

Supply—National Defence

So far as the Oberon submarines are concerned, the minister in his statement last night boasted about having obtained the first of these submarines and talked about how important this acquisition would be to the Canadian navy. I think that is an indication of how the minister has worked and the inadequacy of the knowledge he had before in this regard. He must have learned a great deal in the past few years because he has now gone ahead with the Oberon program and has reinstated the general purpose frigate program, although on a reduced scale. His education in this regard has been expensive for the country. He has probably had the most expensive education of anybody in Canada.

In relation to the new ships which are being built, the general purpose frigate or helicopter destroyer, if the minister wishes to call it that—

The Chairman: Order, please. I apologize for interrupting the hon. member but his allotted time has expired.

Some hon. Members: Continue.

The Chairman: Does the committee give unanimous consent to the hon. member to continue?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Harkness: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will take only a very few more minutes. These new ships were to be powered by steam but I understand now that they are to be powered by gas turbine engines. Such an engine has not yet been designed for a ship of this size. I think the inevitable result will be all kinds of bugs and difficulties and no doubt a greatly increased cost. No one actually knows what the final result will be. I should like to know upon whose advice the decision was made to power these ships with gas turbine engines because I think this is a very doubtful proposition.

I should like to say something about R.C.A.F. equipment. The minister has been very boastful about the F-5 for which orders have now been placed. Following the evaluation of this aircraft in Viet Nam the United States Air Force has decided not to purchase any of them so it looks as though Canada will be the only country using the F-5.

I have before me some excerpts from a letter written by an R.C.A.F. officer who was fairly intimately concerned with the evaluation of aircraft, including the F-5. I should like to put these statements on record to give

[Mr. Harkness.]

some idea of the opinion of the R.C.A.F. regarding this aircraft. This letter states:

A second comment is on the statement of the F-5. It is not only considerably inferior to the other aircraft of its comparative size and performance, but also was the only one of the three aircraft evaluated by the integrated services, i.e., A-7, A-4, F-5, which was rejected as being unsuitable. The other two were considered to be acceptable, and were considerably more effective.

The other point which has been overlooked is that the F-5 is the only aircraft of the three which is not carrier compatible. The result of course being that there is no way now for the mobile command to achieve mobility in its fighter deployment since the F-5 cannot provide any protection to the command when it moves overseas, since the aircraft has not the range or navigation facilities to protect the force while underway. In addition of course the statement that the F-5 has an outstanding record in Viet Nam is nonsense. To date, unless there has been a recent change in policy, the F-5 has only been used in South Viet Nam in local short range sorties against rifle and small arms fire from ground forces. It not only does not have the range to operate in North Viet Nam but also has such a poor weapon load that it is uneconomical to operate. The minister's remark about Canadian modifications is partly true. Mainly so because without the improvements proposed by Canada, the aircraft is virtually useless. The F-5 was designed and built as a cheap high altitude interceptor, and to modify it for a low altitude strike aircraft, virtually destroys its worth. It is interesting to note that the small A-4 is flying over 80 per cent of the missions in Viet Nam and the U.S.N. is so pleased with its performance that it will be in service until 1973. Also of course the A-7 is its replacement and is being purchased by the U.S.N. and U.S.A.F.

Both the A-7 and A-4 as stated were selected by the Canadian forces over the F-5. Costs were of little significance when performance and cost effectiveness was applied. To modify the F-5 now of course to make it effective has escalated the costs considerably.

That is the opinion of a member of the R.C.A.F. In addition to that statement we have a considerable amount of evidence from *Aviation Week* and various other United States journals regarding the performance or lack of performance and the disabilities of this aircraft. The experience in Viet Nam showed, as indicated in *Aviation Week*, that the take-off roll, in other words, the amount of runway required for this aircraft to take off, was excessive. It is therefore unsuitable for the role the minister envisages for it.

● (12:40 p.m.)

This is his statement in that regard:

Take-off roll of the MAP F-5 is felt to be too long to permit operation from short fields with a large combat load for close air support. A typical 6,000-foot or greater take-off roll is longer than a great many short fields. To clear an obstacle at the end of the runway, additional field length would be required.