

Supply—National Defence

all that kind of thing, I would like to make some more general observations and ask him some more general questions which will provide the foundation, I hope, for the subsequent questions. I would ask the minister if he could explain in some detail, because it is a very important matter, the nature of the new role that is now being undertaken by part of the Canadian air division attached to the NATO forces in Europe. It is a new role; it is bound to be a difficult role, a role of responsibility. Perhaps it is a new departure in our participation in NATO military activity in Europe, and I think the committee would like to know something about it.

The minister has called it a strike reconnaissance role. He has also, I think, referred to it, or it has been referred to, as a strike attack role. We would like to know exactly what this change involves as far as the remaining squadrons—I think four CF-100 squadrons, although I may be wrong in that figure—are concerned. The minister said last night that they will continue the role they have been performing in Europe. Perhaps the minister will explain to us how they will be able to carry out that role in the future. They will no doubt be functionally detached from the new squadrons and will be carrying out the old role in new conditions of capability of attack. But we are more interested at the moment in the picture of the new strike attack or new strike reconnaissance role and what it involves for the R.C.A.F.

We are also interested, as I know the committee will be, in the conditions under which this new NATO role will have to be carried out. I understand, and the minister will correct me if I am wrong, that the headquarters of six of the twelve R.C.A.F. squadrons are located in France; the others are in Germany. I believe it is the case, and again the minister will correct me if I am wrong, that France has not seen fit to integrate her own air forces with the NATO forces under NATO command. Also, France in the exercise of her sovereign rights has not found it possible to facilitate certain plans of the United States as part of European NATO forces for the storage and use of nuclear weapons which the United States consider to be an indispensable part of the NATO forces and which indeed, as was pointed out yesterday, General Norstad has said is the capability on which all NATO planning and tactics are now based.

As a result of this stand taken at the present time by France—perhaps France may reverse her decision—the United States air forces contemplate leaving the NATO air fields in France for other sites where these difficulties will not be encountered. Therefore

[Mr. Pearson.]

the minister might tell the committee in some greater detail than he did when I asked him a question about this the other day what will happen if the United States feels it must make that decision. I suppose the result would be that the only foreign squadrons—by “foreign” I mean non-French squadrons—left in France would be those of the R.C.A.F. I believe it is also true that at the present time the Canadian air units depend for their logistics and their supply on the United States military pipe line. They get their ammunition, their aviation fuel and their rations through that United States pipe line.

Therefore I ask, because I think the question is particularly pertinent at this time when we are contemplating the re-equipment of Canadian air squadrons in France, how these squadrons could be maintained economically if all this was cut off, quite apart from the fact, although this is not strictly relevant to this particular question but perhaps I might mention it, that this whole system of NATO infrastructure will be very seriously affected, communications, the oil pipe line and all the rest of it, if the United States squadrons feel that they have to leave France. Surely this is an important thing to know before we discuss in detail the nature of the decision reached by the government to re-equip these squadrons, and perhaps the minister would be good enough at this time to deal with these two somewhat background subjects.

Mr. Pearkes: First of all, dealing with the new role, it is that of strike reconnaissance. I explained in some detail when I was speaking the day before yesterday what that role was. I pointed out how the Russian ground troops are in considerable numbers along the Russian border and in satellite countries. If the Russians started a war those troops would very likely move through to overrun the countries of western Europe.

It is desirable in the first place to have reconnaissance aircraft which are fast and able to get information as to the movement of columns so those columns can be engaged either by those aircraft or by other means at the disposal of the commander; for instance, by missiles such as the Lacrosse which we will have in our own brigades in the not far distant future. I think that is a fairly obvious role. It is necessary to have this reconnaissance work carried out; and it is essential, now that the means of engaging aircraft have been made more effective, that these planes be small and fast.

In addition there might be targets of opportunity. One might find that there would be a moving column of armoured fighting vehicles. It would be difficult to attack such