

D.C.S. 3

FINAL EDITION.

Copy No. 49

19th April, 1939.

DEFENCE CONFERENCE, 1939.

It is requested that special care may be taken to ensure
the secrecy of this document.

SECRET.

NOTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE THIRD DAY OF MEETING OF
THE DEFENCE CONFERENCE HELD ON THE 17th APRIL, 1939.

PRESENT:

NEW ZEALAND.

Delegates:

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.C., 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.
Squadron Leader E.A. Gibson.

Secretariat:

Lt.-Col. W.G. Stevens
Lt.-Commander T. Ellis, R.N.
Captain D.T. Maxwell, N.Z.S.C.
Squadron-Leader 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.
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
Major A.H. Stafford

UNITED KINGDOM:Advisers (contd.)

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:

Colonel V.A.H. Sturdee, C.B.E., D.S.O.
Wing-Commander G. Jones, D.F.C., R.A.A.F.

Adviser: Commander J.C.D. Esdaile R.A.N.

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

1. The Conference having re-assembled at 10 a.m., the meeting commenced by a discussion as to the machinery for reporting the Conference. It was decided that the Notes of Proceedings should constitute the official record, the verbatim report being destroyed on the termination of the Conference.
2. After the business of nominating the personnel of the committees had been concluded, GENERAL MACKESY made the following statement regarding Items (c) and (d) of the agenda -
"I would invite the attention of the Conference to a paper before us, United Kingdom Chiefs of Staffs Paper No. 832. The portion of that Paper of which I propose to think aloud is Part III, commencing on page 8 - - New Zealand's co-operation in Imperial Defence. My excuse for doing so is, I think, this, that the committee will have to adopt certain conclusions on Item (c) on your agenda and possibly some general discussion now might be of assistance to you.
3. The first point on which I might invite attention is paragraph 24 of that Paper. I am speaking now not as a soldier, but as a taxpayer in the United Kingdom, and I feel that that paragraph is put with extraordinary moderation. The strain on the people of the United Kingdom, the financial strain, and the strain on the man-power is getting very severe. I was almost tempted to use the word "unbearable" but of course nothing is unbearable. I think that that paragraph states the position with what I can only describe as astounding moderation.

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Then we go on a little to Page 12 headed "Army". These suggestions, I think I am right, were put forward by the Chiefs of Staffs in the United Kingdom to comply with the request made by the New Zealand Government. I think it quite clear that they are not in any way an attempt to dictate to the Government of New Zealand as to what they should do. They merely put in simple language some of the things that might be done from the army point of view if they wished, and I do hope that in anything I say I will not convey the impression that I am presuming in any way to say what should be done. I just wished to explain."

5.

In paragraph 38 we find these words:-

"Any addition, therefore, which New Zealand found it possible to make for a peace-time garrison at Singapore would add appreciably to the security of the base."

6.

Now one reads very often about some defensive position, and I think one reads it chiefly perhaps in regard to the Maginot Line in France, the word "impregnable". The word "impregnable" means exactly nothing. Nothing is impregnable. One does one's best to make a defensive line secure. One hopes that one has succeeded but no one can predict the outcome of any battle on land or at sea or in the air. One can only do what is possible and what one thinks is best but no one can predict the outcome. The fate of a battle is the question of a single moment, a single thought. The smallest reserve force settles the matter - it is the one drop of water which makes the vessel run over. My point is that although one hopes Singapore is safe - everything possible is done to make it safe - no human being can predict the outcome of a battle which may take place. Suppose things went wrong. Suppose the United Kingdom suffered an initial reverse in the European theatre. Suppose that by some new method of attack - surprise in method is just as possible as surprise in the tactical or strategical sphere - Singapore went, what would be the position in these waters then? I think the inevitable conclusion one is driven to is this - that if

Singapore went then New Zealand would be open to the very highest form of attack, even to invasion. It is impossible to over-emphasise the importance of Singapore.

