

The Soldiers' Boots

History tells us that Nero fiddled while Rome was burning. The historian of the present war will tell future generations that when Canada and the Empire were in danger General Sam Hughes outdid Nero's indifference to the national peril by giving a score or more of the 8,000 "good boys" whom he had placed on the Patronage List huge orders for inferior boots, and that these inferior boots were supplied to the men who went out to face death in order that Canada and the Empire might live. The story of the boots supplied the Canadian soldiers is a disgraceful one, but quite in keeping with the other War Scandals of the Borden Government. Had it not been for the work done by the Liberal Members of the Special Committee appointed by the House of Commons to investigate the Boot Scandal the facts would never have become public.

FIRST BLUNDER WAS FATAL.

To fully appreciate the bungling and incapacity of the Government in their failure to provide the most important part of the soldiers' outfit, it is necessary to know the position of affairs in the Militia Department at the outbreak of the War in August, 1914.

At that time there was in the Militia Department an ankle boot made by the Slater Shoe Company which had been sealed in 1905 by the officials of the Department as the Pattern Boot according to which all boots afterwards required for the Permanent Force were to be made. This Sealed Pattern was not an Active Service Boot. In make and shape it was similar to the ordinary walking boot used by civilians in Canada, and was suitable for soldiers only in times of peace and to wear on parade or about the barracks. Neither was it the boot used by the soldiers in South Africa. That fact was proved beyond any doubt before the Special Committee of the House of Commons where the evidence of Assistant Director of Stores McCann established that the boots used in South Africa were supplied by A. W. Reddin and the Vankleek Hill Shoe Company and not by the Slater Shoe Company.

When War was announced in August last and it became necessary to purchase large quantities of boots for active service, several boots made for the Borden Government in 1913 by Gauthier of Quebec, and accepted without proper inspection, were selected from the Ordnance Stores at Ottawa as being in every respect similar to the Slater Sealed Pattern of 1905, and these Gauthier samples were handed around to various manufacturers as models for the Active Service Boots that they were to make under their Contracts with the Militia Department. In no case were specifications furnished the Contractors. It was proved before the Special Committee of the House of Commons that these Gauthier samples were inferior to the Slater Sealed Pattern