

180. Another serious difficulty revealed was the lack of adequate coastal shipping to transport timber from Westland to North Island ports. The demands on shipping due to the war had greatly increased and the coastal fleet available for normal activity had diminished accordingly. It was estimated that the South Island had an annual surplus of 15,000,000 board feet of rimu which was sufficient to meet the North Island deficiency, but the necessary shipping was not available, and no solution could be found to this transport problem.

181. The importance of the timber industry to the war effort was indicated by the fact that at least 85 per cent. of all timber produced was, by November, 1941, being used for essential defence purposes, including the construction of military camps, and hospitals, and the manufacture of containers for munitions and primary produce. In the following few months, as a consequence of Japan's entry into the conflict, the demand for timber was further increased by reason of the huge defence-works programme which had to be undertaken, including Air Force expansion and the provision of equipment, stores, and military camps for the American Forces in New Zealand. The fact that this additional programme was necessarily to be undertaken in the North Island added materially to the difficulties of the situation.

182. At that point the following measures were adopted to protect and build up the labour force in the industry :—

(a) Provision was made for the regular weekly hours of employment in North Island mills to be increased from forty to forty-eight.

(b) Steps were taken to effect the release from the home Forces of experienced sawmill workers, and these men were directed to North Island mills despite the fact that many were normally employed in South Island mills. During the period June, 1942, to March, 1943, Armed Forces Appeal Boards made recommendations for the release of 315 men for return to the industry.

(c) The postponement from military service by Armed Forces Appeal Boards of both skilled and unskilled sawmill workers. Whereas at August, 1941, 87 men were held in the industry by the action of Appeal Tribunals, by 31st March, 1943, this figure had increased to 1,124.

(d) The gazettement of a special Order requiring men with experience as timber-workers to register with District Man-power Officers. This enabled District Man-power Officers to direct back to the mills men who had acquired experience in the work but had drifted into other occupations.

183. The period 1st April, 1943, to 31st March, 1944, was one of continued endeavour on the part of the Department to ensure the adequate staffing of the industry. Recorded vacancies at the commencement of the year were fairly steady at from 300 to 400. The home Forces were combed for experienced sawmill workers, and during the year 317 were released for return to the industry.

184. To relieve the labour shortage men of the Forestry Unit were returned from England to the Dominion in November, 1943. Some 250 were directed into the timber industry from this source. Owing to continued shipping difficulties, directions were again made to North Island mills as far as possible.

185. As at 31st March, 1944, 1,173 Grade I men were held in the industry on appeal.

186. With the tapering-off of defence construction works the demand for timber was not eased, as it was vitally necessary to resume the building of houses, which had come to a standstill during the period of concentration on defence works. Consequently the timber industry continued to require all possible assistance in the period 1st April, 1944, to 31st March, 1945. During this period the industry was greatly assisted by the decision to return the Third (Pacific) Division to the Dominion and to direct to priority industries those members who responded to the appeal to volunteer for essential work as an alternative to further military service. Of 9,100 men of the Third Division held in industry under direction as at 30th November, 1944, 474 were employed in logging and sawmilling. In addition, 194 men were released from the home Forces to the industry in the period 1st April, 1944, to 31st March, 1945. A special survey of the industry was undertaken at the end of 1944 covering bush and town mills. The survey revealed that there were 321 units operating in the industry, the labour force of which had increased during 1944 from 6,561 to 6,780, notwithstanding an outflow of 1,788 men.