7. Now in the nature of things the United Kingdom is driven to rely to a considerable extent for the security of Singapore on Indian troops. It is inevitable. It is believed to be satisfactory, yet one cannot help feeling that any stiffening by troops of our own Nation would solve some of our anxieties.
8. In this Paper, in paragraph 39, certain tentative suggestions are put forward as to what New Zealand might do should New Zealand wish to do anything. The two suggestions put forward here are an anti-aircraft regiment or taking over the Changi Fire Command. In both cases it amounts to much the same. The figure for one is twenty-five officers and 589 other ranks. The Changi Fire Command is about forty officers and 782 other ranks.
9. Now although those two suggestions are put forward it is quite clear that both of them might present considerable difficulty in the training of personnel. The Changi Fire Command, for instance, includes guns from fifteen-inch guns downwards. The matter of training personnel appears to me at first sight to present great difficulties. So also does the training of a British anti-aircraft regiment. But there are other possibilities. I do not think I will waste your time by touching on every one but I will just suggest one possibility to show that we are not rigidly tied by these two suggestions in the Chiefs of Staff Paper. One of the most important factors in the defence of Singapore is beach defence. There are many miles of beach upon which a landing is possible and those beaches have to be protected by troops armed in the main with eighteen-pounder field guns on beach defence mountings, machine guns and a certain number of lighters. The training of a unit of that sort might be very much easier than the training of one of these units suggested in this Paper. It is a task of the

first importance. It is a task I think which gives scope for the initiative and skill and self-reliance of smaller sub-units which, if I may say so, your troops in New Zealand can be relied upon to show in a very high degree. I think, Mr. Chairman, if we could get some thought on this it would be a great help to the Committee which has to deal with the conclusions on paragraph (c).

10. Mr. FRASER enquired as to what force would be required.
11. GENERAL MACKESY replied that it could be flexible and suggested something in the neighbourhood of five hundred trained men who should be stationed at Singapore in time of peace.
12. MR. NASH said that he considered that there was a lot to be said for New Zealand doing something in defence measures overseas from the point of view of achieving the defence of the actual territory of New Zealand, but there were political difficulties involved, for instance, the possibility of troops sent overseas being required to deal with local civil unrest or rebellion.
13. He also said that should New Zealand troops replace the troops already garrisoning Singapore that did not mean that the garrison would be strengthened.
14. GENERAL MACKESY pointed out to Mr. Nash that the suggestion to which he (Mr. Nash) referred, in C.O.S. 832, was only an alternative. The suggestion which he (General Mackesy) had made (a beach defence unit) would be a definite addition to the existing garrison at Singapore.
15. CAPTAIN E.C. JOHNSTON, representing the Civil Aviation Department, Australia, joined the Conference on resuming at 11.15 a.m., and was welcomed by the Chairman.
16. GENERAL DUIGAN said that he would like to mention one point in regard to General Mackesy's statement and that was that the security of Singapore is of paramount importance to New Zealand, for if it goes, the scale of attack against this country goes up.

17.

MR. JONES referred to the question of the responsibility of the Dominions and the accepted principle that each were responsible for their own defence. While anxious to assist he said, there would be difficulties in sending such a force overseas in peace-time. Another question was the responsibility of other portions of the Empire, such as Australia, Canada, or South Africa in respect of defence beyond their own shores. Mr. Jones said that in New Zealand we are not adequately protected and much remained to be done in building up the Air Force. We have only a small land force and it required a large amount of equipment. The Navy was reasonably efficient, but whether it was adequate was another matter. He considered that if New Zealand's measures for her own defence made her reasonably safe that would give much satisfaction to the Old Country. Taking into account our commitments with the three Services, it was a question whether we could at the present time send a force of five hundred overseas, at a cost of something like £150,000. It is a question of policy, and a question of our ability to do what has been suggested in the Chiefs of Staffs Paper.

18.

MR. SULLIVAN said that he would like to have a view on the degree of necessity involved. Could General Mackesy tell us whether the element of great or overwhelming necessity enters into consideration of the question of the reinforcement of Singapore by European troops.

19.

GENERAL MACKESY replied that he found it very difficult to go beyond the words used by the Chiefs of Staff in this Paper that has been referred to: "Any addition which New Zealand found it possible to make to the peace-time garrison at Singapore would add appreciably to the security of the base."

20.

MR. ASHWIN asked if it were not putting the cart before the horse to concentrate on providing one well trained battalion without providing a certain minimum well trained force in New Zealand. Would not a reasonably well trained force in New Zealand be a better contribution in time of emergency than having one efficient battalion abroad.

