

5. MEDICAL EXAMINATION OF MEN CALLED BY BALLOT

Though the medical examination of men called by ballot was not organized by this Department it deserves special mention in this report on account of its importance as a link in the process of selection of men for service, and its intimate relation to the whole purpose and function of the Department.

It is in fact viewed by this Department with such concern that a considerable amount of statistical research into the operations of Medical Boards has been carried out by the Department, and a high standard of uniformity as between different Boards has finally been achieved.

The object of medical examination is to classify men according to their suitability for different types of Army service, demanding various degrees of physical development and fitness.

The five major classes into which men are placed by Medical Boards are :—

Grade I, in the case of men who are fit for active service in any part of the world :

Grade II, in the case of men who are fit for active service in New Zealand, but who should not normally proceed overseas :

Grade III, in the case of men who are fit only for sedentary or similar work in the Army :

Grade IV, in the case of men suffering from severe disabilities and progressive diseases which render them permanently unfit for any form of military service :

Temporarily Unfit, in the case of men who are suffering from a curable disease or minor ailment, and who can be made fit by treatment.

Men are placed into one or other of these grades quite independently of whether their ages at the time are such as, for example, to preclude them from overseas service.

It should be mentioned that these gradings are not used by the Air Force or Navy, which maintain their own Medical Boards and systems of classification.

Up to date it has been found possible to restrict the sending of men overseas to Grade I men aged twenty-one to forty inclusive, except in a few instances of men selected for garrison duties in comparatively healthy localities in the Pacific.

Grade II men and some Grade III men have, however, been used for home defence duties.

The systematic medical examination of so large a part of the male population has provided a unique opportunity to study the incidence of various medical conditions at each age and in each locality, and to examine the effect of age and other factors on fitness for military service. A number of tables showing the results of statistical investigations into these matters are included in the Appendix to this report.

6. APPEALS AGAINST NATIONAL SERVICE

The calling up of whole sections of the population for military service would have had disastrous repercussions on industrial activity if there had been no administrative machine provided for determining from among the men called for service the individuals who should actually be made available to the forces and those who should in the public interest be held for the time being in industry.

Again, men in every variety of personal circumstances and with every type of surroundings and outlook were included indiscriminately in each ballot, and it was necessary for a tribunal to exist so that those on whom the performance of military service would inflict an undue measure of sacrifice and hardship, or to whom the thought of such service was repugnant for reasons of conscience, could have their individual circumstances examined.

Provision was accordingly made in the National Service Emergency Regulations for the establishment of statutory Armed Forces Appeal Boards, and six Boards were set up at the end of 1940 to handle appeals arising in respect of overseas service. As the volume of work increased these were reinforced by three temporary Boards.

Meanwhile the sixteen District Advisory Man-power Committees were re-constituted as statutory Man-power Committees, and continued to deal with appeals against Territorial service and appeals regarding the service of volunteers. (Appeals on grounds of conscientious objection were, however, referred to Armed Forces Appeal Boards.) A further Committee was established.

These Boards and Committees have handled a very large volume of individual cases, both as regards the initial hearing of appeals and the subsequent periodic review of men whose service has been postponed for the time being.

The bulk of appeals against military service have been based on the ground of public interest, though cases on the ground of undue hardship have formed a fair proportion of the total, a common type of appeal involving both of these grounds. Only a small proportion of men called for service (1·7 per cent.) have lodged appeals on conscientious grounds, and a minute fraction (0·7 per cent.) have appealed on the ground of legal status in relation to liability for inclusion in the ballot. A number of the appeals on the ground of public interest have been initiated by the Director of National Service, in order to protect the interests of important industries in cases where employers or men concerned refrained from lodging appeals because of patriotic scruples or otherwise.

Among fit single men called for overseas service it was found that 45 per cent. in all were affected by appeals, approximately 62 per cent. of these being granted indefinite postponement of service at the first hearing of the appeal, a further 17 per cent. being granted temporary postponement. A rather lower proportion of appeals was found to have been lodged in respect of unfit men, and these appeals were adjourned at the time on account of the ineligibility for service of the men concerned, in view of the policy of not posting unfit men for service at that time. Later, as Grade II and Grade III men began to be posted for service, these cases were brought on for hearing.