

DRAFT.
CONFIDENTIAL.

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
AT THE
268TH MEETING
OF THE
IMPERIAL WAR GRAVES COMMISSION
HELD AT
32, GROSVENOR GARDENS, LONDON, S.W.1,
ON
THURSDAY, 19TH APRIL, 1945.

PRESENT:

Major-General Sir FABIAN WARE, K.C.V.O., K.B.E., C.B., C.M.G., LL.D.,
Vice-Chairman, in the Chair.

V.C. DUFFY Esq., M.V.O.
Representing the High Commissioner for Australia.

C. KNOWLES Esq., C.B.E.
Representing the High Commissioner for New Zealand.

I.T. MEYER Esq.
Representing the High Commissioner for South Africa.

J.L. MURPHY Esq.
Representing the Government of Newfoundland.

General Sir ROBERT GORDON-FINLAYSON, K.C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

Admiral Sir MARTIN DUNBAR-NASMITH, V.C., K.C.B.

Colonel Sir JOHN SHUTE, C.M.G., D.S.O., T.D., J.P., D.L., M.P.

Air Chief Marshal Sir ARTHUR LONGMORE, G.C.B., D.S.O., D.L.

There were also present:

Lieut.-Colonel Sir FREDERIC KENYON, G.B.E., K.C.B.

Lieut.-Colonel Sir HERBERT ELLISSEN, C.B.E. (Adviser on Post-War
Organisation & Reconstruction).

Colonel S.G.G. FRASER, M.C. (A.A.G., War Office).

Brigadier F. HIGGINSON, C.M.G. (Controller and Director of Works).

Lieut.-Colonel H.F. CHETTLE, C.M.G., O.B.E. (Director of Records).

F.C. SILLAR Esq. (Assistant Secretary, Finance).

Major R.W. MURPHY, M.B.E. (Area Superintendent, United Kingdom).

Captain F. TYRRELL, M.B.E.

C.R. KIRTON Esq., M.B.E.

Lieutenant O.D. HOLT.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN said that the Minutes of the last meeting had been circulated, and if they were approved he would sign them.

The Minutes were agreed and signed.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN said that he had received apologies for absence from the Adjutant-General, Sir John Kennedy, Colonel Cole and Mr. Dutt (who had been detained at the last moment from representing the High Commissioner for India).

Mr. Davies had also written to express his regret at being unable to be present; but they would be glad to welcome in his place Mr. J.L. Murphy who had been a friend of the Commission's work for many years.

REVIEW OF RECENT EVENTS.

Members would be very sorry to hear of the death of Dr. S.F.N. Gie, South African Minister in Washington. In 1936, as South African Minister in Berlin, Dr. Gie had given the Commission most valuable advice and help in the formation of the Anglo-German-French Committee. He (the Vice-Chairman) would ask Mr. Meyer to express to Dr. Gie's family the Commission's sympathy and their gratitude for the work he did for them.

Members would be glad to see Colonel Higginson at the meeting, fully restored to health, and now promoted to the rank of Brigadier.

The Commission's 25th Annual Report, which had been published on April 4th, had received wide publicity in the press. Nearly 500 copies had been sent out from the Commission's office at Wooburn, and a reprint of a further 750 copies had been ordered. Copies had been sent to the Dominion delegates who had come to this country for preliminary discussions in connection with the San Francisco Conference. He would pass round the cuttings received, which represented 32 newspapers.

It would be remembered that at the previous meeting the Commission had decided to ask the Director of Graves Registration and Enquiries to attend their meetings in an advisory capacity. Brigadier McNair was absent from the country at present, and they would be glad to welcome Colonel Fraser in his place.

The office at Wooburn was still suffering from shortage of staff. He had seen the Treasury again recently in the matter, and he thought that they would be prepared to consider raising the ceiling. The great difficulty, however, was that when the ceiling was raised it was difficult to find the staff, but he thought that it ought to be possible to obtain recruits in the neighbourhood even if it became necessary to send a 'bus round to collect them.

A letter had been received from the Chief of the Graves Registration and Effects Branch, United States Army, enclosing a report on Cologne Southern Cemetery. The report stated that the only damage to the British part of the Cemetery consisted of five bomb craters, which had destroyed some 30 graves and headstones. The Germans had used the Cemetery to bury personnel of the R.A.F. shot down in the neighbourhood of Cologne; there were 416 R.A.F. graves with crosses, and about 30 hasty burials with no markings. The Cemetery showed evidence of having been kept up during the previous five years.

