1st Conclusions.

WAR CABINET 1 (45).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Tuesday, 2nd January, 1945, at 5.30 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 Right Hon. Lord Beaverbrook, Lord Privy Seal.
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 Hon. Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Items 1-8).
The Right Hon. Lord Leathers, Minister of War Transport (Item 9).

The following were also present:
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 War.
The Right Hon. Sir Stafford Cripps, K.C., M.P., Minister of Aircraft Production.
The Right Hon. Lord Cherwell, Paymaster-General.
The Right Hon. H. U. Willink, M.P., Minister of Health (Items 9 and 10).

Secretariat:

Sir Edward Bridges.
General Sir Hastings L. Ismay.
Sir Gilbert Laithwaite.
Mr. W. S. Murrie.
Mr. L. F. Burgis.
## WAR CABINET 1 (45).

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Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay.

The Prime Minister said that the War Cabinet would be sorry to learn that the Allied Command had suffered a heavy loss by the death of Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay, who had been killed in an aeroplane crash that morning when taking off from an airfield near Paris.

2. The Chiefs of Staff reported the principal events of the previous six days.

Bomber Command had flown 4,450 sorties and dropped 14,500 tons of bombs, 13,500 of which had been on Germany. The targets had included railway centres affecting the battle area, and the Dortmund–Ems Canal, which had again been breached just as the Germans had restored it to working order.

United States bombers had dropped 14,000 tons of bombs and flown 6,000 sorties. Their targets had included railway centres in the battle area, oil targets and the U-boat yards at Hamburg, where it was thought that 2 U-boats had been sunk and 1 damaged.

During the month of December 46,000 tons of bombs had been dropped on Germany by the R.A.F. and 37,000 tons by United States aircraft.

The Allied Expeditionary Air Force had flown 16,000 sorties and dropped 3,000 tons of bombs, mostly on troop concentrations. 3,400 enemy vehicles were claimed to have been destroyed.

401 enemy aircraft were claimed to have been destroyed as against 244 Allied aircraft in combat and 500 on the ground. On the previous day the German Air Force had carried out its first big-scale operation since D-Day, using between 400 and 500 fighters. They had attacked several airfields which had been heavily crowded with aircraft. The German losses had been heavy. Final figures were not yet available, but at least 125 had been destroyed. Casualties to R.A.F. personnel in this attack had been light.

13,000 sorties had been flown and 9,300 tons of bombs dropped, mostly on oil targets and in the battle area. Enemy losses amounted to 36 aircraft as against 33 Allied (including 45 United States heavy bombers).

Shipping losses due to enemy action for the month of December amounted to 92,550 tons. Seven ships had been sunk by U-boat in home waters and 4 by mine in the Scheldt area. The December total was the highest since August 1944, when losses had amounted to 110,524 tons, but was the seventh lowest, monthly figure of the war.

Escorts of a North Atlantic convoy had sunk a U-boat on the 27th December, the entire crew being taken prisoner. The total of assessed U-boat sinkings for December were 2 sunk and 2 probably sunk.

Referring to the report made to the War Cabinet the previous week of a transport with some 2,500 American troops on board which had been torpedoed in the Channel, the First Sea Lord said that 900 lives had been lost. There had been an ample escort of 4 British destroyers. The crew had been negroes from the Belgian Congo under American orders. An enquiry into the incident was being made by the United States Flag Officer at Cherbourg and also by our own Naval authorities at Portsmouth. The First Sea Lord undertook to mention the matter to the War Cabinet again when further details were available.

Japanese warships had bombarded United States positions at Mindoro Island during the night of the 27th December. A United States Liberty Ship and a Japanese destroyer had been sunk.

There had been three outstanding features in the recent German offensive: first, the defence of Bastogne by the 101st United States Airborne Division; second, General Patton's offensive in the South, which had opened up a passage to Bastogne; and, third, the holding of the northern flank of the German penetration. (The War Cabinet warmly endorsed the Prime Minister's suggestion that we should take an opportunity of expressing our admiration of the fighting qualities displayed by the 101st United States Airborne Division.) The situation now was that General Patton was still attacking from
the South towards Houffalize, and an attempt would be made shortly
to narrow still further the enemy salient.

Further south the Germans had attacked in the area of
Sarreguemines, where they had achieved a minor penetration of
1 mile on a 6-mile front, and also in the area of Bannstein.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff added that it was
estimated that the total German strength on the Western Front was
80 divisions (equivalent to, say, 44 divisions) and 25 divisions on
the Italian Front. On the Eastern Front they had 149 divisions.

The passage between the Piréus and the town had been
widened and the road to the aerodrome cleared.

In the advance towards Akyab our troops had reached Dombiak,
Foul Point and Rathedaung. Further north the line had been
straightened out in the advance towards Yé-U. It was thought
that the Japanese would retire on to the Mandalay-Lashio line,
where they would put up a stiff resistance.

The War Cabinet—
Took note of these statements.

3. The Prime Minister said that when he had been at
Washington in May 1943 the United States had been faced with
over-production of Sherman tanks. Under pressure from the
Americans, and after consultation with the authorities at home, he
had agreed to take a larger supply of Shermans so as to make use
of the large American production. In consequence, we had cut
down our own tank production.

