POORLY TRAINED SOLDIERS SENT TO HONG KONG, TOO.

Major Conn Smythe has refused to allow the National Defense department to "brush off" his charges that "green, inexperienced and poorly trained" reinforcements were being sent to the Canadian battalions in France. Supporting his previous statement Major Smythe has said that he has talked to officers of company commander level or lower of eleven units who stated that untrained men were sent to them to fill up the gaps in their ranks caused by casualties in the present bitter fighting in France. The battalions mentioned by Major Smythe are representative of all sections of Canada.

The accusations by this artillery officer, who is now in a Toronto hospital, a casualty of this war, are more specific and to the point than the replies which Defense Minister Ralston and his departmental officials have offered. Their statement that reinforcements are well trained in Canada and that the training is continued in the United Kingdom is a meaningless generalization. Nor does headquarters' further assertion that "no complaints whatever have been received from the general-officer-commanding-in-chief of insufficiently trained reinforcements" mean very much.

Lt. General Crerar, the commanding officer to whom the headquarters' statement refers was the Chief of Staff when the ill-fated contingent was sent to Hong Kong. The investigation which the Chief Justice, Sir Lyman P. Duff, conducted into the selection and arrangements for the transportation of the Royal Rifles and the Winnipeg Grenadiers disclosed that some young soldiers with very little training were included in that expedition almost at the last minute. Although the Royal Commissioner chose to take the view that the addition of untrained men should not detract from the efficiency of a battalion going into dangerous places he admitted that six per cent. of the personnel in the Hong Kong force had not been fully trained. The Royal Commissioner also made this comment: "It is beyond question that it is better practice to send fully trained men overseas than it is to send men who are only partially trained."

The consequences of the incomplete training of these men on the efficiency of the whole expedition may be debatable—but the evidence at the inquiry was clear that some insufficiently trained men were permitted to go to Hong Kong.

If the Chief of Staff permitted this to occur on that occasion how much weight can be attached to the Defense headquarters' present reply to Conn Smythe's recent accusations when it states that the same senior officer, now commanding-in-chief in France, had made no complaint whatever about insufficiently trained reinforcements?

If this officer permitted incompletely trained men to go to Hong Kong is it not possible that he is accepting without demur half-trained reinforcements in France? Major Smythe names the units which received these untrained reinforcements.

The sending of insufficiently trained soldiers into battle is unfortunate at any time. It is an outrage that incompletely trained men should be forced to risk their lives when others with two and three years' training are being retained in Canada by the Government in order to bolster its hold on office.

149
WAR
EUROPEAN
1939
CANADA
ARMY
SMYTHE

950-881-813