

Pension Acts

Far East. There is no question that those who were deprived of their freedom and were herded into prisoner of war camps, those who had the minimum of food to keep them alive, who were humiliated and in some cases were shot because they tried to escape, should now be given more recognition than perhaps they have in the past.

• (8:30 p.m.)

The hon. member for Malpeque (Mr. MacLean) will speak later and perhaps he will tell the House that when he was shot down over northern France his co-pilot survived to be taken prisoner of war. When he tried to escape from a German prisoner of war camp, he and 50 others were shot on the orders of Adolph Hitler. We know only too well that those who served in the Royal Canadian Air Force, especially prisoners who were in eastern Germany near the end of the war, were marched across Germany in the late winter and early spring. They slept in ditches, in the snow and in barns, and they lived on turnips.

We know what happened to the prisoners of the 12th SS Panzer division in France which was commanded by a general named Kurt Meyer who later served a sentence in Dorchester penitentiary for his war crimes. Almost every man they took as prisoner never reached a prisoner of war camp but was shot on the spot, usually with his hands tied behind his back. Others who did survive witnessed this.

I have said that we should give special consideration to our Hong Kong veterans. I realize, as one deeply interested in veterans affairs, that every case is different, just as every man's service is different from that of every other man. May I say this on a purely personal note. It is a little more than 30 years ago when, as a young officer, I was stationed on an island in the St. John River at Woodstock, New Brunswick. It was a pleasant time. We were fit, and it was a wonderful way to fight a war. But it was very different indeed from the shell-fire on the Normandy beaches at Carpiquet and Caen. It was different from the service of those who flew over Germany when the flak was so thick that they said you could walk on it. It was different from the service of the men who served on the little ships on the North Atlantic, covered with ice two or three feet thick. If they slipped, they had five minutes in the North Atlantic before they died.

I believe that every man who served in action lost ten years of his life, not just the five or six years that he served. Colonel John McCrae who wrote "In Flanders Fields" wrote other poems, among which was one about South Africa, where he served. He wrote:

That day of battle in the dusty heat
We lay and heard the bullets swish and swing
Like scythes amid the over ripened wheat
And we the harvest of their garnering.

The effects of the war are now being felt more and more by the men who served. We see it now when we read The Legion each month. I wonder if I will see the names of some of my friends there among those who have died. More and more we see World War II men

[Mr. MacRae.]

dying in their mid-fifties, in many cases suddenly. The incidence of heart attacks among them is very high, as I am sure it was among the World War I survivors at that age. Perhaps it was never recognized that this was due to their service.

I have on my desk the cases of two dozen veterans in whom I am interested. Several of them have had heart attacks as young men. There is also a high incidence of mental illness among them. I do not think it is good enough to say that they would have had heart attacks or mental breakdowns anyway. These are men who have been in action. When we were being discharged, the general objective was to get out as fast as one could—to get out of the uniform and into civilian clothes. Perhaps if we had had a more thorough examination at that time much of this might have been discovered. It was even worse after World War I, when if a man could walk and was warm, away he went for discharge and that was the end of his service. Some of them were so anxious to get out that they even concealed disabilities which they had. Eric Maria Remarque, who wrote "All Quiet on the Western Front," said the following of those who served in World War I:

A generation destroyed by war even if it was spared by its shells.

This also could be said of those who served in World War II. Why did men and women do this? Why did they serve? They served because they valued freedom. It has been said, callously, that some served because they did not have a job; others because they were adventurers. Maybe that is true of some, but the great majority, more than 1½ million men and women who served, did so because they believed in the ideal of freedom. What were they willing to give up? The inscription on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier says that here were men and women who were willing to give the most that man can give, life itself, for God, for King and country, for loved ones, home and empire, for the sacred cause of justice and the freedom of the world. Those are the men and women whom we are considering this evening.

Mr. Hubert Badanai (Fort William): Mr. Speaker, the Minister's masterful introduction of Bill C-203 this afternoon, and the speeches of several hon. members who followed him in the discussion dealt with every aspect of the legislation. Inasmuch as there is unanimous agreement on its substance, I propose to be brief and to allow other hon. members an opportunity to be heard.

There was never any doubt about the government's intention to live up to the promise made by the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Dubé) since he was appointed minister, that a bill would eventually be introduced designed to incorporate into the Pension Act the best possible deal for veterans that the country could afford at this time. All the proposals of the white paper, many of which greatly improved and expanded the act, provide better benefits and in some instances even improve the recommendations of the Woods report.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs charged with the responsibility of hearing sub-