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EXTRACT FROM THE MINUTES OF THE 384<sup>th</sup>  
MEETING OF THE ODC HELD 3.5.39 13

2. NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE CONFERENCE, 1939.  
(O.D.C. Paper No. 1743).

THE COMMITTEE had under consideration a Note by the Secretary covering Part I of the Report of the New Zealand Defence Conference, 1939, (O.D.C. Paper No. 1743).

MR LEE said that the Committee had been asked to advise on the recommendations made by the Conference in Part I, Section 2 of their Report. These recommendations were summarised in paragraph 59, and he suggested the Committee should consider them in turn.

(a) Fiji.

(i) Defence Force.

CONCLUSION (1).

THE COMMITTEE agreed:-

- (a) To endorse the recommendation of the Conference that the Fiji Defence Force should be expanded to one complete composite battalion at Suva, and two European Companies at Lautoka.
- (b) To invite the War Office to investigate the possibility of providing the machine guns and small arms ammunition required for the expansion.

(iii) Coast Defences for Suva.

MR. LEE explained that the Committee had previously discussed a suggestion to provide two 6-inch guns for Suva, and had expressed their views in O.D.C. Minute No. 334. The Conference had been aware of the views of the Oversea Defence Committee, but had



nevertheless recommended that the guns should be installed, and their recommendation had been endorsed by the Chiefs of Staff. The Oversea Defence Committee, therefore, had no option but to accept the recommendation, and to consider whether it could be implemented.

CAPTAIN BUDGEN said that the Admiralty had not had time to investigate fully the availability of guns and ammunition. It was certain, however, that there was no cordite available in Australia.

CAPTAIN GRAHAM said that the original idea had been that two guns should be taken for Suva from Auckland. The Conference had been informed that these guns were not available, and Admiral Colvin had telegraphed to find out whether guns were available at Sydney. He had told the Conference that he had heard in reply that two guns could be made available, and this accounted for the recommendation which they had made.

MR. GILBERT, in reply to an enquiry by MR. LEE, said that if there were any question of buying guns it would be necessary to examine the principle of who was responsible for the defence of the Island. Fiji could not pay for these defences, and it seemed only reasonable that New Zealand and Australia should share in the cost.

CAPTAIN EDELSTEN said that the Admiralty could examine further the position regarding guns. If it were decided that two of the guns held in Australia should be



made available the question of payment would later have to be decided.

MAJOR FRITH said that the provision of searchlights would require further examination. The requirements of Suva could not be placed very high in the order of priority.

#### CONCLUSIONS (2)

THE COMMITTEE agreed:-

- (a) To recommend that Suva should be classified as a defended port Category 'A'.
- (b) To recommend that the scale of coast defences should be two 6-inch guns and two searchlights.
- (c) That the provision of these coast defences should be considered by the Departments concerned, in relation to the requirements of other ports, and the stocks of material available.
- (d) To take note that specialist personnel would be provided by New Zealand and that the remainder of the personnel to man the defences would be raised locally in Fiji.

#### (iv) Landing Grounds.

MR. LEE said that in O.D.C. Minute No. 334 the Committee had suggested that the provision of landing facilities at Fiji was desirable, but that possibly one landing ground would be sufficient. They had also proposed that the cost should be shared between the Governments of Australia and New Zealand. The report of the Conference showed that there were good reasons for constructing two landing grounds, and that Australia was not prepared to take any part in paying for their construction. The Chiefs of Staff supported the recommendation of the Conference.



WING COMMANDER FOSTER said that, for operational reasons, it was clear that two landing grounds would be required. The first long range aircraft would arrive in New Zealand in September, and they would no doubt require to use these landing grounds for training flights. At a later stage some revenue might be secured from civil aviation using the landing facilities. Taking all things into account, £28,000 did not appear to be an unreasonable contribution from the United Kingdom Government.

A discussion then took place as to whether it was the responsibility of the United Kingdom or of New Zealand to defend Fiji. On the one hand, it was argued that Fiji should be defended as an outpost of the general defence system of New Zealand, and the Government of the latter country should therefore make itself responsible for the expenditure involved. On the other hand, it was pointed out that the view held in New Zealand was that the United Kingdom had no right to leave an island of the importance of Fiji in such an undefended state that it constituted a menace to the security of New Zealand.

THE COMMITTEE finally accepted the view that the cost of landing grounds at Fiji could fairly be charged to the Governments of the United Kingdom and New Zealand in equal amounts.

MR. GILBERT enquired what was the meaning of the suggestion in paragraph 44 of the report, that the extra capital costs incurred over and above New Zealand's present programme should be shared equally



by the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

CAPTAIN GRAHAM explained that the New Zealand present programme only covered the provision of aircraft. It had been implied at the Conference that the United Kingdom should pay for half the cost of the construction of the landing grounds, but not for the provision of petrol, bombs, etc. These would form part of the reserves to be provided by New Zealand.

MR. WATHERSTON said that the Governor of Fiji had agreed to provide for the maintenance of the landing grounds, which was estimated to cost £1,500 a year. He then explained to the Committee, in general terms, the financial position in Fiji, as a result of which it appeared that the Government of Fiji should be able to pay for the expansion of the Defence Force and the provision of the coast defence personnel, provided that the voluntary contribution of £5,000 to Imperial Defence was discontinued. No sums had yet been set aside for the R.N.V.R. Unit but this was not likely to be very costly.

