

FINAL EDITION.

DEFENCE CONFERENCE, 1939.

D.C.S.2.

Copy No. 50

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18th April, 1939

SECRET.

NOTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE SECOND DAY OF MEETING OF THE
DEFENCE CONFERENCE HELD ON THE 15th APRIL, 1939.

PRESENT:

NEW ZEALAND.

Delegates:

Rt. Hon. M.J. Savage, P.C.
Hon. P. Fraser
Hon. W. Nash
Hon. F. Jones
Hon. D.G. Sullivan
Major-General J.E. Duigan, C.B., D.S.O.
Commodore H.E. Horan, D.S.O., R.N.
Group-Captain H.W.L. Saunders, M.C., D.F.C., M.M.
Group-Captain T.M. Wilkes, C.B.E., M.C.
C.A. Berendsen, Esq., C.M.G.
B.C. Ashwin, Esq.
L.J. Schmitt, Esq.
Lt.-Col. W.G. Stevens

Advisers:

Commander A.B. Fanshawe, R.N.
Paymaster-Captain E.L. Tottenham, O.B.E., R.N.
Colonel O.H. Mead, D.S.O.
H. Turner, Esq.
Group-Captain L.M. Isitt, R.N.Z.A.F.
Wing-Commander A de T. Nevill, R.N.Z.A.F.
A.R.F. Mackay, Esq.
J.R. Middleton, Esq.

Secretariat.

Lt.-Col W.G. Stevens
Lt.-Commander T. Ellis, R.N.
Captain D.T. Maxwell, N.Z.S.C.
Sqn.Ldr. E.M.F. Grundy, R.A.F.
F. Shanahan, Esq.
H.G. Nicholls, Esq.

UNITED KINGDOM.

Delegates:

Sir Harry Batterbee, K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O.
Sir Harry Luke, K.C.M.G.
Vice-Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin, K.B.E., C.B., R.N.
Major-General P.J. Mackesy, C.B., D.S.O., M.C.
Air-Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore, K.C.B., D.S.O.

Advisers:

Captain W.D. McN. Graham, R.A.
Major A.H. Stafford.
H.H. Vaskess, Esq., O.B.E.
Lt. F.R.J. Nicholls, R.A.

Secretariat:

G.E. Boyd Shannon, Esq.
N.E. Costar, Esq.

AUSTRALIA.

Delegates:

Vice Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin, K.B.E., C.B., R.N.
Colonel V.A.H. Sturdee, C.B.E., D.S.O.
Wing-Commander G. Jones, D.F.C., R.A.A.F.

Advisers:

Commander J.C.D. Esdaile, R.A.N.

Secretariat:

Paymaster Captain J.B. Foley, O.B.E., R.A.N.

1. The Conference re-assembled at 10 a.m. and the proceedings commenced with a suggestion by the Deputy Chairman that Saturday morning and whole of Monday should be devoted to completing the general discussion of the Agenda. He further suggested that Committees should be formed to work on the three divisions of the Agenda, that they should commence their deliberations on Tuesday morning and report to the main Committee on the morning of Thursday, 20th April.
2. The United Kingdom and Australian Delegations approved of the proposal.
3. It was decided that the three Delegations would report on Monday as to the personnel by which they wished to be represented on the Committees.
4. SIR RAGNAR COLVIN asked for information as to the position regarding the two armed merchant cruisers that the Admiralty hoped New Zealand could supply. COMMODORE HORAN explained that there were no ships on the New Zealand register suitable for conversion. ADMIRAL COLVIN suggested that the full circumstances should be made known to the Admiralty. He also raised the question of the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff recommendation that New Zealand should in peace, man and maintain a 3rd cruiser and 2 escort vessels and pointed out that this would make a considerable difference in these waters.
5. MR. NASH said that he would welcome the meeting's views on the question of the addition of a third cruiser to the New Zealand Division.
6. The Pacific cable situation was discussed. GENERAL DUIGAN pointed out that a land force would be necessary for the protection of the cable landings at Suva and Fanning Island. He also remarked on the size of the force required and the arrangements that had been made for their departure.
7. The question of transport of these forces was considered.

