

French Canada and the Canadian Militia, 1868-1914

by Desmond MORTON *

The failure of French Canadians to find a satisfactory place in Canadian military institutions has contributed to problems of national unity in the Twentieth Century. This paper suggests that this problem was faced in the formative years of the Canadian Militia and suggests the institutional circumstances in which it evaded solution.

I. — THE MILITIA AS A NATIONAL INSTITUTION.

A country's armed forces are usually reckoned among those national institutions which help to create a sense of collective identity and pride. It would be difficult to maintain that military institutions and warlike exploits have provided Canadians with many powerful unifying myths. Two world wars are recalled as periods of acute strain within the Canadian duality.

This problem in Canadian history is related to a complex array of factors. What is attempted here is an examination of a small part of the problem. What were the institutional factors which led the Canadian Militia, in its first, formative decades, to become so completely dominated by the English-speaking majority? Other historians have portrayed the broader context in which this development took place; the purpose of this study is to look narrowly at the institution itself.

Institutional considerations have an added importance because the Canadian Militia was consciously devised by a man acutely conscious of the need to make it fit the demands of both French and English-speaking Canadians. Launching debate on the Dominion's first Militia Bill, Sir George Étienne Cartier described the new military institutions as "necessary for the completion of national greatness".¹ Conscious that suspicion of the new militia system was acute among some French-speaking members, he was careful to explain and justify the provisions of the Bill

* Assistant Professor of History, University of Ottawa.

¹ *Parliamentary Debates as Reported in the Globe* (microfilm in the University of

in both languages.² Cartier, whose selection as first Minister of Militia and Defence had seemed a modest recognition for Macdonald's chief lieutenant, professed that he saw the creation of a national military system as a fitting culmination to his public life.³

II. — MILITIA ORGANIZATION : THE REPRESENTATIVE PRINCIPLE.

The Militia Act of 1868 created the Department of Militia and Defence and established a basis for the military institutions of the new Dominion. Essentially, the act extended the military system of the old Province of Canada to the new provinces. The new Department contained a civil and a military branch, the former under a Deputy Minister, the latter under the Adjutant General. The Militia Act established that the senior military officer would be obtained from the British regular army. Until 1904, the military command of the Canadian Militia was exercised by a series of senior British officers.⁴

Cartier's choice for Deputy Minister fell on George Futvoye, an elderly lawyer and civil servant from Quebec. Thereafter, the pattern was established that the post was held by French Canadians. Futvoye was followed in 1875 by a former Liberal senator, Colonel Charles Panet. When Panet died in 1898, he was replaced by Major L. F. Pinault, another Liberal politician from Quebec. In 1906, Pinault was succeeded by a former militia surgeon, Colonel (later Major General Sir) Eugène Fiset.

A number of political heads of the Militia Department should have guaranteed respect for French-speaking interests. For eighteen of the forty-six years between Confederation and the outbreak of world war, the Militia portfolio was held by a Quebec minister. Three of them, Cartier, L. F. R. Masson and Sir Adolphe Caron were men who, by influence or service, could claim standing in the Cabinet.

The first Militia Act divided the original four provinces of Canada into nine military districts. Three of these were in Quebec. The province

Toronto library), 31 March 1868, p. 149. For the French version, see Sir Joseph TASSÉ, *Discours de Sir Georges Cartier Barronet, accompagnés de notices* (Montreal, 1893), p. 566.

² See, for example, *Debates in The Globe*, 21 April 1868, p. 177.

³ John BOYD, *Sir George Etienne Cartier, Bart., His Life and Times* (Toronto, 1914), p. 283.

⁴ In 1875, the Act was amended to raise the status of the military command. Thereafter, the British officers filled the appointment of Major General Commanding the Canadian Militia. The post of Adjutant General was open to Canadians, and was held for twenty-one years by Colonel Walker Powell.

was divided as carefully as possible into two predominantly French-speaking districts, under French Canadian staff officers. The remaining district united the English-speaking militia of Montreal and the Eastern Townships.⁵ The result was geographically untidy but it offered some guarantee that militia units would be inspected by men who knew their language.⁶

Linguistic considerations governed the selection of staff for the new military districts. The need for representation was also recalled when the young Dominion prepared its first military expedition, the force sent to the Red River colony to secure it for Canada. Cartier planned that a battalion would be raised in each of the two central provinces. Lieutenant Colonel L. A. Casault, a French-speaking staff officer, was given command of the 2nd Quebec Battalion of Rifles. Most of his officers were also French-speaking although examination of the nominal rolls of the battalion suggest that a high proportion of the men in the ranks were English-speaking.⁷ The difficulty in obtaining men from Quebec for service at the Red River helps explain why the bulk of the small Dominion garrison maintained in Manitoba from 1870 until 1877 was recruited in Ontario and the Maritimes.⁸

A more persistent need for a permanent military force was created by the withdrawal of the British garrison from central Canada between 1868 and 1871. To fill the role the British troops had played as models and instructors for the Canadian Militia, Cartier agreed to form two small batteries of artillery, one at Kingston, the other at the Citadel in Quebec City. Officers from the Royal Artillery were borrowed to command the new units. Captain (later Major General) Thomas Bland Strange, who took command at Quebec, found that two of his three Canadian

⁵ Military District (M.D.) Number 5 included counties to the west of Montreal, such as Argenteuil, Pontiac and Ottawa, which were then heavily settled by English-speaking Quebecers, as well as English-speaking Montreal and the Townships. M.D. 6 included French-speaking Montreal and counties to the north of the predominantly English-speaking areas. M.D. 7 included French and English battalions in Quebec City and French-speaking units in the northern half of the province.

