

nize the special situation of those who suffered as a result of being taken prisoner by the Japanese in Hong Kong on Christmas day, 1941. The exceptionally rigorous and debilitating conditions that marked their almost four years of captivity have left an imprint of misery on this group in a way never before experienced by other Canadian veterans. The nature of their disabilities is so unique that the government has proposed special legislation to provide a minimum pension of 50 per cent for all Hong Kong veterans who make application and have an assessable degree of disability. This will, of course, make their dependents eligible for survivor pensions in the event of their death.

This new part also makes provision for the widows and dependents of those Hong Kong veterans who died prior to the effective date of this Act. Their deaths will be presumed to be attributable to their service, thereby making their widows and dependents automatically eligible for survivor pensions. With the enactment of this proposal, the Hong Kong veterans will have finally achieved the special recognition they have sought for the past 25 years.

When I had the honour of addressing the annual meeting of the Hong Kong Veterans in Toronto last summer, I confessed to a special feeling for the men of C-Force; the Winnipeg Grenadiers and the Royal Rifles of Canada. Perhaps, as minister for all veterans, I should not have made this confession, but many members of the Royal Rifles came from my home territory of the Restigouche and Matapedia valleys, and I can still remember the great grief and sorrow which swept the countryside when Hong Kong fell back in 1941, near Christmas.

Another comment I made at that same meeting in Toronto was the hope that this new legislation could be introduced during this session. I am most happy that this hope has come true. This legislation will apply not only to the Hong Kong Veterans and their survivors, but to all Canadian veterans who were captured by the Japanese in the Pacific theatre of war and who were held prisoners for a year or more.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, these are the five most significant and advanced changes we propose to incorporate into the Act. There are many other new sections which will enhance and enrich the rights and benefits extended to our Canadian veterans and their dependents. I would like to deal briefly with some of these.

The section, in the present Act, dealing with military service in peacetime and in the militia will be clarified by the introduction of guidelines which define military duty. These guidelines will spell out, for pension purposes, the various activities in which members of the forces participate.

Clothing allowances for bilateral amputees will be increased and provision will be made for special allowances to those pensioners who require specially made clothing or apparel due to the nature of their disabilities.

We are proposing additional pensions for those who might suffer the loss of a paired limb, or organ, from any

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cause whatever. In other words, if a veteran was in receipt of a pension for the loss of a leg as a result of military service and subsequently lost his other leg in an automobile accident he will be entitled to an additional pension amounting to 50 per cent of the normal assessment for the loss of the second leg.

Provision is being made for posthumous assessment where pension was paid at less than 48 per cent at the time of death to determine whether the disability was fully assessed at that time. This may, in some cases, entitle the widow, children or other dependents, to receive survivor benefits.

Another new clause proposes to allow additional pension awards to a member of the forces who suffers an additional disability that is wholly, or partly, a consequence of the disability for which he is already receiving a pension. His right to additional pension in respect of a consequential disability will no longer be denied simply because he engaged in an activity which he ought to have known could cause additional disablement.

We are broadening the legislation regarding the payment of attendance allowance to provide that the allowance will be payable during the month of admission and during the following month of hospitalization.

We are proposing to amend the act so as to extend from twelve months to three years the retroactive period for which a pension may be granted.

I would like to point out that the government is also planning to institute several changes in pension procedure which will not require legislative action but which will have beneficial financial implications for the veteran.

[English]

For example, the stabilization of pensions for World War I veterans was effected in 1948. We now propose to stabilize pensions arising out of service subsequent to the First World War. This means that any pensioner who reaches, or has reached the age of 55, and whose pension has been unchanged for three years or more, will not have his pension reduced even if his condition should improve.

Other recommendations, already accepted but not requiring amendments, include an increase in the attendance allowance for the totally blind to the maximum rate of \$3,000 per year; the increase of the attendance allowance for the bilateral Symes amputee to \$1,200 per year, and the discontinuance of the deduction of \$15 per month from the pensioner's treatment allowance whenever he is admitted to hospital. These changes will be implemented at about the same time this bill is given Royal Assent. It is the government's intention to refer this bill to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. I will, of course, be available to appear before that committee along with officials of my department and of the Canadian Pension Commission.

As hon. members know, the terms of reference of the Woods Committee did not include pension rates as set forth in Schedules A and B of the Pension Act. However, hon. members will recall that I announced an increase in