

Supply—Veterans Affairs

taken over from an Indian reserve, it carried, of course, the oil and mineral rights. It would only be proper that those rights should go to the returned veterans who have now taken up land and have cultivated it. I understand the department made a deal with the Indians whereby the Indians were given other land back in the mountains suitable for trapping and so forth, in return for this fine agricultural area for soldier settlement which is now being so successfully operated. I may say that oil is being found in that vicinity and it might very well be that these soldiers are in the centre of a great oil basin.

Mr. Gregg: May I ask the hon. member whether that is the Bobtail reserve?

Mr. Murray (Cariboo): That is the Montney reserve near the Alaska highway in the neighbourhood of Fort St. John.

Mr. Gregg: I think I should like to look into that matter and be sure of my answer.

Mr. Brooks: Before the item carries, there is another question I wish to ask the minister. It is an old perennial, and I am sure if the hon. member for Battle River (Mr. Fair) were here he would ask the question. It has to do with the old soldier settlers. As the minister knows, there has been an agitation in practically every veterans affairs committee to have the soldier settlers given title to their land.

It is not necessary to review the history again. These men settled there after the first war. Many of them settled on land which was submarginal and they have not been able to make their payments. These men have raised their families and their sons have gone overseas. Many of them are now over sixty years of age and have not title to their land. There is no possible chance of their ever gaining title. I understand that the number of these men is now less than 2,000, whereas originally, I think, it was over 25,000. Of that 2,000, many of the men have paid the price of their land two or three times over. I think there are only about 21 who have no equity in the land at all, if I remember correctly the statements that were made before the veterans affairs committee. I should like to ask the minister if there is any disposition on the part of his department or of the government to include in the amendments to the Veterans Land Act a gift to these old soldier settlers of the titles to these lands. After all these years I think that could well be done. I do not think it would establish a precedent. I know that in our veterans affairs committee we would sometimes be met with the argument that it would establish a precedent; but the Canadian Legion has recommended it on

[Mr. Murray (Cariboo).]

many occasions and I am sure that the sympathy of all the soldiers, whether they have paid for their own lands in previous years or not, is with these men. If the department is not already doing so, I should like to ask the minister if they would sympathetically consider granting the titles of these lands to these old soldiers who have lived on them for so many years, who now are old, and who have no title.

Mr. Gregg: The department has considered the matter, but not in exactly the same wholesale fashion that my hon. friend indicates. Perhaps he missed it, but when our estimates were up for discussion before, as reported at page 623 of *Hansard*, in the second column, I gave a fairly detailed picture of how the matter stood now on the basis of doing it piecemeal. For the reasons given there, we feel that this method is obviating any hardship and is doing it better than it would be done by making a wholesale, sudden forgiveness.

Mr. Brooks: Doing things piecemeal seems to be a habit of the government.

Mr. Gregg: My hon. friend may not agree with me, but he knows as well as I do that in his own province a great many of the old veterans under the soldier settlement board are getting cleared off in this fashion. Last year there was an item of \$150,000 in the estimates; this year there is an equal amount; and I hope to ask for the same amount next year.

Mr. Brooks: The idea is eventually to see that these men are given the free title to their land.

Mr. Gregg: That is correct.

Mr. Brooks: I thank the minister for the information he has given.

Mr. Gregg: The report there will indicate that substantial progress has been made.

Mr. Brooks: I recall that the former member for Yukon, Mr. Black, spoke about getting certain land for the construction of homes in the Yukon. I believe some difficulties arose, and that the minister said he would investigate and see what could be done in that area. Has there ever been any investigation, and what is the situation with regard to those veterans in the Yukon?

Mr. Gregg: Yes. If all the items related to the Veterans Land Act had come to as happy a conclusion as that, it would please me greatly. I think it was three weeks after the veterans affairs committee disbanded that the director of the Veterans Land Act and my parliamentary assistant took a plane to the Yukon. While there I