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THE CANADIAN MILITIA  
1867 - 1900

A Political and Social Institution

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of this report is to correlate the research already completed or readily available on the Canadian Militia and Canadian defence policy in the period 1867 - 1900. The evidence is neither complete nor is it appropriately weighted. The intention is to provide semi-processed raw material from which a more balanced and briefer chapter may be developed. For the period up to 1890, an attempt has been made to deal with specific areas of interest; thereafter a more strictly chronological form has been adopted.
2. Considerable areas of evidence have not been examined. The records of a government department for a third of a century are substantial in themselves. Added to that is a wealth of material in newspapers and in contemporary pamphlets and books. Much of the field has been wormholed by specialists in regimental history, in military traditions and even by those who become enthusiastic about badges and buttons. Recently, however, there would appear to be several students who have been trying to come to a better and wider understanding of Canada's military institutions in the period after Confederation. This may produce the sort of sifting of material which has been quite impossible



in a research period of five months.

3. In this report, areas which have been adequately covered by readily available secondary sources have not been dealt with in detail. The background to the period has been covered by another study. The military campaign in the Northwest in 1885 has been very lightly sketched. The report ends with the removal of General Hutton in February, 1900. Like any closing date, it is far from satisfactory for his career marked the beginning of a period of military reform and expansion in Canada and the departure of General Gascoigne in 1898 might be a more satisfactory terminal date for a study which is so largely based on the Militia as a social and political institution. Since battles and campaigns have a small place in the history of this period (and even a smaller place in this account) other elements have been allowed to dominate, chiefly the Militia as a factor in Canadian self-government within the British Empire, the Militia as an area of conflict for the doctrine of ministerial responsibility and the Militia as a social and political institution.

#### THE MILITIA ACT OF 1868

4. Although it has no very prominent place in the British North America Act of 1867, defence was a major issue in the negotiations which preceded the formation of the Dominion of Canada. The earlier conferences took place amidst a general apprehension about United States policy after the Civil War. Would Northern armies be turned against the last major British possessions in North America? With the conclusion of the American Civil War, these fears passed but they were replaced by apprehension at the activities



of the Fenian Brotherhood. This movement believed that it could serve the cause of Ireland by attacking British rule in Canada. While its military capacity did not prove to be particularly formidable, its threats were a continuing source of anxiety to the Government even up to the turn of the century. In forming a federal union in British North America, Canadian political leaders had no desire to forfeit British military protection from the United States. On the other hand, the British Government was anxious about its military liabilities in North America and conscious of a strong public sentiment against them. There was a widespread feeling that any conceivable British garrison would be no match for the American might and that British battalions would some day share the gloomy fate of the legions of Varus.

5. In the fall of 1863, Lieutenant Colonel W.F.D. Jervis of the Royal Engineers visited Canada and prepared an extensive report on the defences of Canada. The major centres of fortification were at Quebec and Kingston but there were British troops scattered in garrisons further west. Jervis felt that it would be impossible to achieve naval superiority on the Upper Lakes and on Lake Erie and that it would only be possible on Lake Ontario if the canals were enlarged to allow ironclads to come up the St. Lawrence. Without control of Lake Ontario, no defence of Canada West could be possible and the garrisons should be withdrawn to Canada East and concentrated at Montreal. The defence of Montreal was essential to Canadian defence for the capture of the city, only a few score miles from the American border, would sever communications with the interior and cut off the retreat of any forces stationed there. The fortification



of Montreal received a high priority in Jervois's report and he also recommended improvements in the defences of Quebec. Jervois was in Canada at the time of the Quebec Conference of 1864. For it, he prepared a second report, more cautiously adjusted to the limited means available to the Canadian government. He arrived at an estimate of \$8,770,000 to cover the cost of gunboats, works and armament.<sup>1</sup> Since the amount was equivalent to the annual revenue from all sources for the Province of Canada,<sup>2</sup> it was a daunting figure for the Canadian politicians.