It now appeared that the Americans had greatly reduced their
production and had used up more tanks than they expected. In
consequence, they had cancelled our assignment of tanks for
November and December 1944.

The Prime Minister said that he thought that any short-fall
should be shared between the Allies and should not fall on us alone.
He had drafted a telegram to the President drawing his attention
to the difficulties with which we were faced as a result of their
action. He suggested that this draft should be considered at a
meeting which had been summoned by the Minister of Production
for the following day to deal with the tank position.

The War Cabinet—
Agreed to the procedure proposed by the Prime Minister.

4. At the request of the Prime Minister, the Secretary of
State for War gave the War Cabinet a summary of the measures
which were being taken to add 250,000 fighting men to the
fighting line.

In this connection the Prime Minister said that it was of the
utmost importance that all men who wore The King’s Uniform
should have arms and should be trained to use them against the
enemy in an emergency, even if they were normally employed in a
sedentary or non-combatant rôle.

The War Cabinet—
Took note, with approval, of this statement.

5. The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security said
that in the previous six days 27 incidents from long-range rockets
had been reported: 8 in London, 13 in Essex, 4 in Kent, 1 in
Hertfordshire and 1 in the Thames Estuary. Only in one incident
had casualties exceeded 10 persons killed. This had been in Islington
on Sunday night.

There had been no attacks by flying-bombs during the period.
The casualties during the period had been 29 killed and 122 seriously injured—all in London.

The total casualties in the incident at Islington, which had occurred on the 29th December, and had been covered by the previous report, were now known to have been 68 persons killed and 99 seriously injured.

The War Cabinet—
Took note of this statement.

6. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs informed the War Cabinet of the latest developments in the Greek situation and in regard to Russo-Polish relations. A full record of the discussion and of the conclusions reached is contained in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

7. At their meeting on the 18th December the War Cabinet considered the circumstances in which a broadcast by the B.B.C. about a demonstration in Trafalgar Square had been relayed abroad.

The Minister of Information reminded the War Cabinet that, at the outbreak of the war, the then Government had made an arrangement whereby the Ministry of Information had exercised a virtual control over the B.B.C. in time of war. Early in 1941 this arrangement had been revised by the present Government. While the Government had retained direct control of services to enemy or enemy-occupied territories, responsibility for Home news and talks had been restored to the Governors of the B.B.C., subject only to the parliamentary responsibility of the Minister of Information for all the B.B.C.'s actions. In effect, since 1941 the Governors of the B.B.C. had had authority to deal with home news on the same basis as the Press, and was subject to censorship to the same degree. Because of the amount of material given out it was impossible to avoid all errors, but the work of the Corporation during the war had been of first-class quality. Moreover, it was the business of the B.B.C. to report news, and if it adopted too restrictive a view of its functions it would lose credit for impartiality.

When a territory was liberated the arrangement whereby direct control of broadcasts to that territory was exercised by the Political Warfare Executive ceased; but the Government's indirect connection with the B.B.C.'s services to that country was maintained through the Ministry of Information. The relations between the Ministry and the B.B.C. were such as to ensure, by persuasion and negotiation, that the Government could secure due regard to its views.

In regard to programmes given out to countries with which we were still at war, or where hostilities were still taking place, control of programmes continued with Political Warfare Executive.

The Prime Minister said that, since statements broadcast by the B.B.C. carried so great authority, he thought it was essential that we should retain full control of all statements broadcast to countries or areas where hostilities were still being conducted and where the lives of British soldiers were at risk.

The War Cabinet—
Took note of these statements.
8. At their meeting on the 30th December the War Cabinet had invited the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to report to them on the circumstances in which a particular message had been sent by Reuter's Agency to Athens and circulated to the troops.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that he and the Prime Minister, when in Greece, had been shown a Reuter's message which had been distributed to the troops by a body known as the Anglo-Greek Information Service and which purported to reproduce an article by Mr. A. J. Cummings, described as Reuter's Political Correspondent. The article was highly critical of the Greek policy of His Majesty's Government.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that the message as handed in for transmission had described the article as being by Mr. A. J. Cummings, Political Correspondent of the News Chronicle. By an accident the words News Chronicle were omitted in transmission, thereby giving the impression that Mr. Cummings was Reuter's Political Correspondent. That he was not and, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs understood, never had been. He was, on the other hand, the Political Correspondent of the News Chronicle, and Reuter's had now undertaken not to quote him in the future. It appeared, further, that Reuter's local correspondent was not, in fact, of the highest quality, but the military authorities had not been prepared, when the point was raised at an earlier stage, to agree to a second correspondent, who would have been more experienced in dealing with this class of matter.

