Mr. H.F.G. Letson
August 14, 1973

Interview ___, Tape 2, Track 1.

Mr. Letson: I was thinking of the period of 1918 and early '19 when the Officers Training Corps was disbanded. During the war it was necessary to have two years in the corps to qualify for your promotion from one year to another or to get your degree. There was some unrest after the armistice. In fact there was one incident which to my mind was quite a serious incident and had rather lasting implications in two phases. One was its effect on the C.O.T.C. and the other the effect on student government and discipline by the students council of the students of the university. Shortly after the armistice of November 11, 1918, I was horrified to see that they had built a scarecrow on the top of the science building and it was dressed up in a uniform....and considered a scarecrow. Well, when you consider that at that time every day brothers and friends were dying right and left in defence of Canada, the thought that they should defile the uniform in that way was revolting to everybody except those who did it. Nobody seemed to be able to find out who did it and of course Klinck and Co. were not particularly concerned about it. Following that there was another incident which was a serious incident. We were on parade about 150 strong outside the Arts building which was the only stone building there at Fairview. It had been the new building for the Vancouver General Hospital and we took it over before it was furnished. We were on parade when all of a sudden the whole parade was deluged from the third storey with a fire hose. It was on all the men and knocked some of them over. Fortunately

it didn't hit me and although I was quite lame and still in hospital, I hobbled up three flights of stairs to see if I could catch them. I thought as I went up that they wouldn't come down the stairs they might try the fire excape. Then I suddenly remembered that there was a hatch into the library which was on the third floor and that they wouldn't come down the fire excape but they'd go into the library and mix up with the students in there who were studying. So I went into the library and stood there, looked around for a while and I saw a couple of fellows who didn't seem to have any books. I turned around and saw that the back of their hands was absolutely black. So I went up to them and said, "What's your names?" They gave me their names. Then I said, "Were you on the roof?" Of course they couldn't deny it, their hands were black. So I got their names and reported them. They were up for trial before the students council. This is a full trial in the auditorium. That was the first trial or disciplinary action, I think, taken by the students council of U.B.C. They were convicted and I really can't recall what the sentence was. I think it was that they weren't allowed to get their degree with the other students, they weren't barred their degrees but they weren't to take part in the ceremonies and were censured in that way. So that established the principle that the student government had power over the students. That's why I mentioned this thing. I think this was the first major incident in the history of the University where the council really took action. They had their council who were students. I was also a student and the complainant on this case and there was a real break

between those who favoured the action these young vandals had taken and the others, many of whom had come back wounded or otherwise, or who had brothers killed and that sort of thing. So it established the principle that student government if properly administered can handle the problems of the student. Now I'm sure that in the last sixty years there have been many other instances where students have been up, but I thought it might be of interest to you to hear that story.

Mr. Specht: Yes, it is interesting.

Mr. Letson: Yes.

Mr. Specht: As you're describing these two events, do you think they sort of devided the campus in opinion?

Mr. Letson: It did to some extent. I'm afraid that many of the students who did these things which were disgraceful were not really bad people but just misguided in their attitude. Of course one can readily appreciate how you would be feeling to see a uniform of somebody who had died in it...put up as a scarecrow. They undoubtedly caused a rift. But it may have been a good thing to have brought this to their attention. Especially I think it was a good thing that the whole of the student body was present when the court was held. It was just like an ordinary court. Then shortly after the armistice they had some troubles at Toronto University on this business of having C.O.T.C. compulsory. They folded and said, "No, we're not going to do anything." Then of course Klinck and Co. had a great argument and they folded. That's when it went out of existence, I would say about April 1919. That's my memory of quite a long time ago.

Mr. Specht: After that it took 9 or 10 years before it came back.

Mr. Letson: Yes, because by that time, people who were thinking could see that the war to end all wars, wasn't really ending it. By 1928 the resurgence of Germany was coming along a bit and there were troubles in Europe. People were starting to think well, maybe we'll have to fight again....as it turned out.

Mr. Specht: In the early years of the war after you left the Pacific Defence, you went to Washington. You mentioned earlier that your role was in part procuring of military equipment.

Mr. Letson: That's right.

Mr. Specht: Was this for supplying the Canadian army?

Mr. Letson: The Canadian army yes...and as you know, the United States were not in the war at that time. Therefore it was a matter of some delicacy to get what we wanted and still keep within the law.

Mr. Specht: Did you deal directly with the American army?

