

Supply—National Defence

Mr. Green: Are these to be fighter squadrons exclusively?

Mr. Claxton: Fighter squadrons at present. We are already having training flights of transport aircraft to the other side whenever the opportunity presents itself, so that quite a good proportion of our transport command not only have wartime experience of flying in all parts of the world, but also a great deal of peacetime experience, and they have shown a really first-class record of transport and performance. As I pointed out before, about the only test in connection with the operational work of an air force is the number of man-hours per month flown in comparison with other forces, and I am glad to say that our record compares very favourably, in proportion to total strength, with those of the United Kingdom and the United States.

With regard to the army the position is perfectly plain. At the present time we have not, and are not aiming immediately to get, any greater forces actually ready to fight at the drop of the hat than the brigade group. That is perfectly evident from everything that has been said and from the state of training of the reserve forces. Should the need for anything additional develop, then again it must be done either at the expense of some other service or by the provision of more money from the treasury of Canada, which in view of the demands of other government departments I suggest can only come out of the pockets of the Canadian people. That brigade group, we estimate—and it is only an estimate on the basis of all the information available—is adequate to deal with the type of attack that might be made on Canada in the foreseeable future, again having regard to what we know of the possible forces of both enemies and friends and how those forces would have to be employed.

Mr. Green: Is the brigade group up to war strength?

Mr. Claxton: As I explained when the house was in committee before—and, perhaps I should not have given the information, but I did—it is at about eighty per cent of strength. We do not expect that it will ever be right up to war strength, because there is a constant flow of men from it, either through discharge or through appointment to other units such as courses, schools and so on; and there is a constant flow in from the courses and schools. In addition to the brigade group there are in training in the courses and schools enough men, if put immediately and directly into the brigade group, to bring it up to strength; but there will never be a time when it is

[Mr. Claxton.]

completely up to strength. I do not suppose any unit is ever up to strength in that sense, just as no unit is ever fully trained in the strict sense of the word. Training is continuously going on; there is no moment at which training does not go on.

In addition to the brigade group, as hon. members know we have a very considerable administrative and training staff. The last time these estimates were under consideration I was asked as to the personnel employed at national defence headquarters, and today was about to rise and give the information when the leader of the opposition rose. There the total as at May 31, 1950, was 4,029, broken down into a total of 972 officers, 991 men and 2,066 civilians, including 184 who are members of the defence research board. In addition there are considerable staffs at command and area headquarters. I am trying all the time to reduce the proportion of our forces employed in that way, just as similar efforts are being made in other countries. Their experience is exactly the same as ours. We have tried to compare our figures and our results with those of the United States and the United Kingdom, and we find that we have about the same proportion of civilians to service personnel, a rather smaller proportion of officers, and about the same proportion of what might be called overhead to operational troops. We are never satisfied with the proportion of overhead, and are constantly endeavouring to reduce it. In that connection I might add that the establishments of all types of units in the three services were reviewed over the past two years by teams representing the department, the service concerned, the civil service commission, and the treasury board. That did not result in any considerable reduction, despite the efforts of the agencies of governments concerned. Frequently when we have had reviews of establishments by experts, either from outside the government or from within, it has not resulted in a reduction.

As to the employment of other personnel, I should like to give all the information possible to hon. members; but of course here I am faced with the fact that, as the leader of the opposition has said, the Soviet union surrounds itself and its armed forces with rigid secrecy. In these debates and in statements outside the house I have tried to give information which would not affect the national security but would correspond closely to that given in other countries. I have followed this matter with the closest possible attention, and I wish hon. members could see the kind of debates that take place on defence in the United Kingdom. There they had four days on defence estimates out of twenty-three. This is our fourth day