⁶ The only French-speaking unit in M.D. 5, the 21st Richelieu Light Infantry, from the Saint-Jean area, languished and died in 1880. The 6th Fusiliers, a Montreal unit originally in M.D. 6, was transferred to M.D. 5.

⁷ For comments on the Quebec battalion, see *Official Journal of the Red River Expedition*, Public Record Office, London, W.O. 33/21/418, pp. 12 *et seq.*

⁸ On the Manitoba Force, see Department of Militia and Defence, *Militia Reports, 1870-1877 passim* (hereafter *Militia Reports*). See also C. P. STACEY, "The Military Aspect of Canada's Winning of the West, 1870-1885", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. XXI, no. 1 (March 1940).

officers were French-speaking, as were more than half of his men. Strange developed a high opinion of his French Canadians, finding them willing, disciplined soldiers, inured to hardship and resourceful. The rough engineering skills of the logging camp were easily adapted to artillery work.⁹

III. — THE VOLUNTEER MILITIA : THE BASIC INSTITUTION.

As Minister of Militia, Cartier had made it evident that he would work for a duality within the militia system. However, public policy had to be supported by private will. The key issue in the first years of Cartier's militia system was whether the ranks of the force could be filled by voluntary enlistment or whether compulsion would be necessary. Elaborate machinery for obligatory service, the product of nearly a century of militia legislation, had been taken over by the new Dominion in its new militia statute. It had come in the face of Opposition hostility, mobilized by the veteran Rouge leader, A. A. Dorion,¹⁰ but it was an opposition privately shared by Cartier himself.¹¹ In the face of pleas by militia commanding officers, even of his own staff appointees, Cartier was determined that the new Canadian Militia would stand or fall on a basis of voluntary service.¹²

Nowhere was the issue of a voluntary or a compulsory basis for the militia more acute than in Quebec. At the first enrolment after the Militia Act, 12,637 of the Dominion's 37,170 volunteers had been found in Quebec but almost half of them came from the English-speaking district.¹³ The officers commanding the two French-speaking districts pleaded for resort to the ballot with even greater urgency than their English-speaking colleagues. Lieutenant Colonel Antoine de Lotbiniere Harwood reported :

Several well-to-do persons have told me that they would willingly shoulder the musket were they obliged to do so, but that their occupations would not

⁹ T. B. STRANGE, *Gunner Jingo's Jubilee* (London, 1896), pp. 352-358.

¹⁰ On Dorion and the Liberals, see CANADA, HOUSE OF COMMONS, *Journals*, 1868-1869, pp. 342-343; *Debates in The Globe*, 12 May 1868, p. 236.

¹¹ For Cartier's views, see TASSÉ, *Discours de Cartier*, pp. 707-709; Chas P. Treadwell to Cartier, 25 September 1871 and enclosures, Public Archives of Canada, *Cartier Papers*, pp. 1393-1395.

¹² For views of staff officers, see *Militia Report*, 1871, Appendix, pp. 1 ff. For the views of militia officers, see Memorial to Cartier, 12 March 1870, Public Record Office, London, *Carnarvon Papers*, vol. 170, pp. 3-4.

¹³ *Militia Report*, 1868, pp. 2-3.

allow them to voluntarily neglect their business and impair their fortunes...¹⁴

Lieutenant General the Honorable James Lindsay, sent to Canada by the War Office to supervise the British withdrawal and to offer the Canadians advice on their future defence arrangements, drew particular attention to the weakness of the French Canadian militia. Three battalions ordered out to meet a Fenian raid, with a total nominal strength of 1005 men, had mustered only 358 strong. He noted that words of command were given in English and were then explained in French, a procedure he accepted, but he went on to complain that the staff officers chosen by Cartier sometimes did not know their drill in either language.¹⁵ Some of Lindsay's criticisms were repeated two years later by Lord Dufferin, arriving in Canada to become Governor General. The French Canadian militia battalions he inspected at Levis were filled with aged and undersized men.¹⁶ If good men were not forced to serve, officers had to fill their ranks with unsuitable recruits.

The acute crisis over manpower in the militia resolved itself. The severe financial crisis which struck Canada in the mid 1870s meant sharp reductions in an already small defence expenditure. The strength of the force was cut and weak, dis-spirited units disappeared. A disproportionate number of French Canadian units were affected. Some, including the senior French Canadian battalion in the force, the 4th Chasseurs Canadiens, had already collapsed because of their failure to attract volunteers.¹⁷ Many others now followed them.

The bitter financial stringency which dominated Canadian militia administration from 1875 until 1896 accentuated the differences between the English- and French-speaking units of the force. It also fostered a sharp distinction between city and rural units. Economy sharply limited training. By 1878, a pattern had developed which allowed city battalions to drill throughout the year in their own drill halls while rural units were assembled in two-week camps only every other year, sometimes even less frequently. The government intentionally gave an advantage to city corps, seeing their value as an auxiliary police force against rioters or

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1871, p. 27.

¹⁵ Lt. Gen. James Lindsay to Sir John Young, 4 August 1870, Canadian Forces Historical Section, Ottawa, W.O. 32/813/058/316.

¹⁶ Dufferin to Kimberley, 5 July 1872, confidential, Public Record Office, London, C.O. 537/103, p. 294.