Mr. Letson: The American Army Yes...in its various phases. Various branches of the American Army. As the military attache there, my duties were primarily directed to what is known as the branch of the staff. The American Army at that time was called G-2. It's primary duty was intelligence and therefore as military attache we gathered as much military intelligence as we could that would be helpful to the Americans and vice versa and we passed it back and forth.

Mr. Specht: Did you observe a difference in attitude between

the uU. S. Army and the Official Government position?

Mr. Letson: No, as far as I could gather there was the greatest co-operation but they felt, and I think quite rightly so, that it would have been premature to have gone into the war when the general public wasn't very much interested in another war in Europe. But so far as official Washington was concerned, they might just as well have been in the war as they were breaking the law right and left in favour of the Allies. They were most co-operative. I never found anything but the greatest of co-operation from all of them.

Mr. Specht: Did you observe anything which would have led to the lend/lease policy of Great Britain.

Mr. Letson: Well, that was really a matter between Great Britain and the United States. Under their legislation it was impossible for them to give away these things, but they could loan them or lease them...under their law. That was really the reason for the lend/lease thing starting. In other words I could loan you something provided I didn't give it to you.

Mr. Specht: After your post in Washington you were appointed adjutant general in Ottawa.

Mr. Letson: That's right. It was February 1942. I was promoted from Brigadeer to Major General and took over adjutant general which is the second branch of the staff. There's a chief of the general staff who is the co-ordinator for all branches of the staff. He is primarily charged with plans, operations, and training. Then there's the adjutant general whose primary duty is personel in the broadest sense of the term, discipline, recruitment, hospitalization, reinforcements, rehabilitation

and everything that has to do with personel.

Mr. Specht: In this capacity then, would you have dealt directly with all the militia units across the country....specifying the needs of the armed forces?

Mr. Letson: No we didn't directly deal with them. We deal through the various District Officer Commanding....or Area Commands later on. There was a Pacific Command, a Central Command, an Eastern Command. We would deal through their staff and they in turn would deal with the militia. That was the chain of command.

Mr. Specht: From the middle of 1942, until Dieppe, the forces weren't under pressure of recruitment were they? There hadn't been any action so there wouldn't be any need for replacements.

Mr. Letson: The recruitment kept up very well. Several times during the early phases of the war we shut down recruitment. It wasn't until 1942 that we could see that there might be a problem.

Mr. Specht: What was the policy at that time regarding recruitment?

Mr. Letson: It was a voluntary recruitment and I really forget when the National Resources Mobilization Act came in. It was sometime during the time when there was recruitment and then there was compulsory service .....home service for home defence. I think it was in the latter part of '42.

Mr. Specht: I bel ve in 1940 the government held a plebiscite to release them from their previous pledge not to have any conscription.

Mr. Letson: That's right. That was for overseas service.

Mr. Specht: I believe it was 1941 when they introduced conscription for home defence.

Mr. Letson: I think it was '41, you're quite right.

Mr. Specht: Until the Canadian forces were very deeply involved in the battles of Europe in Italy and France, the policy was more one of preparedness, don't you think?

Mr. Letson: No, it was voluntary service. We always felt that if we could go on the voluntary principle it was the best way because anyone who came in, came of their own volition. But it's a very untidy way to do things. You never know how many men you're going to have and you know nothing about the action and how many men you're going to require in action. You can estimate but that's it.

Mr. Specht: What was your position on conscription later on when McKenzie King did use forces for overseas service?

Mr. Letson: Well, it was an absolute necessity. It had to be done. You can't allow your fellow soldiers to be fighting an enemy in a bitter struggle and not support them. We had all these men in Canada trained. It was unfortunate that it was this political issue which was largely due to the Quebec situation. Actually we only missed the boat so far as voluntary recruitment was concerned, not by the numbers we had volunteer...but we had them in the wrong packages. We had too many artillery, too many army service corps and too few infantry. That is a very fascinating problem as too how many of each category you train. It's dependant first of all on the severity of the action when you're in action and out of the line. It depends on the time factor.