6. Jervois's report was also studied by the British government. The British Government eventually agreed to improve the fortifications of Quebec but it refused to consider even guaranteeing a Canadian loan to cover the cost of defending Montreal. On 21 January 1865, Edward Cardwell, the Colonial Secretary, sent his government's views to Canada. While the British authorities accepted Canadian reluctance to assume heavy defence burdens while negotiations for closer union were in progress, and while they would proceed to strengthen Quebec, they looked to Canada to undertake the fortification of Montreal.<sup>3</sup>

This memorandum formed part of the basis for the negotiations in the spring of 1865. At a series of meetings with British ministers, including Cardwell and William Gladstone, the Canadian representatives were pushed closer and closer to definite commitments to participate financially in the defence of Canada. On May 19th, the opening meeting was held at the Colonial Office. Macdonald was left to explain his mission and did so at length. He spoke of Canadian anxiety for efficient defence in connection with Britain and of Canadian willingness to make every exertion in men and money. In the course of the following week, the Canadians agreed to proceed with implementing the recom-



mendations of the Jervois Report, with the exception of deepening the waterways, the prerequisite of moving warships into the Great Lakes.<sup>4</sup> In the course of the conference, the Canadians made an undertaking to increase their annual expenditure on the Militia from \$300,000 to \$1,000,000 and to train the Militia annually while Confederation was pending. They were also committed to the construction of fortifications at Montreal. The British had also adjusted their stand. They were now willing to guarantee the loan for the Montreal fortifications provided the Canadians provided satisfactory security and the Canadian Parliament acted first.<sup>5</sup> The Cabinet also gave the Canadians the assurance of strong support in carrying Confederation and in renewing the Reciprocity Treaty with the United States. Moreover, as George Brown exultantly informed his wife:

We have received strong assurance that all the troops at England's disposal & the whole Navy of Gt. Britain will be used for the defence of every portion of Canada in the event of war. We have got quit of the burden of five millions of dollars for works of defence. We have choked off the cry that we will do nothing towards defence.<sup>6</sup>

7. Although they antedate the period of Confederation, the arrangements of 1865 were of importance in two spheres. The Jervois Report remained the only serious, professional study of the defence of Canada until the Defence Committee of 1898 and its recommendations for the defence of Montreal remained an unrelieved concern for military authorities for many years. The offer to spend \$1,000,000 annually on the Militia remained a background principle in establishing the defence estimates for many years thereafter.

8. The first Dominion cabinet was formed on 1 July 1867.



The second senior minister was Sir George Etienne Cartier,<sup>x</sup> Macdonald's loyal colleague from the Province of Quebec. With his free choice of most of the 13 portfolios, Cartier chose to become the first Minister of Militia and Defence. It was, as he explained to the House of Commons and to several public meetings, the most difficult post in the Government.<sup>7</sup> Cartier had good reason to believe it. In 1866, there had been a serious engagement with the Fenians at Ridgeway and there had been other minor incursions along the Border. In 1867, there were further alarms. Along with the very real responsibilities of the Militia, the new Minister was aware that military expenditures were basically unpopular in Canada. In 1862, he and Macdonald had been defeated through their advocacy of a Militia Bill rather less ambitious than it had subsequently become the practice to present regularly. There would also be the difficulty of extending the Militia system of the old province of Canada to the new members of the Dominion. The portfolio offered several real challenges to a veteran political leader.

