative of her commanding officer before these orders were received. On receipt of Commodore Harwood's signal H.M.S. *Cumberland* increased to full speed.

Meanwhile, other operations were set on foot by the Admiralty. Orders were given for the aircraft carrier H.M.S. *Ark Royal* and the battlecruiser H.M.S. *Renown*, and other ships all of which had been operating some 3,000 miles away, to proceed at once to the South American coast, and steps were taken to ensure that adequate supplies of fuel would be available at various strategic points.

By 10.5 a.m. H.M.S. *Achilles*, who had over-estimated the speed of the *Admiral Graf Spee*, had closed the range to eleven and a half miles. The *Admiral Graf Spee* then altered course and fired two three-gun salvos of eleven-inch at H.M.S. *Achilles*. The fact that the *Admiral Graf Spee* altered course sufficiently to bring her forward turret to bear in order to fire these salvos suggests that the enemy's after 11-inch turret was out of action at that time. The first of these salvos from the *Admiral Graf Spee* fell very short, but the second fell close to H.M.S. *Achilles*, which ship was already under helm. H.M.S. *Achilles* turned away at full speed under cover of a smoke screen and resumed shadowing from a longer range.

An hour later a merchant ship was sighted fairly close to the *Admiral Graf Spee*. She appeared to be stopped and blowing off steam. A few minutes later H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles* received a signal from the *Admiral Graf Spee*. It read:—" *Ajax* and *Achilles* from *Admiral Graf Spee*. Please pick up lifeboats of English steamer."

On coming up with the merchant ship H.M.S. *Ajax* found that she was the British S.S. *Shakespeare*, and that all her boats were hoisted. H.M.S. *Ajax* signalled to her asking if she required assistance, and the S.S. *Shakespeare* replied that she was quite all right and did not require assistance. It would appear, therefore, that the signal of the *Admiral Graf Spee* to H.M.S. *Ajax* was a ruse adopted by the German raider in an attempt to shake off her tenacious pursuers.

The shadowing of the *Admiral Graf Spee* by H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles* continued without further incident until 7.15 p.m. At this time the *Admiral Graf Spee* altered course and re-opened fire on H.M.S. *Ajax* with her 11-inch guns at a range of thirteen miles. H.M.S. *Ajax* at once turned away under cover of a smoke screen and resumed a shadowing position out of range.

By this time it was clear that the *Admiral Graf Spee* intended to enter the estuary of the River Plate.

The entrance to the River Plate estuary is guarded by a sand bank sixteen miles long, running across the estuary. This is known as English Bank. Commodore Harwood considered that the *Admiral Graf Spee* might try to elude the British cruisers and break back to the open sea by doubling round this sand-bank. He therefore disposed his forces so as to prevent the enemy slipping out. As soon as the *Admiral Graf Spee* passed the Island of Lobos, and was therefore committed to entering the estuary of the River Plate, the whole duty of shadowing the enemy devolved upon H.M.S. *Achilles*, while H.M.S. *Ajax* proceeded to the south of English Bank so that she would meet

the *Admiral Graf Spee* if she tried to double back towards the open sea after rounding the sandbank.

The sun set at 8.48 p.m. and the *Admiral Graf Spee* was, from H.M.S. *Achilles*, clearly silhouetted at a range of about twelve and a half miles. H.M.S. *Achilles* altered course to the north-westward in order to take full advantage of the afterglow. She had already increased speed in order to close the enemy before dark.

The enemy appeared to resent any shortening of the range by the British cruiser, and at 8.55 p.m. the *Admiral Graf Spee* altered course under cover of a smoke screen and opened fire at H.M.S. *Achilles* with 11-inch guns. H.M.S. *Achilles* at once replied to the German fire, turning away at full speed as she did so, and laying a smoke screen to throw out the enemy's fire and cover her own movements. The *Admiral Graf Spee* ceased firing, and H.M.S. *Achilles* at once turned to the westward again at high speed in order to keep in touch.

At 9.26 p.m. the enemy again laid a smoke screen in an attempt to throw off the pursuit. This failed, and six minutes later the *Admiral Graf Spee* fired an 11-inch salvo at H.M.S. *Achilles*. H.M.S. *Achilles* at once made a large alteration of course to port in order to throw out the enemy's gunfire. On two other occasions, at 9.40 p.m. and at 9.43 p.m., the *Admiral Graf Spee* fired single salvos at H.M.S. *Achilles*. H.M.S. *Achilles* did not reply to these salvos. The loom of the land, now to the north-eastward of H.M.S. *Achilles*, must have made it very difficult for the enemy to see her, and it was considered that the flash of her guns would give away her position. It seemed clear that these sporadic salvos from the *Admiral Graf Spee* were merely attempts to drive off shadows.

By 10.2 p.m. H.M.S. *Achilles* had closed to five miles from the *Admiral Graf Spee*, and it was possible to determine that the enemy was heading to pass to the northward of English Bank. H.M.S. *Achilles* informed H.M.S. *Ajax* accordingly.

Soon after that time H.M.S. *Achilles* found the *Admiral Graf Spee* very difficult to see owing to low clouds and patches of smoke. The British cruiser accordingly hauled to the southward in order to get the enemy silhouetted against the lights of Montevideo. This manoeuvre was successful.

At 10.48 the *Admiral Graf Spee* was observed to be about 7 miles east of the Whistle buoy at the entrance to the Montevideo channel, and it was clear that the defeated German raider was about to seek the shelter of the neutral harbour of Montevideo.

Throughout the day and the three hours of darkness the shadowing action of the British cruisers had been entirely successful, and every attempt of the *Admiral Graf Spee* to elude or drive off her pursuers had been defeated.

The *Admiral Graf Spee* anchored in Montevideo roads at ten minutes past midnight.

#### THE FOURTH PHASE.

Commodore Harwood had called off the pursuit an hour before the *Admiral Graf Spee* anchored in Montevideo roads, since the enemy's intentions had been by that time clear, and the British Commander was at pains to respect neutral territorial waters.

New dispositions were at once taken up by the British cruisers. The *Admiral Graf Spee* might have taken refuge in Montevideo harbour, but there was no reason to suppose that she intended to remain there. It devolved upon the two small British cruisers to ensure that the German "pocket battleship" did not break out into the open sea, and it was clear that reinforcements could not reach Commodore Harwood for some time.



Nor were the geographical factors of the situation in Commodore Harwood's favour. The Estuary of the River Plate is 120 miles across from Cabo San Antonio, in the Argentine, to Punta del Este, on the Uruguayan coast. Out of the estuary there are three widely separated deep-water channels. The northernmost of these is between the English Bank lightship and Cumberland Shoal. The second deep-water channel, the centre of which lies thirty miles further south, is between the south end of English Bank and the north end of Rouen Bank—a large shoal approximately half way between English Bank and the Argentine Coast. Between Rouen Bank and the Argentine coast is the third deep-water channel, which is nearly thirty miles wide.

There were thus three widely separate routes by which the *Admiral Graf Spee* might break out to the open sea. Commodore Harwood had only two cruisers, and he could not hope to destroy the enemy unless they were concentrated.

There was a danger that the British ships might be surprised by their superior enemy in the dawn light, when the British cruisers would be silhouetted against the lightening eastern sky, while the *Admiral Graf Spee* would be invisible against the dark loom of the land and the offshore mists of dawn. The difficulties of the position were great, but Commodore Harwood had one vital advantage. One might expect the crews of ships which had undergone a fierce action in which they had suffered damage and casualties, and taken part in a long and arduous chase, to be in need of rest. This was not the case. The spirit of the personnel of the British cruisers was such that they showed no fatigue. It was the same spirit which animated Commodore Harwood, commanding a greatly inferior force in a dangerous and difficult situation, to begin the signal telling his ships of his intentions with the words "My object—destruction".

Commodore Harwood reviewed the difficulties with which he was faced and determined upon his course of action. The primary necessity was to keep to seaward of the *Admiral Graf Spee* if she put to sea and at the same time avoid being caught against the dawn light. He therefore ordered H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles* to withdraw from the River Plate and patrol well to seaward during the night and to move back into the estuary after dawn.

The night passed without incident, and as soon as the danger of being silhouetted against the dawn light had passed, the ships closed in towards Montevideo, keeping constant watch over as much of the estuary as was possible.

At 10 p.m. on that day—Thursday, 14th December—the eight-inch gun cruiser H.M.S. *Cumberland* arrived in the River Plate area, having made the long passage from the Falkland Islands in thirty-four hours. This reinforcement enabled Commodore Harwood to dispose his forces so that sectors to seaward of all three of the deep-water channels leading out of the River Plate Estuary could be watched during the night. H.M.S. *Cumberland* patrolled the centre sector, with H.M.S. *Achilles* to the north of her and H.M.S. *Ajax* to the southward. Should the *Admiral Graf Spee* come out, she was to be shadowed, and the three British cruisers were to concentrate sufficiently far to seaward to enable a concerted attack to be delivered on the enemy.

Next day—Friday, 15th December—another problem faced Commodore Harwood. His ships could not keep the sea indefinitely, with boilers always ready to drive the ships at full speed, without further supplies of fuel. The Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker *Olynthus* was in the vicinity, and H.M.S. *Ajax* was ordered to oil from her at sea, while the operation was covered by the other two cruisers. Fuelling at sea is a difficult operation in anything but

a flat calm, and it was by no means calm. Securing wires, and even two spans of hurricane hawsers, were parted, but the fuelling was successfully accomplished.

Shortly after this, Commodore Harwood received news that the *Admiral Graf Spee* had been granted an extension of her stay in Montevideo up to seventy-two hours, in order to make herself seaworthy. Nevertheless, Commodore Harwood's despatch states:—"I could feel no security that she would not break out at any moment." The strain of watching and waiting, in instant readiness for action, could in no way be relaxed.

Before dawn on Saturday, December 16th, H.M.S. *Cumberland*, H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles* concentrated in the southern part of the River Plate Estuary, and H.M.S. *Ajax* flew off her aircraft to carry out a reconnaissance. The pilot was told to be careful not to fly over territorial waters. The aircraft returned at 8.30 a.m. and reported that it had been impossible to see anything owing to bad visibility.

There was danger that the *Admiral Graf Spee* might take advantage of the mist and try to break out.

The British cruisers at once went to action stations and stood to the northward to intercept the enemy. Information was soon received, however, which indicated that the *Admiral Graf Spee* was still in Montevideo harbour, that she was repairing damage with assistance from the shore, and had provisioned. It was reported as unlikely that the *Admiral Graf Spee* would sail that night, but Commodore Harwood did not feel able to rely upon this report. The unceasing vigilance of the British cruisers continued and Commodore Harwood made a signal to his squadron informing the ships of his intentions in the event of the enemy breaking out during that night.

It was in the late afternoon of this day that Commodore Harwood received the Admiralty's signal informing him of the honours bestowed by His Majesty upon him and the Captains of H.M.S. *Exeter*, H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles*, and of his promotion to Rear-Admiral to date December 13th—the date of the action and chase of the *Admiral Graf Spee*. Admiral Harwood's despatch states:—"This was a most stimulating tonic to us all, and I took steps to pass it on to H.M. Ships under my command, emphasizing the share of all concerned in the honours which their senior officers had received."

The British squadron spent that night patrolling on a north and south line five miles to the east of the English Bank light buoy.

On the morning of Sunday, December 17th, H.M.S. *Achilles* took in oil fuel at sea from the Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker *Olynthus* while H.M.S. *Cumberland* and H.M.S. *Ajax* acted as a covering force for the operation.

The British squadron then cruised off the south-east of the English Bank, remaining concentrated and ready to take up the same night patrol as on the previous night.

That afternoon messages were received that the *Admiral Graf Spee* was preparing for sea. Admiral Harwood's despatch states:—"We all expected that she would break out at any moment. I would like to place on record the fact that at this stage the most cheerful optimism pervaded all ships in spite of the fact that this was the fifth night of waiting for the enemy."

About 5.30 p.m. on the afternoon of Sunday, December 17th, news was received by Admiral Harwood stating that the *Admiral Graf Spee* was weighing anchor. It seemed that the British expectations of action were to be fulfilled.

H.M.S. *Cumberland*, H.M.S. *Ajax* and H.M.S. *Achilles* at once altered course towards the entrance of the five-mile dredged channel leading into Montevideo roads and the crews went to action stations. H.M.S. *Ajax's*

aircraft was flown off, with orders to report the position and movements of the *Admiral Graf Spee* and of the German ship *Tacoma*, to which ship the *Admiral Graf Spee* was known to have transferred a large number of men.