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Whether the action is intense, whether it's ordinary or it it's a no casualty type of thing. Then there's the question of recovery. How many men will go to hospital? How long are they goin to be in hospital before they can rejoin their unit? The other thing is how fit will they be when the come out of hospital? Will they be front line soldiers or would they be able to do a job just as well as a fit man back of the line somewhere? So all these are problems then you have to figure out, what is the enemy action going to be? What percentage are going to be killed and wounded in the infantry, artillery...? That will depend, of course all on the type of warfare. If you have strafing from the air, the people in the back are just as liable to be killed as those in the front lines. Whereas if you have air superiority and the enemy are excluded from coming over your lines, the fellows that are going to have all the casualties are the ones in the front. It's interesting that after the Sicilian invasion, I questioned the rate that the British had worked out over a number of years....what percentage should go to infantry, what should go to artillery and so forth. I questioned that and I said that I was wrong...I wrote another paper on it which I'd give a thousand dollars if I had a copy of it. It was pointing out that I thought they were wrong. They weren't putting enough into infantry. Well, as it turned out I was quite right. We had all kinds of fellows over in the other corps but we were short in infantry. We only missed the boat by about 1%. But we shouldn't have missed it at all. If we had been able to predict. Now I'm not saying that it's possible to predict. Instead of putting 10% into

Army Service Corps, we'd put 5% in there and put the other 5 in the infantry. So at the end of the war just before the conscription crisis came, we were transferring people from one corps into another. The United States had the same problem. In fact General Marshall just went through the Officers Training Corps and took them all and turned them all into infantry because they were short at about the Battle of the Bulge time.

Mr. Specht: What factors do you think were responsible for Canadian forces being short of infantry?

Mr. Letson: Well, because we didn't put enough in to train. We put too many in other places. You have a thousand men. Your army is made up of so much infantry, so much artillery, so much army service corps, so much ordinance and so on. Well if you put them all in ordinance, then you have nobody to fight in the front. If you put them all in the front then you have no ordinance to support them.

Mr. Specht: Yes, but this was based upon the predictions of what kind of warfare was going to be fought. I wonder was it because of the campaigns in Italy...

Mr. LEtson: Well, the campaign in Italy did affect us to some extent. You had two headquarters. You double up when you have two armies, one in England and one in France. But the primary fault in my opinion was that we did not put enough people in to train as infantry. You can't take a fellow that's trained as an artillery man there and throw him overnight to become an infantry. He's used to handling the big gun and he doesn't necessarily know very much about handling the weapons of the infantry.

Mr. Specht: Also in the latter years of the war the Allies had almost complete control of the air. That means that all the rear operations wouldn't suffer at all.

Mr. Letson: That's right and it's quite contrary to what happened in the first of the war when the Germans had air superiority. It's a fascinating study and a typical example of the 'fog of war'. That's how it is because you can't predict acurately what's going on. Then our casualties were heavier and the Canadians were involved in intense action for longer periods than had been predicted when these tables were made up. We took the British tables and of course they suffered the same way. They were particularly short of officers so when our home defence divisions here were broken up as they became unnecessary we were able to give to the British on loan, which was called Can Loan, 200 or 300 highly trained officers many of whom reverted from being Majors and in one case a Lieutenant Colonel to Lieutenants to go when the invasion of France took place. They suffered very heavily but no heavier casualties than would be expected of Lieutenants. A Lieutenant is the highest casualty rate of the platoon commanders as a rule.

Mr. Specht: The National Defence Department had a policy regarding C.O.T.C. encouraging students to stay in university until they graduated before enlisting in the forces. Were you aware of that policy at the time? Did you approve of it? A student should get his education and also get his ranking qualification before he enlisted.

Mr. Letson: Well, we felt that not knowing how long the war was going to last it was well for them to finish. I don't know

that that was a firm policy, was it? That they had to finish their education.

Mr. Specht: It wasn't a compulsory kind of set up, it was just a government encouragement to do this. As long as you take the compulsory military training on campus then you won't be called up and the official opinion is that you should graduate first.

Mr. Letson: Yes, well, you get the best of two worlds then. You get an officer who has a good education and during that time has had a basic military training...and beyond his basic military training. He's a qualified officer when he comes out.

Mr. Specht: How did you feel about dividing up the Canadian forces when they were overseas?

