

CHAPTER 9

OFFICIAL VISITORS TO INTERNMENT CAMPS

POLICY.

1. In accordance with policy adopted during the First World War, action was taken to incorporate in National Security (Internment Camps) Regulations necessary authority for the appointment of Official Visitors to Internment Camps in Australia. Regulation 9(1) of these Regulations reads: -

“The Minister may appoint in respect of each internment camp one or more persons, to be known as “Official Visitors”, who shall visit the camp periodically.”

2. Chief consideration in favour of these appointments were:-

- (a) As internees of both sexes were civilians placed in military custody for reasons of national security and not for punishment, their conditions of internment should be reviewed by civilians.
- (b) As internees were apprehended for detention without regard to their convenience or private circumstances, they should be afforded some assistance in attention to problems resulting from their sudden removal from civilian life.
- (c) In the interests of Australian and other British subjects interned by the enemy, reasonable standards of accommodation and treatment should be assured enemy subjects interned in Australia, thus avoiding retaliatory action by the enemy.
- (d) Regular inspections of internment camps by Official Visitors provided those responsible for custody of the internees with defence against illfounded complaints concerning treatment and also provided a channel of appeal for the internees them-selves.

APPOINTMENTS

In order that internees could not protest against the type of appointees, gentlemen of high standing in the community, and of undoubted integrity, were chosen to act as Official Visitors. The following is a list of appointees during the existence of internment camps in Australia : -

<u>STATE</u>	<u>CAMPS VISITED</u>	<u>APPOINTEES</u>
Queensland	Gaythorne	The Hon Mr Justice Neal Macrossan – Senior Puisne Judge of the Queensland Supreme Court
New South Wales	Liverpool Hay Cowra	(1) The Hon Sir Frederick Jordan – Chief Justice of New South Wales. (2) The Hon Mr Justice C. Davidson – Puisne Judge Of the Supreme Court of New South Wales.

Assistants

		(i)	Dr H.O. Lethbridge, O.B.E.
		(2)	The Hon Mr Justice A.K. a 'Beckett Terrell – Judge of appeal of the Supreme Court of Malaya.
Victoria	Tatura Group	(1)	The Hon Mr Justice Norman O'Bryan – Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of Victoria.
		(2)	The Hon Mr Justice Gavan Duffy – Puisne Judge of The Supreme Court of Victoria.

Assistants

		(1)	Sir Kenneth Beatty – Former Chief Justice of Gibraltar.
		(2)	Sir Llewellyn Dalton K.B.
South Australia	Loveday Group	(1)	Mr K.F. Sanderson S.M.
		(3)	Mr W.V. Ray S.M.
Western Australia	Parkeston Harvey	(1)	The Hon Mr Justice A.A. Wolff – 3 rd Puisne Judge of The Supreme Court of Western Australia.
		(2)	Mr W.J. Wallwork P.M.

4. Each of these appointments was voluntary undertaken with the concurrence of the State Government concerned and no charge was made by that Government for the Official Visitor's Services. Although appointments meant the acceptance of many onerous duties the appointees, accepted the responsibility gladly as a contribution to the war effort, and received no compensation except the reimbursement of normal travelling expenses. Where the services of clerical assistant were used a small additional allowance was made to cover reasonable costs.

FUNCTIONS

5. The duties and functions of the Official Visitors were as set out in Regulation 9 of National Security (Internment Camps) Regulations. They visited camps at regular intervals (usually once a month) and received from internees any petitions or complaints they desired to make concerning treatment received at the camp and conditions of internment, after reports were submitted by the Visitors to the Military Board (later to the Adjutant-General) concerning such matters.

6. To facilitate procedure and avoid waste of time, Official Visitors discussed with Camp Commandants the various matters brought up by the internees during visits and in this way were able, in many cases, to clear up problem on the spot. Under procedure laid down copies of the Visitor's reports were forwarded direct to the L of C or Command HQ Controlling the camps visited and the duty of those HQ was to investigate the matters raised therein, to take any necessary action including reference to AHQ and then furnish replies to the Official Visitors. Copies of these replies were forwarded to AHQ.

DIRECTORATE ACTION

7. Action by the Directorate of Prisoners of War and Internees was as follows: -

- (a) Upon receipt of an original report this was perused to ascertain whether any urgent action was necessary or whether Command HQ concerned should be informed of the lines upon which any particular problem should be dealt with.
- (b) A written acknowledgement of the reports was then despatched to the Official Visitor informing them that a reply to the petitions and complaints raised therein would be furnished by the Command HQ concerned.
- (c) On receipt of a copy of the reply furnished by the Command HQ to the Official Visitor, a detailed minute was prepared for the Minister, forwarding the report and stating action taken on each matter raised.
- (d) The only remaining action was to follow up items not properly finalised, or upon which the Minister desired further information, and then to render a final report as soon as practicable.

8. The many and varied complaints made by internees were often a source of annoyance to officers handling these reports as internees were inclined at times to exploit the nuisance value of petty or unfounded grievances and many insisted on repeating the same complaint again and again although all possible action had been taken. Generally, however, the system proved a most valuable one, and the constant care and attention given to petitions and complaints left little to be desired. The Official Visitors used considerable tact and discretion and at all times maintained cordial relations with the internees and the Camp Commandants.

9. To avoid complaints that internees were not free to correspond at will with the Official Visitors or to discuss complaints in private, standard instructions were laid down concerning these matters. These are contained in a memorandum dated 10 Nov 43 concerning conditions governing visits to Internment Camps, vide Appendix 3. It will be observed that letters from internees to Official Visitors were not subjected to censorship and that during inspection of Compounds they were not accompanied by any military personnel.

10. By adoption of the policy and procedures referred to above, the Commonwealth avoided many embarrassments and possible action against its nationals held by the enemy. Meticulous care was taken at all times to ensure that every matter brought forward by the Official Visitors was followed up until there could be no question of failure on the part of the Military Authorities to carry out the expressed intention of applying the principles of the Geneva Convention to interned civilians. The Director of PW & I exercised personal control over the reports of the Official Visitors at all times and insisted on prompt and careful attention to all problems raised.

11. It is considered highly desirable that this system should be adopted in relation to all internments of civilians and that the care exercised during recent hostilities in selection of appointees as Official Visitors should be a matter for special attention.

12. In conclusion, it is desired to place on record the appreciation of the Department; and of the Directorate in particular, for the valuable services rendered by the Official Visitors in their honorary appointments. Each of them showed abundant possession of the attributes so necessary to the task, namely, geniality, tact and sympathy, combined with good judgement and knowledge of the world and human nature.