8. MR. JONES asked if the cutting of a cable at a distance from the shore was a practical proposition. SIR RAGNAR COLVIN did not think so, because the position of the cables was kept secret, and in any case a cable ship would be required.

9. COMMODORE HORAN commented on the effect of the destruction of instruments in cable stations. ADMIRAL COLVIN in answer to a question by Mr. Jones stated it was desirable to maintain cable routes despite the alternative route afforded by wireless.

10. COLONEL STURDEE explained the peace time position as to the defence of Norfolk Island. GENERAL DUIGAN was of opinion that a defence force should be established at Fanning Island in time of peace.

11. MR. JONES suggested that the whole cable question should be reviewed by a sub-Committee.

12. SIR RAGNAR and MR. NASH discussed the possibility of arranging a panel of ships from which the required armed merchant vessels could be drawn.

13. The Conference then proceeded to discuss item C. of the Agenda which is: "most effective means of co-operation with the United Kingdom in defence of the British Commonwealth after providing for security in South Western Pacific, including schemes for mutual support".

14. GENERAL DUIGAN drew attention to the suggestion of the Chiefs of Staff sub-Committee report C.O.S. 832 in which it is stated that in the event of war immediate reinforcements for use in the Pacific and the provision of a Division for despatch overseas would be a valuable contribution to Imperial Defence. He pointed out the necessity for peace preparation if the suggestion was adopted by the New Zealand Government.

15. The question of training pilots for service overseas was discussed, also the possibility of sending New Zealand aircraft to Singapore or elsewhere.

16. GROUP-CAPTAIN SAUNDERS said that he thought it would be unwise to promise any New Zealand units for overseas operations until we were quite certain that the situation in the immediate vicinity of New Zealand was secure.

17. In reply to a question by Mr. Nash, GROUP-CAPTAIN SAUNDERS gave certain figures in connection with the cost of a contribution to the air defence of Singapore.

18. The possibility of New Zealand's assistance in the manning of overseas garrisons was considered. MR. JONES gave it as his opinion that the whole question of a contribution of this nature, that is, the defence of the Empire generally, was a matter for an Imperial Conference. MR. FRASER while agreeing that the question was ultimately one for the Government concerned and an Imperial Conference to decide, he thought that this Committee should give the matter a thorough examination.

19. In answer to a question by Mr. Jones whether Australia had been asked to undertake any commitment such as sending troops to Singapore, ADMIRAL COLVIN replied that although the United Kingdom Government had mentioned the possibility of such assistance in peace time, it had indicated that a more suitable form of co-operation for Australia would be by addition to Naval and Air strength. He mentioned that the Australian Air Force is now being largely increased and that the Commonwealth Government is taking active steps to investigate the provision of a capital ship dock in Australia and also had given consideration to the acquisition of a capital ship.

20. MR. NASH raised the point about the defence of Fiji. Though a responsibility of the United Kingdom, he said, we are anxious to have something done. It was understood from other discussions that the heart of the problem was the North Sea and the Atlantic, and that the defence of the United Kingdom and Singapore were essential for the defence of the Commonwealth,

but there was the question of our liability in the Pacific which ought to be considered here. Mr Nash said that he did not think there was any limit to what we would do to train men to defend New Zealand and other places too, though we could not make any commitments that men will be sent overseas.

21. In reply to Mr Fraser, MR. JONES said it was agreed that the strategic points of defence for New Zealand may possibly be outside New Zealand.

22. MR. SAVAGE considered that there would be no difficulty if an appeal were made for men, in raising a force for overseas. He was satisfied that we could get 40,000 to 50,000 men up to a certain age, and General Duigan agreed.