At the last meeting the Finance Committee considered a long and useful report from Mr. Sillar on the staff, particularly

staff abroad, and their relations with the Transport and General Workers' Union. It had not yet been possible to revive the Staff Committee, but he would like to suggest (in agreement with the Finance Committee) that the Commission should ask Sir John Shute and Mr. Lawson to allow Mr. Sillar to refer to them any matters which were causing him particular trouble, and he would be very grateful if Sir Arthur Longmore would join them.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur LONGMORE said that he would be willing to act in that capacity.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN said that Colonel Buller, the Commission's Inspector for the Sudan and East Africa, had forwarded record documents and the taking-over certificate for Addis Ababa War Cemetery. The burials in that Cemetery, including those concentrated from smaller cemeteries, numbered 296.

In that connection, he would like to mention an interesting little ceremony which had taken place in Eritrea following the gift of the land for Keren War Cemetery by a local chieftain on behalf of his community. It had been suggested that a letter of thanks from the Commission in the name of the President, H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester, would have a good effect, and he, the Vice-Chairman, had got into touch with the Duke's private secretary, Sir Godfrey Thomas, who had written a letter of grateful appreciation. Colonel Buller now reported that this letter had arrived at a very opportune moment, just before a chiefs' meeting in Keren at which the Chief Administrator had presented the letter to the chief concerned, having translated extracts from it to the meeting. The incident had been summed up in the words "It was a good show".

The Commission's Deputy Director of Works, Western Mediterranean District, had reported that seven more cemeteries in North Africa had been taken over from the Graves Registration Service. These were Béja, Dely-Ibrahim, Bougie (La Réunion), Massicault, El Alia, Tabarka (Ras-Rajel) and Sfax. Arrangements had also been made for the interim maintenance of a number of other cemeteries which were not yet ready for handing over. Moreover the Deputy Controller, Eastern District, had forwarded taking-over certificates and record documents for the present war graves at Chatby and Hadra Cemeteries, Alexandria, and for Hinaidi Indian Cemetery.

A report had been received of a visit paid in September 1944 to the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel. The visitors were a Company of Newfoundland Artillery, and a service had been conducted by a priest from Albert. Afterwards members of the Company had visited the graves of relatives and friends who had been killed in the late war and were buried in cemeteries near the Memorial. They had been escorted by Gardener-Caretaker S.C. Humphreys.

Mr. MURPHY said that Mr. Davies had received the report, and had forwarded it to the Newfoundland Government.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN said that a commemorative service had been held at the Canadian Memorial at Vimy on the 9th April when Colonel Haworth, in General Roberts's absence in England, had represented the Commission.

On Easter Day, April 1st, representatives of the Allied Forces had attended the ceremony of sounding the "Last Post" at Brookwood Military Cemetery.

Major MURPHY, in reply to the VICE-CHAIRMAN, said that there were representatives of the American, French, Belgian, Czech

and Polish Forces. There were about 150 civilians present, including relatives and local inhabitants. They were received by members of the Woking Urban District Council.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN said that the Commodore Superintendent, H.M. Dockyard, Bermuda, had undertaken to mark with wooden crosses and maintain on the Commission's behalf the present war graves in Bermuda, numbering 38 in 10 cemeteries. The offer had been accepted and drawings of temporary markers had been sent to the Admiralty for transmission to Bermuda.

With regard to the question of personal inscriptions on the headstones, he would like members to know that he was taking the same line that he took during the last war, and leaving the choice of the inscription entirely to the relatives concerned. The space at the foot of the headstone was sacred to them, and there they could inscribe anything they liked so long as it might not give offence to others. A number of inscriptions were received from illiterate people, and as far as possible we accepted them as they stood. Only recently two very curious inscriptions (which he read) had been submitted, but he thought that members would agree that the widest latitude should be allowed.

Sir Arthur LONGMORE asked whether inscriptions in Welsh were allowed.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN replied that they were certainly allowed. A question had recently been asked in the House of Commons on the subject, and it had caused a little trouble. The point in that case, however, was that the Welsh inscription submitted had been too long, and it was only on that ground that it had been referred back to the relative; but she had misunderstood the Commission's letter and had thought that they were objecting to Welsh. It was the Commission's practice to allow any language, Welsh, Gaelic or Latin, and Colonel Chettle had a small group of advisors to help him translate the Welsh, Gaelic and other inscriptions.

Colonel Sir John SHUTE said that he had spoken to Sir Henry Morris-Jones, who had asked the question, and had been able to satisfy him on the point.

