

THE SOLDIERS' BOOTS.

HISTORY tells us that Nero fiddled while Rome was burning. The historian of the present war will tell future generations that when Canada and the Empire were in danger General Sam Hughes outdid Nero's indifference to the national peril by giving a score or more of the 8,000 "good boys" whom he had placed on the Patronage List huge orders for inferior boots, and that these inferior boots were supplied to the men who went out to face death in order that Canada and the Empire might live.

First Blunder Was Fatal.

When war came there was in the Militia Department an ankle boot made by the Slater Shoe Company which had been sealed in 1905 by the officials of the Department as the Pattern Boot according to which all boots afterwards required for the Permanent Force were to be made. This Sealed Pattern was not an Active Service Boot. In make and shape it was similar to the ordinary walking boot used by civilians in Canada, and was suitable for soldiers only in times of peace and to wear on parade or about the barracks. Neither was it the boot used by the soldiers in South Africa. That fact was proved beyond any doubt before the Special Committee of the House of Commons where the evidence of Assistant Director of Stores McCann established that the boots used in South Africa were supplied by A. W. Reddin and the Vankleek Hill Shoe Company and not by the Slater Shoe Company.

When War was announced in August last and it became necessary to purchase large quantities of boots for active service, several boots made for the Borden Government in 1913 by Gauthier of Quebec, and accepted without proper inspection, were selected from the Ordnance Stores at Ottawa as being in every respect similar to the Slater Sealed Pattern of 1905, and these Gauthier samples were handed around to various manufacturers as models for the Active Service Boots that they were to make under their Contracts with the Militia Department. In no case were specifications furnished the Contractors. It was proved before the Special Committee of the House of Commons that these Gauthier samples were inferior to the Slater Sealed Pattern Boot of 1905, and, as has been pointed out, the latter was never intended for an active service boot. Hence at the very outset a fatal blunder was made by the Government in ordering boots that were not fit for active service, and that blunder has been repeated over and over again.

Number of Inferior Boots Ordered.

In the month of August, 1914, orders were given for 65,000 pairs of these inferior boots. In September a second order for 32,867 pairs were given. The boots of this second order were to be made from the inferior Gauthier samples and from some samples furnished by the Contractors themselves. On October 8th, 9th and 10th, further orders were given for 30,000 pairs. All the boots were ordered up to this time were to cost \$3.85 per pair. On October 24th the Department of Militia made a change in the sample boot by providing a double sole and between

October 29th and November 4th, orders were placed for 40,532 pairs of these double-soled boots at \$4.00 per pair.

Boots Bought From Middlemen.

Later on in the month of November under instructions from the Acting Minister of Militia to purchase boots locally in Winnipeg, the Senior Ordnance Officer in that City, bought 3,798 pairs of boots from middlemen. These middlemen had the boots manufactured in different factories in Ontario and Quebec at prices ranging from \$3.40 to \$3.60 per pair, while they charged the Government an average price of \$4.00 per pair. Afterwards several other orders were placed in Vancouver and in other parts of Canada, and in all, the Department purchased 180,664 pairs of boots.

No Proper Inspection.

Up to the end of the year 1911 the Inspector of boots in the Department of Militia and Defence was a practical boot and shoe maker. He was dismissed without cause in December 1911 and in his place another gentleman was appointed, who had had no experience as a boot maker or as a tanner, and whose business immediately prior to his entering the Department had been that of a broker. It was because of this dismissal that the boots supplied by the Gauthier Company in 1913 were not properly inspected. Then in August last when the first War Contracts under the inferior Gauthier samples were awarded, five other boot Inspectors were employed, all of whom owed their appointment to political pull, and the majority of them had had no experience as boot and shoe makers. All practical men admit that the only way in which boots can be properly inspected is to follow them through the various processes of manufacture in the factory. In the case of the Government orders, inspection in the factories took place only in a limited number of cases. The general inspection was done by making a superficial examination of a finished boot. Thus it was impossible to tell what material or workmanship was contained in the interior of the boot, and obviously inspection of this kind was absolutely worthless.

Another thing that made the inspection a farce was the fact that all the Inspectors used the same stamp so that it was impossible to identify the man who had passed defective boots. The Inspector who was dismissed in 1911 had a special stamp bearing the initial letter of his name, and thus his work could be traced in every case. Under the Borden Government no such useful record was desired and the incompetent Inspector could stamp bad boots without any fear of being detected.

In the case of the first order given in August last, 13,962 pairs of boots were delivered at Valcartier without any inspection whatever. This was the case also with the boots purchased months afterwards at Winnipeg and Vancouver. Under all the circumstances, therefore, it is not surprising that so many bad boots were accepted and paid for by the Government.