Mr. Letson: Well the poor Air Force were scattered to the four winds of the earth. We resisted that policy in the first war. When Sir Sam Hughes was the minister of National Defence and when the first Canadian contingent went over, Kitchener said to him, "Well, yes, we'll take you're men. We'll put a batallion here and a batallion there." Sam Hughes, who to my mind was a great man said, "To hell with that. We're going to fight as a unit or not at all! We don't mind taking British officers who are trained to handle larger bodies of men than we had trained officers in Canada. But you're not going to break us up." He won his battle with Kitchener who was, I think, one of the stupidest men that ever happened. The Germans in the first war, did us a good turn when they sunk the Hampshire and down went Kitchener.....as he was out of the way. He blocked

everything that was forward looking. Sir Sam Hughes happened to be on the train when I came back wounded when I landed in Saint John, New Brunswick. He was on the same train and he had me in every day for three days to talk to me. I was only a lieutenant and he'd say, "What do you think of Sir Arthur Currey? I don't think he did right in this and that." Of course as a young lieutenant of 19 or 20 you wouldn't think of speaking about the Commander in Chief. If I'd had a tape recorder I wouldn't need to work for the rest of my life.... the stories he told me about South Africa. I must tell you one. Sam Hughes came from Ontario and he wanted to get out to the South African war. Canada sent two contingents..small contingents too to the South African War. Sam wasn't very popular. He was a Member of Parliament, I think and not very popular with the military authorities. He couldn't get out...but eventually he got to South Africa and joined up with the Canadians as a Colonel or Lieutenant Colonel. What his capacity was, I'm not quite clear. Anyway he told me this story. He said, "Now I remember one day riding up to the front.....bullets were flying around everywhere. I was wondering what to do when I saw 'way up at the front in the British lines a young Highlander there and he tied a white handkerchief to the bayonet on his rifle and was waving it to the enemy." He said, "I didn't know whether to draw my revolver from my holster and shoot him but I thought of something else." Now this is a true story. He said, "I felt in my saddlebag and I pulled out a Union Jack I had there." He said,"I galloped up to this boy. Here my boy, whenever you feel like that tie this to your bayonet

instead of that white flag!" And he said, "Do you know, that fellow rose to be a Major and won the Distinguished Service Order." Now whether it's a true story or not..... but stories were like that. They were just fantastic. I believe it. It was a wonderful three days, that train trip from Saint John to Winnipeg.

Mr. Specht: Was Sam Hughes quite adament about keeping the Canadian forces together?

Mr. Letson: Oh yes, he won the battle there. So, we had no trouble about that.

Mr. Specht: He set a precedent then, by doing that.

Mr. Letson: Oh, absolutely....because the Canadians fought better together than they would....as was evidenced in the first war when we had the division of the Canadian corps. We won our battle there. But there were various factors that entered into it, political and otherwise. We'd been in England since December 1939 and it was not on to '43 and they hadn't been in action except for the Dieppe raid. Our senior officers had no experience what ever in battle in handling brigades, divisions, corps. It was felt that it would be imprudent to trust anyone of them with a Canadian Corps as such going into battle for the first time when none of them had been blooded. Consequently they sent a number of officers to North Africa for training but still it was felt that we should have at least a division and its staff that had some battle experience. So that was the reason for the dispatch of the 1st Division. I think it was a wise decision because they gained a great deal

of experience which according to such great authorities as Lord Alexander, can only be gained in battle. You can't learn it at school. You can't learn it in exercises.

End of Track I

Interview ___, Tape 2, Track 2.

Mr. Letson: It was bitterly opposed by General McNaughton. I had the unhappy task of carrying the message to him in England at his headquarters that it had been decided that the 1st Division would go to Italy. He said to me, "You and Ken Stuart will be responsible for returning us to colonial status again if you do this." Ken Stuart was the Chief of the General Staff and my superior. He was ill then. I knew he had 'flu and all that but he was very bitter about the whole thing.. ...unreasonably so, in my opinion.

Mr. Specht: The Canadians stayed on in Italy for a long time after that.

Mr. Letson: Yes, we sent out another division....and they joined up finally in Europe much to Lord Alexanders sorrow that he was losing the Canadians. He was Commander in Chief in the Mediterranean. But he quite agreed that they should go. He always agreed that the Canadians should fight as a unit and that was our only thought that they could fight as a unit....but they should go in with experienced officers, batallion, brigade and division commanders.

Mr. Specht: Would you then say that the experience in Italy did add up for the whole Canadian army. So when they were fighting in France there was experience to draw upon which would help them in their campaigns?

Mr. Letson: Oh, definitely. No question about that in my mind.

Mr. Specht: Do you think you were sacrificing some autonomy by joining one part of the Canadian Army to the British 8th Army?

