

THE CANADIAN MILITIA GAZETTE

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NOTE AND COMMENT.

Major Hughes gave notice on Wednesday last of his intention to move for an order of the House of Commons showing:

1. The corps of the active militia of Canada that have been drilled, (a) annually, (b) biennially, and (c) triennially, in the period 1889-91 inclusive.

2. The number of qualified combatant officers in each corps.

3. The number of provisionally appointed officers in each corps, specifying those whose period of qualification has expired.

4. The names, length of service, and ages of each commanding officer upwards of sixty years of age.

5. The actual strength of and number of enlistments in, during the year 1891, the permanent corps located in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick.

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The force is to be congratulated upon the evident intention of Major Hughes has displayed thus early in the session, to interest himself in the affairs of the militia; and as the returns asked for will furnish him with ample materials to discuss the administration of the department, an opportunity will be given him to explain to the Government and House, as one who is competent to speak with practical knowledge of the subject under discussion, the disadvantages under which a large proportion of the force now labour in consequence of the very objectionable policy of biennial and triennial drills.

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Fortunately for Major Hughes and for those he is interesting himself in, the militia expenditure is an item which admits of criticism by a Conservative member, with greater freedom from party ties and consideration than that of any other department: and in any suggestions he may offer for the improvement of the

force, he may count upon hearty support from a large majority of members on both sides of the House.

It would be well indeed if consideration of matters of defence could be separated distinctly and completely from party questions, and discussed from a national point of view solely. If such a course could be adopted we would not find the departmental reports filed, year after year, with recommendations by experienced officers, possessed of thorough practical knowledge of the subjects they are speaking of, without some action being taken to carry out the recommendations made by them.

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Ample as the returns called for by Major Hughes appear to be, it will perhaps surprise many to learn that the information asked for by him under heading No. 1, will not include the whole of the Active Militia Force of Canada. There are battalions carried on the strength of active militia, who not only have not drilled during the past three years, but who actually have not paraded in three times that space of time.

We know of one instance in which a certain battalion has not paraded since June 1882, on which occasion the commanding officer marched into camp with three companies, having been unable to muster the remaining half of his command. In the succeeding year the D. A. G. of his district reported to the department that the battalion had been relieved from drill owing to the sudden resignation of two captains, and the inability of the officers to muster another portion of the regiment owing to the busy season. His report adds, "If the request of the officer commanding to be allowed to recruit in the county of ——— (the adjoining county) were complied with, this battalion could soon be brought into an efficient state."

Although this recommendation does not appear to have been complied with, and the battalion is absolutely defunct, its arms, accoutrements, and stores having all been returned to the department, yet it is carried on the active list, and its officers, some qualified under the old military school system, and some unqualified, are published annually in the militia list as members of the active force, and those of them who have their qualification certificates have been quietly and easily gaining their seniority, the commanding officer being well up in the list of lieutenant-colonels on the active list.

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This is but a single instance of many that we could point to evidencing necessity for a more thorough overhauling of the Department of Militia and Defence than it has ever received, and the desirability of allowing a freer scope, and more untrammelled rules to the practical head of the department, than is likely to be permitted unless the affairs of the department are considered outside of the ordinary range of party politics.

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The annual report of the Department of Militia is looked for this year with more than the usual amount of interest, as it will contain the first report of Major General Herbert upon the force under his command, and it will be a surprise to many if the General is not more free in his criticisms and recommendations than his immediate predecessor.

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Already on more than one occasion in public, General Herbert has expressed his opinion upon the desirability of improving the arm with which the force is equipped, and it will not be surprising if he further emphasises his views upon this point in his report.