CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1, on Monday, 7th May, 1945, at 6:30 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. Lord Woolton, Minister of Reconstruction.
The Right Hon. Lord Beavbrook, Lord Privy Seal.
The Right Hon. Sir Stafford Cripps, K.C., M.P., Minister of Aircraft Production.
The Right Hon. Richard Law, M.P., Minister of State.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. Brendan Bracken, M.P., Minister of Information.

Secretariat:
Sir Edward Bridges.
General Sir Hastings L. Ismay.
Mr. Norman Brook.

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The Prime Minister informed the War Cabinet that at 2:41 A.M. that morning General Eisenhower had received at his headquarters the unconditional surrender of all German forces in Europe. The instrument of surrender had been signed by representatives of the German High Command and the surrender was made simultaneously to the Allied Expeditionary Force and the Soviet High Command. By the terms of the surrender hostilities would formally cease one minute after midnight on 8th/9th May.

General Eisenhower had originally suggested that the surrender should be announced by the Governments of the three Great Powers simultaneously on Tuesday, the 8th May. The Prime Minister had then proposed to President Truman and Marshal Stalin that the announcement should be made on the 8th May, at 3 P.M. in this country, at 9 A.M. in Washington, and at 4 P.M. in Moscow. This proposal had been accepted by President Truman and Marshal Stalin. Early that morning, however, General Eisenhower had expressed the view that it would be impossible to keep the news secret until the 8th May as orders to German troops would be broadcast en clair during the 7th May. He had therefore urged that the announcement by Governments should be made at the earliest possible moment. In the light of this message the Prime Minister had proposed to President Truman and Marshal Stalin that the announcement should be made here at 6 P.M. on the 7th May (12 noon in Washington and 7 P.M. in Moscow). During the course of the day he had had several telephone conversations with Washington. President Truman had been unwilling to agree to the proposed change in the time of the announcement unless Marshal Stalin concurred; and he had adhered to this view even when it was pointed out to him that the Germans had announced full details of the surrender and that news of this was being broadcast throughout the world by the Columbia Broadcasting Service. A few minutes before 6 P.M. a further message had been received from Washington, from which it appeared that, as Marshal Stalin did not concur in the change proposed, President Truman would not make any announcement in Washington until 3 P.M. on the 8th May, even though the Prime Minister should decide to make his announcement in London at 6 P.M. on the 7th May. In these circumstances the Prime Minister had decided that it would be inexpedient to proceed with his plan for announcing the news at 6 P.M. that evening. In view of the numerous reports which were being broadcast throughout the world, he thought it unfortunate that the official announcement should be delayed, and he thought it a matter for special regret that the public in this country should be deprived of the opportunity for spontaneous celebration of the victory; but, on balance, he had thought it preferable to avoid the risk of a reproach from Marshal Stalin for having departed from the arrangements previously agreed between the three Powers.

The War Cabinet endorsed the decision which the Prime Minister had taken. At the same time, they felt that, as the news had become so widely known on an unofficial basis, it was necessary to give some guidance to the public and, in particular, to let it be known whether workers should proceed to work on the following day. After discussion,

The War Cabinet—

(1) Invited the Minister of Information to arrange for an announcement to be broadcast forthwith in the following terms:

"It is understood that in accordance with arrangements between the three Great Powers an official announcement will be broadcast by the Prime Minister at 3 o'clock to-morrow, Tuesday afternoon, the 8th May. In view of this fact to-morrow, Tuesday, will be treated as Victory in Europe Day and will be regarded as a holiday. The day following, Wednesday, the 9th May, will also be a holiday. His Majesty The King will
broadcast to the peoples of the British Empire and Commonwealth to-morrow, Tuesday, at 9 p.m. Parliament will meet at the usual time to-morrow.”

The War Cabinet were informed that General de Gaulle was intending to announce the German surrender in a broadcast at 8 o’clock that evening. It was agreed that General de Gaulle should be informed of the plans for synchronising the announcements by the Governments of the United Kingdom, the United States and the U.S.S.R., and advised to postpone his announcement until a corresponding hour on the 8th May. If, however, he was unwilling to accept this advice no further pressure could be brought to bear on him.

The War Cabinet—

(2) Invited the Minister of State to arrange for a message on these lines to be conveyed to General de Gaulle.

The Prime Minister said that, immediately after making his broadcast announcement on the 8th May, he would go to the House of Commons and ask leave to interrupt the business for the purpose of repeating the announcement which he had made on the wireless. Thereafter he would propose that the House should adjourn for a Service of Thanksgiving in St. Margaret’s, Westminster. Similar arrangements would be made in the House of Lords.

Later in the afternoon His Majesty The King desired to receive in audience the members of the War Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff.

The War Cabinet—

(3) Invited the Secretary to ensure that the authorities in both Houses of Parliament were informed that arrangements should be made for the Services of Thanksgiving in St. Margaret’s, Westminster, and Westminster Abbey to be held during the afternoon on the 8th May.

The Home Secretary said that, in accordance with the proposals approved by the War Cabinet on the 9th April, arrangements had been made to invite a fully representative congregation to the Thanksgiving Service which was to be held at St. Paul’s Cathedral on Sunday, the 13th May. The question had now been raised whether Members of both Houses of Parliament should be invited to this Service. He had assumed that this would be unnecessary, as each House of Parliament was to have its own Service of Thanksgiving on the 8th May and most Members of Parliament would wish to be free on the following Sunday to attend Services of Thanksgiving in their constituencies. He had therefore proposed that Members of Parliament should not be invited to the Service at St. Paul’s.

The general view of the War Cabinet was that Members of Parliament could not properly be excluded from this Service. While seats could not be reserved for any large number of Members, without displacing some of the other groups who should be represented at the Service, it should be possible to reserve about 100 seats for Members of the two Houses of Parliament.

The War Cabinet—

(4) Invited the Home Secretary to consider, in consultation with the authorities of the two Houses of Parliament, whether facilities could not be given for about 100 Members of both Houses to attend the Thanksgiving Service in St. Paul’s Cathedral.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
7th May, 1945.