

stated that if the recommendation contained in the report of the chief of staff was formally made to the cabinet and not accepted, you would feel compelled to resign, in view of what you had said in parliament. Subsequently you stated that you saw clearly that the cabinet were not disposed to accept your recommendation. In view of your possible resignation on these grounds, I felt it necessary to ascertain the views of General McNaughton. This I did, and ascertained that General McNaughton was not satisfied that compulsory service was necessary to provide full support for the army overseas. In reply to my further inquiries, General McNaughton indicated to me that, with the cooperation of the cabinet, he believed it would be possible to obtain the necessary reinforcements by voluntary means, and that in this belief he would be prepared to assume the responsibility of Minister of National Defence should you resign. In these circumstances, I expressed the opinion that there should not be further delay in reaching a decision.

I cannot express to you too sincerely my own thanks for your great services as a colleague in the years we have shared the responsibilities of office. Nor can I too warmly express my recognition of what your services in all war activities have meant to Canada in these most difficult years.

Yours very sincerely,

W. L. Mackenzie King.

On November 6, 1944, I received the following further communication from the Hon. J. L. Ralston:

Ottawa, November 6, 1944.

Right Honourable W. L. Mackenzie King,  
P.C., M.P.,  
Prime Minister of Canada,  
Ottawa, Canada.

Dear Prime Minister:

Your letter of November 3 came to my apartment very late in the evening of that date. On consideration I felt that it called for an answer, and I regret that over the week-end imperative matters which I could not escape have prevented my writing you earlier.

In the second, third and fourth paragraphs of your letter you appear to imply that the main issue was in some way affected by the fact that the need to provide for additional infantry reinforcements was not reported by me until October 19 on my return from my overseas inspection trip. I think this has really no bearing on the issue of sending N.R.M.A. men as reinforcements or on my recommendation to that effect. If it has any bearing it seems to underline the urgency of the necessity which I reported. I cabled you from London on October 13 indicating my apprehensions. I reported to you personally on the 18th, the same day I arrived home. I reported to war committee the next day. I do not think your letter represents all the information given by me to you or to war committee or to cabinet from time to time with regard to the reinforcement situation; but suffice it to say that I have not at any time withheld any information which appeared to require attention.

The point is that when I obtained information which led me to believe that the need for infantry reinforcements could not be met by departmental action alone, I so reported at

the earliest possible date, and I presented this information as fully as possible with my recommendation for action. The fact that such information was not expected or was disturbing has no bearing, I think, on the essential question of the necessity which I presented.

Regarding the assurance as to reinforcements given in August: You refer to the combining of existing units in Italy into an infantry brigade. Any assurance on this point was given by the officers who knew the situation, and as I have already told you, the corps commander advised me when I was in Italy recently that the casualties sustained by this brigade were no greater than those which had been forecasted for the units if they had operated separately.

The discussions at Quebec, of which you make mention, had nothing to do with the reinforcement situation overseas, but were in connection with participation in the war against Japan.

The point is that we are faced with a practical situation which has to be met.

You take exception to my statement that "our differences are fundamental on the vital matter of reinforcements". I have given the facts regarding these differences in my letter of resignation. I think, when my recommendation has not been accepted, when there is disagreement between us as to what was the policy to which the government committed itself in 1942, and when there is disagreement as to what is the present policy, that these are fundamental differences.

You say you are prepared to follow the course outlined in your speeches in parliament in 1942 if that course should ever be necessary, but you do not believe it has become necessary. There is disagreement between us on the vital point as to the meaning of the word "necessary". Your view, recently expressed, is that you consider it means "necessary to win the war", "necessary to defend Canadian soil", "necessary to avert some great calamity or catastrophe". I took the word "necessary" to mean primarily "necessary to keep our overseas army reinforced". I always thought that this was the meaning given to the word in council and parliamentary discussions. There is, I think, a vital and fundamental difference between us on this point.

In my letter of resignation I said that my first thought was my duty to our fighting men in our overseas army. You say that for the proper accomplishment of this purpose nothing should be done which would divide the country, and in this connection you speak of a general election.

I must point out that when Bill 80 was introduced and discussed in the house, nothing was said about an election. The declared procedure, as appears from your speeches, was that if the government decided that it was necessary to send N.R.M.A. personnel overseas, it would go to parliament, announce its decision, and ask for a vote of confidence, and that there would be no second debate on the question of conscription. You said that debate would have to be curtailed and that only a short time, if any, would be allowed for discussion. The suggestion now of a general election on the matter is the introduction of a new condition not contemplated or discussed at the time Government policy was laid down two years ago.

You mention that you always received assurances that additional commitments would not