WAR CABINET, 473.

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Tuesday, September 17, 1918, at 12 noon.

Present:
The Right Hon. A. Bonar Law, M.P. (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. the Earl Curzon of Kedleston, K.G., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.
The Right Hon. Austen Chamberlain, M.P.

The following were also present:
Major-General Sir G. M. W. Macdonogh, K.C.M.G., C.B., Adjutant-General to the Forces (for Minute 10).
Major-General F. H. Sykes, C.M.G., Chief of the Air Staff (for Minutes 8 and 10).
The Right Hon. H. W. Forster, M.P., Financial Secretary, War Office (for Minute 11).
Mr. H. C. M. Lambert, C.B., Colonial Office (for Minute 10).

Rear-Admiral G. P. W. Hope, C.B., Deputy First Sea Lord (for Minutes 5 to 7).
Rear-Admiral A. F. Everett, C.B., Admiralty (for Minute 10).
Sir Leo Chiozza Money, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Shipping (for Minute 12).
Major-General J. E. B. Seely, C.B., D.S.O., M.P., Deputy Minister of Munitions (for Minute 10).
Sir A. G. Boscawen, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Pensions (for Minute 11).

Lieutenant-Colonel W. Dally Jones, C.M.G., Acting Secretary.
Mr. Thomas Jones, Assistant Secretary.
Lieutenant-Colonel L. Wilson, C.M.G., D.S.O., M.P., Assistant Secretary.
Captain L. F. Burges, Assistant Secretary.
1. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff stated that there was no news from the Western front beyond that contained in the morning’s telegrams, with the exception that the French had made a small attack on the Ailette on the previous day, capturing 600 prisoners and a few guns. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff stated that, for the American operations at St. Mihiel, General Pershing had been under General Pétain’s orders, and not directly under Marshal Foch.

Attention was drawn to a War Office telegram (No. 66437 of the 16th September, 1918) to the Military Attaché at Madrid, which stated that it was probable in the near future that the position on the Western front would again become stabilised, and that the enemy’s retirement was thought to be at an end. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that he had not seen this telegram, but, in view of the pessimistic tenour which it was thought to exhibit, would enquire from which department it had emanated.

2. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported that the Allied forces at Salonica had advanced on a front of 15 miles to a depth of 5 miles.

3. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff informed the War Cabinet that General Dunsterville had evacuated Baku and reached Enzeli with a force of some 1,200 men. It was not known how many out of this number were British troops.

4. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff drew attention to several telegrams which had been received from General Knox, some of which had not been circulated to the War Cabinet, regarding the differences of opinion which existed as to the responsibility for the formation and control of the new Russian Army in Siberia. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that amongst our Allies there seemed to be a general disinclination to entrust this task to a British officer. The Americans and the French favoured the idea of a Frenchman being chosen.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that our relations with the United States at the moment were not of the best. The Americans had got into their heads that we wished to push them into a policy that they did not like, and the unfortunate mistake recently committed by General Poole at Archangel had rather confirmed them in this impression.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that the immediate question on which he desired a War Cabinet decision was whether approval should be given to a request put forward by General Knox that he should be allowed to go ahead with raising 3,000 men with the assistance of General Dietrichs. General Knox had also stated that the fact that no one person had been appointed to co-ordinate the efforts of raising a Russian army was leading to a certain amount of confusion, and that he himself was quite willing to waive his claims, so long as someone was appointed. He laid stress on the point that it would be for the bad if some steps were not taken at once.

It was suggested that General Knox should be authorised to proceed with the raising of the 3,000 men, and that the ultimate command could be settled by the Supreme War Council. It was pointed out, however, that, as the Japanese were supplying the Commander-in-Chief for the whole expedition, they should have a voice in the question as to who was to be charged with the raising of the Russian levies, but they had no representative at Versailles.
It was agreed that no body other than the Supreme War Council existed which could settle a matter of this nature. The War Cabinet decided that—

(a.) The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, in conjunction with the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, should draft a telegram to General Knox, authorising him to proceed with the raising of 3,000 Russians, but stating that the ultimate control of collecting Russian troops for the Siberian Army would be settled by the Versailles Council. The telegram should also warn General Knox to be careful in his relations with the French and American representatives in Siberia on this subject.

(b.) It was advisable that information as to the steps it was proposed to take should be communicated to the French, and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should consider with the Chief of the Imperial General Staff the form in which this communication should be made.

