

Adjournment Debate

The Minister of National Defence (Mr. Richardson) said he rejected the premise on which I asked the question. I think it is very important that the minister, who is in the House tonight, completely answer the charges that have been made in this article. They were obviously made by somebody who was able to look at the logs and records of this particular squadron.

I want to make it perfectly clear that in no way do I criticize the personnel, the squadron leader, the efficiency or the effectiveness of the people in that squadron. As a matter of fact, in the article that drew this to the attention of the public in the province of British Columbia there is no suggestion that anyone in our armed forces in that particular squadron was not doing everything he could to make the squadron as operational as possible.

The fact of the matter is that because of apparent budget savings the spare parts are kept in Toronto. There are long delays in bringing them from Toronto to Vancouver. There are further difficulties getting them into commercial aircraft to fly them to Comox. The budget saving means we have limited the number of aircraft available for search and rescue in this area.

The minister says the record of the squadron and Canadian armed forces' squadrons generally is very good in terms of search and rescue. But the question is, what is the minister now going to do about these allegations? Has the minister looked into them? Is the minister going to give an answer which will satisfy the public as to the competency of this particular squadron in terms of materiel to carry out its allotted task? I think we are entitled to the minister's answer. He has had time to look into this matter.

I think the minister ought to advise us tonight whether similar situations exist anywhere else in the country. I am sure the minister realizes that this is a serious matter; I gather so from his presence in the House. It is indeed a matter of life or death for lost pilots.

Hon. James Richardson (Minister of National Defence): Mr. Speaker, in reply to the hon. member for Vancouver South (Mr. Fraser) may I first of all say I am always pleased to learn of the interest of any member of the House in the very important subject of search and rescue.

This is an area of our work to which the Canadian forces are particularly dedicated, and I believe also an area in which they are particularly proficient. Some of the search and rescue operations in which Canadian forces personnel have been involved are among the most heroic and the most selfless passages in our national life.

As this may perhaps seem to be an overstatement, let me provide some facts. I am sure the hon. member for Vancouver South will be encouraged to learn that out of a total of 130 aircraft searches last year, only four aircraft were not found. This outstanding record is even more impressive when we realize that unfortunately some aircraft go down and disappear into lakes and rivers and are beyond the technical capability of even the most dedicated and efficient search teams. During the same year, the Canadian forces flew a total of 5,230 hours in search and rescue work and contributed either directly or indirectly in the rescue of 122 people.

[Mr. Fraser.]

In this respect I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the outstanding support contributed by civilian flyers who participate enthusiastically and effectively in search operations. As evidence of their contribution, let me say that of a total of 126 aircraft successfully located in 1972, 40 were located by civilian aircraft participating in the search.

As to the serviceability of the aircraft employed, the question the hon. member raised in connection with 442 Squadron, I am able to confirm that the serviceability of the Labrador helicopters belonging to the squadron averaged 73.7 per cent, and that during some period serviceability of up to 90 per cent was achieved. For a complex, rotary-wing aircraft this is a good serviceability ratio by any standards, military or civilian. The serviceability ratio of the Buffalo aircraft went up from 45 per cent in 1971 to a current level of 63.1 per cent. This is an availability factor almost 10 per cent higher than is set for this aircraft by Air Transport Command.

I believe these figures demonstrate not only a standard of serviceability but also a level of efficiency which is a credit to 442 Squadron and to the aircraft and the service personnel of this west coast unit.

AGRICULTURE—SHIPMENT OF HORSES TO EUROPE FOR SLAUGHTER

Mr. Ken Hurlburt (Lethbridge): Mr. Speaker, on May 30, 1973, I asked the House for unanimous consent to amend the Criminal Code, asking that all horses shipped to Europe be first inspected under the terms of the Canada Shipping Act. I was very sorry to see that several hon. members left the impression of being inhumane.

On June 6, the Prime Minister's office sent a letter to a woman in Ottawa stating that as of June, 1971, all shipment of horses to Europe by sea were banned: following a review by officials of the Department of Transport and the Department of Agriculture and the adoption of a special code for shipboard transportation of horses, shipment was again permitted in 1972. The code states that horses must be in good health and not older than 16 years before being transported. Veterinarian officials must be present during the marshalling to examine them with respect to age and fitness to travel.

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The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan), in a letter to the Ontario Humane Society, also stated that it was the policy of the government of Canada that horses would only be allowed to be exported for work or breeding purposes. Yet everyone in the business knows that most of the animals go directly to the slaughterhouses. The cruelty lies in what the horses have to go through to get there. They have to be trucked in, branded, haltered, loaded on trucks or trains, unloaded, then reloaded on a boat with whips or cranes. From the time a horse leaves its home, it never eats the same again. It gets homesick and fevered up. It cannot stand long trips. Some of the horses brought from the United States to Canada for slaughter barely make it to the plant. Just think what they go through, Mr. Speaker, to get to Europe.