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SECRET.

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WAR CABINET, 388.

*Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on  
Wednesday, April 10, 1918, at 11:30 A.M.*

Present :

The PRIME MINISTER (*in the Chair*).

The Right Hon. the EARL CURZON OF  
KEDLESTON, K.G., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.

The Right Hon. A. BONAR LAW, M.P.

The Right Hon. G. N. BARNES, M.P.

The Right Hon. the VISCOUNT MILNER,  
G.C.B., G.C.M.G.

Lieutenant-General the Right Hon. J. C.  
SMUTS, K.C.

The following were also present :—

The Right Hon. A. J. BALFOUR, O.M.,  
M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign  
Affairs.

Rear-Admiral G. P. W. HOPE, C.B., Deputy  
First Sea Lord.

The Right Hon. the EARL OF DERBY, K.G.,  
G.C.V.O., C.B., Secretary of State for  
War.

Major-General SIR F. B. MAURICE,  
K.C.M.G., C.B., Director of Military  
Operations.

Lieutenant-Colonel SIR M. P. A. HANKEY, K.C.B., *Secretary.*

Paymaster-in-Chief P. H. ROW, R.N., *Assistant Secretary.*

Mr. THOMAS JONES, *Assistant Secretary.*

The Western  
Front:  
German Attack.

1. The Director of Military Operations stated that the attack made by the Germans on the previous day had, in the light of further information, turned out to be more important than had been at first thought, and that they had attacked with probably 8 divisions, and certainly with 5 which had actually been identified. The Portuguese put up a fight at the beginning, and then collapsed, with the result that a dangerous salient had been created between Armentières and La Bassée. It was certain that a number of guns had been lost, and that both Portuguese and British prisoners had been taken. At one time the enemy reached Givenchy, but had been driven out by our counter-attack, in which we took 750 prisoners. On the whole, the flanks had held well, and our line of defence was now the River Lys.

General Maurice continued that another attack had taken place this morning further north, to the east of Armentières and Messines, and that the enemy had got into our front system everywhere between the Lys and the Douve. Our reserves had been moved up, but an awkward salient existed for Bethune, which was very important, and also for Armentières. The whole of the attack that started to-day was carried out against the IInd Army, under General Plumer, while nearly the whole of yesterday's attack was against the Ist Army, under General Horne. Against the IInd Army, the Germans had 8 fresh divisions in reserve.

At a later stage the War Cabinet were informed by General Maurice that the enemy who had obtained a footing on Messines Hill had been driven back. The enemy holds Ploegsteert Wood, but we hold Hill 63, which dominates the wood and Armentières. The situation is generally better, but we may have to evacuate Armentières. General Maurice stated that he was of opinion that we were approaching another crisis. The Germans were now entrenching hard between Noyon and Montdidier, and, whilst holding us there, having drawn all our reserves down south, were throwing into the battle up north all their fresh troops against ours, who were tired and contained a number of young and inexperienced drafts. The weather was very much against us, being foggy, which rendered it impossible for us to take full advantage of our heavy gun and machine-gun defences.

General Maurice stated that Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, General Foch, and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff had had a conference at Montreuil, and that they had reached arrangements which the latter considered sufficiently satisfactory. He was leaving for Paris to interview M. Clemenceau.

The War Cabinet were not satisfied with the statement of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff that the arrangements arrived at at Montreuil were "sufficiently satisfactory," and it was suggested that it would be desirable that the Prime Minister should telegraph to the President of the Council urging that French reserves should be sent up to assist us, but it was felt that, before any action of this nature was taken, it was advisable to hear from General Wilson as to the result of his conference with M. Clemenceau to-day, which the Director of Military Operations undertook to communicate to the Prime Minister.

The War Cabinet considered it essential that the French should treat our portion of the line as part of their battle-front. If we were satisfied on this point, the less the Generals were interfered with the better.