21. GENERAL MACKESY replied that if New Zealand has a unit at Singapore, then the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff would no doubt advise that there must be a suitable force in this country for relief and training.
22. MR NASH asked had not the discussion resolved itself into what was the best way to defend New Zealand.
- GENERAL MACKESY replied that he believed the essential for the eventual security of New Zealand is Singapore and if Singapore goes the defence of New Zealand would become a matter of the utmost difficulty.
23. COMMODORE HORAN suggested that the defence of New Zealand is the defence of New Zealand trade and not so much the defence of the Coast line.
24. COLONEL STURDEE outlined what was being done in Australia in the same direction. Colonel Sturdee said that while not knowing the intentions of his Government with regard to reinforcing Singapore or elsewhere, it had just been decided to raise a regular Field Artillery Brigade and two Regular Rifle Battalions. This force is the beginnings of a very much larger force consisting of two mixed brigades and some detached battalions but that is in the future. The force will have a peace establishment of about 7,000 men and a war establishment of about 10,000. This force gives the Government the ability, if the situation becomes necessary, to reinforce other parts.
- In reply to Mr Sullivan, Colonel Sturdee said that he could not say what the Government intended to do, though at the moment they would be used purely for local defence.
25. MR JONES asked if it was known how long it would take before the Japanese would attack Singapore. It was understood that Hong Kong would have to be captured first.
26. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE replied that it was only guesswork. Hong Kong would probably be invested and the use of it denied to the British Naval Forces, but its actual capture was not essential before operations could be started by the Japanese against Singapore.

In reply to Mr. Jones SER ARTHUR LONGMORE said that the attack on Singapore might be the first indication that war had broken out, but on the other hand the Japanese might delay to establish a base in Borneo. It was guesswork to give a definite answer.

27. The Conference then proceeded with Item (g) "The Possible Effect of German demands for Mandated Territory" D.C.5.

28. MR. BERENDSEN outlined what steps have been taken for the defence of Samoa. While small they are in the opinion of the Chiefs of Staff in New Zealand quite adequate. The administration has been authorised to raise a force of 600 ultimately and in the meantime a force of 150 men is being raised. Mr. Berendsen enumerated the equipment, weapons and ammunition held at Samoa and stated that in the opinion of the Chiefs of Staff the force of 150 with its existing arms was adequate to repel a raid of the scale likely to be made. All the inhabited New Zealand Islands, including the Mandated Territory of Samoa and the Union Group, with the exception of two small unimportant islands, are in wireless touch with Wellington either directly or indirectly, and the wireless network is, it is understood, made full use of by the Naval authorities. It is not considered that Samoa presents any particular problem to us at all.

29. COLONEL STURDEE said that as far as the Mandated Territory is concerned in relation to a German demand, the problem would be very much less than if Japan were at war. It should be considered from the point of view of a war with Japan.

After a general discussion concerning the Mandated Territories it was accepted that the conclusions in paragraph 12, Item (g) of the New Zealand Paper D.C.5 be generally agreed upon.

Before proceeding with the items on Supply, COLONEL STEVENS pointed out that it had not been decided whether the main agenda should be discussed in general with the full Conference.

30. MR. FRASER asked for the views of the Conference.
31. MR. SULLIVAN said there were two aspects, the organisation of our own internal supplies and the shipping question upon which depended the trade of the country. In putting the question to Admiral Colvin earlier in the Conference as to whether we could get our ships through both ways, said Mr. Sullivan, it was gathered that we could with some losses, and that is a most important aspect of the matter.
32. COMMODORE HORAN said that a study of paper D.C.6 giving an analysis of the trade figures with regard to the United Kingdom and this country, showed how vitally important it is. In reply to Mr. Sullivan Commodore Horan said that so long as they were not sunk or taken away to some other area, we would have the ships to carry on.
33. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE considered that (b) (11) was linked up with (h) and suggested dealing with these supply problems on the assumption that there would be a certain interruption to trade.
34. MR. JONES asked if any indication could be given as to an easing of the situation with regard to supply of equipment from overseas. Mr. Jones said that orders for the supply of equipment had been made two or three years ago.
35. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE replied that that was distinct from the item on the agenda which refers to "Sources of supply of equipment after the outbreak of war." Those problems ought to be taken up separately and would have to be investigated by the machinery which existed to deal with these matters. Information on this subject should be available in the Departments concerned as to the prospects of obtaining delivery of overdue supplies, but it does not affect this item of the agenda.