9. In 1867, the Volunteer Militia of the province of Canada had just been increased, in a year, from under 20,000 to just under 34,000 men, all of them volunteers. It was headed by a British officer, Colonel Patrick MacDougall, who held the title of Adjutant-General. There were two assistant adjutant Generals, Lieutenant Colonel Walker Powell for Canada West and Lieutenant Colonel Casault for Canada East. The men were armed with the Snider rifle, a breech loading conversion of the Enfield muzzle loader. There were 30,000 of them in the hands of the Militia. The cavalry were armed with the Spencer carbine. Some 107 drill sheds were built or building in the two central provinces.<sup>8</sup> While later generations were made aware of the selfless enthusiasm

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x Cartier was christened "George", not "Georges".



with which the Volunteers gave their service during the Fenian Raids, contemporaries were not so sure. In his Report for 1867, Colonel MacDougall warned that the most serious weakness in the Volunteer system, after an experience of almost three years was the feeling of the members of the force that they were contributing out of all proportion to their neighbours. While they paid their taxes, they also gave their service and their pay was hardly an adequate compensation. The Adjutant-General suggested that since the State had the right to demand some sacrifice from every citizen for the common defence, there might be some pecuniary sacrifice from which the Volunteer would be exempt. Other problems of the force were equally fundamental. Rifles might be externally clean but they were so dirty inside that they could not be fired. The officers commanding the various corps of which the Militia was composed neglected to make the necessary returns to Headquarters. At the same time, Colonel Casault in Quebec could report that many companies had been formed whose services could not be accepted by the government.<sup>9</sup> Such observations were to form a consistent refrain in Militia Reports for many years to come.

10. After delays due to illness and to preoccupation with other government business, Cartier was able to give his full attention to a Bill which would extend the Militia system of Ontario and Quebec to the other two provinces of the Dominion. It was introduced to the House of Commons on 31 March 1868 in a five hour speech which Cartier regarded as one of his major parliamentary performances. The purpose of the Bill was to give Canada the means, in ordinary times, of looking after her own defences. Military force, he declared, was the crown of a national edifice of population, territory and sea. By the time that the Bill had become law on 22 May 1868, it had evoked general support from both sides of the House and Richard Cartwright, a Liberal, had gone so



far as to admit that the defeat of the Militia Bill of 1862 was an unpatriotic action.<sup>10</sup>

11. Because the Act of 1868 had such a central place in establishing the post-Confederation Militia, it will be necessary to examine it in some detail. It provided that the command in chief would be vested in the Queen, to be exercised personally or through the Governor General.<sup>11</sup> The Minister of Militia and Defence was charged with the administration of Militia affairs and with the initiative in spending money.<sup>12</sup> The conscriptive aspect of the old Canadian Militia system was carried over to the new and a considerable part of the Act is devoted to it. The Militia was to consist, in fact, of all the male inhabitants of Canada between 18 and 60 and not otherwise exempted, although all able bodied males capable of bearing arms might be conscripted for the levee en masse.<sup>13</sup> The men were divided into four classes depending on their age and marital status.<sup>14</sup> The Militia was divided into an Active and a Reserve portion, the Active Militia to consist of Volunteer, Regular and Marine Militia. The first was to consist of corps raised by voluntary enlistment, the second of men who either volunteered or were balloted to serve in it and the last was to consist of sailors and seamen and those who were normally engaged in "navigation Dominion waters."<sup>15</sup> All volunteer corps in existence before the Act were held to have survived it but they had to be remustered within three months of its passage and all the members who had not previously indicated that they would be withdrawn would be re-enrolled. Thereafter, no volunteer could retire without giving six months

\* The 1st Class were those between 18 and 30, unmarried or childless widowers. The 2nd Class were the unmarried or the childless widowers between 30 and 45. The 3rd Class were the married men or widowers with children between 18 and 45 while the 4th Class were those between 45 and 60.



notice to his commanding officer. The term of service in the Volunteer Militia was set at three years.<sup>16</sup> In the other two components, it was two years, with the further proviso that men could not be compelled to serve another engagement until all the men in the same area belonging to the first three classes had been given a turn.<sup>17</sup>

