CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held in the Prime Minister’s Room, House of Commons, S.W. 1, on Thursday, September 10, 1940, at 12 NOON.

Present:

The Right Hon. WINSTON S. CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).

The Right Hon. C. R. ATTLEE, M.P., The Right Hon. A. GREENWOOD, M.P.,

Lord Privy Seal.
Minister without Portfolio.

The Right Hon. LORD BEAVERBROOK,

Minister of Aircraft Production.

The following were also present:


M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security.

The Right Hon. VISCOUNT CALDECOTE, The Right Hon. LORD LLOYD, Secretary of State for the Colonies (Items 6 to 8).

The Right Hon. A. V. ALEXANDER, M.P., The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P.,

First Lord of the Admiralty.
Secretary of State for War.

The Right Hon. Sir ARCHIBALD The Right Hon. R. H. CROSS, M.P.,

SINCLAIR, Bt., M.P., Secretary of State for Air.
Minister of Shipping (Items 8 and 9).

The Right Hon. A. DUFF COOPER, M.P., The Hon. Sir ALEXANDER CADOGAN,

Minister of Information.
Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Items 1 to 7).

Air Chief Marshal Sir CYRIL L. N. General Sir John DILL, Chief of the
NEWALL, Chief of the Air Staff.

Imperial General Staff.

Secretariat.

SIR EDWARD BRIDGES,
Major-General Sir HASTINGS ISMAY.
Mr. W. D. WILKINSON.
Mr. L. F. BURGIS.
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Naval, Military and Air Operations.

(Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 253rd Conclusions, Minute 1.)

Air Casualties.

1. The Chief of the Air Staff said that the air casualties during the twenty-four hours ending 7 A.M. that morning had been as follows:—

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<th>Destroyed</th>
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<td>Enemy</td>
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<td>By Fighters—</td>
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Twelve aircraft, but 9 pilots safe.

Nearly 200 British aircraft had carried out bombing operations on the previous night, mainly against the invasion ports. Except for attacks on Berlin, which would be resumed as soon as the weather was favourable, it was intended that our bombing effort should be concentrated almost entirely against these ports.

The First Sea Lord reported that H.M.S. Golden Eagle had hit an aircraft which had been about to lay mines in the Thames Estuary during the night 17th-18th September. The aircraft had exploded in mid-air.

The U-Boat which had been attacked by an aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm off Cape Wrath on the 14th September had almost certainly been destroyed.

A report had just been received that our submarines were attacking 8 enemy merchant ships off Texel.

On the 16th September an aircraft from Illustrious had set one merchant ship on fire at Benghazi, damaged several other ships and sunk a destroyer.

A further report had now been received about H.M.S. Kent. She had been attacked by two torpedo aircraft in bright moonlight at midnight on the 17th-18th September. She had been hit by one torpedo which was suspected to have been of the magnetic pistol type. Nubian had had her in tow by 3 A.M. and she ought to arrive in harbour that day.

On the night of the 17th-18th September Ladybird had bombarded the Escarpment Road, Sollum, at close range, while Juno and Janus had attacked enemy concentrations at Sidi Barrani. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that there was no news of importance from the Western frontier of Egypt. The Italians appeared to be consolidating their position at Sidi Barrani.

There were signs of an Italian advance on the Sudan front, south of Kassala. The enemy appeared to have crossed the River Gash and to have completed the concentration of a column consisting of some 6,000 men, together with artillery, tanks and lorries. It appeared unlikely that any deep move into the Sudan would be attempted before October. The R.A.F. were attacking the enemy concentrations.

Part of force "Niblick" had landed at Port Sudan and was now reinforcing the Sudan.

The War Cabinet took note of the above statements.

2. Further information was reported in regard to the movements of the French Fleet, and is recorded in the Secretary's Standard File of War Cabinet Conclusions.
Overseas Evacuation.
(Previous References: W.M. (40) 207th Conclusions, Minute 15, and W.M. (40) 204th Conclusions, Minute 7.)

3. The First Sea Lord reported that four merchant ships had been sunk. These included the City of Benares, which had had on board 100 children and 100 adults for Montreal. On present information the saved included only 13 women and 15 children. The Benares' boats had been rushed by lascars and capsized. The view was expressed that there was much to be said, in present circumstances, for discontinuing the scheme for evacuating children overseas.

The War Cabinet—
(1) Invited the Minister of Information to arrange for suitable publicity to be given to the torpedoing of this ship.
(2) Invited the Home Secretary to report to the War Cabinet whether, in present circumstances, the scheme for evacuating children overseas should be continued.

Air Raid Damage.
(Magnetic mines. (Previous Reference: W.M. (40) 253rd Conclusions, Minute 3.)

