

## CHAPTER 10.

### CORRESPONDENCE OF INTERNEES

1. This subject can be most conveniently dealt with under two main sections, viz: Outward mail from internees and Inward mail addressed to internees.

#### SECTION A

#### OUTWARDS MAILS AND PARCELS FROM INTERNEES.

##### Numbers of letters permitted

2. Normally, each internee was allowed to send two letters or postcards in each week (vide Regulation 31(1)) and to despatch parcels only in cases where permission had been granted by his Camp Commandant (Vide Regulation 30). It was found necessary, however, to make various concessions to internees of various classes and nationalities and these will be dealt with in the present Chapter. Cable and wireless communication overseas, either direct or through third parties, were prohibited except that overseas internees could be authorised to send telegrams by cable or wireless making application for, or representations regard, release or regarding urgent private affairs (vide Regulation 31(3)). No limit was placed on the number of postcards sent by an internee acknowledging receipt of parcels, books, music and other gifts received by him.

##### Requirements as to length of letters, subject matter etc.

3. It was expressly provided, in Internment Camp Order No.10 (para 27) that letters from internees would not exceed 23 lines of writing on one side only of the paper, except in special circumstances, and then only with the permission of the Camp Commandant. Other requirements concerning the language to be used, restrictions on subject matter and the use of ciphers, etc., are set out clearly in the Internment Camp Order referred to.

##### Types of stationery to be used.

4. Authorised writing paper for the use of internees was the "notelope" a combined paper and envelope with a specially glazed surface to prevent use of secret inks or markings. Supplies of these were forwarded to Camps, as required, by HQ's Commands concerned.

5. In any cases where supplies of notelopes were not available, internees were permitted to use the following (vide para 26 of Internment Camp Order No.10) :-

- (a) Plain white glazed paper, not exceeding in size 10 inches by 8 inches and plain white envelopes, and
- (b) Thin white glazed postcards.

##### Correspondence not permitted.

6. As mentioned in paragraph 2 of this Chapter, cable or wireless communications overseas were not permitted except in certain circumstances. The concession granted to internees from overseas were found necessary after the receipt in 1940, shortly after arrival in Australia of internees from the United Kingdom, of large numbers of "Reply-paid" cablegrams and wireless messages addressed either to the internees or to the Prisoners of War Information Bureau. It was first suggested to the Government of the United Kingdom that the practice of sending any such communications should be discouraged in the interests of security, but the Government made a request for the amendment of the then existing Regulations to permit despatch of this type of message by overseas internees. In making this request, the United Kingdom authorities stated that their censorship authorities would assume full responsibility provided each telegram commenced with the words "Internees' Telegram." After consultation with the Censorship Authorities in Australia, the necessary amendment was gazetted in 1941.

7. To prevent despatch of any unauthorised communication lodged by a third party on behalf of an internee, provision was made for approval for the despatch of any cable or wireless communication of this nature to be given by the Adjutant-General or the Commander of a Lines of Communication Area.

8. Other general types of correspondence not permitted were those not complying with the express requirements of Internment Camp Order No.10 (paras 27 and 28).

#### Concessions to certain classes of Internees.

9. Apart from the concession regarding cable and wireless messages of certain types (vide para 6 of the Chapter) further express concessions were made to overseas internees who were not classified as dangerous. These were the subject of a Ministerial Order under Regulation 3A of National Security (Internment Camps) Regulations, known as "Classification of Overseas Internees Order (No.1)." The concessions granted under the order are summarised briefly as follows : -

- (a) To send an air mail letter not exceeding 100 lines in length in each week at the internee's expense,
- (b) To join with other internees of the same classification in sending collective air mail letters not exceeding 100 lines in length, to approved addressees,
- (c) To use at his own expense, special stationery approved by the Camp Commandant,
- (d) To send, with the Camp Commandant's approval, telegrams within Australia necessary for the purpose of any application for release, or relating to urgent private affairs.
- (e) To undertake a correspondence course or a course of lectures by post, with an institution approved by the Chief of the General Staff or by an officer duly authorised by him.

10. Reference should also be made to paragraphs 19 to 24 of this Chapter dealing with special facilities made available to internees generally and/or to internees of particular nationalities.

#### Censorship of Internees' mail.

11. Army censorship was controlled by the Chief of the General Staff who issued necessary Army Field Censorship Instructions, but insofar as these affected Internees, A Branch (through the Directorate of Prisoners of War & Internees) was charged with the responsibility of ensuring proper compliance with Convention requirements and with the observance on the part of Australia of reciprocal agreements with the enemy permitting various special constant liaison to be maintained by the Directorate with General Staff Intelligence and with the Controller of Posts and Telegraphic Censorship.

