

WHITEWASHING THE BAD BOOTS.

Majority (Tory) Report Excuses the Government—Minority Report Quotes Evidence Proving Boots were Utterly Bad and Unsuitable.

AFTER holding 51 sittings, examining some 87 witnesses, and inspecting and dissecting hundreds of pairs of boots made for Canadian soldiers, the special committee appointed by the Borden Government to find out all there was to find about the boots, reported to Parliament on April 9th. Quite as was expected, there were two reports. The majority report, signed by four dutiful Tories, proved to be nothing more nor less than a careful "whitewash" which asserted that the boots were not so bad after all and that if there was anything wrong with them it could be excused because the haste was such that the Government had no time to do any better. That was the reason there was not better inspection. Also, there was bad weather to blame. But the dutiful Tories found no negligence, no graft, no middlemen, no bad leather, no undue profits. And this in spite of the sworn evidence of dozens of competent witnesses who proved these very things.

The Minority Report.

The minority report, signed by the three Liberal members of the committee, Mr. E. M. Macdonald (Pictou), Hon. Chas. Murphy (Russell) and Mr. E. W. Nesbitt (North Oxford), finds:

That the evidence, on which the minority report is strictly based, shows negligence and want of care on the part of the Government and the Militia department in the whole business of supplying boots to the soldiers of Canada.

That, in the first place, the boots supplied were certainly not suited for men going on active service.

That **poor materials, poor workmanship, poor inspection, poor specifications, and the undue influence of middlemen, injured efficiency and health among the troops.**

That **the evidence of the men who wore the boots, as testified at numerous regimental Boards of Enquiry, amounts to a wholesale condemnation of the boots.**

That the contractors making the boots were supplied with samples to be copied which were inferior to the standard "sealed" sample of the Militia Department.

That **no specifications** were furnished to the contractors and no conditions as to details of manufacture were imposed.

That there was no proper or strict inspection of boots before delivery, and that 13,926 pairs were sent to Valcartier and accepted **without inspection of any kind.**

That Alfred Minister, a manufacturer of Toronto, with his name on the Tory patronage list, told officials of the Militia Department that he would not manufacture, **at any price**, boots like the sample issued from the Militia Department, because "he did not want to make money out of a man's life."

That other manufacturers and contractors had protested against the style of boot called for and declared them "ridiculous boots to put on a soldier."

That the Government must have been fully aware that the boot would not stand hard wear, and that it was utterly unsuitable for active service.

That in spite of this knowledge and in spite of all the facts brought to their attention, the Government went on to order the same kind of boot, giving a second order for 30,000 pairs in October, after the boots supplied in September had been found unsuitable.

That the Government received "grave complaints" from the men on active service as to the failure of the boots supplied them, "which caused illness among the men, prevented them from performing their proper training, and occasioned much discomfort and difficulty to them."

That over 70 Regimental Boards of Enquiry, held in all parts of Canada, examined 11,054 pairs of boots, and condemned and discarded 7,807 pairs.

That commanding officers of different battalions comprising the Overseas Expeditionary Forces gave evidence before the Committee and had unanimously condemned the boots supplied by the Government.

That General Alderson, the British General in command of the first Canadian Contingent now in Northern France, cabled a protest as to the boots with which the men were supplied.

That Boards of Enquiry held in England had found the boots unsuitable, following which the Canadians were supplied with British made boots.

That in spite of these protests and findings in England, more Canadian troops were sent to England outfitted with the same unsatisfactory boots.

The Military Evidence.

The report summarizes the evidence taken by the military inquiry as follows:

"That the boot was of unsuitable shape and make, and that the leather contains no water-resisting medium.

"That the heels and soles are unprotected, and sole fitting is often of poor quality.

"That the boot was unsuitable for the soldiers, and for the particular work for which they were provided, because—

"(a) The shape is such that the average foot has not room for free movement of the toes, and is thus not suitable for marching.

"(b) The leather is dry, containing no grease, and consequently quickly absorbs the water.

"(c) Soles and heels not being reinforced with metal, soon wear down, especially when wet."

The Minority Finding.

Taking all this unquestioned evidence together, the minority report arrives at the only possible conclusion. It finds that—

The Government should have, without much trouble or delay, provided a proper boot suitable for soldiers on active service, and that failure to do so constitutes grave and serious negligence on their part. It also points out that the excuse of haste in sending the first contingent to England cannot possibly be accepted as applying in the case of the second and third contingents, which are still in Canada.