

STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER,  
THE RT. HON. JOHN GORTON, MP. IN  
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON  
13 MARCH 1968

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PAYMENT TO CAPTAIN ROBERTSON

In conjunction with its consideration of the Report of the Royal Commissioners, the Government has given much thought to the position of Captain R.J. Robertson. On his resignation in 1964, Captain Robertson was ineligible for any pension from the Defence Forces Retirements Benefits Fund and received only the repayment of his own contributions to the Fund. As Honourable Members are well aware, no Service Board, either in 1964 or now, has authority to grant pensions. Provision for pensions in all three Services is made in the Defence Forces Retirement Benefits Act 1948-66. The Naval Board in 1964 could only ensure that Captain Robertson was aware of the consequences of his decision to resign and this it did.

No officer of the Armed Services is entitled to resign and claim his full pension merely because he is dissatisfied with a particular appointment. However, it is widely felt that Captain Robertson resigned as and when he did because of certain critical findings made by the first Royal Commission and that, in the special circumstances of this case, the second Royal Commission having accepted a different reconstruction of the accident and having said that Captain Robertson was free of any criticism, the Government should take some action recognising the changed position.

The Government has now decided that a payment should be made to Captain Robertson and in reaching this conclusion necessarily had to take a broad view. Whilst paying some regard to the pension which Captain Robertson might have received in certain eventualities if he had not resigned as and when he did, the Government did not regard this as the sole criterion. Other factors also had to be taken into consideration. Having considered various ways in which this payment might be made the Government decided that payment of a lump sum, as an act of grace, would be the most appropriate and the Government has now decided to authorise payment accordingly of \$60,000. In reaching this decision, the Government took into account advice from the Commissioner of Taxation that he would regard payment made in the form proposed as being free of income tax.

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