12. The general direction regarding censorship of internees' mail was contained in Regulation 33(1) of National Security (Internment Camps) Regulations, reading:-

"All outward letters and postcards, except letters or postcards addressed to an Official Visitor, and all parcels shall be sent for censorship to the Post and Telegraph Censorship' Authority at the capital or principal city or town of the State to Territory in which the Internment Camp is situated."

13. In addition, Camp Commandants were authorised by Regulation 34 to institute such local examination of letters, postcards and parcels despatched by or addressed to internees, as considered necessary, with the provision that care was to be taken to ensure that communications were not unduly delayed. This authority did not of course apply to letters and postcards addressed by internees to the Official Visitors. It is stressed that the Camp Commandant, by virtue of this right of examination, was not empowered to exercise any right of censorship; he could suggest that a letter or postcard contravened regulations and advise the internee concerned not to send it as written, but if the internee insisted on its despatch without alteration, the Camp Commandant was obliged to forward it through normal channels but could append a note for the Censorship authorities stating why he considered it should not be despatched. A final decision then rested with the District Censor.

14. Throughout hostilities, various censorship instructions concerning correspondence of internees were issued. These were later consolidated into a substantially firm set of regulations known as "LHQ Field Censorship Instruction No.3: of 10 Oct 42, vide Appendix 4. These instructions provided the necessary machinery for the handling of all communications and parcels to and from internees and enquiries concerning internees.

#### Mail arrangements for sick internees.

15. Provision was made in the Regulations (Reg 39) for appropriate arrangements to be made regarding the receipt and despatch of mail matter by internees admitted to civil or military hospitals or other institutions. It was essential to ensure proper observance of regulations by sick internees. Medical officers in charge of institutions where they were held were therefore informed of requirements under the Regulations and Camp Order, including censorship.

#### Correspondence between internees.

16. Internees were not permitted to correspond with internees or prisoners of war interned in any other camp in Australia without special permission of the Camp Commandant, but correspondence between internees in working camps or in hospital and internees in their parent camp was permitted. (Camp Order No.10, para 28).

17. Some administrative difficulties were encountered in the implementation of this order, as Camp Commandants interpreted the authority in different ways. To secure uniformity of practice specific directions were issued reading as follows: -

"Subject to censorship and to regulations relating to internees' correspondence, it is desired that Camp Commandants permit internees, out of their authorised weekly allowance of letters, to engage in inter-camp correspondence dealing with family and personal matters on the following basis: -

- (a) As between interned parents and interned children and vice versa – one letter each per week.
- (b) As between other members of a family – one letter each per month.
- (c) As between persons who are not related – only at such times as the Camp Commandant is satisfied that urgent or exceptional personal reasons exist to justify such correspondence.
- (d) As between internees and prisoners of war – the development of contacts between internees and PW is highly undesirable and any such correspondence will be referred to GSI, HQ L of C Area for approval of transmission.

18. Issue of this direction assisted greatly in promoting standard procedure throughout camps and no further difficult problems were encountered in this particular matter.

#### Special facilities granted to internees.

19. Various authorities concerned with the welfare of internees, and enemy governments concerned, made representations from time to time for the granting of special facilities to internees. The more important of these schemes are given hereunder.

#### Messages through Apostolic Delegate.

20. Monthly messages not exceeding 25 words were permitted to be despatched by internees through His Excellency the Apostolic Delegate in Australia. These messages were subject to examination by the Camp Commandant and were not deemed part of the authorised allowance of letters and postcards permitted under the Regulations. Directions for the handling of outwards messages under this authority and of replies thereto were contained in Memorandum SM22410 of 19 Nov 42, vide appendix 5.

#### Messages through the International Red Cross Delegate.

21. This service was known as the "Express Message" service. Personal messages only were permitted to be sent to certain reciprocating countries, addressed to the next-of-kin of the internees concerned. It was a condition of the service that the right to despatch a message reserved exclusively for internees who had received no communication from their next-of-kin for a period of three months or more. As in the case of messages through the medium of the Apostolic Delegate, these communications were not deemed part of the internees' normal authorised allowance. Detailed instructions to Commands on the subject are given in memorandum No.48365 of 23 Apr 45 Appendix 6. It will be observed that Japan was not included in the list of countries to which internees could send express messages. The IRC Delegate in Australia had advised that the Japanese did not accept the scheme and he was therefore asked to address to Japanese camp leaders of camps concerned appropriate advice of the Japanese Governments' decision.

#### Airgraph service.

22. Internees were permitted, at their own expense, to send letters by airgraph to countries where airgraph facilities were available, but only for special reasons in connection with emigration or urgent business or urgent family matters. These letters were deemed part of the internees' authorised allowance. They were written on special forms provided for the purpose by the Postmaster-General's Department and had to comply with Regulations and Camp Orders regarding correspondence.

