

Veterans Allowance Increases

The hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe and others mentioned the organizations which made their views known.

Finally, after many meetings, and after deep thought and a great deal of work, we had the report of the veterans committee brought before the House of Commons. I share the regret of other members of my party and I suspect, of members on the government side as well, that we have not yet introduced any legislation. I have a very special reason for saying that, Mr. Speaker. I am deeply interested in the welfare of our veterans, as the minister knows. We were born in the same county and have both lived for most of our lives in the same community in the Restigouche River Valley.

Let me say that the brutality, the starvation, the privation, humiliation and torture that were suffered by the men of the Royal Rifles of Canada, and the Winnipeg Grenadiers at Hong Kong is second only to the horrible treatment that was meted out to those who were imprisoned in Hitler's concentration camps. I know that the minister will agree with me when I say that many of these men are broken in body and mind. I have seen the welts on their bodies and the scars. I know one young lad from Campbellton who died after being beaten with rifle butts because some Japanese guard was displeased with something he had done.

These are things we ought to think about when we consider these men. I do not mean to be critical, but I feel that the legislation should have been brought down a year ago so that we could have taken care of these Hong Kong veterans by bringing them all up to the 48 per cent level. I understand that 395 of them have not yet been brought up to that point. I think the legislation ought to be made retroactive because, in this past year, several more of them have died. The mortality rate among these men has been very high because their lives have been shortened through the starvation they endured day after day, month after month and year after year. The food they were given daily was the amount of rice a man could hold in the palm of his hand. That was not all. They trapped rats and spiders as well as snakes to try to obtain a little more protein to keep them alive. So, I say to the minister in all sincerity and honesty, do not delay any longer; let us do something for these very, very courageous men who have suffered so much on our behalf.

I should like also to mention this point. It has been discussed in the past. It concerns the hon. gentleman who is occupying the chair at this moment. The veterans affairs committee went to Europe in 1966. Its function was to attend a number of ceremonies, to visit battlefields and visit Canadian cemeteries. We discovered that there are 850 cemeteries in France. We visited the battlefields of the Second World War from Normandy to the Rhine. We went to Ortona and Casino. Then, we went to the first war battlefields, to Ypres, Vimy and Passchendale and to the others. It was a most moving experience. I know that there has been a certain amount of criticism of committees going out of this country. They are criticized even for travelling in this country. Nevertheless, I

[Mr. MacRae.]

believe completely that that was one of the most valuable trips, for want of a better word, that any committee has ever taken.

● (4:30 p.m.)

On that trip, Mr. Speaker, you were the Chairman of the committee. I think I speak for all who were there when I say that we found Your Honour to be a gentleman; able, kind, efficient and sympathetic. I became better acquainted with Your Honour. It was a pleasure to be with you at that time.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacRae: Recently I read an editorial on remembrance. On the 25th anniversary of D-Day, one year ago, I had hoped to be in Europe. However, a heart attack intervened. Some of my colleagues attended, including the hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi (Mr. Smith) and the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), both of whom served in France on D-Day. In Holland there is a memorial to the Canadian Scottish, a very fine Canadian regiment. Among the Europeans, the Dutch people were among the most horribly treated by the Nazis. Under Hitler's tyranny some unspeakable brutalities occurred. Recently, I spoke with a widow who is now living in Fredericton. She informed me that when the Germans left her village in Holland near the end of the war most of the men were already in slave labour camps. The last act of the Gestapo and the S.S. troops was to take the 17 remaining men in the village, mostly teenage boys and old men, line them up against a wall and shoot them. The Dutch have much to remember.

A year ago a group, mostly former officers, placed a wreath at the memorial there to the Canadian Scottish. After the wreath was placed some young lads, 17, 18 or 19 years of age, tore down the wreath, stamped it into the ground and insulted the Canadians standing there. Of course, the older people were horrified. They apologized and made amends. An editorial regarding these young people stated, "How can they be expected to remember what they were not around to forget?" But there are still a great many Canadians who are here to remember. There is no more important body of Canadian citizens than those who wore a uniform and served in time of war, and no more important body than the women and children who waited for a husband or father who in so many cases did not return.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. MacRae: I support the motion of my distinguished and gallant comrade in arms, the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe and the subamendment of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). With all the sincerity at my command, I urge the minister not to delay any longer than necessary the introduction of the best possible legislation for these very important Canadians.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!