

1940.
NEW ZEALAND.

RECESS DEFENCE COMMITTEE.

(REPORT OF).

Laid on the Table of the House of Representatives.

ORDER OF REFERENCE.

Extract from the Journals of the House of Representatives.

FRIDAY, THE 6TH DAY OF OCTOBER, 1939.

Ordered, "That a Select Committee be appointed, consisting, by leave, of thirteen members, to consider all matters which may be referred to it by the House or by the Government relating to the camp accommodation, comfort, amenities, recreation, and general welfare of the men of the Special Force, and, in addition, to consider any matters affecting the defence measures of the Dominion which may be referred to it by the Government; that the Committee have power to report from time to time to the Government; that the Committee have power to sit on days on which the House is not sitting and during the recess and for twenty-eight days after the commencement of the next session, and at such times and at such places as the Committee may see fit, and that in the event of the Committee sitting during the recess, that it report to this House within twenty-eight days after the commencement of the next ensuing session of Parliament: the Committee to consist of Mr. Anderton, Hon. Mr. Barnard, Right Hon. Mr. Coates, Mr. Coleman, Mr. Cullen, Mr. Frost, Mr. Grigg, Colonel Hargest, Mr. Lee, Mr. Lowry, Mr. Roy, Mr. Tirikatene, and the Mover."—(Hon. Mr. JONES.)

REPORT.

CHAIRMAN.

THE Hon. W. E. Barnard was appointed Chairman.

MEETINGS.

Meetings were held on the 7th and 8th November, 1st and 7th December, 1939, 5th January and 11th July, 1940.

ATTENDANCE.

The only absences from meetings were occasioned by the attendance of members to other official duties.

FUNCTIONS OF COMMITTEE.

(a) At the first meeting the Minister of Defence intimated that, although the terms of reference did not include the Air Force, there was no objection to the inclusion of Air Force camps within the province of the Committee.

(b) The Minister of Defence further suggested that the main Committee be divided into four sub-committees of three members each, each sub-committee to visit certain camps and receive representations. This suggestion was the subject of discussion, after which the following resolution was adopted:—

"That an individual member of the Committee or a small group of members of the Committee decide what visit is to be undertaken, and this information to be communicated to the secretary. Each proposal for a visit to a camp by a sub-committee be referred to the Hon. the Minister by the secretary, and if Ministerial approval is signified, the secretary to make arrangements for the visit accordingly. It was not desired that any rigidity be imposed on the personnel of the Committee or the time when visits be made. It was also agreed that where a sub-committee visits the electorate of a member of Parliament who is a member of the Defence Select Committee, that member be informed of the visit."

Visits to Camps.

All members of the Committee visited mobilization camps at various times.

BUSINESS OF THE COMMITTEE.

At the initial meeting of the Committee the Minister of Defence made reference in general terms to certain items dealing with camp establishment and maintenance. The matters covered included the establishment of wet canteens, the relationship of prices charged in canteens to those in chain stores, and employment of returned soldiers as canteen workers; hospitals; amenities and recreation; sporting-facilities; bands; and details of troops then in camp.

In Committee a multitude of subjects, which need not be detailed in this report, were deliberated upon. As a result of visits to mobilization camps and Air Force stations, members were able to obtain a clear view of military organization, the billeting, feeding, and clothing of troops, recreation amenities, and training. In some specific cases direct representations were made to the Government through the Minister of Defence, and the Committee desires to place on record its appreciation of the way in which its suggestions and recommendations were received.

The Committee commenced to function in November—that is, within two months of the outbreak of war—and by that date the effect of the Government's plans, pre-prepared and brought into operation in September, had become evident. However, the Committee deemed it helpful to administration if its views on specific matters, the more important of which are referred to in detail below, were made known.

Ration Scale.

The system in operation in the Army during the early months of the war of rationing on the fixed-scale method was costly, and did not permit of the greater variety and change in menus. In the Air Force the ration system has operated on a maximum-cost basis, which eliminated waste and permitted of more varied selection for the men's tables. A resolution to introduce into the Army a scheme based upon a fixed maximum cost per man in substitution of the fixed ration allowance (in kind) was passed in Committee and conveyed to the Minister of Defence.

In his reply the Minister informed the Committee that the Government had already decided, as from the 1st December, 1939, to make the change suggested, and explained in the following words the newly introduced system:—

"From the 1st December onwards units have been authorized to indent for any items of food they require, adopting the ration scale as a guide only, provided the cost on an average does not exceed 1s. 9d. per man per day.

"Officers commanding units have been instructed to draw up weekly menus in advance, forwarding one copy to the Camp Commandant and one to the Camp Supply Officer, and ration indents will be in the hands of each Camp Supply Officer twenty-four hours prior to time of issue. This will enable the Camp Supply Officer to have all food indented for delivery to each unit, and it will be the unit commander's duty to maintain variation in the day-to-day menus by authorization of a ration list on a cash per head basis instead of a fixed article basis. This will ensure greater variety and will also remove any possibility of supplies in excess of requirements being drawn.

"It is recognized that the 1s. 9d. per man per day is an arbitrary figure, and it will probably happen that over one period the cost may be a little higher, perhaps up to 2s., where on another it may be down as low as 1s. 6d. It is expected that on an average, however, the cost will not exceed 1s. 9d. per man per day."

Clothing Issues.

This question was introduced at the meeting held on the 8th November, when, by invitation, the Adjutant-General gave details of the stocks of khaki drill in store, and of the battle dress issue. The Adjutant-General stated that if New Zealand troops were sent to France on active service they would be issued with two suits of battle dress.

Much consideration was given to the cut and style of the trouser issue. The Committee notes with satisfaction that the issue to the Second and Third Echelon troops is a decided improvement on that issued to the First Echelon.

