

OFFICERS ON WAR SERVICE.

Up to the end of March the number of employees of the Department released for service with the armed forces overseas had reached a total of 1,395, comprising 1,284 permanent officers and 111 temporary employees.

The response of officers to the call for service with the forces has been most gratifying. Up to the time when the voluntary system of recruitment was discontinued no fewer than 1,537 had enlisted.

Every effort has been and continues to be made to release men who are called up for service. Exemption is applied for only in cases of absolute necessity. Since the commencement of the war exemption has been sought for thirty-eight men—all technical officers or radio operators.

It is recorded with regret that two of the Department's officers have been killed in action, one has died from sickness, two are reported missing, and four are prisoners of war.

Four officers have received decorations for meritorious services and five others gained special mention in despatches.

Following the introduction of the intensive training scheme for Territorial units, no fewer than 1,256 officers were released to undergo three months' Territorial training. At the end of March there were 581 departmental officers in Territorial camps throughout the Dominion.

STAFFING PROBLEMS DUE TO WAR CONDITIONS.

With many of its trained personnel serving with the armed forces, it was only to be expected that the Department would experience difficulty in maintaining its staff at a strength sufficient to meet all requirements. Some measure of relief has been obtained by retaining in service beyond their normal time of retirement a number of officers who have completed forty years' service. The Department's main effort in meeting the staffing problem has, however, been in the direction of employing female labour. Every endeavour has been made to secure the right type of applicant, and, generally, the women placed in employment are performing good service and have quickly adapted themselves to departmental work. These women are being engaged purely on a temporary basis and on the clear understanding that their services are required only for the duration of the war. Whenever possible, the wives of officers released for war service are given employment in the Department.

The policy of training young women in certain work formerly undertaken by men—for instance, in machine-printing telegraphy—has been adopted with very good results. A training-school in machine-printing was opened in May, and already sixty-two trainees have completed the course and are now being employed as full working units in telegraph offices where the machine-printing system is in operation. Twenty-three trainees who are still in the school should soon qualify, and additional applicants are being selected for training.

Another arrangement which eased the staffing position was the working of branches of the Service with minimum staffs during the Christmas—New Year period and up to the middle of January. In this way it was possible not only to dispose of a considerable amount of annual leave, but also to utilize relief staffs to greater advantage. Moreover, many officers were afforded the opportunity of taking a mid-summer vacation—an opportunity that was welcomed, particularly by married officers with children of school age.

It seems hardly necessary to add that the need for effecting staff economies during wartime has received close attention. It was realized that, wherever possible, man-power should, in the national interest, be conserved. Many avenues of saving man-power were therefore investigated, and some services to the public which during wartime could scarcely be justified in full measure were curtailed.

COST-OF-LIVING ALLOWANCE.

Payment of a cost-of-living allowance to all State servants was authorized by Government with effect as from the 12th August, 1940. The allowance is at the rate of 5s. a week for employees paid on an hourly, daily, or weekly rate, and £13 per annum for those paid on either a monthly or an annual rate, and is payable to all employees of eighteen years and over who are in receipt of salary not exceeding £335 per annum or the equivalent in daily, hourly, or weekly wages. For juniors under eighteen years of age the allowance is at the rate of £6 10s. per annum if they are residing away from home and £3 5s. per annum if they are living at home. In the case of officers whose salaries or wages exceed £335 per annum, the allowance abates by £1 for every £3 or fraction thereof of salary in excess of £335. No allowance is payable when the salary exceeds £374 per annum.

Non-permanent Postmistresses who are in receipt of salaries of not less than £50 per annum and who are employed full time on departmental duties in accommodation used solely for post-office purposes also receive the allowance.

MINIMUM WAGE FOR MARRIED EMPLOYEES.

The rate of remuneration operating throughout Government Departments as the minimum for married men received consideration during the year. It was agreed that circumstances justified an increase on the then existing rate of £210 8s. 1d., and Government approved an additional amount of £20 per annum being paid to these men, with effect as from the 1st October. This increase, together with the cost-of-living allowance of £13 per annum also authorized by Government, will assist materially those married officers on the lower rates of classified salary.