The Minister of Information said that Reuter's received a fee of £2,000 a year for the provision of news for the troops, and had undertaken to consult the military authorities as regards messages for despatch. He understood that the offending article had, in fact, been approved by the competent authority at the War Office. Reuter's, which was owned under a trust by various leading newspapers, was not under Government control save through the censorship, nor could he as Minister of Information give directions to it. Reuter's had recently indicated that they would prefer to dispense with the subsidy of £80,000 which they received from the Government, because of the suggestion it carried that they were a Government agency. We should not, therefore, over-estimate the degree of pressure that could be brought to bear upon Reuter's by its withdrawal. On the facts as reported, Reuter's did not appear to have been responsible for what might have happened in the present case.

After further discussion, the Prime Minister said that it would be well to establish the facts about the source of the message under discussion and the circumstances in which, and the approval subject to which, it had been transmitted to Athens and there distributed to the troops. He suggested that a small Committee consisting of the Minister of Labour (Chairman), the Minister of Production and the Minister of Aircraft Production should investigate accordingly and report to the War Cabinet.

The War Cabinet—

Approved the Prime Minister's proposal at "X".

9. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Lord President of the Council (W.P. (44) 785) about a proposal that arrangements should be made for a warning which would enable the flood-gates of the under-river tubes to be closed when a rocket was approaching.

It was explained that the flooding of the tubes might cause a very serious loss of life and put the central area of the tube system out of action for as much as two years. A radar warning system could be installed, giving about ninety seconds in which to close the
flood-gates. The gates would be closed only for about three minutes at each warning and the passengers need not leave the trains.

The proposal had been considered by the Lord President's Committee (L.P. (44) 58th Meeting, Minute 2), who had agreed that the installation of the proposed radar warning system should proceed, but that its operation should be deferred pending consideration of a report by the Paymaster-General on the question whether, if a rocket fell in the river near one of the tubes, the explosion was likely to breach the tube.

Annexed to W.P. (44) 765 was a report by the Paymaster-General to the effect that there was little risk in the case of a rocket falling at high tide, that experiments were being carried out to show what the risk would be at low tide, and that the provision of a bursting layer would eliminate all risk.

The following points were raised in discussion:

(a) About 4,500 shelterers used those tube stations which were liable to be flooded in fifteen minutes in the event of a major breach. If they were transferred to other accommodation considerable difficulties might follow.

(b) If it became known that a special warning was being given to the London Passenger Transport Board, there was likely to be a demand for a general public warning. Any such general public warning of the approach of rockets would be impracticable.

(c) The London Passenger Transport Board had already begun to install klaxons in the tubes. It was explained, however, that the intention of the London Passenger Transport Board was to use the klaxons only in the event of flooding.

The general feeling of the War Cabinet was that the suggestion that the risk of damage to the under-river tubes could be eliminated by the provision of a bursting layer should be explored further, but that, pending this, the proposed warning system should be brought into operation.

The War Cabinet:

1. Invited the Minister of War Transport, in consultation with the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Paymaster-General, to investigate the possibility of providing a bursting layer over the under-river tubes.

2. Agreed that in the meantime the warning system proposed by the Minister of War Transport should be brought into operation.

3. Took note that the klaxons installed by the London Passenger Transport Board in the tubes would be used only in the event of flooding.

4. Agreed that it was unnecessary to move to other accommodation the shelters now using tube stations which were liable to flooding.

5. Invited the Minister of Information to take steps to prevent the publication of any information in the Press with regard to the warning system or the provision of a bursting layer.

10. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security (W.P. (44) 660) about the future of Civil Defence.

The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security explained that the Civil Defence Services were being steadily reduced and by the end of the European war would cease to have any active role to perform. Unless action were taken now, the Services would disintegrate and it might prove extremely difficult to revive them. The Civil Defence Services would play an essential part in any
future war and they should be so organised in peace time as to enable them to be mobilised at very short notice. Under his proposals the Home Office would take over the functions of the Ministry of Home Security and, in consultation with the other Departments concerned, exercise the central responsibility for Civil Defence. The regional organisation of the Ministry of Home Security would come to an end, but plans would be made for its re-establishment in the event of war. The local authorities should remain responsible for the Civil Defence Services and should designate officers, either full- or part-time, who would form a skeleton organisation which could be rapidly expanded. If the War Cabinet agreed, he would propose to discuss with the local authorities the detailed application of his proposals.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he did not dissent from the general scheme outlined by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security. It had to be borne in mind, however, that the finance of Civil Defence had been worked out in emergency conditions, with the result that the Exchequer bore a very high proportion of the burden. If Civil Defence Services were to be maintained in peace time, he hoped that the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security would be able to agree with the local authorities on a system of grants which would be more in accord with the financial relations between the Exchequer and local authorities in respect of normal peace-time services.

The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security said that he would consult with the Chancellor of the Exchequer before he met the representatives of the local authorities.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Gave general approval to the proposals for the future of Civil Defence set out in W.P. (44) 660 and authorised the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security to discuss them with the local authorities.

(2) Invited the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security to submit a further memorandum reporting the results of his consultations with the local authorities, and, in particular, making proposals as to the finance of the peace-time Civil Defence Services. Pending consideration by the War Cabinet of this report (which should contain an estimate of the annual peace-time expenditure contemplated), no commitment with regard to finance should be entered into with the local authorities.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
2nd January, 1945.