12. For Militia purposes, Canada was divided into nine military districts and these districts were to be further subdivided into brigade, regimental and company divisions.<sup>18</sup> These further subdivisions were chiefly designed for the enrolment of the Reserve Militia, consisting of all those who were not involved in the Active Militia. Officers were to be appointed in the company and regimental districts and the company officers were to complete their enrolment by actual enquiry at each house before 28 February 1869. A complete nominal list of the Reserve Militia would thus be available and it was to be renewed at two yearly intervals thereafter.<sup>19</sup> Certain people were reserved from this service, including Judges, clergy, professors and all teachers in religious orders, the wardens, guards and keepers of penitentiaries and lunatic asylums, those disabled by bodily infirmity and the sons and sole supports of widows. Except in case of war or insurrection, half-pay and retired military and naval officers, seafarers actually employed, pilots and their apprentices, and school teachers were also exempted. Those who objected to bearing arms from religious scruple were to be exempt under conditions and regulations which were left up to the Governor in Council.<sup>20</sup> There was also provision for balloted men to purchase exemption for \$30 in time of peace or by arranging a substitute at any time.<sup>21</sup>



13. The Active Militia was to consist of troops of cavalry, field batteries of artillery, companies of mounted infantry, companies of engineers, brigades and batteries of garrison artillery, battalions and companies of infantry and naval and marine corps. The military train, medical staff and other services were only to be formed when required.<sup>22</sup> The services of volunteers might be accepted but their commanding officers would be responsible for keeping them at full strength and they might be disbanded if they became inefficient or weak in numbers.<sup>23</sup> There is a curious off-handedness in references to the only existing component of the Militia. Matters were more definite in reference to command. There was to be an Adjutant General, "a person educated in the military profession" and a field officer in the regular army. He was to be a colonel and to be paid \$3,000 per year. There was also to be a Deputy Adjutant General, for whom no qualifications were specified, to be a lieutenant colonel and to earn \$2,240 per year. There were also to be Deputy Adjutant General in each of the Military Districts, also lieutenant colonels but paid only \$1,200 per year.<sup>24</sup> For other officers in the Militia, the transition from the old to the new system was to be accomplished by placing them all on the retired list and then appointing them back to the Active Militia.<sup>25</sup> The maximum peacetime rank was to be lieutenant colonel save for the Adjutant General. The relative rank of the Militia officers would be the same as in the regular army but regular officers would always be senior in the same rank, a provision necessary if the Militia was to work in harmonious subordination to the British garrison.<sup>26</sup>

13. The new Act also made detailed provision for the administration and training of the force. While officers were to furnish their own arms, clothing and accoutrements,



the government would provide the men with uniforms which might be replaced at five yearly intervals.<sup>27</sup> The officers and 40,000 of the men of the Militia might be drilled for eight to sixteen days each year and for each day's drill of three hours, each officer, non-commissioned officer and man was to be entitled to 50¢ and each non-commissioned officer and man in a mounted corps was to receive 75¢ for his horse.<sup>28</sup> The same period of drill and rate of pay was provided for the Regular Militia and the Marine Militia. The Act also authorized the appointment of drill instructors, the holding of inspections and the establishment of Schools of Military Instruction for Militia officers. There was authority for Rifle Associations and Drill Associations and independent companies in schools and universities. In educational institutions where instruction in military drill and exercises was offered, arms and accoutrements might be issued, under regulations, to all pupils over the age of 12.<sup>29</sup>

14. In the event of invasion or insurrection or its imminent danger, an officer commanding might call out all or part of the militia under his command and they were to march whither he directed.<sup>30</sup> The Militia might be called out to serve for a year or more although no man would serve for more than a year save in an emergency. A man who volunteered to serve throughout a war, however, might be compelled to fulfil his engagement.<sup>31</sup> When on active service, the militiamen would be under the same rules and articles of war as a regular soldier but corporal punishments other than death or imprisonment, were specifically excluded.<sup>32</sup> There were a considerable number of possible offences with penalties listed in the Act. Refusing to attend a drill might be punished by a fine of \$10 for an officer and \$5 for a soldier in the ranks. Disobedience of a lawful order or insolent or disorderly behaviour to an officer could also be



fined - \$20 for an officer, \$10 for other ranks. Since the Militia was obliged to turn out to aid the civil power when called upon, there were stiffer penalties for failing to appear on such occasions \$40 for an officer, \$20 for other ranks. However, there was a limitation on prosecutions. Proceedings against officers had to be authorized by the Adjutant General while a Commanding Officer had to authorize prosecutions of other ranks.<sup>33</sup>

