

CONFIDENTIAL



MO 6/17/15/1J

PRIME MINISTER

1433
CCPK
Prinf Minister 2
PA
D
-

OPERATION GRANBY: POLICY ON REPATRIATION OF THE DEAD

I believe that OD(G) colleagues would wish to be aware of the policy it is proposed to adopt in the event of hostilities towards the bodies of any Servicemen killed in the Gulf. I have endorsed the recommendation of the Chiefs of Staff that our policy should be local temporary burial coupled with repatriation of bodies, wherever practical, once fighting had ceased. This policy would be announced in advance of hostilities only if we are pressed and, otherwise, when casualties arise.

2. Our traditional policy has been that of local temporary burial of Servicemen killed in action overseas, with a view to their later reburial near the battlefield on which they fell. In the case of those killed at sea, the senior officer present has decided whether to land the body or bury at sea. This policy was reconsidered by OD(SA) shortly after the 1982 Falklands Conflict, primarily as a result of pressure from the public and next of kin. It was decided then that the bodies of those temporarily buried in the Falkland Islands should be either repatriated or given permanent burial at San Carlos, according to the wishes of the next of kin. In the event, 65 out of 81 Servicemen killed on land were repatriated. We have, however, concluded that it would not be tenable in current circumstances to wait until the end of hostilities before deciding whether repatriation would be offered.

3. Advice from the FCO is that permanent Christian war graves in Saudi Arabia would be unacceptable to the Saudi authorities, although it is possible that they might review their attitude if large numbers of Western servicemen were to die in support of their country. But permanent burials in Saudi Arabia could also subject

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

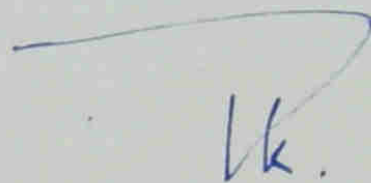


next of kin to unnecessary hardship since future visits to war graves could not be guaranteed in the long term. Bodies (including, possibly those who fell in Saudi Arabia) could be buried in other Gulf states. Our objective would remain to offer, in accordance with tradition, burial at least close to the field of battle but we have to recognise that the Gulf States (particularly Kuwait) would also be unattractive sites for many next of kin. It is therefore likely that we will be asked to repatriate at least a proportion of those killed. For reasons of equity, if repatriation is to be made available it should be offered to all next of kin, subject to practicality, regardless of where the Serviceman was killed.

4. We have, however concluded that we should not adopt a policy of repatriating of bodies during hostilities. Such a policy could prove impossible, or have to be suspended, because of the logistic and operational pressures of a campaign, leading to a major criticism of the MOD, perhaps especially if some Servicemen were repatriated immediately and others were not. The arrival of bodies in the UK while fighting was still underway could also have a serious impact on public opinion and support for the campaign at home (as occurred in the US during the war in Vietnam).

5. For those who are killed or die of their injuries at sea, however, the decision on whether bodies should be transferred ashore for later repatriation or buried at sea would continue to rest with the afloat commander in the light of operational circumstances.

6. I am sending copies of this minute to members of OD(G) and to the Cabinet Secretary.



Ministry of Defence

T K

16th November 1990

CONFIDENTIAL