CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held in the Cabinet War Room, on Tuesday, 27th June, 1944, at 6 p.m.

Present:

The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).


The Right Hon. SIR JOHN ANDERSON, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.

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

The Right Hon. ERNEST BEVIN, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer. 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. LORD WOOLTON, Minister of Reconstruction.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. PETER FRASER, M.P., Prime Minister of New Zealand.

Lieutenant-General His Highness the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, 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. LORD BEAVERBROOK, Lord Privy Seal.

The Right Hon. LORD LEATHERS, Minister of War Transport (Items 3-5).

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

The Right Hon. SIR JAMES GRIGG, M.P., Secretary of State for Air.

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

The Right Hon. SIR STAFFORD Cripps, K.C., M.P., Minister of Aircraft Production.

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

Mr. DUNCAN SANDYS, M.P., Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Supply (Items 3-5).

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.

General SIR HASTINGS L. ISMAY.

Mr. W. S. MURRIE.

Colonel D. CAPEL DUNN.
## War Cabinet 82 (44).

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Mr. Fraser. 

1. The Prime Minister said that all his colleagues would regret that this was the last occasion on which Mr. Fraser would attend a meeting of the War Cabinet on his present visit to this country. Mr. Fraser's presence here during these critical and momentous days had been of great value. The New Zealand Government had made a typically generous gesture in deciding to leave the New Zealand Division in Italy, where under General Alexander's command they were adding to their splendid record of achievement.

Mr. Fraser thanked the Prime Minister warmly for what he had said. He counted it a high privilege to have been here in these days. He would return to New Zealand with confidence, if possible, strengthened in the efficiency with which the central direction of the war was being conducted.

2. The Chiefs of Staff reported the events of the previous week. Bomber Command had flown 3,665 sorties for a loss of 90 aircraft and had dropped 11,000 tons of bombs. One heavy attack had been made on two oil plants in the Ruhr area. Railway centres and 'Crossbow' targets had also been attacked.

American heavy bombers had attacked oil targets in Germany by day on three occasions with good results. In one operation the Americans had sent 160 aircraft to bomb targets in Eastern Germany. The aircraft had then flown on to Russia. There, owing to lack of adequate defence, they had lost 56 aircraft destroyed on the ground by German air attack.

The Allied Expeditionary Air Force had flown 27,000 sorties. The enemy had lost 335 and the Allies 412 aircraft in the week. In the Mediterranean theatre 8,600 sorties had been flown as against 560 by the enemy. Enemy losses amounted to 76 as against 55 Allied aircraft.

During the previous week confirmed shipping losses due to enemy action amounted to 7,555 tons. Total losses for June to date amounted to 34,244 tons.

During June 12 U-boats had been destroyed and 6 probably destroyed.

Bad weather considerably impeded unloading operations on the British beaches in North-West France during the early part of the week.

Three American battleships, two American cruisers and two British cruisers bombarded Cherbourg on the 25th. Whilst doing so they came under accurate fire from shore batteries and some warships had received slight damage.

On the night of the 25th June M.T.Bs. had intercepted an enemy convoy consisting of seven small ships south of Jersey, sinking two ships for certain and probably three others. On the following night another enemy ship attempting to leave Cherbourg had been sunk and three others damaged.

The United States Army had first driven across the Cherbourg Peninsula. The enemy divisions cut off had withdrawn without offering much opposition until reaching the Cherbourg defences, when firm resistance had been offered; but the port had now been occupied.

The British 30th Corps in the Tilly area had been engaged in heavy fighting and had inflicted considerable loss on the enemy. The enemy had been driven southwards across the road running east and west through Tilly. On the 25th June the 49th and 50th Divisions seized ground south-east of Tilly, and the following day the 15th Division, supported by a heavy artillery barrage, attacked south from the area Norrey-en-Bessin. This attack was progressing favourably.

In the last few days the enemy's resistance in the area of Lake Trasimeno and westwards had stiffened considerably and it seemed
that he intended to stand for as long as possible on that general line. Progress had, however, been made, particularly in both coastal sectors.

During the past week our forces had cleared the Kohima-Imphal road. The road from Dimapur to Imphal was now open to through traffic and in use by motor transport convoys. East of Kohima the enemy appeared to be rapidly withdrawing southwards.

In North Burma General Stilwell’s forces, with the assistance of our own long-range penetration groups, had brought about the fall of Mogaung.

The Russians had begun an important offensive north of the Pripet Marshes. This was making good progress and Vitebsk had fallen.

The War Cabinet—
Took note of these statements.

Air Raids.
Attacks by
Flying Bombs.
(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (44) 80th
Conclusions,
Minute 4.)

3. The War Cabinet had before them—

(i) A Note by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security (W.P. (44) 343), covering reports by the Research and Experiments Department of the Ministry of Home Security summarising the information collected by the Department on the subject of flying bombs up to 24th June; and

(ii) A Memorandum by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security (W.P. (44) 348), on the flying bomb and the rocket.

