

NATIONAL DEFENCE—FATAL ACCIDENT AT LAC LA BICHE—
ESTABLISHMENT OF BOARD OF INQUIRY. (B) AGE OF
EQUIPMENT

Mr. Gordon Towers (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, it is with sadness that I rise to speak at this time but I must deal with that tragic accident that occurred at Lac La Biche, Alberta, on September 30, in which three young lives were snuffed out.

● (1810)

I appreciate having received the letters General Thériault sent to members of the families and I should like to put them on record. The first one is to Mr. and Mrs. Ian McKinnon, R.R. 2, Lousana, Alberta. He wrote:

1. Please accept my most sincere condolences, and those of the Canadian Forces, following the death of your son, Richard Hebert Norton, in a vehicle accident at Lac La Biche, Alberta

2. I very much regret that such peacetime military service accidents do occur from time to time. Canada and the Canadian Forces are indebted to your son for his service to his country. Signed G.C.E. Thériault, General

The same letter went out to Mr. and Mrs. Norman Duguay at 203-4811, 67th Street in Red Deer. The third young man was from Airdrie just outside my constituency. His name was McDonald.

One of the concerns I expressed in the question I put to the Minister that day was that no one would be made a scapegoat as a result of the malfunctioning of any equipment that they used. We all know that the trucks that those members of the force used were anywhere from 30 to 40 years old. It is very easy to understand how a vehicle of that vintage could malfunction. I was as concerned with the Minister's answer to my question, reported at p. 27665 of *Hansard*, when he said:

I would indicate to the hon. gentleman that indeed there is going to be a board of inquiry. I will seriously consider, having received the report, what portion of that report can be made public.

We are not at war, Mr. Speaker. Surely the parents of those young men are entitled to know exactly what happened. If the Government failed to provide the proper equipment for members of the force we should know about it. Neither the Minister nor anyone in Cabinet nor Government should hide behind someone in the forces and use them as a scapegoat. If there was a malfunction of equipment, then it is easy to understand how the accident happened. I would hope that members of the force would give a little more credence to the human aspects when something like this happens.

I was contacted by neighbours of the families involved who were very upset and angry at the lack of consideration shown by the Department toward the families. The accident happened at noon on a Friday. There is a very fine gentleman who is padre at the Canadian Forces Base, Penhold. I know that if the Department of National Defence had contacted him he would have driven over to see both families and to notify them of what took place. Instead, a call went through from the Colonel Belcher Hospital in Calgary and a minister in Three Hills, which is quite far from where the family lived, went to see them. He did not know the family or any of the details of the accident. It is too bad that things happened this way. I

Adjournment Debate

think that in time of peace greater consideration could be given to people caught up in this sad situation.

The padre from Penhold is a friend of mine and I know he would have gone to see the family and help explain things to them. There were only two boys in the McKinnon family and now the oldest one is gone. The neighbours speak very highly of the family and certainly the family is suffering. More consideration should have been shown. I understand they were told a car would pick them up to take them to the funeral which was supposed to be at two o'clock on a Wednesday. They waited until a quarter after one. There was still no car. The car had broken down, but they had not been notified of this. To me, this is totally unacceptable. As I said earlier, the minister from Three Hills was the one who told them on the Friday night that their boy had been killed and that they should call the funeral home on Saturday morning. They could then find out exactly what the details were. They phoned the funeral home and found it had not been contacted at all. It was not until Sunday night that they actually knew what was going on.

● (1815)

Certainly I feel that the Department was really lacking insofar as its treatment of this family is concerned. I believe we can do better. I know that you and I agree on that, Mr. Speaker. It is the responsibility of all of us because when anyone joins the force, that person becomes a part of us and we are a part of that person. I would hope that the members of the force would take this into consideration and not be so impersonal when it comes to deaths in a family, especially tragic deaths such as these.

Mr. Jesse P. Flis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Hudecki) and on behalf of the Minister himself, I am pleased that the Hon. Member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers) has given me an opportunity to discuss matters relating to the tragic accident at Lac La Biche. I would like to join him, the Parliamentary Secretary and the Minister in offering condolences, not only to the families mentioned by the Hon. Member in the House today, but to the extended families and friends of those who died as a result of this tragic accident.

I was in this Chamber when the Hon. Member directed his question and his supplementary on October 3, 1983 to the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Blais). I want to strongly object to the inference made in his supplementary question considering the road worthiness of this type of vehicle. Although the fleet is aging, all the vehicles are maintained to a set standard and in accordance with stringently laid down CF vehicle maintenance policy. If the vehicle cannot meet those standards, it is not used.

It is much too early to make judgments on the cause of this accident. I can only repeat what the Minister stated in the House in response to the Hon. Member's question, that it is a given that the board of inquiry is competent and that an