CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held in the Cabinet War Room on Monday, 5th February, 1945, at 5.30 p.m.

Present:

The Right Hon. C. R. Attlee, M.P., Deputy Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right 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., Minister of Labour and National Service.
The Right Hon. Lord Woolton, Minister of Reconstruction.

The following were also present:
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.
Colonel the Right Hon. J. J. Llewellyn, M.P., Minister of Food (Items 4-6).
The Right Hon. Brendan Bracken, M.P., Minister of Information.
The Right Hon. Lord Cherwell, Paymaster-General.

Sir Orme Sargent, Deputy Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
Air Marshal Sir Douglas C. S. Evill, Vice-Chief of the Air Staff (Items 1-8).

Secretariat:
Sir Gilbert Laithwaite.
Major-General L. C. Hollis.
Mr. L. F. Burcis.
## WAR CABINET 14 (45).

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Naval, Military and Air Operations.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (45) 12th Conclusions, Minute 1.)

Air Operations.

1. The Vice-Chiefs of Staff reported the principal events of the previous week.

   Bomber Command had flown 4,100 sorties and had attacked by day Krefeld marshalling yards, communications at Munchen-Gladbach and the submarine pens at Maaslouis and Ijmuiden. By night, attacks had been made on various communications, industrial and oil targets. Mosquitoes had attacked Berlin on two nights.

   United States bombers had flown 3,730 sorties. Their targets included Berlin (on which 2,020 tons had been dropped), railway stations and oil targets.

   The Allied Expeditionary Air Force had flown 11,900 sorties. They claimed to have destroyed 1,250 motor transport vehicles, 91 locomotives, 920 road and rail cars and 60 tanks.

   Enemy losses for the week had been 86 aircraft destroyed (including 38 on the ground). Allied losses had been 86 bombers, 53 fighters and 2 Coastal Command aircraft.

   Bad weather had again interfered with air operations. 7,500 sorties had been flown and 1,860 tons of bombs had been dropped. Targets included an oil refinery in Austria and enemy communications behind the line.

   Super-Fortresses had attacked Singapore naval base and had damaged the floating dock.

   Super-Fortresses had dropped 172 tons of bombs on Tokyo on the 27th January.

There had been no shipping losses from enemy action during the previous week. The total shipping losses from enemy action for January now amounted to 74,619 tons.

There had been a temporary lull in U-boat activity during the week.

   Aircraft operating from escort carriers Mairana and Campania had carried out an attack on enemy shipping off the Norwegian coast in the night of the 28th/29th January. Two merchant vessels of 1,500 tons and one of 2,500 tons had been hit.

   Aircraft from four Fleet carriers operating off Sumatra had carried out a further attack on oil refineries at Palembang on the 29th January. Photographs showed direct hits on many of the principal installations, some of which had afterwards been burnt by oil fires from adjacent oil refineries. Eight Japanese planes had been shot down by the escort and 4 destroyed on the ground. Seven Japanese aircraft got through to the Fleet and 6 of these had been shot down. Fifteen of our aircraft were missing, but 5 of the crew had been saved. None of our ships had sustained damage from enemy action and our casualties had been light.

   During recent patrols in the Malacca Straits the submarines Stygian and Thrasher had sunk 16 junks and 1 tanker.

Military Operations.

N.W. Europe.

In the south, successful attacks had been made towards Colmar and Mulhouse. These two separate thrusts had now succeeded in joining hands, and it was probable that the enemy was withdrawing in this area. In the Haguenau district the enemy had gone on to the defensive. In the Ardennes the Germans had retired to the Siegfried defences whilst fighting strong rearguard actions. It was probable that they would now endeavour to make a stand on this line.

A thaw had set in on the 31st January. The muddy conditions increased German resistance and a strained administrative situation had slowed down the Russian advance. In the north, Königsberg was now invested from north, east and south and the area held by the Germans had been appreciably reduced. East Prussia was isolated and strong enemy efforts to break out to the west had been repulsed. Marshal Zhukov had reached the middle Oder at a number of places between a point 15 miles east of Kustrin and Glogau. He was within 9 miles of Frankfurt and had also advanced the north-west flank of his salient. Posen continued to offer stubborn resistance. There had been very little news from the front south-west of Cracow. German reports suggested that there had been exceptionally heavy fighting on the Oder between Glogau and
and Ratibor, but the Russians did not claim to have crossed the river in this sector. The Russians had made some slight progress in the difficult mountain country of Slovakia.

The following had been the maximum advance in miles of the Russian Generals commanding the different sectors during the first two weeks and the third week since the offensive began:

<table>
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<th>First Two Weeks</th>
<th>Last Week</th>
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<td>Cherniakovsky</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>112</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rokossovsky</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>120</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zhukov</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>275</td>
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<tr>
<td>Koniev</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>245</td>
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<tr>
<td>Petrov</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>110</td>
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On the island of Luzon the United States forces had made two more landings, the first on the west coast and the second south of Manila. Both had been unopposed. According to a press report, Manila had been entered from the east. On the left flank Roserlo had been captured after heavy fighting.

The War Cabinet—

Took note of these statements.