H.M.S. "Glatton." 5. The Deputy First Sea Lord reported that a serious explosion occurred on board H.M.S. "Glatton" on the 16th September, in Dover Harbour. After one and a half hours' attempt to extinguish the fire, and as the magazines could not be flooded, the ship was sunk by a torpedo in the harbour. It was feared that there were numerous casualties. Admiral Hope stated that the loss of this Monitor was rather serious, as there was a long-range gun on board.

Aerial Engagements. 6. The Deputy First Sea Lord reported that two F.A. and two D.H. machines, whilst on patrol, sighted six hostile aircraft about noon on the 16th September, 12 miles East of Shipwash Light Vessel. The hostile aircraft were of smaller span than the D.H. machines. One German seaplane was seen to have been set on fire, but was lost sight of by our machines. Admiral Hope also stated that a report had been received from Dunkirk to the effect that, in addition to a considerable amount of bombing, eleven enemy aeroplanes had been destroyed and seven driven down out of control. A balloon at Ostend has also been shot down in flames. Two of our machines were missing.

Shipping Losses. 7. The First Sea Lord of the Admiralty stated that he had been asked to give the estimated shipping losses for this month. If we assumed that the losses for the remainder of September continued on about the same level as they had done for the first fortnight, we should have lost for the whole month 217,000 tons through marine peril and war loss. There was, however, no basis or reason for this assumption. Up to date we had ourselves lost 78,000 tons out of 98,000 tons which had been lost by the Allies by enemy action. Sir Eric Geddes stated that the Cabinet must not look for reduced shipping losses, as the situation was likely to get worse, owing to the fact that we were not sinking so many submarines as formerly, mainly in consequence of the requirements for convoy of American troops, and that the enemy were making a greater effort in output and in increased activity.

Air Activities. 8. General Sykes said that there were good indications of a shortage in Germany of aircraft material and personnel. There were also indications that the enemy had diverted several aircraft units from the West to the East of the Western front. The previous day on the Western front was one of the most successful
days we had yet had; we destroyed 46 enemy machines and drove
down 20 out of control, whilst we ourselves had only lost 16. On
the previous day we had dropped 23½ tons of bombs by day, and
15 tons by night. No report had been received regarding the
operations of the Independent Air Force for the 16th September.

9. With reference to War Cabinet 434, Minute 5, Lord
Curzon drew the attention of the War Cabinet to a letter which
had been received from Mr. Horatio Bottomley, Chairman of the
Racing Emergency Committee. In this letter Mr. Bottomley asked
that, as he was most desirous of avoiding any public agitation on
the question of the restriction of winter racing, the War Cabinet
should write him a letter, which he might put before his Committee,
saying that they would be prepared to reconsider the question of
winter racing if approached by the National Hunt Committee,
assuming that the railway position and other circumstances made
such a course possible.

After a short discussion, in which it was pointed out that the
War Cabinet had arrived at the decisions on the subject of racing,
already announced, on the grounds of interference with essential
war traffic on the railways by race meetings, the War Cabinet
decided that—

The Secretary should reply to Mr. Bottomley to the effect that
the War Cabinet would, of course, consider any
responsible representations which were made to them on
the subject of winter racing under National Hunt Rules,
but that they were not justified in holding out hopes that
the decision of the Government on this question, which
was based exclusively on considerations affecting the
prosecution of the war, would be departed from.

10. The War Cabinet had under consideration the following
memoranda and letters on the question of the award of a decora-
tion for the operations in Gallipoli:—

Memorandum by Mr. Chamberlain (Paper G.T.-5843).
Memorandum by Mr. Barnes (Paper G.T.-5386).
Letter from the National Federation of Demobilised Sailors
and Soldiers to the Prime Minister (Paper G.T.-5394).
Memorandum by Mr. Montagu (Paper G.T.-5413).
Letter from Sir C. M. Barlow, with memorandum from
Memorandum by the Secretary of State for War (Paper
G.T.-5558).
Memorandum by the Minister of Munitions (Paper
G.T.-5014).
Memorandum by the First Lord of the Admiralty (Paper
G.T.-5693).