4. The Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister of Home Security said that considerable damage had been done by air raids in the London area during the previous twenty-four hours. Some 200 people had been killed and some 550 admitted to hospital. On the other hand, the position on the railways was easier. On the Southern Railway power supply and signalling had been restored at Victoria (Central). There did not appear to have been any special concentration on railways during the previous night.

The most serious development had been the continued dropping of parachute mines, probably of the magnetic type, some 12 of which had been dropped over the London area during the night of the 17th-18th September and some 25 during the night of the 18th-19th September. The damage to the L.C.C. County Hall during the previous night had almost certainly been due to a parachute mine. The blast of the explosion from these mines was so great that it had been found necessary to clear the area for 400 yards round the spot, when a mine did not explode.

The War Cabinet—
(1) Agreed that we should retaliate by dropping mines over Berlin.
(2) Invited the First Sea Lord to report to the Prime Minister on the steps now being taken to fit mines with an attachment for this purpose.

The Sudan.

5. The War Cabinet were informed that Sir Stewart Symes, the Governor-General of the Sudan, had been in indifferent health for some time past and would already have retired, had it not been for the war. His successor was to have been Sir Bernard Bourdillon, the present Governor of Nigeria; Sir Bernard's appointment had in fact been announced, and the approval of the Egyptian Government obtained. With the outbreak of war, however, it had been decided to extend Sir Stewart Symes's service, and to keep Sir B. Bourdillon in Nigeria for the time being.

Sir Miles Lampson and General Wavell were both strongly of the opinion that Sir Stewart Symes's retirement should no longer be postponed.

The War Cabinet—
(a) Invited the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (subject to consultation with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) to make arrangements for Sir Stewart Symes to be relieved of his present office as Governor-General of the Sudan forthwith.
(b) Decided that Sir Stewart Symes's successor should be Major-General H. J. Huddleston. Pending the arrival of Major-General Huddleston, Sir Stewart Symes's second in command should take charge at Khartum.

6. In connection with the preceding Minute, the War Cabinet—

Invited the Secretary of State for the Colonies to submit a report to the Prime Minister as to the age, experience and suitability for office under war conditions of the Governors of all Colonies likely to be of importance for the conduct of the war.

7. The Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that our reply to the recent Swiss Note had been handed to the Swiss Minister on the previous day. The Minister had said that he thought the Note might result in public opinion in Switzerland, and possibly also in the United States, reacting against this country. But he had also said that he appreciated that the Air authorities in this country were faced with a difficult situation, and on the whole, he had taken the Note fairly well.

The Swiss Minister had said that it would take him about 24 hours to deliver the Note to his Government. The Permanent Under-Secretary of State thought that the Air Ministry could therefore assume that the reply had now been delivered.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement, and agreed that the Royal Air Force should now be free to resume attacks on targets in North Italy.

8. The War Cabinet had before them a Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies (W.P. (40) 374) regarding supplies for Malta.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies said that the policy approved before the war was that Malta should be provisioned for six months. When Italy came into the war, the Governor had stated that he had six months' supplies available. Further, when asked at intervals whether he was satisfied with the position, he had made affirmative replies. The Governor had now telegraphed to say that he was short of all supplies, except coal and wheat. Further, the Chiefs of Staff now considered that the level of essential supplies, both civil and other, in Malta should be built up as soon as practicable to eight months' stock. If this recommendation of the Chiefs of Staff was to be adhered to, it meant that some 80,000 tons would have to be shipped to Malta every month.

The Minister of Shipping said that we were very short of the fast ships which would be necessary to carry the stores through the Mediterranean, but that he would do his best to meet these new demands.

The War Cabinet—

Gave approval in principle to the report and invited the First Lord of the Admiralty to prepare a plan to give effect to it.
9. The War Cabinet had before them a joint Memorandum by the Minister without Portfolio, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Minister of Shipping (W.P. (40) 365).

The Minister of Shipping said that the shipping position this time next year would give cause for anxiety, because the rate of replacements of tonnage lost was deplorably low. He would like the War Cabinet to realise that there would be a considerable reduction in our importing capacity this time next year, unless there was an improvement in the tonnage situation.

The Prime Minister said that within the next few months our own new destroyers, now under construction, together with the arrival of the American destroyers, should greatly improve the forces available for escort duties and it was hoped would reduce the present rate of tonnage losses.

The War Cabinet—

Approved the recommendations contained in the summary of W.P. (40) 365.

10. The First Sea Lord asked whether action could be taken in regard to the supply of large flying-boats by the United States of America.

The Prime Minister said that the United States of America had made very large demands in regard to bases. No further action, however, had been taken by them in respect of the supply to us of the further 250,000 rifles, the 20 motor torpedo-boats, the 150 aircraft on order for Sweden and the 10 large flying-boats.

The War Cabinet—

Invited the Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to send an urgent message to Lord Lothian pressing for the supply of these further munitions and, in particular, of the 10 large flying-boats.

Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1,
September 19, 1940.