Mr. Letson: Well we were always under the command of a higher formation.....army groups, you see. No I don't think we sacrificed any autonomy at all because we finally joined up for the final episode. We couldn't have had the whole of the corps go in at the landing, I don't think. I don't think they would have put them all in at the landing anyhow. So I think it worked out alright. It did stretch our reinforcing pools a bit. If you have two reinforcing pools, one in England and one in Italy working at the same time, it does take a staff for each. So it was a bit of a strain in that case. That would not have occurred if we had been one unit entirely.

Mr. Specht: As you had some personal contact with General McNaughton, what do you think was the meaning of his phrase that Canada was becoming more of a colony?

Mr. Letson: Well, he said reverting to colonial status. In other words that we were breaking up our army and putting it under British command. Well it was going to be under British command anyhow.

Mr. Specht: The chain of command was broken, though, because it would be the British and then the overall Canadian commander and then all the Canadian forces. Whereas in this case it would be the British who had command over one part of the Canadian army which was going to supersede the Canadian control over that part.

Mr. LEtson: Well, no it never did. Theoretically the Commander of the Canadian troops anywhere has direct access to Canada and he can refuse if he so chooses...any order that he feels is detrimental to the safety of the command. That was always

included in any orders that attatched troops to the British or to any other formation.

Mr. Specht: In 1944 to 1946, you returned to Washington?

Mr. Letson: Yes.

Mr. Specht: In what capacity was this?

Mr. Letson: I was Chief of the Military Mission. I was senior. I was the Major General. There was a Rear Admiral and an Air Vice Marshall. Those were the three heads of the three services. Our job was to be a liason with the combined Chiefs of Staff and to keep Ottawa informed as to what the plans were for the future and the present. Of course as the war came to a conclusion we worked then with the Americans in the formation of the Pacific force which was never utilized and to work out whether we'd go on British War establishments or whether we'd go on the American Table of Organization as to whether we would have our own line of communication regarding supplies, ammunition and so forth, whether we would adopt American weapons... That was one of the big problems I dealt with when I was there during that time towards the end. But it was mostly keeping Ottawa informed and keeping in touch with the whole situation.

Mr. Specht: By this stage in the war, the States had tremendous military power. Did you feel that there was a harmonious relationship between the Canadian and American forces in this way? Was there any sort of assumption on the part of the American forces that the Canadian forces should pretty well follow what the American forces do?

Mr. Letson: No, I didn't sense that at all. General Marshall

who was the Chief of the General Staff and senior Commander was always meticulous about such matters. There were occasions where they made decisions, undoubtedly, forgetting about Canada, decisions which did effect us. But once it was drawn to their attention, especially on the higher levels..they... never did anything deliberately.

Mr. Specht: It was really then from a lack of information about a decision rather than...

Mr. Letson: Yes, and when you consider the size of our forces compared to the tremendous forces they had and the fact that they were fighting well, two wars at once, one in the Pacific and one in Europe. My experience was that they never presumed to order us around in any way. On the other hand some of the senior British officers were inclined to think that we were part of their outfit. I can remember one or two instances.

Mr. Specht: Would you recall one?

Mr. Letson: We had a bat alion in Jamaica doing guard duty there and there was a flare up between British Honduras and Honduras which had been going on for a hundred years. To my horror and amazement I got a call from this officer who said, "I've told my Brigadeer that your battalion will be ready to go to Honduras." I said, "The Hell you have!" I said, "You have no command over them any more than you have over me. I'm informing Ottawa on the phone right now." "Oh," he said, "you're not going to do that." I said, "You're damn right I am." He was a good friend of mine. McCreedy was his name. I said, "As those troops were sent to Jamaica and they cannot be sent anywhere else without the authority of the Canadian government

for it." "Oh," he said, "is that so?" I said, "Yes, you knew that too, Gordon. You knew it. You knew it." But the Americans never tried any of that stuff. They knew better than that. He said, "You're not going to tell Ottawa, are you?" I said, "Yes I am." Within five minutes I went to the phone and called Murchie who was then the Chief of Staff and he said, You did quite right."

Mr. Specht: After the war and until 1952, you were secretary to the Governor General?

Mr. Letson: That's right.

Mr. Specht: Then after that you were on a commission for the reorganization of the militia.

Mr. Letson: That's right. We travelled all over Canada studying it. There'd been so many forms of militia since the early days of the French regime in 1660.....in fact our Canadian Army ante-dates Cromwell's army, you know.

Mr. Specht: Really?