The *Admiral Graf Spee* left harbour at 6.15 p.m. and proceeded slowly down the dredged channel, after leaving the end of which she turned to the westward. The *Tacoma* also weighed anchor and followed the *Admiral Graf Spee*.

H.M.S. *Ajax*'s aircraft reported the *Admiral Graf Spee* in a position in shallow water about six miles south-west of Montevideo, and shortly afterwards—at 8.54 p.m.—the aircraft signalled "*Admiral Graf Spee* has blown herself up".

The British cruisers carried on towards Montevideo, proceeding north of the English Bank. H.M.S. *Ajax* recovered her aircraft, and as she was doing so H.M.S. *Achilles* passed her. The two British cruisers which had done such excellent service cheered ship as they passed one another.

Navigation lights were switched on, and the British squadron steamed past the whistle buoy at the entrance to the Montevideo dredged channel, passing within about four miles of the wreck of the *Admiral Graf Spee*. Admiral Harwood's despatch states:—"It was now dark, and she was ablaze from end to end, flames reaching almost as high as the top of the control tower, a magnificent and most cheering sight."

While H.M.S. *Cumberland*, H.M.S. *Ajax*, and H.M.S. *Achilles* were witnessing the ignominious end of the ship which had been the pride of the German navy—which had represented Germany at the Coronation Review at Spithead, and which had carried Herr Hitler triumphantly to Memel—H.M.S. *Exeter*, who had contributed so gallantly to the *Admiral Graf Spee*'s defeat, was at the Falkland Islands.

"I have the greatest pleasure in informing you of the very high standard of efficiency and courage that was displayed by all officers and men throughout the five days of the operation. . . . Within my own knowledge, and from the reports of the Commanding Officers, there are many stories of bravery, devotion to duty, and of the utmost efficiency, which show that H.M. Ships have been forcefully trained and made thoroughly ready to deal with the many and various exigencies of battle. I am submitting separately a list of officers and ratings whom I consider to be especially deserving of award. I would remark, however, that the standard throughout has been so high that the preparation of this list has been very difficult.

I would like also to place on record the honour and pleasure I had in taking one of H.M. Ships of the New Zealand Division into action, and fully concur with the Commanding Officer of H.M.S. *Achilles*' remark that 'New Zealand has every reason to be proud of her seamen during their baptism of fire.'

Further, it is most satisfactory for me to be able to inform you that the machinery and equipment of H.M. Ships proved to be of the highest efficiency, and well able to stand up to the prolonged strain of battle.

The main impression left on my mind is of the adequacy of our peace training. Little that had not been practised occurred, particularly among the repair parties."—Admiral Harwood's despatch.

#### ENCLOSURES.

- (1) Chart of *Admiral Graf Spee*'s cruise.
- (2) Track chart of the action of December 13th, 1939.
- (3) Plan of the Estuary of the River Plate.

15 May 1940

Telegram Nr. 1216 from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated  
15 May 1940.

Answered by Roosevelt in telegram Nr. 872 to Churchill,  
dated 16 May 1940.

JR

GRAY

London

Dated May 15, 1940

Rec'd 12:55 p.m.

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

RUSH.

1216, May 15, 6 p.m.

[REDACTED] STRICTLY PERSONAL AND [REDACTED] FOR THE  
PRESIDENT.

[REDACTED] AND PERSONAL. TELEGRAM. PRESIDENT  
ROOSEVELT FROM FORMER NAVAL PERSON.

Although I have changed my office, I am sure you would not wish me to discontinue our intimate, private correspondence. As you are no doubt aware, the scene has darkened swiftly. The enemy have a marked preponderance in the air, and their new technique is making a deep impression upon the French. I think myself the battle on land has only just begun, and I should like to see tanks engaged. Up to the present, Hitler is working with specialized units in tanks and air. The small countries are simply smashed up, one by one, like matchwood. We must expect, though it is not yet certain, that Mussolini will hurry in to share the loot of civilization. We expect to be attacked here  
ourselves

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

0063



-2- #1216, May 15, 6 p.m., from London.

ourselves, both from the air and by parachute and air borne troops in the near future, and are getting ready for them. If necessary, we shall continue the war alone and we are not afraid of that. But I trust you realize, Mr. President, that the voice and force of the United States may count for nothing if they are withheld too long. You may have a completely subjugated, Nazified Europe established with astonishing swiftness, and the weight may be more than we can bear. All I ask now is that you should proclaim nonbelligerency, which would mean that you would help us with everything short of actually engaging armed forces. Immediate needs are: first of all, the loan of forty or fifty of your older destroyers to bridge the gap between what we have now and the large new construction we put in hand at the beginning of the war. This time next year we shall have plenty. But if in the interval Italy comes in against us with another one hundred submarines, we may be strained to breaking point. Secondly, we want several hundred of the latest types of aircraft, of which you are now getting delivery. These can be repaid by those now being constructed in the United States for us. Thirdly, anti-aircraft equipment and ammunition, of which again there will be plenty next year, if we are  
alive

-3- #1216, May 15, 6 p.m., from London.

alive to see it. Fourthly, the fact that our ore supply is being compromised from Sweden, from North Africa, and perhaps from northern Spain, makes it necessary to purchase steel in the United States. This also applies to other materials. We shall go on paying dollars for as long as we can, but I should like to feel reasonably sure that when we can pay no more, you will give us the stuff all the same. Fifthly, we have many reports of possible German parachute or air borne descents in Ireland. The visit of a United States squadron to Irish ports, which might well (\*) prolonged, would be invaluable. Sixthly, I am looking to you to keep that Japanese dog quiet in the Pacific, using Singapore in any way convenient. The details of the material which we have in mind will be communicated to you separately.

With all good wishes and respect."

KENNEDY

RR

(\*) Apparent omission.

18 May 1940

Telegram Nr. 1267 from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated  
18 May 1940.



JT

GRAY

LONDON

Dated May 18, 1940

Rec'd 1:14 p.m.

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

RUSH

1267, May 18, 6 p.m.

[REDACTED]  
Your 872, May 16 and my 1243, May 17, noon.

[REDACTED] AND PERSONAL FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM FORMER  
NAVAL PERSON.

"Many thanks for your message for which I am grateful. I do not need to tell you about the gravity of what has happened. We are determined to preserve to the very end whatever the result of the great battle raging in France may be. We must expect in any case to be attached here on the Dutch model before very long and we hope to give a good account of ourselves. But if American assistance is to play any part it must be available."

KENNEDY

CSB

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

0067

20 May 1940

Telegram Nr. 1271 from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated  
20 May 1940.

For exchange of letters between President Roosevelt and Secretary  
of State Hull concerning this telegram, see correspondence  
filed under date of 11 November 1941.

HSM

FROM

Gray

London

Dated May 20, 1940

Rec'd 8:40 a.m.

Secretary of State,

Washington.

1271, May 20, 1 p.m.

**[REDACTED]** AND PERSONAL FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM FORMER  
NAVAL PERSON:

"Lothian has reported his conversation with you. I understand your difficulties but I am very sorry about the destroyers. If they were here in six weeks they would play an invaluable part. The battle in France is full of danger to both sides. Though we have taken heavy toll of enemy in the air and are clawing down two or three to one of their planes, they have still a formidable numerical superiority. Our most vital need is therefore the delivery at the earliest possible date of the largest possible number of Curtiss P-40 fighters now in course of delivery to your army.

With regard to the closing part of your talk with Lothian, our intention is whatever happens to fight on to the end in this Island and, provided we can get the help

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

hsm -2- No. 1271. May 20, 1 p.m., from London

help for which we ask, we hope to run them very close in the air battles in view of individual superiority. Members of the present administration would likely go down during this process should it result adversely, but in no conceivable circumstances will we consent to surrender. If members of the present administration were finished and others came in to parley amid the ruins, you must not be blind to the fact that the sole remaining bargaining counter with Germany would be the fleet, and if this country was left by the United States to its fate no one would have the right to blame those then responsible if they made the best terms they could for the surviving inhabitants. Excuse me, Mr. President, putting this nightmare bluntly. Evidently I could not answer for my successors who in utter despair and helplessness might well have to accommodate themselves to the German will. However there is happily no need at present to dwell upon such ideas. Once more thanking you for your good will."

KENNEDY

HPD

COPY:EDH

**REGRADED**  
**UNCLASSIFIED**

HSM

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Gray

London

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Rec'd 8:40 a.m.

Secretary of State,  
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0071

hsm -2- No. 1271, May 20, 1 p.m., from London

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KENNEDY

HPD

12 June 1940

Telegram Nr. 1622 from Churchill to Roosevelt, 12 June 1940.

See further telegram Nr. 1628, 13 June 1940, from Churchill to Roosevelt.



MA

This telegram must be closely paraphrased before being communicated to anyone. (D)

London

Dated June 12, 1940

Rec'd 7:45 p.m.

Secretary of State

Washington

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

RUSH TRIPLE PRIORITY.

1622, June 12, 9 p.m.

(GRAY) Prime Minister to President Roosevelt.

Following from former naval person.

PERSONAL AND [REDACTED]

I spent last night and this morning at the French G Q G where the situation was explained to me in the gravest terms by Generals Weygand and Georges. You have no doubt received full particulars from Mr Bullitt. The practical point is what will happen when and if the French front breaks, Paris is taken and General Weygand reports formally to his Government that France can no longer continue what he calls 'coordinated war'. The aged Marshal Petain who was none too good in April and July 1918 is I fear ready to lend his name and prestige to a treaty of peace for France. Reynaud on the other hand is for fighting on and he has a young general de Gaulle who believes much can be done. Admiral Darlan declares he will send the French fleet to Canada, it would



MA -2- tel # 1622, June 12 from London

it would be disastrous if the two big modern ships fell into bad hands. It seems to me that there must be many elements in France who will wish to continue the struggle either in France or in the French colonies or in both. This, therefore, is the moment for you to strengthen Reynaud the utmost you can and try to tip the balance in favor of the best and longest possible French resistance. I venture to put this point before you although I know you must understand it as well as I do.

Of course I made it clear to the French that we shall continue whatever happened and that we thought Hitler could not win the war or the mastery of the world until he had disposed of us, which has not been found easy in the past and which perhaps will not be found easy now. I made it clear to the French that we had good hopes of victory and anyhow had no doubts whatever of what our duty was. If there is anything you can say publicly or privately to the French now is the time (END GRAY).

Before I left the Prime Minister he urged me strongly to present again his crying need for destroyers. They lost two more yesterday. With invasion threatened and the trade routes likely to be attacked with the help of Italian submarines he feels he is in a most precarious position

0075

MA -3- tel # 1622, June 12, from London

- position and believes he needs destroyers more than anything else including planes. Replacements and repairs are by no means filling the gap.

KENNEDY

WYC

13 June 1940

Telegram Nr. 1628 from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated  
13 June 1940.

0077

hsm

GRAY

London

Dated June 13, 1940

Rec'd 9:10 a. m.

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

RUSH

1628, June 13, noon.

My 1622, June 12, 9 p. m.

[REDACTED] AND PERSONAL FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM FORMER  
NAVAL PERSON JUST RECEIVED.

"French have sent for me again, which means that crisis has arrived. Am just off. Anything you can say or do to help them now may make a difference.

We are also worried about Ireland. An American squadron at Berehaven would do no end of good I am sure."

KENNEDY

RR

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

15 June 1940

Telegram Nr. 1677 from Churchill to Roosevelt, 15 June 1940.



JT

GRAY

LONDON

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

Dated June 15, 1940

Rec'd 6:37 p.m.

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

RUSH

1677, June 15, 9 p.m.

██████████ AND PERSONAL FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM FORMER  
NAVAL PERSON: (SECTION ONE)

"I am grateful to you for your telegram and I have reported its operative passages to Reynaud to whom I had imparted a rather more sanguine view. He will I am sure, be disappointed at non-publication. I understand all your difficulties with American public opinion and Congress, but events are moving downward at a pace where they will pass beyond the control of American public opinion when at last it is ripened. Have you considered what offers Hitler may choose to make to France. He may say, 'surrender the fleet intact and I will leave you Alsace Lorraine', or alternatively 'if you do not give me your ships I will destroy your towns'. I am personally convinced that America will in the end go to all lengths but this moment is supremely critical

-2- #1677, June 15, 9 p.m., from London

critical for France. A declaration that the United States will, if necessary, enter the war might save France. Failing that in a few days French resistance may have crumbled and we shall be left alone.

