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Monday, Mar. 03, 1941

World War: BALKAN THEATRE: II Duce Talks Tanks

In the Adriano Theatre in Rome the Blackshirts roared. First they roared with laughter. Then with anger. Then with exultation.

Benito Mussolini was speaking, and he was in good form. "I have come to look you in the eye," he said, "and to take your temperature and to break my silence, dear to me especially in wartime." This was his first speech since Nov. 18, when the first shock of terrible Greek counter-attacks had undermined Italian morale. That day he promised grimly: "We shall break Greece's back; whether in two months or twelve months, it little matters."

Now that four months had passed, the grimness was gone; he was confident. He jibed at the U. S. and at Churchill. He lambasted Italians who complain about Italy's having plunged into the war, and foreigners who laugh about it: "Some think now we were too soon, who then thought we were too late." Of the conflict against the Greeks, he spoke with cryptic assurance: "Soon maybe it will be spring, and as the season may dictate, will come our beautiful season."

Last week Italy's season of war was still in its driest blight. The Greeks continued to storm strategic heights, and continued to succeed in taking them. The R. A. F., easing off from its withering missions in Libya, intensified them in Greece. When the Italians attempted night counterattacks, they lost more ground than they had had in the first place.

Benito Mussolini's optimism in the face of this continuing difficulty in Albania, and even after the Libyan tragedy, arose from one thing alone—Adolf Hitler's help. About this help II Duce made one very significant statement. He referred to "German air and armored detachments now in the Mediterranean." Every one had known about the air assistance, but the presence of German armored units in the area was news. These units could not very well have been transferred across the Mediterranean, which is Britain's lake, to Libya. They were doubtless in the Mediterranean area to operate against Greece. If so, the Greeks' two remaining hopes were that German tanks would prove no more efficient in hilly country than Italian tanks, and that, to the extent that Dictator Hitler had come to succor Dictator Mussolini, George of Britain would help George of Greece.

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