

Was assistance from U.S. (General)

655/33/40

3 END

I am afraid
Mr Kennedy is the cause
Mr Kennedy was unready
Diplomatic about the
destroyers.

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[W 8124/G]

(No. 530.)

My Lord Marquess,

Foreign Office,

June 3, 1940.

WHEN the United States Ambassador came to see me this afternoon, he told me that, though he had not received any reply from his Government on the question of the destroyers which were urgently needed by this country, he was inclined to think that this in itself might be an encouraging sign. Thirty or forty United States destroyers were at present being recommissioned, and his own personal feeling was that President Roosevelt might be waiting for the entry of Italy into the war to serve as the final pretext for sending us the assistance which we needed.

2. I told his Excellency that, in view of all the recent indications that Italy had now decided to enter the war, His Majesty's Government proposed to inform the Italian Government to-morrow that certain Italian ships with important cargoes of copper, toluol and lubricating oil would be held up at Gibraltar and Aden until Italy's position had been made clearer. Meanwhile, we had informed the French Government of our intention to take this step.

3. Mr. Kennedy, who agreed that, whatever the Italian reaction to this might be, it could not really make us any worse off than we were at present, said that, if Signor Mussolini did not now decide to take the plunge, he would find it difficult to believe that it was, in fact, his intention to do so. He expressed satisfaction when I told him that I should be telegraphing this information to you for transmission to President Roosevelt, as it would be most useful to the President to know in advance what the possibilities were.

4. The Ambassador went on to express his admiration of the manner in which the evacuation of the B.E.F. from Flanders had been carried out. He had yet, he said, to find anybody who could explain to him how it was that the Germans, with their apparent superiority in the air, had not been able to hamper the evacuation more effectively. He still felt some doubts, however, with regard to the spirit in France.

5. I told his Excellency that my impression was that the French knew that they were in for a hard time, but fully intended to do their best. Whatever might be happening in France, however, our information was that the Germans were feeling a considerable strain on account of the lack of air pilots, as well as the shortage of petrol and lubricating oil, and that, in spite of their victories, the people were not very enthusiastic. I told his Excellency that the more President Roosevelt could give out about the United States effort, the fact that they were going into production, and so on, the better.

6. The Ambassador replied that I need have no fears on this score. Feeling in America was running very high and, while there was still, of course, strong opposition to any suggestion of sending men to help the Allies, there was no longer any considerable body of opinion against affording the Allies all possible help short of that. As regards the sending of destroyers, which he recognised as being of vital importance to us, the question was, of course, whether it would be possible for the United States Government to do this without a declaration of war. Some step by Signor Mussolini in the near future, however, might make things much easier for the President.

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I am, with great truth and respect,
My Lord,
Your most obedient Servant,

L 25/6

Nigel Ronald

(for the Secretary of State)

The Most Honourable
The Marquess of Lothian, C.H.,
etc., etc., etc.,
WASHINGTON.

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