

St. Johns and the Richelieu River,

The Richelieu the Gateway to the Province from the United States.

The N. Y. Press of Sunday has a profusely illustrated article dealing with the militia equipment of Canada, and St. Johns as an objective point of attack. It is from the pen of Mr. Edgar Maurice Smith, of Montreal. On account of its local and general interest we reproduce it in full:

Although the majority of level-headed persons on both sides of the line are of the opinion that a war between the two great English speaking nations of the world is hardly within the range of probability, still it might come to pass over the Venezuela dispute. Anyway, it is worth knowing just how Canada is situated with respect to an invasion.

The permanent force of Canada seems absurdly small, consisting as it does of only 132 cavalry, 344 artillery and 321 infantry; or a total of 800 men. This handful is distributed throughout the vast Dominion, there being small schools of artillery or infantry at such important places as Quebec, Toronto, London, Winnipeg, Kingston, Fredericton, N. B., and St. Johns, P. O.

It may appear strange that such small bodies of men are kept in active service, but this is done chiefly to furnish schools for the volunteers who would otherwise be unable to procure efficient instruction. The permanent stations are therefore but as so many nuclei for the forming of that number of armies in the event of war.

Canada has twelve military districts, as follows: No. 1, London; No. 2, Toronto; No. 3, Kingston; No. 4, Ottawa; No. 5, Montreal; No. 6, St. Johns; No. 7, Quebec; No. 8, Fredericton; No. 9, Halifax; No. 10, Winnipeg; No. 11, Victoria, B.C.; No. 12, Prince Edward Island. There is a small standing force in most of these districts, but at the first prospect of war the active militia would at once be called out.

This numbers 35,035 men, and is made up of 2,125 cavalry, 3,807 artillery, 151 engineers and 28,942 infantry. The volunteers are at present only armed with the antediluvian Snider rifle, but a general change for the Lee-Metford has been decided upon by the Government, and the Quartermaster General is in England arranging for the necessary purchase.

In the War of 1812 an invasion upon Canada by the Richelieu River was one favored by the American officers, and there is no reason to suppose that any different opinion would be held by those now at the head of the forces. A few miles from the frontier near the village of Lacolle is a bridge that spans the river and connects the county of St. Johns with that of Missisquoi.

It is not probable that any attempt would be made by the defenders to retain this bridge, for though it might prove of inestimable value it would not be worth the risk of losing, and would therefore be demolished before the arrival of the enemy.

Six miles further down in the middle of the stream is the island known as Isle-aux-Noix (Nut Island), where stands the old fort that did such good service in days gone by. Though unoccupied save by a decrepit keeper, who loves to talk of his fighting days passed in the mutiny and the Crimea, the fort is still in fair condition. Through negligence a great part of the walls has crumbled away, but it would not be an over difficult job to put the place in sufficiently good repair to shelter a strong battery.

RIVER SWEEP BY CANNON.

The fort is so situated that a few cannon well mounted could sweep the river in every direction, and as the course of the Richelieu is straight, approaching boats would be exposed to this fire, while St. Johns, the headquarters of the Sixth military district, being only twelve miles distant, a force could be placed on the island at a few hours notice. The Fourteenth field battery would be at the disposal of the District Adjutant General, and this he would probably send to Isle-aux-Noix as temporary defenders under the command of a shrewd officer.

It would be no easy matter to capture the old fort, as an attacking army would be exposed on every side to a murderous fire. Land, moreover, is not more than a quarter of a mile distant, and troops there encamped would be compelled to throw up earthenworks to protect themselves. Of course the freezing of the river in winter would materially affect the complexion of things.

POINT OF ATTACK.

The first important resistance would be made at St. Johns, as the possession of this town would be as invaluable to the invaders as its retention would be necessary to the defenders. Once it fell, the highways to Montreal would be comparatively clear, as both the Grand Trunk and Canadian Pacific Railways connect the place with the metropolis. The Central Vermont has its terminus there, and troops and supplies from any part of the Eastern States could be sent by rail to within sight of Montreal.

At St. Johns also commences the Chambly Canal, which makes a water connection between this part of the country and the St. Lawrence River, the Richelieu from here to the end of its course abounding in rapids to so great an extent as to make navigation impossible. The canal runs alongside the river of which it is in reality part, and is divided from it by a bank with the natural bank on the other side.

