

Supply—Veterans Affairs

Kirchner. I felt that there was never a more sincere, earnest, industrious and persistent advocate of the rights of pensioners in the Dominion of Canada. This man was injured in world war I, and devoted himself to the welfare of his fellow veterans practically from the time of his return to Canada. He was known as the secretary of the Canadian Combat Veterans Association. Mr. Kirchner had been entrusted by a good many veterans with the care of their petitions for redress of certain grievances. He had been to Ottawa a great many times and had prepared extensive briefs in relation to the cases of the various men who had presented themselves to him.

On July 16, 1947, the hon. member for Acadia and the then member for Swift Current brought to the attention of the house two bad cases on which Mr. Kirchner had been working, and as to which there appeared to be grave irregularities as a result of which veterans had been deprived of their just rights. Hon. members will find these cases briefly summarized at pages 5759-5765 and 5768-5769 of *Hansard* for 1947. Apparently two things were supposed to have gone wrong in the cases of these men. First of all their plea was that their service records had been tampered with, that falsifications had been written into them through which they were deprived of their just dues in respect of pensions. The second complaint was that men called psychiatrists had diagnosed their cases and declared them to be not neurasthenia or some other nervous injury which would naturally result from war service, but mental trouble which would be a pre-enlistment disability. If a man's case was diagnosed as pre-enlistment that automatically deprived him of a pension. These men felt they had been so deprived by these two irregularities committed by officers of the Department of Veterans Affairs. As a result of what has been said at previous times, together with what was said on July 16, the then minister of veterans affairs, Hon. Ian Mackenzie, made what was taken to be an undertaking. This is what he said, as reported at page 5769 of *Hansard* for 1947:

As far as we are concerned, I would welcome a committee of three doctors from this house to go into the suggestions that have been submitted, and I would suggest the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. McCann), the hon. member for Lanark (Mr. Blair) and the hon. member for Inverness-Richmond (Mr. McGarry). They could meet some time between now and the next session and call in whom they want and submit a first-class report.

That suggestion appealed to all members who were particularly interested in these cases and who had been convinced that Mr. Kirchner was sincere and well informed,

which I believe he was. As a result of that statement by the minister there was set up what was known as the McCann commission. To show that the McCann commission was a public inquiry operating generally under the Inquiries Act, I desire to read into the record the following, which consists of excerpts from appendix A to the report:

Report of a commission appointed under the provisions of part I of the Inquiries Act by order in council P.C. 4980 dated December 4, 1947, as amended by order in council P.C. 75, dated January 8, 1948.

1. The following members of parliament were appointed by order in council P.C. 4980 dated December 4, 1947, and order in council P.C. 75, dated January 8, 1948, as commissioners under part I of the Inquiries Act for the purposes hereinafter set forth:

The Hon. James J. McCann, M.P., chairman, Ottawa, Ont.; Dr. M. E. McGarry, M.P., Margaree Forks, N.S.; Dr. W. G. Blair, M.P., Perth, Ont.; J. O. Probe, Esq., M.P., Regina, Sask.

R. H. Winters, Esq., M.P., Lunenburg, N.S., in the absence of the Hon. James J. McCann, M.P.

F. L. Barrow, Esq., Ottawa, Ont., departmental secretary, Department of Veterans Affairs, was secretary of the commission.

2. The purpose of the commission was to investigate complaints made by Walter H. Kirchner, Esq., M.C., D.C.M., secretary, Canadian Combat Veterans Association, Inc., Vancouver, B.C., regarding pension and treatment services and, in particular, to inquire into and report to the Minister of Veterans Affairs on

(i) the adequacy of the treatment provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs with respect to the cases concerning which Mr. Kirchner has made representations;

(ii) the qualifications and competence of departmental doctors treating these cases; and

(iii) the adequacy of pension consideration given to the cases concerning which Mr. Kirchner has made representations.

5. The commission was charged with considering the cases of sixty-two veterans with respect to whom Mr. Kirchner had made representations. Subsequently, in giving his evidence at Vancouver, Mr. Kirchner presented one additional case in which it was understood that he had become interested only very recently.

I read this to show hon. members that the commission was set up as a first-rate commission. It was no second-rate affair, no two-for-a-nickel commission which could do its job in a more or less haphazard way. On the contrary, it was one of the most important commissions that could be set up in the Dominion of Canada.

I should like to draw the attention of hon. members to this important fact, that whereas, as I have already pointed out, the hon. member for Acadia (Mr. Quelch) and Mr. Bentley had represented Mr. Kirchner as the complainant about (1) the falsification of records and (2) the felony of psychiatrists in the department, in the statement I have read setting forth the purposes of the commission, these complaints were not even mentioned.