Patriotic Funds.

A resolution on this subject is quoted:—

"In the opinion of this Committee the regulations dealing with Patriotic Funds covering the provision of entertainments, comforts, conveniences, &c., for soldiers be amended, if such amendment is necessary, in order to provide that the National Patriotic Council and the Provincial Patriotic Councils be empowered to grant complete exemption from the regulations to voluntary organizations concerned with the entertainment or comfort of soldiers on leave, subject to proper audit of accounts. The A.N.A. Social Club, Wellington, is a case in point."

A deputation consisting of the Chairman, supported by other members of the Committee who were also members of the National Patriotic Council, awaited on the Council, and as a result very satisfactory arrangements were completed whereby smooth and efficient management and working of organizations such as the A.N.A. Social Club was ensured.

Welfare.

The Committee, from the personal observations of its members, notes with appreciation the results of the efforts made by the National Patriotic Council and the various religious and social organizations in the provision of recreational amenities and comforts for military personnel. In the opinion of the Committee the work performed by these organizations and institutions warrants the highest commendation, and is undoubtedly a factor in the attainment of such a high standard of efficiency in each arm of the Service.

The meeting held on the 5th January, 1940, was called for the main purpose of hearing an address by Major-General B. C. Freyberg, V.C., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., LL.B., General Officer Commanding, Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force, who, accompanied by Major-General J. E. Duigan, C.B., D.S.O., Chief of the General Staff, attended by invitation.

The Committee expressed to the Minister of Defence its thanks for the arrangements made, and to both General Freyberg and General Duigan. The sense of responsibility and realization of the duty his office as Officer Commanding the Second New Zealand Expeditionary Force overseas as expressed by General Freyberg created a favourable impression upon the members of the Committee, and an expression of the reception his remarks created was contained in a letter despatched by the Chairman of the Committee under date 1st February, 1940. The letter read as follows:—

As Chairman of the Select Committee of Defence which was appointed by the Government last session to consider all matters which may be referred to it by the House or by the Government relating to the camp accommodation, comfort, amenities, recreation, and general welfare of men of the Special Force, and which consists of thirteen members of the House of Representatives, it is my pleasure to convey to you the following resolution:—

"The very sincere thanks of the Chairman and each individual member of the parliamentary Select Committee of Defence be recorded, and that a letter of appreciation of the manner in which General Freyberg explained to the Committee his policy regarding the welfare of the troops under his command be forwarded."

The resolution was passed unanimously at the meeting of the Committee held on Friday, 5th January, 1940, at which, despite the very vast inroads made on your limited time in New Zealand, you were able to attend.

Before passing the resolution the Committee expressed their very best wishes to yourself, and gave an assurance that they would make every effort to assist in maintaining the military strength for which commitment overseas is made.

I am forwarding this letter to the Hon. F. Jones, Minister of Defence, with a request that it be forwarded on to you.

Subsequently a reply was received by the Chairman from General Freyberg in Egypt, and the Committee feels that this letter should be placed on record. The letter, under date 7th March, 1940, reads:—

I very much appreciated your letter of the 1st February telling me of the resolution passed by the Select Committee of Defence. Will you please thank your Committee for their kind thought in passing the resolution, and also for their good wishes and the assurance that they will continue to work for the maintenance of our strength overseas. The success of the recruiting to date has been very encouraging to us. From the accounts we have received the campaign must have had most satisfactory results.

You will realize, I know, how much there is to do. I feel it is all I can do to keep up to date with the mass of administrative work which piles up. The matters for which your Committee was set up—i.e., to safeguard the welfare and health of the officers, N.C.O.s, and men of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force—have received very careful consideration here. The health of the men generally has been good, and every effort is being made to see that the carefully planned precautions are carried out and that disease is as far as possible kept under control. As you know, the camp was not complete when we came in, and there is still a good deal of work to be done. Some of the hutments for officers and bathhouses are not finished, but every day shows new improvements. The cinema, canteens, and institutions of the N.A.A.F.I. and Y.M.C.A. and the recreation-rooms run by various organizations in Cairo and Maadi are all proving very popular with the men.

I am glad to be able to report that the V.D. graph is not alarming at present. It is only a very small fraction of what it was in all your times.

So far the hot weather has not arrived. When it does come, the swimming-bath, which is to be finished by the middle of this month, will be a great asset. Every one is very grateful to the Government for giving it to us, and we expect to get it for less than the generous grant which the Government has made.

Football is now in full swing and the men are making the most of the last few weeks of the season. Needless to say, even those who are not playing enjoy watching the games. There is nothing like a game of football to make a New-Zealander feel at home.

Thank you again for your letter.

B. C. FREYBERG.

SPECIAL MOTIONS.

1. On the motion of the Minister of Defence, seconded by Mr. Coleman, it was resolved that the Committee place on record and embody in the report its appreciation of the manner in which the Hon. W. E. Barnard undertook the duties of Chairman in a way which reflected not only his own personal interest in the work of the Committee as a member, but also his desire to control the meetings in a most fair and impartial manner.

2. On the motion of the Hon. Mr. Jones, seconded by the Chairman, it was resolved that the Committee place on record and embody in the report its appreciation of the services rendered by the secretary, Mr. F. B. Dwyer (Assistant Army Secretary), which had been performed with care and efficiency to the entire satisfaction of the Committee.

CONCLUSION.

The Committee is of opinion, as a result of its deliberations and of the personal visits paid to mobilization camps and Air Force stations, that the difficulties confronting the Government on the outbreak of war, including the problem of mobilization, were dealt with in a manner with which the Committee could find little fault.

Any representations made to the Government were offered in a spirit not of criticism, but of assistance, and, it is hoped, were helpful to the Government in the national war effort.

W. E. BARNARD, Chairman.

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