

PARTING WORDS

ON THE

REJECTED MILITIA BILL.

BY

COLONEL D. LYSONS, C. B.

QUEBEC:

PRINTED AT THE CANADA GAZETTE OFFICE.

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APOLOGY.

Great misapprehension having arisen in the public mind with respect to the intentions of the late commission appointed to report upon the best means of reorganizing the Militia of this Province, I trust it will not be considered out of place if I venture, as the representative of the regular army on that commission, to leave behind me, on my departure for the mother country, a few words of explanation.

ORGANIZATION AND DRILL.

People who have not turned their attention to the study of Military matters are apt to confound organization with drill, whereas they are totally distinct from each other.

I. Organization in an army is the system by which great masses of men are divided into separate bodies and placed under the command of subordinate Officers, in order that the whole may be brought under the control of one commander.

Organization does not only apply to troops on parade or in action, but to their life in camp or quarters, to the means by which they are

subsisted, clothed, &c., and above all to the moral effect produced on the minds both of the Officers and men in the performance of their duties and the exercise of discipline.

II. Drill is the system by which organized bodies are taught to move at the will of the commander under certain rigid rules, when on parade or in action.

THE PRINCIPAL UNIT OF AN ARMY.

In the organization or division of an army, the principal unit should be as large as possible, provided that it is at all times, and under all circumstances, completely within the control of one man. A principal unit or Battalion of 1,000 strong, if kept up to its full strength, is somewhat large and unwieldy in the field, and it is beyond the control of one commander. The Battalion of 800 men has been found by experience the most convenient formation.

The advantage of dividing an army into large principal units, may be illustrated in the following manner :—Every order from the General must necessarily be conveyed separately to the Commander of each principal unit, whether it be great or small, the different departments of an army must communicate separately with each principal unit, and all issues of provisions, clothing, stores, &c., must be made separately to each of them ; thus, if 800 men were formed into one unit, they would require only one order, one set of communications, and one set of issues—but if 800 men were divided into two units of 400 each, they would require two orders, two sets of communications, two sets of issues, and would moreover require two establishments of Staff Officers ; if the same number of men were divided into 8 units, the orders, communications, &c., would have to be multiplied by 8. It is therefore obvious that the

difficulties, the complication, the chances of error and the number of officers required, must all increase in proportion as the principal unit of the army is in itself composed of a smaller number of men.

PROPOSED CANADIAN ORGANIZATION.

Under the existing Militia Law Canada is divided into Military Districts, which are subdivided into Sedentary Battalion and Company Divisions, each having its complete number of officers residing in the division.

The Sedentary Battalions consist of *all* the able bodied men between the ages of 18 and 45, resident within the territorial division; now it would evidently produce the most disastrous effect were the Battalion Divisions to be stripped of all their young men even for 14 days, and the aged, the sick, the women and children left alone to provide for themselves.

For the sake of illustration I will take a Sedentary Battalion of 800 strong (this number including, of course, every man in the territorial Division between 18 and 45), and I will suppose the Battalion to be divided into 10 companies consisting of 80 men each. Although for the reasons above stated the whole battalion could not be spared, a portion of it, say 80 men, might be taken without inflicting any great injury or inconvenience; but if any one complete company were taken, the population of the Company Division, whence it was drawn, would suffer as above stated, while that of the remaining Divisions would be left untouched; therefore the only just method of getting the number would be to take 8 men from each Company, in other words to take 1 man from every 10, leaving the remaining 9 to cultivate the land. No doubt the one man would be missed, but freedom and independence cannot be maintained without some slight sacrifice.

Having selected 8 men from each Sedentary Company they could not be sent into the field as 10 separate Companies, each consisting of 3 officers and 8 men, but the whole 80 men from the Battalion might be united into one Company, and three officers might be selected out of the Battalion to complete it.

With a view of making the force serviceable in the field, the 10 separate Companies, drawn from 10 adjoining sedentary Battalions, might be brought together and formed into one complete active Battalion or principal unit for active service—the field officers and staff being selected, according to their merits, from amongst the officers of the 10 Battalions, or being, if necessary, specially appointed from elsewhere.

The habit of obedience, more especially amongst officers, and knowledge of the method of carrying out the general chain of responsibility which connects a Battalion together and produces discipline and *esprit de corps*, are even more important in the organization of an army than mere drill, which can always be reduced to a certainty, while regular troops are at hand as instructors; in order therefore to maintain a force that would be efficient in case of necessity, the companies must be accustomed to meet together as complete Battalions in time of peace. When the enemy's cannon are thundering at your threshold, it is too late to think of organization, or to learn habits of discipline.