The War Cabinet were further of opinion that it was essential that a member of the Cabinet should, during this crisis, be on the spot in France, and they therefore asked—

Lord Milner to hold himself in readiness to proceed to France at an early date.

**Transfer of German Divisions.**

2. With reference to War Cabinet 386, Minute 1, the Director of Military Operations reported that a further German division, brought from Russia, had been identified on the Western front, making 199 in all. The highest estimate of the total number of German divisions that could be concentrated against us on the Western front was 220, although other estimates put the number at 205.

**Comparison of Allied and Enemy Forces.**

3. With reference to War Cabinet 371, Minute 2, in reply to questions, the Director of Military Operations gave some particulars as to the relative strengths of the Allied and enemy armies at the present time on the Western front. Reckoned-in divisions,

the enemy had 199 divisions compared with our 167. Assuming the enemy casualties to be about 200,000, they would now have 1,370,000 infantry. The 6 or 7 divisions which had been brought across from Russia since the beginning of the battle might be regarded as compensating for their casualties.

On the Allied side, the French had brought in 2 divisions, and we had brought in 1, but 5 of ours, and the Portuguese division, had been knocked out, which reduced the Allied rifle strength to 1,450,000.

The Director of Military Operations was of opinion that the enemy, in anticipation of this offensive, had prepared drafts to replace all casualties. They had 400,000 drafts available before the offensive started. In addition, it was possible for them to draw on their divisions in the East to the extent of 100,000 drafts. Moreover, the Germans had taken all their troops that were serving in Macedonia and in Italy, which proved conclusively that they were concentrating every ounce of strength on the present battle. Against this, the French had 250,000 in depôts, and we had 200,000, including the men returning from leave. We had sent to France, since the 21st March, 1918, 110,000 infantry and 20,000 to 30,000 others, over and above the men returning from leave.

It was mentioned that, as regards the thinning of the divisions on the Russian front, this might be counter-balanced by 100,000 United States troops due to arrive shortly in France.

**Troops from  
Macedonia.**

4. The Director of Military Operations stated that the General Staff were considering the advisability of withdrawing troops from Salonica, and would report to the War Cabinet on the matter later.

**Casualties.**

5. With reference to War Cabinet 384, Minute 1, Lord Derby reported that the estimated number of casualties, based on the roll-call, was 150,000, but the casualties which were definitely known to have been incurred from the 21st March to the 6th April were as follows:—

	Officers.	Other ranks.
Killed	1,010	9,307
Wounded	3,658	46,407
Missing (including prisoners)	2,524	49,460
	<u>7,192</u>	<u>105,174</u>

In connection with the wounded he wished to instance the remarkable returns from one hospital which had dealt with 5,000 cases, in which there had been only 8 deaths, 4 of which were from gas gangrene, and not one from tetanus. He added that the wounded were being evacuated to England as rapidly as was possible.

**Ireland:  
Compulsory  
Military Service.**

6. The Prime Minister read a telegram (Paper G.T.-4189) received from Mr. Duke, which indicated that de Valera was urging the Sinn Fein County Executive that it would be better for their policy if conscription came, when they could undertake systematic and violent opposition to its enforcement. He was advocating a policy of the stoppage of all transport work, and the shooting of the recruiting authorities, whether belonging to the Army or to the Royal Irish Constabulary.

It was pointed out that it would be desirable to make it clear to the dock labourers that if they went on strike their exemptions would be automatically cancelled, and that they would be absorbed into the Army.

The Secretary was directed to send a copy of the telegram to the Field-Marshal Commanding Home Defence, for communication to the military authorities in Ireland for such action as might be necessary.

Mr. Barnes and Lord Derby undertook to make enquiries as regards the situation at the various docks.

Publication of  
Shipping Losses.

7. The War Cabinet had under consideration an Admiralty memorandum as to the form in which the losses and output of merchant tonnage should in future be published, and approved the proposals as set out in Paper G.T.-4174.

2, *Whitehall Gardens, S.W.*,  
*April 10, 1918.*