

*Reinforcements*

At the same time I drew attention to factors which were deterring N.R.M.A. men from converting to general service. I undertook that these difficulties would be removed.

I told the men in the N.R.M.A. that fair play required that, in demobilization, our troops overseas would have the first call on all gainful employment and that those who did not convert to general service would have to wait their turn.

Then followed the radio address made by the Prime Minister on Wednesday, 8th November. He covered again the points I had previously been authorized to make. I thought that this appeal addressed to the men and the other measures we were taking would have the effect desired and that, as well, we would have the united support of all our people, and that shortly our difficulties in finding men trained as infantry would be largely over.

I drew the policy defined in the Prime Minister's speech to the attention of all our senior commanders in Canada. I directed that it be adopted forthwith, and I asked their help in every way.

Later these officers met me in Ottawa and I was able to explain to them personally the objectives which we should reach if the numbers of reinforcements for overseas were to be adequate to meet the army's needs. I was able to hear at first hand their views on the problem and discussed with them the means of removing the difficulties which had operated to deter N.R.M.A. men from converting to general service. I undertook that these matters would be corrected and this has in large part been done. The district commanders told me quite frankly they had not much hope that our requirements would be met, but they loyally undertook to make another effort. This they have now done, and I must admit that the results have not been adequate. I am advised that there are very many N.R.M.A. men who will not volunteer under present circumstances but who are quite willing to be sent overseas.

I think that I should now state our problem in terms of numbers and times.

First, let me say that in total for all arms and services overseas there is no present shortage. Moreover, no overall shortage is expected in the period for which the figures have already been forecast which extends well on into next summer. Unfortunately, however, it is not in totals that our present problem can be expressed, for men are not quickly transferable from one arm of the service to another, and even with time, there is a limit beyond which remustering cannot be carried out.

[Mr. McNaughton.]

The difficulty we have arises in the infantry, for it is in this arm that we have unfortunately experienced heavy casualties in Italy and in northwest Europe since D-day. In total for all arms the casualties have been very close to the estimates, but in infantry they have been heavier than the forecasts on which our plans for reinforcements were based. Should casualties continue at the higher rates, there is a possible prospective shortage of fully trained infantry, which may come late in January or early in February next. Against this there will be, at that time, large numbers of infantry in the depots whose training has approached completion and who will be available for posting to the units shortly thereafter in the following month.

We must remember that our figures are forecasts and estimates and so we cannot expect a high order of precision. There are many uncertainties one way or another, such as sailing dates delayed by adverse weather, quarantine for minor contagions, etc., which may affect particular groups of the men concerned and for which allowance must be made. The figures I am using to assess the situation are very definitely on the safe side and I think it well that this should be so, for if there is any error it should be on the safe side. In all the figures which are used the rates of wastage and the scales of future activity are those which have been arrived at by our own officers in the field and confirmed by the theatre commanders.

Later on in the spring or early summer the forecasts show another period when the infantry reserves behind the troops might become low. In this period the intake into the pools of trained infantry reinforcements depends on the numbers now in the training stream and on the conversions to general service from the fully or partially trained infantry in the N.R.M.A. The number of volunteers in the training stream is known. The number of conversions from the N.R.M.A. to general service has been estimated at the average rate of recent months.

The forecasts have not as yet been carried through the summer, and all I can now say is that the situation then will depend on the rate of recruiting for general service in December and in the following months.

I look forward to placing before you the actual figures up to the end of May inclusive under conditions in which they can be disclosed.

Within the general infantry situation there is another which I frankly admit is giving great concern. I refer to reinforcements for our French-speaking infantry units. These,