¹⁷ *Militia General Orders*, no. 13, 23 May 1872.

strikers. In return, many city corps developed into lively, prosperous social and sporting clubs. Officers and frequently other ranks contributed their pay to regimental funds to buy elaborate uniforms, to finance excursions or to rent messes.

Throughout the militia, a contrast developed between the smartly dressed, self-confident city corps and the shabby, ill-trained and aggrieved rural militia.¹⁸ Even to keep a rural battalion together between the infrequent camps demanded enthusiasm and some financial outlay on the part of the officers. In Ontario, some county councils helped by making special contributions to the county battalion, but there is no record of such assistance elsewhere in Canada.¹⁹

The absence of government support was turning the militia into a rather expensive voluntary society. In most parts of Canada, the private's pay of fifty cents a day was only half the standard rate for a day labourer. Particularly in Quebec, undergoing a serious agricultural depression, it might be possible to find men willing to serve for such meagre pay,²⁰ but it was much more difficult to find officers willing to pay for the privilege. In 1883, when Parliament was debating a possible increase in militia officers' pay, it was suggested that the extra money would be quickly passed on to the men. A Quebec M.P. observed that it did not happen that way in his part of the country.²¹ A correspondent in the *Canadian Militia Gazette* alleged that in some French Canadian battalions, captains held on to the command of their companies until an advanced age, even refusing promotion, so that they could secure about \$100 a year in government grants.²² Lieutenant Colonel Gustave d'Orsonnens of the permanent infantry school at St. Jean waged fruitless war on commanding officers who insisted on sending him hopeless illiterates, men of bad

¹⁸ "The Odd File" (Captain Greville HARSTON), *The Militia of Canada* (Toronto, 1892), p. 20, has a rather light-hearted look at the rival attitudes.

¹⁹ Some counties contributed 25¢ a day to the men's pay, others raised money to buy helmets, colours and band instruments. Another form of assistance was not limited to Ontario but was required by Militia Department regulations. A municipality had to contribute the land on which a drill shed or armoury would be built.

²⁰ Sir Adolphe Caron found it politically expedient to keep a large number of men of the 87th Battalion from his constituency as a garrison in the Citadel during the winter of 1885-1886, an alternative the men apparently preferred to work in the woods (Caron to Lt. Col. J. V. Laurin, 3 April 1886, Public Archives of Canada, *Caron Papers*, letterbook 15, p. 275).

²¹ CANADA, HOUSE OF COMMONS, *Debates*, 19 April 1883, p. 728 (Michel Auger).

²² *Canadian Military Gazette*, vol. XII, no. 14, 21 July 1897, p. 9.

character and other social misfits in search of a winter's lodging at public expense.²³

With rural units in a serious state of decline, even relative to the rest of Canada, it was unfortunate that there were only two French Canadian city battalions, the 9th Voltigeurs of Quebec and the 65th Carabiniers Mont-Royal of Montreal. While these units went through periods of difficulty, they were in all respects on a par with the English-speaking city corps.²⁴

French Canadians who regretted their relative weakness in the militia saw the need for additional French-speaking city battalions. In Montreal, with only one French Canadian battalion to five English-speaking units, plans were made to revive the defunct 4th Chasseurs. This time, it would be designed to appeal directly to a French Canadian military tradition by wearing Zouave uniform.

This Franco-Algerian military costume had been made popular by the troops of the Second Empire. It had crossed the Atlantic to be adopted by some American militia units before the Civil War. Its main attraction for French Canadians was its connection with the Papal Zouaves, the contingent of faithful Canadian Catholics that had set off in 1869 to help defend the temporal power of the papacy.²⁵ Many leading French Canadian military and political figures had helped to sponsor the Papal Zouaves and the expedition represented one of the few elements in a uniquely French Canadian military tradition.

The proposal won the immediate support of the Honorable Louis Masson, the Minister of Militia. A former militia staff officer and now Montreal's representative in the Cabinet, Masson had several motives for pressing the idea. The resistance did not come from his colleagues but from the British to whom the proposal was referred. The Duke of Cambridge, the Commander-in-Chief and Queen Victoria's cousin had no intention of allowing any of Her Majesty's forces to be arrayed in what he regarded as a foreign fancy dress. British officials based their argument on the

²³ *Militia Reports*, 1885, pp. 175-179; 1886, pp. 171-175; 1887, p. 194.

²⁴ Writing of the Quebec dock labourers' strike in 1878, Dufferin explained to Mackenzie that while the local English-speaking battalion had been called out, the 9th, with many of its men recruited from disaffected districts, had not been trusted (Lord Dufferin to Alexander Mackenzie, 18 June 1878, Public Archives of Canada, *Mackenzie Papers*, M 199, p. 1950). The 9th Voltigeurs are currently the subject of doctoral research by Mr. Pierre Gravel at Laval University.

²⁵ On the Zouaves, see Léopold LAMONTAGNE, "Habits gris et chemises rouges", *Report of the Canadian Historical Association*, 1950.

agreed doctrine that militias both in Canada and in Britain were uniformed like regulars so that no enemy would know whether he faced irregular levies or well-disciplined professionals. Even if the Zouave promoters changed their colours from grey to scarlet, the costume was unacceptable.