23. MR. NASH asked if some of the other Delegations' ideas could be obtained as to the modes of "mutual reinforcement" mentioned in item paper D.C. 2 dealing with (c). SIR HARRY BATTERBEE suggested that as the proposal was contained in a New Zealand paper New Zealand might like to open the subject.

24. MR. NASH continuing, explained that the problems were not exclusively New Zealand ones and hoped that some ideas from members of the visiting Delegations about strategy in the Pacific and more particularly on a mutual reinforcement basis would be a help in coming to a decision.

25. MR. FRASER said that he gathered after reading the verbatim report of yesterday's proceedings that in the event of attack on New Zealand the New Zealand and Australian fleets would co-operate. That was a considerable step towards mutual co-operation. ADMIRAL COLVIN stated that was generally agreed, and to avoid divided control in one area the Naval Board in Melbourne should control trade protection in the Tasman and the Naval Board in Wellington should control trade protection east of New Zealand.

26. MR. AGNEW referred to another point which had been discussed - the question of reconnaissance patrols between Port Moresby and Fiji. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE said that was a

point he was going to bring up and if appropriate could be discussed now. SIR ARTHUR explained how the Australian and New Zealand Air Force might co-operate in putting a screen between Suva and Port Moresby. It was rather much in the future as Australia is not quite established at Port Moresby and we are only beginning to think about Suva. The value of such a reconnaissance reinforced by reports from the Islands would help considerably in the defence of New Zealand and Australia if established at an early date, and it would give another argument in favour of establishing a flying base at Suva. Sir Arthur suggested for the consideration of the two Governments concerned that they should include Suva - Vila in the New Zealand reconnaissance sphere, thus giving New Zealand a responsibility for certain areas for reconnaissance purposes; Australia having from Vila to Port Moresby. This was more important than an air reconnaissance pushed up towards the Marshalls or Hawaii and gave a closer screen and was the more probable line by which an attacking force would approach.

27. MR. FRASER asked whether an attacking force might not come from the direction of the Marshall Islands, and refuel there. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE said that if they had supply bases there that was a possibility. In reply to Mr. Fraser, ADMIRAL COLVIN said that it would be very hard to tell from the peace time movements of Japanese shipping that these advanced bases were being replenished with fuel and supplies.

28. MR. SULLIVAN mentioned that the Japanese in spite of fuelling difficulties might take the East route and so avoid observation. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE explained that this would mean long distances, but if an air base is established at Suva, we could push up to Tonga and expand reconnaissance that way.

29. WING-COMMANDER JONES explained what Australia can do now in the South-western Pacific and what they hope to do in the near future. It is intended to send one flight of amphibians to Port Moresby during a precautionary stage to be reinforced by 3 or 4 Empire Flying boats after a week or two. These aircraft

could operate on a line from New Guinea down to the Solomons and possibly as far as the New Hebrides dependent on our ability to get a ship there, to lay down fuel supplies, provision of moorings, etc. The mass of islands in the area might lessen the task of reconnaissance. Survey has been made of portions of the route and information is available about seaplane landing sites, but not over the whole area. At present no land plane reconnaissance aircraft or bombers could operate further than 300 miles east of Port Moresby.

30. As to the future, WING-COMMANDER JONES said Australia hoped to be able to establish a chain of landing grounds at intervals of 600 miles preferably where it is possible to defend them. Preliminary survey of sites had already been made and soon land planes will be available to operate over the whole area either to supplement the reconnaissance force, or act as a striking force. They would have a range of 1,000 miles, that is a radius of 500 miles. Australia intended to establish a squadron of large flying boats at Moresby as part of the present development programme.

WING-COMMANDER JONES stated that in all their plans they visualised working in very close co-operation with the naval forces.

The total strength at the present time, said Wing-Commander Jones, was 11 squadrons with still another 8 squadrons to be formed by June, 1941. Arrangements in connection with that are going on as well as can be expected.