Although the present government and I personally would never fail to send the fleet across the Atlantic if resistance was beaten down here, a point may be reached in the struggle where the present ministers no longer have control of affairs and when very easy terms could be obtained for the British islands by their becoming a vassal state of the Hitler empire. A pro-German government would certainly be called into being to make peace and might present to a shattered or a starving nation an almost irresistible case for entire submission to the Nazi will. The fate of the British fleet as I have already mentioned to you would be decisive on the future of the United States because if it were joined to the fleets of Japan, France, and Italy and the great resources of German industry, overwhelming sea power would be in Hitler's hands. He might, of course, use it with a merciful moderation. On the other hand he might not. This revolution in sea power might happen very quickly and certainly long before the United States would be able to prepare against it.

If

-3- #1677, June 15, 9 p.m., from London

If we go (down?) you may have a United States of Europe under the Nazi command far more numerous, far stronger, far better armed than the new.

I know well, Mr. President, that your eye will already have searched these depths but I feel I have the right to place on record the vital manner in which American interests are at <sup>(stake?)</sup> state in our battle and that of France.

I am sending you through Ambassador Kennedy a paper on destroyer strength prepared by the naval staff for your information. If we have to keep as we shall, the bulk of our destroyers on the east coast to guard against invasion, how shall we be able to cope with a German-Italian attack on the food and trade by which we live? The sender of the 35 destroyers as I have already described will bridge the gap until our new construction comes in at the end of the year. Here is a definite practical and possible decisive step which can be taken at once and I urge most earnestly that you will weigh my words."

(SECTION TWO). MOST SECRET: "Since beginning of war Britain and France have lost 32 destroyers with displacement of 47,380 tons which were complete losses. Out of these 25, with displacement of 37,637 tons, were  
lost

-4- #1677, June 15, 9 p.m., from London

lost since 1st February.

There is always a large number of destroyers out of action for repairs to damages caused by enemy action and hard service. From outbreak of war up to Norwegian invasion approximately 30% of British destroyers in home waters were in this condition but since then the percentage has greatly increased and for instance, out of 133 destroyers in commission in home waters today, only 68 are fit for service, which is lowest level since war started. In 1918 some 433 destroyers were in service.

The critical situation which has arisen in land operations has unfortunately made less apparent the grave difficulties with which we are faced on the sea.

The seizure of the channel ports by the enemy has provided him both with convenient bases and stepping off ground for descents on our coast. This means that our east coast and channel ports will become much more open to attack and in consequence more shipping will have to be concentrated on west coast ports. This will enable the enemy to concentrate their submarine attacks on this more limited area, the shipping lanes of which will have to carry the heavy concentration of shipping.

This



-5- #1677, June 15, 9 p.m., from London

This alone is a serious enough problem at a time when we know that the enemy intend to carry out the bitter and concentrated attack on our trade routes, but added to our difficulties is the fact that Italy's entry into the war has brought into the seas another 100 submarines many of which may be added to those already in the German U-boat fleet, which at a conservative estimate numbers 55.

The changed strategical situation brought about by the possession by the enemy of the whole coast of Europe from Norway to the channel has faced us with a prospect of invasion which has more hopes of success than we had ever conceived possible. While we must concentrate our destroyers on protecting the vital trade, we must also dispose our naval forces to meet this threat.

If this invasion does take place, it will almost certainly be in the form of dispersed landings from a large number of small craft and the only effective counter to such a move is to maintain numerous and effective destroyer patrols.

To meet this double threat we have only the 68 destroyers mentioned above. Only 10 small type new construction destroyers are due to complete in next four months.

The



-6- #1677, June 15, 9 p.m., from London

The position becomes still worse when we have to contemplate diverting further destroyer forces to the Mediterranean as we may be forced to do when the sea war there is intensified.

We are now faced with the imminent collapse of French resistance and if this occurs the successful defense of this island will be the only hope of averting the collapse of civilization as we define it.

We must <sup>(see)</sup> ~~ask~~ **ASK** therefore as a matter of life or death to be reinforced with these destroyers. We will carry out the struggle whatever the odds but it may well be beyond our resources unless we receive every reinforcement and particularly do we need this reinforcement on the sea."

KENNEDY

NPL

15 June 1940

Telegram Nr. 1678 from Churchill to Roosevelt, 15 June 1940.

JT

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

GRAY

LONDON

Dated June 15, 1940

Rec'd 7 p.m.

Secretary of State,

Washington,

TRIPLE PRIORITY  
1878, June 15, midnight.

**[REDACTED]** AND PERSONAL FOR THE PRESIDENT.

"10:45 p.m., 15th June, 1940.

President of the United States from former naval person.

Since sending you my message this afternoon I have heard that Monsieur Reynaud, in a telegram which he has just sent to you, has practically said that the decision of France to continue the war from overseas depends on your being able to assure the French Government that the United States of America will come into the war at a very early date.

When I sent you my message just now I did not know that Monsieur Reynaud had stated the dilemma in these terms, but I am afraid there is no getting away from the fact that this is the choice before us now.

Indeed, the British Ambassador in Bordeaux tells me that if your reply does not contain the assurance asked for,

-2- #1678, June 15, midnight, from London

for, the French will very quickly ask for an armistice, and I much doubt whether it will be possible in that event for us to keep the French fleet out of German hands.

When I speak of the United States entering the war I am, of course, not thinking in terms of an expeditionary force, which I know is out of the question. What I have in mind is the tremendous moral effect that such an American decision would produce not merely in France but also in all the democratic countries of the world and in the opposite sense of the German and Italian peoples."

KENNEDY

HPD

15 June 1940

Telegram handed to Prime Minister Churchill to the United States Ambassador, 15 June 1940. Sent to the President by Henry Morgenthau on 18 June 1940.



THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

*file*  
*Confidential*  
*Maguire*

June 18, 1940.

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE PRESIDENT

After reading this, unless we do something to give the English additional destroyers, it seems to me it is absolutely hopeless to expect them to keep going.

H. M., JR.

Received via Arthur Purvis  
June 18, 1940  
I.M.J.

Viscount Halifax

Lord Lothian

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

June 17th, 1940

" "

Following was handed to United States Ambassador by former naval person late on June 15th. Please inform Purvis.

Since beginning of the war Britain and France lost thirty-two destroyers with displacement of 47,380 tons, which were complete losses. Out of these twenty-five with displacement of 37,637 tons were lost since February 1st.

There is (? always) a large number of destroyers out of action for worst damages caused by enemy action and (defence service ?). From the outbreak of the war up to invasion approximately 30% of British destroyers in home waters were in this condition and since then percentage has greatly increased and for instance out of 133 destroyers in commission in home waters today only 68 are fit for service, which is lowest level since the war started. In 1918 some 433 were in service.

The critical situation which has arisen in land operations has unfortunately made less apparent the grave difficulties with which we are faced on the sea.

The seizure of the Channel ports by the enemy has provided him both with convenient bases and stepping-off ground for descents on the coast. This means that our East Coast and I presume ports will become much more open to attack and in consequence more (? shipping) will have to be concentrated on the West Coast ports. This will enable the enemy to concentrate their submarine attacks on this more limited area, the shipping lanes of which will have to carry a heavy concentration of shipping.

This alone is a serious enough problem at a time when we know that enemy intend to carry out bitter and concentrated attack on our trade routes but added to our difficulties is the fact that Italy's entry into the war has brought into the seas another one hundred submarines many of which may be added to those already in German U-Boat fleet which at a conservative estimate numbers fifty-five.

The change of strategical situation brought about by possession by the enemy of the whole coast of Europe from Norway to Channel has faced us with a prospective invasion which has more hopes of success than we had ever conceived possible. While we must concentrate our destroyers on protecting vital trade, we must also dispose our naval forces to meet this threat.

If this invasion does take place it will almost certainly be in the form of dispersed landings from a large number of small craft and only effective counter to such a move is to maintain numerous and effective destroyer patrols.

To meet this double threat we have only the 68 destroyers mentioned above. Only 10 small type new construction destroyers are due for completion in the next four months.

The position becomes still worse when we have to contemplate diverting further destroyer forces to the Mediterranean as we may be forced to do when the sea war there is intensified.

We are faced with the imminent collapse of French resistance and if this occurs successful defence of this Island will be only hope of averting collapse of civilisation as we define it.

We must ask therefore as a matter of life or death, to be reinforced with these destroyers. We will carry on the (? struggle) whatever the odds but it may well be beyond our resources unless we receive every reinforcement and particularly do we need this reinforcement on the sea.

16 June 1940  
17 June 1940

Six messages. No record of the sender or recipient of these messages.

Telegram of June 17th/1940

MOST IMMEDIATE

Your telegram 1011.

You will see (from) H. PETAIN's broadcast how fast things are moving.

2. In view of President's willingness as expressed in your telegram No. 1011 to act as we had suggested in regard to making transfer of French fleet to us a condition of his willingness to act if he had been approached I hope that he will put immediate pressure on the French Government in no circumstances to fail to send the fleet to British ports before armistice is concluded.

3. Petain has acted in complete disregard of our stipulation and we can have no confidence in further action that he may take unless he can be stiffened to act up to principal condition on which we gave our conditional assent.



Telegram of June 17th, 1940

MOST IMMEDIATE

My telegram No. 1148.

I am deeply sensible of the President's desire to help us. Please tell him that most effective thing he can do is to let us have destroyers immediately. Our need of them is vital and their addition to our fleet might be decisive. It is most important that not a day should be lost.

June 16. 1.50 p.m.

(1)

You should tell the President that French Government have asked whether, in spite of Treaty forbidding a separate peace or armistice, His Majesty's Government will consent to their enquiring what terms of armistice Germany would offer France.

2. His Majesty's Government have replied as follows: "You should deliver following message which has been approved by the Cabinet to M. Renaud. Begins.

Our agreement forbidding separate negotiations, whether for Armistice or peace was made with French Republic and not with any particular French Administration or Statesman. It therefore involves honour of France. Nevertheless, provided, but only provided, that French fleet is sailed forthwith for British harbours pending negotiations, His Majesty's Government give their full consent to enquiry by French Government to ascertain terms of an armistice for France. His Majesty's Government being ardent to continue the war wholly exclude themselves from all part in above-mentioned enquiry for an armistice. Ends."

3. I trust that if the President is asked by the French Government to act as intermediary in this inquiry he will tell French Government that before doing so he must be assured that in accordance with British request French fleet has been moved to British ports and that he will if necessary also make it clear to German Government that a demand for surrender of French fleet will not be permitted by United States Government.

June 16 (16 Paris) 9.50

You should, in continuation of my message contained my telegram No. 368, inform Monsieur Reynaud as follows:-

We expect to be consulted as soon as any armistice terms are received. This is necessary not merely in virtue of treaty forbidding separate peace or armistice but also in view of the vital consequences of any armistice to ourselves, have regard especially to fact that British troops are fighting with French army.

You should also impress on French Government that in stipulating for removal of French fleet to British ports we have in mind French interests as well as our own and are convinced that it will strengthen the hands of French Government in any armistice discussions if they can show that French navy is out of reach of German forces.

As regards French Air Force we assume that every effort will be made to fly it to North Africa, unless indeed the French Government would prefer to send it to this country.

We count on French Government doing all they can both before and during any armistice discussions to extricate the Polish, Belgian and Czech troops at present in France and to bring pressure on them to proceed to North Africa. Arrangements are being made to receive Polish and Belgian Governments in this country.

(3)

June 16. 1.19 p.m.

After message was sent to Monsieur Reynaud in reply to his request for permission from us to make enquiry about armistice we received information from responsible French quarters that decision of French Government to continue the war might still be secured if we would subscribe immediately to a declaration for text of which see my telegram to Bordeaux.

This has been conveyed to Monsieur Reynaud and our earlier reply on armistice proposal has been suspended pending further consideration of position by French Government in the light of declaration contained in paragraph 2 of above.

If French Government decide to continue war on strength of this, armistice proposal and our reply to it will of course lapse. Alternatively if they decide to pursue armistice proposal declaration will not be proceeded with.

Please explain to President whole position and how situation would develop. We will continue to keep him informed.

Prime Minister is going over tonight to meet Reynaud tomorrow.

