

*Reinforcements*

theatre. Early in 1943 and again in the spring of 1944 increases had been made in the proportion of infantry troops to total army manpower. Instead of being acted upon apparently the telegram was pigeon-holed. Not only was no action taken by the military, but what is now considered much more serious, the situation was not brought to the attention of the minister or the war cabinet. Presumably the cabinet staff officers were figuring on an early end to the war and ignored the overseas request. Only when Colonel Ralston arrived overseas in October did he learn about the matter. By that time nearly two and a half months had passed. Had the matter been dealt with in early August and a large number of men diverted into the infantry pool at that time the present crisis might never have arisen.

I should like to know if the minister has any knowledge of the truth or otherwise of that statement.

Mr. RALSTON: I do not imagine the minister would have any knowledge of it. That would have to do with my own administration. I know of no telegram that was sent from overseas with regard to a matter of that kind which was not brought to the attention of the minister. Any important wire on a matter of that kind would be brought to the attention of the minister. The real situation is that it was found that infantry casualties were "very much higher"—we have always used those words, although I could give the percentages—than had been anticipated, and that goes not only for the Canadian forces but for our allies as well. The over-all casualties were practically the same, but the infantry casualties were a much higher proportion of the total than had been estimated on the very best information available. The result was that the infantry pool became exhausted. Immediately vigorous steps were taken by Canadian military headquarters over there to remuster men from other arms and train them for infantry. I was going to tell the house at some time or another if it does not invade security—I do not think it does—that at one time our units were down by something like 3,000 in the aggregate. I think that happened about the middle of August, if I am not mistaken. By a very effective remustering programme they had built the units up to strength about a month later, and had a small margin. It was expected that the pool would build up through the remustering that was taking place, and that what had occurred was more or less a splurge in activities and that the pool would build up again. That expectation was not realized. The rate of casualties continued in view of the kind of warfare we were undertaking. The result was the losses continued, putting us in the position where we are—I am not going to anticipate

[Mr. Gillis.]

what the general is going to say about the expected position at the end of November—in a situation where it seemed to me, after having gone over the situation in the battle areas both in Italy and in France and also in the United Kingdom, that we had to provide a very substantial lump sum number of additional trained infantry in order to reestablish the pool which was so depleted as to be almost exhausted at that time.

Mr. GILLIS: I am trying to get information because this story had been circulated in a paper as influential as the one I have mentioned. It is a very serious accusation.

Mr. RALSTON: I had not seen it or heard it.

Mr. GILLIS: It is a very serious accusation against a responsible military official in Canada and should be cleared up. I asked the question to get an official answer. I am very glad that the former Minister of National Defence has cleared it up.

There is one other point that I am interested in. I can understand the remustering of men who have had considerable military training in other branches of the service and are hardened up. I am concerned about the syllabus of training for service personnel coming in. Take a boy eighteen and a half years of age as an example. He is a young lad just out of school and is very soft. He is taken into the basic training centre. From there he goes to the advanced training centre. As I understand it, the syllabus of training is twelve weeks. I do not think twelve weeks are sufficient.

Mr. McNAUGHTON: Sixteen.

Mr. GILLIS: I was at a basic training centre within the last couple of weeks. In talking this matter over with some of those responsible for training, I was informed that the syllabus had been changed and that it was now twelve weeks. I thought at that time it was rather unfair to take a young boy eighteen and a half years of age who is very soft and to run him through basic training and advanced training and consider him then fit for active combat service in an infantry unit with that amount of hardening, to say nothing about the knowledge of the weapons he has to use. I consider it totally inadequate. It might serve the purpose in transferring the men from one unit to another where there was some training and where the personnel were hardened up. Some consideration should be given to this young fellow coming in before he is put into combat service. The amount of training given is something