

# Military Funeral For Victims

## AT WAGGA TO-DAY

### Official Inquiry Opened

What is stated to be the largest military funeral ever to take place in Australia will be held in Wagga this afternoon when the 26 victims of the unfortunate demolition explosion at Kapooka Engineering Training Camp on Monday afternoon are to be buried in the military cemetery.

The funeral will leave Kapooka at 2 p.m. and will proceed directly long Edward-street to Tarcutta-road and then Cemetery-road to the cemetery. It is expected that the cortege will reach the Wagga Base Hospital corner at 2.25 p.m. The caskets will be carried on four semi-trailers, and when the individual religious ceremonies are concluded at the graveside the askets will at a given signal, be lowered simultaneously into the graves.

The Mayor (Alderman J. V. Boyle), has announced that the offices of the Municipal Council will close between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. to-day, and he invites the citizens to line the Edward-street route of the funeral cortege. The Mayor also invites all banks, government offices, and business and professional men to give their employees time off to participate. It will be a fitting and nice tribute if the townspeople line Edward-street in thousands to pay respect to 26 young men who have truly given their lives for their country just the same as if they had been killed in action.

The stores will be closed, of course, all this afternoon, as it is the usual half holiday in the town.

Pupils from the Wagga Public Schools and the Catholic Schools, including Wagga High, Christian Brothers High, Gurwood-street, and South Wagga, will line both sides of the funeral route in Edward-street, opposite the South Wagga school.

A number of motor cars have been generously loaned by the public and these will assemble at the Town Hall at 4.20 p.m. and will convey relatives of the men to Kapooka to join the funeral at that point.

Returned soldiers are asked to assemble at the intersection of Baylis and Edward-streets at 2 p.m. to form a guard of honor.

The State police will assist by controlling traffic at intersections to ensure the free passing of the funeral.

#### THE TRAGEDY

Of three instructors and 25 trainees, only one trainee and one instructor are alive as the result of the explosion which took place in a dug-out while the men were receiving instruction in demolition work. There were no eye witnesses of the tragedy.

The terrific blast of the explosion drew the attention of other instructors on a nearby range. They immediately hastened to the scene, where they saw one of the instructors lying barely 15 yards from the enclosed dug-out. They gave the alarm to the hospital quarters, and all available medical help—doctors, ambulances and medical orderlies—raced to the scene.

The victims of the explosion came mainly from Victoria. The others were from N.S.W., Western Australia, South Australia and Queensland. Most of them were reinforcement troops, many with service in the Middle East and New Guinea. Others were from units which had been broken up as a result of Army changes. The men had done a little more than one-fifth of their sappers' training.

Within five minutes of the time of the accident medical help reached the dug-out, which was situated in the demolition range. This is a range where all forms of high explosive tuition is given to sappers in training. When the first ambulance arrived with two doctors the scene was one of destruction in the dug-out. When others rushed to the dug-out they were horrified to find that the 28 men were, with very few exceptions, apparently dead. About 24 were evidently killed by the blast. Two men were extensively mutilated and one was apparently seriously injured. One, an instructor, was blind and deaf, and shortly afterwards lapsed into unconsciousness. Later two of the men died, making 26 dead out of the whole party of 28.

One of the survivors is an instructor who, it is understood, left the dug-out 20 minutes before the explosion occurred. He was laying charges for night exercises which were to have taken place that night. The Army are relying on his recovery, because they consider that he is the only one who may be able to give some explanation of the tragedy. Blackboard instruction is usually given in huts set 15 feet below the earth. These are fairly roomy and allow work to proceed both on the range and in the classroom with the minimum of delay. There is a rounded earthen mound at the top and the dug-out is properly ventilated and lighted. It is understood that gelignite and detonators were stored in the dug-out prior to use in practical work.