36. In reply to Mr. Sullivan, MR. SCHMITT said that New Zealand will depend very largely after the outbreak of war for a number of semi-manufactured materials and raw materials. These matters would be dealt with in Committee said Mr. Schmitt, but consideration of laying up a six months supply of certain raw and semi-manufactured goods which are essential is now being made. It was explained by Mr. Schmitt that to keep industries going we require approximately 80% of either raw material or semi-manufactured material from overseas. After outlining what was aimed at with regard to reserves of material, supply of raw material, and service equipment for primary production, Mr. Schmitt expressed the view that the United Kingdom Delegates may be able to give an idea as to the extent the United Kingdom may be looking to New Zealand for supplies in war.

37. MR. FRASER said that this matter was pre-eminently a Committee one. There were certain differences however in the problem as it effected Australia and as it effected New Zealand. Mr. Fraser said he was sure everyone agreed that everything possible must be done to ensure that the trade of the whole Commonwealth goes on as uninterruptedly as circumstances will allow.

The Chairman then called for any comments on Part 2 of the Agenda, viz., Supply Problems.

38. MR. SULLIVAN asked the following questions:-

- (1) Can we depend on sending supplies overseas?
- (2) Can we depend on obtaining supplies to maintain essential industries?

39. COMMODORE HORAN suggested that it was essential that trade be fully maintained to preserve the well-being of the country, but as losses might occur the necessary shipping might not be available.

41. THE HON. MR. JONES asked whether supplies would be available for an armed force from New Zealand, if, owing to lack of materials, the necessary supplies were not available before that force left New Zealand.
42. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE stated that he could not reply to that question without reference to his Government.
43. MR. SCHMITT indicated that for New Zealand to be able to continue to supply certain requirements of the armed services some materials must be made available from Australia after the outbreak of war. At the present time the Supply Committee operating in New Zealand based all questions of supply on the possibility of a six months' interruption to shipping facilities. After that period it would be essential to have ships for transport of essential materials to and from New Zealand.
44. He then asked for an indication of the extent to which the United Kingdom would rely upon New Zealand for supplies of foodstuffs, etc.
45. THE HON. MR. FRASER stated that New Zealand was self-supporting only to a limited extent. It could provide the essentials of life such as food and clothing, but it had not the large range and variety of production that Australia had. After the outbreak of war there would be no possibility of the country commencing production of commodities such as iron and steel.
46. THE HON. MR. NASH stated that New Zealand was creating reserves on the basis of a six months' hold-up to facilitate supplies for the civil community and for overseas armed services, including foodstuffs and war materials, and gave specific instances.
47. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE said that we must expect severe dislocation of trade at the outbreak of war, and explained his reasons therefor.
48. THE HON. MR. NASH raised the problem of the effect on primary industries if the supplies of phosphate rock were seriously dislocated. In the general discussion, it was

pointed out that present supplies were secured from Ocean Island and Nauru Island, and these Islands were within four hundred miles of the nearest Japanese possession.

49. THE HON. MR. JONES raised the question of supplies of fuel for the Navy.
50. COMMODORE HORAN replied that an organisation was in force to create the necessary supplies.
51. COMMANDER ESDAILE on behalf of the Australian Delegation, stated that they were providing oil according to the Admiralty plan.
52. COMMODORE HORAN, when asked a question on oil supplies in New Zealand, stated that at present we had storage capacity for 14,000 tons; in June there would be storage capacity for 26,000 tons; and when a new tank was completed at Kaiwarra (Wellington) there would be a storage capacity for 38,000 tons.
- When asked how long this would suffice for naval activities, he stated that a cruiser normally uses 18,000 tons per annum.
- He stated further that there was a tankage capacity at Fiji for 4,000 tons, and suggested that some arrangement might be made to create a reserve in an island in the French possessions.
53. PAYMASTER-COMMANDER TOTTENHAM stated that the reserve in Fiji is normally 1,000 tons, with an additional 1,000 tons for normal consumption.
54. THE HON. MR. NASH suggested that some arrangement should be made to obtain fertiliser supplies from New Caledonia to avoid being completely cut off from supplies in war.
55. MR. BERENDSEN outlined the proposals of the Phosphate Commission to create reserves of phosphate rock, and stated that steps were being taken to have this reserve supply shipped. This, however, was a long process, and we would certainly be caught short if any untoward developments occurred in the near future.
56. MR. SCHMITT stated that similar arrangements were being made for reserve supplies to be sent to Australia.

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Singapore went then New Zealand would be open to the very highest form of attack, even to invasion. It is impossible to over-emphasise the importance of Singapore.

