CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, February 23, 1942, at 6 P.M.

Present:
The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. C. R. ATTLEE, M.P., Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.
The Right Hon. Sir JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Lord President of the Council.
The Right Hon. ERNEST BEVIN, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.
The Right Hon. ERNEST BROWN, M.P., Minister of Health (Items 7 and 8).
The Right Hon. BRENDAN BRACKEN, M.P., Minister of Information.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. Sir EARLE PAGE, Special Envoy from the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia (Items 1-6).
The Right Hon. HERBERT MORRISON, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security.
The Right Hon. VISCONT CRANBORNE, Secretary of State for the Colonies.
The Right Hon. Sir JAMES GREGG, Secretary of State for War.

[23499]
WAR CABINET 23 (42).

CONTENTS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minute No.</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Naval, Military and Air Operations</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Air Operations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Naval Operations:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shipping losses.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Military Operations:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Far East.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burma.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Libya.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Russia.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Australian Troop Movements</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Aircraft Production</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Production and Repair Facilities in India.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Repatriation of Civilians from Italian East Africa</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sinking of an Italian Tanker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>France: Relations with Vichy Government</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Martinique.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Treatment of Prisoners at Hong Kong</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question of Publicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Home Defence</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scheme for Evacuation of Coastal Areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Home Defence</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role of the Civil Population</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. The Chiefs of Staff gave the following information in amplification of Cabinet War Room Records Nos. 888-904:

- In the home theatre bad weather had impeded our bomber operations.
- In the Middle East the enemy had lost 8 destroyed, 12 probably destroyed and 18 damaged; we had lost 12.
- At Malta, which continued to be heavily attacked from the air, the enemy had lost 3 probably destroyed and 10 damaged; we had lost 5 (4 on the ground) and 11 damaged on the ground.
- In the Dutch East Indies we had lost 50 aircraft (25 on the ground) and the enemy 35.
- In the Dutch East Indies enemy cruisers, destroyers and transports had been attacked from the air on the 14th February. It was thought that at least 3 cruisers and 1 destroyer had been hit and 1 transport sunk. Later reports might show an increase in these figures.
- A German cruiser and pocket battleship had been attacked that morning in Norwegian waters by one of our submarines. It was hoped that a hit had been obtained.
- During the previous week 164,000 tons of shipping had been lost, including marine casualties. Most of our losses had occurred in the Dutch East Indies area and off the American Coast.
- The Cabinet were informed of the disposition of the Japanese land forces in the Far East and of the reinforcements due to arrive in the Far East and the Indian Ocean area.

2. The War Cabinet discussed the movements of an Australian Division. The discussion and the Conclusions reached are recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

3. The Minister of Labour and National Service said that the report prepared by the Minister of Aircraft Production, in accordance with the request which he had made a week ago, made a strong case against establishing capacity to manufacture aircraft in India at the present moment. The report pointed out, however, that, if the production of aircraft in India was to be increased, it would be necessary to establish adequate repair facilities, and this would probably be the best way in which to use Indian resources.

The War Cabinet—
Invited the Secretary of State for Air to furnish a report on this suggestion.
4. The War Cabinet were reminded that we had reached an agreement with the Italian Government that they should provide ships, under safe-conduct from us, for the repatriation of civilians to Italy. Unfortunately, an Italian tanker, fetching oil under safe-conduct from us as part of this arrangement, had been sunk.

The Foreign Secretary said that there were extenuating circumstances. Nevertheless, he thought that we should express our regret.

It was suggested in discussion that, while we should not offer compensation for the ship which had been sunk, we might undertake to provide a quantity of fuel oil equivalent to that carried by this tanker.

The War Cabinet—

Authorised the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the First Lord of the Admiralty to settle this matter in such a way as to ensure that the sinking of this tanker did not bring to an end the scheme for the repatriation of Italian civilians from Italian East Africa.