In the face of British intransigence, the scheme languished. Sir John A. Macdonald, as Prime Minister, adopted an amused neutrality. Ill health prematurely drove Masson from his post in the Militia Department and the promoters of the Zouave regiment gave up in disgust.²⁶

It would be easy to exaggerate the significance of this abortive venture into a specifically French Canadian military dress and tradition. The incident did reveal that the British military authorities and their allies in the Canadian Militia Department would do nothing to widen the character of the force to suit the wishes and traditions of French Canada. Their action contrasts with their willingness to sanction the equally inappropriate Highland costume when it was demanded by many English-speaking battalions. For, as Masson pointed out in the course of his protracted transatlantic correspondence, as long as Britain kept no Highland regiments in Canada, a group of Militia in Scottish costume would be as conspicuous as Zouaves in blue, green or scarlet, and far less suitably dressed for Canadian conditions.²⁷

IV. — PERMANENT MILITARY INSTITUTIONS : PROFESSIONALISM.

For most Canadians for many years, the thirty thousand odd men in the volunteer militia were all that the country needed as a military force. Insistence on economy went hand in hand with constitutional slogans about the dangers of standing armies. Nonetheless, governments were forced to the conclusion that to achieve even a modest level of efficiency, the militia would require permanent military schools. In his first parliamentary session, Alexander Mackenzie pushed through the legislation which led to the creation of the Royal Military College at Kingston. Eight years later, the Honorable Adolphe Caron, as Minister of

²⁶ Privy Council minutes, 23 October 1879, Public Archives of Canada, R.G. 2, 7, a, vol. 18, p. 542; Correspondence in Public Archives of Canada, *Macdonald Papers*, vol. 229, pp. 98675-98677; vol. 301, pp. 139889-139901.

²⁷ Masson to Macdonald, 10 November 1879, *ibid.*, vol. 229, p. 98679.

Militia, was responsible for amendments to the Militia Act which finally acknowledged the need for a tiny permanent army to man schools for cavalry, artillery and infantry.

The new military college, opened in 1876, was the first militia institution to ignore the bilingual needs of the country. Entrance examinations required candidates to translate French and Latin into English but there was no corresponding hurdle for English-speaking candidates. When these and other examples of discrimination were brought to the attention of the Government, neither the Prime Minister nor his succession of lack-lustre Ministers of Militia seemed to understand the point.²⁸ No serious concessions were made to help French-speaking entrants.

By 1900, 255 cadets had graduated from the Royal Military College; only eleven were French Canadians. Even these were almost exclusively from upper-class and largely assimilated families. There were two Joly de Lotbinières, two Panets, a DuPlessis, a Gaudet and a Boucher de Boucherville.²⁹ Repeated demands by militia reformers that commissions in the permanent corps be reserved for graduates of the College would have created a near-perfect barrier to French-Canadian representation.

Bilingualism was hardly more successful from the other direction. Successive Major Generals commanding the Militia complained that cadets at the College knew even less French than British Officers of the same age — surely a modest enough standard.³⁰ In 1895, in the course of an investigation which eventually led to the removal of the Commandant and most of the academic staff, Major General Gascoigne found that the Professor of French was most conspicuously unfitted for his work. Even in the General's presence, he could not keep order in his class.³¹ In the following year, when outside examiners were introduced for the first time to assess the level of academic achievement, the examiner in French reported that, while most of the graduating class could make out the approximate meaning of a paragraph in French, they could neither write a passable French letter nor even pretend to sustain a conversation.³²

²⁸ CANADA, HOUSE OF COMMONS, *Debates*, 4 April 1876, pp. 1044-1045; 12 April 1877, pp. 1430-1431. On Mackenzie's Militia ministers, see Sister Teresa Avila BURKE, "Mackenzie and His Cabinet, 1873-1878", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. XLI, No. 2 (June, 1960).

²⁹ DEPARTMENT OF MILITIA AND DEFENCE, *Militia List*, 1900, pp. 11-16.

³⁰ For example, see Major General I. J. C. Herbert to the Duke of Cambridge, 6 July 1891, Royal Archives, Windsor Castle, *Cambridge Papers*.

³¹ CANADA, DEPARTMENT OF MILITIA AND DEFENCE, *Reports in Reference to the Royal Military College for the Year 1895* (Ottawa, 1896), p. 24. See also pp. 9, 11.

³² *Militia Report*, 1897, pp. 38-41.

Another blow to bilingualism was more the unconsidered by-product of an administrative decision than a conscious act. In 1880, the two permanent batteries of artillery changed station. Most of the French-speaking gunners found themselves transferred to the Anglo-Saxon setting of Kingston. Neither they nor their commander, Colonel Strange, found it a happy exchange. Officers resorted to political influence to return to Quebec while men in the ranks deserted or failed to re-enlist. The bilingual character of the unit was lost within a few years.³³

The authorization of additional permanent schools in 1883 made it possible again to provide specifically for French-speaking needs. One of the three new infantry schools was established in the crumbling barracks at St. Jean. Its first commandant was Lieutenant Colonel Gustave d'Odet d'Orsonnens, the grandson of a Swiss officer in de Meuron's regiment. D'Orsonnens had served in the militia during the Fenian Raids and for his services in organizing the Papal Zouaves, the Pope had made him a papal count. All but one of the officers under his command were originally French-speaking.

