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CABINET

SERVICE ACCOMMODATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

MEMORANDUM BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

I circulate herewith for the information of my colleagues memoranda by the Service Ministers on the subject of accommodation in the United Kingdom.

2. The outlook they report is a melancholy one. Though the reasons are different in the case of each individual Service, the position in all three is that only a minority of the men and women now serving can be considered to be even tolerably housed. All three Services are suffering from the necessity to continue using huddled accommodation hurriedly constructed during the war to minimum austerity standards and now rapidly deteriorating. The Army and the Royal Navy are also compelled to continue using antiquated barrack accommodation, some of which needs to be entirely rebuilt, while the remainder, though structurally sound, will have to be entirely gutted to bring it up to reasonable present-day standards. The worst examples of this type are perhaps the Army accommodation at Aldershot, and the naval barracks at the three Home Ports, though there are many other places in which the situation is equally bad.

3. There is also a serious shortage of married quarters in all three Services. Even on pre-war entitlement scales, it will take the Army and the Royal Air Force at present rates of progress something between ten and fifteen years to complete their programmes. The Royal Navy, which has never had married quarters in the past, is making a beginning by providing them at isolated establishments such as air stations, and is hoping to complete its very modest programme of some 5,000 houses within four years.

4. My colleagues will appreciate that the generally poor state of barrack accommodation and the serious lack of married quarters are most powerful deterrents to that general increase in the rate of regular recruiting on which we are counting to build up and reorganise our peace-time armed forces.

5. There is an urgent problem in the provision of accommodation for territorial and auxiliary forces. Though it is most acute in the case of the Army, which will require to spend no less than £13 million a year for five years in order that the Territorial Army may be ready to receive the National Service reservists from 1st January, 1950, onwards, the other two Services have similar problems, which must be tackled soon if their reserves are to be built up at an adequate rate. At present, recruiting for the reserve and auxiliary forces is extremely slow, and it cannot be doubted that the lack of suitable accommodation is one of the main reasons for this situation.

6. The Service Ministers and I fully accept that in our present circumstances large building programmes for the Services are out of the question. We do, however, feel that the Cabinet should be aware of the situation and that it should realise that the cuts in the housing programme and the general reduction of capital investment are having a serious effect upon the Services. The works labour strength allocated to the Services by the White Paper on Capital Investment in 1948 (Cmd. 7268) is not really adequate even for essential maintenance, apart from large-scale measures of rehabilitation or new construction.

7. In that White Paper it was stated that "The Government attach great importance to meeting the requirements of the Services for housing as a major factor in maintaining morale and in stimulating regular recruiting. The Service housing programme must be considered in relation to the general programme of housing construction, but it is the policy of the Government to give favourable consideration to it, though in some areas it will, if a conflict of priority arises, have to take second place to houses for miners and farm workers."

8. The Minister of Health has, I know, been giving most sympathetic consideration to the needs of the Services. Now that it has been decided (C.M. (48) 16th Conclusions, Minute 4) that the housing programme is to be increased, I trust that it will be possible to allocate to the Services a substantial share of this increase. Such action would, I know, have a great effect not only on the morale of men and women already in the Services, but also on regular recruiting.

9. I also observe from the memorandum recently circulated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the housing programme (C.P. (48) 56) that there is a risk of considerable unemployment in the building industry. I would urge that wherever such a situation arises and the surplus labour can be employed on work of any kind for the Service Departments, whether maintenance or new construction, it should be so employed, even though this might mean that the labour ceilings at present authorised are temporarily exceeded. It will in any case be necessary to press for a considerable increase in the labour allocations of the Service Departments when the time comes to settle the level of capital investment in 1949.

A. V. A.

*Ministry of Defence, S.W. 1,
5th March, 1948.*

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ACCOMMODATION FOR THE NAVY, MARINES AND RESERVE FORCES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

MEMORANDUM BY THE FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY

I am deeply concerned over our present inability to implement promises made in Parliament, that accommodation for both married and single personnel shall be brought up to a reasonable standard.

2. Accommodation for naval personnel on shore in the United Kingdom is, by reason of their duties, concentrated largely in and around the dockyard ports of Chatham, Portsmouth and Plymouth. Until the beginning of this century, naval personnel were housed in ships and hulks afloat in the naval ports. With the construction of naval barracks on shore at Chatham (1901), Portsmouth (1903) and Plymouth (1885-1901), however, few shore-based naval ratings are now housed afloat. Other similar establishments of importance are the Gunnery School, H.M.S. *Excellent*, which, though built about 1900, consists largely of utilitarian buildings, and the Torpedo School, H.M.S. *Vernon*, housed in a former Army establishment in which the accommodation of the ratings was provided by adaptation of old War Department storehouse buildings.

