

# Sir Samuel Hughes

## Early Militia Days

Sir Sam Hughes was a major supporter of the creation of a Canadian Militia for defence of the country. He believed it could be more effective than the small British regular forces stationed in Canada, and help to promote more autonomy within the nation. In 1897, Hughes was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel to command the 45<sup>th</sup> Battalion within the Militia forces.

Hughes would be one of the many Canadian volunteers to go over-seas to fight in the South African War in 1900. While there he liked to lie about what he accomplished, and stated many times that the British officers were incompetent. This led to him being dismissed by the British army and returned to Canada. Hughes believed that he had been wrongfully dismissed and "that he had been denied not one but two Victoria Cross awards for his bravery. The episode hardened his lack of respect into a lasting distrust of professional soldiers, be they British or Canadian (Robert Brown, 4)."

## Outbreak of War

Hughes had been a proponent of the Canadian made Ross Rifle as the weapon of choice for the Militia. He saw it as being symbolic of the volunteer spirit of the Canadian Militia. This would come back to haunt him in 1916, when he acknowledged that the Canadian forces should retain the rifle even with numerous reports of them jamming in battle, costing numerous Canadian lives.

## Moving Up the Ranks

Hughes had convinced Prime Minister Borden to change the rules allowing civilian minister of parliament to be promoted to the rank of Major-General. He was given this title in 1912, to create an equal within the Militia of that of the highest ranking British official in the regular forces. However, with this new found position he did a lot of good for the militia, bringing it up "to unprecedented levels of strength, improving equipment and training, constructing new armouries and drill-halls and pushing for a second dominion arsenal (Brown, 5)."

He did so at the expense of enlarging the regular forces.

Hughes would continually have the problem of discussing the superiority of Canadian equipment over British, even when it was not the case (Ross Rifle, poor boots and uniforms that disintegrated in the trenches). Hughes had been put in charge of the Shell Committee responsible for building the equipment for the war effort. He would use this position to hire old friends into positions where they could make extreme profit, while producing inferior equipment.



## End of His Military Career

"As the war grew in intensity and expense, as more and more men were shipped overseas, the voluntary spirit and pluck that characterized Hughes's leadership became out of place, inefficient, and outdated (Brown, 8)."

Hughes would end up losing control of the organization of the war effort back home to more competent business men.

At the front lines, the Canadian Corps had been fighting under British Command. Hughes failed to straighten out the issue of how the English and Canadian officers communicated with each other in the first two years of the war, resulting in numerous casualties. Hughes opposed Currie's promotion to Divisional and Corps Command, and was forced to resign his position as head of the Canadian forces on Nov. 9, 1916. At the end of the war, Hughes would complain heavily about the loss of lives under Currie's command, especially during the final battle of Cambrai. He stated that Currie had led "the needless massacre of our Canadian boys...he had sacrificed the lives of even more Canadian soldiers in his attack on Mons and should be tried summarily by court martial and punished so far as the law would allow (Brown, 9)."

## Source

Robert Craig Brown, "Hughes, Sir Samuel," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 15, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003-, accessed September 24, 2014, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/hughes\\_samuel\\_15E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/hughes_samuel_15E.html).