June 16 eve 9. p.m.

At this most fateful moment in the history of the modern world, the Governments of the United Kingdom and French Republic make this declaration of indissoluble union and unyielding resolution in their common defense of justice and freedom, against subjection to a system which reduces mankind to a state of robots and slaves.

The two Governments declare that France and Great Britain shall no longer be two nations but one Franco-British Union.

The constitution of the Union will provide for joint organs of defence, foreign, financial and economic policies.

Every citizen of France will enjoy immediate citizenship of Great Britain, every British subject will become a citizen of France.

Both countries will share responsibility for repair of devastation of war, wherever it occurs in their territories, and resources of both shall be equal, and as one, applied to that purpose.

During the war there shall be a single war cabinet, and all the forces of Britain and France, whether on land, sea or in the air, will be placed under its direction. It will govern from wherever it best can. The two Parliaments will be formally associated. The nations of the British Empire are already forming new armies. France will keep her available forces in the field, on the sea, and in the air. The Union appeals to United States to fortify the economic resources of the Allies, and to bring her powerful material aid to the common cause.

-2-

The Union will concentrate its whole energy against  
the power of the enemy no matter where the battle may be.  
And thus we shall conquer.



9 July 1940

Telegram from Churchill to Roosevelt, transmitted 9 July 1940  
by letter from Lord Lothian to the President.

For reply, see Roosevelt's letter to Lord Lothian (undated),  
filed under date of 12 July 1940.

REF ID: A66000  
UNCLASSIFIED

SECTION EMBASSY,  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

July 9th, 1940.

~~Private~~  
Dear Mr. President,

I enclose herein a copy of a telegram containing a message for you from the Prime Minister regarding the appointment of the Duke of Windsor as Governor of the Bahamas. You will see from this telegram that the Prime Minister was particularly anxious that you should have advance information of this appointment. Most unfortunately the telegram containing the Prime Minister's <sup>message</sup> letter reached this Embassy about midday in a corrupt form, and it was necessary to ask the Foreign Office for a repetition. Before this repetition was received another telegram was received from London stating that owing to/

The Honourable

Franklin D. Roosevelt,

President of the United States of America,

Washington, D. C.

to an unfortunate leakage it had been necessary to arrange for the appointment to be announced this evening by the British Broadcasting Company.

I am afraid therefore that circumstances have made it impossible to give you the advance notice desired.

Believe me,

Dear Mr. President,

Very sincerely yours,

*L. Horan*

The position of the Duke of Windsor on the Continent in recent months has been causing His Majesty and His Majesty's Government some embarrassment as, though his loyalties are unimpeachable, there is always a backwash of Nazi intrigue which seeks now that the greater part of the Continent is in enemy hands to make trouble about him. There are personal and family difficulties about his return to this country.

In all the circumstances it was felt that an appointment abroad might appeal to him and the Prime Minister has with His Majesty's cordial approval offered him the Governorship of the Bahamas. His Royal Highness has intimated that he will accept the appointment.

The Prime Minister wished the President to have the earliest possible advance information of this decision which has only just been arrived at.

31 July 1940

Telegram Nr. 2490 from Churchill to Roosevelt, 31 July 1940.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DIVISION OF COMMUNICATIONS AND RECORDS

From:

*London*

Number:

*2490*

Dated:

*7-31-6pm*

Code:

*Bray*

Caption:

*Secret and personal  
for the President*

This telegram has been distributed to:

*5*

Please advise the Division of Communications and Records if further distribution should be made.



JT

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

GRAY

LONDON

Dated July 31, 1940

Rec'd 3:35 p.m.

TRIPLE PRIORITY

2400, July 31, 6 p.m.

**[REDACTED]** AND PERSONAL FOR THE PRESIDENT  
FROM FORMER NAVAL PERSON:

"It is some time since I ventured to cable personally to you, and many things both good and bad have happened in between. It has now become most urgent for you to let us have the destroyers, motor boats and flying-boats for which we have asked. The Germans have the whole French coast line from which to launch U-boats, dive-bomber attacks upon our trade and food, and in addition we must be constantly prepared to repel by sea action threatened invasion in the narrow waters, and also to deal with break outs from Norway towards Ireland, Iceland, Shetlands and Faroes. Besides this we have to keep control of the exit from the Mediterranean, and if possible the command of that inland sea itself, and thus to prevent the war spreading seriously into Africa.

(END SECTION ONE)

WSB

KENNEDY

0107

JT

GRAY

LONDON

Dated July 31, 1940

Rec'd 6:30 p.m.

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

TRIPLE PRIORITY.

2490, July 31, 6 p.m. (SECTION TWO)

Point two. We have a large construction of destroyers and anti-U-boat craft coming forward, but the next three or four months open the gap of which I have previously told you. Latterly, the air attack on our shores has become injurious. In the last ten days we have had the following destroyers sunk: BRAZEN, CODRINGTON, DELIGHT, WREN, and the following damaged: BEAGLE, BOREAS, BRILLIANT, GRIFFIN, MONTROSE, WALPOLE, WHITSHED, TOTAL 12. All this in the advent of any attempt which may be made at invasion. Destroyers are frightfully vulnerable to air bombing, and yet they must be held in the air bombing area to prevent seaborne invasion. We could not keep up the present rate of casualties for long, and if we cannot get a substantial reinforcement, the whole fate of the war may be decided by this minor and easily remediable factor.

This

-2- No. 2490, July 31, 6 p.m. (SEC TWO) from London

This is a frank account of our present situation and I am confident, now that you know exactly how we stand, that you will leave nothing undone to ensure that 50 or 60 of your oldest destroyers are sent to me at once. I can fit them very quickly with asdic and use them against U-boats on the western approaches and so keep the more modern and better gunned craft for the narrow seas against invasion.

Mr. President, with great respect I must tell you that in the long history of the world, this is a thing to do now. Large construction is coming to me in 1941, but the crisis will be reached long before 1941. I know you will do all in your power but I feel entitled and bound to put the gravity and urgency of the position before you.

Point three. If the destroyers were given, the motor boats and flying boats which would be invaluable, could surely come in behind them.

(END SECTION TWO)

KENNEDY

NK:LMS

JT

GRAY

LONDON

Dated July 31, 1940

Rec'd 6:37 p.m.

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

TRIPLE PRIORITY.

2490, July 31, 6 p.m. (SECTION THREE)

Point four. I am beginning to feel very hopeful about this war if we can get 'round the next three or four months. The air is holding well. We are hitting that man<sup>hard</sup> both in repelling attacks and in bombing Germany. But the loss of destroyers by air attacks may well be so serious as to break down our defense of the food and trade routes across the Atlantic.

Point five. Tonight the latest convoys of rifles, cannon and ammunition are coming in. Special trains are waiting to take them to the troops and home guard, who will take a lot of killing before they give them up. I am sure that with your comprehension of the sea affair, you will not let this crux of the battle go wrong for the want of these destroyers. I cabled to Lothian some days ago, and now send this through Kennedy, who is a grand help to us and the common cause."

(END OF MESSAGE)

KENNEDY

NK

0110

15 August 1940

Telegram Nr. 2730 from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated  
15 August 1940.

EN

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

GRAY

LONDON

Dated August 15, 1940

Rec'd 8:44 p.m., 14th

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

TRIPLE PRIORITY

2730, August 15, 1 a.m.

Your 2316, August 13, 6 p.m.

**[REDACTED]** AND PERSONAL FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM FORMER  
NAVAL PERSON.

"I need not tell you how cheered I am by your message or how grateful I feel for your untiring efforts to give us all possible help. You will, I am sure, send us everything you can, for you know well that the worth of every destroyer that you can spare to us is measured in rubies. But we also need the motor torpedo boats which you mentioned and as many flying boats and rifles as you can let us have. We have a million men waiting for rifles.

The moral value of this fresh aid from your government and people at this critical time will be very great and widely felt.

We can meet both the points you consider necessary to help you with Congress and with others concerned, but I

am sure



-2- #2730, August 15, 1 a.m., from London.

am sure that you will not misunderstand me if I say that our willingness to do so must be conditional on our being assured that there will be no delay in letting us have the ships and flying boats. As regards an assurance about the British fleet, I am of course, ready to reiterate to you what I told Parliament on June 4th. We intend to fight this out here to the end and none of us would ever buy peace by surrendering or scuttling the fleet. But in any use you may make of this repeated assurance you will please bear in mind the disastrous effect from our point of view and perhaps also from yours of allowing any impression to grow that we regard the conquest of the British Islands and its naval bases as any other than an impossible contingency. The spirit of our people is splendid. Never have they been so determined. Their confidence in the issue has been enormously and legitimately strengthened by the severe air fighting of the past week.

As regards naval and air bases, I readily agree to your proposals for 99 year leases which is easier for us than the method of purchase. I have no doubt that, once the principle is agreed between us, the details can be adjusted and we can discuss them at leisure. It will be necessary for us to consult the governments of Newfoundland and Canada about the Newfoundland base in which

Canada

-3- #2730, August 15, 1 a.m., from London.

Canada has an interest. We are at once proceeding to seek their consent.

Once again, Mr. President, let me thank you for your help and encouragement which means so much to us.

KENNEDY

NPL

25 August 1940

Telegram from Churchill to Roosevelt, 25 August 1940.

PERSONAL AND [REDACTED]

I fully understand legal and constitutional difficulties which make you wish for a contract, embodied in letters, but I venture to put before you the difficulties and even dangers which I foresee in this procedure.

For the sake of precise list instrumentalities mentioned, which in our sore need we greatly desire, we are asked to pay undefined concessions in all islands and places mentioned from Newfoundland to British Guiana "as may be required in the judgement of the United States". Suppose that we could not agree to all your experts asked for, should we not be exposed to a charge of breaking our contract, for which we had already received value. Your ~~commitment~~ <sup>commitment</sup> ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> ~~essence~~ <sup>essence</sup> is definitely ~~unlimited~~ <sup>ours</sup> ~~unlimited~~ <sup>unlimited</sup>. Much though we need destroyers, we should not wish to have them at the risk of a misunderstanding with the United States, or indeed any serious argument. If the matter is to be represented as a contract both sides must be defined with far more precision on our side than has hitherto been possible. But this might easily take some time. As I have several times pointed out, we need destroyers chiefly to bridge the gap between now and the arrival of our new construction, which I set on foot on the outbreak of the war. This construction is very considerable. For instance, we shall receive by the end of February new destroyers and new medium destroyers 20. Corvettes, which are a handy type of submarine-hunter, adapted to ocean work 60. Motor torpedo boats 37. M.A.S. Boats 25.

Fairmiles/

REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED

0116

Fairmiles, a wooden anti-submarine patrol boat 104.  
72 ft. motor launches 29. An even greater in-flow will  
arrive in the following 6 months. It is just in the  
gap from September to February inclusive, while this  
new crop is coming in and working up that your fifty  
destroyers would be invaluable. With them we could  
minimize the shipping losses in North Western approaches,  
and also take a stronger line against Mussolini in the  
Mediterranean. Therefore time is all-important. We  
should not, however, be justified in the circumstances  
if we gave a blank cheque on the whole of our trans-  
Atlantic possessions merely to bridge this gap, through  
which anyhow we hope to make our way though with added  
risk and suffering. This I am sure you will see puts  
forth our [?] difficulties] plainly.

2. Would not following procedure be acceptable?

I would offer at once certain fairly well-  
defined facilities which will show you the kind of gift  
we have in mind and your experts could then discuss these  
or any variants of them with ours, we remaining the final  
judge of what we can give. All this we will do free  
trusting entirely to the generosity and goodwill of the  
American people as to whether they on their part would  
like to do something for us. But anyhow it is the  
settled policy of His Majesty's Government to offer you  
and make available to you when desired solid and effective  
means of protecting your Atlantic seaboard. I have  
already asked the Admiralty and Air Ministry to draw up  
in outline what we are prepared to offer leaving your  
experts to suggest alternatives. I propose to send  
you this outline in two or three days and to publish

in/

in due course. In this way there can be no possible dispute and the American people will feel more warmly towards us because they will see that we are playing the game by the world's cause and that their safety and interests are dear to us.

3. If your law or your Admiral require that any help you may choose to give us must be presented as a quid pro quo, I do not see why the British Government have to come into that at all.

Could you not say that you did not feel able to accept this fine offer which we make unless the United States matched it in some way and that therefore Admiral would be able to link the one with the other.

