

PREFACE

1. The following report on the administration of prisoners of war and internees in Australia, during World War II, has been prepared by direction of the Adjutant-General, Australian Military Forces, and is drawn up, as far as practicable, in a form suitable for the following purposes: -

- (a) As a complete historical review as required by Staff duties (Military History Section),
- (b) As a basis for study by students of Staff Schools, and
- (c) As a guide to those who may be concerned, during any future hostilities, with the administration of prisoners of war and / or internees.

2. It was apparent from the commencement of hostilities that lack of experience or precedent in the handling of prisoners of war and internees, and the absence of appropriate standing orders, would create many difficult problems of administration. Experience during the early stages of the war emphasised the utmost necessity for prior planning and the early determination of a firm policy on all major aspects of this problem. This would enable immediate implementation of an established plan without the necessity for repeated alterations and revision of instructions by which authority could to some extent be undermined.

3. It is most important to understand the basis of PW and internee administration in Australia during World War II. Upon the recommendation of the Dept of the Army, the Commonwealth Government, promulgated sets of National Security Regulations which actually interpreted and implemented the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to PW, to which Convention the commonwealth was a ratified signatory. This made the convention the basis of administration and whilst it led to some degree of inflexibility, it had the immense advantage of fixing a definite uniform and sound policy. When at times, the public and political agitation threatened some aspect of PW and internee administration, the defence was that action had been in accordance with National Security Regulations based on the Convention. With a few unimportant exceptions that defence was adequate and effective throughout the war. Without such defence, the administration and treatment of PW would inevitably have been subjected to most undesirable pressure from public and political opinion which fluctuated according to the fortune of war. Throughout the war the Directorate endeavoured to conduct PW and internee administration with firmness, fairness and consistent observance of the principles adopted by the Commonwealth i.e. the provisions of the Geneva Convention.

4. Conditions under future conflicts will no doubt differ to some considerable extent from those existing during the period under review, and few, if any, prisoners or internees may be held owing to the nature of hostilities. It is felt, however, that the principles outlined in this report will not vary to any appreciable extent, and officers who may be charged with the onerous task of prisoners of war and internee administration should therefore benefit greatly by its existence.

5. In an effort to provide a useful documentary record, practical aspects of the problem have been included in addition to general policy matters. All Commands concerned in administration of prisoners of war and internees under the Director of Prisoners of War and Internees (DPW & I), were given the opportunity to submit detailed reports and much useful information obtained in this manner is incorporated in the report. Recommendations have been made by Group and Camp Commandants concerning the construction of prisoner of war and internment camps, and practical suggestions have been made for the guidance of officers who may be later concerned with the establishment and control of any such camps.