

Government Orders

benefits as outlined in the bill to certain groups heretofore excluded from designation as war veterans, said groups which include the Canadian Merchant Seamen, registered with the Canadian government between 1939 and 1945 end of hostilities in the Pacific, who made at least one trip through dangerous waters.

The hon. member for Kootenay East—Revelstoke on debate.

Mr. Lyle Kristiansen (Kootenay West—Revelstoke): Mr. Speaker, in rising to address briefly Bill C-87, an act to amend the statute law in relation to war veterans, I would just like to add to the words of my colleague from Regina—Lumsden that there is no better way for us in this House to pay tribute to the Canadian men and women who served in the two world wars and the many other conflicts in which Canada has been engaged than to act in support of the bill before us to improve the benefits and pensions of those who have served in Canada's forces in all of those conflicts.

Concerning my colleague's amendment to define those who served in Canada's merchant marine as veterans entitled to full veterans benefits, I can recall well the father of a good friend of mine—in fact the friend was the best man at my wedding—who three times was torpedoed and dumped into the North Atlantic while on the Murmansk run. He survived all three times. I can think of very few others, no matter which branch of the services, who perhaps earned full benefits and full pensions more than that gentleman and others who, like him, put their lives on the line in the most dangerous theatre of operations.

There is another group in addition to those in the merchant marine who I and my colleagues believe should also be recognized. These other Canadians who have never been given the recognition due to them as war veterans are those who went to Spain to fight fascism during the Spanish Civil War.

There cannot be more than 200 or so surviving Mac-Paps who were of course the first from our land to fight fascism. They were not paid well in Spain. They were given weapons and basic provisions as their reward for helping to try and stop Franco, Hitler, and Mussolini. For their courage and self-sacrifice, their own government declared them outlaws because they violated the Foreign Enlistment Act.

Imagine in the years just before World War II that it was against the law to fight against the most vicious tyranny the world had ever seen, but the Mac-Paps, the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion and others risked imprisonment to stand up for democracy and made their way to Spain on their own where they served with honour.

Many were decorated by the Spanish Republican Government. Many were wounded, captured, tortured, or killed in the fight to stop the fascists and the Nazis.

I have often said that if the democracies had listened to the Mac-Paps and others, we might have headed Hitler off and perhaps stopped the sequence of escalating aggression that resulted in World War II. Many of the members of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion came back to Canada, joined the Canadian forces and continued in the war against fascism.

Now all they want is recognition as veterans. They are not even asking for benefits, though they certainly deserve them. Most importantly, they deserve to know that their country no longer regards them as outlaws for being among the first Canadians to try to stop the spread of fascism.

I hope that the minister will act soon to include as veterans, members of the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion and other Canadians who helped the democratically elected government of Spain defend itself against a fascist invasion during the Spanish Civil War.

Thus, Mr. Speaker, the remainder of these gallant freedom fighters may finally be allowed to take their rightful place of honour and stand as a unit before Canadian cenotaphs on Remembrance Day. It is well past time.

I would move:

That the following words be added to the previous amendment:

and members of the Mackenzie Papineau battalion and other Canadians who fought with Spanish Republican forces during the Spanish Civil War.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The question is on the amendment to the amendment.

All those in favour of the amendment to the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): All those opposed will please say nay.