

he should have backed off and ordered a withdrawal at that time? What would my hon. friend have said; what would the people of Canada have said; what would the people of Britain have said if the Canadians, simply because the situation was not clear on the left, had ordered withdrawal and not gone on with the operation? It is all very well to sit here and make judgments now, and pass caustic remarks and talk about "incompetent leadership"; but it is another thing to be in the midst of a battle, in charge of what was the climax of all the commando operations which had been put on up to that time, and which it was hoped would be a success, and for which he had been given reserves in order to try to make it a success, and then decide to quit on the job, not to call in his reserves or make any further effort. That is the situation which presented itself to Major-General Roberts, and that is why I say that the hon. gentleman's suggestion of incompetent leadership in the high command, if he means General Roberts, is not justified by anything he has read or anything in the book, but quite the reverse.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Just one word, if you please, notwithstanding the minister's defence.

Some hon. MEMBERS: Order.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Who is running this committee, you or the chairman?

The CHAIRMAN: Order. I think the hon. member for Fort William has the floor.

Mr. MacNICOL: He is not in his seat.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): Notwithstanding the defence which has been made by the Minister of National Defence, the fact remains that after Dieppe Major-General Roberts was demoted and taken out of an operational position and put into an administrative position.

An hon. MEMBER: That has already been denied.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): What inference are we entitled to draw from that? I put that to the minister. I do not wish to enter into a controversy about the tragedy of Dieppe. The fact speaks volumes for the understanding and judgment of those in charge over there, and I do not know General Roberts from a hole in the ground. He has been "demoted upstairs," and why was he demoted upstairs if it were not as a result of dissatisfaction with his leadership at the top? I put that question to the minister.

Mr. RALSTON: I have only to say to my hon. friend that I answered him once; as a matter of fact, I believe, I answered him twice. Dieppe took place on August 18, if I remember correctly. General Roberts was given charge of the reinforcement units some time in February, six months afterwards. If the occasion for the change had been Dieppe, would they have left General Roberts in command of a division all that time?

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): I do not know.

Mr. RALSTON: I would think not. I have stated, and I state again to the committee and my hon. friend, that the change of job by which General Roberts was put in charge of a reinforcement unit, and which involved the control of thousands more men than he had before—

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): An administrative position.

Mr. RALSTON: No; far from an administrative position—was not due in any way to his conduct of the Dieppe operations. I cannot say any more about the matter. What I have said is that, far from its being an administrative post, it is a position which involves the utmost knowledge of training and the requisites of battle, because he is training men for battle.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): He is not going to lead them in battle.

Mr. RALSTON: And it is the first time a decision was made to put a major-general in charge of a Canadian reinforcement unit. My hon. friend cannot get away from that book, and that book states exactly what the situation was with regard to General Roberts at that time. I leave it to the hon. members of the house and to the fair judgment of the people of this country whether there is any man here or any man in this country who would say that General Roberts was guilty of incompetent leadership under the circumstances portrayed by Saunders in his discussion of the Dieppe operations.

One thing more. The hon. member for Parkdale has indicated it was General Roberts to whom he referred and that it was not the high command. Let me read the words he used, as reported in *Hansard*, at page 3004:

I want to say just a word about the Canadian army's battle honours. After nearly four years of war they are represented by two tragic failures, Hong Kong and Dieppe.