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W.M. (44)

119th Conclusions.

WAR CABINET 119 (44).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at No. 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Saturday, 9th September, 1944, at 12 noon.

Present :

The Right Hon. C. R. ATTLEE, M.P., Deputy Prime Minister (*in the Chair*).

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. LORD WOOLTON,
Minister of Reconstruction.

The following were also present :

The Right Hon. Sir STAFFORD CRIPPS,
K.C., M.P., Minister of Aircraft
Production.

Mr. DUNCAN SANDYS, M.P., Joint
Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of
Supply.

Vice-Admiral Sir E. NEVILLE SYFRET,
Vice-Chief of Naval Staff.

Lieut.-General Sir ARCHIBALD E. NYE,
Vice-Chief of the Imperial General
Staff.

Air Marshal Sir DOUGLAS C. S. EVILL,
Vice-Chief of the Air Staff.

Admiral G. P. THOMSON, Chief Press
Censor, Ministry of Information.

Secretariat :

Sir EDWARD BRIDGES.
Brigadier E. I. C. JACOB.

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**Attack by
Rockets.**

(Previous
Reference:
W.M. (44) 118th
Conclusions,
Minute 3.)

The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security informed the War Cabinet that two missiles had fallen the previous evening—one in Chiswick and one near Epping. From investigation, it appeared almost certain that these missiles were rockets of the type expected. They had caused large craters, but there was less blast than from the flying bomb, and there had been few casualties.

The Vice-Chief of the Air Staff said that there had been no radar trace of these rockets, but the sound-ranging organisation had plotted them, and their observations showed that they had come one from the neighbourhood of Rotterdam and the other from the direction of Amsterdam. Owing to the lack of radar trace, no warning was received, and therefore no jamming could be put into operation. The Vice-Chiefs of Staff had considered the position earlier in the day, and counter-measures in accordance with the previously arranged plan had been put into operation, *i.e.*, Intruders had patrolled during the night, and armed reconnaissance had been sent out early in the morning. So far, there were no reports, and no further rockets had arrived. The Vice-Chiefs of Staff had arranged for the Service Staffs to consider immediately whether steps should be taken to send mobile radar sets or sound-ranging and flash-spotting equipment to Belgium, from where there would be a better chance of locating the firing-points.

The Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff explained to the War Cabinet the military situation in Belgium and Holland, and the probable course of operations. He said that he had telegraphed to Field-Marshal Montgomery asking him to give an estimate of when the area Rotterdam-Utrecht-Amsterdam would be sealed off or captured. The reply to this would enable the Staffs to form an opinion as to whether apparatus could be got to Belgium in time to make it worth while sending it. The Chiefs of Staff had previously recommended to the War Cabinet (W.P. (44) 413) that, if rocket attacks started, certain drastic measures should be taken to prevent information leaving the country. They now felt that the conditions were entirely different from those in which their previous Report had been made, and that no such drastic steps were called for. Their suggestion was that the only security measure that need be taken was to instruct the Press that no reference should be made to the firings, or, if this could not be done, at least to the fall of shot. The Vice-Chiefs of Staff felt that no serious attack could be developed by the enemy, whose organisation in Holland must have been hurriedly improvised, and any attacks would probably be of short duration.

The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security then put forward certain points on which decisions were required, as follows:—

(a) *Publicity.*—There were arguments for and against a statement to the public at the present time. On the whole, he was inclined to recommend that there should be no publicity for at least 24, and perhaps 48, hours, but that information should be given confidentially to the Press. If in the meanwhile further rocket attack developed, it might be necessary to reconsider the matter, and he asked that some discretion should be given to himself, in conjunction with the Minister of Information, to act as might seem necessary.

“ X ”

(b) *Warning of Attack.*—It was clearly impossible in present circumstances to give a warning of the arrival of rockets. He had considered whether to sound the alert in the evening, so as to induce people to take shelter at night, but he had decided against this course the previous evening, and he proposed that there should be no sounding of the alert unless a more serious attack developed.

(c) *The Closing of the Tube.*—Under present arrangements the tube under the river between Waterloo and Leicester Square was closed to the public on the sounding of an alert, though this precaution had not been thought necessary at the beginning of the attack by flying bombs. There would obviously be no sounding of the alert

for the fall of each rocket, and there was the danger that one might penetrate the tube, with disastrous results. The chances were extremely small, however, and he recommended that for the moment the tube should remain open.

"X"

(d) *Evacuation.*—The Minister of Health would require to know whether any change was to be made in the present plans whereby no further evacuation was being made, but people were being discouraged from returning. He suggested that this policy should remain unchanged.

The War Cabinet—

- (1) Took note that all possible counter-measures were being taken, and that, if possible, apparatus for the location of firing-points would be moved to Belgium, so as to improve the chances of getting warning of attack.
- (2) Agreed that the security measures set out in Appendix I to W.P. (44) 413 should not be applied.
- (3) Agreed that for the present there should be no publicity of any kind—the matter to be reviewed on Monday—unless attacks on an appreciable scale developed in the interval, when the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security, in consultation with the Minister of Information, should use his discretion in the matter. In the meanwhile, confidential information should be given to the Press.
- (4) Approved the proposals of the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security set out at "X" above.
- (5) Invited the Vice-Chiefs of Staff to instruct S.O.E. to endeavour to obtain information from the Resistance Movement in Holland of the rocket storage, handling, and firing arrangements, so that air attacks could be profitably directed.

*Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
9th September, 1944.*



