

Veterans Affairs

difficult. It is a period of transition when they need to carry on and adjust to the future. This amendment adds a great deal to the humane attitude to veterans legislation.

You had to be a prisoner of war for 30 months on a continual basis before qualifying for any compensation under the Compensation for Former Prisoners of War Act. Now you can add one, two or three imprisonments together to get a total of 30 months. That is only fair. A person who was captured two or three times went through much greater ordeal.

There is another technical amendment. These sorts of things pass by legislators when Bills are drawn up. If a person was captured on February 1—and the legislation in the past said that you required three months to get a prisoner of war pension—you would require only 89 days to qualify for that pension, but if you were captured on July 1 you would require 92 days to qualify. Those of us who handle a lot of veterans' cases run across these inequities from time to time.

Another important part of this Bill authorizes the Canadian Pension Commission to grant compassionate prisoner of war compensation in cases of special hardship where an applicant is otherwise unqualified. The Minister in this case today mentioned prisoners in North Africa who were considered to be outside the enemy's territory. I think what this legislation recognizes and should recognize is that in times of war we know no boundaries. Boundaries can change from day to day. You cannot really say that because it is not in actual enemy territory, you are not in enemy territory. How would you be captured if you were not in enemy territory or vice versa? That is a good amendment.

In bringing all this together today I think again that the historical tradition of Canada and Canadian Governments over the years has been to provide for veterans, survivors and their spouses. This is a great responsibility that must never be forgotten. We must look after families of those who have died in defence of freedom and those veterans who came home incapacitated, unable to provide for their spouses and families. That is our job here at home and one that we must continue.

I know that the Minister today has a great feeling for his job, as did the Hon. Dan MacDonald when he was in this House. He understands it is important that veterans be made comfortable for the remainder of their lives. That is the least we can do for the service they have given to this country. He understands it is important that veterans be made comfortable for the remainder of their lives. That is the least we can do for the service they have given to Canada. Therefore, we must be reminded at this time that present day Canadian nationalism was really born on the battlefields of Europe, of the world and also at the negotiating tables that brought World War I and World War II to a close, not forgetting the Korean War later on. Only if we ourselves in this Parliament look after normal lifetime responsibilities that would have belonged to those veterans who did not return and only if we look after the lifetime responsibilities of those who returned incapacitated, can we really say that we are remembering them. That is the

job of every Canadian, not just at the cenotaph on November 11. They may have been maltreated while in prison or wounded in war, but it is the job of Canadians as a whole to remember them by looking after those who returned incapacitated, their spouses, families and dependants.

The Minister mentioned various organizations. I would like to pay tribute, on behalf of my Party today, the Liberal Party of Canada to organizations such as the National Prisoners of War Association, one of which is the renowned Dieppe Prisoners of War Association; the National Council of Veterans Associations; and the Royal Canadian Legion, which has some 1,700 branches across Canada. People in these organizations have continued to champion the causes and brought forward representations to the Government of Canada to amend the legislation so that we as parliamentarians can better carry on the job of supporting our veterans. Of course then we have the Canadian families who are directly affected by things that arise by way of technicalities and legislation that do not apply to their individual cases. We owe it to them too for bringing their ideas forward to us.

To all those people I want to say thank you today. I appreciate that the Minister has brought this legislation forward in the historical and great traditions of Canada as a caring nation on behalf of its people for those who sacrificed their lives or health for our country. Last August I had the privilege of attending the ceremonies in Dieppe with the Minister along with many other veterans in remembering that horrendous day, August 19, 1942. It brought home the fact that there should be no complaint or disagreement among political Parties in Canada to support legislation benefiting those who were killed or wounded in such battles all over the world on Canada's behalf. They fought for all of Canada. Therefore, all Canadians, regardless of their political stripe, should defend spouses and dependants of veterans at a time of need.

Thank you for giving me this time to say a few words on this Bill, Mr. Speaker. Again I congratulate the Minister for bringing this legislation forward today.

Mr. Neil Young (Beaches): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I want to say that the proposed legislation before the House, Bill C-100, has the full support of the New Democratic Party. My remarks will be extremely short. It is crucial that this legislation be passed in all stages today because it contains quite a number of improvements for prisoners of war, their dependants and their widows.

• (1630)

I have been a member of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs since I came here in 1980. At practically every appearance before the committee of the Royal Canadian Legion, the Canadian Council of War Veterans' Associations, the National Prisoners of War Association of Canada, as well as of the wives and widows of the members of the National PWO Association, we heard a