

Sept. 15, 1980

# I.I.D. SWINDLES VETERANS OF LAND

Before 1928, the original IMPERIAL IRRIGATION DISTRICT of Imperial County, Calif. adjoining the Mexican border consisted of 603,840 acres ONLY OF WHICH 360,000 ACRES WERE IRRIGABLE BY GRAVITY FLOW. It is very important to remember the figure 360,000 acres to understand what is written later in this Newsletter. Then in 1928, the Swing-Johnson bill was passed which said that the Federal Government would build the Boulder Dam and build the All-American Canal for the benefit of the Imperial Irrigation District.

It must be understood that before 1928, even though it was possible to irrigate by gravity flow 360,000 acres, only about 200,000 acres were actually receiving irrigation water. The remaining land was just virgen desert land that had never received irrigation water which came via a Mexican corporation named Sociedad de Terrenos y Irrigacion de Baja California which owned a canal in Mexico which ran 60 miles and then crossed the border at Calexico, Calif.

As soon as the Swing-Johnson bill was passed, the I.I.D. began to extend its boundaries North of Niland Calif., around the Southern tip of the Salton Sea and up the West side of the Salton Sea. It also extended its boundaries West of Westmorland. These extensions by the I.I.D. by 1932, brought its total size of the original I.I.D. 603,840 acres to around 750,000 acres. But all this additional land if irrigable by gravity flow could not get water for the Mexican canal did not deliver enough water. In 1929, the I.I.D. got only 1.6 million acre feet of water yearly.

Then on Dec. 1, 1932, the Imperial Irrigation District signed a contract with the Federal Government to have the government build the All-American Canal and for the I.I.D. to repay for the Canal in installments but not to pay interest. The payments will end in the 1990's. But there was another important portion to this contract. The Federal Government permitted the I.I.D. to extend its boundaries to include the Pilot Knob area of about 20,000 acres, the East Mesa of about 225,000 acres and the West Mesa of about 125,000 acres. This increased the area of the original I.I.D. to over one million acres. But even this virgen land could not get water and as a matter of fact the Colorado River was so short of water in 1935, that land which previously got water could not get water. The I.I.D. made a regulation that no virgen desert can receive water for the first time.

It was the Great Depression at that time and there was a tremendous surplus of farm products that could not be sold at the prices where farmers could make a living. The Federal Government was short of money so there was no urgency in building the All-American Canal. There had been a Revolution going on in Mexico from 1910 and suddenly in 1938, one group won the Revolution. It then started to confiscate all foreign owned property in Mexico like oil wells, mines, factories, ranches, etc. The I.I.D. owned the stock of the Mexican corporation which owned the 60 mile canal. The Mexican Government confiscated the canal. Imperial Valley farmers were afraid that Mexico would use the water for its own farmland, so they pleaded with the U.S. Government to speed up building the All-American Canal. It was completed in late 1941.

World War #2 was going on at the completion of the All-American Canal. The land speculators who had the 200,000 acres of virgen desert land in the original I.I.D. unit got busy and levelled land and had the I.I.D. build water delivery canals to their virgen desert land. But putting 200,000 acres of virgen desert land into farming takes many years. A

description of the activities of Charlie Morrow, John Elmore Sr. and Jack Benson is typical of how the land speculators operated. Morrow had a lumber yard in Brawley and was on the Board of Directors of the I.I.D. from 1935 to 1955. He was a close friend of Elmore who is the father of John and Steven Elmore who are the biggest landowners living in the Valley. Jack Benson is the father of John Benson who was just elected to the Board of the I.I.D. and is the father-in-law of Bob Myers, formerly Asst. Secretary of Agriculture who was forced to resign by President Carter when he was found lobbying to get the U.S. Reclamation Law repealed. Morrow was also a close friend of Jack Benson.

The senior Elmore got the I.I.D. to build a 15 mile irrigation canal from Westmorland to his 6,000 acres ranch on the West side of the Lower Salton Sea even before the All-American Canal was completed. The I.I.D. had a policy of putting the first water to flood a farmer's land so that the salt on or near the surface of the land would be picked up by the water and then percolate to a lower level in the soil so crops could grow. This water came free to the farmer. But the 6,000 acres ranch of Elmore got 5 floodings for free and the other farmers were really angry.

Jack Benson was one of the busiest persons taking virgen desert land, levelling it and bringing the water from the All-American canal to it. He used to boast that he made more money selling land than farming for he would sell this new farmland to outsiders for "tax shelters".

Then World War #2 ended in 1945. The servicemen were coming home to an uncertain future. So the Dept. of Interior announced that they could make a desert entry of 160 acres per serviceman and be supplied by the All-American Canal. The servicemen would pay \$3.00 per acre for a total of \$480. If the servicemen had gotten the land then, it would be worth \$2,000 to \$3,000 per acre now for a total of \$360,000 to \$540,000 in 1980!!! This entry was to be to the East Mesa of 225,000 acres.

Many applied in 1946-47. Suddenly, an announcement was made that all entries to the East Mesa were cancelled. What had happened was this- the land speculators who are the big farmers realized if the veterans got onto the East Mesa and with their demand for All-American canal water, that there might be a shortage for the virgen desert land they owned in the original I.I.D. So with their political influence, they got the Interior Dept. to cancel the East Mesa entry and the big farmers were able for many years to get the All-American water to put their virgen desert land into farming. SO THE VETERANS WON THE WAR BUT LOST THE PEACE!!! THE I.I.D. HELPED THE BIG FARM INTERESTS IN THIS SWINDLE!!

Now the veterans are being swindled again. The I.I.D. has been giving water to big farmers who have bought land from the government in the East Mesa and West Mesa. The I.I.D. under the control of the big farm interests had the Bureau of Land Management of the Dept. of Interior make a regulation on Oct. 21, 1976 that any veteran trying to make an entry into the East and West Mesas must prove that he has a reliable source of water. This means that the veteran must go to the I.I.D. and have it write a letter saying it will supply the water. BUT THE I.I.D. WILL NOT DO IT FOR THE AVERAGE VETERAN CLAIMING THERE IS A SHORTAGE OF WATER. This is a lie to prevent veterans now from getting desert land.

In the local daily newspapers of August 22, 1980 is an article telling how John Elmore Jr. has filed charges that the I.I.D. is wasting water. The same newspapers of Sept. 6, 1980 reports that the Water & Power Resources Service (formerly known as the Bureau of Reclamation) says the I.I.D. is wasting about 30% of its water or one million acre feet yearly. As further water conservation measures are taken, even more water will become available. The I.I.D. gets twice the water of 1929.

I advise every veteran, male or female, whether an active farmer or not, to go to the Bureau of Land Management 333 South Waterman Ave, El Centro (the Southwest corner of the Valley Plaza Shopping Center). Make an application for 160 acres in the East Mesa. If refused, send a letter of complaint to Secretary of Interior, Cecil Andrus, Washington, D.C. 20240. I was in Washington, D.C. on Sept 4, 1980 and spoke to Secretary Andrus about this matter. Be sure to send me a copy of your letter so I can contact the NATIONAL LAND FOR PEOPLE, 2348 North Cornelia Ave. Fresno, Calif. 93711. This is an organization set up to help get land for average people. It has a magazine to help you and it cooperates with me. Besides the 225,000 acres of the East Mesa, the little people are entitled to get at about 1/4 the present price, the 200,000 acres of farmland in the original I.I.D. which got their first water after 1928.