I am so very grateful to you for all the trouble you have been taking and I am so sorry to add to your burden knowing what a good [? friend?] you have been to us.

August 25th, 1940



27 August 1940

Letter from Lord Lothian, British Embassy, to President  
Roosevelt, enclosing a telegram from Churchill to Roosevelt.

~~SECRET~~

BRITISH EMBASSY,  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

August 27th, 1940

Dear Mr. President,

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Here is the Prime Minister's reply

\_\_\_\_\_ together with the drafts of the letters I am to

\_\_\_\_\_ write to Mr. Hull, approved by London. I think

you will agree that they meet all essential points

so far as our side of the transaction is concerned.

I should very much like to know whether

you are satisfied before you leave Washington to-day.

General Watson tells me you have got a terrible lot

of engagements for the rest of the day so perhaps

you could get him to give me your answer over the

telephone.

Believe me,

Dear Mr. President,

Yours very sincerely,

*L. Huran*

The Honourable

Franklin D. Roosevelt,

President.

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

Following from former naval person for President.

"Lord Lethian has cabled me outline of facilities you have in mind (~~Gr. corrupt~~) (~~suggestion~~). Our naval and air experts studying question from your point of view had reached practically the same conclusions except that in addition they thought that Antigua might be useful as a base for flying boats. To this also you would be very welcome. Our settled policy is to make the United States safe on their Atlantic Seaboard beyond a peradventure to quote a phrase you may remember.

2. We are quite ready to make you a positive offer on these lines forthwith. There would of course have to be an immediate conference on details but for reasons which I set out in my last telegram we do not like the idea of an arbiter should any difference arise because we feel that as donor we must remain the final judges of what the gift is to consist of within the general framework of the facilities which will have been promised and always on the understanding that we shall do our best to meet the United States wishes.

3. The two letters drafted by Lord Lethian to the Secretary of State are quite agreeable to us. The only reason why I do not wish the second letter to be published is that I think that it is much more likely that German Government will be one to surrender or scuttle its fleet or what is left of it. In this as you are aware they have already had some practice. You will remember that I said some months ago in one of my private cables to you that any such action on our part would be a dastardly act and that is the opinion of everyone of us.

4. If/

4. If you felt able after our offer had been made to let us have instrumentalities which have been mentioned, or anything else you think proper, this could be expressed as an act not in payment or consideration for but in recognition of what we had done for the security of the United States.

5. Mr. President this business has become especially urgent in view of recent menace which Mussolini is showing to Greece. If our business is put through on bilateral lines and in the highest spirit of good-will it might even now save that small historic country from invasion and conquest. Even the next forty-eight hours are important."

Draft letter from H.M.Ambassador to Secretary of State  
of the United States.

Sir,

I have the honour under instructions from His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to refer to the speech made by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons on August 20th. In that speech Mr. Churchill stated that His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom had decided some months ago that the interests of both the United States and the British Commonwealth of Nations required that the United States should have facilities for the naval and air defence of the western hemisphere against the attack of a hostile power which might have acquired temporary but lengthy control of a large part of western Europe and its resources.

I have now been instructed to inform you that His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, in agreement with His Majesty's Government in Canada, are happy to give the assurance that in the hope of furthering and making still more cordial and enduring the existing good relations between Great Britain and the United States, and as a free contribution on their part towards the defence of the Americas, and the inhabitants thereof, they are ready to make available immediately to the United States Government naval and air facilities in certain areas in Newfoundland, Bermuda, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Antigua, St. Lucia, Trinidad, and British Guiana, needed for the purpose of hemispheric defence, such areas to be leased to the United States Government for a period of 99 years.

In order to give further precision to this offer I am authorised to state that His Majesty's Government are ~~be~~ prepared in friendship and good will to meet ~~your~~ <sup>of the U.S.A.</sup> representatives/forthwith in order to consider the terms

of/

of the aforementioned leases and that subject to later settlement of points of detail the facilities which they are prepared to offer at the above-mentioned places are:-

- (a) facilities to develop naval and air establishments together with the necessary seaward, coast and anti-aircraft defences.
- (b) Provision for location of sufficient military garrisons.
- (c) Facilities for accommodating these garrisons, together with stores, etc.
- (d) Such measures of jurisdiction and of local administrative control in each of the areas as may be determined by mutual agreement to be necessary in order to give effect to the objects of the lease and for security and effective exercise by the United States Government of all the above facilities.

His Majesty's Government do not desire rent or any other payment in return for the grant of these facilities or in consideration of the leases, though they presume that the Government of the United States will be willing to pay compensation to private interests for eviction or disturbance.

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Draft letter from H.M.Ambassador to the Secretary of  
State of the United States.

Not for publication.

Dear Mr. Secretary,

I am writing with reference to my note of  
to-day regarding my Government's offer of certain naval  
and air facilities to the United States Government to  
inform you that I have been authorised in this connexion  
to draw your attention to and to confirm on behalf of the  
Prime Minister certain statements made by him in the House  
of Commons on June 4th and August 20th.

On June 4th Mr. Churchill said:

"We shall never surrender and even if, which  
I do not for a moment believe, this land or a large part  
of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond  
the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, will  
carry on the struggle until in God's good time the New  
World, with all its power and might, sets forth to the  
liberation and rescue of the Old."

On August 20th Mr. Churchill said:

"In our own case, if we had been put in the  
terrible position of France - now happily impossible,  
although it would have been the duty of all war leaders  
to fight on here to the end - it would also have been their  
duty, as I indicated in my speech of June 4th, to provide  
as far as possible for the naval security of Canada and  
our Dominions and to make sure they had the means to carry  
on the struggle from beyond the oceans."

-----

27 August 1940

Telegram from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated 27 August 1940.

London - British lease naval bases to U. S.

JR

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

GRAY

London

Dated August 27, 1940

Rec'd 10:15 a.m.

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

TRIPLE PRIORITY.

2912, August 27, 3 p.m.

[REDACTED] AND PERSONAL FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM FORMER  
NAVAL PERSON.

"Lord Lothian has cabled me the outline of the facilities you have in mind. Our naval and air experts studying the question from your point of view had reached practically the same conclusions except that in addition they thought Antigua might be useful as a base for flying boats. To this also you would be very welcome. Our settled policy is to make the United States safe on their Atlantic seaboard beyond a peradventure to quote a phrase you may remember.

We are quite ready to make you a positive offer on these lines forthwith. There would of course have to be an immediate conference on details but for the reasons which I set out in my last telegram we do not like the idea of an arbiter should any difference arise because we feel that as donors we must remain the final judges of what the gift is to consist of / <sup>within</sup> the general framework of the facilities

0127

-2- #2912, August 27, 3 p.m., from London.

facilities which will have been promised and always on the understanding that we shall do our best to meet United States wishes.

The two letters drafted by Lord Lothian to the Secretary of State are quite agreeable to us. The only reason why I do not wish the second letter to be published is that I think it is much more likely that the German Government will be the one to surrender or scuttle its fleet or what is left of it. In this as you are aware they have already had some practice. (END SECTION ONE)

KENNEDY

RR

1

HSM

GRAY

London

Dated August 27, 1940

Rec'd 10:50 a. m.

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

TRIPLE PRIORITY

2912, August 27, 3 p. m. (SECTION TWO)

You will remember that I said some months ago in one of my private cables to you that any such action on our part would be a dastard act and that in the opinion of everyone of us.

If you felt able after our offer had been made to let us have the instrumentalities which have been mentioned or anything else you think proper this could be expressed as an act not in payment or consideration for but in recognition of what we had done for the security of the United States.

Mr. President, this business has become especially urgent in view of the recent menace which Mussolini is showing to Greece. If our business is put through on big lines and in the highest spirit of good will it might even now save that small historic country from invasion and conquest. Even the next forty-eight hours are important."

(END MESSAGE)

KENNEDY

RR

24 September 1940

Telegram from Churchill to Roosevelt, 24 September 1940.

Answers Roosevelt's telegram Nr. 3166 to Churchill, dated  
23 September 1940—filed herein.



2.15  
file ✓  
[REDACTED]  
Telegram from London dated  
September 24th, 1940

I was encouraged by your reception of information conveyed by Lord Lothian about Dakar. It would be against our joint interests if strong German submarine and aircraft base were established there. It looks as if there might be a stiff fight. Perhaps not but anyhow orders have been given to ram it through. We should be delighted if you would send some American warships to Monrovia, Freetown, and I hope by that time to have Dakar ready for your call. But what really matters now is that you should put it across the French Government that a war declaration would be very bad indeed for them in all that concerns United States. If Vichy declare war that is same thing as Germany, and Vichy possessions in Western Hemisphere must be considered potentially German possessions. Many thanks also for your hint about invasion. We are all ready for them. I am very glad to hear about rifles.

REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED

0131

will

COPY

[REDACTED]

Telegram from London dated (David Brown)  
September 24, 1940

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I was encouraged by your reception of information conveyed by Lord Lothian about Dakar. It would be against our joint interests if strong German submarine and aircraft base were established there. It looks as if there might be a stiff fight. Perhaps not but anyhow orders have been given to ram it through. We should be delighted if you would send some American warships to Monrovia, Freetown, and I hope by that time to have Dakar ready for your call. But what really matters now is that you should put it across the French Government that a war declaration would be very bad indeed for them in all that concerns United States. If Vichy declare war that is ~~ane~~ same thing as Germany, and Vichy possessions in Western Hemisphere must be considered potentially German Possessions. Many thanks also for your hint about invasion. We are all ready for them. I am very glad to hear about rifles.

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

*For original of this message -  
see Great Britain - Drawer 4-1940.*

0132

4 October 1940

Telegram Nr. 3325 from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated  
4 October 1940.

JT

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

Secretary of State,

Washington.

TRIPLE PRIORITY.

3325, October 4, 9 p.m.

**[REDACTED]** AND PERSONAL FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM  
FORMER NAVAL PERSON.

"After prolonged consideration of all the issues involved we today decided to let the Burma Road be re-opened when the three months period expired on October 17. Foreign Secretary and I will announce this to Parliament on Tuesday 8th. I shall say that our hopes for a just settlement being reached Japan and China have not borne fruit and that the Three Power Pact revives the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1939 and that it has a clear pointer against the United States. I know how difficult it is for you to say anything which would commit the United States to any hypothetical course of action in the Pacific. But I venture to ask whether at this time a simple action might not speak louder than words. Would it not be possible for you to send an American squadron, the bigger  
the

GRAY

LONDON

Dated October 4, 1940

Rec'd 8:11 p.m.

*Life in desk drawer*

-2- 3325, October 4, 9 p.m., from London

the better, to pay a friendly visit to Singapore. There they would be welcome in a perfectly normal and rightful way. If desired occasion might be taken of such a visit for a technical discussion of naval and military problems in those and Philippine waters and the Dutch might be invited to join. Anything in this direction would have a marked deterrent effect upon a Japanese declaration of war upon us over the Burma Road opening. I should be very grateful if you would consider action along these lines as it might play an important part in preventing the spreading of the war.

In spite of the Dakar fiasco the Vichy Government is endeavoring to enter into relations with us which shows how the tides are flowing in France now that they feel the German weight and see we are able to hold our own.

Although our position in the air is growing steadily stronger both actually and relatively our need for aircraft is urgent. Several important factories have been seriously injured and the rate of production is hampered by air alarms. On the other hand our losses in pilots have been less than we expected because in fighting over our own soil a very large proportion get down safely or only wounded. When your officers were over here we

WERE

0135

-3- No. 3325, October 4, 9 p.m., from London

were talking in terms of pilots. We are now beginning to think that airplanes will be the limiting factor so far as the immediate future is concerned.

I cannot feel that the invasion danger is passed. The gent has taken off his clothes and put on his bathing suit but the water is getting colder and there is an autumn nip in the air. We are maintaining the utmost vigilance."

KENNEDY

NPL



21 October 1940

Telegram Nr. 3482 from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated  
21 October 1940.

Pres.

Conf file - do not return Kennedy

EH

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

GRAY

London

Dated October 21, 1940

Rec'd 11:25 a.m.

Secretary of State,

Washington.

TRIPLE PRIORITY

3482, October 21, 4 p.m.

