

*Prisoners of War Medical Examinations*

who have had to deal with this type of problem through correspondence with many of their constituents.

One of the main reasons for putting this motion on the order paper arises from conversation with the former minister of veterans affairs, now the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert), who has had experience not only as a prisoner of war and pensioner but has some idea of what we are trying to do. I would like for a moment to refer to correspondence between the hon. member for Edmonton West and the present Minister of Veterans Affairs. I do not have to say much about the letter sent to the minister on July 9, 1968, by the hon. member for Edmonton West, but perhaps to lay groundwork for further discussion on this motion I will read portions of both letters. In part the hon. member for Edmonton West stated:

On a number of occasions in the past I have spoken in the House and privately to your predecessor, about the advisability of now calling in all prisoners of war, save the so-called Hong Kong group for whom this has been done on a separate program, for a thorough physical examination. Many of these men are presently pensioners and their medical histories have been established by the Canadian Pension Commission. The great majority, however, have not been near doctors of the commission or of the departmental treatment services. So many of them should, for their own good and for the benefit of both the commission and your own officers. Long term effects of varying periods of privation and hardship (different than that of men who fought long hard battle campaigns) are at work and the results must be assessed.

He goes on to say:

Much valuable time has been lost as it is approaching 25 years since release.

He is referring to the former prisoners of war:

The fact that I was one of them and now have a limited pension entitlement should not blur my objectivity. I have discussed this at length with a number of ex-P.O.W. who generally share my views.

The minister replied that they were going to consider this matter. He said in part:

As you know, the Hong Kong survey was conducted by the medical advisory branch of the Canadian Pension Commission. It is generally agreed that during the period of their internment the Hong Kong prisoners were subjected to slave labour, maltreatment and starvation, and suffered from diseases not commonly known in Canada. As a result, they now have disabilities, the extent of which were not fully realized until revealed by the review.

I would add at this time that the same conditions, although possibly to a lesser

degree, apply to many of our veterans who were prisoners of war in Europe. The minister goes on to say:

● (5:20 p.m.)

From time to time there have been suggestions made to the Pension Commission by veterans and their organizations that prisoners of war from the European theatre of war be surveyed in the same manner as were the Hong Kong veterans. While the European prisoners of war suffered great privations, the commission has been able to assess with a great degree of accuracy the resulting disabilities—

I doubt that, Mr. Speaker.

—and accordingly it has been felt that there is not the same need for a review along the lines carried out in the case of the Hong Kong group.

With that statement I disagree. The minister goes on to say:

—the suggestion contained in the resolution passed at the Dominion convention of the Royal Canadian Legion outlines a slightly different procedure than that so far advocated. Your request is that all prisoners of war, aside from the Hong Kong veterans, be now given thorough medical examinations. Since this would include non-pensioners as well as pensioners, it could best be done by our treatment services, and I will ask them to consider the suggestion with a view to ascertaining the extent of the problem.

I hope the minister has consulted the treatment services branch of his department and that the result will be favourable. I say this because in many cases we have had requests for assistance from some of these men who were prisoners of war and who have no documentation as to their disabilities. On their release many prisoners of war were very glad to get home quickly and as a result of their urgency were not properly documented by our medical services at the time of their discharge.

Many of these men after their release felt they could go back into the stream of life, to their former vocations or into some new trade, and make a living for themselves and their families. We have received many briefs pointing out that some of them were not able to do this because the disabilities they suffered while prisoners of war have since shown up. Now they have difficulty establishing that their condition is the result of disability suffered during service to their country.

The nation has a national obligation to all of these men whether we admit it or not. Most of them were volunteers at the time that their country needed them. They dropped whatever they were doing and volunteered for service. Regretfully, I say, possibly the medical examination given to some of these