

Pension Act

comparative figures. In the navy there were 149 rejected after attestation as medically unfit, or 12.4 per thousand.

Mr. McCANN: Is it not a fact that applicants for both the navy and the air force are examined by a board?

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vanceuvor Centre): Yes.

Mr. McCANN: The only applicants who are examined by individual doctors are those for the training camps. I think that should be understood. If they were rejected, that was done by a board; and surely when a board of three medical men is set up, it is an added protection both to the department and to the individual.

While I am on my feet I should like to ask the minister one other question. In the changes in the act is it proposed that a pensioner may be able to avail himself of local hospital facilities instead of having to go all the way to what we might call a regional hospital, as is the case under the present system? My understanding is that when a pensioner develops some disability that requires hospital treatment, he is not entitled to enter a local hospital and receive treatment at the expense of the department; he must proceed to a regional hospital—in the Ottawa valley it would be to either of the hospitals here in Ottawa—where he receives treatment the cost of which is paid by the department. I would suggest, as I have suggested previously, that the law could well be changed to permit pensioners to avail themselves of the privilege of taking treatment in any of the modern hospitals which now exist in a great many of the smaller communities, provided the pensioners can get competent hospitalization and treatment in their own localities.

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver Centre): There is no such provision in the proposed amendments, but I will see that the matter is brought to the attention of the committee.

Mr. NEILL: Would the Minister of National Defence be kind enough to waive etiquette and answer a question which the Minister of Pensions and National Health says does not come under his department; that is, why the dependent mother gets only \$20 while the dependent wife gets \$35?

Mr. RALSTON: I cannot answer my hon. friend with regard to the amount. I may say however that the whole matter was dealt with by a committee at the time provision was made for dependents' allowances. The matter was gone into last year, as hon. members will recall. The situation is this:

[Mr. I. A. Mackenzie.]

A mother has never been recognized as being entitled to pension or allowance, as of right. That principle begins away back with the pensions connected with the last war. The provision then placed in the Pension Act, and the provision there to-day, is that pension is allowed only if it is shown that the soldier was supporting his parents, and then it is allowed only to a limited amount.

A wife is entitled to pension, as of right. Even if she has a private fortune in her own right, she is entitled to pension. The mother is not so entitled. A case of need and the fact that the soldier has been supporting the parents must be shown, in order that the parents may qualify. That applies to the father and to the mother.

At the time of the last war there was no provision whatever for pensions to parents. Assistance given to parents was taken care of through the patriotic fund. Perhaps I should not put it that strongly, because as I speak it comes to me there was one provision respecting a parent, and I would have to look that up. Generally speaking however the patriotic fund was the source looked to.

In this war, under the provision for dependents' allowances we have introduced the same sort of provision which appears in the Pension Act, namely provision for a parent in need. That need must be shown, and, if shown, the parent who has been supported by a soldier is entitled to a limited amount. The amount is less than the amount allowed a wife. I cannot tell my hon. friend why that is so, except that possibly it was felt that primarily there was no entitlement at all, and a limited amount was regarded as all the country should undertake. It is obvious to anyone who looks at our pension laws that a parent is not considered in the same position as a wife, and has never been so regarded. That principle is the one which is carried into the dependents' allowance regulations.

As I have said, the amount was laid down by the committee which dealt with the whole matter of dependents' allowances about a year and a half ago, and the amount was adopted at that time. The matter was fully discussed in the house. At that time the question did come up as to whether a parent should not be entitled to some allowance, when the son was liable for that parent's support and was unable to contribute because of circumstances beyond the parent's control. An amendment was made to make provision for such a case. The whole distinction is that one is in the nature of a compassionate allowance, and the other is an allowance as of right.