MR. LEE said that the revenue of Fiji was dependent to a very large extent upon trade in sugar and copra, both of which commodities were somewhat depressed. It appeared, therefore, that it would be reasonable not to ask the Government of Fiji to pay more than they proposed, (i.e. approximately £18,000 a year which should cover the annual cost of the defence forces of all kinds. Large items of capital expenditure



would have to be found from other sources.

CONCLUSION (3).

THE COMMITTEE agreed:-

- (a) To recommend that the construction of two landing grounds in Fiji should be carried out, and that the cost of constructing these landing grounds should be shared equally between the Governments of the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

(b) Tonga.

(i) Defence Force.

MR. LEE said that the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific had suggested the raising of a defence force of one Company at Tonga, and this recommendation had been endorsed by the Conference. The Committee would be aware that the Governments of the United Kingdom and Tonga were bound by a Treaty under which we undertook to defend Tonga. The Colonial Office could not contemplate the exercise of pressure on the Government of Tonga to provide a defence force, if such action were likely in any way to impair friendly relations between the two Governments. The High Commissioner had indicated that the Queen of Tonga appeared willing to play her part in assisting in defence measures, but the question of money would probably prove a difficulty. If a landing ground were established in Tonga, it would certainly be desirable to raise a small defence force to guard it, though he doubted whether the United Kingdom Government should contribute anything towards the cost. They might, however, provide the necessary arms.



MAJOR FRITH agreed that if it proved possible to raise a defence force the small amount of arms and ammunition required could probably be provided, subject to Treasury sanction, though their maintenance and replacement would be the responsibility of the local Government.

MR. WATHERSTON said that the total budget of Tonga was only £65,000 a year, so that an expenditure of £5,000 a year to maintain a defence force would represent a considerable effort on the part of the Government of Tonga. The High Commissioner might be authorised to sound the Government of Tonga on the subject of raising the proposed Company.

CONCLUSIONS (4).

THE COMMITTEE agreed:-

- (a) To recommend that a defence force, consisting of one Infantry Company, should be provided if possible at Tonga, with the proviso that the cost of raising and maintaining the Company apart from the initial provision of arms, ammunition and war equipment should be borne by the Government of Tonga.
- (b) To invite the Colonial Office to instruct the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific to approach the Government of Tonga with a view to the formation of a Company, on the terms set out in Conclusion (a) above.
- (c) To take note that in the event of a Company being formed at Tonga the rifles and web equipment required would be provided by the Government of New Zealand, and the machine guns and small arms ammunition would be provided by the War Office.

(ii) Landing grounds.

CONCLUSION (5).

THE COMMITTEE agreed:-

To take note that the New Zealand Government would undertake surveys of possible sites for emergency landing grounds in Tonga.



(d) Fanning Island.

(i) Garrison.

MR. LEE said the Committee would recall that when they previously discussed a proposal from the Government of New Zealand to station a garrison at Fanning Island in peace-time, they had deprecated the proposal on various grounds, set out in O.D.C. Minute No. 334. Nevertheless, the Conference had recommended the stationing of one Platoon at Fanning Island, and the Chiefs of Staff had endorsed the recommendation. It had not, however, yet been accepted by the New Zealand Government.

CAPTAIN GRAHAM said that a member of the staff of the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, who had been present at the Conference, had informed them that he had lived for about a year at Fanning Island, and that it would be no hardship to the troops to be stationed there. The amenities would not be entirely lacking, and water and food could be arranged. A ship called there every three months, and this would enable personnel to be relieved periodically.

MR. LEE said that the Colonial Office saw no objection to the proposal, provided that the whole cost was borne by the New Zealand Government.

CAPTAIN GRAHAM said that from the discussion at the Conference it appeared that the New Zealand Government were prepared to pay the whole cost.

CONCLUSIONS (6).

THE COMMITTEE agreed:-

- (a) To recommend that the proposal by the Conference that one Platoon from New Zealand should be stationed at Fanning Island in time of peace should be welcomed, on the understanding that the cost of the necessary arrangements



for the reception of the garrison, and for its subsequent maintenance, would be borne by the New Zealand Government.

- (b) To take note that the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific was taking up with the Cable and Plantation Companies the question of increasing the food reserves for their staffs at Fanning Island to a supply sufficient for a minimum period of six months.

(e) Ocean and Nauru Islands.

(i) Food Reserves.

CONCLUSION (7).

THE COMMITTEE agreed:-

To take note that the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific was taking up with the British Phosphate Commissioners the question of providing emergency food reserves for their staff to ensure supplies for a minimum period of six months.

(ii) Arms and Ammunition.

MR. WATHERSTON said that the Colonial Office had under discussion with the War Office the provision of rifles for the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, and they could together clear up the matter raised by the Conference.

CONCLUSION (8).

THE COMMITTEE agreed:-

That the provision of the extra arms and ammunition recommended by the Conference for Ocean Island should be settled by the War Office and the Colonial Office in consultation.

(f) New Hebrides.

MR. WATHERSTON said that the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific was at the moment visiting the New Hebrides and the French authorities in New Caledonia, and would no doubt furnish a report.



CONCLUSION (9).

THE COMMITTEE agreed:-

To defer consideration of the recommendations of the Conference with regard to the New Hebrides until a report had been received from the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, after his consultation with the French authorities.

CONCLUSION (10).

THE COMMITTEE agreed:-

To instruct the Secretary to prepare a Minute containing the views of the Committee as expressed at the meeting.