

CHAPTER 12

CLASSIFICATION AND SEGREGATION OF INTERNEES

1. The problem of classifying and segregating internees held in Australia was a difficult one. From the time of the arrival of the United Kingdom internees until the internment camps were closed these questions were constantly under consideration and review, and repeated representations from the various interested parties required careful but firm handling.
2. The general policy adopted was to endeavour to segregate the various nationalities and groups of internees who should be able to live together in reasonable harmony, but the implementation of this policy was necessarily governed by administrative and security factors, and by the extent and nature of camp accommodation available. It was quite obvious from the outset that the statement of internee that he possessed anti-Nazi or anti-Fascist views could not be accepted prima facie, in view of the fact that his internment denoted that he was being held for reasons of national security, and for that reason no camps were permitted to be described as "anti-Nazi" or "anti-Fascist" camps. Furthermore, in most camps internees showed a tendency to subdivide into groups with the result that friction arose between them. This tendency became more pronounced as the Axis Powers met with reverses, as the allegiance of certain classes of internees to Nazi and Fascist doctrines waxed and waned according to the situation overseas.
3. While HQ of Commands dealing with internees were permitted to use discretion in the matter of transfer of internees between camps in their own areas when considered necessary to effect harmonious segregation, or to correct errors in segregation, it was essential that action be taken to ensure that transfers based merely on personal considerations such as incompatibility or disagreeable habits should be guarded against. Transfers of members of families and of close relations in order to bring them together in one camp were of course considered desirable, but single male internees of 18 years and over were not accommodated with members of their families at family internment camps.
4. The following three main factors in respect to segregation had always to be kept in mind:-
 - (a) Security: Where an internee advanced reasons to support a request for transfer, which were at variance with his known record and the grounds for his internment, the request had necessarily to be viewed with great caution, and was not usually granted unless exceptional circumstances existed. For instance, an internee might claim that he was being victimised and such victimisation might easily be the result of a plot to have him transferred to another camp to make certain contacts.
 - (b) Personal incompatibility: Cases were known of internees who, by reason of their personal habits, or personality, were unable to maintain satisfactory personal relationships with other internees, who might then commence an agitation to have them removed from the camp. It was inevitable in camps of up to 1000 persons that such situations would arise, and they could seldom be cured by transferring the incompatibles, who would merely cause fresh trouble in the new camps to which they were transferred.
 - (c) Limits of accommodation: For reasons for economy, and to facilitate administration, internment camps were erected with a capacity of 1000 each. If the camps were not kept reasonably well filled, there was a waste of accommodation facilities and of garrison manpower. Small camps were not economical.
5. Over 11,000 internees of many different nationalities and political sympathies were held in Australia and although problems of classification and segregation were always under consideration, the actual percentage who complained was exceedingly small.

6. To trace the subject chronologically, it is necessary to go back to September 1940, when approximately 2,550 internees arrived in Australia on the "Dunera" from the United Kingdom. The circumstances under which these internees had been interned in England and classified by Tribunals are stated in Chapter 3 of this report. It had been intended to accommodate German internees classified as dangerous or potentially dangerous (numbering 251), and 200 Italian internees at the Tatura Internment Group, Victoria, and the balance of the German internees (expected to be about 2000) at Hay Camps, New South Wales. However, as the total number exceeded expectations, it was found necessary to disembark in Victoria an additional 94 Germans and to accommodate them separately at Tatura as they were not regarded as dangerous.

7. Early in 1941 a Home Office Liaison Officer (later Home Office Representative) Major Layton, arrived in Australia. This officer received numerous advices from the United Kingdom concerning reclassification of internees, and it became apparent that the original classifications were not entirely reliable. As advices were received it was evident that there were roughly three groups of internees, viz: -

- Group 1. Internees classified as dangerous or potentially dangerous (about 250) whose classification should remain fairly stable.
- Group 2. Doubtful internees, whose numbers were reduced gradually to about 30, most of whom were classified as dangerous, but who persistently stated that they were anti-Nazis.
- Group 3. The remainder who were not considered to be dangerous, except that the 200 Italians were not given consideration for release in the early stages of the war.

8. For the purpose of segregation the classification of the United Kingdom authorities as originally communicated or as amended by those authorities themselves or by their Representative, had to be accepted in Australia. Close liaison was maintained at all times with Major (later Lt-Col) Layton, and necessary transfers between camps and compounds effected as necessary.