Mr. Letson: Well, if you count the French Regime. So, they've been organized in various forms and every minister that comes along always thinks that he had a better idea. Maybe it's a good idea and everybody says that this will be the last reorganization. But it wasn't five years after our report that there was another report came in....and it reorganized things. And after that there was another and then came along Hellyer with his grandiose scheme of mucking up the whole works which he did.

Mr. Specht: What were the major proposals in your report? That came out in 1955?

Mr. Letson: Yes. It's difficult to say what our major proposals

were. Our major proposals were that there should be a regular army and the militia more or less on the same scale that it was prior to the war. So instead of having too many units we'd have enough to look after the needs of the various localities. That was a difficult task because some units had to be disbanded. It's always a heartbreak to those who'd served in the unit to have it broken up. For instance, the Irish Fusiliers which was a good unit, but it didn't have a war history behind it from either the First or the Second War although it had sent many, many men from its ranks, it had never served. So we felt that there were sufficient infantry units in Vancouver, to leave them just as they were. In some places we stood down units and in other places instituted new units...but now not many.

Mr. Specht: Was the general trend towards consolidation?

Mr. Letson: Yes, and to give more responsibility to grouping of the units. To go back in Vancouver to what we had before the war.....a Vancouver group, you see....with a group commander. Well they've pretty well reverted to that now. You have your militia area and you militia colonel and so forth.

Mr. Specht: You still saw the C.O.T.C. as being a major source of officers though?

Mr. Letson: We did. The C.O.T.C. sent a fair proportion to the regular army in the P.O.T.P. phase of it but in the post war years it never seemed to attract many officers graduating from C.O.T.C. to the militia. I think that was one of the reasons that the regular army were able to say with some authority, "What's the use of keeping this up. They're not going into the militia." I always said that even if they don't go into the militia, they're still trained.....the same as prior to the war. The R.M.C.,

Royal Military College, at one time there were only three vacancies out of each class that could go to the regular army and the rest could go to the militia. Some didn't have any vacancies in the militia so they were just out. But when the war came they were trained officers, they joined up and they were there. So for the money involved, I think it was a very short sighted policy.

Mr. Specht: The squeeze on the C.O.T.C. began in the late fifties. One of the reasons was that the army complained that there weren't enough graduates going into the militia at that time. But R.O.T.P. which was instituted in the early fifties it was compulsory so it was easy to see that R.O.T.P. was paying off/in terms of officers....not like the C.O.T.C.

Mr. Letson: Well they had to in the R.O.T.P. because they had their fees paid and everything else.

Mr. Specht: Don't you think too, that in the post war period the armies really required less manpower but more specialized people?

Mr. Letson: Yes, I think that's a fair observation.

Mr. Specht: The Western Nations seemed to be moving away from mass armies.

Mr. Letson: Yes that's true. But you see our armies are very low in regard to our population if you compare the armed forces of other nations. I'm not saying it's right or wrong, but we're on the low side. I think before the war, our regular army was the lowest per capita in the world except for Guatamala. (chuckles) That's true! We only had 3,000 all together in our forces before the war.

Mr. Specht: What did you think about integration when it started to come about?

Mr. Letson: Well, I'm very opposed to it in its present form. I think that there were certain things that were underway and could have been proceded with and reached the same objective of doing away with overlapping and wastefulnes. For instance in the pay services. I don't think it matters too much where you get your pay from. So there could be one pay corps. The same as the chaplain services, I don't think it matters to religion whether you wear a Navy uniform or what. It's not too important. But as far as putting sailors in these green jumpers....taking away their....I think it's absolutely ludicrous! A sailor has a tradition that he wants to be a sailor and all other Navies are different. So Hellyer, the big brain, thought that he could do something that no other nation in the world was going to be able to do. I feel that it will take another 30 years to eradicate the damage which he's done. It's really gradually working out that way. Everybody wants to be distinctive to some extent....no matter whether you're in civilian life or business life or anything else.

Mr. Specht: You're emphasizing mainly the psychological effect.