15. The Act of 1868 was very comprehensive but, like most such statutes, many of its sections had no effect from the start and others rapidly lost their force. The provisions for compulsory service were a survival of a system which had never had more than the barest reality since the beginning of the century. The enrolment was taken three times.\* An amendment Act of 1874 increased the interval to four years<sup>34</sup> but, for reasons of economy, it was never again carried out. Even the provisions for maintaining discipline in the Militia by means of fines foundered on the voluntary principle. Nonetheless, in its broad outlines, the Act provides a useful description of the Militia until the end of the Nineteenth Century and, to some degree, survived until the National Defence Act of 1950.

16. On 1 May 1868, Cartier also introduced a Bill to authorize a loan of 1,200,000 pounds, to be guaranteed by the British Government and to be used for payment of the cost of fortifications for Montreal, Saint John, New Brunswick and for other places vaguely referred to as "west of Montreal".<sup>35</sup> Although the Bill was passed and received assent on the same day as the Militia Act, it was never put into effect. The failure in this case rests with the British Government which, under the vigorous domination of Gladstone's first Ministry,

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\* 1869, 1871 and 1873



had more serious matters to concern it than colonial fortifications.

#### ORGANIZING THE MILITIA

17. Although there was a threat of a Fenian invasion in 1867, none materialised and there was relative calm on the frontier until 1870. There was an opportunity for the reorganization which the Act had authorised. In the meantime, the Militia of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia continued to exist in a relative state of independence, with Colonel MacDougall exercising a sort of distant authority over them. The Ontario and Quebec militia who were not posted on the frontier against the Fenians were authorised to complete their sixteen days of drill for 1868-69 at Battalion headquarters -- in effect, serving only six days, with a day to come and a day to go and drilling for six hours a day.<sup>36</sup> This order was issued on 22 June 1868. Then, on 2 July, almost as an afterthought, an order was issued for the Eastern Provinces, authorising their Militia, including the Nova Scotia Naval Brigade, to drill at their local headquarters for the period of eight days. New Brunswick was authorised, in a footnote, to have a camp of instruction if it preferred, provided the total cost did not exceed \$26,000.<sup>37</sup> In all cases, the pay was the same. Since two drill days were compressed into one, the officers were paid \$2.00 per day and the other ranks, \$1.00. \$12.00 per horse was authorised. The Militia Act principle of equal pay for all ranks had not survived into practice. Apart from an allowance for transportation, all other expenses, including rations and quarters, had to be defrayed by the Volunteers from their drill pay.

18. The new Act came into effect officially on 1 October 1868. That was the day on which the Volunteer Corps were required to remuster<sup>38</sup> and the results were



awaited with some anxiety. The results for Ontario and Quebec soon showed that the vast majority of the men were willing to transfer to the Militia under the new Act. There were some exceptions. In the Peel Battalion, the men of the Streetsville company refused to re-muster but this was said to be due to local indignation at their town being passed over in favour of Brampton as the county seat.<sup>39</sup> 21,816 were mustered for Ontario and 12,637 for Quebec, virtually the same strength as before the enrolment date. Comparisons were more difficult in the Maritimes but it is clear that opposition to Confederation was reflected in a total of 1,789 Volunteers for New Brunswick and 928 for Nova Scotia.<sup>40</sup> The enrolment for the Reserve Militia was begun at the same time and it found a total of 618,896 men, 69,946 in Nova Scotia, 53,833 in New Brunswick, 202,597 in Quebec and 293,536 in Ontario.<sup>41</sup> The regimental districts, with few exceptions, were the electoral districts for the House of Commons.