31. In reply to Mr. Jones, WING-COMMANDER JONES said that the task of the flying boats at Moresby was primarily reconnaissance though they might take action in certain circumstances against submarines and other vessels.

ADMIRAL COLVIN said there was one other aspect and that was that these reconnaissance craft would be invaluable in reporting any likely refuelling and/or supply bases that an enemy force would endeavour to set up.

32. MR. ASHWIN asked whether anything had been done in the matter of instructing people in the Islands how to operate their sets and what information they should supply. After some discussion on the subject, Sir Harry Luke and Mr Vaskess detailed the location of the various wireless sets in the Islands and how they were manned. No scheme had been worked out as regards reporting but information is collected at Fiji and passed on to New Zealand but not on to Australia. Mr Jones said it was important as to what Islands should supply information and whether it should go to Australia, New Zealand, or to the British Government. There should be some joint control or co-operation. This matter was previously considered in 1936 at the Air Conference, said Mr Jones, and a copy of the report was sent to Australia and Great Britain but nothing came of it.

SIR HARRY LUKE suggested that this be discussed with the Committee appointed to deal with (b) (1).

33. MR. JONES asked if it was the intention to send any bombers at all to Port Moresby.

34. WING-COMMANDER JONES said that Australia visualised that they would establish aerodromes at suitable intervals in that area and that under certain circumstances, if advisable, a striking force might be sent up there.

35. MR. JONES replied that Group-Captain Cochrane in his original report visualised operating the Wellington bombers from landing grounds in the Islands because they were the only type of aircraft that it would be possible to send a long distance from New Zealand.

36. WING-COMMANDER JONES said that in certain places it might be reasonable to establish aerodromes, but in other places such as the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, which it would not be possible to defend, it would not be advisable so to do.

37. SIR RAGNAR COLVIN summed up by saying that they were discussing rather the long range policy but at the present moment a striking force was not practicable.

38. GROUP-CAPTAIN SAUNDERS then gave the view of the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff. Their idea was that they would establish landing grounds in Fiji and also to the eastward in Tonga. They hoped to be able to use the Trans-Tasman flying boats in order to conserve the few Wellingtons New Zealand had. He admitted that aerodromes established in the Gilbert and Ellice Group would provide a stepping stone for both sides. He suggested that the areas for which New Zealand and Australia should be responsible was a matter for a Committee and finally he said that air force units based on Fiji could cover an area 500 miles north and west of Fiji and, with landing facilities in Tonga, the area between Fiji and Tonga and up to a distance of approximately 300 miles north and east of Tonga. He continued that he would like some information on what the French are doing in the New Hebrides, but that information was not available.

39. MR. FRASER asked Sir Harry Luke if he had any understanding with the French in New Caledonia or New Hebrides.

40. SIR HARRY replied only administratively, but that Sir Harry Batterbee and himself were discussing the possibility of communicating with the Home Government and asking if either they could obtain the information direct from the French Government or else authorise possibly himself to get in touch direct with the French High Commissioner at Noumea.

41. The discussion then turned to paper D.C.3, dealing with item (d). SIR HARRY BATTERBEE explained that it was the view of the United Kingdom Government that while there were certain matters in relation to the co-ordination of Defence (e.g. the question of reconnaissance which they had just been discussing) and which it was possible for the Conference to reach practical conclusions, there were other matters raising questions of high policy or finance on which it was only possible for the members of the Conference to explore the problem in a preliminary way and submit recommendations ad referendum to their Governments.

42. MR. JONES said that the paper arose from the idea that there was not sufficient interchange of information between New Zealand and Australia. While the New Zealand Government was kept informed by the Government of the United Kingdom that was not so in the case of Australia, nor in fact did Australia receive a great deal of information from New Zealand. He suggested that information available to each of the Governments should be co-ordinated and pooled.

