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D.C.G.(AIR) 1.

DEFENCE CONFERENCE 1939.

Parliament Buildings,
WELLINGTON, C.1.

S E C R E T.

19th April, 1939.

MEMORANDUM for:-

D.C.G.(AIR) 1 - NOTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF COMMITTEE
ON AIR PROBLEMS.

FIRST DAY - 17th APRIL.

With reference to the above paper which has
already been forwarded to you, I have to inform you that this has
been replaced by a final edition which is forwarded herewith.

I shall be glad, therefore, if you will destroy
the copy of the first edition in your possession.

W. J. Steens
Secretary,
Defence Conference 1939.

FINAL EDITION.

D.C.C. (AIR) 1.

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DEFENCE CONFERENCE, 1939. 19TH APRIL, 1939.

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the secrecy of this document.

SECRET.

NOTES OF PROCEEDINGS

OF

COMMITTEE SET UP TO DISCUSS

"POLICY IN RELATION TO THE TRANS-PACIFIC AIR
ROUTE AND UNITED STATES ACTIVITIES IN THE PACIFIC."

(FIRST DAY - MONDAY, APRIL 17th, 1939).

PRESENT :

Hon. P. Fraser - Chairman
Mr. C.A. Berendsen
Group Capt. Wilkes
Sir Harry Batterbee
Sir Harry Luke
Air Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore
Capt. Johnston

Paymaster Capt. Tottenham
Mr. Barrow
Sqd. Ldr. Gibson
Mr. Ashwin
Mr. Cornish
Dr. Barnett
Mr. Vaskess
Mr. Boyd Shannon
Wing Commander Jones

Sqd. Ldr. Grundy

Notes on the Meeting of the Committee Held in Room 61,
Parliament Buildings, on the 17th April, 1939, to discuss:

"POLICY IN RELATION TO THE TRANSPACIFIC AIR ROUTE,
AND UNITED STATES ACTIVITIES IN THE PACIFIC."

1. MR. FRASER corrected a statement made by him in the morning by stating that it was the Australian promoters who had abandoned the idea of making a base at Noumea and that no such intimation had been received from Pan-American Airways.
2. MR. FRASER said that SQUADRON-LEADER GIBSON had raised the possibility of an apparently French company being formed to operate an air service between Noumea and Brisbane, and AIR MARSHAL SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE stressed the importance of the Australian Government granting rights only to a bona fide French Company. CAPTAIN JOHNSTON pointed out that in the event of this possibility becoming seriously threatening the Qantas service from Australia could be terminated at Singapore and not continued on to Marseilles as at present, thus dispensing with the need for granting the French reciprocal rights. MR. CORNISH mentioned the fact that Mr. Gatty, representative of Pan-American, had stated that a ship might be run from Noumea to Brisbane to connect with the air service but the committee was of opinion that it would not be a paying proposition as the distance was 700 miles and the amount of passenger traffic would be small.
3. MR. FRASER said that under the agreement the American company has to apply for permission to vary the route and Mr. Gatty had approached the Government to do this but a reply had been deferred until after this Conference. MR. CORNISH read a letter from the Government to Mr. Gatty dated granting an extension of the time allowed for the commencement of the company's operations but expressing dissatisfaction that the agreement was between a Government and a private person and that the United States Government was not even morally bound to provide reciprocal landing rights. The New Zealand Government

expected the company to use its influence with the United States Government in this respect. The company was granted a license to establish and utilize the wireless stations at Russell and St. Heliers Bay, but the licenses were terminable at 6 months' notice.

4. The question was asked whether there was any significance in the fact that Pan-American Airways had apparently made no attempt to continue the service after the accident which interrupted it, but SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE considered that the reason was that it had begun a little ahead of its time and that they needed new boats of a better type. MR. ASHWIN said that they were looking for through passengers to connect with the Trans-Tasman service which is to start in September.

