

16/N/348/S1
16/N/7/S3
DRAFT.

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS
of the
39th (SPECIAL) MEETING OF THE IMPERIAL WAR GRAVES COMMISSION
held at
THE WAR OFFICE
on
TUESDAY, 29th NOVEMBER, 1921.

PRESENT:

The Hon. SIR GEORGE PERLEY, K.C.M.G., High Commissioner for Canada.
M.L.SHEPHERD, Esq., I.S.O., representing the High Commissioner
for Australia.

Colonel the Hon. SIR JAMES ALLEN, K.C.B., High Commissioner for
New Zealand.

SIR WILLIAM GARSTIN, G.C.M.G., G.B.E.

Lieut.General SIR GEORGE MACDONOGH, K.C.B., K.C.M.G.,

Vice-Admiral SIR MORGAN SINGER, K.C.V.O., C.B.

SIR ROBERT HUDSON, G.B.E.

H. MADDOCKS, Esq., K.C., M.P.

and

Major-General SIR FABIAN WARE, K.B.E., C.B., C.M.G., in the Chair.

COLONEL LORD ARTHUR BROWNE, K.B.E.

Principal Assistant Secretary.

THERE WERE ALSO PRESENT :

Lieut.Colonel SIR FREDERIC KENYON, K.C.B.

Lieut.Colonel H. ELLISSEN, C.B.E.

Lieut.Colonel H.F. ROBINSON.

Major H.F. CHETTLE, O.B.E.

Major C.K. PHILLIPS, O.B.E.

THE VICE CHAIRMAN said that it had seemed desirable to call this special meeting to go into the question of British graves in Germany. The Committee which had been appointed at the last meeting of the Commission had met, and as a result the Chairman (Secretary of State for War) had been consulted as to the policy suggested in the following proposals :-

1. That all graves (approximately 1954) in Occupied Germany should be concentrated in one Cemetery in Cologne.
2. That all graves in Unoccupied Germany (approximately 5,000) should be concentrated in one cemetery in Unoccupied Germany. The site of this cemetery to be left for future discussion, but it is suggested that the neighbourhood of Hanover would be suitable.
3. That if it is thought that it will be impossible to withstand the criticism which may be raised against the proposals 1. and 2. the next-of-kin should be given the option of having their relatives transferred to the cemetery nearest the place in France and Flanders at which they were taken prisoner or buried in the proposed concentration cemetery.

The opinion of the Chairman had been particularly invited as to how far he thought, on the basis of this policy, it would be easy to meet the demand, which would come from a number of relatives, to bring the bodies of the dead home from Germany. The Chairman said that he was quite prepared to agree in this policy if the option were not given to the relatives suggested in (3), as he felt this concession would lead to demands for further concessions which it would be extremely hard to resist. Further, an offer had been received from the Adjutant General for the War Office to undertake the work of concentration acting as the Agents of the Commission.

SIR GEORGE MACDONOGH thought that the principal factor was the number of cemeteries in Germany. There were some 531 of them scattered all over the country. It would be impossible to maintain these 531 cemeteries by British personnel, while to employ Germans would doubtless be contrary to the sentiment of the relatives. The policy on which the Commission had acted up to that time was not to exhume and move bodies except in the case

of absolute necessity. He thought in this case the necessity was that of maintenance. If the bodies could be exhumed and brought into one or a few cemeteries it would be possible to make beautiful British cemeteries designed by their own architects and maintained by their own gardeners. If they offered the relatives the alternative of being moved into France he thought there would at once be a demand to take them to their own countries, and any concessions given in this respect would also apply to other countries, e.g. Turkey, Bulgaria, etc. Further, if the bodies were brought from Germany to their own countries a fresh demand would arise to bring back the remains from France. The Commission had concentrated the graves in Switzerland and so far as he knew there had been no complaints, although the numbers involved were small as compared with Germany.

He had considered the question of expense. The work could either be done by British military or civilian labour or by German labour under British supervision. British civilian labour would be very difficult to control, administer and handle generally, and if British labour were to be employed he thought it essential to employ military personnel who would be under discipline. As a rough estimate, to include all contingencies, he thought that the work could be done by British military labour in about eight months at a cost of £75,000.

If German civilian labour were employed under British supervision it was quite possible the cost might be reduced to £30,000. The War Office would not carry out this exhumation and concentration at its own expense, but they were ready to do it as Agents for the Commission. The figures he had mentioned only referred to concentration in unoccupied Germany, but if the Commission desired he had no doubt the War Office would also be ready to act as their Agents, at the Commission's expense, in carrying out the exhumation and concentration in occupied Germany.

SIR GEORGE PERLEY said that the Commission had a recognised policy that bodies should not be moved from where they were except in case of necessity, and for definite reasons. In spite of this they had been obliged to do a considerable amount of concentration. They had never made any public announcement as to their policy. If it were decided in the case of Germany to concentrate he thought it inadvisable to make any public statement in the matter, as it would at once arouse opposition. He agreed that for the purpose of maintenance it might be essential to concentrate, especially owing to the fact that British bodies were intermingled with those of other nationalities in most of the cemeteries in Germany. He thought they would avoid the difficulty if they acted as they had done in France; their policy would be unchanged, but they were forced to do concentration in the interests of proper maintenance or for other definite reasons. He thought it most essential that they should adhere to their policy but a public statement that they were going to concentrate graves in Germany would at once be understood as a departure from that policy. If any public statement were made, such as, for instance, an announcement by the Secretary of State in the House of Commons, it should be that the Imperial War Graves Commission had not altered its policy but intended to move and concentrate graves in order that they might be able to maintain them with British labour or to comply with German regulations on the subject.

