WAR CABINET 148 (40).

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Thursday, May 30, 1940, at 5.30 P.M.

Present:
The Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
The Right Hon. Viscount Halifax, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
The Right Hon. Anthony Eden, M.P., Secretary of State for War.
The Right Hon. A. Greenwood, M.P., Minister without Portfolio.
The Right Hon. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. Sir Archibald Sinclair, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
The Right Hon. Viscount Caldecote, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.
The Right Hon. Malcolm MacDonald, M.P., Minister of Health (Item 11).
The Hon. Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. A. Duff Cooper, M.P., Minister of Information.
Mr. R. H. Cross, M.P., Minister of Shipping (Item 9).
Air Chief Marshal Sir Cyril L. N. Newall, Chief of the Air Staff.
General Sir John Dill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Secretariat.
Sir Edward Bridges.
Major-General H. L. Ismay.
Lieutenant-Colonel V. Dykes, R.E.
Group Captain W. Elliot.
Mr. E. P. Donaldson.
Mr. G. N. Flemming.
### WAR CABINET 148 (40).

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1. The Prime Minister said that he had received conflicting accounts of the numbers of the British Expeditionary Force who had been evacuated. The War Office figure of the numbers evacuated to Dover, Ramsgate, Margate and Harwich since the 20th May were as follows:

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<th>Number</th>
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<td>British fit</td>
<td>92,642</td>
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<td>British wounded</td>
<td>8,152</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allies</td>
<td>4,447</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>105,241</strong></td>
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The Admiralty had given a figure of 86,000.

Later in the Meeting the First Lord of the Admiralty said that the Admiralty figure for the number landed at all the ports up to 12 noon that day was 101,154.

The Prime Minister asked that the War Office and the Admiralty should, in future, collaborate in computing the numbers of British and other troops evacuated from France, with a view to submitting an agreed report to the War Cabinet.

The Prime Minister read a report from Dunkirk stating that a ship had been sunk there that afternoon under conditions which suggested that it might be difficult to continue to use the harbour; that fog was seriously interfering with the evacuation; and that progress was being delayed by the withdrawal of the more modern destroyers.

The Chief of Naval Staff said that he had no knowledge of this report and that every available destroyer was being used.

Later in the Meeting the Minister of Information read to the War Cabinet a draft communique as to the operation of withdrawal from France and as to the very successful air fighting on the previous day (see Minute 2).

The Secretary of State for War said that Lord Gort had been placed in a difficult position owing to the fact that the senior French officers at Dunkirk had received no orders at all about evacuation. If the French received clear orders to evacuate as many of the troops as possible, the British could thin out the troops holding the perimeter, but in present circumstances Lord Gort felt compelled to retain local reserves for counter-attack in order not to let the French down. The Secretary of State suggested that a telegram should be sent by the Prime Minister to M. Reynaud asking for the French action to be co-ordinated with that of the British. He read the terms of the proposed telegram to the War Cabinet.

After discussion, the War Cabinet—

(1) Authorised the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to despatch to General Weygand a telegram in the above sense.*

(2) Approved the terms of an official statement to be made to the Press by the Ministry of Information announcing that evacuation was in progress, and giving some description of the operations which were taking place.

2. The Chief of the Air Staff said that during the operations on the previous day the Royal Air Force had definitely accounted for 76 enemy aircraft in France and Norway. The true figure probably amounted to more. Three of these had been shot down in Norway and the remainder over Dunkirk. Against this, our total losses had amounted to 30. This figure included 16 Fighters and 3 out of 15 heavy Bombers which had been caught by fog on

* Copy attached to these Conclusions.
returning from operations on the previous night. The crews of these had been saved by jumping with parachutes. The remaining losses had been among aircraft belonging to the Fleet Air Arm and Air Component. Bombing operations on the previous day had been directed mainly on enemy road movements south of the British Expeditionary Force.

The air operations in progress that day were being hampered by fog and low cloud; nevertheless, 47 bombers were at that moment out on various missions. The bad flying weather over France was in our favour in tying the enemy to the ground and preventing him from bombing the beaches from which the British Expeditionary Force was evacuating. So far, only one enemy aircraft had been reported that day over Dunkirk.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statement.

3. The War Cabinet had before them the following information:

(a) A telegram from the Swayne Mission to the War Office in regard to the position on the Oise Canal.

(b) Reports to the Prime Minister from General Spears as to the position of the French Army and French requests for assistance.

Discussion ensued as to the extent of the help which we could afford to the French at the present juncture. Details of this discussion are recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

The War Cabinet—

(1) Agreed that the Prime Minister and the Lord Privy Seal, accompanied by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, should proceed to France on the following day.

(2) Gave general approval to the line which the Prime Minister proposed to take in his discussions with the French Government.

4. The Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs informed the War Cabinet that he had just heard that the United States Ambassador had asked for an audience with His Majesty The King in order to present a message from President Roosevelt. He knew nothing as to the nature of the message.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

5. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that he had just received a telephone message from His Majesty's Ambassador in Paris to the effect that M. Daladier had again raised the question of making a direct communication to Signor Mussolini, and had handed him a document setting out the lines on which he proposed to make such an approach. Sir Ronald Campbell had done his best to dissuade M. Daladier, but the latter had only returned to the charge.