#### EXPERIENCED INSTRUCTORS

The camp commandant, Colonel W. D. McDonald, was very distressed at the shocking tragedy which cast a pall of gloom, not only over the camp, but over the Wagga district. Colonel McDonald said: "I have no idea how the accident could have occurred. The instructors were so experienced and well trained that I can only think that it must have been some unaccountable force. Until the injured instructor recovers we will not know very much. Then there is every chance he may not be able to remember what took

place, seeing he had been out of the dug-out for 20 minutes. I can say no more than hope that the Army Investigation Board can, with his assistance, reach a speedy and just decision. The lack of any other eye witnesses to the tragedy creates great difficulty.

#### KILLED ON BIRTHDAY

Most poignant note of the tragedy to date was the death of Sgt. Instructor Herbert John Pomeroy, who was killed on his 31st birthday. He resided temporarily at Beckwith-street, with his wife and four children. There are three boys and a girl, aged 6½ years, 4 years, 2 years and 10 months respectively. Sergeant Pomeroy was one of the original Sixth Division men and had served in the Middle East, Greece, Crete and New Guinea. He has been an instructor for the past six months and was hoping to rejoin his unit next month. He was formerly a well-known amateur cyclist in Victoria.

Constable Harry Hickson, of Wagga, with whom the Pomeroy family lived, said: "Sergeant Pomeroy was a good-living family man who did not drink. His main thought was always for his wife and children. He loved the Army and was very bored with the inactivity of being an instructor, especially when he knew his mates were fighting in New Guinea again. Sgt. Pomeroy had the week-end off and was very happy because it was his birthday on Monday. He went off early on Monday morning in high spirits. His wife is broken-hearted at the terrific shock," said Constable Hickson.

#### INQUIRY OPENED

General Lloyd flew from Melbourne to Wagga yesterday afternoon to conduct an investigation into the tragedy. The military inquiry was opened at Kapooka and adjourned.

#### PUBLICATION OF NAMES

The Army censor telephoned us from Sydney last night asking that we refrain from publishing the names of those killed because they were still awaiting a flash that the telegrams had all reached their destinations to inform the relatives. It was suggested that the release of the names for publication would be made this morning.

#### THE INQUIRY

##### COMPLETION IMPOSSIBLE

##### TILL SURVIVORS RECOVER

CANBERRA, Tuesday: The official inquiry into the tragic explosion at an Army establishment at Kapooka (N.S.W.) would not be completed until the two survivors had recovered sufficiently to give evidence. This was stated in the House of Representatives today by the Minister for Post-War Reconstruction (Mr. Dedman) representing the Minister for the Army in reply to Mr. Fuller (Lab. N.S.W.) in whose electorate (Hume) the tragedy occurred.

Mr. Dedman expressed the Government's sympathy with those bereaved by the death in the explosion of the 26 soldiers.

#### SIXTH DIVISION "VERY TIRED"

##### BRIGADIER'S APPEAL

MELBOURNE, Tuesday: It was hoped that the Australian Government and people would recognize that the men of the Sixth Division had served them well for nearly six years and release them, said Brigadier W. A. Cremer, the original C.O. of a Sixth Division unit, speaking at the Legacy Club to-day.

The men of the Sixth Division were very tired, he added. The "Mother of all our divisions," as General Blamey had called the Sixth, should not be used beyond the limit of endurance simply because they were the first to volunteer.

A great majority of the people were eager to help the lads returning from active service, but there was a section opposed to them, said Brigadier Cremer. This section comprised many who had refused to risk their skin and got themselves into reserved occupations. "We must overcome the attitude of some Government departments—fortunately very few—that the returned serviceman is a malingeringer and a loafer until he proves himself otherwise," said Brigadier Cremer.

#### CHINA'S THANKS

##### TO ALLIES FOR AID

CHUNGKING, Tues. (A.A.P.): A resolution expressing gratitude for British, American and Russian aid to China was adopted by Kuomintang Congress. The resolution declared that Japan in desperation, is certain to make a last stand in China. It adds that only the restoration of Korean independence, and the total extermination of Japanese aggression can China consider victory completely won.