Mr. Letson: That's right. After all, what was it Napoleon said? "Moral is ~~the~~ to the physical as three to one." In other words the will to fight and the pride in the unit, pride in not letting the side down. It's something like a baseball team or football team....anything you like. That was destroyed to a large extent by trying to make them all one. I'm all for co-operation and we were doing it. I can give you an example in Washington when

I went there as head of the mission. We were granted two cars and drivers for the Army, two cars and drivers for the Air Force and two cars and drivers for the Navy. That was six cars. Our officers were on one side of the Potomac and the Pentagon was on the other and we'd often get calls to go back and forth and our taxi bills, even with the six cars, was getting pretty high. Yet the Army would go out and there'd be two Navy cars and two Air Force cars sitting there, but they couldn't use them. We'd have to get a taxi. So I said, "Why don't we make a pool out of this thing?" The Navy fellows all said, "Fine." The Air Force fellows said, "Fine." But who's going to run it??? I said, "I don't give a damn who you get to run it. Get a Navy..." The AirForce said, "Oh no..no." I said get an Air Force fellow and the Navy said no. But they said they would agree if I'd give up the staff sergeant to run it. I said, "Alright, I'll take somebody else to drive me around. I don't give a damn." So he ran it. We pooled the cars and the taxi bill was over. Now that's the sort of thing that can be done by co-operation. And that phase of it is working out well now. There's lots of things that have worked out well. But he went too far too quickly, in my opinion....by making them all wear the same uniform. When you've had a tradition of Navy or Merchant Marine for generations in the family....you don't want to get into the same uniform as the Army or the Air Force. You want to be a little distinctive. That's where I think he destroyed more than he gained . He said he was going to save a lot of money on uniforms...well of course that's all nonsense. The amount of money spent to re-uniform the whole outfit, I'm sure it cost more than the thousands of

old uniforms they had kicking around.

Mr. Specht: In the 1960's you were a civilian.

Mr. Letson: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Specht: You were a resident in Ottawa which is your home now.

Mr. Letson: Yes, that's right. I've been president of the Dominion of Canada Rifles Association and maintained my interest as I do today in that respect.

Mr. Specht: Do you remember what your reaction was when you heard that they were considering disbanding the C.O.T.C.?

Mr. Letson: Yes, I do. The very strong reaction I had was that it was a very short sighted policy. I agreed and nobody could refute the fact that they weren't gettin the officers into the militia like they wanted. I couldn't understand why they didn't get the officers they wanted. I don't understand it yet. But I still felt that the C.O.T.C. should be kept up for those who wanted it. I didn't want it to be compulsory by any means. I hate the compulsory idea. But even if they didn't join they had had that training and I thought it made better citizens of the lads. It made them available if necessary for a war. There was an educated man who should be an officer. If he hadn't had any training he'd likely have to be drafted into something else right away and all his education and training as a leader is gone.

Mr. Specht: Do you think there's anything to the point that because the armed forces in the future were going to be smaller and the positions probably more specialized that there would be less need to draw from the civilian ranks.....even people

who had previously had some officers training.

Mr. Letson: I don't think that was a factor. I think it was really, as it always is as far as the armed forces in Canada and Great Britain and elsewhere is concerned, they're faced with so many demands and with rising costs of equipment...to keep the equipment up to date, where are you going to get the money? The politicians give you so much money. How're you going to spend it? Well they had to spend it as they see, to the best advantage. If they see no immediate response to the money that's been spent on C.O.T.C. somebody says, "Why not do away with them and we'd save what ever it was." It wasn't a big sum of money you know....compared to the budget. That's why I think the fairest thing to say is that it was a short sighted policy.

Mr. Specht: Did you know that the quota at U.B.C. that was set by Ottawa was 15. That was very, very small compared to the previous. That's for C.O.T.C. Mind you R.O.T.P. was in addition to that.

Mr. Letson: 15, eh?

Mr. Specht: I wonder if in an unofficial capacity you spoke to people or corresponded with people when they were trying to disband the C.O.T.C. trying to persuade people who you knew personally to reconsider the decision?

Mr. Letson: Oh, I did, yes. I was talking to the chaps that I knew on the staff in Ottawa. The fellow that must know more about it that anybody is president McKenzie. He was very, very, opposed to this. He asked me what I thought of it and I agreed with him entirely. It was a short sighted policy.

I think you'd find that he could tell you quite a lot about what went on then. I wasn't personally involved in it although I was ~~next~~ our ex-commanding officer, I did what I could indirectly. But I knew that once these decisions are made it's pretty hard to change them.

Mr. Specht: Did you speak to anyone in the armed services?

Mr. Letson: Oh yes, I spoke to a number of people about it.

Mr. Specht: Did you speak to any politicians?

Mr. Letson: No, I keep clear of them...(chuckles).

End of Track II