The Foreign Secretary suggested that it was useless to attempt to restrain the French any longer from making the proposed approach, but that we must make it quite clear that they should not commit us by anything which they said to Signor Mussolini.

The War Cabinet approved the line of action proposed by the Foreign Secretary.
6. **The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs** drew the attention of the War Cabinet to telegram No. 15 (Saving), dated the 28th May, from His Majesty's Ambassador at Lisbon reporting that Dr. Salazar was said to have expressed the belief that Italy would not enter the war.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

7. **The Home Secretary** said that the number of desperate characters whom he would wish to intern was 1,500 Italians, plus 300 British subjects connected with Italian institutions in this country.

**The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs** said that Count Ciano had raised with Sir Percy Loraine the question of evacuating British subjects from Italy. The Foreign Secretary suggested that, as soon as the French Government had replied to the communication which we had made to them on the previous day, Sir Percy Loraine should say to Count Ciano that we appreciated the fact that he was placing no obstacle in the way of British subjects leaving Italy; that we should like to act reciprocally and facilitate the departure of Italians in this country; that the first shipload would be leaving shortly, and that we should be glad to know to which port it should be directed. He (the Foreign Secretary) would be glad if the Admiralty would at once have a ship prepared for this purpose, so that as soon as we had heard from the French Government the scheme could be put in motion if so decided.

The Foreign Secretary added that we might continue in the present position *vis-à-vis* Italy for some further time; was it necessary that these 1,800 men should be seized at once?

**The Home Secretary** said that he had no objection to some further delay, provided that there was no leakage of our intentions. He assumed that the communication made to the French had dealt with the matter on the basis of a return of the Italians to their country on humanitarian grounds.

**The Foreign Secretary** confirmed that our approach had been made on these lines.

The War Cabinet agreed—

(i) That no further action should be taken in regard to the internment of Italians until a reply had been received from the French Government, but that the latter should be asked to expedite their reply.

(ii) That in the meantime the First Lord of the Admiralty should arrange for a suitable ship to be made available, in which these 1,500 Italians could be deported as soon as practicable after they had been seized.

(iii) That the Foreign Secretary and the Home Secretary, in consultation, should review from day to day the question whether these 1,500 Italians plus the 300 British subjects connected with Italian institutions in this country should be seized.

8. The War Cabinet had before them a Report by the Chiefs of Staff (W.F. (40) 175) setting out the arrangements which had been concerted with the French for the seizure of Crete in the event of an Italian attack on Greek territory.

**The Chief of the Air Staff** said that the Allied forces would take about 48 hours on the voyage. The ships would sail on the orders of local Commanders, without further reference to their home Governments, and arrangements had been made to give the
Commanders as early information as possible of an Italian attack. The plan would not be set in motion unless the Italians attempted an attack on Greek soil. The Greeks would not be informed of our intention to occupy Crete until the order for the despatch of the expedition had been issued. It might be difficult to hold Crete indefinitely, with the forces proposed, under heavy air attack from the Dodecanese, but by dispersing the troops to give them protection against such attack it would probably be possible to deny the use of the aerodrome to the Italians. In the last resort the aerodrome could be mined with delay action mines, before the forces were evacuated.

The War Cabinet—

Approved the arrangements made for the despatch of an Allied force to seize Crete in the event of an Italian attack on Greek territory, as set out in Paper No. W.P. (40) 175.

9. The War Cabinet had under consideration a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in regard to operations in Norway.

A record of the discussion, and of the conclusions reached, is recorded in the Secretary’s Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.

10. The War Cabinet had before them a Report by the Chiefs of Staff (W.P. (40) 178).

The Chief of the Air Staff said that, in view of recent reports of the possibility of a sea-borne raid on a large scale by a fleet of fast motor boats, combined with air-borne raids, the Chiefs of Staff felt that the whole country should be warned and roused to the imminent danger which confronted us. He drew attention to the recommendations of the Chiefs of Staff contained in paragraph 12 of the Paper, (b) and (c) had already been put to the Commander-in-Chief, and he was acting accordingly. As regards (d), additional labour for beach defences would be required on a large scale. The length of coast to be covered was very considerable.

The Lord President of the Council said that he was holding a meeting of the Ministers concerned on the following morning to deal with the question of rousing the country. As for the provision of additional labour, the Minister of Labour had informed him that Divisional Controllers had already been instructed to prepare the labour exchanges to supply whatever was required, but the details of the requirements of the War Office had not yet been received. The Minister was prepared to use compulsory powers to obtain the labour necessary. The Lord President said that he had later consulted the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, who fully concurred in the recommendations of the Chiefs of Staff. He had ordered Commands to proceed immediately with defence works on the beaches, and to put local Commanders in touch with the labour exchanges to obtain the men they required.

Discussion ensued as to the possibility of different methods of attempted invasion.

