WAR CABINET 97 (43).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, 12th July, 1943, 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 Foreign Affairs.

The Right Hon. Sir JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Lord President of the Council.

The Right Hon. OLIVER LYTTELTON, M.P., Minister of Production.

The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

The Right Hon. ERNEST BEVIN, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.

The Right Hon. HERBERT MORRISON, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security.

The Right Hon. R. G. CASEY, Minister of State.

The following were also present:


Field-Marshal Sir ARCHIBALD WAVEll, Viceroy of India (Designate).

The Right Hon. Sir KINGSLEY WOOD, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Right Hon. L. S. AMSEY, M.P., Secretary of State for India and Secretary of State for Burma.

The Right Hon. OLIVER CHURCHILL, M.P., Secretary of State for War.

The Right Hon. R. A. BUTLER, M.P., President of the Board of Education (Items 5-8).

The Hon. Sir ALEXANDER CADOGAN, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Air Chief Marshal Sir CHARLES F. A. PORTAL, Chief of the Air Staff.

The Right Hon. Sir ARCHIBALD SINCLAIR, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.

The Right Hon. BRENDA BRACKEN, M.P., Minister of Information.

Sir RAMASWAMI MUDALIAR, Representative of India.

The Right Hon. VISCOUNT CRANBORNE, Lord Privy Seal.


The Right Hon. Sir ARCHIBALD PORTAL, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Admiral of the Fleet Sir DUDLEY FOUNT, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff.

General Sir ALAN BROOKE, Chief of the

Secretariat:

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
Lieutenant-General Sir Hastings ISMAI.
Mr. NORMAN BROOK.
Mr. L. F. BURGIS.
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1. The Chiefs of Staff reported the principal events of the previous week.

The operations in the attack against Sicily were described.

Air Operations.—The preparations for the air attack on Sicily had begun immediately after the capture of Pantelleria, and a rising scale of attack had reached its height during the previous week. This had very greatly reduced the enemy's strength of serviceable aircraft, in Sicily itself and in Southern Italy. The airborne assault, despite adverse weather, had been very successful. The British airborne troops (in gliders) had landed North-West and South-West of Syracuse, and the American (parachute) troops behind the coast defences which they had to assault. During the actual landing from the sea the air opposition had been very light, but had increased somewhat during the 11th July. The air position would be difficult until we could operate fighters from the captured aerodromes.

Sea Operations.—The passage and arrival of British and American troops off the Sicilian beaches had gone as planned, although the weather, on which so much depended, had at the last moment become unfavourable. Most of the parties were landed at the exact place and hour, except for a few which had been one hour late. The weather affected the landing of the Americans more than ourselves, but fine seamanship had enabled the difficulties to be overcome. No enemy opposition had been experienced from surface craft. One hospital ship (which had been showing lights) and one United States destroyer had been sunk, and four other ships had been lost on passage.

Military Operations.—The landings had been carried out according to plan, and with only slight casualties. All the first, and some of the second, objectives had been secured. Among the towns and forts now in our hands were Syracuse, Pachino, Gela, Licata, Avola, Noto and Scoglitti. The morale of the Italian troops was reported to be indifferent, and 6,000 prisoners had been taken up to date.

During the next phase the major problem was likely to be that of landing munitions and supplies sufficient to enable our forces to maintain their operations. This task would, of course, be facilitated by the capture of Syracuse.

During the previous week bad weather had interfered with Bomber Command operations. Cologne and Gelsenkirchen had been attacked. We had lost 21 bombers, 2 Coastal Command and 9 fighter aircraft.

Enemy air losses up to the previous Friday had been 184 aircraft destroyed, with 22 probably destroyed and 60 damaged. Allied losses had been 61 aircraft.

Shipping losses by enemy action during the previous week, including belated reports, amounted to 135,000 tons. This figure did not include two ships, one of 16,000 tons and another of 20,000 tons, which had since been sunk by aircraft off Cape Finisterre. Some discussion ensued as to whether ships in this area should be routed further away from land.

In a night action in the Kula Gulf on the 5th July American naval forces claimed to have sunk 4 Japanese cruisers and driven 1 cruiser and 5 destroyers ashore. United States submarines had sunk 9 enemy supply ships in this area.