43. MR. NASH asked if Admiral Colvin would explain the procedure for the interchange of Naval information.

44. THE ADMIRAL replied that he had certain instructions from the Australian Government on this matter. He said that the Government entirely agreed that the two Dominions should keep each other posted on questions of broad policy but that they did not consider the deliberations leading up to those conclusions should also be interchanged. He suggested that from a Naval point of view a quarterly interchange of letters between the respective Chiefs of Staff should meet the case.

45. MR. NASH then asked if it would not be possible for a representative of the New Zealand Government to be present at the Australian Defence Council's discussions and also a representative of the Australian Government to be present at the New Zealand Defence Council's discussions.

46. LT.-COL. STEVENS interposing said that this applied not only to matters affecting the armed services but also to matters in relation to defence in general, such as censorship, man-power, etc.

MR. BERENDSEN endorsed Col. Stevens' remarks.

47. After some discussion it was suggested that a Liaison Officer in each Defence Department should be authorised to attend Council of Defence meetings. GENERAL DUGAN stated the New Zealand Liaison Officer had been recalled to New Zealand and he hoped the Government would agree to a New Zealand Officer being appointed for duty at the War Office and at Army Headquarters in Australia.

48. MAJOR GENERAL DUGAN, GROUP CAPT. SAUNDERS and COL. STURDEE testified to the invaluable work done by their Liaison Officers in the United Kingdom.

49. THE PRIME MINISTER said that he did not think any Government would be prepared to invite a representative of another Government to its Council meetings because it would not always be advisable to make another Government aware of its political and domestic discussions.

SIR RAGNAR COLVIN agreed.

50. MR. JONES here said that his original point was that some machinery should be set up for an interchange of information.

51. MR. FRASER said that the recent correspondence between the Naval Boards in Australia and New Zealand seemed to lay the foundations of what was required for an interchange of opinions and that if some such system was worked in regard to national security in general it would meet the whole situation. It was suggested by Mr. Sullivan that more frequent conferences would help and was a matter for arrangement between the two Governments.

52. THE PRIME MINISTER replied that this Conference might usefully recommend such a course.

53. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE said that so far as air co-operation is concerned he would suggest that the time had arrived to give it more serious consideration than in the past, because the increased range of modern aircraft was gradually making the problem analogous to that of the Navy. Therefore co-operation between the two Dominions would be necessary particularly with regard to air reconnaissance areas.

54. MR. SCHMITT gave an example of the value of co-operation between the Supply Organization in Australia and the Supply Organization in New Zealand. The co-operation was informal but had proved of the greatest value and he hoped that it would be put on a more formal basis in the future. A report on this matter would be available to the Supply Committee.

55. GROUP CAPT. SAUNDERS said that occasional letters had been exchanged with the Australian Air Force but that the question of the Islands had not been discussed.

56. THE PRIME MINISTER summed up by saying that it was a question of providing the machinery to ensure adequate co-operation.

57. MR. ASHWIN then asked if he could hark back to an early paper and said that the question of New Zealand being unable to provide two armed merchant cruisers was due to the fact that many ships operating solely in New Zealand waters were registered in London. Over these ships the New Zealand Government had no control simply owing to their port of registration. He asked if it would not be possible to adopt some other basis for deciding who is to control the ships.

58. ADMIRAL COLVIN suggested that a Committee should go into the question.

59. MR. FRASER said that it was possible by legislation to insist on ships trading solely in New Zealand waters to be registered in New Zealand but this might be construed as a hostile action. He pointed out that it would be stupid to say that ships registered in New Zealand could not be better used elsewhere in the same way that it was stupid to say that ships registered in London could not be better used in New Zealand. The whole thing required organization and he considered that a Committee should make recommendations.

ADMIRAL COLVIN agreed.

60. A statement was submitted to the meeting and approved for issue to the Press.

61. The Conference then adjourned at 12.30 p.m. until 10 a.m. on Monday, the 17th April.