WAR CABINET 67 (44).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, 22nd May, 1944, at 6 p.m.

Present:

The Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).


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. Lord Woolton, Minister of Reconstruction.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. John Curtin, M.P., Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia.

Lieutenant-General His Highness the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, Representative of the Government of India.

Sir Godfrey Huggins, M.P., Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia.

The Right Hon. Lord Beaverbrook, Lord Privy Seal.

The Right Hon. Sir James Grigg, M.P., Secretary of State for War.

The Right Hon. Sir Stafford Cripps, K.C., M.P., Minister of Aircraft Production.

The Right Hon. the Earl of Selborne, Minister of Economic Warfare (Items 3-5).

The Hon. Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Items 1-3).

Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Charles F. A. Portal, Chief of the Air Staff.

Field-Marshal the Right Hon. J. C. Smuts, M.P., Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa.

The Hon. Sir Firoz Khan Noon, Representative of the Government of India.

The Right Hon. Viscount Cranborne, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.

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

The Right Hon. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.

The Right Hon. Brendan Bracken, M.P., Minister of Information.

The Right Hon. Lord Cherwell, Paymaster-General.

Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff.

Field-Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Secretariat:

Sir Edward Bridges.
Lieutenant-General Sir Hastings L. Ismay.
Sir Gilbert Laithwaite.
Mr. L. F. Burgis.

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1. The Chiefs of Staff reported the events of the previous six days.

Owing to bad weather Bomber Command had only made attacks on two nights. The previous night they had dropped 2,200 bombs on Duisburg, and on the night of the 19th/20th May French railway centres, coastal batteries and Radar Stations had been attacked.

United States bombers had made three attacks, one on Berlin and the other two on airfields, factories and "Crossbow" targets.

The Allied Expeditionary Air Force and the Tactical Air Force had made 8,900 sorties, attacking railway centres and other targets in Occupied Territory. On the previous day some 1,500 fighters (of which 51 were missing) had attacked rolling-stock in France, the Low Countries and Germany.

Enemy losses claimed for the previous six days had been 300 destroyed (including 127 on the ground), 18 probably destroyed and 147 damaged. Allied losses amounted to 170, including 30 British and 30 United States bombers.

13,000 sorties had been flown as against 750 by the enemy. The weather had affected the activities of the medium and heavy bombers. Enemy losses amounted to 101 as against 105 Allied.

In South-East Asia the monsoon weather was beginning to affect operations. 40 Japanese aircraft had been destroyed as against 14 Allied.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff gave an account of the progress of the attack which had started on the 11th May on the Italian Front. The Allied forces were in contact along the whole front of the Hitler Line and had penetrated at a few places. Fighting was taking place in the outskirts of Pontecorvo; Pico had been reached. American forces had taken Fondi and Terracina was reported to be in our hands. The movement of German reserves indicated that the enemy meant to fight the battle out in his present positions; but the enemy's forces were somewhat disorganised. 6,000 prisoners had been taken so far.

In discussion the comment was made that hardly anything had been said so far about the part taken by British troops in this battle. The Prime Minister undertook to bring this point to General Alexander's notice.

General Stilwell, by a surprise movement into the Irrawaddy Valley, had taken one of the airfields of Myitkyina, and fighting was going on in the town.

United States forces had captured Wakde Island, 120 miles off Hollandia.

Sinkings by enemy action this week amounted to 7,000 tons, and for the first three weeks of May amounted to 17,000 tons. During May 9 U-boats had been sunk and 6 probably sunk. Details were given of a number of actions against E-boats in the Channel and the North Sea. A British merchant ship had been sunk in the Mediterranean. The U-boat responsible had itself been sunk yesterday.

In the Indian Ocean and Pacific the Japanese naval base at Sourabaya had been attacked from the air on the 17th May, the Eastern Fleet co-operating with the Richelieu, one Dutch cruiser and one destroyer, and three United States destroyers. The operation had been very successful. Ten ships of some 35,000 tons, including a small tanker and possibly a destroyer, had been hit, one of which had been blown up and some others probably sunk. Nineteen aircraft had been destroyed on the ground and 2 shot down. One only of our aircraft was missing. Great satisfaction was expressed at the results of this successful attack.

Australian Naval escort vessels had bombarded Karka Island on the 12th and 13th, and destroyed buildings, gun positions, and ammunition dumps.

The War Cabinet—
Took note of these statements.
2. The Prime Minister said that he had sent a telegram to Marshal Tito, informing him that King Peter had dismissed M. Puric's administration and was about to form a new Government under the Ban of Croatia. A satisfactory answer to this communication had now been received.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that King Peter was moving very slowly as regards setting up a new Government. The suggestion had been made that it might be better that the new Prime Minister should be not the Ban of Croatia but M. Grol, who was a Serb. In this event, the Ban of Croatia would support the Government, but it did not seem certain that he would be a member of it.

The Prime Minister said that the Ban of Croatia, who had been brought over from America, should certainly be a leading member of the new Government. Moreover, he thought that a very early decision should be reached on this matter, so that a public announcement could be made.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that Mr. Stevenson, our Minister to the Government of Yugoslavia, would be seeing King Peter on the following day.

Discussion ensued about General Velebit, the Chief of Staff to the Yugoslav Military Mission, who had come on a visit to this country with Brigadier Maclean. It was reported that an impression had gained ground that General Velebit had been somewhat neglected during the first week or so that he had been in this country.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that he had received a letter of protest on the matter from Mr. Harold Laski. It was agreed that the reply to this letter should be that the Prime Minister, as Minister of Defence, had always intended to see General Velebit before he left this country.

After some further discussion, the following decisions were reached:

(1) The Minister of Information should make arrangements for General Velebit to make a tour of this country. This would afford him an opportunity of visiting provincial centres, and of seeing for himself our war effort; but would not be made the occasion for Press interviews on political matters.*

(2) The Minister of Economic Warfare was asked to report to the Prime Minister regarding the programme which had been made for General Velebit's visit whilst in this country.

3. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs reported the latest developments. A discussion followed, which is recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

4. The Minister of Reconstruction referred to the decisions reached by the War Cabinet at their previous meeting as to the arrangements for publication of the White Paper on Employment Policy. After a short discussion, the War Cabinet reached the following conclusions:

(1) The White Paper should be published on Friday, the 26th May, and an announcement to this effect should be made in Parliament on Wednesday, the 24th May, 1944.

*Note: It did not, in the event, prove possible to carry out this decision, as General Velebit left the country on 23rd May, 1944.
(2) Importance was attached to adhering to the decision that no copies should be made available to the Press before the paper had been presented to the House of Commons. A suggestion that an exception might be made in the case of the Lobby journalists, who should be given copies the night before in confidence, was not approved.

5. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs referred to the suggestion that the Prime Minister should make a statement on the war situation before the Whitsun recess. The question was raised whether such a statement could more appropriately be made on Wednesday, before the Debate on Foreign Affairs, or on one of the two ensuing days.

The War Cabinet—
Agreed that the Prime Minister should discuss this matter with the Leader of the House and with the Chief Whip.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
22nd May, 1944.