REPORT OF THE 312TH MEETING OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE - CONSTRUCTION OF HALFAYA-SOLLUM AND TOBRUK CEMETERIES.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN said that the Committee's Report contained recommendations for the construction of the two cemeteries at Sollum and Tobruk, but he would like to deal with the other items first.

Mr. SILLAR, in reply to the VICE-CHAIRMAN, said that items 3, 4 and 5 were all directed towards pressing ahead with construction in Africa, and item 7 dealt with the case of one of the gardeners who was knocked down by a military lorry early in 1940 and had been in hospital in occupied territory ever since. The Vice-Chairman had already referred to item 8, which concerned a memorandum on relations with the staff.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN said that he would now deal with item 6. The Committee had gone very carefully into the plans for these two cemeteries. An estimate of the cost had been received from the Royal Engineers, and on the advice of the Treasury the authorities in Egypt had been consulted as to whether the cost of labour and materials was likely to decrease in the near future. Their reply had been that there was little likelihood of this, and the Treasury representative had therefore said at the meeting that he did not wish to advise against the Commission proceeding with the work.

Instructions had accordingly been sent to North Africa that tenders should be called for with certain defined omissions which he would ask Sir Frederic Kenyon to explain. The main question which remained open was that of the wall at Tobruk Cemetery.

The Committee had gone very fully into the matter, but a decision as to the height of the wall at Tobruk was required. When the Commission had come to a decision, he would ask them to adopt the procedure followed after the late war, which was to give the Finance Committee authority to call for and accept tenders without further reference to them. A resolution had been drafted, copies of which he would pass round. He would now ask Sir Frederic Kenyon to explain the question of the height of the wall.

Sir Frederic KENYON said that the Architect's original proposal was that the wall should be 7 feet high; Mr. Worthington had chosen this height because, from enquiries he had made in Egypt, he understood that there was always a danger of sand drifting over into the Cemetery. In conversation with Mr. Worthington before the meeting of the Committee the desirability of such a height had been questioned, not only on the score of expense but because no one liked a high wall. Mr. Worthington had in consequence agreed to reduce the height to 6 ft., but at the meeting of the Committee, at which Mr. Worthington was not present, Sir Robert Gordon-Finlayson had said that in his opinion the fear of drifting sand had been exaggerated. Sir Robert added that as a general principle, with which he (Sir Frederic) agreed, a 4½ ft. wall was preferable to a 6 ft. wall, since it would leave the cemetery clearly visible from outside. When this proposal was reported later to Mr. Worthington he had said that if it were adopted it would throw all the rest of his work out of proportion. The architectural features had been designed in reference to a 7 ft. wall, and though their proportions would not be seriously injured by reducing the wall to 6 ft. any further reduction would involve a redesigning of the whole. The question which the Commission had now to decide was not merely one of difference in cost, as the draft resolution suggested, but whether they considered the lower wall sufficiently desirable to justify referring the design back to the Architect.

General Sir Robert GORDON-FINLAYSON said that he was anxious that a wall should be built of such a height that anybody on the road or approaching the cemetery would be able to see clearly into it over the wall. Looking at a high wall, one did not know what was behind it: it might be a prison. A low wall, on the other hand, would give an uninterrupted view of the cemetery from the escarpment and as one approached it across the surrounding plain. The Cemetery was magnificently laid out and he believed it would be one of the most beautiful in North Africa. He thought the sand question was of little importance; the local vegetation showed that sandstorms could not be a frequent occurrence but were probably due to the ground having been churned up during the fighting; and even the contingency of drifting sand could be provided against by digging a trench alongside the lower wall. He had recommended cutting 1 ft. 6 inches off the wall, partly on the score of expense, but mainly from the point of view of visitors approaching the Cemetery; it would be a beautiful place and he wanted to save it from the threat of being blocked by a high wall. The change he proposed could not involve a delay of more than a month or so, whereas, if they built a high wall and did not like it, it was there for good. Mr. Worthington had designed twenty or more cemeteries and had done his work extraordinarily well, but this was one which he (Sir Robert) would like to see modified.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN said that the Treasury Representative had urged that if the lower wall were decided upon it should have the same thickness, so that in the event of the sand becoming a difficult problem it would be possible to build up to an increased height.

Sir Frederic KENYON said that if the Commission chose to ask Mr. Worthington to redesign the Cemetery to conform to the lower wall there was no reason why he should not do so; but the question was whether, having chosen their Architect, they should not be prepared to trust his judgment.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN said that he was most anxious to avoid the delay which would be involved by the proposed reduction; he felt it was important to make a beginning, so that they could proceed with other construction.