The simple method of collecting men together from the Sedentary Battalion and Company Divisions, and forming them into Active Battalions, as above explained, is all that was proposed in the rejected Bill.

In cases of great emergency the force might have been increased by taking a second and a third man from every ten, but whatever the demand in time of war, the pressure would then, by the operation of the Bill, have been equalized throughout the length and breadth of the province, and the proposed machinery would have sufficed to produce an army of any strength.

As the Sedentary Militia system embraces the whole able bodied population, it is clear that it could not be made available for military purposes in its present organization without some additional arrangements.

The proposed system might doubtless have been carried out without reference to the Sedentary Militia system, and would perhaps have been more simple without it, but as this organized division of the population existed and was understood through the country, it was deemed advisable to leave it unaltered and make it available as a powerful means of raising and maintaining an active force.

VOLUNTEERS.

Although the language of the Report appears extremely simple, the most absurd misrepresentations have, strange to say, gained circulation with respect to the intentions of the Commission in regard to the Volunteers of Canada who have shewn so much zeal and devotion in preparing for the defence of their country.—The simple alteration proposed in the conditions of the Volunteers in the great cities was as follows: that the class A should be increased so as to take in the *whole* of class B, and even leave a margin for increase; that all Volunteers should be armed and should receive an allowance for clothing; and furthermore, that they should receive 28 days' pay instead of 6—surely this does not appear much like ignoring the Volunteer movement. Under the full conviction of the great advantages of forming the whole active force into large battalions, and of the necessity of perfecting, in the time of peace, the organization necessary for active service in the field, the Commission proposed that the Volunteer battalions should be increased to 800, the number which has been proved by long experience to be the best suited for service. The idea that the

discipline of Volunteers would not admit of such an organization is erroneous, for there is scarcely a Volunteer battalion in London, and the Volunteers in Canada are quite as intelligent and are as far advanced in discipline as those in England, which is not above 800 strong. In the United States all the Volunteers are formed into complete battalions of 800 strong. Moreover if the Canadian Volunteers were more deficient than others, which I deny, there would be the more reason for teaching them in time of peace what *must* be practised in time of war.

There is no doubt that in carrying out this principle suddenly and rigidly some private interests might be injured, but by conferring with the Commanding Officers in the different cities, I am certain that steps might have been taken that would have gradually brought about this desirable end, if not completely, at any rate to a great extent, without inflicting injury on any body. I do not think any man, however strongly he may be attached to his own private interests, will deny the force of the principle above explained, nor would he like in the event of war to see the corps he had taken so much pains to drill, left behind and neglected, because it was not so organized as to be efficient in the field.

With respect to the isolated Companies of Volunteers in the rural districts, it is evident that small independent corps of 50 or 60 men, which would soon sink to half those numbers in time of war, would be next to useless, and in time of need all their gallant efforts would be lost. The distances between these corps are so great that it would have been next to impossible to connect them under any organisation, or to establish any system by which they could have been reinforced and kept up when on service ; it was therefore proposed to invite them to join the general organization with their officers, non-commissioned officers and men complete, making their town or village, with a portion of the surrounding country, if necessary, one

of the 10 divisions of an active battalion, and farther to request them, as they would already have acquired some knowledge of drill, to become the flank company of the battalion, and to assist in its organization.

SYSTEM OF DRILL.

Much has been said about the training of Militia and Volunteers, and the most absurd misrepresentations have been circulated with regard to the intentions of the Commission on this subject. It has actually been stated in one of the colonial journals, although there is not a single word from the first page to the last of the Report that could lead the most careless reader to draw such an inference, that it was their intention to encamp the Volunteers for drill during 14 days in each summer. I can only say that such an idea was never entertained by me, and I believe by no other member of the Commission. It was proposed to place power in the hands of the Commander in Chief to divide the drill as he thought proper, for the sake of meeting the wishes of the Volunteers. So many hours drill would have been taken as a day—a certain number of days battalions would have been required, because they are necessary to produce efficiency, probably about six, but the Volunteers would not even then have been required to encamp or to devote the entire day to drill, probably two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening, or if more convenient, two hours every morning only or every evening only, and at the most convenient time of the summer; a form of return shewing that every Volunteer, in a corps had performed at least the number of hours drill during the year required by law would have been adopted; the sole object was to ensure efficiency with as little inconvenience to the Volunteers as possible.