In organizing the new schools, Adolphe Caron, as Minister of Militia, had not restricted himself to appointing graduates of the military college. His aim, as he explained it to a Quebec City friend was to provide "for some good young fellows who have a taste for military life".³⁴ The professional standards were no higher than for the militia as a whole and Caron found it possible to oblige many of his friends, both English and French-speaking. When the British commander of the Militia objected to the officer nominated as d'Orsonnens' second-in-command on the grounds of a reputation for drunkenness, the complaint was acknowledged but overruled on the grounds that the gentleman was the son of a prominent Conservative and the grandson of a former premier of the Province of Canada.³⁵

Caron also established a small cavalry school at Quebec City but only one of its three officers was French-speaking, Lieutenant (later Major General) F. L. Lessard.

³³ The order exchanging the batteries did provide for a small number of French-speaking gunners to be left at Quebec to serve as instructors (Militia General Orders, no. 10, 7 May 1880). For the reaction, see STRANGE, *Gunner Jingo*, pp. 371 *et seq.*; *Militia Report*, 1880, p. 236.

³⁴ Caron to Dr. Colin Sewell, 12 March 1883, *Caron Papers*, letterbook 4, p. 576.

³⁵ Correspondence in *Macdonald Papers*, vol. 83, pp. 32465-32476 *passim*.

V. — ACTIVE SERVICE AND MILITARY REFORM.

The most serious challenge for the Canadian Militia between 1868 and 1914 was the Northwest Rebellion of 1885. The outbreak evoked predictable enthusiasm among the Canadian volunteers, as anxious to display their military prowess as to crush the Metis. Offers of service bombarded the Prime Minister and his Minister of Militia.

As Minister, Adolphe Caron was persuaded by his military advisers that the relatively well-organized city battalions would be sent out first. While two units from Toronto were the first to be selected, political expediency dictated that offers of service from the 9th and the 65th Battalions were quickly accepted. English-speaking units in Montreal and Quebec were left behind.³⁶ The commanding officers of both battalions, Lieutenant Colonels Guillaume Amyot of the 9th and J. Alderic Quimet of the 65th, happened to be Conservative M.Ps., and this reinforced the considerable interest Caron took in their progress.³⁷

French Canadian participation in the campaign provoked both major and minor storms. The ranks of the 9th included many undergraduates of Laval University and telegrams deluged the Minister from the Rector, priests and parents, demanding that the young men be returned to their studies.³⁸ Caron was accused of ordering a veritable slaughter of the innocents: "... les malédictions pleuvent sur ceux qui les privent de leurs enfants" warned one correspondent.³⁹ The students were ordered back to their desks and the ranks of the battalion were seriously depleted. One of the companies had only thirteen privates, another only eight.⁴⁰

A much more serious problem was created by criticism of the French Canadian contribution to the campaign. The 1885 rebellion was the occasion for violent attacks on French Canada in some of the Ontario press and the role of the French-speaking battalions in the North West was subjected to close scrutiny. It was perhaps unfortunate that the two Quebec units played their role in Alberta, far from the chief centres of excitement. The 9th Battalion was dispersed in garrisons through the

³⁶ In Montreal, the Garrison Artillery, whose commanding officer was a close personal friend of the Minister, was called out near the end of the campaign (Lt. Col. W. R. Oswald to Caron, 7 April 1885, *Caron Papers*, file 5326).

³⁷ See, for example, Caron to Amyot, 1 April 1885, *ibid.*, vol. 199, p. 90; Caron to Thomas McGreevy, M.P., 1 April 1885, *ibid.*, p. 104.

³⁸ M. E. Methot to Caron, 31 March 1885, *ibid.*, p. 80.

³⁹ Anonymous to Caron, 2 April 1885, *ibid.*, p. 142.

⁴⁰ Georges BEAUREGARD, *Le 9^e Bataillon au Nord-ouest* (Quebec, 1886), p. 8.

Blackfeet country southwest of Calgary. The 65th joined Major General Strange's column, marching north to Edmonton and then down the North Saskatchewan in pursuit of Big Bear's band of Crees.

Strange, already familiar with French Canadians, was delighted by the men of the 65th. They were tough, spirited and uncomplaining in performing the arduous work of the campaign.⁴¹ Unfortunately, neither Colonel Ouimet nor his second-in-command accompanied the battalion. Having brought his men to Calgary, Ouimet returned to Montreal, ostensibly to recover some lost equipment and to take his place in Parliament. When Ontario papers raised a storm at this conduct, Caron ordered his colleague to return to the North West.⁴² The command of the 65th fell to Major G. A. Hughes, a veteran of the Pontifical Zouaves and a more robust campaigner.⁴³

Criticism from the English-language press went far to cancel out any warming sense of solidarity between French- and English-speaking participants in the campaign. Bitterness was focussed and aggravated by the much more important questions surrounding the death of Louis Riel. Both Amyot and Ouimet were among the Conservative M.Ps. who split from their party to oppose Riel's execution. However, the constant sniping at the French Canadian role in the campaign, and particularly at Ouimet's alleged desertion of his battalion, helped turn memories of a creditable achievement into a sour sense of injustice.⁴⁴

Friction was not allayed by the British general commanding the Militia, Major General Sir Fred Middleton. When he sought the Canadian appointment, Middleton had seemed eminently qualified to appreciate Canada's national duality. While serving in Canada some years before, he had married a French Canadian. Her relatives used their influence with Caron to secure Middleton his appointment.⁴⁵ In fact, Middleton rapidly developed an acute contempt for French Canadians, filled letters

⁴¹ For Strange's comments on the 65th, see *Gunner Jingo*, pp. 419-420, 426, 509-510. See also CANADA, DEPARTMENT OF MILITIA AND DEFENCE, *Report Upon the Suppression of the Rebellion in the North-West Territories*, etc. (Ottawa, 1886), pp. 51-60.