19. With the Act, it also became possible to confirm appointments. The first Adjutant General was Colonel MacDougall, an officer who had served for some years with the Royal Canadian Rifles and who had been Adjutant General for the province of Canada since 1 May 1865. The Deputy Adjutant General was Lieutenant Colonel Walker Powell, an officer who was to have a long career in Militia Headquarters and a considerable influence on the development of the force. Born at Waterford in Upper Canada in 1828, he had spent four years

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\* Colonel Maunsell, the Adjutant General of New Brunswick, maintained that the record in his province was satisfactory since, although his quota was 3,264, there had never been more than 2100 volunteers in the province. The units which had not converted had failed to turn out due to the distance necessary to travel. In Nova Scotia, however, 5,000 men had been trained under provincial auspices in 1868. Lieutenant Colonel Laurier, one of the staff officers, later laid claim to special recognition for his services in this difficult period. [Militia Report, 1868 57 et seq.; 68. Macdonald Papers, M.G. 26 A 1 (c) 331, 149868, Laurier-Macdonald, 1 May 1889.]



as a Liberal member of the Legislature from 1857 to 1861. In 1862, he became the Deputy Adjutant General for Canada West and his promotion to Headquarters was a natural advance.<sup>42</sup> The boundaries of the nine Military Districts were also established on 1 October, by Order in Council. M.D. 1 was to consist of London and the counties of Western Ontario. M.D. 2 included Toronto, Hamilton, the Niagara Peninsula, the Central Ontario counties and the North. M.D. 3 consisted of more easterly bloc of counties running from Durham to Frontenac and including Kingston. M.D. 4 covered the remainder of Ontario. Quebec was divided into three Districts. M.D. 5 consisted of the Eastern Townships of Quebec and included part of Montreal. M.D. 6 consisted of the remainder of Montreal and the western counties up to Three Rivers. The remainder of the province formed M.D. 7. M.D. 8 was New Brunswick and M.D. 9 was Nova Scotia.<sup>43</sup> On 23 December, 1868, Deputy Adjutants General for the Military Districts were named.<sup>46</sup> Within each District, Brigade Majors were appointed to supervise training within each Brigade Division. Most Districts had two or three of these subdivisions. A total of 22 Brigade Majors were appointed, most of them retired British officers and the remainder with experience in the Volunteer Militia.<sup>47</sup> Each Military District was also provided with a paymaster and storekeeper.

20. When the Militia Act was being passed through parliament, MacDougall had protested vehemently that the provision which would allow a militiaman to resign by giving six months notice would make all discipline impossible. While admitting that the provision for balloting would not be as satisfactory as a voluntary system, he also wanted its provisions strengthened so that it would serve as a greater impetus to the volunteer system. All of these views he pushed most emphatically and when Cartier proved unwilling to



accept his advice, he asked that he not be associated with the Militia when the new act came into effect. To spare the Government embarrassment, he chose as his grounds of resignation the low rate of pay allowed the Deputy Adjutant-General at Headquarters and the other staff officers.<sup>48</sup> His resignation took effect on 4 May 1869 but his successor, Colonel Patrick Robertson Ross did not reach Canada for several months. The Deputy Adjutant General acted in his stead, and it was he who bore the burden of setting up the new system.

21 Walker Powell was left with many of the problems to solve. One was the existence of the Civil Service Rifles, a battalion of Ottawa civil servants which was an anomaly in the new structure. It had been authorised in 1866 by Order in Council and consisted of six companies. One, composed of employees of the Queen's Printer, was on a voluntary basis but the other five were based on obligatory service. The battalion was popular with the officers but, Powell discovered, there was "a positive dislike" for it among the men. Under the voluntary system, he believed that perhaps two companies might be formed. His recommendation that the Civil Service Rifles should be disbanded was accepted.<sup>49</sup> A more serious question was to establish the allowances for the various volunteer corps. \$40.00 per year was allowed to the commander of each troop, company or battery for drill instruction and the commanding officer of a rural battalion or artillery brigade received \$25.00 per year. A field battery instructor who would also act as care-taker was allowed \$200.00 per year. \$40.00 was allowed per company or troop for the care of arms where they were not kept in public armories under caretakers paid by the Department. A postage allowance of \$5.00 per efficient company was allowed each Battalion commanding officer.<sup>50</sup>