**[REDACTED] AND PERSONAL FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM FORMER  
NAVAL PERSON:**

"We hear rumors from various sources that the Vichy Government are preparing their ships and colonial troops to aid the Germans against us. I do not myself believe these reports, but if the French fleet at Toulon were turned over to Germany it would be a very heavy blow. It would certainly be a wise precaution, Mr. President, if you would speak in the strongest terms to the French Ambassador emphasizing the disapprobation with which the United States would view such a betrayal of the cause of democracy and freedom. They will pay great heed in Vichy to such a warning.

You will have seen what very heavy losses we have suffered in the northwestern approaches to our last two convoys.

0138

EH -2- 3482, October 21, 4 p.m. from London.

convoys. This is due to our shortage of destroyers in the gap period I mentioned to you. Thank God your 50 are now coming along, and some will soon be in action. We ought to be much better off by the end of the year, as we have a lot of our own anti-U-boat vessels completing, but naturally we are passing through an anxious and critical period with so little small craft having to guard against invasion in the narrow waters, with the very great naval effort we are making in the Mediterranean, and the immense amount of convoy work".

KENNEDY

KLP

25 October 1940

Telegram from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated 25 October 1940.

Message from Mr. Winston Churchill

to the President, dated October 25th, 1940.

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Our Chargé d'Affaires will have told you about the telegrams which we have received from and sent to Sir Samuel Hoare in Madrid and of the views of the French Ambassador there. There seems to be a desperate struggle going on between Petain and Laval. If the French fleet and French bases on the African shore are betrayed to Germany our task will become vastly more difficult and your dangers will grow. I have a feeling that things are hanging in the balance at Vichy. The King is sending a personal message to Marshal Petain appealing to his soldierly honour. Would it not be possible for you, Mr. President, to send a message to him yourself? It would greatly strengthen his position and might make him choose rightly. Anyhow there is no time to be lost as a very disastrous turn may be very easily given to the war by the Vichy Government committing another act of shame.

On October 19th the Prime Minister sent a telegram to His Majesty's Ambassador at Madrid expressing the hope that he would be able to convey to the French Government through the French Ambassador in Madrid two root ideas. Firstly, His Majesty's Government would let bygones be bygones and would work with anyone who convinced them of his resolution to defeat the common foes. In the second place as the British people were fighting for their lives as well as for a victory which will simultaneously relieve all captive States, they would stop at nothing.

Sir Samuel Hoare was instructed to try to make the Vichy Government feel what everyone in London took for certain - i.e. that Great Britain had got Hitler beaten and that although he might ravage continually and the war might last a long time, his doom was certain. The Prime Minister's message went on to say that it passed his comprehension why no French leaders seceded to Africa where they would have an empire and the command of the seas. If this had been done at the beginning Italy might well have been knocked out by now. Surely the opportunity was the most splendid ever offered to daring men. Sir Samuel Hoare was instructed to do his best to convey these ideas to the Vichy Government even though precise responses to such suggestions could hardly be expected.

A telegram has been received in reply from Sir Samuel Hoare stating that on October 24th he was informed by the French Ambassador that this

message/



message from the Prime Minister was likely to have a great effect on the French Government. M. Laval and Admiral Darlan were pressing hard for an agreement with the Germans over the transfer of the French fleet and bases while Marshal Petain and General Heygand were resisting.

The French Ambassador had suggested that a similar message from the Prime Minister to M. Petain, possibly in the name of The King, might turn the scales in Great Britain's favour and prove a damning document against M. Laval if it were published. Such a message should refer to Marshal Petain's loyalty to his signature of the Armistice and make it clear that the present German demands went far beyond the terms of the Armistice. The message should end with a personal appeal to M. Petain to repudiate such dishonourable terms.

Later in the evening of October 24th the French Ambassador again urged the immediate despatch of such a message to Marshal Petain. Sir Samuel Hoare enquired whether he could be authorised to inform his French colleague by mid-day October 25th that such a message would be forthcoming. He thought that if this were done the French Ambassador might be able to hold up negotiations in Paris and forestall M. Laval.

In reply Sir Samuel Hoare has been told that the message will be sent. Arrangements are being made to send it simultaneously via Madrid and direct to Vichy through the United States Embassy in London.

October 25th, 1940

0143

27 October 1940

Telegram from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated 27 October 1940.

London,  
October 27, 1940.

To: Purvis

From: Salter

Please request Mr. Morgenthau to convey the following message to the President from former naval person:

"We have not yet heard what Vichy has agreed to.

If, however, they have betrayed warships and African and other Colonial harbours to Hitler, our already heavy task will be grievously aggravated. If Oran and Bizerta become German-Italian submarine bases, our hopes of stopping or impeding the reinforcement of the hostile army now attacking Egypt will be destroyed, and the heaviest form of German-organized Italian attack must be expected. The situation in the Western Mediterranean will also be gravely worsened. If Dakar is betrayed, very great dangers will arise in the Atlantic unless we are able to rectify the position, which will not be easy.

On the other hand, the announcement of Vichy's terms may lead to much desired revolt in the French Empire, which we should have to aid and foster with further drains upon our slowly expanding resources.

Either way, therefore, immense exertions will be required from us in the Mediterranean during the next year.

We are endeavouring to assemble a very large army in the Middle East, and the movement of troops thither from all parts of the Empire, especially from the Mother country, has for some months past been unceasing. The campaign which will develop there certainly in the new year, and which may involve Turkey and Greece, makes demands upon our shipping and munitions output and resources which are enormous and beyond our power without your help to supply to a degree which would ensure victory.

All the time we have to provide for the defence of the island against invasion which is fully mounted and for which sixty of the best German divisions and superior Air Forces stand ready.

Lastly the U-boat and air attacks upon our only remaining life line, the northwestern approach, will be repelled only by the strongest concentration of our flotillas.

REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED

0145

You will see, therefore, Mr. President, how very great are our problems and dangers. We feel, however, confident of our ability, if we are given the necessary supplies, to carry on the war to a successful conclusion, and anyhow we are going to try our best.

You will, however, allow me to impress upon you the extreme urgency of accelerating delivery of the programme of aircraft and other munitions which has already been laid before you by Layton and Purvis. So far as aircraft is concerned, would it be possible to speed up deliveries of existing orders so that the numbers coming to our support next year will be considerably increased? Furthermore can new orders for expanded programme also be placed so promptly that deliveries may come out in the middle of 1941?

The equipment of our armies, both for home defence and overseas, is progressing, but we depend upon American deliveries to complete our existing programme which will certainly be delayed and impeded by the bombing of factories and disturbances of work.

A memorandum on the technical details is being furnished you through the proper channels, and having placed all the facts before you I feel confident that everything humanly possible will be done. The world cause is in your hands."

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November 1940

Letter from Churchill to Roosevelt, November 1940.

*Great Britain*  
*Folder*



*78*

10, Downing Street,  
London, W.C.2.

November 1940.

My dear Mr. President,

This is to introduce to you my friend, Sir Walter Citrine. He worked with me three years before the war in our effort to arouse all parties in the country to the need of rearmament against Germany. At the present time he fills a position in the Labour movement more important to the conduct of the war than many Ministerial offices. As he is a Member of the Privy Council, you can count in every way upon his responsibility and discretion. He has the root of the matter in him, and I most cordially commend him to your consideration.

Believe me,

Yours very sincerely,

*Winston Churchill*



10, Downing Street,  
London, W.C.2.

Favoured by Sir Walter Citrine.

The President of the United States  
of America.

10 November 1940

Telegram from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated 10 November 1940.

THE UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

November 11, 1940

My dear Mr. President:

The British Chargé d'Affaires left with me this morning the attached letter addressed to you. This letter contains the text of the message addressed to you by Mr. Churchill also contained in the telegram received from the American Embassy in London last night.

An instruction is being sent by telegraph to the American Chargé d'Affaires in Vichy indicating the direct interest of this Government in the reported transfer of these French men of war. A copy of this telegram will be transmitted to you as soon as it is despatched, together with a suggested reply for you to send to Mr. Churchill.

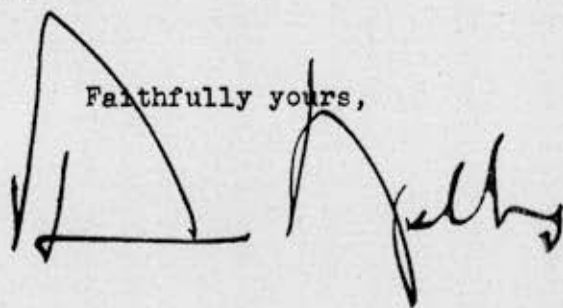
Believe me

Faithfully yours,

Enclosure.

The President,

The White House.

A large, stylized handwritten signature, likely of the Under Secretary of State, is written over the words "Faithfully yours,". The signature is in dark ink and appears to be a cursive or semi-cursive style.

BRITISH EMBASSY,  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

November 11th, 1940.

Dear Mr. President,

I enclose herein the text  
of a message from the Prime Minister  
which I have been instructed by telegram  
received from London last night to  
communicate to you.

Believe me,

Dear Mr. President,

Very sincerely yours,

*David Butler*

The Honourable

Franklin D. Roosevelt,

President of the United States of America,

Washington, D. C.

Message from the Prime Minister to the President  
received from London on the evening of November 10th

We have been much disturbed by reports of intention of French Government to bring the "Jean Bart" and the "Richelieu" to the Mediterranean for completion. It is difficult to exaggerate the potential danger if this were to happen, and so open the way for these ships to fall under German control. We should feel bound to do our best to prevent it.

We conveyed a warning to the French Government through the Ambassador in Madrid a few days ago on the following lines:-

Such a step would greatly increase the temptation to the Germans and the Italians to seize the French Fleet. We doubt not the good faith of the French Government, but their physical ability to implement their assurances that they will not let the Fleet fall into the enemy's hand. We particularly wish to avoid any clash between British and French naval forces and therefore hope that if they had thought of moving the ships they will now refrain from doing so.

As we said to the French Government, we should not question the good faith of their assurances, but even if we accept them we can feel

no/

no security that they will in fact be able to maintain them once the ships are in French ports in the power or reach of the enemy, and I confess that the desire of the French Government to bring these ships back, if this turns out to be well founded, seems to me to give cause for some suspicion.

It would be most helpful if you felt able to give a further warning at Vichy on this matter, for if things went wrong it might well prove an extreme danger for us both.



16 November 1940

Telegram Nr. 3771 from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated  
16 November 1940.

JR

GRAY

London

Dated November 16, 1940

Rec'd 4:05 p.m.

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

TRIPLE PRIORITY.

3771, November 16, 9 p.m.

PERSONAL AND [REDACTED] FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM FORMER  
NAVAL PERSON.

"I am deeply obliged to you for the promptness of your action about the two big French ships. I am sure you will have been pleased about Taranto. The three uninjured Italian battleships have quitted Taranto today, which perhaps means they are withdrawing to Trieste. I am writing you a very long letter on the outlook for 1941; which Lord Lethian will give you in a few days. I hope you get my personal telegram of congratulation."

JOHNSON

CSB

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

23 November 1940

Telegram from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated 23 November 1940.

REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED

Message for President Roosevelt from  
Mr. Winston Churchill, received in  
Washington on November 23rd, 1940.

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Personal and [REDACTED]

Our accounts show that the situation in Spain is deteriorating and that the Peninsula is not far from the starvation point. An offer by you to dole out food month by month so long as they keep out of the war might be decisive. Small things do not count now and this is a time for very plain talk to them. The occupation by Germany of both sides of the Straits would be a grievous addition to our naval strain, already severe. The Germans would soon have batteries working by radio direction finding which would close the Straits both by night and day. With a major campaign developing in the Eastern Mediterranean and need of reinforcement and supply of our armies there all round the Cape we could not contemplate any military action on the mainland at or near the Straits. The Rock of Gibraltar will stand a long siege but what is the good of that if we cannot use the harbour or pass the Straits? Once in Morocco the Germans will work South, and U-boats and aircraft will soon be operating from Casablanca and Dakar. I need not, Mr. President, enlarge upon the trouble this will cause to us or approach of trouble to the Western Hemisphere. We must gain as much time as possible.

0158

7 December 1940

Telegram from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated 7 December 1940.

Also letter from the British Embassy to the President, 20 December 1940, with correction to the above telegram.

BRITISH EMBASSY,  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

December 8th, 1940

Dear Mr. President,

I enclose herein the special letter addressed to you by Mr. Winston Churchill, about which I told you, and which he wanted you to get while you are on board your cruiser. This letter has been sent from London by telegram.

