

Troops' Return

Admit Policy Unfair, 'Too Late' to Change It

By RALPH ALLEN

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APELDOORN, Holland, Nov. 15 (Delayed).—Last Sept. 19 and 20 the Continental edition of the Canadian Army newspaper, The Maple Leaf, published two front-page articles attacking the policy under which Canada's 285,000 overseas soldiers were being sent home. The total result of these criticisms was to obtain the immediate repatriation of one man, the paper's editor. There was no other result.

Because it has been working longer, the repatriation policy is working better than it worked two months ago, but the basic unfairness of the policy has not been changed in any detail since Sept. 6, and even at the highest levels of the overseas command the strongest defense of the repatriation program is the negative remark, "It's too late to change it now."

Soldiers who have been overseas only a few months and in the army less than two years are still getting home ahead of soldiers who have been in the army since the early days of the war, and haven't been in Canada in three, four and in a few instances five or six years. NRMA who were drafted abroad against their wills and arrived too late to get in the fighting are still being repatriated ahead of volunteers who fought through whole campaigns.

Trend Still Evident

Hundreds of men with fewer than 60 repatriation points are still disembarking at Halifax while thousands of men with more than 90 points are sweating it out in the 4th and 5th Armored Divisions in Holland, in the Canadian Army Occupation Force in Germany, in transit depots in England, and in the vast housekeeping which is necessary to keep the repatriation stream moving.

Some men are even getting home on fewer than 50 points ordained as the repatriation minimum.

For the last 10 days, at the invitation of the Canadian Army's Chief of Staff, this correspondent has been studying repatriation at all levels and in all formations both in England and on the Continent. One of the things I asked for and received was a breakdown according to point scores of a battalion which was repatriated as a unit last month with the 2nd Division. The figures given below are official figures, supplied by the Army's records office at Acton, England.

The unit's total strength on embarkation was 452, all ranks. Two of the soldiers who went home with it—months ahead of the repatriation date envisaged for thousands of men with more than twice as much service—had fewer than 40 points. Three others, like the first two probably smuggled through, had between 40 and 50

points. Forty-eight were NRMA men who arrived overseas last winter or last spring—in four cases as late as April and 19 others in March. Two hundred and twenty-five men had fewer than 90 points. Only 85 had 130 points or more. At the time the draft sailed, 130 was a significant figure; that was the number of points it took to get a soldier home unless he was fortunate enough to be on the strength of one of the units designated for repatriation as a unit.

Only 85 Eligible

In other words, of a total of 452 men on this particular draft all but 85 sailed ahead of what would have been their turn if the Canadian Army were being repatriated on the principle of first in, first

out; 367 of them were allotted shipping space to which, on any basis of seniority or service, thousands of men who stayed behind had prior claim.

This was not an accident. It was not the result of administrative inefficiency or indifference.

It was merely the inevitable outcome of the confused and unbalanced system under which Canada has been repatriating her soldiers since last June and is committed to continue repatriating them until the process ends, probably next May.

Under this system Canadian soldiers go home in two kinds of draft. One kind is known to the army as the Canada Draft, the other kind as the Unit Draft. Most soldiers are directed into Canada Drafts, but 48,000 have gone home or will go home in Unit Drafts. Broadly speaking the difference is that a man designated for repatriation in a Canada Draft sails in his individual turn, according to his individual point score, but a man designated for repatriation with a unit sails when the unit sails, provided only that he has 50 points or more.

Alternating System

In the overall repatriation plan Canada Drafts and Unit Drafts alternate. First of all, at the outset of the movement of troops from Europe, long service personnel with 150 points and more who were not still needed by the army went home in Canada Drafts. Then the 1st Division moved, taking all men with between 50 and 150 points who were on its strength on V-E Day or who were transferred to the division in the administrative reshuffling that followed Germany's capitulation. In the next place Canada Drafts were made up of personnel with 130 points or more from the 3rd, 4th and 5th Divisions, from Headquarters and of communications establishments and from the rolls of Canadian Military Headquarters in England.

The 2nd Division sailed with all its 50 pointers and at present a further block of Canada Drafts is on the way to Canada, drawn from the 110 pointers of the Canadian Army Occupation Force, from the 4th and 5th Divisions and from the administrative line of communication formations. The 3rd Division is waiting in England with 9,000 personnel whose points scores are between 50 and 130.

After the 3rd Division completes its movement the 90 pointers of 4th Division, Canadian Army Occupation Force and the administrative and the line of communication formations who are not frozen in key jobs, will be sent home in another series of Canada Drafts. The 5th Division leaves next, with approximately 7,000 soldiers whose points range from 50 to 110. Then the 4th Division will be repatriated with its own 50 to 120 pointers and the 50 to 90 pointers of CAOF, headquarters unit and the lines of communication.

Blind Chance vs. Logic

Finally, the balance of the Canadian Army Overseas, exclusive of the occupation forces, will be cleaned up by Canada Drafts.

The foregoing paragraph explains, in a large and labyrinthine nutshell, why Canadian soldiers with low-point scores are constantly getting home ahead of soldiers with high-point scores and why the sequence in which any given soldier moves up a gangplank is almost as likely to be governed by blind chance as by logic. It explains at least 75 per cent of the complaints the troops themselves have to make about repatriation, and nearly all of them have complaints.

It explains why—with the repatriation of neither one speeded up or retarded by any other factor than the repatriation policy itself—a soldier with 50 points could get home in September through the accident of being posted to the 1st Division, perhaps without ever fighting in it, while a soldier with 89 points was still over here hoping to make it by March or April, 1946, with the 4th Division.

Such things as that are epidemic and will remain epidemic almost

until the last Canadian soldier is out of Europe. In attempting to repatriate itself partly by points and partly by units, the Canadian Army has entangled its repatriation machinery in a maze of paradox and inequalities from which even some of the system's severest critics fear escape has become impossible. With few exceptions both the system's victims and the administrators who are trying to make it work agree that the attempt to fuse two fundamentally different methods was a serious mistake.

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