Recent Losses of Passenger Aircraft.

2. The War Cabinet had a short discussion regarding the recent losses of aircraft carrying official passengers, a record of which is contained in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

Attacks by Rockets and Flying Bombs.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (45) 75, Conclusions, Minute 2.)

3. The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security informed the War Cabinet that during the previous week there had been 42 incidents from long-range rockets: 25 in London, 13 in Essex and 2 each in Kent and Hertfordshire.

No flying-bomb incidents had been reported.

The casualties for the week had been 86 killed and 167 seriously injured, 641 slightly injured and 1 unclassified.

The War Cabinet—

Tak note of the statement by the Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security.

Transport Situation in France.

4. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (W.P. (45) 75), to which was attached a Note on the Transport Situation in France by the French Minister of Labour and Social Security. The Note urged that the assistance being given by the Allied military authorities was completely inadequate in view of the extremely critical situation of the French railways, and that it would be necessary, in the view of the French Government, for the Allies to make a greater effort to bring to France trucks and, above all, locomotives. A certain number of tugs for inland navigation should also be made available, and the barges and tugs at present used on the Seine for military transport released.

The Minister of State said that it was of the greatest importance in the view of the Foreign Office that we should spare no effort to help the French in this matter. Unless the transport position could be improved at a very early date, there was no hope of any long-term political improvement. He had spoken to M. Massigli and explained that our main difficulty was with the United States Chiefs of Staff.
The Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of War Transport, said a special Mission sent to Paris by the Ministry of War Transport had now returned after discussions with the French Ministry of Labour and with S.H.A.E.F. He agreed as to the vital importance of helping the French over internal transport. Not much more could be done directly over locomotives. Seven hundred were under order from the United States in the second half of the year, and we were sending 950 from here to S.H.A.E.F. We had also put into service some 30 to 60 English locomotives stored at Dieppe. These, and the locomotives sent to S.H.A.E.F., should set free an equivalent number of French locomotives. The wagon position was more urgent still. Repairs to 80,000 wagons out of action were called for. We could probably best help in this respect by the provision of machine tools, though there might be some that could only be got from our own railway workshops. As regards waterways, tugs were the bottleneck, and the Ministry of War Transport mission thought that the French had more barges at their disposal than they could use with the tugs available. We had been trying to assist the French to obtain bridging material, while the greatest assistance of all could be given by the provision of reconditioned or unreconditioned second-hand lorries.

The general sense of the War Cabinet was that it was of great importance to help the French to re-establish their transport arrangements. In discussion, the following suggestions were made:

(a) Civil Defence and National Fire Service organisations in this country might be combed for old vehicles, which would perhaps be transported to France in tank-landing craft and so spare shipping.

(b) The possibility of releasing some of the bridging material, maintained in this country as a reserve in connection with the blitz, which would not be of operational value, might be considered if S.H.A.E.F. would allocate transport to get it over.

(c) The possibility of sparing machine tools and spare tools should be investigated.

(d) Would it be possible to divert some of the lorries which we have been building for the Turks to France?

The following points were made in discussion:

(i) The Chancellor of the Exchequer, after conversation with the French Minister of Finance, felt that the chance of a satisfactory financial and monetary agreement with France, which was so desirable from our point of view, would depend very largely on an improvement in the supply situation, since concessions, which we should be anxious to secure from the French, could be made acceptable to French public opinion only if the negotiators could give the impression that they had improved a desperate transport position.

(ii) Assistance of this nature to the French should not be regarded as charity to the destitute, but rather as an insurance against the development of a situation that might at any moment become of great military importance.

(iii) The Minister of Fuel and Power said that the greater the improvement in internal transport, the greater the increase in French coal production, with all its advantages to the internal position in France.

(iv) The Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that many of the suggestions made were new to the Chiefs of Staff and might have serious military implications. He suggested that the Civil Departments concerned should say what, in their judgment, was desirable with a view to examination of their proposals by the Chiefs of Staff and the submission of a combined report to the Cabinet.

After further discussion, the War Cabinet—

(1) Took note of W.P. (45) 75 and of the suggestions that had been made at "X" above for easing the transport situation in France.
(2) Invited the Minister of Production, the Minister of War Transport and the Minister of State to formulate suggestions as a matter of urgency in the light of the discussion for examination by the Chiefs of Staff with a view to a combined report being submitted to the War Cabinet.

5. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Minister of Food (W.P. (45) 73), to which was attached a report by Sir Jack Drummond on food conditions in Belgium and the Netherlands.

In Belgium the town populations appeared to be in better shape than in October, but the very serious rise in unemployment figures meant that the poorer families, as compared with the pre-liberation period, were no longer able to purchase food in the black market. In Sir Jack Drummond's view, the economic crisis that was rapidly approaching in Belgium would be associated with a serious deterioration in the food situation as it affects the poorer people, even if the official ration scale was maintained or improved.