SIR FREDERIC KENYON thought that the point could be met by having four or five cemeteries in the principal parts of Germany, such as, for example, one in Bavaria and one in Saxony, etc. They could inform the public in general that the burials were mostly in single isolated graves or small groups where they could not be maintained. The Commission would really be acting as they had done everywhere else.

MR. MADDOCKS thought that the general opinion in the House of Commons was that bodies should remain where they were and not

be brought home.

MR. SHEPHERD agreed with Sir George Perley that what they had to meet was criticism from outside on any deviation from their policy.

SIR GEORGE PERLEY said that from one point of view he would have preferred the graves to be all in one cemetery, and if they could concentrate into one cemetery without deviating from their original policy he would be content. He would not, however, be prepared to agree to an alteration of policy without reference to his Government.

THE VICE CHAIRMAN thought that the German Government would very probably make regulations as to the size of cemeteries which would make concentration necessary. The French had a regulation that no cemetery should contain less than 40 graves. He did not know what number would be fixed by the Germans but he thought they should ascertain this by negotiation with the German authorities.

SIR GEORGE MACDONOGH said that if the War Office were to carry out the work on behalf of the Commission he would require very definite instructions from the Commission. It would be quite unworkable for a Committee of the Commission to carry out negotiations with the German Government. If the Commission deputed him to act in the matter he would be willing to act, but in that case he must be responsible himself and could not work through a Committee.

SIR ROBERT HUDSON said that they should determine their policy there and then and decide whether the War Office were to do the work on behalf of the Commission or whether the Commission were to do it themselves. There could be no divided responsibility.

After some further discussion the following resolution was moved by Mr. Shepherd:-

1. "That the scheme of concentration of isolated graves in Germany be decided upon; that such concentration be

given effect to in such a way as to confirm in general to the policy carried out in France and other countries; that the necessary negotiations immediately take place to give effect to the best possible way of carrying out this policy in Germany."

The resolution was seconded by Mr. Maddocks and agreed to.

THE VICE CHAIRMAN said there would be certain definite advantages in having the work carried out by a military organisation. If this were not convenient it would no doubt be possible for the Imperial War Graves Commission to carry it out themselves.

SIR GEORGE MACDONOGH said that in any case the Commission were responsible and must bear the expense. His proposal had been originally that the work should be done by British military labour; if this were too expensive he was ready to agree that the War Office should act as the Agents of the Commission in employing German labour supervised by British personnel.

SIR GEORGE PERLEY said the British Government would have to pay the greater part of the cost. A large proportion of the bodies to be moved were from the United Kingdom. It was necessary therefore that whatever they agreed upon should be acceptable to the British Authorities.

MR. MADDOCKS thought that if the exhumation and concentration could be done under British supervision, particularly military supervision, it would not matter whether German labour were employed or not. There was a certain amount of sentiment in it.

THE VICE CHAIRMAN in reply to several questions said he thought that, speaking sentimentally, it would be better to do the work by British military labour, but if necessary the Commission could get the work done economically and efficiently by civil British or German labour supervised by their own personnel, who were, as a matter of fact, ex-service men.

A long discussion ensued in which the opinion was

strongly expressed by the Dominion representatives that either the British Government should undertake the full responsibility as to the policy and carry out the work of concentration through the War Office at their own expense or that the work should be done at the expense of the Commission, the Dominion Governments participating, in which case full responsibility for the policy must be borne by the Commission and consequently the work should be carried out by them.

The following resolution was moved by Sir Robert Hudson:-

2. "That there is no objection to the use of German civil labour for this purpose if under the proper supervision of British personnel."

The resolution was seconded by Mr. Maddocks and agreed to.

After some further discussion, the view was expressed that more definite information should be obtained by the Commission as to the actual conditions in Germany which would govern this work before deciding whether it should be undertaken by the Commission themselves or through the War Office as their agents.

MR. SHEPHERD then suggested that a Committee should be appointed to conduct the negotiations with the German Authorities. He was anxious to get the policy settled. The details could be arranged when it was decided by whom the work should be done.

SIR GEORGE PERLEY thought the Committee should go to Germany and decide on the amount of concentration, etc. necessary. He thought Sir George Macdonogh should be one of the Committee, and that the general arrangements should be made and the details worked out when the Committee returned.

SIR GEORGE MACDONOGH said that if the work was to be done by British military personnel he must have three months' notice in order to train transport staff, etc.

MR. SHEPHERD moved the following resolution:-

3. "That a Committee be appointed to visit Germany to make

general arrangements for the carrying out of this policy."

The resolution was seconded by Sir Robert Hudson and agreed to.

THE VICE CHAIRMAN said that they now had to nominate the Committee. He thought there should be one Dominion representative.

4. It was finally decided that the Committee should consist of Sir George Macdonogh, Mr. Shepherd and the Vice Chairman.

Agreed unanimously.

THE VICE CHAIRMAN expressed the unanimous feeling of the Commission that they were very indebted to the Adjutant General for the thought he had given to this question. It was agreed that if he were unable to accompany the Committee to Germany some other Commissioner should be appointed in his place, but it was felt that, even if it were decided that the Commission should undertake the work themselves, the Adjutant General's experience and advice would be of the greatest possible value to them.