

*War Appropriation*

My hon. friend referred to the matter of letters to soldiers. I can only say that I will take up that point. The hon. gentleman has sent me three envelopes. I can assure him—though I think he knows it without my assuring him—that there is no intention in the world to keep these men away from communication with their homes or to deprive them of their right to receive mail, the same as anyone else. There may have been carelessness; it may not have been realized that these young men were in these camps; apparently they were away by the time the letters arrived. I agree that there should be some proper system of forwarding mail; I am sure there is such a system in force, and I will see that these matters are looked into.

Then the hon. gentleman referred to my humble effort on the radio, and said something to the effect that I said I had the responsibility and then said that someone else, the people who actually had the responsibility, would give the facts. What I said was that I had the responsibility for the department, but that I would ask the people of this country to listen to the men who actually did the work. That is what I hope will be done in the course of the next few Sunday evenings.

I want to say a word to the committee with reference to what the department has done and is doing in regard to the matter of seeing to it that French-Canadian representation is properly maintained, and I make no apology at all for it. The hon. member for Trinity said something to the effect that race should not play any part in connection with military appointments. I agree with him; that is to say, that efficiency must not suffer. At the same time, however, I say, as I have said previously in this house, that I think it is a matter of national responsibility that we see to it that as far as possible, in connection with appointments in the army and in connection with commands, proper representation is maintained with respect to our French-Canadian fellow citizens. I want to say to my hon. friend that whether he believes it or not, if there has been any libelling or slandering done, as he complains, it has not been done by the Department of National Defence. I want to tell him that I think the most thorough measures have been inaugurated in order to see to it that every possible encouragement, assistance and support is given to French-Canadians who come into the army and give their services. I want to pay tribute to the men who have come in and to the officers who have helped in that respect. It

[Mr. Ralston.]

just happens that two of the three staff officers who are sitting before me to-night are bilingual. That only just happens. At the same time there are at national defence headquarters at the present time nearly fifty French-Canadian officers.

Let me say to my hon. friend that in connection with the Department of National Defence we have taken measures which we thought were appropriate and useful in order to make sure that French-Canadian representation was properly maintained. My hon. friend referred to a speech which was made by the late Right Hon. Mr. Lapointe some time ago in that connection. I want to bring to the attention of the committee two or three of the measures which have been taken and which we think have been of assistance in this respect.

We have organized a bilingual junior leaders school at Megantic, Quebec. The total capacity of this school is set at 210. The quota which has been provided for French Canadians at that school is beyond anything that has been supplied. I am not saying anything against the fact that the full quota has not been supplied; I only want to say that the quota has been just as generous as it could be in order to ensure that plenty of opportunities were given for instruction. This school was organized for the purpose of teaching English-speaking and French-speaking candidates the principles of leadership and enabling them to overcome any language handicap they might have.

With regard to training centres we have seen to it that there are French-speaking instructional staffs at the training centres in eastern Ontario and in Quebec. I think the proportion of these instructors is fully up to the number of men in the training centres. In the officers' training centre the proportion of French-speaking instructors is even higher.

My hon. friend referred to mobilization and contended that there had not been proper representation. Let me say to him that in the army programme for the present year there is provision for the formation of the following French-speaking units:

- One regiment medium artillery
- One engineer battalion
- Five field batteries
- One search-light battery
- Five infantry battalions
- One R.C.A.S.C. unit
- One field ambulance
- One general hospital
- One provost company
- One Canadian forestry corps company.

In addition, there is a bilingual infantry battalion, the Sherbrooke Fusiliers, being incorporated into the fourth armoured division.