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W.W. 1st MEETING

*See by HE: Am
Mr. V. V. Miller
G. R. Campbell*

WASHINGTON WAR CONFERENCE

RECORD of a meeting held at the WHITE HOUSE on TUESDAY, 23rd DECEMBER 1941 at 12 Noon

P R E S E N T

The Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill, M.P.,
Prime Minister and Minister of Defence (in the Chair).

The Right. Hon. Viscount Halifax.

Mr. R.W. Close, Union of South Africa.

The Right Hon. Major R.C. Casey, Australia.

Mr. Leighton McCarthy, Canada.

The Right Hon. F. Langstone, New Zealand.

SECRETARIAT

Brigadier L.C. Hollis.

MR. CHURCHILL said that he was glad to make it his first official duty, after paying his respects to the President, to have a talk with the Dominion representatives in Washington.

THE PRIME MINISTER then gave a general survey of the war situation.

The Far East

The situation in the Far East presented grave problems, and for a time we should have to be prepared to take punishment. At the best we had hoped that the United States would enter the war on our side without Japan becoming involved, although this was always an unlikely contingency. The next best was that Japan by some act of aggression would be involved in the war as well as the United States. Thirdly, the situation might have remained as before - namely both Japan and the United States neutral. The worst possible situation would have been Japan in the war and America out. On balance we could be not dissatisfied with the turn of events. Nevertheless, both we and the United States had suffered initially grave losses in the Far East. We had therefore to review the situation afresh. The Prime Minister then outlined certain Naval dispositions which had been made and the employment of aircraft carriers as a means of offsetting the loss of Capital ships which we both had suffered. Our ultimate object was to build up our Naval forces in the Pacific and to regain Naval control in that area. This, however, would take a little time and would depend on new heavy ships coming into service.

Malaya

The key to the situation was the security of the fortress at Singapore. Every effort was being made to send reinforcements to Malaya, but it would be the height of folly to withdraw our troops and aircraft from the Middle East just at the moment when our operations in Cyrenaica were progressing so successfully with every prospect of our gaining a major military victory over the German - Italian forces in that area. As soon as General Auchinleck had achieved complete victory it might be possible to free our forces and some tanks for despatch to the Far East. In the meanwhile we were considering inviting the Australian Government to agree to send one or more Australian divisions from the Middle East to the Far East.

Australia and New Zealand

For the present there was no danger of a serious attack developing on Australia or New Zealand.

The Japanese Air Force

It would have to be remembered that the Japanese Air Force was a wasting asset. Our estimate was that their production was only about 200 - 300 aircraft a month, although we had some evidence that Japan had been supplied with about 1500 German aircraft possibly with some German Air Force personnel.

Russia

The Russian situation was unexpectedly favourable, amounting to almost a miracle. As long as the Soviet continued to contain and destroy a large part of the hitherto victorious German Army it would be unreasonable to press M. Stalin to declare war on Japan. Mr. Eden, who was now on his way back from a mission to Moscow, had reported M. Stalin as saying that he might be in a position to make war on Japan in the Spring, although it was quite possible that his hand would be forced by Japan making war on Russia before that date.

In the meanwhile, it was important that we should keep up our quota of equipment to Russia, which was paying a splendid dividend.

The Trade War

THE PRIME MINISTER outlined the present position regarding the enemy attacks on our trade. In spite of a large increase in the number of U-boats operating, our shipping losses had decreased in a most satisfactory manner during recent months. This was due to the increasing effectiveness of our counter-measures.

Future Conduct of the Conference.

THE PRIME MINISTER then outlined his ideas as to the general conduct of the conference which would take place in Washington during the period of his visit. There would, of course, be several conferences on the highest level under the Chairmanship of the President during the following two or three days. The Chiefs of Staff would be in constant consultation with their American colleagues, and the Staffs would get together on the details of our joint action.

An early opportunity would be taken to keep the Dominion representatives informed of the progress of the conference. Ultimately, at the concluding stage of the conference he and the President had in mind to call a meeting of representatives of all the countries now ranged in opposition to the Axis Powers. This meeting would of course be of a formal nature with a view to demonstrating the solidarity of the Allied front opposing the Axis.

In reply to a question, the Prime Minister said that opportunity would be taken during the present conferences for the British Staffs to consult with the Staffs of the Dominion Representatives now in Washington.

Summing up, the Prime Minister said he regarded the present situation as being full of hope and encouragement. The Russians were fighting back magnificently and we had the powerful assistance of the United States of America. We could therefore look to the future with hope and confidence.

THE DOMINION REPRESENTATIVES thanked the Prime Minister for the opportunity he had afforded them for obtaining up to date and first hand knowledge of the situation. They hoped it would be possible to have a further meeting of a similar nature and the opportunity for discussions between their respective Staffs and the Chiefs of Staff organisation in Washington.

The meeting adjourned and a communique was issued to the Press*

WASHINGTON, D.C.

23rd December, 1941.

* Annex.

ANNEX

Communicate to Press.

Mr. Churchill's first official engagement, after being received by the President, was to hold a meeting at 12 noon with the British Dominion Representatives in Washington. The following were present:-

The Rt. Hon. The Viscount Halifax, K.G.

Mr. R. W. Close, K.C. (Union of South Africa).

The Rt. Hon. Major R. G. Casey, D.C.S., M.C. (Australia).

Mr. Leighton McCarthy, K.C. (Canada).

The Rt. Hon. F. Langstone (New Zealand).

Mr. Churchill gave a general survey and discussed with the Dominion Representatives the general war situation and outlined the aims of his visit to Washington.

24th December, 1941.