

Supply—Veterans Affairs

was not able to get there. Sometimes what appear to be unreasonable delays are occasioned by the fact that the advocate requires a tremendous length of time to assemble the information, sometimes from far places of the earth, in order to make his case. Consequently such an application is delayed until the advocate feels he has all the available evidence at hand. He then lets it be known to the chairman of the pension commission that he is now ready to deal with eight, nine, ten or fifteen cases at Vancouver or New Westminster, as the case may be. I will look into the matter raised by my hon. friend.

Mr. Cruickshank: I believe you have a sitting at Kamloops in the interior of British Columbia. I can be corrected by the hon. member representing that constituency if that is not so. I believe you also have sittings in Vancouver and New Westminster. I want to suggest that it means a great deal of inconvenience and expense to veterans, who may or may not have a case, to go to Vancouver or New Westminster. Chilliwack has a population of some 17,000 or 18,000 people. Could we not have a sitting of the commission in Chilliwack? Chilliwack has the largest Canadian Legion branch in the province of British Columbia, and therefore we must have quite a number of veterans. I should like to see a sitting at Chilliwack instead of veterans from the entire Fraser valley having to go to Vancouver or New Westminster at their own expense and inconvenience.

Mr. Gregg: Owing to the large number of veterans in British Columbia, the sittings there are under constant consideration. I will take under advisement the suggestion made. I am informed that an appeal board of the commission is sitting in British Columbia at the present time, and that every appeal listed as ready for hearing is being heard. We have at least three appeal boards sitting in British Columbia each year.

Mr. Cruickshank: Will the minister take into consideration having one of the appeal boards sitting in the city of Chilliwack?

Mr. Gregg: I will discuss it with the chairman of the board.

Mr. Lennard: A few minutes ago the minister said that the reason for delay in the hearings was that the pension advocates take so long to prepare their cases. That is the same complaint I have had, that we have not enough pension advocates to adequately care for the different cases. I would not say that they have too much to do but I feel that some of the pension advocates have a few more cases than they can adequately handle under the circumstances. Sometimes it does not take much to keep them busy.

Mr. Mutch: I think it is pretty well the experience of everyone who has had anything to do with this matter that the fastest pension advocate is not necessarily the best one. At the present moment I know of a case which has been in the course of preparation for more than a year. It is an application for leave to reopen, and in order to make the case stand up you have to have new evidence. Correspondence has been going on with the British ministry and with people scattered all over the country. That is where a good deal of the delay arises. Once an appeal fails after leave to reopen has been granted, it is exceedingly difficult to succeed on a second appeal for leave to reopen. In most instances the delays are delays in preparation. It is not so much the result of a shortage of pension advocates as the fact that these people have got a bit foxy through long experience. They have not only the interest of the veteran but their own reputation at stake, and they exhaust every possibility in order to get evidence. Just recently one of these chaps sent a man to a country drugstore to search for prescriptions issued twenty years ago which might substantiate a claim. That involved nearly a week spent in the dusty basement of a small-town drugstore. I am sure these efforts contribute more to delays than either failure to work hard enough or insufficiency of pension advocates.

Mr. Gillis: What are the necessary qualifications under the regulations for a pension advocate?

Mr. Gregg: The qualifications are rather special. Normally of course, if other qualifications exist, training in the law is useful. It is not always possible to entice a lawyer from his practice to that work. To answer the question in an offhand way I would say that the prime qualifications are intelligence, patience, industry, and anxiety to serve the best interests of the veteran.

Mr. Gillis: Is it not necessary that he should know something about the Pension Act?

Mr. Gregg: Oh yes, of course. He gets an orientation course in that.

Mr. Gillis: The reason I ask that is that at one time it was obligatory that a pension advocate must be a member of the legal profession, but that has been removed. It is necessary to know something about the machinery.

Mr. Cruickshank: So that it may be on the record, I should like to ask the minister a question. I should like to be corrected if I am wrong in my understanding of the procedure. Let us say a man is entitled to