

I inquired as to how it happened that letters had in a few cases been erroneously returned direct to the senders marked "Deceased," "Killed in action," &c., and found that this had been done by officers and comrades instead of returning the letters to the post-office for verification. It is quite possible that a few letters so marked were returned through the office itself when it was short-staffed and had to rely upon the units for its information.

Mistakes were also made in hospitals. In one case the High Commissioner sent the officer in charge of our records at Alexandria an envelope endorsed on the back "Died in — General Hospital, 7/9/15," and signed by the Colonel in charge of the hospital. The envelope, which was handed to the High Commissioner by the addressee himself, is stamped on the front "Verified at Records Base M.E.F."—that is the British Army Records Office. On inquiring at the hospital the officer in charge of our records was informed that a mistake had been made, a man of the same name as the addressee having died about the time the envelope was endorsed. The man responsible for the mistake was dismissed.

I am glad to say that there is now a better check, and that very few, if any, such unfortunate occurrences are likely to happen in the future.

Another cause of non-delivery of mail-matter was that parcels were often incorrectly or badly addressed. In all the military post-offices I visited I found a large number of parcels without labels, flimsy labels or labels the gum of which had perished in the tropics having become detached. Many addresses, too, were destroyed owing to the contents of the parcels being of a liquid nature. I was glad to note that, subsequent to my cabling to you on the subject, New Zealand parcels were being much better packed, and that fewer perishable articles likely to get adrift were being sent.

Causes for non-delivery and delay in the delivery of mail-matter are set forth in detail in a memorandum from Lieutenant McCurdy, attached hereto.

Before leaving for Egypt I received from Mr. W. R. Morris, Secretary of the New Zealand Post and Telegraph Department, a number of valuable suggestions which experience had shown his officers it was desirable to give effect to. In every case these suggestions have been put into operation with very beneficial results to our Army postal service.

At Malta, in the early stages of the operations, long delays took place in the delivery of correspondence. Later, however, the British Army Postal Service established there a "Wounded" Army Post-office, and when I visited the island late in December I found the delivery of correspondence to our men in the hospitals and the convalescent camps to be quite satisfactory, excepting that, owing to the infrequency of communication with the island, mails had often necessarily to be held a long time in Egypt.

As regards the procedure followed in the distribution of mail-matter in the different Army post-offices, I found that the Australian office sorted letters into battalions and sent them to the front twice, while the British office sent them once. On the return to the latter office of undelivered letters they were kept for six weeks, at the end of which time, if the addressees could not be found, the letters were sent to England. The procedure followed in the New Zealand office was to sort all letters alphabetically, to pick out those for men who were known not to be at the front, and then to despatch by first transport the remainder arranged according to battalions. Consequently our sick and wounded in the hospitals and convalescent homes received their correspondence promptly, while British and Australian patients had to wait until their's had been returned from the front.

A system had been adopted before my departure from Egypt of listing all parcels and receiving a receipt for them upon delivery. It was hoped that as a result of this precautionary measure fewer parcels would go astray. For a long time many were so badly packed that they had to be repacked at our base post-office before being sent on to the front, but our system of forwarding parcels in boxes from New Zealand now ensures their safe arrival at the base. I found that New Zealand was the only country to make this provision for the safe transit of its parcels. On the occasion of my visit to the Parcels Branch of the Australian Base Post-office at Alexandria I had ample evidence that our method was the best, for I found in that office many parcels that had been crushed to atoms, and even strong tins were flattened. I was informed that in some of their bags 50 per cent. of the contents were either damaged or destroyed.

In the course of conversation with me in December the General Officer Commanding the Alexandria District bore testimony to the efficiency of our office, saying that it compared most favourably with the Army post-offices of other countries, and this is the opinion I formed as the result of my inquiries.

In view of the growing business of our Army post-offices and of the further distribution of our troops, I deemed it advisable to recommend to you the appointment of a Director of New Zealand Army Postal Services, who should be a senior officer of good organizing ability. It would be his duty to supervise all our Army postal arrangements wherever our troops might be located; and he would, of course, be attached to the Base Headquarters Staff of our Expeditionary Force.

(13.) *"Any other matters affecting the well-being, comfort, and health of New Zealand soldiers."*

From what I could learn our men must, in the early stages of the Gallipoli campaign, have suffered very hard fare, their rations consisting then for the most part of biscuits and bully-beef; but when they returned to Anzac after two months' rest at Lemnos the catering was very much better. They then received, in addition to other rations, fresh bread and fresh meat three times a week, besides rice and a small quantity of preserved milk. The weather by that time had become comparatively cool, and I found that there was an urgent demand for oatmeal. General G. N. Johnston, of the Artillery, who had been able to get small supplies of oatmeal from the war-