

JUN 3 - 1944

GLOBE AND MAIL

Warriors' Estates

Branch of Defense Department Supervises Distribution of Effects

Ottawa, June 2. (Special). — More than 15,000 men of Canada's three armed services have been fatal war casualties so far, and most left a variety of personal effects—clothing, letters, photographs, diaries and watches—to be sent to relatives or other persons legally entitled to them, by the Estates Branch of the Department of National Defense.

If there is a will, the one named therein is entitled to the personal effects. If there is no will, they go to the widow, or the parents, or otherwise to the senior relative for division among those equally entitled under the law of the Province in which deceased was domiciled. The same law governs the distribution of the estate of the man who dies on active service and the man who dies a civilian.

Procedure in Canada.

Where death occurs in Canada, the collection of effects is fairly simple in that they are nearly always right in his unit quarters. Any money found on his person or in his effects is removed by the unit officer charged with collecting his effects, and given to the paymaster, and the pay account is credited with that amount. The effects are inventoried and are sent with a complete report on the case to Ottawa.

Here they are checked with the inventory, and as soon as the will is received, or notice that there is none, legal entitlement is determined and the effects are forwarded, the bulk by prepaid express and the small articles of real or sentimental value by registered mail. At the same time distribution is made of the amount of pay and of assets which have arisen out of pay.

Of course, if administration is taken out through court process, then the Estates Branch sends everything to the executor or administrator so appointed.

Overseas Cases.

Personal belongings overseas take a longer time. If death occurs in England, all the effects are secured by the unit in the same manner as in Canada, inventories made and, with a complete report on the case, forwarded to the Overseas Canadian Estates Office. The effects proceed to Ottawa and, upon receipt of necessary information, are sent to the relative or other person entitled to them. Where that person resides in England, however, the estates officer there sends the effects direct to him.

Where death occurs overseas out of England, the procedure is not greatly different. When personnel leave England their effects are necessarily stripped to minimum requirements. Service storage depots are provided for their surplus kit, but many prefer to store them in relatives' or friends' homes.

Sent Back to Base.

Upon a fatal casualty occurring on the field, an officer has all effects collected, inventoried, and sent back to the base, then, with a complete report, including any paybook will

found, forwarded to the estates officer, England. Here they are assembled with any effects stored in England and, unless the residence of the beneficiary is in England, shipped to the Estates Branch at Ottawa.

Overseas shipments reach Ottawa in the deceased's own trunk, suitcase, or other container, but if he had none, then in wire-found boxes or sealed kit bags. On one day 71 packing cases were received, weighing 10½ tons and containing the effects of 425 late servicemen.

Diaries and letters found in the effects are censored before being repacked. Immediately before forwarding, a letter is sent to the person who is to receive same, advising that the effects are on their way.

Naval Service.

The Canadian naval service differs from the system just mentioned for army and air force. An old custom has come down from the Royal Navy whereunder a "sale before the mast" is held of all ratings' effects other than those which the captain thinks proper to reserve for the relatives. These are forwarded to the Estates Branch, and are dealt with as above, but the remainder are actually sold on board by auction to shipmates, who pay much more for an article than its market value, in the knowledge that the proceeds are added to the pay account and go to benefit the person legally entitled, and that the same procedure will be carried out in the event of their death.

The branch in Ottawa is headed by Col. L. M. Firth, the director of estates, a former Toronto lawyer and an artillery officer in the last war. Wing Cmdr. N. O. Seagram, also of Toronto, is deputy director, and the three services are respectively in charge of the assistant directors, Cmdr. H. R. Wade, R.C.N.V.R., of Vancouver; Capt. R. G. Phelan of Toronto, and Flt. Lt. I. G. Ross of New Glasgow, N.S. Capt. O. Godbout attends to all Province of Quebec cases.

Sympathy Shown.

The task of the Estates Branch requires precise administration and in many cases infinite tact and sympathetic handling. The nature of the casualty may result in complete loss of all effects. Relatives who have not taken this into consideration has written critical letters.

There are other articles which, if delivered, would only cause greater anguish and grief than that already suffered—burned wallets, shell or bullet-mutilated watches, etc. The articles are put aside and retained in safe custody, and, if they are specifically requested, forwarded.

The Estates Branch has received many letters from next-of-kin expressing gratitude. A mother wrote: "I want to thank you for your kindness and the way you took care of everything. With such perfect co-ordination we can't help but win this war. I will now close with these thoughts in mind—V for Victory and God Save the King."

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