

to infantry battalions and fought as N.R.M.A. men. Of this last group, i.e., those who never changed their N.R.M.A. status, sixty were killed in action, 192 were wounded.

When we were hard pressed last autumn and spring and the N.R.M.A. were sent over as reinforcements I believed the feeling of the whole army was that if they "did their stuff" they would be accepted as equal members of this army. They did "do their stuff" and it would be morally wrong at this time when the fighting is over to say that they should be treated differently from other soldiers.

If the criterion is taken as to whether or not a soldier served in an operational theatre, what about volunteers who never served in an operational theatre. A comparison of risks run is not valid at this stage for those of us who are awaiting repatriation, have in fact survived, we are here alive and well regardless of comparative risks to which individuals might have been exposed. There are both volunteers and N.R.M.A. men who have fought in battle. Some of both have been killed. Some of both have been wounded. Some of both have come through the battle unscathed. There are both volunteers and N.R.M.A. men who have never served outside Canada. There are both volunteers and N.R.M.A. men who have never served in an operational theatre. Length of service and length of service abroad are the only proper individual yardsticks at this time. Two points for a month's service in Canada, three points for a month's service abroad discriminates in favour of the man who has served abroad. But between men of equal points there cannot be further moral discrimination.

I have used the term moral discrimination because there must be some practical discrimination between individuals. There are many with high scores who must be prepared to wait because duty so requires.

I consider it my duty to see that those who have to wait the longest before returning home are at least as well served as regards health, education, sports, welfare, recreation and leave as those more fortunate ones who have returned to Canada in the earliest drafts. To do this I must retain, sufficient experienced staff and regimental officers, warrant officers, N.C.O's, clerical staffs, cooks, administrative specialists and tradesmen and units of the services to ensure that a proper standard of administration is upheld until the end. That is why it is impossible to let the point score be the only consideration in the order of return home. Some with very high scores, others with medium group scores must subordinate their own personal wishes to return home to their duty to the group as a whole.

Feeling as we do about this question of return home it is not difficult to find individual cases here and there which appealing to our emotions give rise to feelings of indignation and injustice that our particular turn has not come sooner. But the few individual cases do not really affect this problem which is still to be solved in terms of many thousands.

I assure you that it is my intention to work the repatriation plan with the greatest possible degree of fairness to the individual providing that this does not react to the serious detriment of the remaining groups.

My hon. friend asked me to give a statement on the repatriation policy. The broad

[Mr. Abbott.]

details of that policy I think are pretty well known and are as indicated in General Simonds' message. They were outlined in the pamphlet which was issued after VE-day early in May.

Mr. GREEN: What I asked about was the policy of the government on repatriation of the N.R.M.A. soldiers.

Mr. ABBOTT: That is pretty well indicated too in General Simonds' statement. But may I point out to the house, as I indicated in the statement I gave to the press last night, that this repatriation policy is not a policy which was adopted here in Ottawa and imposed on the army overseas. That policy was evolved overseas, by the men over there, by General Crerar and his officers. It was, of course, approved in Ottawa, but neither my predecessor nor I, nor for that matter the staff here in Ottawa, initiated or designed that policy. It was worked out overseas. It was felt here that the policy would be more satisfactory if it were designed by the men on the spot who knew the problem. I want to make that perfectly clear, because this editorial indicated, as some others have since, that this was a policy imposed by somebody here in Canada. That is not the case.

The policy from the very outset with respect to these N.R.M.A. men has been this: Once they stepped on a ship there was no distinction made between the N.R.M.A. man and the volunteer soldier. They were all going over to fight. There has been a lot of talk in this country—not by me, let me say—of two armies, but so far as overseas service is concerned we have never had two armies. There has been no distinction made between the volunteer soldier and the man sent over under the National Resources Mobilization Act. Once the N.R.M.A. man got over there he took his place in the reinforcement pool, and when his turn came he went over to France as part of the reinforcements and was posted to a unit, just the same as any other soldier. General Foulkes told me only this morning that when people asked him over there how the N.R.M.A. men were doing, he replied, "I do not know, because I do not know who they are. So far as I am concerned they are soldiers just the same as any other soldier."

So there has been no distinction made, and so long as I am minister there will not be any distinction made, between the soldier who is over there compulsorily and the soldier who is over there voluntarily. And to old soldiers it is obvious why that must be so. There must be mutual trust and confidence in the man be-