

# THE CANADIAN MILITIA GAZETTE

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THE CANADIAN MILITIA GAZETTE, P. O. Box 316, Ottawa, Ont.

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## Pensions and Politics.

An ex-Minister of Militia caused the time of the House of Commons to be occupied for about an hour on Friday afternoon last, in an attempt to reduce the miserable sum of \$355 a year paid to the dependent family of Sergt. P. Valiquette, who served in the North-West with the 65th Battalion, and died on the 4th July, 1885, from fever contracted on the march to Fort Pitt. This critic was Hon. A. G. Jones, returned to Parliament from the eminently military City of Halifax. His complaint was claimed to be founded on a discrepancy between the amount paid the family of Valiquette (French); and the relatives of Gunner Ryan of the Montreal Garrison Artillery; he asked not that the Ryans should get more, but that the Valiquettes should get less, and the present Minister of Militia being a French-Canadian Mr. Jones insinuated that the difference in nationality was the cause of the difference in treatment; and this insinuation was made in face of the well known fact that the pensions were not fixed by the Minister, but by a board consisting mainly, we believe, of Ontario English-speaking officers. But for political effect these charges are repeated year after year. On this occasion Sir Adolphe Caron repeated his reply of last year. He said:—

"I am prepared to repeat to the House the explanation I gave last year, and I have no other means of doing so than by laying before the House the statute, and the regulations, and the facts, as they were submitted to the Department of Militia, when the pension was discussed and passed. Sergeant Primat Valiquette, No. 4 Company, 65th Battalion, entered the Active Militia at about the age of eighteen years, and was twenty-two when he left with his battalion for the North-West, 2nd April, 1885. Was most robust. Had never been sick. Wages between \$1.50 and \$2.00 per diem, all went to his father. On the march from Beaver River to Fort Pitt, thirty seven miles, marched in one day, 25th June, 1885; took sick with gastric enteritis, of which he died on the 4th July, 1885. His father, Antoine Valiquette, is fifty-eight or sixty-eight years old. He is unable to work since twenty years on account of chronic asthma. His wife is fifty years old, manages all the affairs of the family, and works outside for their living. Children: four girls, sixteen, eighteen, twenty and twenty-two years; two boys, twelve and fourteen years. All, with the father and mother, working the best they can, but family is poor, and, at times, has been depending upon public charity. Board (4th March, 1887) recommend pensions as per sections 15, 16 and 17 of Order in Council of the 8th July, 1885. Father, half widow's pension, that is, \$51.33 per annum, and a pension at the same rate to the two boys until they attain the age of 18, and a pension, at the same rate, to the three youngest girls until the age of twenty-one."

If ever there was a case deserving generous treatment, it would seem that this one did; and the circumstances stated by the Minister might well have stopped further discussion. But Sir Richard Cartwright made objection on the ground that as Valiquette had served as a Sergeant at 75 cents per day, or less than \$300 a year, it was "absurd" to pay his relatives \$355 a year for his loss, and a very dangerous princi-

ple to establish. The fallacy of this argument is obvious, and Sir John Macdonald, who had been a close listener to the discussion, rose to ask from the House the sympathy he himself felt for the poor volunteer's family.

"There is," said the Premier, "a distinction between the general principle and the practice as admitted in this case of Valiquette. If Valiquette had been a soldier in the regular service, or in any of the permanent corps, then the rule would properly apply. But this man was, as I understand it, a tradesman in Montreal, and a volunteer in the regiment of which Mr. Speaker was Colonel. Seventy-five cents a day was his pay as sergeant only.

SIR RICHARD CARTWRIGHT.—I know that.

SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD.—That was, I take it, but a small portion of his income.

SIR RICHARD CARTWRIGHT.—Quite possibly.

SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD.—If he had been a soldier, and his pay were the whole sum which he received for the support of his family, it would certainly look rather extraordinary to give a larger pension to the family than he earned himself, and out of which he supported his family. Sergeant Valiquette, from the fact of his being a sergeant, must have been an educated man, and most likely a tradesman of some standing whose income would be much larger than 75 cents a day. I take it that upon that ground the Commission which settled all these matters awarded the sum which the Minister of Militia sanctioned.

Then Sir Richard declared that all he wanted was that all should be treated alike, as he was not disposed to advise that the House should be stingy in such cases. Hon. David Mills next objected that the pension board had exceeded the regulation, and Mr. Jones wound up the discussion with this hearless declaration:

"The explanations given by the Minister do not touch this case at all. The power to grant a pension was a conditional one. It is conditional on the fact of the person being the support of the family or the head of a family, or leaving sisters who are dependent upon him for support. In this case the Minister had no right to grant one cent of pension to Sergeant Valiquette's family. He was not the support of the family according to the meaning of that clause of the Militia Act. His father was alive, his sisters were grown up, he left two brothers, and therefore it cannot be said that he was in any sense the main support of the family. I contend that the granting of this pension was a complete and utter violation of the spirit and intention of the Militia Act, and the hon. gentleman has not been able, to-day, or on any previous occasion, to explain satisfactorily to this House the grounds on which that pension was granted to all the members of this family. The hon. gentleman says he was a poor man. He may have been poor, and there are other poor people, but you are not obliged to pension every man because he is poor. How poor was he? Had he a farm or a shop, was he prosperous, and what was his age? The truth is that this is one of the grossest acts of misappropriation of the public funds that has ever come to the knowledge of this House, and the hon. gentleman may attempt to explain it as many times as he likes, and he cannot move me or remove from the minds of the disinterested and fair-minded men of this House, that it is an act of favoritism that cannot be defended."

We print this discussion in order to let our readers understand just how much sympathy the militia may expect from some of their representatives in Parliament. Not a member raised his voice to say that even had the Minister stretched a point to give in a case of exceptional distress the most liberal pension possible, he was entitled to praise rather than blame. But immediately after this discussion was over, another was launched upon censuring the Minister for not allowing certain extraordinary special claims of a Mr. C. T. Hurrell, who was in the ranks of the Ninetieth for the same campaign, and who receives 55 cents a day on account of rheumatism contracted there. His chief business since appears to have been to haunt the Government buildings at Ottawa reciting how he suppressed the rebellion and claiming his reward; and his latest achievement has been to put his story in pamphlet form and send a copy to each member. As a sample of the good conduct of this soldier, it may be mentioned that he committed the gross offence of interrupting from the public gallery whilst some of his misguided sympathisers were stating his woes to the House; and for this he had to be