⁴² On Ouimet, see STRANGE, *Gunner Jingo*, p. 419; Caron to Strange, 18 April 1885, *Caron Papers*, vol. 199, p. 285; on Major C. A. Dugas, see Dugas to Caron, 4 May 1885, *ibid.*, file 5815.

⁴³ Hughes to Caron, 19 April 1885, *ibid.*, vol. 199, p. 290; Benjamin SULTE, *Histoire de la Milice canadienne-française* (Montreal, 1897), p. 97.

⁴⁴ For evidence of this feeling and efforts to allay it, see Strange to Caron, 24 August 1885 and enclosures, *Caron Papers*, file 6619.

⁴⁵ Caron to Charles A. Doucet, 8 March 1884, *Caron Papers*, letterbook 7, p. 297.

to the Duke of Cambridge with his scorn for their shortcomings and was only concerned lest his wife, "a most decided Englishwoman now", might make their joint prejudices known.⁴⁶

In the aftermath of the campaign, militia officers had shared the grievance that although both Caron and Middleton had been rewarded for their services, there were no decorations for their subordinates. The blame fell on Middleton. Only on his departure in 1890 did the General publish a statement declaring that his list of proposed honours had been rejected by the Minister on the grounds that it included neither of the French Canadian colonels.⁴⁷ Bitterness which had been directed at the British general was redirected at French Canadian political influence.

Middleton's successor was very much better suited to the needs of the force. Major General Ivor Herbert was young, an able soldier, a man of means and a member of an aristocratic family. More to the point, Herbert was a Catholic and spoke fluent French. For the first time, the Militia had a commander who insisted on attending camps in the French-speaking districts and on instructing the troops in their own language.⁴⁸

It was Herbert's misfortune to serve in Canada at a time when tensions between the two groups were being aggressively exploited for political ends. His sympathy with the French Canadians under his command was added to the list of offenses he accumulated as an energetic reformer. When Herbert included a glowing reference to the Papal Zouaves in a speech to the 65th Battalion, he found himself denounced on the floor of the House of Commons by the ardent and influential Orangeman, Major (later Lieutenant General Sir) Sam Hughes.⁴⁹ It was a refrain picked up by Ontario newspapers.

Herbert's regime marked the slow beginning of the reform and modernisation of the Canadian Militia. Virtually unaltered in training and equipment since the British withdrawal in 1871, the force began to acquire new weapons and its professional instructors began to go to England for their training. The links with British Army doctrine and

⁴⁶ Middleton to Cambridge, 30 August 1885, *Cambridge Papers*.

⁴⁷ Sir Fred MIDDLETON, *A Parting Address to the People of Canada* (Toronto, 1890), pp. 9-10.

⁴⁸ Herbert also wrote to the completely bilingual Caron in French, some evidence of his genuine fluency in the language. See, for example, Herbert to Caron, 8 January 1891, *Caron Papers*, file 14316.

⁴⁹ HOUSE OF COMMONS, *Debates*, 14 May 1894, pp. 2733-2734; for Herbert's speech, see G. A. DROLET, *Zouaviana* (Montreal, 1898), pp. 410-412.

traditions were tightened. Hitherto, professional needs had been generously leavened by political influence. The advantage of having a *patroneux* like Caron at the head of the Militia Department might be that considerations of merit and efficiency could be balanced by a desire to make the militia acceptable to French Canada. For such a directing policy, Herbert's linguistic skill and genuine sympathy were no substitute.

Herbert's immediate successor was a good-natured nonentity but, in 1898, came a new prophet of reform. Major General (later Lieutenant General Sir) Edward Hutton was a fervent Imperialist, charged by Joseph Chamberlain with the task of creating an efficient defence system for Canada.⁵⁰ It was a task for which he had already acquired considerable experience in Australia and soon after his arrival, he launched a vigorous personal campaign to invigorate the militia and to popularize military reform. His attentions extended to Quebec. Like Herbert, he had the decided asset of speaking fluent French and he used it, as in the rest of Canada, to deliver public speeches. At a dinner at St. Jean, attended by Israel Tarte and his own minister, Dr. (later Sir) Frederick Borden, Hutton noted that while French Canadians made up 30% of the population, they provided less than 20% of the militia. No people had ever become truly great, he warned his audience, by the cultivation of land and pastoral pursuits alone.⁵¹

Hutton tackled the problems of the French-speaking militia units with the same energy he displayed in promoting other military reforms. Old and inefficient officers were persuaded to retire and companies which failed to appear for training were disbanded. One of the few remaining French-speaking officers in the permanent force was assigned to prepare a French drill book.⁵² Hutton personally commanded the militia camps in Quebec in the summer of 1899 and made a point of organizing massive church parades where mass was said by the archbishops of Quebec and Montreal.⁵³ At both camps, the public was welcomed to sham battles during the day and to choral competitions at night.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ For Hutton's career in Canada, see Norman PENLINGTON, *Canada and Imperialism, 1896-1899* (Toronto, 1965); and "General Hutton and the Problem of Military Imperialism in Canada, 1898-1900", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. XXIV, no. 2 (June, 1943).

⁵¹ *Montreal Gazette*, 13 February 1899.

