

Mr. CASTLEDEN: I believe the recent achievements of our airmen, particularly in the European war zone, reveal the importance of the striking power of our air forces. The ability of this arm of the service to reach over the fortifications, the armies and the navies of the enemy and strike at the nerve centres of a nation's production and distribution, and paralyze them, is rapidly changing the technique of war. To-day the immense value of the air force in saving man-power and the wastage which ordinary land fighting involves is becoming realized as never before. It is quite possible that the role of the army will be changed very largely to the essential work of carrying out occupational duties. The deep striking power of the allied air force has made it one of the major arms of allied forces, and I know Canadians generally are justly proud of the part our men have played in the air on every front where the united nations are fighting.

The British commonwealth air training plan in Canada has done a good job; it has turned out men who have maintained the high standards which Canadians set in the first war. These men are carrying on and winning new laurels for this dominion. When we realize that the boys who to-day are standing the brunt of this attack and carrying on this work only a few years ago were lads in our high schools and universities, playing hockey and football, carrying on their studies in technical schools and so on, we marvel at the ability of a training scheme to turn them into fighting men with the nerve, the will and the natural ability to adapt themselves to changing circumstances so that they get through, do their job and come back. I do not think Canada will ever be able to repay these men for the sacrifices they are making. I wish to pay tribute also to those thousands of brave mothers and fathers of these men who month after month stand the strain of worry and anxiety and who so bravely take the news, when it comes, that their boys are missing after air operations. Some interesting figures were published recently in the press showing how the casualties were distributed among the empire troops. These figures show that the United Kingdom has suffered 275,000 casualties; Canada, 10,400, Australia, 53,000; New Zealand, 19,000; South Africa, 22,000; India, 101,000 and the colonies, 30,000. Those are the rough figures. In the break-down of Canada's casualties I find that the Royal Canadian Air Force has suffered the loss of 3,957 men killed, 1,899 missing, 565 wounded and 629 prisoners, making a total of over 7,000.

Mr. POWER: I do not wish to interrupt my hon. friend, but those figures do not quite coincide. He will notice that the figures of total empire casualties are given as of three years of war. That would be September of 1942. As a matter of fact, the casualties list I placed on *Hansard* was as of May 14, or of very recent date. Most of the Royal Canadian Air Force casualties have occurred within the last several months. So that a comparison is not quite exact.

Mr. CASTLEDEN: It states that the Canadian army figures are for to-day, whereas the air force figures are as of April 30. The minister is correct in that. The total for Canada at the present time is over 13,000.

We all are interested in making the air force the most efficient weapon possible. There are some little matters, such as the granting of commissions, which very often alter a man's attitude. It seems to me it is only right and fair that any man actually engaged in aircrew, flying over enemy territory, should be qualified for commission. It is an incongruous state of affairs when we find, we will say, a sergeant-pilot who is piloting the bomber, and having under him during operations a commissioned man as one of his gunners. Then, it may be that the pilot of the next machine is a commissioned officer. These men are assuming the same responsibilities, but one is a pilot officer and the other a sergeant.

If these men were forced down or had to bail out over enemy territory, and be taken prisoner, they find that in the prison camps there is a difference between the treatment handed out to a commissioned man and that given non-commissioned men. I am not saying that every man who graduates from an air training school should necessarily receive a commission. But if he completes his training successfully, and engages in operational duties over enemy territory, surely he has won his right to a commission.

When a ship returns safely, the sergeant-pilot, who has been in command of the craft, leaves it, followed by his gunner, who may be a commissioned officer. From then on, the commissioned man receives recognition of his rank, and the sergeant must salute him. One goes to the officers' mess and the other to the sergeants' mess. The sergeant is not allowed in the officers' mess.

It would be good for the morale of these fighting men to grant the recognition I suggest. I know that in Canada commissions are granted to men doing clerical work, or to others who are doing technical or intelligence