

3.4. Fireside Chat

Excerpt from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Fireside Chat on Labor Day, September 7, 1942.

In that global war there are now four main areas of combat; and I should like to speak briefly of them, not in the order of their importance, for all of them are vital and all of them are interrelated

(1) The Russian front. Here the Germans are still unable to gain the smashing victory which, almost a year ago, Hitler announced he had already achieved. Germany has been able to capture important Russian territory. Nevertheless, Hitler has been unable to destroy a single Russian Army; and this, you may be sure, has been, and still is, his main objective. Millions of German troops seem doomed to spend another cruel and bitter winter on the Russian front. Yes, the Russians are killing more Nazis, and destroying more airplanes and tanks than are being smashed on any other front. They are fighting not only bravely but brilliantly. In spite of any setbacks Russia will hold out, and with the help of her Allies will ultimately drive every Nazi from her soil.

(2) The Pacific Ocean Area. This area must be grouped together as a whole—every part of it, land and sea. We have stopped one major Japanese offensive; and we have inflicted heavy losses on their fleet. But they still possess great strength; they seek to keep the initiative; and they will undoubtedly strike hard again. We must not over-rate the importance of our successes in the Solomon Islands, though we may be proud of the skill with which these local operations were conducted. At the same time, we need not underrate the significance of our victory at Midway. There we stopped the major Japanese offensive.

(3) In the Mediterranean and the Middle East area the British, together with the South Africans, Australians, New Zealanders, Indian troops and others of the United Nations, including ourselves, are fighting a desperate battle with the Germans and Italians. The Axis powers are fighting to gain control of that area, dominate the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, and gain contact with the Japanese Navy. The battle in the Middle East is now joined. We are well aware of our danger, but we are hopeful of the outcome.

(4) The European area. Here the aim is an offensive against Germany.

There are at least a dozen different points at which attacks can be launched. You, of course, do not expect me to give details of future plans, but you can rest assured that preparations are being made here and in Britain toward this purpose. The power of Germany must be broken on the battlefields of Europe.

Various people urge that we concentrate our forces on one or another of these four areas, although no one suggests that any one of the four areas should be abandoned. Certainly, it could not be seriously urged that we abandon aid to Russia, or that we surrender all of the Pacific to Japan, or the Mediterranean and Middle East to Germany, or give up an offensive against Germany. The American people may be sure that we shall neglect none of the four great theaters of war.

Certain vital military decisions have been made. In due time you will know what these decisions are -- and so will our enemies. I can say now that all of these decisions are directed toward taking the offensive.

Today, exactly nine months after Pearl Harbor, we have sent overseas three times more men than we transported to France in the first nine months of the First World War. We have done this in spite of greater danger and fewer ships. And every week sees a gain in the actual number of American men and weapons in the fighting areas. These reinforcements in men and munitions are continuing, and will continue to go forward.

This war will finally be won by the coordination of all the armies, navies and air forces of all of the United Nations operating in unison against our enemies.

This will require vast assemblies of weapons and men at all the vital points of attack. We and our allies have worked for years to achieve superiority in weapons. We have no doubts about the superiority of our men. We glory in the individual exploits of our soldiers, our sailors, our marines, our merchant seamen. Lieutenant John James Powers was one of these—and there are thousands of others in the forces of the United Nations.

Several thousand Americans have met death in battle. Other thousands will lose their lives. But many millions stand ready to step into their places -- to engage in a struggle to the very death. For they know that the enemy is determined to destroy us, our homes and our institutions -- that in this war it is kill or be killed.

Battles are not won by soldiers or sailors who think first of their own personal safety. And wars are not won by people who are concerned primarily with their own comfort, their own convenience, their own pocketbooks.

We Americans of today bear the gravest of responsibilities. And all of the United Nations share them.

All of us here at home are being tested -- for our fortitude, for our selfless devotion to our country and to our cause.

This is the toughest war of all time. We need not leave it to historians of the future to answer the question whether we are tough enough to meet this unprecedented challenge. We can give that answer now. The answer is "Yes."