

Supply—Veterans Affairs

distances, costing time and money, to make representations before a parliamentary committee which I knew the government was not able to put into effect this year. The one which I knew could be put into effect I brought forward, and it at least has passed this house.

The national organizations of veterans, everyone knows here, are in the closest touch with the veteran constituencies across Canada. I can say the same of the hon. members of this house. There is not a member of this house, in whose constituency there are many hundreds of veterans, who is not in close touch with them. If it is individual cases of grievances, or unfairness or hardships, the quickest and most effective committee or people to deal with it are those in the district office. If no recourse can be obtained there I can assure hon. members that we in Ottawa are only too glad to go into these cases at once. In any event, in the past parliamentary committees have in the main dealt with principles and not with individual cases. When suggestions have been made for improvements in administration or in legislation, open discussion has taken place here and there has been an opportunity and there will continue to be an opportunity for the national veterans organizations to make representations before the minister at any time and before the cabinet at regular intervals. I consider it perhaps as valuable to maintain that direct route as it is slavishly to set up a parliamentary committee every session whether there is any particular job for it or not.

Having said that, may I say that when the government introduces legislation, or for any other reason there are improvements in veterans affairs, I shall be glad to discuss the matter of a committee with my colleagues. I have said these things because I have felt that at this particular session of parliament no parliamentary committee was necessary.

On the other point made by the hon. member for Vancouver-Quadra, my department became the custodians and shippers of the medals in midstream. Hindsight is often better than foresight. If one were put back into the situation that must have obtained at the end of the war when decisions were reached as to what should have been done, my opinion would be that I would have agreed with the steps that have been taken with regard to the medals for perhaps no better reason than this. As hon. members know, all the medals issued to Canadians received the authority emanating from the war office with the exception of one, the C.V.S.M. In former wars they were made in London and sent to Canada. This time—I suppose it may

have been owing to the vast number of men and women involved—at any rate in the United Kingdom, in the United States and in Canada decisions were reached that medals be issued without the names stamped on, not engraved, because our old medals were not engraved. They were stamped around the edges as with a punch and hammer; the names and regiment were put on. On that basis our mint went ahead this time and produced them. As it has turned out, there are approximately $3\frac{1}{2}$ million individual medals in the lot. Those who saw the magnitude of this job looming up—certain veterans were entitled to eight medals each—realized that it was going to be easier and quicker to pack them up, wrap them and send them than to have them stamped or engraved and then to sort out John Jones' several medals out of the pile of 3 million. It was admitted that it would take at least three years longer than it did to get out the medals if the stamps were made. I am going to confess immediately that I am not worrying so much about those who are living but I will not take any exception whatsoever to the remarks that have been made regarding those who have gone out to the next of kin. I quite heartily wish it had been possible to have got these and to have had the names appear on them. While I can see difficulties in reversing orders and having them come back, nevertheless my officials are studying the situation to see whether there is any possibility of sending something out that might be attached to them and that would be appropriate.

A question that has been asked not here but elsewhere is, why was it necessary for the veterans to go to the post office and get a postcard like an old field postcard and put on their name and number and address? The answer is, it is not always clear how much veterans, after their rehabilitation, moved around in Canada. Even in respect of those in receipt of pensions, we find it very difficult to keep tab on them from month to month; consequently it would have been simply hopeless to have sent the medals to the addresses registered on the date of discharge.

The suggestion was also made that the medals were not well parcelled. I will admit that the parcel was not perhaps a very solid one. The suggestion is sometimes made that a good deal of slapdash and carelessness was evidenced in shipping out the parcels. I disagree with that. The medals were carefully packed. It was brought to my attention that after the first war when the medals went out they did not know the order of precedence and one was up and one was down; the suggestion was made this time that a little booklet be put in giving that information; furthermore, that