MR. FRASER was asked whether, if America proved obdurate about Honolulu and San Francisco, it was the policy of the New Zealand Government to denounce the agreement, and he replied that the advantages and disadvantages would have to be weighed. The Government had had to accept the agreement which was signed before the Election in 1935 but they would rather it had not been signed, and if a denunciation of the agreement were necessary he was sure that they would not hesitate to make it.

5. SIR HARRY LUKE suggested that it might be helpful if the Conference were to place on record that it would deprecate an air service being established between Noumea and Brisbane, and MR. FRASER said that in the Wellington conference there was complete agreement that the Australian Government would not agree to any alternative route from San Francisco. At the Imperial Conference it was stated that the Australian Government would not agree to any alternative route without consultation with the United Kingdom and New Zealand Governments. MR. FRASER read a letter from the late Mr. Lyons dated 19th December, 1938, confirming this.

6. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE suggested that the question of the islands to be used in the service should be settled first before the question of negotiations was raised. The Trans-Tasman service was the first step in the route from Australia, across the Pacific and Canada, and then across the Atlantic to England. The point to decide was whether the first stop after Auckland should be Suva or Tonga. Suva was much more important and the island was bigger and it also links up with the defence scheme, but Tonga was on the direct route and had slightly better weather conditions and flying boat facilities. MR. GIBSON was of the opinion that Suva was more suitable on the whole.
7. SIR HARRY LUKE pointed out that apart from technical considerations there was the political consideration that Tonga is the only remaining self governing Polynesian community in the Pacific, and that the Tongans were very anxious to be left alone as much as possible and not to be exposed more than was necessary to the doubtful benefits of European infiltration. They were extremely loyal friends of the Imperial Government and there was definitely no element of anti-British or anti-white feeling to be taken into consideration; but they were comprehensibly anxious to preserve their isolation as far as possible. Sir Harry felt that we must be very considerate of their feelings, so that if the balance on the technical aspect were fairly even, he would like to throw in this political consideration to weight it still further down in favour of Suva.
8. SQUADRON-LEADER GIBSON said that taking everything into consideration Suva was the most suitable island. Tonga could be developed as an alternative alighting area in the event of Fiji being closed by hurricanes. Both Tonga and Fiji offered facilities for either land or marine aircraft.
9. THE CHAIRMAN then moved that the first stage from Auckland on the route through to Canada should be Suva, with provision for emergency arrangements to land at Tonga in the event of hurricane weather at Suva. The motion was carried unanimously.

10. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE then considered the penultimate Pacific stage and said that the choice lay between Fanning Island and Christmas Island. SQUADRON-LEADER GIBSON said the position at Fanning Island was that there is an alighting area for marine aircraft which requires very little work, but unfortunately it is restricted. It is impossible to extend it and there is no area that could be made into a land plane aerodrome. At Christmas there is a much larger area available, and there are also suitable areas for aerodromes. He suggested that Fanning Island should be used until either a land plane service is contemplated or until the flying boats develop beyond the ability to use Fanning Island. The runway at Fanning is about 1600 yards and then there are coral reefs. Only about five or six tons of explosives would be required. Fanning has a cable station $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the alighting area and Burns-Philp's buildings could be renovated and made into hostel at a small cost. There is a good mooring site close inshore in sheltered water. At Christmas £3,000 to £4,000 worth of blasting would have to be done and there is no jetty as at Fanning. A launch channel would need to be made and there are no buildings which could be used. The weather conditions are preferable at Christmas to Fanning, and he considered that it would be the ultimate base.
11. MR. ASHWIN said the time factor did not press and if Fanning Island was not going to be satisfactory in the long run there was no need to sink expenditure in it and abandon it later. The machines would not be there for three years. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE said that the later machines would probably require more space to take off. SQUADRON-LEADER GIBSON said that his remarks about the area at Christmas would have to be verified as he had not had time to complete the survey. He estimated the cost at Christmas would not be more than £10,000. Even if Christmas were decided on it would be advisable to have Fanning as an emergency alighting area. This could be done without incurring any greater total cost when Christmas Island is developed.