Mr. Chamberlain, alluding to the proposal that a committee
should be constituted to discuss this question, which had been put
forward by the First Lord of the Admiralty in his memorandum
(Paper G.T.-5693), said that he considered this course was desir-
able. At the same time he was of opinion that the committee
should be presided over by someone who had personal knowledge
of the Parliamentary situation, and who was in touch with public
opinion on this subject. It was also important that this com-
mittee should have before it all the Cabinet memoranda on the
subject, and the many representations from public bodies and
individuals which had been sent to the Prime Minister and the
War Cabinet.
The Adjutant-General also welcomed the proposal to form a committee to deal with this question, and proposed amendments to the composition of the proposed committee, which were accepted and are embodied in the decision given below.

Speaking on behalf of the Secretary of State for India, who was unable to attend, General Macdonogh said that Mr. Montagu concurred in this proposal, and desired that General Cox, the Military Secretary for India, should be one of the members of the committee.

The War Cabinet decided that—

(a.) A committee, constituted as under:—

The Deputy Minister of Munitions (Chairman);
Rear-Admiral A. F. Everett, C.B. (Naval Secretary to the First Lord of the Admiralty);
Sir Oswyn A. R. Murray, K.C.B. (Permanent Secretary to the Admiralty);
The Adjutant-General, or his representative;
Sir Reginald H. Brade, K.C.B. (Secretary of the War Office);
The Right Hon. Sir F. Ponsonby, K.C.B.;
Lieutenant-General Sir H. V. Cox, K.C.M.G., C.B., C.S.I.;
The Director of Air Personal Services (Air Ministry),
should meet and consider all the problems involved in granting decorations for operations during the war, and that a report should be rendered as soon as possible to the War Cabinet for their consideration on the question of the issue of a decoration in connection with the operations in Gallipoli.

(b.) All papers in connection with this question, including those circulated to the War Cabinet, should be referred to the committee.

Pensions of Officers' Widows.

11. The War Cabinet had under consideration a note by Mr. Chamberlain (Paper G.T.-5471), and memoranda by the Minister of Pensions (Paper G.T.-5500), and by the Secretary of State for War (Paper G.T.-5535), on the subject of pensions of officers' widows.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Pensions explained that there had been no increase of officers' widows' pensions granted under the old warrant, with one exception, namely, that the pensions of widows of subalterns had been brought up to the same level as those of the widows of captains. The pensions of disabled officers had been raised, but as officers' widows' pensions had not been raised above the amount granted in former wars, with the exception to which he had alluded, there was no case for any alteration in the scale of the pensions for the widows of officers (above the rank of lieutenant) who had fallen in former wars. It was true that the pensions of widows of non-commissioned officers and men who had fallen in former wars had been brought up to the same level as the pensions granted for the present war.

Mr. Chamberlain pointed out that the children's allowances for the children of officers killed in the present war had been increased, and expressed the opinion that at any rate it was only fair that the amount of pensions awarded to widows of officers who had fallen in former wars should be brought up to the same level as that at present in force. In former days the pension payable to the wife of an officer killed in action, who was above the rank of colonel, was not paid on any fixed rate, each case being
investigated on its merits. The rates for all senior ranks had now been fixed, and Mr. Chamberlain urged that, if any widow of an officer of senior rank was now receiving less than the fixed rate, the amount of her pension should be raised to that rate. Mr. Chamberlain also invited the Ministry of Pensions to investigate as to whether the scale of pensions now payable to officers' widows should not be reconsidered as a whole, in view of the fact that the pensions of widows of non-commissioned officers and men had been increased, and in view of the greatly increased cost of living. He suggested that the sum of 200£. for the widow of a colonel, and 140£. for the widow of a major, was insufficient at the present time.

The War Cabinet decided that—

(a.) The "highest rate" of the pensions of the widows of subaltern officers killed in former wars, namely, 80£., should be raised to 100£.

(b.) The pensions of widows of officers above the rank of colonel killed in action, or whose death was due to war service in former wars, should be paid at the fixed rate now payable to widows of officers of similar rank, provided that no widow's pension should be reduced by this decision.

(c.) The Minister of Pensions should forward a memorandum for the consideration of the War Cabinet, setting forth the exact position in regard to the pensions of the widows of officers, N.C.O.'s, and men, and the stages by which it had been reached.

12. The War Cabinet took note of the decisions of the Allied Maritime Transport Council at meetings held on the 29th and 30th August, 1918 (Paper G.T.-5621).

13. The War Cabinet approved the proposals of the Air Council, as approved by the India Office, to employ Indian Army personnel with the Royal Air Force in Egypt (Papers A. P. C., 7th Minutes, G.T.-5653).

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.

September 17, 1918.