Believe me,

Dear Mr. President,

Yours very sincerely,

*L. L. L.*

P.S. I am sending a few extra figures about shipping to Harry Hopkins who asked me for them.

*Hope you are having a most pleasant holiday.*

The Honourable

Franklin D. Roosevelt,

President of the United States of America,

Washington, D.C.

REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED



December 7th 1940.

My Dear Mr. President,

As we reach the end of this year I feel that you will expect me to lay before you the prospects for 1941. I do so strongly and confidently because it seems to me that the vast majority of American citizens have recorded their conviction that the safety of the United States as well as the future of our two democracies and the kind of civilisation for which they stand are bound up with the survival and independence of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Only thus can those bastions of sea-power, upon which the control of the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans depends, be preserved in faithful and friendly hands. The control of the Pacific by the United States Navy and of the Atlantic by the British Navy is indispensable to the security of the trade routes of both our countries and the surest means to preventing the war from reaching the shores of the United States.

2. There is another aspect. It takes between three and four years to convert the industries of a modern state to war purposes. Saturation point is reached when the maximum industrial effort that can be spared from civilian needs has been applied to war production. Germany certainly reached this point by the end of 1939. We in the British Empire are now only about half-way through the second year. The United States, I should suppose, was by no means so far advanced as we. Moreover, I understand that immense

programmes of naval, military and air defence are now on foot in the United States, to complete which certainly two years are needed. It is our British duty in the common interest as also for our own survival to hold the front and grapple with Nazi power until the preparations of the United States are complete. Victory may come before the two years are out; but we have no right to count upon it to the extent of relaxing any effort that is humanly possible. Therefore I submit with very great respect for your good and friendly consideration that there is a solid identity of interest between the British Empire and the United States while these conditions last. It is upon this footing that I venture to address you.

3. The form which this war has taken and seems likely to hold does not enable us to match the immense armies of Germany in any theatre where their main power can be brought to bear. We can however by the use of sea power and air power meet the German armies in the regions where only comparatively small forces can be brought into action. We must do our best to prevent German domination of Europe spreading into Africa and into Southern Asia. We have also to maintain in constant readiness in this Island armies strong enough to make the problem of an overseas invasion insoluble. For these purposes we are forming as fast as possible, as you are already aware, between fifty and sixty divisions. Even if the United States was our ally instead of our

friend/

friend and indispensable partner we should not ask for a large American expeditionary army. Shipping, not men, is the limiting factor and the power to transport munitions and supplies claims priority over the movement by sea of large numbers of soldiers.

4. The first half of 1940 was a period of disaster for the Allies and for the Empire. The last five months have witnessed a strong and perhaps unexpected recovery by Great Britain; fighting alone but with invaluable aid in munitions and in destroyers placed at our disposal by the great Republic of which you are for the third time chosen Chief.

5. The danger of Great Britain being destroyed by a swift overwhelming blow has for the time being very greatly receded. In its place there is a long, gradually maturing danger, less sudden and less spectacular but equally deadly. This mortal danger is the steady and increasing diminution of sea tonnage. We can endure the shattering of our dwellings and the slaughter of our civilian population by indiscriminate air attacks and we hope to parry these increasingly as our science develops and to repay them upon military objectives in Germany as our Air Force more nearly approaches the strength of the enemy. The decision for 1941 lies upon the seas; unless we can establish our ability to feed this Island, to import munitions of all kinds which we need, unless we can move our armies to the various theatres where Hitler and his confederate Mussolini must be met,

and/

and maintain them there and do all this with the assurance of being able to carry it on till the spirit of the continental dictators is broken, we may fall by the way and the time needed by the United States to complete her defensive preparations may not be forthcoming. It is therefore in shipping and in the power to transport across the oceans, particularly the Atlantic Ocean, that in 1941 the crunch of the whole war will be found. If on the other hand we are able to move the necessary tonnage to and fro across the salt water indefinitely, it may well be that the application of superior air power to the German homeland and the rising anger of the German and other Nazi-gripped populations will bring the agony of civilization to a merciful and glorious end. But do not let us underrate the task.

6. Our shipping losses, the figures for which in recent months are appended, have been on a scale almost comparable to that of the worst years of the last war. In the 5 weeks ending November 3rd the losses reached a total of 420,300 tons. Our estimation of the annual tonnage which ought to be imported in order to maintain our war effort at full strength is 43,000,000 tons; the tonnage entering in September was only at the rate of 37,000,000 tons and in October at 38,000,000 tons. Were the diminution to continue at this rate it would be fatal, unless indeed immensely greater replenishment than anything at present/

present in sight could be achieved in time. Although we are doing all we can to meet this situation by new methods, the difficulty of limiting the losses is obviously much greater than in the last war. We lack the assistance of the French Navy, the Italian Navy and the Japanese Navy, and above all the United States Navy, which was of such vital help to us during the culminating years. The enemy commands the ports all around the northern and western coast of France. He is increasingly basing his submarines, flying boats and combat planes on these ports and on the islands off the French coast. We lack the use of ports or territory in Eire in which to organise our coastal patrols by air and sea. In fact, we have now only one effective passage of entry to the British Isles namely, the northern approach, against which the enemy is increasingly concentrating, reaching ever farther out by U-boat action and long distance bombing. In addition, there have for some months been merchant ship raiders both in the Atlantic and in the Indian Oceans. And now we have powerful warship raiders to contend with as well. We need ships both to hunt down and to escort. Large as are our resources and preparations we do not possess enough.

7. The next six or seven months bring the relative battleship strength in home waters to a smaller margin than is satisfactory. The "Bismark" and the "Tirpitz" will certainly be in service in

January/



January. We have already the "King George V" and hope to have the "Prince of Wales" at the same time. These modern ships are of course far better armoured, especially against air attack, than vessels like the "Rodney" and "Nelson" designed twenty years ago. We have recently had to use the "Rodney" on trans-Atlantic escort and at any time when numbers are so small, a mine or a torpedo may alter decisively the strength of the line of battle. We get relief in June when the "Duke of York" will be ready and will be still better off at the end of 1941 when the "Anson" also will have joined. But these two first class, modern, thirty-five thousand ton, fifteen inch gun German battleships force us to maintain a concentration never previously necessary in this war.

8. We hope that the two Italian "Littorios" will be out of action for a while and anyway they are not so dangerous as if they were manned by the Germans. Perhaps they might be ! We are indebted to you for your help about the "Richelieu" and the "Jean Bart" and I daresay that will be all right. But, Mr. President, as no one will see more clearly than you, we have during these months to consider for the first time in this war, a fleet action in which the enemy will have two ships at least as good as our two best and only two modern ones. It will be impossible to reduce our strength in the Mediterranean because of the attitude of Turkey and indeed the whole position in the Eastern basin depends upon our having



a strong fleet there. The older un-modernized battleships will have to go for convoy. Thus even in the battleship class we are at full extension.

9. There is a second field of danger: the Vichy Government may either by joining Hitler's new order in Europe or through some manoeuvre such as forcing us to attack an expedition despatched by sea against free French Colonies, find an excuse for ranging with the Axis Powers the very considerable undamaged naval forces still under its control. If the French Navy were to join the Axis, the control of West Africa would pass immediately into their hands with the gravest consequences to our communications between the northern and southern Atlantic, and also affect Dakar and of course thereafter South America.

10. A third sphere of danger is in the Far East. Here it seems clear that the Japanese are thrusting Southward through Indo China to Saigon and other naval and air bases, thus bringing them within a comparatively short distance of Singapore and the Dutch East Indies. It is reported that the Japanese are preparing five good divisions for possible use as an overseas expeditionary force. We have to-day no forces in the Far East capable of dealing with this situation should it develop.

11. In the face of these dangers, we must try to use the year 1941 to build up such a supply of weapons, particularly aircraft, both by increased output at home in spite of bombardment, and through ocean-borne supplies, as will lay the foundation of victory. In view of the difficulty and magnitude of this task, as outlined by all the facts I have set forth to which many others/

others could be added, I feel entitled, nay bound, to lay before you the various ways in which the United States could give supreme and decisive help to what is, in certain aspects, the common cause.

12. The prime need is to check or limit the loss of tonnage on the Atlantic approaches to our Islands. This may be achieved both by increasing the naval forces which cope with attacks, and by adding to the number of merchant ships on which we depend. For the first purpose there would seem to be the following alternatives:

(1) the reassertion by the United States of the doctrine of the freedom of the seas from illegal and barbarous warfare in accordance with the decisions reached after the late Great War, and as freely accepted and defined by Germany in 1935. From this, the United States ships should be free to trade with countries against which there is not an effective legal blockade.

(2) It would, I suggest, follow that protection should be given to this lawful trading by United States forces i.e. escorting battleships, cruisers, destroyers and air flotillas. Protection would be immediately more effective if you were able to obtain bases in Eire for the duration of the war. I think it is improbable that such protection would provoke a declaration of war by Germany upon the United States though probably sea incidents of a dangerous character would from time to time occur. Hitler has shown himself inclined to avoid the Kaiser's mistake. He does not wish to be drawn into war with the United States until he has gravely undermined the power of Great Britain. His

maxim/

maxim is "one at a time". The policy I have ventured to outline, or something like it, would constitute a decisive act of constructive non-belligerency by the United States, and more than any other measure would make it certain that British resistance could be effectively prolonged for the desired period and victory gained.

(3) Failing the above, the gift, loan or supply of a large number of American vessels of war, above all destroyers already in the Atlantic, is indispensable to the maintenance of the Atlantic route. Further, could not United States naval forces extend their sea control over the American side of the Atlantic, so as to prevent molestation by enemy vessels of the approaches to the new line of naval and air bases which the United States is establishing in British islands in the Western Hemisphere. The strength of the United States naval forces is such that the assistance in the Atlantic that they could afford us, as described above, would not jeopardise control over the Pacific.

(4) We should also then need the good offices of the United States and the whole influence of its Government continually exerted, to procure for Great Britain the necessary facilities upon the southern and western shores of Eire for our flotillas, and still more important, for our aircraft, working westward into the Atlantic. If it were proclaimed an American interest that the resistance of Great Britain should be prolonged and the Atlantic route kept open for the important armaments now being prepared for Great Britain in

North/

North America, the Irish in the United States might be willing to point out to the Government of Eire the dangers which its present policy is creating for the United States itself.

His Majesty's Government would of course take the most effective steps beforehand to protect Ireland if Irish action exposed it to a German attack. It is not possible for us to compel the people of Northern Ireland against their will to leave the United Kingdom and join Southern Ireland. But I do not doubt that if the Government of Eire would show its solidarity with the democracies of the English speaking world at this crisis a Council of Defence of all Ireland could be set up out of which the unity of the island would probably in some form or other emerge after the war.

13. The object of the foregoing measures is to reduce to manageable proportions the present destructive losses at sea. In addition it is indispensable that the merchant tonnage available for supplying Great Britain and for the waging of the war by Great Britain with all vigour, should be substantially increased beyond the one and a quarter million tons per annum which is the utmost we can now build. The convoy system, the detours, the zig-zags, the great distances from which we now have to bring our imports, and the congestion of our western harbours, have reduced by about one third the value of our existing tonnage. To ensure final victory, not less than three million tons of additional merchant ship-building capacity will be required. Only the

United/

United States can supply this need. Looking to the future it would seem that production on a scale comparable with that of the Hog Island scheme of the last war ought to be faced for 1942. In the meanwhile, we ask that in 1941 the United States should make available to us every ton of merchant shipping, surplus to its own requirements, which it possesses or controls and should find some means of putting into our "hands" a large proportion of the merchant shipping now under construction for the National Maritime Board.

14. Moreover we look to the industrial energy of the Republic for a reinforcement of our domestic capacity to manufacture combat aircraft. Without that reinforcement reaching us in a substantial measure, we shall not achieve the massive preponderance in the air on which we must rely to loosen and disintegrate the German grip on Europe. The development of the Air Forces of the Empire provides for a total of nearly 7000 combat aircraft in the fighting squadrons by the spring of 1942, backed by about an equal number in the training units. But it is abundantly clear that this programme will not suffice to give us the weighty superiority which will force open the doors of victory. In order to achieve such superiority it is plain that we shall need the greatest production of aircraft which United States of America are capable of sending us. It is our anxious hope that in the teeth of continuing bombardment/



bombardment we shall realize the greater part of production which we have planned in this country. But not even with the addition to our squadrons of all the aircraft which under present arrangements, we may derive from the planned output in the United States can we hope to achieve the necessary ascendancy. May I invite you then, Mr. President, to give earnest consideration to an immediate order on joint account for a further 2,000 combat aircraft a month? Of these aircraft I would submit that the highest possible proportion should be heavy bombers, the weapon on which above all others we depend to shatter the foundations of German military power. I am aware of the formidable task that this would impose upon the industrial organisation of the United States. Yet, in our heavy need, we call with confidence to the most resourceful and ingenious technicians in the world. We ask for an unexampled effort believing that it can be made.

