

S.O. 29

provide 29 CL 215s by 1988, 12 for the provinces and 17 for the federal Government. Four of the federal water bombers will be based in the Northwest Territories and the remaining 13 federal planes will be leased to appropriate provinces for a nominal sum. All provinces have agreed to share their water bombers during forest fire operations, a sharing that the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre will co-ordinate under the Mutual Aid Resources Sharing Agreement.

During the past two weeks we have witnessed a real tragedy. Dry, hot weather has resulted in an extremely high incidence of forest fires in the two provinces mentioned. Not only have we witnessed the destruction of thousands of acres of forest, but also of homes and personal properties. As well, lives and towns have been threatened by the ravages of fire. We are indeed fortunate that there has been no loss of life, even though I know the sorrow that is being felt by those who have witnessed the destruction of their properties.

Canadian Forces Base Gagetown had to contend with two major fires in its training area last Thursday. The most serious one managed to jump the fire breaks at the training area and threatened the village of Upper Gagetown. One thousand people were evacuated from the village. Finally, through the combined efforts of some 400 military personnel, many local civilians and provincial water bombers the fires were brought under control on Saturday allowing the residents to return to their homes.

Another major forest fire in the Tracadie area burned out of control for several days destroying some 60,000 acres of forest. To help in bringing this fire under control military assistance was sought. A 200-man force from the 2nd RCR, Gagetown, was dispatched last Friday. Over the weekend that portion of the fire which was threatening populated areas was brought under control. At CFB Chatham Base fire fighters assisted local fire fighters to contain a fire threatening the village of Douglstown and at CFB Moncton a small fire near the Town of Dieppe threatened the supply depot at the base. The base commander mobilized his base defence force until such time as the fire was brought under control.

In Newfoundland last Friday, when a fire threatened the towns of Grand Falls and Windsor, residents most threatened had to be evacuated. At the request of the RCMP local militia assisted in traffic control and security of vacated homes and buildings. As well, a 50-man force from the Grand Falls company of the 2nd Royal Newfoundland Regiment was deployed and assisted police until Sunday when the fire was brought under control. I am proud of the efforts of our Armed Forces personnel in helping in this way.

There has been much discussion about the cause of the fires at CFB Gagetown, two of which were serious, the most serious of which leaped a fire break and threatened the town of Upper Gagetown. Upon hearing this I immediately ordered an inquiry. The fire marshal had already left mobile command headquarters St. Hubert for Gagetown to personally investigate the cause of the fire. I have given orders that a board of inquiry be set up immediately and that it proceed with

dispatch to deal with the causes of the fire as quickly as possible so that any compensation due any of those who suffered personal losses as a result of a fire can be dealt with expeditiously and, as I indicated earlier today, with generosity.

● (2050)

I suppose it is with some embarrassment that I have to admit we have some experience in this sort of thing. There have been times when actions taken by the military while on mobilization have caused personal property damage. We have a procedure in place involving boards of inquiry. I am especially interested that this board of inquiry not take a lot of time or be involved in unnecessary legal wrangling. The money spent should go to the benefit, if appropriate, of the people who have suffered damages and not be used up by legal fees through endless weeks and months of wrangling.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Andre: I am assured that that will not happen and I commit to the House that I will keep the situation under active observation. I do not want to prejudice the inquiry with respect to what it might find other than to indicate that I have instructed the military not to find legalistic ways to avoid their responsibility. On the other hand, they have to conduct a fair and proper inquiry. I am not asking for patience. If the Hon. Member for Westmorland—Kent (Mr. Robichaud) or my colleague, the Hon. Member for Fundy—Royal (Mr. Corbett), because of their proximity to the situation, have information which would be useful to me in pursuing the objective we all share, I invite them to contact me. I think we have similar interests in this regard.

The only other comment I would like to make at this time is with reference to the existence of a disaster financial assistance arrangement between the federal and provincial Governments, and I bring this to the attention of the House. It is administered by Emergency Planning Canada which, although a separate agency, does report to the Minister of National Defence (Mr. Nielsen) and for which I am responsible. This arrangement has been in place for some 15 years and is there to provide assistance when dealing with damage to property or individuals as a result of natural disasters. There is a cost-sharing formula. The first dollar of costs, on a per capita basis, are the responsibility of the provinces. In other words, for New Brunswick, the first \$750,000 in costs would be the responsibility of the provincial Government. The next \$2, or \$1.5 million in total, is shared 50/50. The next \$2 above that, or \$1.5 million in total, is 75 per cent federal and 25 per cent provincial. Anything above that is 90 per cent federal and 10 per cent provincial.

There is a reasonable and fairly generous, indeed unlimited in total, plan in place for financial assistance in case of a natural disaster. The initiative rests with the provincial Government. They must make a request for such assistance. There is a provision for an interim payment until the final amount is determined and all requests are submitted as a