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[S.S. 499.]

**FIRES.**

## INSTRUCTIONS AS TO INQUIRY AND LIABILITY.

(Circular Letter No. A.G. (b) 1650, dated 4-8-16, is cancelled.)

1. Whenever a fire occurs in a locality occupied by British Troops, and such damage to, or destruction of, private property is involved as may give occasion for the preferment of a claim against the British Government, the General Officer Commanding, or Officer Commanding Troops, will, as soon as possible after the occurrence, assemble a Court of Inquiry, which will always be composed of officers unconnected with the unit concerned.

In cases where Government property only is involved, G.O.sC. have authority to dispense with a Court of Inquiry when they are satisfied that no good purpose would be served by convening one.

2. When a Court of Inquiry is held to investigate a fire which has occurred within the area of an Army, and there are claims from inhabitants, or loss of Government property, exceeding £100 severally or jointly, application will be made for the Inspector of Fires to sit as President of the Court of Inquiry. This Officer's address is c/o Town Major, Doullens (telegraphic address, "Fires, Doullens"). He is in possession of a motor car.

3. The Inspector of Fires will not as a rule attend inquiries in the Lines of Communication Area, but in cases of special importance or difficulty application may be made for his services.

4. *In cases where civilian property is involved*, the following instructions will be observed:—  
Previously to the sitting of the Court of Inquiry—

(a) The Divisional Claims Officer will investigate the case immediately after the fire, according to the instructions in the memorandum issued by the Claims Commission.

(b) He will arrange for the attendance at the Court of Inquiry of all witnesses, both military and civilian, and will be responsible for their presence and that of an interpreter. He will attend the Court of Inquiry himself.

(c) He will be prepared to put in a list showing in detail the losses caused by the fire, and the amount at which he estimates them.

(d) The A.P.M. will, as soon as possible, send his Gendarmes to draw up a Procès-Verbal, and this will be submitted to the Court by the Gendarme who drew it up.

(e) The Gendarmes will be ordered by the A.P.M. to procure the attendance of such civilian witnesses as the Divisional Claims Officer may think necessary.

5. *In all cases when a Court of Inquiry is held to investigate a fire* a sketch plan of the site of the fire, with appropriate measurements, will be made by an Officer of the unit concerned and will be submitted to the Court.

The plan should show, if possible:—

(a) The burned portion of the building.

(b) The portion of the premises previously in military occupation.

(c) The portion of the premises previously in civilian occupation.

6. The Court will take and record evidence as to:—

(a) The cause of the fire.

(b) The extent of British and other occupation of the burned premises at the time of the occurrence.

(c) The nature and extent of the damage or loss, and whether any portion thereof is attributable to British troops.

(d) The precautions adopted by the troops in the case under investigation.

(e) The equipment of lanterns in the possession of the unit or provided for the building.

(f) The issue of Orders by the unit concerned for the prevention of fires. The Officer Commanding the Company or other detachment which was in occupation of the burned premises will attend the Court of Inquiry and will produce all fire orders published in his unit during the six months previous to the fire.

7. The Court will record an opinion as to:—

(a) The cause of the fire,

(b) Whether the fire is attributable to British troops.

(c) Whether orders for prevention of fires were correct and properly promulgated.

8. (a) The proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, together with a sketch plan and all other documents, will be forwarded with the recommendation of the General Officer Commanding formation through the usual channels to the Quartermaster General. An estimate should at the same time be furnished of the amount of the damage done both to civilian and to Government property. If these facts do not appear in the proceedings of the Court of Inquiry they should be ascertained before the case is submitted to the Quartermaster General.