#### Use of Airmail by internees.

23. In pursuance of reciprocal arrangements with the German and Italian Government's, German and Italian internees were permitted, at their own expense, to send by airmail addressed to overseas countries, any or all of the letters and postcards authorised under National Security (Internment Camps) Regulations.

The rates prescribed for letters to Germany and Italy were 1/-per half ounce for letters and 6d. for postcards.

#### Special letters from Japanese internees.

24. Following upon representation from the Japanese Government in 1942 and in view of the fact that the proposal meant recognition of status to internees, all Japanese internees of 21 years and over held in Australia were each permitted to lodge for transmission to Japan or Japanese Occupied Territory one letter of 23 lines. Careful scrutiny of these letters resulted in little of value being found although a fairly large percentage of the internees took advantage of the approval. The arrangement was a reciprocal one under which a number of letters from Australians were received. These were dropped in Rabaul by air numbered 395. It was apparent on examination that they were written on the condition that all references to conditions of captivity were favourable.

## SECTION B

### INWARD MAILS AND PARCELS FOR INTERNEES

#### Number of letters and parcels permitted.

25. Subject to censorship and to the Internment Camp Orders, no limit was imposed on the number of letters and postcards an internee could receive but he was not permitted to receive picture postcards or letters containing pictures or drawings of a suspicious or objectionable nature, vide Regulation 35(1). He was also allowed to receive parcels of books, valuables, foodstuffs or other articles, vide Regulation 36(1).

26. Normal internees rates of postage and conditions, and the normal internal registration fees and conditions, were made applicable to all mail matter, including parcels, posted in Australia, and addressed to an internee within the Commonwealth. Postal articles received from outside Australia addressed to internees held in the Commonwealth were transmitted free of charge.

27. Internees were also permitted to receive books (other than books containing hostile sentiments or propaganda), music and small musical instruments, vide Regulation 37(1).

#### Examination of inward mail etc.

28. Camp Commandants were authorised to arrange for all inward letters, whether registered or not, to be opened to enable to Camp Paymaster to extract any remittances of money, and to have all parcels received examined in order that any prohibited articles could be removed (see Regulations 35(2) and 36(3)). Examination of parcels was effected under such conditions as would ensure the preservation of any foodstuffs which they might contain and was done, where possible, in the presence of the addressee or a representative duly authorised by him. Books or music could be withheld from delivery at the discretion of the examiner at the camp as these afforded an easy means of passing messages or hostile propaganda into camps.

#### Arrangements for inward mail for sick 'internees'.

29. To ensure that prohibited articles were not received by internees in civil or military hospitals or other institutions, arrangements were made in each case, for any parcels received to be despatched to the Internment Camps concerned for examination before delivery (vide Reg 38(c)).

#### Short wave messages for Internees.

30. Under arrangements with the Department of Information, short-wave messages from abroad for internees held in Australia were advised through the Prisoners of War Information Bureau. This scheme was inaugurated in an attempt to secure as much reciprocity as possible for Australian and Allied Servicemen held by the enemy.

#### Disposal of parcels for deceased and repatriated internees.

31. Procedure adopted in Australia to dispose of parcels received for deceased and repatriated internees was in general conformity with practice in the United Kingdom and with the wishes of the International Red Cross. Parcels were forwarded to camps in which internees of the same nationality as the addressee were held and if practicable, to the camp in which the addressee had been accommodated. The parcels were then dealt with as follows:-

- (a) Contents, other than articles of a personal nature or articles of value, were distributed among indigent or sick internees of the same nationality as the addressee.

- (b) Articles not distributed were sent to the Prisoners of War Information Bureau. Each parcel was marked with the name and address of the addressee and, if known, the sender. When the name of the sender was not known the parcel was marked "Name of Sender not known."
- (c) The P.W.I.B. forwarded articles received to the I.R.C. Delegate in Australia, for disposal.

To guard against pilferages or losses, Camp Commandants and the P.W.I.B. were directed to maintain adequate records of the receipt and disposal of all articles taken from parcels for despatch through the P.W.I.B.

Cessation of censorship.

32. The censorship of PW mails ceased as from 10 Nov 45, when appropriate amendments were made to National Security Regulations. The discretionary powers of Camp Commandants to conduct local examinations of letters and parcels was not affected but such examinations were conducted for information only, and unless the nature of a communication was itself an offence against Regulations or Camp Orders, the delay, destruction or withholding of mail was not permitted.

33. It is noted that consideration should be given to the types of articles (and their volume) transmitted to internees from their native country in either personal or Red Cross parcels. For example large quantities of cigarettes and tobacco in the hands of internees can be used in attempts to bribe their guards. Australian PW testify to the efficacy of such an approach whilst they were held in custody in Europe.