⁵² Chief Staff Officer to the District Officer Commanding, M.D. 6, 29 November 1899, Public Archives of Canada, R.G. 9, II B 1, Confidential Letterbook, vol. 599, p. 387.

⁵³ *La Patrie*, 26 June 1899; *Le Soleil*, 8 July 1899.

⁵⁴ *Montreal Herald*, 3 July 1899; *Le Soleil*, 7 July 1899.

A constant theme in Hutton's reform campaign was the need to create a Canadian national army. Certainly such a force would require a much greater degree of bilingualism. There had even been complaints that the staff officer commanding a predominantly French-speaking district in Quebec had returned a letter to its sender because it was not written in English.⁵⁵ Hutton's concern for bilingualism was not merely a matter of abstract justice; he was also convinced that Quebec would only join his military crusade if "... the more energetic and professionally educated English-speaking officers should get at the French Canadians".⁵⁶

To achieve his aim, Hutton launched an historic General Order on February 14, 1899, the day after his highly acclaimed speech at St. Jean. It warned permanent officers that the Major General now considered it as an essential prerequisite for promotion to the staff that they should be able to convey their instructions to French Canadian troops in French. It concluded pointedly that "all those who are unable to read or speak French with fair facility should take an early opportunity to make good this defect".⁵⁷

The order was received with predictable mixed reactions. Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Evanturel of the 9th Battalion, in thanking Hutton, went on to comment on the previous status of French in the Militia :

Sans doute, jamais à ma connaissance du moins, on a refusé de nous entendre dans la langue qui nous est si chère, mais c'était toujours avec crainte & hésitation que nous nous approchions des autorités qui souvent ne pouvaient nous suivre dans nos remarques sans être obligées de s'en rapporter à des interprètes quelques fois pas expérimentés.⁵⁸

English-speaking reaction was more cool. Never before had bilingualism been seriously urged as an advantage for an officer — to say nothing of being a pre-requisite for promotion. A few weeks later, Hutton used part of a speech in Toronto to defend his regulation, arguing that it was discreditable that staff officers did not know enough French to be able to handle a French-speaking battalion.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Borden to Israel Tarte, 15 March 1898, Nova Scotia Archives, *F. W. Borden Papers*, letterbook 5, p. 768. The accusation was denied (Borden to Tarte, 22 March 1898, *ibid.*, p. 938).

⁵⁶ Hutton to Lt. Col. Gerald Kitson, 7 January 1899, British Museum, London, *Hutton Papers*, add. 50079.

⁵⁷ *Militia General Orders*, no. 12, 14 February 1899.

⁵⁸ Lt. Col. Evanturel to Hutton, 19 February 1899, Public Archives of Canada, *Hutton Papers*, pp. 467-468.

⁵⁹ *Toronto Globe*, 4 March 1899. For examples of comment on the order, see *Toronto Evening Telegram*, 8 March 1899, and *Montreal Witness*, 7 March 1899.

Hutton left Canada a year to the day after he had issued his bilingualism order. His departure to serve with the British Army in South Africa was the culmination of his struggle to impose his will on the Canadian government and of the intolerable friction which conflicting policies had produced. Hutton's personal attitude had turned to a cold hatred of a French Canada which remained uninfected by his own imperial patriotism.⁶⁰ His brief encouragement to internal bilingualism in the Militia was soon forgotten.

VI. — THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR AND A NEW ROLE.

The conflict between French and English Canada over participation in the South African War has been studied elsewhere. Within the institutional confines of the Militia Department, the problem resolved itself into the traditional concern with producing a representative force. As early as July, 1902, Hutton had worked out a plan for a contingent although his Minister and the Government were not informed of the details until September.⁶¹ When Laurier finally announced the despatch of a contingent, its strength was smaller than Hutton had planned and some of the proposed appointments were altered. The essence remained. Canada was to send a battalion of a thousand men under the command of Lieutenant Colonel (later General Sir) William Otter of Toronto. One of the two majors was Lieutenant Colonel Oscar Pelletier, a young artillery officer who commanded one of the military districts in Quebec.⁶² Of the battalion's eight companies, one was to be recruited from Montreal and another at Quebec City. All the officers of one of these companies were French Canadians although a study of the nominal roll of the completed contingent suggests that there were only a few French Canadians in the ranks.⁶³

Recruiting plans for the Second Contingent recognized the hopelessness of finding a representative share of French-speaking recruits for the

⁶⁰ For evidence of Hutton's later views, see Hutton to Lord Minto, 10 January 1902, Public Archives of Canada, *Minto Papers*, vol. 17, pp. 58-59.

⁶¹ On Hutton's plans for the contingent, see Hutton to Minto, 17 July 1899, *Minto Papers*, vol. 15, pp. 100-104.

⁶² Pelletier was also the son of Sir Charles Pelletier, Government Leader in the Senate. In 1898, he had been only a substantive lieutenant and his rapid promotion reflected not merely political influence but also the lack of suitable French-speaking officers to command a French-speaking military district. For comment, see *Canadian Military Gazette*, vol. XII, no. 14, 21 July 1897.

⁶³ CANADA, PARLIAMENT, *Organization, Equipment, Despatch and Service of the Canadian Contingents*, Sessional Paper 35a, 1901.

rank and file but officers continued to be sought to fill a representative function. Lieutenant Colonel F. L. Lessard commanded one of the two battalions of Canadian Mounted Rifles, and one of the three batteries of field artillery had French Canadian officers as both commander and second-in-command.⁶⁴ Among the junior ranks of officers, French-speaking representation was virtually non-existent.

