for Mark. WB
cc HMT

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

12 January 1981

Dear Mr. Gardner and Lord Wallace,

You wrote to me on 17 December to express the concern of yourselves and your fellow Commissioners at certain reports in the Press which followed the Written Answer which I gave in the House on 3 December on the subject of Non-Departmental Public Bodies.

I assure you that I fully share your concern that there should be any misunderstanding about the Commission, its standing and functions. I would like to set out briefly the sequence of events.

The Commission was referred, along with all other Non-Departmental Public Bodies, for review in early 1979. It was included because its status fell within the compass of the review. Its inclusion carried no adverse implication whatever as to the value and importance of its work. A large number of other distinguished institutions were also covered by the review.

A Report on the review was published in January 1980 (Cmnd 7797). This contained a brief factual note on the Commission (page 126), stating that it was financed by a number of governments, and that the staff-manning levels were under review. No misunderstanding or concern arose from the publication of the Report.

As you know, on 3 December I gave a Written Reply concerning the follow-up to the Report. This Answer referred in its last two lines to savings which would be effected by the Commission. That Answer was headed by the Editors of Hansard with the words 'Quangos (Report)'. The Government has no responsibility for the editing of Hansard. It was this heading which accounted for the

/ tenor of some

JS

tenor of some of the subsequent reports in the press though, with one exception, those reports were factual and 'neutral', simply reproducing the wording of the Answer. I see no reason why there should be any further public reference to the Commission in relation to the review of Non-Government Public Bodies.

I am grateful for your assurances concerning the application of all possible economies in the running of the Commission.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Thatcher

Edward Gardner, Esq., Q.C., M.P. and
Lord Wallace of Coslany

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG
01-233 3000

8 January 1981

Mike Pattison, Esq.,
Private Secretary,
10, Downing Street

Tyne Pa PM, nl
MAP 7/1.

Dear Mike,

COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

Mr. Edward Gardner, QC., MP., and Lord Wallace, two Parliamentary Commissioners of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, wrote to the Prime Minister on ~~17~~ December. They said that the Prime Minister's Written Answer in the House on 3 December about Non-Departmental Public Bodies had been followed by articles in the national press referring to the Commission as a 'quango' and of arbitrary cuts in expenditure by the Commission. They are deeply concerned that the Commission should be shown 'in public statements' in a way likely to misrepresent it.

We have examined all the cuttings from the national press for 4 December. The Times carried a five-line factual quotation on the Commision taken from the Answer. The Telegraph did likewise. The only report which could have been taken as offensive by the Commission was in some editions of the Daily Mail, which stated that:-

> 'The staff of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission which cares for the graves of servicemen will be cut drastically'.

In the light of this generally low-key and factual reporting in the press, the letter to the Prime Minister may be thought to be something of an over-reaction. But the Commission are, by virtue of their responsibilities, sensitive to any publicity which appears to demean their status.

It is, of course, no fault of the Government that the Editor of Hansard, and consequently in this case, the press articles coupled the Commission with the pejorative term 'Quango'.

We have been assured by the Commission staff, that if the Prime Minister can give some reassurance that any future reference to the Commission in any public manner will not associate it with the review of Non-Departmental Public Bodies, all will be well.

.... We attach a draft letter which the Prime Minister may wish to send to the Commission.

Yours ever, Richard Tolkien.

R.I. TOLKIEN

DRAFT

To:

Edward Gardner QC MP and Lord Wallace,
Commonwealth War Graves Commission,
2 Marlow Road,
MAIDENHEAD. Berks.

You wrote to me on the 17th December to express the concern of yourselves and your fellow Commissioners at certain reports in the Press which followed the Written Answer which I gave in the House on 3rd December on the subject of Non-Departmental Public Bodies.

I assure you that I fully share your concern that there should be any misunderstanding about the Commission, its standing and functions. I would like to set out briefly the sequence of events.

The Commission was referred, along with all other Non-Departmental Public Bodies, for review in early 1979. It was included because its status fell within the compass of the review. Its inclusion carried no adverse implication whatever as to the value and importance of its work. A large number of other distinguished institutions were also covered by the review.

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and 'neutral', simply reproducing the wording of the Answer. I see no reason why there should be any further public reference to the Commission in relation to the review of Non-Government Public Bodies.

I am grateful for your assurances concerning the application of all possible economies in the running of the Commission.

VLB

South Atlantic Campaign MAP FILE

cc FCO
MOD

BF 12.1.81

31 December 1980

I enclose a letter to the Prime Minister from Edward Gardner and Lord Wallace, about the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

I should be grateful if you would let me have a draft reply for the Prime Minister to send. It would be helpful if this could reach us by 12 January.

I am sending a copy of this letter and its enclosure to Roderic Lyne (FCO) and Derek Piper (Ministry of Defence).

M A PATTISON

Peter Jenkins, Esq.,
H.M. Treasury.

FILE

VLB

Miss PORTER

31 December 1980

I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to thank you and Lord Wallace for your letter of 17 December, about the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

I will place this before the Prime Minister, and a reply will be sent to you as soon as possible.

M A PATTISON

Edward Gardner, Esq., Q.C., M.P.

RH

FILE

VLB

31 December 1980

I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister to thank you and Lord Wallace for your letter of 17 December, about the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

I will of course bring this to the Prime Minister's attention, and a reply will be sent to you as soon as possible.

M A PATTISON

Edward Gardner, Esq., Q.C., M.P.

WK

TRY 9/R.NO

Treasury Chambers
Parliament Street London SW1P 3AG

Telex 262405

Telephone Direct Line 01-233 7920
Switchboard 01-233 3000

J Saynor
Commonwealth War Graves Commission
2 Marlow Road
Maidenhead
Berks

Your reference

Our reference AEF(S 9/227/01

Date 18 December 1980

Dear M. Saynor,

REVIEW OF NON-DEPARTMENTAL PUBLIC BODIES

Thank you for your letter of 12 December and enclosures.

