

CHAPTER 14

DEATHS OF INTERNEES

1. In accordance with the expressed policy of the United Kingdom to apply to internees, as far as practicable, the provisions of the Prisoners of War Convention of 1929, burials of internees were conducted in the same manner as that prescribed for the burial of personnel of the Defence Forces, particular care being taken to ensure the permanent recording of graves and the recording of burials. Article 76 of the Convention required that prisoners of war who had died in captivity were to be honorably buried and that graves, which should bear the necessary indication, should be treated with respect and suitably maintained.

2. National Security (Internment Camps) Regulations provided (Reg. 46) for the holding of a Coronial Inquiry relative to the death of any internee from any cause other than in pursuance of a sentence of death passed by a competent court, and authorised the Camp Commandant to arrange for the funeral and burial.

3. The actual machinery of burial and the control of graves rested with Graves Registration, but it was necessary for the Directorate to issue certain administrative instructions on this matter to ensure proper handling of evidence and findings of coronial enquiries, proper notification of death, and reimbursement of the costs of burial under certain circumstances.

4. It was also necessary for the Directorate to co-ordinate the various instructions issued by Graves Registration, Second Echelon and the Directorate itself. Under no circumstances could any situation be allowed to exist under which conflicting instructions or the lack of instructions would cause errors in notifications to next-of-kin or failure to notify such next-of-kin of anticipated or actual death. A situation of this nature did in fact occur under which the next-of-kin of an internee was not informed of the serious illness of the internee, and after death some delay took place before appropriate notification was sent. Prompt action was immediately taken to prevent a recurrence of this state of affairs.

5. General instructions issued by "A" Branch (through the Directorate) in November 1944 were promulgated to consolidate the various directions previously issued and covered all aspects of this matter. A copy of these instructions is attached to the report as Appendix. It will be seen that every effort was made in these instructions to ensure proper handling of coronial enquiries, and that reference was made on them to the Records Procedure as laid down by Second Echelon and contained in Records Procedure No. 54. This latter procedure covered all aspects of notifications for both local and overseas internees, and provided for the form of such notifications.

6. It is not proposed to deal very fully with this subject, as the Directorate was not primarily concerned with the actual arrangements for burials, but the following matters of interest are recorded:-

- (a) The Commonwealth Government assumed responsibility for the burial of interned enemy civilians, the erection of wooden crosses and other appropriate memorials, the maintenance of graves and the completion of necessary records. In the case of interned enemy civilians sent to Australia from overseas at the request of other Governments, the Commonwealth reserved the right to recover the cost of such services from Governments concerned.

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- (b) Actual expenses of burial were limited to the following:-
 - (i) Supply and delivery of coffin;
 - (ii) Shroud (if required);
 - (iii) Cemetery fees;
 - (iv) Collection of remains;
 - (v) Use of funeral parlour, if necessary.
 - (c) As prescribed by Regulation 46 (1 B) of National Security (Internment Camps) Regulations, the costs of the funeral and burial of a deceased internee of non-enemy nationality were recoverable from his funds or estate.
 - (d) The question of disposal of the effects of deceased internees is dealt with in ^{PART I} Chapter 15 of this report, concerning the Property of Internees.

7. Because the death of an internee could always be misrepresented as due to ill-treatment by the Detaining Power it is noted that procedure for promptly reporting the death and for openly investigating and stating the cause should be most scrupulously observed. Deaths resulting from factious fights amongst internees are likely to occur if internment is prolonged and can be a serious embarrassment to service authorities as they are invariably followed up by allegations of faulty segregation and oppressive treatment of minorities.