Colonel Sir John SHUTE said that he did not think the question of the difference in cost had been uppermost in the minds of the Committee. It was entirely from the artistic and general points of view that they had considered the question, and he thought the Commission should argue the point on that basis alone.

Mr. KNOWLES asked whether Mr. Worthington had indicated that the change in his designs would be radical owing to a reduction in the height of the wall.

Brigadier HIGGINSON, in reply, said he had examined the question most carefully with Mr. Worthington, who had found, on consulting the working drawings, that the reduction from 7 ft. to 6 ft. would be quite feasible, but that any further reduction was impossible except at the cost of a complete revision of the design.

Mr. KNOWLES said he thought that in that case the Commission should see the modified design before anything further was done. He personally preferred the idea of a lower wall; and he felt that it was only fair to the Architect that the Commission should see what was going to be done in place of his original intention.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN, in the course of the discussion which followed, said that it was a question of either accepting the 6 ft. wall and going ahead with the work, or referring the alternative of the lower wall to the Architect and accepting the delay involved.

Admiral Sir Martin DUNBAR-NASMITH and Sir Frederic KENYON agreed that it was this point on which a decision must be reached.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN said that while he personally preferred the idea of a lower wall he was anxious to avoid the delay which the consequent revision of the design would entail. He hoped that if the Commission decided on the lower wall they would allow the Finance Committee to proceed to call for tenders, leaving it to the Architect to make the necessary modifications.

Mr. KNOWLES said that, supposing the resolution was accepted as it stood, he hoped that an undertaking would be given that the matter would be referred again to the Commission if the Architect in the course of revising the design found himself up against a real difficulty and became dissatisfied.

Brigadier HIGGINSON said that he would say in advance, from his knowledge of Mr. Worthington's view expressed in recent

conversations, that he would regret having to alter a design into which he had put so much study.

Mr. DUFFY said that owing to the deep sentimental attachment felt throughout the Empire for Tobruk it was most important to avoid even a shadow of dissatisfaction between the Commission and the Architect of the Cemetery. He therefore suggested, and he fully supported what Mr. Knowles had said, that the Commission should decide now on a 4 ft. 6 inches wall but that Sir Frederic Kenyon should be invited to see the Architect; then, if Mr. Worthington were dissatisfied, he should give the Commission another chance to consider the matter.

General Sir Robert GORDON-FINLAYSON said that it was clear from what Brigadier Higginson had said that the Architect would object to making the alterations involved in the proposal to lower the wall, and therefore if they were going to carry the Architect with them they would have to choose the 6 ft. wall. He thought that all the members agreed with the Vice-Chairman that further delay was undesirable and that it was important that the Cemetery should be constructed so that there was something for visitors to see. In these circumstances he felt that the only thing for him to do was to withdraw his objection to the 6 ft. wall and say "Carry On" in the manner proposed.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN thanked Sir Robert Gordon-Finlayson for opening this way out of the difficulty.

After a short discussion, in which certain verbal amendments to the draft resolution were put forward and agreed, it was proposed by Colonel Sir John SHUTE, seconded by Mr. DUFFY, and carried unanimously:

2. 1. That the Report of the 312th Meeting of the Finance Committee be adopted.
2. That having considered a statement by the Vice-Chairman on item 6 of the Report (tenders for construction of Halfaya-Sollum and Tobruk Cemeteries) the Commission authorise the Finance Committee without further reference to the Commission to consider and accept tenders for the work; subject, as regards both Cemeteries, to the specified omissions, and as regards Tobruk, to the substitution of a 6 ft. wall.

CEMETERIES OF THE LATE WAR IN MACEDONIA.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN said that he hoped members would read Colonel Chettle's memorandum on the subject. It was clear that the reports received reflected great credit upon Mr. Sakharoff who had been left in charge when Colonel Menzies had had to leave the country in 1941. There was no doubt that the comparatively small degree of damage and deterioration was in a great measure due to Mr. Sakharoff's devotion and courage.

MAINTENANCE OF WAR GRAVES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM - 10TH QUARTERLY REPORT.

Major MURPHY, in reply to the VICE-CHAIRMAN, said that he did not think that there were any items to which he particularly wished to draw attention.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur LONGMORE said that he had recently visited about 12 cemeteries, mostly containing plots of R.A.F. graves, and generally speaking maintenance was reasonably

good having regard to the present shortage of labour. The new plots such as that at Chester, were difficult to handle, and it would take some time to make them look tidy, but the cemetery authorities were doing their best. He had visited the cemeteries in company with two of the Commission's Inspectors, Captain Gill in Lincolnshire and Captain Dix at Chester and Shrewsbury.