In the rural districts I am of opinion that the same advantages might, to a certain extent, have been accorded to the existing Volunteer Corps in small Towns and Villages, but as the regular Militia could not generally be expected to meet together during the winter for squad or company drill, it was considered that they would learn more of real discipline and drill in 28 days, if encamped for that time, than they would acquire in three or four times that number of days if drilled separately in their own parishes; moreover it would have afforded the officers an opportunity of learning their duties in the field, and would create that *esprit de corps* in the active battalion which is so necessary in the principal units of an army. As only one man out of about 8 or 10 would have been required and that at the least inconvenient time of the season, it was considered that this system was practicable and advantageous.

ADVANTAGES TO VOLUNTEERS.

I think I have now clearly shown that the rejected bill far from ignoring the Volunteer movements in the Province, proposed to provide for all the existing Volunteers in Canada, and even to allow a margin for their increase; it moreover proposed to place them on a much better footing than they have hitherto enjoyed or are likely under any other system to enjoy; all that was asked in return was that they should improve their organization so as to render themselves efficient in case of war. Should we not take advantage of the experience of our neighbours in the Northern States who well nigh lost their cause through the defective organization of their Volunteers at the commencement of their struggle with the South, and who have since found the necessity of improving the construction of their army and have in fact adopted the very system recommended in this paper?

METHOD OF RAISING MILITIA.

In raising the Militia it matters little *how* the men are drafted, provided the numbers are forthcoming; in the rejected bill three methods were proposed in order to meet the requirements of the different sections of the province, and it was left to the option of the people themselves to select whichever of those methods suited them best.

APPLICATION OF PROPOSED SYSTEM.

In order to test the working of the proposed system as far as the division of the present Military Districts were concerned, No. 5 District was, on paper, divided into active battalion districts and it was found that the new arrangement would fit exactly to the existing territorial divisions, every two counties giving one active battalion. No. 2 Military District, probably the most difficult of all the districts in Canada to re-arrange, was also divided experimentally, and the Colonel Commanding found no difficulty in meeting all the requirements of the proposed system.

ARMORIES.

The central armories, though not positively essential to the system, would I think have been extremely advantageous, and, once built, they would have lasted for a hundred years; proper rooms must at any rate have been provided for the safe custody of the arms, clothing, harness, saddles, &c., a small magazine for practice ammunition and

quarters for the sergeant or person in charge of them, would also have been required ; it is moreover advisable that arms should be kept in a place where they would be protected not only from *rust* but against any sudden attack. I have very good reason to believe that a great number of the arms now in the possession of the Volunteers of Canada have been much injured from want of proper care.

MUSTER AND COMMUTATION TAX.

I make no mention of the muster of the Sedentary Militia—of the proposed commutation tax—or of the fees on commissions, &c., as these were mere matters of policy and finance, and had no reference whatever to the military organization which would have been simpler and better without them.

WORKING OF THE PROPOSED SYSTEM IN RURAL DISTRICTS.

Had the proposed system been carried out, I cannot but think that it would have gained popularity, day by day, in its working in the rural districts, and would soon have become so completely interwoven in the habits and ideas of the people, that nothing would have interrupted its welfare. The Colonels commanding Military Districts would first have been requested to arrange the new Active Battalion Divisions, fitting them upon the Sedentary Militia system, with as little alteration as possible ; this done, fully detailed instructions and

forms of returns would have been sent for each Battalion Division, and the Sedentary Officers, assisted by the principal inhabitants and the clergymen of the parishes, would have been invited to call their people together, and, amongst themselves, to select their compliment of men, in the manner they liked best. The Adjutants and Serjeants-Major would have been sent through the country to afford any assistance or give any information required, and to instruct all Officers who came forward to join the Active Force ; every encouragement would have been given to the people of the country to manage their own Battalions amongst themselves, giving them every assistance required, and every means would have been taken to create emulation in drill and rifle shooting amongst the Battalions and Companies of Militia. It was considered that the fact of their having their own Armories and Drill-grounds in the centre of their Battalion Districts, under their own responsibility, would have increased this feeling of *esprit de corps*.

The system proposed may be considered expensive, but it must be remembered that after the first year or two, when the Militia was fairly established, the expense might have been reduced to any extent, without endangering the stability of the organization, which would have remained firmly rooted in the Province, and would at all times have enabled the population to rise and pour its full force against an enemy, however suddenly it might have been attacked.

CONCLUSION.

In taking leave of the people of Canada, I can assure them that I have conscientiously laboured in their cause, and have recommended

what my experience in military matters has led me to believe was necessary for their safety in case of attack. I feel certain that no amount of desultory drill, no amount of theoretical knowledge without practice, will be a sufficient protection to them in the hour of danger. Nothing short of a broad Organization which will enable this Province to put forth her whole power in the very best formation, under the most advantageous circumstances, will enable her to preserve her liberty and her independence, in case of a war with the neighbouring States.

D. LYSONS,

COLONEL.