5. The Foreign Secretary referred to reports that enemy submarines had refuelled at Martinique.

The War Cabinet—

Agreed that the Foreign Secretary should communicate this information to the United States Government, urging them to take strong action.

6. The War Cabinet had under consideration the question of publicity about the treatment of prisoners at Hong Kong.

It was pointed out in discussion that many of the allegations had not been verified. But it seemed unlikely that we should be able to verify some of the reports until after the war. How could the matter be kept quiet until then? In any case, the Japanese, by refusing their consent to the visit to Hong Kong of representatives of the International Red Cross Committee or of the Protecting Power, had laid themselves open to the gravest suspicion that atrocities had taken place.

Some publicity on this matter could not be avoided. In particular, the Foreign Secretary said that it would be very difficult to ask the Chinese Government to suppress publicity on this matter.

There was also reason to believe that the best way to stop atrocities would be to give them full and early publicity. This had been the line which the Chinese had always taken, e.g., in regard to the Nanking outrages. It was essential, however, to give prominence to the ill-treatment of Asians as well as Europeans.

For these reasons the balance of argument was felt to be in favour of publication. Both General Wavell and the Governor of Burma had, however, opposed publication of the atrocities at Hong Kong. It would therefore be right that they should both be consulted before a final decision was reached.
Accordingly, the War Cabinet—
Invited the Secretaries of State for War and Burma to send short telegrams to General Wavell and Sir Reginald Dorman Smith summarising the points made in discussion, drawing attention to those in favour of publicity which had weighed with the War Cabinet, and inviting an early expression of their views.

7. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security (W.P. (42) 91) covering a report by the Civil Defence Committee, proposing certain modifications of the Scheme for the compulsory evacuation of certain towns at or near the coast of South-East England if invasion was imminent.

The main point discussed was whether the Brighton group of towns should be included in any scheme for the evacuation of coastal towns.

The serious disadvantages of this course from the civil point of view were pointed out; in particular, that most of the inhabitants of this group of towns would have to be evacuated into Central London.

The War Cabinet were informed that, if the possibility of evacuating the Brighton group of towns was to be faced, it would be necessary to carry out a registration scheme in the towns concerned, and to make the necessary arrangements for billeting in various London boroughs. This would inevitably involve some publicity.

The War Cabinet were also informed that the French scheme for the evacuation of Lille, Roubaix and Tourcoing, containing a population of 800,000 people, had worked satisfactorily in 1940, although its results had been nullified by the German forces getting round to the rear of these towns and causing the people who had been evacuated to return.

After a short discussion, the War Cabinet agreed as follows:

(1) Plans for the evacuation of the thirty-one towns should be framed on the basis that the War Cabinet will be asked to authorise evacuation to begin twenty-one days before the enemy’s preparations for invasion are likely to be completed, it being understood that the War Cabinet will decide, in the light of all the relevant considerations at the time, whether to authorise evacuation.

(2) A scheme on the same basis should also be prepared for the evacuation of the Brighton group of towns on the understanding that, when the time came for the War Cabinet to consider whether compulsory evacuation should be effected, the need for putting into force each section (e.g., the Brighton group of towns) should receive separate examination.

8. The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security referred to a Motion put down by Lord Mottistone: ‘To call attention to the status of civilians in the event of invasion in accordance with the law of the land and the provisions of The Hague Convention of 1907, especially Articles I and II of Convention 4, and to request His Majesty’s Government to issue precise instructions; and to move for Papers.’ Mr. Lipson also had put down a Question to the Prime Minister on the same subject.
The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security said that, in the light of the experience of guerrilla warfare in Russia, he thought that there was a case for examining whether any amendment was called for in the previous instructions in this matter, which had been included in the leaflet approved by the War Cabinet in July 1940 (W.P. (G) (40) 197).

The War Cabinet—

Invited the Lord President of the Council to examine, in consultation with the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security and any other Ministers concerned, the question whether the instructions issued on this matter required amendment.

Great George Street, S.W. 1,
February 23, 1942.