The Russians continued to hold the German attacks in the area between Byelgorod and Orel. During the last few days the intensity of the attacks had apparently abated to some extent; but it was likely that this was only a temporary phase. It was to be expected that fierce fighting would continue in this sector for some time.

The War Cabinet—

Took note of these statements.
2. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that some
progress had been made in forming a new Polish Government,
following the death of General Sikorski. M. Mikolajczyk had
agreed to form a Government and was prepared to accept General
Skonkowski as Commander-in-Chief. There were, however, some
difficulties which had not yet been overcome. The main issues
were

(a) M. Mikolajczyk maintained that the Commander-in-Chief
should be subject to the directions of the Government
and not responsible only to the President.

(b) The Prime Minister also considered that the Commander-
in-Chief should not have a right of succession to the
Presidency in the event of the President's death. This
arrangement had been acceptable to a majority of Poles
while General Sikorski was Commander-in-Chief; but
there was no sufficient reason for conferring a similar
right on his successor.

(c) M. Mikolajczyk wished to have an assurance that he would
in no circumstances be dismissed from office by the
President.

(d) At present the control of the Polish secret organisations
rested partly with the Polish Home Secretary and partly
with the Commander-in-Chief. M. Mikolajczyk desired
that all these organisations should be brought under the
control of the Government.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that he had
been asked for his views on these points. He had expressed
sympathy with M. Mikolajczyk's views on the points mentioned
at (a) and (b); he had indicated that he should not feel able to
support the Prime Minister in his attitude on (c); and, as
regards (d), he had said that he would have thought that some
suitable arrangements could be come to between the Polish
authorities.

In discussion, it was suggested that it was most desirable that
the British Press should avoid dwelling on the domestic difficulties
of the Polish Government; and the Minister of Information was
invited to consider what he could do to influence the newspapers
in this matter.

The War Cabinet—

Took note of the statements by the Secretary of State for
Foreign Affairs.

3. The Secretary of State for War drew attention to the
failure of the Great Western Railway to make satisfactory arrange­
ments for the reception at Paddington Station of the coffin
containing General Sikorski's body.

The War Cabinet—

Asked the Minister of War Transport to take this matter
up with the railway company.

Air Raids,
Casualties and
Damage.
(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (43) 94th
Conclusions
Minute 4.)

4. The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security said
that during the afternoon of the 9th July ten enemy aircraft had
made low-flying attacks, in cloud, on Croydon, Orpington, Hastings
and East Grinstead. Two of these aircraft were destroyed. The
total casualties were 83 killed and 56 seriously injured.

The most serious incident was at East Grinstead, where heavy
casualties were caused by a direct hit on a cinema.

It was pointed out in discussion that the distress caused by
such an incident as this, in a small and compact town like East
Grinstead, was disproportionate to the actual number of casualties.
The War Cabinet—

Took note of this statement, and invited the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security to consider whether a message of sympathy might not be sent to the Chairman of the Urban District Council of East Grinstead on behalf of the War Cabinet.

5. The Prime Minister referred to the advantages which might follow if Basic English were widely used as a means of interchange of thought throughout the world. He suggested that this matter might be the subject of preliminary examination in its broad aspects by a Committee of Ministers.

After a short discussion, the War Cabinet appointed a Committee comprising—

The Secretary of State for India (in the Chair),
The Secretary of State for the Colonies,
The President of the Board of Education,
The Minister of Information,
The Secretary, Department of Overseas Trade,
The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs,
The Parliamentary Secretary, Board of Education,

...to consider whether action should be taken to promote the spread of Basic English, and, if so, to recommend a programme of action.

It should be open to the Committee to consider alternatives to Basic English, such as "Essential English."

6. The Lord Privy Seal said that Lord Mansfield had put down a Motion to ask His Majesty's Government whether they were satisfied with the defensive fire-power of our heavy bombers. Lord Mansfield had not accepted a suggestion that he should take this Motion off the Paper, and the Lord Privy Seal proposed to inform him that if the matter was debated it would have to be in Secret Session. In accordance with the arrangement made in January last, he asked that the War Cabinet should endorse this decision.

The War Cabinet—

Approved the course proposed.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
12th July, 1943.