

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel R. Tremblay (Québec East): Mr. Speaker, first of all I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to the motion before the House today.

As the House is aware, the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Hees) would have liked to give us his comments on the motion, but as you know, Mr. Speaker, the Minister is over in France this week where with his usual dignity he is representing Canada at the ceremony to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we are considering a motion asking the Government to amend the Civilian War Pensions and Allowances Act by eliminating the condition for entitlement of serving at sea for at least six months in order that one trip through dangerous waters would be the only qualification necessary for the Civilian War Allowance on the part of Canadian Merchant seamen.

Mr. Speaker, as you know it was a Progressive Conservative Government that introduced this legislation in 1962, thus demonstrating a very real interest in the fate of those civilians who served in a theater of war to support the Armed Forces.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to refer at this point to an excellent brochure published by Veterans Affairs and entitled: War Veterans Allowance and Civilian War Allowances, published in April 1985, and with your permission, I will give a short description of the various groups of civilians who served in a theater of war, as I said earlier, and are entitled to a civilian war allowance. They have to meet certain criteria, and I shall, if I may, quote this brief passage.

Eligible are the following groups of civilians, provided they meet certain criteria as to duration and area of service:

- (1) Canadians who served in the Merchant Marine in either war or in the Korean War;
- (2) Non-Canadians who served in Canadian merchant ships in either war or in the Korean War;
- (3) The Canadian Voluntary Aid Detachment of the First World War;
- (4) Canadian Fire Fighters of the Second World War;
- (5) Canadians overseas welfare workers who also served during the Second World War;
- (6) Canadian Trans-Atlantic Air Crew of the Second World War; and
- (7) Members of the Newfoundland and Overseas Forestry Unit of the Second World War.

In responding to this motion, we must consider two major points, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the reason why a minimum of 180 days of service is required to be eligible, and second, the relevance of this criterion in 1987.

Mr. Speaker, anyone interested in the proceedings of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs would know that merchant seamen made repeated representations to the various

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post-war governments concerning their eligibility for veterans allowances.

And so did the following groups:

- The St. John Ambulance volunteer help detachment during the 1914-18 war;
- Volunteer firemen during the 1939-45 war;
- The social assistance service members who served under the auspices of the Canadian Red Cross Society and the St. John Ambulance during the 1939-45 war;
- The Royal Air Force Transport Command transatlantic flight crew in 1939-45; and
- The Newfoundland Foresters, again during the World War II of 1939-45.

Mr. Speaker, the response was always negative until the election of the Diefenbaker Conservative Government in 1962. The then Minister of Veterans Affairs—we all remember the Hon. Gordon Churchill—had drawn the attention of his senior officials to the position of merchant seamen and the other groups I have just mentioned.

Consultations with the groups involved and such veterans organizations as the Royal Canadian Legion led to a compromise: civilians who served during the war became eligible under the Civilian War Pension and Allowances Act which, as you recall, was unanimously adopted by the House on February 14, 1962.

As we all know, the benefits provided under this legislation are similar to those provided under the War Veterans Allowance Act.

Mr. Speaker, it was not easy to reach a compromise, considering the vastly divergent views on this matter. The argument most frequently heard against awarding these benefits to civilians was, in essence, that civilians should not be given a veteran's allowance.

Supporters of this position were against the principle that civilians who had in any way contributed to the war effort should have the same privileges as veterans.

Civilians described, and rightly so, the heroic, distinguished and extremely perilous services rendered in carrying food, raw materials and munitions to our troops overseas and claimed they were eligible for veterans benefits.

The criterion of 180 days of service enabled the parties to reach a compromise. After all, Mr. Speaker, any person who had served voluntarily for six months in the Merchant Marine and who made at least one trip in dangerous waters was truly engaged in the war effort. No one could deny that.

The 180-day criterion is no accident. It corresponds to the days of service required to qualify for the Atlantic Star, the Pacific Star, the 1914-1918 Merchant Marine War Medal and the 1939-1945 Medal.

If the six-month criterion is acceptable for the military to qualify for these medals, I think it is entirely proper and