15. You have also received information about the needs of our armies. In the munitions sphere, in spite of enemy bombing, we are making steady progress. Without your continued assistance in the supply of machine tools and in the further release from stock of certain articles we could not hope to equip as many as 50 divisions in 1941. I am grateful for the arrangements already practically completed/



completed for your aid in the equipment of the army which we have already planned and for the provision of American-type weapons for an additional 10 divisions in time for the campaign of 1942. But when the tide of dictatorship begins to recede, many countries, trying to regain their freedom, may be asking for arms, and there is no source to which they can look except to the factories of the United States. I must therefore also urge the importance of expanding to the utmost American productive capacity for small arms, artillery and tanks.

16. I am arranging to present you with a complete programme of munitions of all kinds which we seek to obtain from you, the greater part of which is of course already agreed. An important economy of time and effort will be produced if the types selected for the United States Services should, whenever possible, conform to those which have proved their merit under actual conditions of war. In this way reserves of guns and ammunition and of aeroplanes become inter-changeable and are by that very fact augmented. This is however a sphere so highly technical that I do not enlarge upon it.

17. Last of all I come to the question of finance. The more rapid and abundant the flow of munitions and ships which you are able to send us, the sooner will our dollar credits be exhausted. They are already as you know very heavily drawn upon by payments we have made to date.

Indeed/

0173

Indeed as you know orders already placed or under negotiation, including expenditure settled or pending for creating munitions factories in the United States, many times exceed the total exchange resources remaining at the disposal of Great Britain. The moment approaches when we shall no longer be able to pay cash for shipping and other supplies. While we will do out utmost and shrink from no proper sacrifice to make payments across the exchange, I believe that you will agree that it would be wrong in principle and mutually disadvantageous in effect if, at the height of this struggle, Great Britain were to be divested of all saleable assets so that after victory was won with our blood, civilisation saved and time gained for the United States to be fully armed against all eventualities, we should stand stripped to the bone. Such a course would not be in the moral or economic interests of either of our countries. We here would be unable after the war to purchase the large balance of imports from the United States over and above the volume of our exports which is agreeable to your tariffs and domestic economy. Not only should we in Great Britain suffer cruel privations but widespread unemployment in the United States would follow the curtailment of American exporting power.

18. Moreover I do not believe the Government and people of the United States would find it in

accordance/

accordance with the principles which guide them, to confine the help which they have so generously promised only to such munitions of war and commodities as could be immediately paid for. You may be assured that we shall prove ourselves ready to suffer and sacrifice to the utmost for the Cause, and that we glory in being its champion. The rest we leave with confidence to you and to your people, being sure that ways and means will be found which future generations on both sides of the Atlantic will approve and admire.

19. If, as I believe, you are convinced, Mr. President, that the defeat of the Nazi and Fascist tyranny is a matter of high consequence to the people of the United States and to the Western Hemisphere, you will regard this letter not as an appeal for aid, but as a statement of the minimum action necessary to the achievement of our common purpose.

I remain,

Yours very sincerely,

Winston S. Churchill.

The following figures show losses by enemy action of British, Allied and Neutral merchant tonnage for the periods given. Vessels of all tonnage are included but no commissioned ships.

<u>Week ended</u>	<u>British</u>		<u>Allied</u>		<u>Neutral</u>		<u>Total: British- Allied-Neutral</u>	
	<u>No.</u>	<u>Gr. Tons.</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Gr. Tons</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Gr. Tons</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Gr. Tons.</u>
June 2, 1940	28	79,415	5	25,137	2	4,375	35	108,927
" 9, "	13	49,762	8	22,253	4	14,750	25	86,765
" 16, "	15	60,006	10	40,216	6	23,170	31	123,392
" 23, "	16	91,373	12	81,742	12	39,159	40	212,274
" 30, "	6	30,377	4	13,627	5	19,332	15	63,336
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>310,933</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>182,972</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100,786</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>594,694</b>
<u>Week ended</u>								
July 7, 1940	14	75,888	4	18,924	5	21,968	23	116,780
" 14, "	10	40,469	5	13,159	7	24,845	22	78,473
" 21, "	12	42,463	2	3,679	7	13,723	21	59,865
" 28, "	18	65,601	2	7,090		NIL	20	72,691
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>224,421</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>42,852</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>60,536</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>327,809</b>
<u>Week ended</u>								
Aug. 4, 1940	14	67,827	2	7,412	5	13,768	21	89,007
" 11, "	9	32,257	2	7,674	2	6,708	13	46,639
" 18, "	10	41,175	1	7,590	2	4,134	13	52,899
" 25, "	20	108,404	1	1,718	2	8,692	23	118,814
Sep. 1, "	12	62,921	5	15,038	5	18,460	22	96,419
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>312,584</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>39,432</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>51,762</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>403,778</b>
<u>Week ended</u>								
Sep. 8, 1940	13	44,975	4	18,499	3	13,715	20	77,189
" 15, "	13	55,153	4	12,575	3	7,379	20	75,107
" 22, "	22	148,704	3	13,006	5	14,425	30	176,135
" 29, "	11	56,096	4	12,119	2	7,351	17	75,566
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>304,928</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>56,199</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>42,871</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>403,997</b>
<u>Week ended</u>								
Oct. 6, 1940	8	30,886	3	5,742	1	3,687	12	40,315
" 13, "	10	52,668	3	17,537	4	14,544	17	84,749
" 20, "	34	154,279	7	24,686	6	26,816	47	205,781
" 27, "	6	9,986	2	6,874	1	1,583	9	18,443
Nov. 3, "	13	65,609	4	5,403		NIL	17	71,012
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>313,428</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>60,242</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>46,630</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>420,300</b>

<u>Week ended</u>	<u>British</u>		<u>Allied</u>		<u>Neutral</u>		<u>Total: British- Allied-Neutral</u>	
	<u>No.</u>	<u>Gr.Tons</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Gr.Tons</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Gr.Tons</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Gr. Tons</u>
Nov.10,1940	11	69,110	2	10,236	2	8,617	15	87,963
" 17, "	15	57,977	3	15,383	1	1,316	19	74,676
" 24, "	19	75,560	3	12,415		NIL	22	87,975
	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	45	202,647	8	38,034	3	9,933	56	250,614
	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Grand Totals to November 24th, 1940.

372 1668,941 105 419,734 92 312,517 569 2401,192

Notes: Week ended November 24th is the last full week for which details are available and from the nature of the circumstances must be considered provisional.

For the specified period the following commissioned ships of 500 gross tons and over (formerly merchant vessels) have been lost by enemy action: 20 vessels of 183,000 gross tons approximately.

AMERICAN EMBASSY,  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

December 20th, 1940

**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

Dear Mr. President,

Owing to the fact that as explained in Lord Lothian's letter of December 8th the Prime Minister's letter to you of December 7th was sent to the Embassy from London by telegram, a few mistakes occurred in the text. The Prime Minister is anxious that these should be corrected and that the alterations shown in the attached list should be made in his original letter. I hope therefore that you will be good enough to arrange for these amendments to be inserted in the text of the letter as sent you by Lord Lothian.

Believe me,

Dear Mr. President,

Yours sincerely,

*Mark Butler*

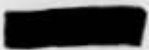
The Honourable

Franklin D. Roosevelt,

President of the United States of America,

Washington, D.C.



  
Alterations to be made in the Prime  
Minister's letter to the President of December 7th, 1940.

(a) Paragraph 6, 9th sentence (page 5, line 13):

For the sentence "we lack the use of ports  
or territory in Eire in which to organise our  
coastal patrols by air and sea" substitute "we are  
denied the use of ports or territories of Eire in  
which to organise our coastal patrols by air or sea".

(b) Paragraph 6, 10th sentence (page 5, line 16):

For the words "only one effective passage  
of entry" read "only one effective route of entry".

(c) Paragraph 14, 3rd sentence (page 11, line 18):

For the sentence beginning "The development  
of the air forces of the Empire" substitute the fol-  
lowing sentence: "We are at present engaged in a  
programme designed to increase our strength to 7,000  
first line aircraft by the Spring of 1942".

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**REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED**

13 December 1940

Telegram Nr. 4066 from Churchill to Roosevelt, dated  
13 December 1940..

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  

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THE SECRETARY

December 17, 1940

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

I am sending you this copy of  
London's telegram No. 4066 in the event  
you failed to see the one I sent you on  
December 13.

C.H.

REGRADED  
UNCLASSIFIED

EG  
A portion of this message  
must be closely paraphrased  
before being communicated  
to anyone. (B)

London

Dated December 13, 1940

Rec'd 1:40 p.m.

Secretary of State,  
Washington.

TRIPLE PRIORITY.

4066, December 13, 6 p.m.

**REDACTED** AND PERSONAL FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM  
FORMER NAVAL PERSON.

(GRAY) "One. I am sure you will be pleased about  
our (\*) in Libya. This coupled with his Albanian re-  
verses may go hard with Mussolini if we make good use  
of our success. The full results of the battle are  
not yet to hand but if Italy can be broken our affairs  
will be more hopeful than they were four or five months  
ago.

Two. North Atlantic transport remains the prime  
anxiety. Undoubtedly Hitler will augment his U-boats  
and air attack on shipping and operate ever farther  
into the ocean. Now that we are denied the use of Irish  
ports and airfields our difficulties strain our flotillas  
to the utmost limit. We have so far only been able to  
bring a very few of your fifty destroyers into action on  
account

0182

-2- #4066, December 13, 6 p.m. from London

account of the many defects which they naturally develop when exposed to Atlantic weather after having been laid up so long. I am arranging to have a very full technical account prepared of renovations and improvements that have to be made in the older classes of destroyers to fit them for the present task, and this may be of use to you in regard to your own older flotillas.

Three. In the meanwhile we are so hard pressed at sea that we cannot undertake to carry any longer the 400,000 tons of feeding stuffs and fertilizers which we have hitherto convoyed to Eire through all the attacks of the enemy. We need this tonnage for our own supply and we do not need the food which Eire has been sending us. We must now concentrate on essentials and the Cabinet propose to let de Valera know that we cannot go on supplying him under present conditions. He will, of course, have plenty of food for his people but they will not have the prosperous trading they are making now. I am sorry about this but we must think of our own self-preservation and use for vital purposes our own tonnage brought in through so many perils. Perhaps this may loosen things up and make him more ready to consider

-3- #4066, December 13, 6 p.m. from London

consider common interests. I should like to know quite privately what your reactions would be if and when we are forced to concentrate our own tonnage upon the supply of Great Britain. We also do not feel able in present circumstances to continue the heavy subsidies we have hitherto been paying to the Irish agricultural producers. You will realize also that our merchant seamen as well as public opinion generally take it much amiss that we should have to carry Irish supplies through air and U-boat attacks and subsidize them handsomely when de Valera is quite content to sit happy and see us strangled." (END GRAY)

JOHNSON

KLP

(\*) Apparent omission

0184



21 December 1940

Telegram from Churchill to Roosevelt, 21 December 1940.

0185

*File*  
*Confidential*  
*KB*  
*9-40*  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

December 21st, 1940

Dear Mr. President,

I enclose herein a message  
for you from the Prime Minister which was  
telegraphed from London this afternoon.

Believe me,

Dear Mr. President,

Very sincerely yours,

*Wendell Butler*

The Honourable

Franklin D. Roosevelt,

President of the United States of America,

Washington, D. C.

I have now decided to ask for your formal agrément to the appointment of Lord Halifax as our Ambassador to the United States. I need not tell you what a loss this is to me personally and to the War Cabinet. I feel however that the transaction of business and the relationship between our two countries, and also the contact with you, Mr. President, are of such supreme consequence to the outcome of the war that it is my duty to place at your side the most eminent of my colleagues, and one who knows the whole story as it unfolds at the summit.