

and in recognition of the changes that are taking place during this last quarter of the twentieth century. And I wish he could be as successful as he was on the subject of veterans benefits, and persuade his Government to try and improve the lives of others, including his fellow ministers who are having to cope with regrettable cutbacks which will have a pauperizing effect on the least fortunate in our society. I wish he could persuade his colleagues that this has gone far enough and that with his vast parliamentary experience, he could convince the Government that what he did for his Department, his Cabinet colleagues should be able to do in a similar fashion in order to improve the situation of the average Canadian.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think there will be much opposition to this Bill being adopted at all stages in the House today, and once again, I take pleasure in thanking the Minister for having introduced these important improvements for the benefit of those who served their country so well.

● (1620)

[English]

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay-Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, it is with great honour that I participate in the debate today. When we are elected to this House, we come with our own ideology, our own beliefs and some of our own pet projects. This is one of mine, and I congratulate the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Hees) on bringing forth the legislation. It was long overdue and I think it goes a long way to meeting the concerns of many of our veterans in Canada.

One of the reasons I am here is the previous legislation. I am a son of a Dieppe prisoner of war. I went to school on a DVA scholarship. My brother did the same but went much further on his DVA scholarship. My mother was looked after by the DVA in terms of pension income for the 23 to 25 years that she lived after my father. Matters relating to compensation for prisoners of war are, therefore, very close to my heart.

I want to set the stage in terms of the importance of this Bill and the importance of the improvements to one sector, that of the Dieppe prisoners of war. I would like to start by reading from a diary, that of private Albert Adam Angus, B Company, Queens Own Cameron Highlanders, Canada. He was a prisoner of war, taken at Dieppe and imprisoned at Stalag VIII B for 33 months. The diary starts:

Notes as a prisoner of war in Germany. I am starting this five weeks after being captured. I was taken about 11 a.m. on August 19, 1942, four kilometers inland from Dieppe. There were six of us together and an officer, Sergeant Thompson, was taken a few minutes later. We were treated quite decent. They were all young fellows. We spent most of the day bringing in our wounded, also theirs. They let us look after our own first. Late in the p.m. we were marched into Dieppe just in time to catch the rest of the prisoners as they were being marched off to the first night's camp about 15 miles away where we were given some tea and a loaf of bread.

The next p.m. we were loaded on a train in boxcars and travelled all night to another camp in France where we were searched and questioned. The eats were pretty scarce at first but the French Red Cross sent in some oatmeal and some fresh vegetables, which helped a lot.

We were kept there for about 10 days when we were again loaded into boxcars, (40 to a car) and rode four days to our permanent camp at Lansdorf, Germany.

Army Benevolent Fund Act and Related Acts

We arrived at camp about 4.30 p.m. and were given some cabbage soup. After that we were given our first Red Cross parcel, one parcel between four men. "Were they good." We were just like a bunch of kids opening their parcels on Christmas morn. From then on we got a parcel on Monday and Friday with bulk issues on Wednesday, Thurs. and Sat. There was an epidemic of dysentery which broke out (I had it for five weeks). After a couple of weeks we were moved to another compound where things were a little better, more water and wood.

That is how my father spent those first weeks before things got rough. When I say things got rough, I would like to describe to you, Mr. Speaker, a bit of what those prisoners of war had to endure.

As I said before, they were prisoners for 33 months. Their hands were tied with ropes for the first 54 days, then replaced by chains for 13 months. The personal trauma experienced by these men while shackled remains in their minds to this day. Their personal hygiene and activities were restrained by the fact that they required the assistance of another human being in order to attend to their normal bodily functions. Nothing could degrade a man more than having to ask his friend to help him in that way.

In January, 1945, during the Russian army advance and in retaliation of bombardment inflicted upon them by the allies, the German authorities decided to march the prisoners. They marched until May, 1945, five months later, with very little food, improper clothing in all types of weather and at the same time being infested with lice. This march was later referred to as the Death March because so many of them did not survive the ordeal.

Over time, many briefs, as the Minister is aware, have been presented to the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. The DVA at that time requested a Dr. Herman to undertake research on the life of European prisoners of war. He found in his report that the Dieppe POWs suffered the worst maltreatment and should receive a compensation for their suffering. He also stated that the death rate of Dieppe POWs is the highest of all European theatre prisoners of war. At that time the Government brought in Bill C-92 creating the Compensation for Former Prisoners of War Act. That Act determined the compensation each POW would receive. Someone who had been a POW for three months would receive the equivalent of a 10 per cent pension. For 18 months it would be 15 per cent. For 30 months or more it would be 20 per cent. Today the Minister is increasing the upper limit by 5 per cent and I thank him for making that modest improvement.

● (1630)

The feelings of POWs have been recorded in a number of ways over the years. Some made notes while in prison camps, others have their recollections, and others have writings on their behalf. I would like to quote three excerpts from my father's diary to give you his impressions:

Dec. 28, 1942

—we put in a pretty fair Xmas . . . the parcels were real good . . . we were not chained up Xmas Day.

Jan. 7, 1943

What a hell hole this is now . . . the snow tracks in and lays in puddles all over the floor . . . your feet are damp all the time and you can't keep warm. I have all the clothes I own on now, more than I ever wore in my life before.