

THE BOOT INVESTIGATION.

What the Soldiers Themselves Testify.

CANADA'S humiliating army boot scandal is being probed by a special committee of the House of Commons which has been sitting almost daily since February 19th. The decision to hold this investigation was announced by Premier Borden on February 15th, the same day that Major General Hughes tabled in the House the report of a departmental board of enquiry which proved so utterly unsatisfactory and unintelligible that it was impossible to accept it as a final finding. This report showed in a general way that there could be no doubt that on the whole the boots supplied to Canadian troops were far from satisfactory, but it failed to discover where the fault lay and it failed utterly to bring the blame home to anyone.

The special committee, it is expected, will complete the taking of evidence about March 20th, and its report may quite likely reach Parliament before the end of the month. Until its finding is made public *The Liberal Monthly* will not deal with the very interesting evidence that has already been given. In the meantime, however, it is possible to give some evidence that must be recognized as absolutely convincing, since it comes from the soldiers themselves; from the men who wore the defective boots as long as they could be worn, who suffered in the wearing of them and who gave their evidence under oath in regimental enquiries held at different times and at many places. Herewith is given a summary of the findings of the duly constituted Regimental enquiries, the details of which have been filed with the Parliamentary Committee.

AT MONTREAL, a Court of Enquiry consisting of Capt. W. B. Howell, Lieut. R. H. M. Hardisty and Lieut. S. G. Ross, sitting January 18, made this finding: "From the evidence, the Court having found the boots defective in workmanship and materials, recommends that they be replaced at the expense of the Government." Major W. F. C. Sullivan and Col. E. W. Wilson, commanding the 4th Division, concurred in the finding.

AT HALIFAX, a Board of Officers consisting of Capt. A. N. Jones, Lieut. L. Bullock and Lieut. and Quartermaster T. F. Newnham, reporting on January 5th, found that of 172 pairs of boots received from Ordnance Stores "the majority of them were worn through outer soles and welt, and that the uppers of the boots are of a material little better than paper, resulting in wet feet after a short march in the snow. The Board recommends that the boots above mentioned be replaced at once by a new issue." This board also recommended the issue of a second pair of boots to all ranks, so that worn boots could be repaired. The report was concurred in by Lieut.-Col. A. H. Panet, commanding the 6th Division, who in a later report stated that 172 pairs of new boots were issued "owing to the fact that it was pointed out to me that the men were bare-footed." Another Board of Officers investigation at Halifax on January 20th, made an exactly similar finding regarding 158 pairs of boots, and recommended that "the men should not be paraded outside the armouries until another issue of boots be made."

AT KINGSTON (Tete-du-Pont Barracks), a Board of Officers consisting of Capt. F. Craig, Lieut. Ross and Lieut. Urquhart on January 25th, made the following finding: "The board examined the boots as exhibited, also those at present worn by the men, and are of the opinion that the boots were of inferior quality when issued." This board recommended a new complete issue of boots. The finding was concurred in by Major J. Hamilton and recommended for approval by Col. T. D. R. Hemming, commanding 3rd Division.

AT MONTREAL, (Peel Street Barracks), a Court of Enquiry of the 24th Battalion (Victoria Rifles) consisting of Lieut. S. W. Watson, Lieut. G. R. Robertson and Lieut. V. E. Duclos on December 12, 1914, reported "Having examined a number of these defective boots and listened to the evidence, are of the opinion that the boots supplied the 24th Battalion are of a very inferior grade and quite unfit for the purpose for which they are required," and recommended that the battalion be outfitted with a new issue of boots of higher quality and "that special attention should be paid to the quality and curing of the leather of same." This was concurred in by Major W. F. C. Sullivan and Col. F. A. Pages. On December 19th, another Court of Enquiry of the same regiment, consisting of Lieut. B. G. Languedoe, Lieut. H. B. Buchanan and Lieut. K. E. Drinkwater, made an exactly similar finding regarding another 145 pairs of boots, which was approved by Lieut.-Col. J. A. Gunn, commanding the 24th Battalion.

AT HALIFAX, a Regimental Board of Officers examining boots issued to men of the Army Medical Corps, Overseas Reinforcements, reported on January 11, 1915, regarding boots the majority of which were issued on November 9, 1914, that "on account of material of an inferior quality and poor workmanship, the boots are unfit to wear on active service, and therefore recommend that a new issue of boots be made to the men at public expense." Major J. D. Brosseau, Officer Commanding No. 8 Detachment added "I have personally inspected these boots and fully concur in the finding of the board."

AT MONTREAL, January 7, 1915, a Court of Enquiry at No. 6 Barracks, consisting of Capt. W. B. Howell, Lieut. R. H. M. Hardisty and Lieut. A. B. Walter, enquired into 29 pairs of boots and reported "The court having found the boots defective in workmanship and material, recommend that they be replaced at the expense of the Government."

AT FREDERICTON, N.B., December 31, 1914, a Board of Officers, consisting of Lieut.-Col. Seely, O. C., Capt. A. T. McKay and Capt. E. A. Chisholm, enquired into boots issued to the 23rd and 24th Batteries and reported them "unsuitable for climatic conditions prevailing in this country in the winter season; stock in the bottoms of these boots is generally of poor quality, and the kind of leather in uppers is not suitable for winter wear."

AT HALIFAX, N.S., December 16, 1914, a Board of Officers, consisting of Major A. W. P. Weston, Capt. A. N. Jones and Lieut. and Quartermaster T. F. Newnham, after examining boots issued to the 25th Battalion found "that the leather is of an inferior quality and the stitching in the soles is defective. Also, the leather does not appear to be sufficiently seasoned to stand the work the troops are called upon to do. The boots inspected are a fair average of the present general condition." This board recommended the issue of an extra pair for all men, and all this was concurred in by Lieut.-Col. C. A. LeCain, and Col. R. W. Rutherford, commanding the 6th Division recommended that the bad boots be replaced and that a second pair be issued.

In the above mentioned cases, detail of the composition of the body of enquiry has been given simply to show that the investigations were apparently conducted in strict accordance with the King's Regulations. Other reports of exactly similar enquiries may therefore be summarized to save space. It will be noted that the reports are not in order of the dates on which enquiry was held, nor are they assembled to being the reports from the different headquarters together. This synopsis of the findings of the different enquiries is given in the order in which the different reports appear in the file which is before the House Committee.

AT MONTREAL, December 22, 1914, No. 6 Field Ambulance, (each man sworn); Finding—All boots examined were of poor quality or badly made, and recommend that they be replaced at expense of the Government.