The Home Secretary and Minister for Home Security gave a report of the casualties and damage caused by flying bombs since the attacks had begun. About 1,600 people had been killed, 4,500 had been seriously injured, and nearly 5,000 slightly injured. About 1,500 flying bombs had been launched, of which nearly 600 had entered the London area. Over 200,000 houses had been damaged to a greater or less extent and, although the Ministry of Works had been extremely active in the repair of war damage, they were finding it difficult to keep up with the damage caused. The result was that considerable numbers of people were homeless. The attacks had led to serious loss of sleep and the fact that they went on continuously meant that there was no relaxation of the strain and, in particular, made parents anxious for the safety of their children. After five years of war the civil population were not as capable of standing the strain of air attack as they had been during the winter of 1940-41. If flying bomb attacks were supplemented by rocket attacks, which according to reports might do as much damage as had been experienced in the heaviest 1940-41 raiding, the Civil Defence machine, which was much weaker in numbers than it had been in 1940-41, might prove unable to cope with the attacks, and there might be serious deterioration in the morale of the civil population. The suggestions as to possible additional action to counter the attacks made in W.P. (44) 348 were put forward tentatively, and he was mainly concerned to stress that the effect of the attacks could not be brushed aside lightly, but must be treated as a major element in the strategy of the war.

Everything possible was being done under the direction of the Civil Defence Committee to mitigate the effects of the attacks. Shelter accommodation was adequate. Steps had been taken some time ago to strengthen street shelters with the result that they had stood up reasonably well to the flying bombs. The main problem was to induce people to use the public shelters which were available. The plans for the evacuation of priority classes were being kept under review, and if any general demand for evacuation appeared they would put them into force.
The Lord President of the Council and the Chancellor of the Exchequer supported the view that the continuous nature of the flying bomb attacks was imposing a particularly heavy strain on the civil population. Even in the worst period of the winter of 1940-41 there had been considerable breaks during which the population had had a chance to recover.

The Minister of Aircraft Production reported that while in general the morale of the workers was good, the attacks had led to a marked increase of absenteeism among married women.

The Minister of Labour and National Service suggested that more might be done to mitigate the effect of the attacks on the civilian population by prompt action to provide for the comfort of those who suffered under the attacks. Homeless persons should be removed from rest centres to more comfortable quarters as soon as possible, even though this meant transferring them to other parts of London, and where such transfers took place, transport should be provided for the workers. More might be done, particularly by the use of mobile canteens, to ensure that the feeding arrangements for persons rendered homeless were adequate. It was of great importance that the repair of damaged houses should be executed as quickly as possible, and workers from other areas should if necessary be brought to London for this purpose. In the 1940-41 raids it had been arranged to borrow a certain number of building workers temporarily from the Army, and he suggested that the Secretary of State for War might consider whether it would be possible for him to release a number of slaters and tilers so that the work of roofing damaged houses might be carried on with the greatest possible speed.

The Prime Minister said that everything possible had been done to counter the flying bomb and rocket, though the enemy had perhaps had a short respite while our air forces had been concentrated on the pre-invasion assault. He realised that the civil population were under a considerable strain and the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security was right to bring these matters to the notice of the War Cabinet. But the hardships imposed on them must be considered in comparison with what was being suffered by the enemy population who were subjected to our air raids. It would be unwise to rely on any diminution in the scale of casualties and damage even though our defences should improve. It was therefore of the first importance that everything possible should be done to provide for the victims of the attacks and nothing should be allowed to stand in the way of the repair of damaged houses and the provision of alternative accommodation and emergency feeding for the people who lost their homes. A further point was that it might be found by experience that the system of warnings required modification. He attached great importance to encouraging the people to use shelters, particularly at night, so that they might sleep undisturbed, and steps should be taken to improve the sleeping accommodation and general amenities of public shelters. He was not afraid that the civil population would lose their morale provided they were satisfied that everything had been done to help those who had suffered under the attacks and provided that the scale of the attacks was not exaggerated.

In the course of discussion, reference was made to a number of operational matters, including the question of counter-measures. A record is contained in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Took note of the information which they had been given with regard to attacks by aircraft on flying-bomb and rocket sites, and intruder patrols over the areas from which the flying bombs were launched, and of the steps which were being taken to counter flying bombs by the use of fighters, anti-aircraft guns, and balloons.
(2) Agreed that the Civil Defence Committee should consider further what steps could be taken to mitigate the effect of the attacks on the civil population. In particular—

(a) Every effort should be made to improve the amenities of public shelters and to encourage the maximum use of shelters for sleeping purposes in order that workers might get an undisturbed night's rest.

(b) The highest priority should be given to the repair of damaged property in the London area and, if necessary, labour should be brought from other areas.

The Secretary of State for War undertook to consider whether slaters and tilers could be temporarily loaned by the Army to assist in first-aid repairing.

(c) In view of the anxiety of parents for the safety of their children, the plans for the evacuation of priority classes should be reviewed in order to ensure that they could, if necessary, be operated at short notice.

(d) Attention was drawn to the importance of doing all possible to provide emergency feeding arrangements, and adequate accommodation for those rendered homeless.

(3) Took note of the reports by the Research and Experiments Department of the Ministry of Home Security, circulated with W.P. (44) 343.

4. The War Cabinet took note of a Memorandum by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security (W.P. (44) 342) setting out the facts so far ascertained about the German woman alleged to be a sniper. At present, no evidence to substantiate the allegation had been received. If it should be received, the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security agreed that the woman must be returned to France and tried by a military court. In the meantime, she would be kept in prison, under the Royal Prerogative, as a civilian of enemy nationality.

5. The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security stated that the Archbishop of Canterbury had proposed that Sunday, the 3rd September, should be declared a National Day of Prayer. He proposed to advise His Majesty The King that this proposal should be accepted.

The War Cabinet—
Approved this suggestion.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
27th June, 1944.