

Oral Questions

can have for the selection of the oldest military band in Canada, the Royal Canadian Regiment band, located at the Canadian forces base at Gaagetown—Canada's largest armed forces base—as one of the four band units to be disbanded, in face of strong representations from citizens and leaders at every level of government in New Brunswick? Will the minister review this decision?

Hon. James Richardson (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member is very concerned about his own location, but the Chief of the Defence Staff has made an announcement which involves the phasing out of four bands. I should like the hon. member to be aware that in the wider context there are over 100 authorized military bands in Canada at the present time.

Mr. Woolliams: That is not quite accurate.

Mr. Richardson: There are 66 in the reserves, some 39 volunteer bands, and 9 permanent forces bands. Within the wider context, we are continuing to have many personnel involved in making music in the armed forces, but we cannot maintain every band and I regret very much that the one the hon. member has referred to is to be phased out within the course of the year.

REQUEST FOR RETENTION OF AIR TRANSPORT COMMAND
BAND AT KINGSTON, ONT.

Miss Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of National Defence. Given that the minister single-mindedly insists on computing the value of the Air Transport Command band in dollar terms only, and refuses to take into consideration the intangible but significant contribution of these great military bands to the culture, history and educational development of Canada, will he reconsider his shortsighted decision to phase out the Air Transport Command band—I would remind the minister that this is a command band—based in Kingston, knowing that the retention of this band has been urged upon him by thousands of people in eastern Ontario?

Hon. James Richardson (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, I would say essentially the same thing to the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands. I acknowledge what the hon. member has said about the merit of the Air Transport Command band but, in the wider context we find it necessary to phase out 160 positions in four bands and that is one of the four that will be phased out.

REMOVAL OF "ROYAL" DESIGNATION FROM MILITARY BANDS

Right Hon. J. G. Diefenbaker (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I also have a question for the Minister of National Defence, so that we will know the actual situation regarding the music to which the minister refers, will he tell the House why four of the bands being phased out are "royal" bands? I mention, of course, the Royal Canadian Air Force band, the Royal Canadian Regiment band, the Princess Patricia's Light Infantry band, and the Royal Canadian Artillery band. By his action the minister

[Mr. Howie.]

knocks out 60 per cent of the bands in Canada that are "royal."

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Is that merely coincidence? The minister can certainly get assistance from the Acting Prime Minister, whose participation in this surprises me. Is this part of the erosive principle that this government has followed, under the Prime Minister, of removing "royal" as far as it is possible to do so?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. James Richardson (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, even after the four bands that were referred to have been phased out, there will be more than 90 bands playing in the Canadian armed forces, and I am certain they will be playing in a royal way.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, frivolity of that kind is no answer. I ask the minister, now that only two "royal" bands will be permitted to live, is this part and parcel of the policy that this government, under the present Prime Minister, has carried into effect since first it endeavoured to get rid of the "Royal" Canadian Mounted Police and then had to retreat in the face of national criticism? Why pick on these bands that are entitled—

● (1440)

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Diefenbaker: Some of these people were not alive when these regiments were born.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Richardson: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I have not yet asked the question.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I understood the right hon. member to ask whether it was the policy, and why pick on these bands.

Mr. Diefenbaker: I do not know how the minister can answer when I have not asked the question. I ask him, why get rid of the Princess Patricia's band which goes back to 1919? Why get rid of bands like this which carry part of Canada's tradition? Why do this? Don't try to fool me by saying there will be a lot of other bands. Those bands do not have "royal" before their names. Is this part and parcel of the erosive principle in which I never expected the minister to be a participant?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Richardson: Mr. Speaker, there is no policy of the kind to which the right hon. member has referred.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Diefenbaker: Mr. Speaker, I could not hear that answer because the government members were yelling too loudly.