The Chief of Naval Staff said that there had been definite signs of German activity on the Norwegian coast. There were also indications that motor-boats had been collected at Bremen and Hamburg. Meanwhile, the Germans were known to have an organised force of ships at Vigo. The dispositions to deal with this latter threat were described. It might also be significant that the Germans had left one particular stretch opposite our coast clear
of mines. The position in this matter had been brought to the notice of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces. It was hoped that the production of anti-tank mines for laying on beaches would start in a week’s time.

The Prime Minister doubted whether a raid on a large scale could be carried out by fast motor-boats. These craft would have to come over in flotillas, if they were to put ashore any useful number of men at any one point. The Navy would have to make every endeavour to intercept such raids on the high seas.

The First Sea Lord said that submarine and trawler patrols were being maintained to get information of such raids, but owing to the speed of the boats and the fact that they might effect the crossing in darkness, the Navy could not guarantee that destroyer patrols would be able to intercept them before they reached the shores of this country. A single cruiser finding them might sink some of the boats, but some would probably get through.

In the discussion which followed the principal points made were:

(i) There was some doubt as to the precise numbers of motor boats which the Germans possessed, but they could be fairly quickly constructed. They would be fitted with the aeroplane type of engine.

(ii) The wake which large fast craft would leave should be visible to air reconnaissance, but experience had shown that it was by no means easy to keep track of the German motor torpedo boats which had been operating recently off the Channel ports.

(iii) These craft could be readily disguised against air reconnaissance as barges. Even if suspicious concentrations were observed in the German or Dutch harbours, it would be difficult to take effective action against them by night bombing.

(iv) The coast watching service had been greatly strengthened recently, and constant watch was being maintained. Small boat patrols along the coasts had been instituted.

The Prime Minister thought that we should not hesitate to contaminate our beaches with gas if this course would be to our advantage. We had the right to do what we liked with our own territory.

The War Cabinet:

(i) Approved the Report by the Chiefs of Staff (W.P. (40) 175).

(ii) Took note:

(a) that the Lord President of the Council had already taken in hand the necessary measures to warn and rouse the country to the imminent danger of invasion;

(b) that the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, was ordering the Army at home to a high degree of alertness, particularly at night, and was reviewing his dispositions in the light of the new considerations put forward in the Chiefs of Staff Report;

(c) that the Ministry of Labour had made all arrangements to supply the necessary labour for beach defences, and that the local military authorities had been instructed to get in touch with the employment exchanges in order to obtain their requirements.
(iii) Invited the First Lord of the Admiralty to report to the War Cabinet the naval measures in hand (including the laying of minefields) to prevent a possible landing on the East Coast.

11. The Home Secretary recalled that it had been decided to start the evacuation of school children and priority classes from nineteen ports on the East Coast and South Coast of England on Sunday. Consideration was now being given to the evacuation of school children from London and other evacuation areas. The Minister of Health was due to broadcast that evening inviting parents to register their children before Monday, the 3rd June. The inducement to be held out to parents to register their children was that it might be necessary to start evacuation in the following week, and that those registered by the 3rd June would go first.

The question arose whether this drive should proceed or whether, if invasion was regarded as a possibility in the near future, it would be better to order the evacuation of a proportion of the inhabitants of the East Coast towns. The argument for the latter course was that, if the inhabitants of these towns remained where they were, or did not move until the country was invaded, they might well interfere with military operations. It would not be possible to proceed with both schemes simultaneously.

The Minister of Health pointed out that hitherto the policy had been not to start evacuation from London until bombing had actually been experienced, but in view of the more recent developments it might be necessary to reconsider this. He himself was in favour of a movement from London, &c., to West Country areas on account of the length of time required to move the large numbers involved.

The Chief of the Air Staff said that the Chiefs of Staff were definitely of opinion that the East Coast evacuation should be given priority over London evacuation.

The Lord President of the Council thought that, as London was well defended, and experience of German methods on the Continent showed that the enemy preferred to attack small towns and villages rather than large cities, it was preferable to avoid by evacuation the serious military difficulties that might be entailed if the East Coast were invaded. On the other hand, the registration of children in London and other evacuation areas in no way committed the Government to proceed with the evacuation of children so registered on any given date.

The War Cabinet:—

Authorised the Home Secretary and the Minister of Health to proceed with the existing arrangements, including the broadcast appeal for the registration of school children in London and other evacuation areas, on the understanding that these arrangements in no way prejudiced the decision as to the date on which the children now registered should be evacuated, or as to the priority between evacuation of children from London, &c., and evacuation of the “useless mouths” from certain East Coast towns.
ORDERS have been sent to Lord Gort that he is to continue to hold his present position as long as possible in order to cover the maximum evacuation of Allied troops. It is clear that the position at Dunkirk cannot be held indefinitely owing, principally, to the difficulty of keeping the forces there supplied with food, water and munitions. Policy must therefore be to evacuate and orders to this effect have been given to Lord Gort. I should be glad if you would give similar orders to the Senior French Commander in the Dunkirk region so that he and Lord Gort may be able to act in complete concord. I am sending a copy of this message to Lord Gort.