2 The decision to include the Commission in the Report on Non-Departmental Public Bodies was taken by Treasury Ministers in the light of a definition of such bodies emanating from No 10 in May 1979. There is no generally accepted definition of a "quango"; Ministers simply decided that they wished certain non-governmental public bodies with executive functions to be included within the scope of an overall review.

3 It is of course regrettable if the current associations of the word "quango" lead some members of the public to believe that a slur is being cast on the effectiveness of the Commission's work. I would have thought, however, that in the present economic climate it would not be difficult for you to explain that economies in administration etc. do not mean that there will be any lowering of standards.

4 I am copying this letter to D J Howells, CSD and to T Lankester at No 10, since you told me that the Parliamentary Commissioner have written to the Prime Minister.

Yours sincerely,

Carolyn Sinclair

CAROLYN SINCLAIR

3

FROM: EDWARD GARDNER Q.C., M.P., and LORD WALLACE

COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION
2 MARLOW ROAD
MAIDENHEAD BERKSHIRE SL6 7DX
Telephone: 0628 34221

17th December, 1980.

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing as the two Parliamentary Commissioners of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

If we may say so, your written answer in the Commons on 3rd December was factually correct. In giving the outcome of the review of Non-Departmental Public Bodies, the Commission was shown under the Treasury heading with the decision that there would be staff reductions and other savings amounting to over £200,000 per annum by 1983/4. Unhappily, following this announcement, the acronym "Quango" was used both in Hansard and, inevitably, the National Press. As a result the Commission has received a considerable volume of protest on two grounds (i) objection (fully justified) to the use of the term "Quango" and (ii) the imposition of arbitary cuts in expenditure which appear to threaten our traditional standards of maintenance expected by the millions from all parts of the world who visit the cemeteries and memorials each year.

At the Commission's formal meeting last Thursday, our fellow Commissioners, including the representatives of all the Participating Governments, asked us to write to you expressing their deep concern that the Commission should be shown in public statements in a way which is likely to misrepresent in the public mind the status and functions of the Commission. It is perhaps worth noting that the Commission is the only international organisation included in the list of Non-Departmental Public Bodies.

We should like to emphasise that the Commission, in full consultation with the Treasury, is intent on making it's savings in the light of current financial restraints and in agreement with all its Participating Governments. These savings are, indeed, in continuation of those realised by its constant endeavours over the years to achieve greater economy and efficiency but at the same time to continue the essential horticultural and structural maintenance of the Commonwealth war cemeteries and memorials throughout the world.

...../2

The Commission fully recognises the need for the utmost economy in its operations and also understands the need for suitably recording decisions reached, but it would be glad of an assurance that there will be no further official public reference to it that would be likely to attract unwarranted concern both about its status and the apparent imposition of arbitary cuts which might adversely affect its work.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Gardner.

Wallace of Coslany

The Rt. Hon. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,
Prime Minister,
10, Downing Street,
London, S.W.1.

M. Ellis
Pl. spk.
GS.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission
2 Marlow Road Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 7DX

Telegrams Comgraves Maidenhead

Telephone Maidenhead 34221
(0628)

Miss C E C Sinclair
HM Treasury
Treasury Chambers
Parliament Street
London
SW1P 3AG

Your reference

Our reference
ORG 6
Date
12 December 1980

Pl. copy to
T Lankester, No. 10
D J Hamill, CSD.
GS

Dear Carolyn,

As you doubtless know, in your absence last week I spoke to Bob Ellis about the Commission's embarrassment as a result of publication of a statement, in answer to a Parliamentary Question, which referred to the Commission making savings, in the context of action to be taken on "Quangos". We realise full well that the word "Quangos" is incorrect, but inevitably it will always be used by the Press and the Hansard entry on the PM's statement was headed "Quangos (Report)".

You probably also know that the Commission has always held strongly that, as an independent international organisation, it should not have been included in the Report on Non-Departmental Public Bodies published in January 1980.

The folly of doing so is now being illustrated by the public disquiet being widely voiced. You know as well as we do that the Commission's plans for future economies should not have any adverse effect on the quality of maintenance of the cemeteries and memorials and simply reflect continuation of the Commission's efforts to do its job more economically and efficiently. However, the general public cannot be expected to know this and it was, to our minds, asking for trouble, apart from being wrong and quite unnecessary, to link the Commission in the public mind with "Quangos". As I told Bob Ellis, the first we heard of the Prime Minister's statement was when the Director-General was rung up late on the Wednesday night by a Daily Telegraph reporter asking for his comments on the reduction in the Commission expenditure announced by the Treasury (which he had wrongly interpreted as £200,000 pa each year until 1984) and on the obvious adverse effect this would have on the Commission's work. Fortunately the enquirer was persuaded that there was no 'story', but the local Reading paper did make something of it, talking about Treasury reductions forcing the Commission to save hundreds of thousands of pounds by staff reductions etc - this has not made our job any easier internally.

That our fears were well-founded is indicated by the three sample letters of which I enclose copies. We are, of course, replying to these and seeking to allay the fears expressed.

The damage has been done in this instance and cannot be undone but, at their meeting today, Commissioners from all participating countries were very firm in expressing the view that such a mistake must not be made again. I am writing informally to let you know that the Commissioners decided that the two Parliamentary Commissioners should write to the Prime Minister on the subject and they will be doing so shortly. You might find it helpful to have this advance warning.

Yours sincerely,

John Boynd

Assistant Director-General