STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
ON VISIT TO TROOPS IN THE FAR EAST

Note by the Secretary of State for War

I circulate, for the information of my colleagues, the text of a statement which I propose to make to the House on Tuesday, 20th June, on the subject of my recent visit to troops in the Far East.

J.S.

War Office, S.W.1,

16TH JUNE, 1950.

Mr. Speaker - With your permission and that of the House, I desire to make a statement on my recent visit to the troops in Malaya and Hong Kong.

The House may rest assured that His Majesty's Government are taking, and will take, the military measures which prove necessary to the suppression of the rising in Malaya. Substantial reinforcements of land and air forces are arriving and will arrive in Malaya.

I wish to emphasise, however, that the problem is not exclusively a military one. General Briggs has put into operation a phased programme under which the efforts of the Army, the Police and the Civil Administration are being carefully co-ordinated. One of
The main objects of this programme is to secure that, when the Army has restored law and order, adequate forces of the police and civil administration are available to ensure that there is no reversion to banditry.

General Briggs has recently issued a statement warning public opinion in the clearest possible terms that this systematic programme can have no quick or sudden results. From their very nature these operations must take a considerable time before they show their full fruits.

I am glad to be able to tell the House that I found all units of the British Army in Malaya showing a most determined spirit. The strain of conducting these most toilsome operations is not a light one, but it is being borne with admirable cheerfulness. I made a practice of asking each of the National Servicemen with whom I spoke whether he preferred to do his period of National Service in Great Britain or in Malaya. Out of several dozen, all except two replied that they preferred to serve in Malaya.

I cannot give details of the casualties of all kinds suffered by our Forces, since this information would be of service to the enemy. But the British Army, including Gurkhas, has suffered 157 fatal casualties since the emergency in Malaya began two years ago. It is a bitter thing that any British soldiers have lost their lives as a result of this rising. It is evidence, however, of the skill and care with which the Army has undertaken its constant and arduous patrolling operations that fatal casualties have been kept down to this figure.

I have no doubt that Far Eastern Command is today a well-found force in respect of weapons, stores and equipment. Nevertheless new needs for equipment and new suggestions for weapons are made from time to time in operations of this sort, and we at the War
Office are doing out utmost to see that these needs and suggestions are quickly met. For example, it has been possible in the last few days to place an order for a new automatic weapon, the American M2 Carbine, which will, it is thought, be of service to the jungle patrols. These weapons should reach Malaya within a matter of weeks.

The health of the troops is excellent. The medical authorities assure me that, taking one thing with another, the sickness rate was below, rather than above, that of troops in the United Kingdom.

Amongst many factors affecting the welfare of the troops I came to the conclusion that the provision of adequate numbers of married quarters took the highest priority of all. Excellent progress is being made with the provision of these quarters in Singapore and in Malaya. The troops see rapid and extensive building going on and married men are aware that, by the first half of 1951, the back of the problem should be broken. For various and comprehensible reasons progress at Hong Kong has so far not been so rapid; but we are now taking urgent steps to overcome the very real building problems which arise in that congested area.

Finally, it is possible to speak with confidence of the result of the operations in Malaya for the following reason. In February, 1948, the Malayan Communist Party decided to undertake an armed uprising. This rising is in no sense a national movement for independence supported by the people of Malaya. On the contrary, over much of Malaya it has been possible for the authorities to arm the civil population on the largest scale without fear of the arms passing into the hands of the Communists. This is surely the acid test of where
the sympathies of the majority of the population lie. British troops serving in Malaya, their relatives and the nation as a whole may therefore rest assured that we are in no sense attempting to suppress a national movement of the Malayan people seeking independence. On the contrary, we are aiding the great majority of the people of Malaya in preventing a small, but well-armed and well-organised, minority of Communists from seizing power in their country.