Being the head of the Sixth military district and the seat of the Third regiment Royal Canadian Infantry, St. Johns is never quite defenseless. The District Adjutant General would from the active militia have a force of 2,200 men, but this would necessitate the calling to St. Johns of all the regiments in the Sixth district.

Montreal, which is in the Fifth military district, could send out as many more men, and these city regiments are wonderfully efficient. Between four and five thousand troops would, therefore, be strongly intrenched at St. Johns, and could doubtless succeed in holding the place until the arrival of a British army.

For about three miles the approach to the town by water is open to a direct fire from the ramparts, where stands the remains of the celebrated St. Johns fort. One of the cannon that was operated so successfully from this point in the war of 1812 is still there, and is in good order. Within a stone's throw of the old fort is the barracks where the regiment of infantry is located under the command of Lieutenant Colonel d'Orsennens, the District Adjutant General.

THE FIRST FIELD OF BATTLE.

The small force of less than one hundred men is under the same regulations that govern the British army, and as a consequence is well equipped for an emergency. Should it at any time be necessary to call the active militia to St. Johns the men of the school would probably be judiciously distributed through the regiments as drill instructors, etc.

The large, roomy buildings of the St. Johns barracks are beautifully located on the Richelieu about a quarter of a mile above the town. Round about are extensive open fields devoid of trees where a large body of troops could be encamped. The country is flat, and an attacking force would be unassisted by any natural shelter, while the defenders could throw

up ramparts and quietly await the enemy. It is certain that a desperate struggle would take place here, a struggle in which should the Canadians and British be successful, the Americans would be forced to beat a hasty retreat. If, however, the invaders should be victorious they would, in the capture of St. Johns, hold an important key to the situation.

EDGAR MAURICE SMITH.

Victoria, B. C.

ARTILLERY PASTIMES.

The Drill Hall Nightly a Scene of Activity Between Instruction and Recreation.

The members of the Garrison Artillery are constantly adding to the attractions afforded in the drill hall on Menzie St., and the latest features on the list are for the especial instruction and entertainment of No. 1 Company. On Feb. 4th they had the first of an intended series of shooting competitions for prettily designed silver spoons, turned out by Davidson Bros., and offered as prizes by the company association. The practice was with Morris tubes fitted in Martini rifles. Owing to the large attendance the programme had to be rather curtailed, but nevertheless the evening was very pleasantly spent.

The opening shot was kindly fired by Mrs. R. Ross Monro, wife of the enterprising captain now in charge of the company. The competition then proceeded by classes, the men having been so divided as to make it interesting to all.

In the first class Sergeant-Major Mulcahy was the winner, with a score of 30, which by the rules took precedence of another 30 made by Lieut. J. D. Taylor. Capt. Ross Monro scored 28 and Gunner W. H. Bailey 27.

Where were two spoons for the second class, and the scores were close and decidedly creditable. The first went to Gunner C. Kenward, with 29 points, and the second to Corp. McLean, with 27. Next in order were Gr. R. Harrap 23, Gr. H. P. Dickinson 21, Lieut. D. B. McConnan 21, and Gr. L. B. Trimen 20.

Two promising recruits, Gunners F. Vigor and A. Sherk, carried off the souvenirs for the third class, their respective scores being 21 and 22. Trumpeter C. Harris was close after them with 21.—The Colonist, Victoria.

Dominion Artillery Association.

The annual meeting of the Association will take place at Ottawa, Ont., on Tuesday, the 25th February inst. Hour and place will be advertised in the local papers. Revised rules will be submitted for consideration by committee appointed at last annual meeting. A full meeting is requested, as the proposed changes are important.

By order,

J. B. DONALDSON Major,
Secretary.

Ottawa

Mr. John Reade, the well-known litterateur of Montreal, has just been elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature of Great Britain. This society was founded by George IV., and the poet Coleridge was one of its Fellows.

The Transvaal question is again assuming an ugly aspect, and it is learned from an official source that the British War Office, acting under orders from the Government, has made every preparation to send an army corps of twenty thousand men to South Africa.