

History of Intelligence Activities in Queensland from September 1939 to September 1945

PART VI INTELLIGENCE AT PRISONER OF WAR AND INTERNMENT CAMPS

The only camp in this Command at which internees, and later Prisoner(s) of War were held was situated at Gaythorne, approximately 7 miles from this Headquarters. So far as internees were concerned, Gaythorne was established as a Staging Camp in which internees could be held until such time as the necessary documentation had been completed, and the internees were then moved to permanent camps situated in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, where they were finally detained. The only exemptions to this were a few isolated cases, where, owing to age or infirmity, it was decided that the individuals had to remain in a warmer climate. For these reasons Gaythorne was not an Internment Camp in the generally accepted sense of the term, and the conditions were much different to those obtaining in the larger camps in the southern States. The practice was to move all internees out of this Command, as directed by Army Headquarters, as soon as possible after they had been arrested.

When the New Guinea campaign commenced, it was intended that any Japanese Prisoners of War would be dealt with in the same manner, but the arrival of the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section (ATIS) in this Command caused a change of policy. As the Prisoners of War arrived at Gaythorne, all interrogations, etc. were conducted by ATIS personnel, and immediately such interrogations were concluded the Prisoners of War were moved to Cowra, New South Wales.

For the above reasons all necessary Intelligence work was performed by I(b), who made periodic visits to the camp. The Interpreter Section attached to the Field Security Police acted as interpreters as and when required. The War Establishment of this camp provided for an Intelligence Officer (Lieutenant) to be allotted only when 2500-500 internees were in the camp. It also provided that an interpreter would be attached if required. As the internees held at Gaythorne fell below the above number an Intelligence Officer could not be allotted, and, because of the arrangements set out above, an interpreter was deemed unnecessary. In 1943 when the number of Japanese Prisoners of War being held in this camp increased, General Staff (Intelligence) arranged that a Japanese linguist be attached as interpreter, and a NCO was appointed to work under the direction of I(b). When the number of Prisoners of War had passed 250, General Staff (Intelligence) recommended the appointment of an Intelligence Officer at the camp and a suitable officer was provided by the Director of Military Intelligence. The officer appointed performed all Intelligence duties at the Camp, assisted by the NCO referred to above, an NCO of ATIS, and two Italian interpreters attached to the camp. Commencing late in 1943, nine Prisoner of War Control Centres were established in this Command to control groups of Italian Prisoners of War who were employed individually on orchard and other rural work. The Intelligence Officer referred to also performed all necessary Intelligence duties in relation to such Centres.

General Staff (Intelligence) was responsible for advising the Camp Commandant on all questions relating to security of the camp area, censorship, interrogation of internees, searches, compilation of dossiers and any other documents regarding the internees. With regard to the latter such dossiers normally contained only the basic details of the internee and were forwarded to the Internment Camp where the internee was to be held finally.

Duties of Intelligence Personnel

The duties of Intelligence personnel at the camp may be briefly summarised as follows:-

- (a) Examination of Prisoner of War and Internee correspondence;
- (b) Control of Photography;
- (c) Checking prohibited possessions;
- (d) Attendance at roll calls for the purpose of identifying personnel;
- (e) Checking routine of working parties;
- (f) Searching the quarters and belongings of Prisoners of War and Internees at varying intervals;
- (g) Keeping the camp area under close observation for any unusual changes in the ground surface;
- (h) Checking the efficiency of guards, and reporting any lack of security;
- (i) Observing methods of intercommunication between compounds, or individual Prisoner of War and internees;
- (j) Checking interviews with visitors;
- (k) Checking trafficking and contact with camp personnel;
- (l) Compilation of dossiers;
- (m) Preparation of Weekly Intelligence Report;
- (n) Liaison with Unit Security Officer and checking security of camp personnel;
- (o) Recommendations to Camp Commandant in relation to any additional security controls required.

Field Security personnel visited the camp, and Control Centres at regular intervals and checked the security measures adopted. A check was also made to ascertain whether the requirements of National Security (Internment Camp) Regulations and the Orders made by the Adjutant-General under such regulations were being fully complied with.

Dossiers

The dossier of a Prisoner of War or internee was regarded as a History Sheet, and normally contained all items of interest relating to his:-

- (a) Record prior to internment (if available);
- (b) Associates in the camp and outside;
- (c) Names and addresses of his correspondence;
- (d) Suitability for work, and the type of work preferred;
- (e) Punishments (if any) with summary of charges;
- (f) Medical history;
- (g) Habits, character and potentialities;
- (h) Capabilities as a leader;
- (i) Extracts from correspondence;
- (j) A character sketch compiled by the Intelligence Officer personally;
- (k) A copy of his basic documents.

All entries in the dossier concerning the character of a Prisoner of War or Internee were supported by a brief account of the incident or facts on which the entry was based, and was signed by the officer making the entry. An Interpreter's report or opinion was followed by the Intelligence Officer's comments. One of the main purposes of the dossier was to enable the Intelligence Officer to make an intelligent deduction from its contents, which deduction could be placed before the Camp Commandant without delay, if and when required.

The compilation of the dossier was a continuous process throughout the period of internment, and, as far as possible, the subjects mentioned in the preceding paragraph received attention by the Intelligence Officer. However, as stated above, the majority Prisoner of War and Internees were not held at Gaythorne for a sufficient length of time to enable the Intelligence Officer to complete the dossier.

Escape Prevention and Recovery of Escapees

There were only two instances of escape from the Gaythorne Camp. Late in 1939 (see 1939), one German internee escaped and in early 1940 (see 1940), two German internees got away. It is of interest to note that the first man was recaptured two days later by means of a message circulated by I(b) through a contact in the German community, and the others were recaptured by General Staff (Intelligence) through reports obtained from its own sources.

In the event of an individual escape the Guard Company was immediately turned out and all sentry posts doubled; lights were turned on; all internees were mustered and rolls checked; and I(b) assisted in making a thorough inspection of the quarters and camp area, and interrogated the escapee's associates. The Civil Police and Security Service were informed immediately, and General Staff (Intelligence) arranged for a full description and photograph of the escapee to be circulated to all police stations, through the Commissioner of Police, who was also given all information available regarding the escapee and his known contacts. Similar particulars were forwarded to detached Intelligence Officers and Military Reporting Officers (see Pt 8) in the locality where it was suspected the escapee might intend to hide. In addition, the District Censor was requested to secretly examine the mail of all relatives and known contacts of the escapee. When Japanese Prisoners of War were being held in the camp it was arranged that a platoon of a Works Company in an adjoining camp should stand by and be available to reinforce the guard.