Colonel FRASER, in reply to a question from the VICE-CHAIRMAN, said that the temporary marking of graves in the United Kingdom was as far as he was aware proceeding satisfactorily from the point of view of the Directorate.

Sir Arthur LONGMORE said that now that many German prisoners of war were reaching this country the plots for enemy graves would inevitably increase and might be bigger than the municipal authorities had allowed for. This had in fact happened at Grimsby, where the burials were now taking place in two plots. He thought that care should be taken not to bury the German dead in too prominent positions in the cemeteries and that this point should be borne in mind if it was necessary to acquire new plots.

Major MURPHY, in reply to the VICE-CHAIRMAN, said that recently a new plot at Leicester had been set aside for German burials, and two others at Aldershot and Reading. The District Inspectors had been warned that the numbers might be expected to increase.

Colonel FRASER said that he had recently taken up this matter with the Directorate of Prisoners of War and had asked that Branch to include specific instructions to all Prisoners of War Camp Commandants concerning burials. Their attention would be drawn to the pamphlet on the subject, which included directions concerning enemy dead, and emphasis would be laid on the fact that the Commission's District Inspectors were available to give advice. He thought it would be helpful if the Inspectors could call on the Camp Commandants, and now that the positions of the Prisoners of War Camps were more or less stabilised it could be settled which cemeteries were suitable for these burials.

AUSTRALIAN MEMORIALS OF THE LATE WAR - CONVERSION OF STOCK.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN referred to the paper before the meeting and said that the Commonwealth Government desired the Commission to exercise the option to convert their holding of £3,208. 16. Od. Commonwealth of Australia 5% Registered Stock 1945-1975 (which had been provided at the cost of that Government to furnish income for the maintenance of the Australian Memorials) into Commonwealth of Australia 3½% Registered Stock 1965-1969.

It was proposed by Admiral Sir Martin DUNBAR-NASMITH, seconded by Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur LONGMORE, and carried unanimously:

3. The Commission, having considered a statement No. F.1198/3 dated 11th April 1945,

Resolve:

That the Seal of the Commission be affixed to, and the Proper Officer sign, an application to the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, 8 Old Jewry, London, E.C.2, for the conversion of the Commission's holding of £3,208-16-0d. Commonwealth of Australia 5% Registered Stock, 1945-1975 into an equal amount of Commonwealth of Australia 3½% Registered Stock, 1965-1969.

ULSTER MEMORIAL, THIEPVAL.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN said that this item was somewhat similar to the last, and concerned the conversion of Stock into new holdings which the Government of Northern Ireland desired that the Commission should take up.

Mr. SILLAR, in reply to the VICE-CHAIRMAN, said that the Commission were maintaining the Ulster Memorial on behalf of the Government of Northern Ireland, and the representative of the Thiepval Memorial Committee had agreed that the Stock should be converted.

It was proposed by Mr. DUFFY, seconded by Mr. MURPHY, and carried unanimously:

4. That the Commission, having considered a statement No. W.G.868 dated the 4th April 1945,

Resolve:

That the affixing of the Seal by the Proper Officer to the form of Request for conversion of £5,305-0-10d. 4½% Ulster Loans Stock 1945/75, forming part of the capital held by the Commission under the Maintenance Agreement with the Thiepval Memorial Committee, into £5,305-0-10d. Northern Ireland 3% Loans Stock 1956/61 be approved and confirmed.

PLACING OF WREATHS ON GRAVES IN WAR CEMETERIES OVERSEAS.

The VICE-CHAIRMAN said that he proposed to adopt the same system as after the late war, namely to draw up a list, which would be given to all enquirers, of the organisations or companies who were prepared to place wreaths on the graves on behalf of and at the cost of relatives. A certain amount of trouble had been caused after the last war by organisations and individuals who charged relatives 10/- or more for wreaths which, in fact, cost sixpence or a shilling, but the Commission had found it difficult to interfere, and after much discussion it had been decided that the best way was to give their approval only to certain recognised organisations. The British Legion had recently asked that the Commission should recognise them as the only authority entitled to lay wreaths, but he thought that the Commission could not grant a monopoly in this matter.

Members notified their agreement.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING.

It was agreed that the next meeting should be held at 11 a.m. on Thursday, May 17th.

The meeting concluded at 12.25 p.m.