9. In connection with this particular group of internees, the main problem was the accommodation of the small group of "Doubtful" internees. These were for some time interned at Tatura with internees from Singapore, and they intermingled with other United Kingdom internees considered not to be dangerous. In view of their doubtful character, they were later transferred to the Loveday Internment Group in South Australia, and for administration reasons were accommodated with local German internees. They were mostly communists and were skilful in conducting agitations on their own behalf, refusing to assist in building their sleeping huts. Their disposal received every consideration, but as their capacity for causing trouble made them undesirable element in any camp holding other internees, it was not until a camp (No.2) at Tatura was subdivided, that they could be suitably accommodated.

10. General problems of segregation arose also in connection with Straits Settlements internees, concerning whom very little information was available, and with local internees. Other overseas internees were considered as a whole to be potentially dangerous class as there were active Nazi agents among them, and although minor problems of segregation arose, these were easily dealt with. The Straits Settlements internees were considered as doubtful, due to the absence of information concerning them, and were not therefore a difficult problem. The Home Office Representative was authorised to act in relation to this group, and the majority were released in Australia to join Labour Units or to work. A small number caused friction from time to time but were gently but firmly handled and no great difficulty arose. In respect of local internees, the problem was more acute, and repeated representations were made by sections of these internees, or on their behalf, for transfer to other camps for various reasons.

11. In 1941 representations were made that the internees in the two compounds of No.1 Camp at Tatura should be permitted to intermingle. The particular groups were 600 odd local German internees and the group of 200 United Kingdom internees classified as dangerous. From an administrative standpoint, the intermingling of these two groups would have offered some advantages in that the internees would be able to develop and enjoy common facilities, and difficulties arising from their being kept separated would have disappeared. It was considered desirable, however, to maintain this separation on the grounds of security as it was undesirable to provide dangerous overseas internees with an opportunity of establishing local contacts. As a matter of interest, it was noted in a letter from the Protecting Power Representative that these two groups of internees contained "many old friends."

12. The next problem was the complaint addressed to the Minister by the Bishop Coadjutor of Sydney relative to a small group of local internees who claimed to have Allied sympathies but who had been heard by Advisory Committees and Aliens Tribunals which had given them ample opportunity to have their cases exhaustively dealt with. It followed that they were detained, after their appeal, for a very good reason. However, as it was impracticable to hold them in a separate camp owing to their small numbers, and it was considered reasonable to treat them to some extent as "doubtfuls", their transfer to a camp containing United Kingdom internees was approved subject to review if necessary. As a result of transfers interstate, these internees were later accommodated with local internees, and with other internees claiming to be anti-Nazi they again caused difficulties.

13. In 1942 the Official Visitors to the Loveday Internment Group in South Australia raised the problem of this group of internees (about 150), and suggested transfer to prevent a serious disturbance. The advice of Security Service was sought to ascertain whether the internees could be divided into any specific groups after examination of their dossiers. Difficulties had also been experienced with the local Italian internees held at Loveday, due primarily to their differing sentiments and political faiths, and action to effect any segregation, but this proposal was not concurred in as it was considered that the proposed action might embarrass Security Service and could easily result in an entirely artificial division being established among internees whom Security Service might finally decide should remain interned.

14. The Director-General of Security finally concurred in the view that any attempt by Army to sort out Italians into two groups might seriously embarrass his release policy, and as numerous releases were effected from this nationality, this particular aspect of the problem resolved itself. There remained the question of the small group of German internees referred to above. After careful consideration, and in view of the problem of segregating certain classes of United Kingdom internees from others, the subdivision of No.2 Camp at Tatura was then agreed upon, and it was possible to use the four small compounds of that camp as follows: -

- (a) For Germans incompatible with main camps, including the Group at Loveday.
- (b) For sundry internees such as those of British race.
- (c) For United Kingdom Italians.
- (d) For United Kingdom refugee types and any compatible local Jewish types.

This action substantially adjusted all difficulties although minor complaints were made from time to time by irresponsible internees or those who deliberately complained merely for its nuisance value.

15. It would be appreciated in the reading of this Chapter, that the matter included merely touches on the surface of the administrative problems encountered by the Directorate. Ministerial interest in segregation and the constant receipt of official representations on the subject required every care and attention, and it was not until the last internee was released from internment camps that the matter could be shelved completely.

16. The reader should also realise that action to segregate overseas internees had at all times to be properly co-ordinated with action to classify them for the purpose of granting special concessions to those considered to be friendly aliens. This action was taken by means of "Classification of Overseas Internees Order" made under Regulation 3A of National Security (Internment Camps) Regulations. The various concessions granted are dealt with in Chapters 10 and 13 of Part I of this report.