He recommended the use of Fanning Island initially. CAPTAIN JOHNSTON thought that the necessity of catering for land planes is vital, and that is out of the question at Fanning. He was in favour of developing Christmas Island.

12. With regard to the title to the islands, SIR HARRY LUKE said that His Majesty's Government regarded their title to Fanning and Christmas Islands as unassailable and MR. FRASER said that the New Zealand Government dissented from submitting these islands to arbitration, and that the United Kingdom Government had taken that view finally.

13. SIR HARRY BATTERBEE said that the United States were usually ready to step in where they saw a chance, and that if we concentrated on Fanning Island there was a possibility that the Americans would take the opportunity of fitting out an expedition and beginning works on Christmas Island with a view to establishing claim. MR. FRASER considered that that could be met by making an emergency landing ground at Christmas Island at the same time as at Fanning Island.

14. SQUADRON-LEADER GIBSON mentioned that while he was at Christmas Island, an American cruising there had said that he was instructed by the American Naval representative that the British claim to Christmas Island was not recognised by the United States Government, but MR. FRASER pointed out that they probably did not recognise our claims to many of the Pacific Islands.

Committee adjourned at 4.10 p.m. and re-assembled at 4.30 p.m.

15. The position in regard to Fanning and Christmas Islands was recapitulated, and CAPTAIN JOHNSTON said he thought the claim to Christmas Island should be substantiated as far as possible. If they concentrated on Fanning Island it might give the impression that they were abandoning Christmas Island to anyone who cared to take it.

16. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE said that it might be as well to say that preliminary arrangements should be made for the construction of aerodromes, or at least the survey of aerodromes on Christmas Island at the same time as at Fanning, in order to establish the fact that it had not been abandoned.
17. SIR HARRY LUKE said he had a sum of £300 which had been made available for the erection of a jetty and moorings. If it was decided not to use Christmas Island the spending of this money would be a gesture and nothing else, except that it might be tactical to spend it seeing it was a small sum. They could go ahead and spend it immediately.
18. There was some discussion in regard to the question of Fanning Island being established as the immediate landing place with Christmas Island as an emergency, with a strong possibility of the positions being eventually reversed. SQUADRON-LEADER GIBSON said he would be in favour of work being started simultaneously at both places. The work to be done at Fanning would not cost very much and it could be done fairly quickly. Christmas Island would take some time to do and would need a fair amount of survey work before it could be got ready. Fanning would be needed anyhow as an emergency landing place. No buildings need be put up yet. While the work necessary was being done there they could go on with the survey for Christmas Island with the idea of eventually developing it as the permanent place. It would take eighteen months or two years to complete the total work at Christmas Island. Fanning could be got ready for a survey flight in three months, and for a permanent station in nine months. The necessary equipment could not be taken on a warship, some of it being of an elaborate nature, and he would therefore suggest that the whole job be done with a ship definitely fitted out to do it and prepared to be away for eighteen months or two years. It could go back periodically to Samoa for supplies. In this way too, use could be made of the ship's personnel for a lot of the work. He stressed the point that it was essential to have an emergency landing area at the

end of a long flight, and that Christmas Island had the only land plane alighting ground in the area.

19. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE suggested that an actual decision as between the two Islands was not necessary at this stage. All that was necessary was to record the fact that both were wanted. This was agreed to.
20. SQUADRON-LEADER GIBSON said he would like to make a suggestion that it be recommended that both these Islands be prepared to survey flights. The cost involved would not be very great. HON. MR. FRASER said a note would be taken of this and it could be considered when the final recommendations were being made.
21. The question of the best intermediate point was then discussed. SQUADRON-LEADER GIBSON recommended Nukunono, which he said required the least amount of work, was most satisfactory in its natural condition, and was on the direct route between Christmas Island and Fiji. It also formed a very favourable junction point if it was desired to switch to Tonga in order to avoid a hurricane at Fiji. The average depth of water was over 50 fathoms and the necessary blasting could be done for £200 or £300. There was a good sheltered area on the other side of the Island from the present settlement and there was ample area for the necessary buildings. In addition the wind was very constant in direction in this Island. The Island was entirely in the hands of native administration. The Senior New Zealand Official there was the Native Magistrate, and he had put forward a request that they should keep away from the settlement for the same reason as mentioned by Sir Harry Luke in connection with another island. There was no possibility of establishing a base for land planes there.
22. Some discussion followed in regard to the relative suitability of Nukunono and Hull. In reply to Sir Harry Batterbee SQUADRON-LEADER GIBSON said he considered Nukunono preferable partly on account of the coral reefs at Hull, which would cost £3,000 to £4,000 to blast away. Winds at both

Islands were very constant in direction, but the rainfall was much better at Nukunono. Hull was more or less in a desert area. There were underground wells but they were slightly brackish. Water was limited everywhere in the Phoenix Group. While recommending Nukunono, he still considered that Hull should be kept in mind as an alternative.

23. CAPTAIN JOHNSTON thought that Nukunono and Hull should be considered equally - much in the same way as Fanning and Christmas. At this stage they were both desirable. Nukunono seemed the best one for immediate development, and Hull provided not only an excellent emergency but also the possibility of a land-plane alighting area at some later date.
24. SQUADRON-LEADER GIBSON suggested that Nukunono should be proceeded with as the main one, while looking into the possibilities of Hull and Samoa. £300 or £400 of blasting at both Nukunono and Samoa would clear the lagoons and in addition to that only refuelling arrangements and moorings would be required. Hull Island on the other hand would require more extensive blasting operations, but it was so potentially valuable that we should not run the risk of losing it; if any service should eventually want to go through the Ellice Islands to Australia Hull would be of paramount importance. In reply to Mr. Fraser, Squadron-Leader Gibson said there was no doubt about the sovereignty of Hull at the moment as far as he knew.
25. SIR HARRY LUKE said that colonisation had been commenced there. The United States had objected but the colonisation was going on in spite of this.
26. SQUADRON-LEADER GIBSON said that the blasting at Hull would not be a much bigger job than that at Christmas, except that there were big heads to be blasted at Hull, whereas at Christmas it was solid reefs. More survey work was needed at all these Islands before actual construction could be commenced.

27. It was agreed that it would be advisable to proceed with the preparation of Nukunono and Samoa simultaneously for survey flights, and that the need for Hull as an alternative should be recorded. It was considered that the colonization at present in process in Hull Island adequately established British Sovereignty therein.
28. The next point discussed was the refusal of the American Government to permit the landing of 'planes at Honolulu, allegedly for reasons of defence. It was suggested that the reasons for the refusal had never been definitely stated by the United States Government and that possibly there was a fear that if permission was given to a British air service, a similar request would be made from Japan, in which case questions of defence would undoubtedly be involved. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE suggested that possibly the United Kingdom Government could ask the United States Government just what the objections were.
29. It was pointed out by Captain Johnston that a route through Canada must necessarily go through Honolulu or one of the Hawaiian Islands, and it was suggested that this matter might be the subject of a conference between the four Powers concerned.
30. THE CHAIRMAN said that he considered that it should be placed on record that all the Delegations would strongly support efforts to call a four-power conference in regard to Pacific air routes.
31. SIR HARRY LUKE suggested that the Committee place on record its dislike of the Noumea-Brisbane proposal.
- THE HON. MR. FRASER said that could be discussed the following day.
- CAPTAIN JOHNSTON said they had covered the aspect of the route they would like to fly. He presumed the Committee would continue on the following day to discuss what action should be taken amongst the Governments to achieve that end.
- THE HON. MR. FRASER agreed and said that any suggestions would be welcomed.
- The Committee adjourned at 5.30 p.m. until 10 a.m. on Tuesday, 18th April.