3. Of the Marine barracks, those at Deal, Chatham and Plymouth are of ancient construction, dating from Napoleonic days, while the Marine barracks at Portsmouth were built in 1863. Few measures of modernisation have been carried out in any of these Marine barracks.

4. Eminent consulting architects have reported to the Admiralty and advised on the best means, where feasible, of modernising the barracks, to provide a reasonable degree of comfort for the Navy and Marines on shore. Their reports indicate that complete rebuilding of the Marine barracks at Chatham and Plymouth will be necessary in order to achieve the required standard, while at the other barracks nothing less than incorporation of extensive measures of modernisation will remove most of the defects. These defects arise primarily from very inadequate standards of ventilation, heating and cooking equipment, from the lack of proper sanitary, bathing and washing facilities, overcrowding and from the need to provide conditions of greater privacy than those which now obtain in the large dormitories.

5. Accommodation in butted camps ranges from the few reasonably satisfactory camps of the militia type to the austere erected Nissen camps constructed during the war at some of the remote Naval Air Stations, many of which are in a very bad state of repair. Replacement of the latter is an urgent necessity. The Admiralty are faced, too, with the problem of providing suitable accommodation for a permanent service of 7,500 W.R.N.S. because there is no naval accommodation previously used by men which can be adapted for the purpose.

6. These commitments will involve very heavy expenditure, clearly in excess of £10,000,000. It has, however, been practicable to make financial provision of a sum of only £80,000 in the forthcoming Navy Estimates for the start of some of the most urgent items of modernisation.

7. As regards naval married quarters, it is pertinent to recall that an accompaniment of the new pay code was the expressed intention to achieve broad equality in conditions of service as between the three Services. The other Services have had married quarters for years, whereas the provision of such quarters is an entirely new commitment for the Navy. The Admiralty is consequently at a grave disadvantage in this connection and it is a cause of great disappointment and impatience in the Naval Service. We were on the point of embarking upon construction of married quarters when it became necessary to review our programme in relation to the curtailed national housing programme. Apart from a certain amount of conversion of existing buildings into a limited number of married quarters, all that we have been able to do so far is to make a small beginning, of about 100 quarters only, towards an immediate requirement at home of some 5,000. While it is hoped to expand the programme appreciably during the year 1948, the fact remains that it has been possible to make provision on the Navy Estimates of only £200,000 for married quarters at home and even that figure includes some provision for civilian employees and for conversions of existing buildings.

8. The Admiralty have also to make provision for the accommodation of the reserve forces, particularly of the R.N.V.R. Whilst in principle this problem of providing for reserve forces is similar for all three Services, in size it is more manageable so far as the Admiralty are concerned. The development of reserve forces, such as the R.N.V.R. and the R.M.F.V.R., requires drill ships or corresponding shore headquarters. Many of the Admiralty's pre-war drill ships ought to be replaced by newer vessels and it is necessary to provide up-to-date headquarters to meet modern requirements for the R.N.V.R. Present-day requirements for training far exceed those which were needed before the war. These enlarged requirements arise from the greatly increased complexity of naval material. At present all that can be done on shore is to provide one headquarters (at Hull) by adaptation of an existing building at comparatively small cost. The other shore headquarters are having to remain in an inadequate condition for efficient training. To build up efficient reserves, adequate training centres will also be required for the R.M.F.V.R., for the Air and W/T components of the R.N.V.R. and possibly for the R.N.S.R. Some of these needs are about to mature.

9. Considerations of economic planning in the matter of building married quarters have been discussed at the official level between the Service Departments and the Ministry of Health pursuant to the Production Committee's conclusions of 13th October, 1947; and these considerations, in their application also to barrack and other constructional work for the Naval Service, together with the restrictions imposed in all directions by labour ceilings, have left the Admiralty no alternative but to prune and limit their works and building projects without any proper regard to the efficiency and well-being of the Navy. Deployment of the limited resources available over other fields, *e.g.*, construction of Research Establishments and the rehabilitation of the Dockyards at Portsmouth and Devonport, is an inescapable need.

10. I consider that the Cabinet should be aware of these facts for they show the inability of my Department under existing conditions to provide any substantial number of married quarters, to bring conditions in the barracks into line with even reasonable welfare standards or, consequently, to fulfil the undertakings given to Parliament referred to in paragraph 1 of this memorandum.

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