In the Netherlands the food situation in the towns in the liberated areas was considerably improved since November and early December and the available supplies were being handled in an admirable manner. Health appeared to be reasonably good. In the occupied Netherlands there did not appear to be difficulties about food supplies in the North-Eastern provinces, which were largely agricultural and where there are few towns of any size; but the position in the West and North-West was critical. We were, in Sir Jack Drummond's view, faced by a position in which it was quite impossible for the Germans to bring in sufficient food to feed the populations of the large towns in the West and North-West reasonably well, even if they wished to do it, and an extremely serious situation might be expected when this area was liberated. If the position of these people was not alleviated materially and soon, many thousands would die directly or indirectly of starvation.

I.—Holland.

The Minister of Food said that the situation in the West and North-West of occupied Holland, as described in paragraphs 9 and 10 of Sir Jack Drummond's Report, emphasised the need for planning ahead. Certain provision had already been made for these areas by 21 Army Group. But, failing early relief, it would be necessary to arrange for supplies of pre-digested proteins, glucose and similar foods which could be easily assimilated by a starving population. A conference at Brussels had been suggested and the Medical Research Council were prepared to assist in this. While a small quantity of medicated foods of the types he had mentioned were available, they would not be nearly sufficient for a population so large as was affected, and replanning in consultation with those able to advise technically would be called for.

After discussion, the War Cabinet—

Invited the Minister of Food to arrange, in consultation with the Secretary of State for War, to take up with 21 Army Group and S.H.A.E.F. the question of the replanning and provision of supplies for West and North-West occupied Holland in the light of the discussion.

II.—Belgium.

The following points were made in discussion:—
(i) Might we not be extending the military period too long? Would there not be advantage in putting more direct responsibility on the Belgian Government and giving it a little more elbow-room, perhaps West of a particular line? A great strain was in present circumstances falling on the military administration. If more of this burden fell directly on the Belgian Government, that Government might make a better showing than at present.
(ii) It was pointed out, on the other hand, that, even accepting that there might be arguments for an earlier termination of the military period, inclusion in the military programme afforded the best present chance of getting foodstuffs quickly into Belgium.

(iii) It was suggested that requisitioning by S.H.A.E.F. had been on too large a scale. The Secretary of State for War informed the War Cabinet, however, that certain of the instances to which attention had been drawn had proved to be exaggerated.

(iv) The Minister of State's recent discussions in Washington had resulted in the provision of some shipping to carry supplies, but the general calorie level was still low, and a breakdown in Belgium would have serious repercussions here as well as in Belgium.

(v) A situation was developing which might endanger the successful conduct of operations. We ought not to be put in a position of primary responsibility, seeing that the United States have at least an equal responsibility and an equal concern in maintaining stable economic and political conditions in countries from which their forces are operating. The War Cabinet should in these circumstances invite the Prime Minister to consider broaching the matter with the President during the meeting of the Heads of Governments.

After further discussion, the War Cabinet—

Invited the Deputy Prime Minister to communicate with the Prime Minister on their behalf on the lines suggested at ‘‘X’’.

6. The Minister of State said that in December last it had been agreed that 5,000 tons of foodstuffs should be imported into Holland from Sweden through the blockade, on the understanding that no further consignment would be approved until we saw how the first consignment had been distributed. Of the 5,000 tons in question, some 3,000 had now arrived and 2,000 were still to come. The Swedes had now asked to be allowed to send in a further 4,000 tons. He enquired whether, in view of the situation disclosed by Sir Jack Drummond's Report circulated as W.P. (45) 73, the War Cabinet would agree, subject to consultation with the Minister of Economic Warfare, and to the Chiefs of Staff confirming that there was no operational objection, that we should accept this proposal, without waiting for confirmation as to the distribution arrangements in respect of the first consignment.

After discussion, the War Cabinet—

Approved the proposal of the Minister of State, subject to the concurrence of the Minister of Economic Warfare and to the Chiefs of Staff being satisfied that no operational objection existed, and invited him to arrange accordingly.

7. At their meeting on the 30th January, 1940, the War Cabinet decided to withhold approval to the publication of the Report of the Royal Commission on the West Indies, since there was a danger that some of the criticisms which it contained of British administration in the West Indies could be used by German propaganda, especially in the United States, with serious damage to our war effort.

They now had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies (W.P. (45) 66) recommending (in agreement with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Information) that the Report be published early this year, and expressing the view that under the very different conditions obtaining to-day there was no reason to suppose that criticism would be more damaging if the report were published now than it would be at a later date; rather, indeed, the contrary, if publication was approved a White Paper setting out the steps taken to carry out the Commission's recommendations would be published simultaneously, and the Report of the Comptroller for Development
and Welfare in the West Indies for 1942/44 would be published early this year, and would be cast in such a form as to cover the Royal Commission's recommendations without referring in terms to them.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies said he had little to add to his paper. He doubted if any harm could at this stage come from publication. He was under some pressure to publish in the House of Commons, while non-publication was causing considerable difficulty in the West Indies, since it was holding up action on valuable recommendations made in the Report. The Report was already in print, so no appreciable extra consumption of paper or use of labour would be involved.

The War Cabinet—

Approved the proposal of the Secretary of State for the Colonies as set out in paragraph 4 of W.P. (45) 66, and invited him to proceed accordingly.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
5th February, 1945.