

CLAIM FIRST IN, FIRST OUT POLICY NOT BEING FOLLOWED

Ian Mackenzie Says Troops Split Over Repatriation By Units Plan

(By Ross Munro, Canadian Press War Correspondent)

Utrecht, Holland, July 18.—(CP Cable)—Hon. Ian Mackenzie said to-day he found a "sense of grievance" among Canadian troops in Europe who feel the Government "is not carrying out its promise that the policy of 'first in, first out' would be followed" in the repatriation system.

Compromise Plan

Mr. Mackenzie said he believed opinions of Canadian soldiers in Holland split about 50-50 on the question of repatriation by units as opposed to a point-priority system, and he intended to advise the Canadian Government of his findings, probably recommending a compromise system.

The Canadian Minister of Veterans' Affairs, touring among units of the 1st Canadian Army in Europe, has visited four divisions in the last three days. To-day he said in an interview:

"There is a sense of grievance here among the troops that the Government is not carrying out its promise to soldiers that the policy of 'first in, first out' would be followed.

"It is my personal view that a soldier who has a definite right to priority for repatriation on points should be given an opportunity to assert his right and return home or waive his right and volunteer to go with a unit on the unit system. It will be my duty to inform the Cabinet of this situation when I return to Ottawa and I will probably make this recommendation."

End Point System

Last week Canadian Army headquarters informed troops in Holland that repatriation on the point-priority system was coming to an end, and the balance—and bulk—of the army would be moved home almost entirely by units and sub-units remustered territorially as far as possible. It was officially stated then that army authorities considered the time had come when high point scores could no longer be an influencing factor in repatriation.

(A soldier receives three points for each month of overseas service and two points for each month of service in Canada, plus 20 per cent. of the total if he is married or 20 per cent. if he is either a widower or divorced with dependent children. If a man is a widower or divorced without dependent children, or has been married since last March 31—date from which point-totals are calculated—he does not qualify for a 20 per cent. bonus.)

Mr. Mackenzie said he found troops asked him more questions about this issue of unit repatriation as opposed to the point system of repatriation than any other subject discussed during his tour, and "they were split about 50-50 on this question."

Definite Promise

"The Government definitely gave a promise to the troops to follow the 'first in, first out' policy and it is an obligation of honour to carry out this promise," he added. "It seems to me to be a problem of making a compromise the basic justice of the point system of the 'first in, first out' and the basic sentiment of the unit system."

The minister emphasized he was not being critical of the army, which has a strong case for the unit repatriation policy in this new phase of the troop movement home. He said he realized administrative difficulties arose when too many high-point men in administrative services were sent home. However, he felt an adjustment should be made.

"There is another thing. Some high-point soldiers who are still held here as essential personnel told me they are worried about letters received from wives and families in Canada telling them some friend from down the street who had a lower point score had arrived home, and they couldn't understand why high-point men were not home, too. I think the Government must make a full statement explaining such situations to wives and families."

Asked if the unit-point program may be thrashed out between the Cabinet and Gen. Crerar on the latter's return to Canada—expected soon—Mr. Mackenzie said:

"That is a very leading question, a very leading question."

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