

Canadian Forces Act

I have reasons to believe that the information supplied to me is in accord with the facts. I will not disclose to the house the names of those who have entrusted me with the information, as it would put them in a difficult situation.

Only those who close their eyes to the evidence contend that French Canadians are treated fairly in the armed services on the battlefield as well as in training camps. I am not of that opinion.

That is what I wanted to say today to the Minister of National Defence.

Mr. Gauthier (Portneuf): Mr. Chairman, I have listened with a great deal of attention to the statement just made by the hon. member for Chicoutimi (Mr. Gagnon).

If French-Canadian soldiers in Korea are being discriminated against, if they are the object of a special affection, in the sense that they are placed in the most dangerous spots, I will be the first to protest, to urge the Hon. Minister of National Defence (Mr. Claxton) and the whole house to demand that this state of affairs be brought to an end.

I read the newspapers after the hon. member had made his statement. Commanding officer Dextraze is reported to have said that not a word of it was true.

I do not know what the Chicoutimi member's sources of information are; they may be excellent. I have not the slightest doubt that he is sincere, but just the same, when he makes charges as important and as serious as those he brought to the attention of this house the other day, from his seat in parliament, as a man responsible not only to the people of Chicoutimi county but to all Canadians, it is important that all hon. members should get further information. We do not ask him to divulge the names of those who gave him this information, but simply to state his charges more precisely, so that we may know if, in fact, certain commanders place French-Canadian soldiers in more exposed positions than others. Personally I cannot see how that can be possible, since there are French-speaking commanding officers in Korea.

The minister made a statement after our hon. friend had stated his allegations, and said that the charges were unfounded. After all I should think these men who command a company or a regiment must be somewhat responsible and sincere.

That is what I wanted to say, Mr. Speaker. I do not in the least wish to blame my hon. friend. The only thing I could blame him for would be that he has not been more definite.

I would be very much surprised, though, if the situation that he spoke of really existed.

After all the efforts made by French-speaking Canadians in the past in order to strengthen the bonds of fraternity in Canada among Canadians of English, French, Ukrainian, Polish, Italian or any other origin, I do not see why English-speaking Canadians would not do the same. I am sure that if such were the case, we would not have to deplore the condition mentioned by the hon. member.

May I say again that I do not doubt the statement made by the hon. member, but we must have proof that such a condition exists.

Mr. Claxton: Mr. Chairman, when the hon. member for Chicoutimi (Mr. Gagnon) took the floor, I thought he had meant to withdraw, unreservedly, his remarks of two weeks ago. But he did not. He repeats them and reasserts, without a scintilla of evidence, that his contentions are in accord with the facts.

We now have seven thousand men fighting communists in Korea. They are seven thousand miles away, and Korean terrain is very rugged. Because they are engaged in combat almost every day, it is essential that they have the utmost confidence in their officers and in other units fighting by their side. If differences were to arise between units, they would cause a great deal of trouble both in Korea and here in Canada.

Now what are the facts? The fact is that there is not a single word of truth in those allegations. Colonel Jimmy Dextraze, D.S.O., C.B.E., is the commanding officer of the 22nd Regiment. A man of great experience, one of the best officers in the Canadian army, he is held in high esteem by his men. When he heard of those allegations, his reply, as reported by Bill Boss, through the Canadian Press was: "It's a damn lie!" Such was the answer of the commanding officer of the 22nd Regiment in the theatre of operations.

The fact is that, through no fault of their own, but because of the hazards of war, the casualties sustained by the 22nd Regiment are much lower than those of the other infantry battalions. It is not their fault, but it is nevertheless true. We cannot hope to achieve the degree of national unity so desirable in Canada when a person, whatever be his race, raises a matter such as this without formal proof. I believe that the allegations made by the member for Chicoutimi (Mr. Gagnon) have not met with the approval of