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GENERAL MACKESY replied that he found it very difficult to go beyond the words used by the Chiefs of Staff in this Paper that has been referred to: "Any addition which New Zealand found it possible to make to the peace-time garrison at Singapore would add appreciably to the security of the base."

20.

MR. ASHWIN asked if it were not putting the cart before the horse to concentrate on providing one well trained battalion without providing a certain minimum well trained force in New Zealand. Would not a reasonably well trained force in New Zealand be a better contribution in time of emergency than having one efficient battalion abroad.

57. The Committee then turned its attention to Item 3 of the Agenda -- the Trans-Pacific Air Routes, and the United States of America activities in the Pacific - (Paper D.C.7.)
58. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE suggested that this matter should first be dealt with by the appropriate committee, but the Deputy Chairman considered it advisable to obtain the general views of the Conference in the first instance.
59. MR. FRASER desired to know if the United Kingdom and Australian Governments were still as enthusiastic in regard to a British-American air route across the Pacific as they were at the last Pacific Air Route Conference.
60. MR. NASH considered that discussion was necessary regarding agreements made by the four countries concerned in Pacific air routes, i.e., the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America (and possibly Canada), and also regarding the possession of islands and all the other details that will require attention before the establishment of air bases.
61. MR. JONES stated that what we are concerned about is how soon the Air Service will be established in the Pacific. Mr. Bertram predicted two or three years. It looks to be as far off today as it was three years ago and does open up the question of reciprocal landing rights with America. All the negotiations that have gone on have been with the New Zealand Government dealing with a private company. That was not our fault, it was dealt with before we came into office, but if we gave away certain landing rights in America, we would be getting the worst of the bargain. The United States Government are leaving it to the company to negotiate and they are not involved at all in regard to these reciprocal landing rights.
62. MR. NASH said the general strategy of our project from a negotiational point of view is for the purpose of getting the right to land in Honolulu, and the use of American air bases, and in return to give United States of America certain rights for landing at Fiji. We really have Honolulu in mind as a

"hopping off" place in Canada. It would be possible to go through Honolulu to San Francisco and then go up the coast to Vancouver or Victoria. We had in mind in all the negotiations that we have had, that if we did give them reciprocal landing rights in Auckland and Fiji, we wanted the same right to go to Honolulu and, if necessary, San Francisco.

If we had not the right to go to Honolulu, we feel that we should have the right to go to Fanning Island or to Christmas Island and then to San Francisco, if they did not want us to go to Honolulu because of Pearl Harbour. If they are willing for us to do that we were willing to provide facilities for them, but not unless. Although we have the right to cancel the facilities in the present agreement that is not worth much, because it cuts us off from the United States just as much as they are cut off from us. We really want to control completely the Tasman because it is a British sphere. We do not want any overseas country to come into that area at all. We wanted a reciprocal arrangement as between Auckland, Fiji and Christmas Island, or Honolulu, San Francisco and Victoria, and we were willing to give the United States reciprocity to the extent that they wanted to use our aerodromes or facilities.

63. SIR HARRY BATTERFEE said that there was no doubt in the minds of the United Kingdom delegations that the objective to be aimed at was the establishment of a British commonwealth service across the Pacific should be established as soon as possible, such a service to operate in co-operation with the United States of America, but there were difficulties of procedure and method to be overcome. This might best be thrashed out by the committee for the Air section of the Agenda.

64. CAPTAIN JOHNSTON said that although we are all in agreement as to the advisability of a British service running right through the Pacific, if this was going to take a considerable time to establish, he advocated the adoption of the Australian proposal of having the British interests on the southern end and the

American interests on the northern end of a Pacific air route. This proposal was intended only as an interim measure that could be implemented promptly and even without United States of America's permission to use Hawaii. He also stressed that continued permission to land in New Zealand and/or Australia was just as vital to United States of America as was permission to use Hawaii to British interests. He suggested that the United Kingdom delegation should give an estimate as to the length of time that would elapse before suitable machines were available for a Pacific service.

SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE replied that he would prefer to examine this question in committee.

65. MR. FRASER stated that Pan-American Airways had abandoned the idea of establishing a base at Noumea.

66. The Chairman, after issuing a warning as to the possibility of misconstruing certain paragraphs in Squadron Leader Gibson's report, then dealt with -

- (1) Press Statement.
- (2) Arrangements for Meetings of Committees on Supply and Trans-Pacific Air Routes.

The Conference adjourned sine die at 12.40 p.m.