With the end of the South African War, Canada entered on a period of military expansion which continued, with only temporary checks, until the outbreak of war in 1914. The authorized establishment for the Militia, held at 35,000 or below since 1868, had nearly doubled by 1914. Military expenditure rose from \$1,160,000 in 1898 to \$9,100,000 in 1912-13. Annual training had been the rule since 1896; now it was extended and drill pay was substantially increased.⁶⁵ Modern equipment, guns and rifles were issued to the whole force.

While French Canadian militia units shared in the general expansion of spending and of military opportunities, it is also apparent that their relative share declined. One measurable index was the French Canadian share of permanent force commissions. Since these were the officers who received the only thorough professional training and who would occupy the key positions in wartime, the absence of French Canadians was of fundamental significance. It certainly helped to explain why, when war came in 1914, it proved impossible to find trained and suitable French Canadians young enough to serve as general officers in the Canadian Corps.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Although the battery commander was not a success, his subordinate, Captain H. A. Panet, won high praise from General Hutton, then serving in South Africa (Hutton to Minto, 30 October 1900, *Minto Papers*, vol. 16, p. 82).

⁶⁵ These key changes were embodied in the 1904 Militia Act which also did away with the requirement that the command of the Militia be held by a British officer.

⁶⁶ THE BACKGROUND OF PERMANENT OFFICERS WITH THE CANADIAN MILITIA, 1886-1912

Rank	British Officers			Canadian Officers					
	1886	1899	1912	English-speaking			French-speaking		
	1886	1899	1912	1886	1899	1912	1886	1899	1912
Major General	1	1	1			1			
Brigadier General						3			1
Colonel		1	2	1	1	9			3
Lieutenant Colonel	2	2	3	15	14	27	5	4	3
Major	3		9	8	11	52	3	3	5
Captain	1		2	4	13	68	1	4	12
Lieutenant	3			18	12	67	6	1	3
TOTAL	10	4	17	46	51	227	15	12	27

(Source: *Militia Lists* for 1886, 1899 and 1912.)

Another index was participation in the Militia Staff Course, a long course designed to prepare senior militia officers for major staff appointments on mobilization. By 1913, fifty-eight officers had received certificates; only seven of them were French Canadians.

In 1911, on the formation of the Borden Government, Colonel Sam Hughes became Minister of Militia. He was certainly the most militant and aggressive defence minister Canada has ever had. Under his command, the national military establishment grew still faster. However, few ministers were less fitted by temperament, experience and political record to associate French Canada in the mood of militaristic enthusiasm. In opposition, he had made no secret of his prejudices and in office, he continued to go out of his way to offend French Canadian susceptibilities. One order which drew wide reaction forbade the 65th Regiment from bearing arms in Montreal's traditional Corpus Christi procession. Not even protests from French-speaking and Catholic colleagues in the Cabinet could move Hughes to reconsider.⁶⁷

However, Hughes was only a final irritant. By the time that he became Minister, the Canadian Militia, permanent and volunteer components alike, had already ceased to be an institution in which there were careers, opportunities and a sense of easy identity for Canadians of both founding races. It was symbolic that the most distinguished French Canadian soldier of the period, Major General François Lessard, should find it congenial to pass his years of retirement on a farm outside Toronto.⁶⁸

VII. — WHAT UNDERLAY THE FAILURE ?

While the role of the Militia Department in Canadian affairs between 1867 and 1914 was peripheral, the failure of French Canada to associate with English Canada in military affairs was not. The failure was due to far more profound causes than the organization of the Department of Militia and Defence or the narrow prejudices of many of its leading officials. No suggestion has been made that the problem can be torn out of its wider context.

⁶⁷ For documentation of the incident, see *La Presse*, 8 June 1914 and Public Archives of Canada, *R. L. Borden Papers*, OC 190, vol. 17, pp. 15614-15619.

⁶⁸ J. F. CUMMINS, "A Distinguished Canadian Cavalry Officer : Major-General F. L. Lessard, C.B.", *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, vol. III, no. 2, January 1926, p. 131.

At the same time, institutional factors did contribute to this failure. Some of them can be summarized here :

1. At no time did military and civil authorities agree that a special approach would be needed to attract French Canadians to the Militia. Masson's support for a Zouave uniform and Hutton's encouragement for bilingualism were isolated episodes, abandoned in the face of opposition.
2. With the exception of the infantry school at St. Jean, little thought was given to the need for instructional facilities for the French-speaking Militia. When higher qualifications were demanded, particularly for officers, a thorough knowledge of English was a prerequisite.
3. Military service, particularly in the permanent corps, meant travel and the breaking of ties, a much more difficult process for a French Canadian than for an English Canadian who would at least find his own language, customs and attitudes in almost all parts of Canada and even in England.

In 1883, speaking in the House of Commons, Lieutenant Colonel J. A. Ouimet had suggested that the Canadian Militia was not maintained for offence nor, indeed, for defence. Its purpose, he suggested, was to build up a national spirit :

... I look upon the Militia as a national institution, the promotion of which is the best means of creating among our population a national feeling, a real Canadian feeling.⁶⁹

Ouimet's vision was not realized. The failure to find more than a superficial place for both Canadian traditions in the country's armed forces before 1914 was to have serious consequences in two world wars.

⁶⁹ HOUSE OF COMMONS, *Debates*, 19 April 1883, p. 725.