22. The Militia Report for the year indicated that the gaps in the Volunteer Militia had been made up quickly and that across the country there was such a pressure of offers of new corps that the strength could be increased. The units authorised gave a total strength of 43,541 although the authorised strength was 40,000. Only Nova Scotia had failed to reach its quota. Robertson Ross, in his first report, was full of praise for the system which, he announced "worked with ease and smoothness". Already, however, there were criticisms and Parliament had discovered that a useful target for indignation was the large size of the staff. Since many of the appointments were less influenced by competence than by political influence, the criticism had a certain justice but it was not based on any very profound analysis of Canada's military needs. Robertson Ross attempted to meet the attack by recommending the removal of a number of Storekeepers and District Quartermasters but he insisted that the Brigade Majors were necessary.<sup>51</sup>

23. The training period for the year was reduced to  $6\frac{1}{2}$  days, again squeezing two drill days of three hours each into a single day. This time, however, the order explicitly excluded Sunday from the calculation.<sup>52</sup> The drill was conducted at local headquarters. In his inspection, the new Adjutant General was reasonably pleased. Having had considerable experience in South Africa with irregular cavalry, he recommended that the cavalry should be converted to mounted rifles. He was impressed by the field artillery, finding the men active and intelligent and capable wagon drivers. There were 75 battalions of infantry, armed with the Snider Enfield and with accoutrements which were "not of the latest or best description, though quite serviceable." The 10th "Royals" of Toronto had worked out a new system of drill which he found to be well executed but which he nonetheless condemned



for the sake of uniformity. The 13th Battalion in Hamilton looked like a regular regiment. Throughout he found much to praise. He was particularly impressed by the quality of the men. Of the 33rd (Huron) Battalion, he wrote that "it would be difficult to see a finer body of men assembled under arms".<sup>53</sup> It is clear that the Volunteer Militia had survived the transition. The Adjutant General claimed, in concluding his report, that in a few hours after the order was given:

... more than 40,000 men of the active Militia, who are at least admirably armed, would stand forth to form the first line of defence, animated with as much courage and determination to defend their Queen and country, as has ever been exhibited by any nation, and their ranks might be hourly swelled by men from the Reserve Militia.<sup>54</sup>

24. It was, however, a Militia consisting chiefly of infantry battalions with 10 batteries of field artillery and 1,500 cavalry. There were no arrangements for supplies or transport. Medical arrangements were limited to the battalion surgeon and his assistant. Assuming that a militiaman received, in his three years of service, the full training that the statute authorised, he would have had 144 hours of drill. In fact, he got very much less. Already in 1869, the authorised drill was reduced to 39 hours. At best, two days of the annual drill were devoted to coming and going and a third day would be a Sunday on which no drill could be performed. There was an assumption in the Militia Act that the Volunteer Corps would recruit all their men for three years. At the end of that time, there would be a complete change of faces save for the officers, and the training cycle could begin again. In fact, one of the first casualties of the voluntary system was the three year engagement. Men fell sick or left the district. Others refused to complete their engagements and, in many cases, employers refused to let them



go. As a result, commanding officers had to complete their ranks with new men each year and the three years training cycle had little chance to develop in many Militia units. None of this need have caused alarm to the authors of the Act of 1868. The Canadian Militia was not intended to serve as an independent field army. When Colonel Peacocke had sent Militia, unsupported by regulars, to Ridgeway, he was generally considered to have blundered. The Canadian Militia was an auxiliary to the British regulars who were the real defenders of Canada. This was the understanding. Unfortunately, it was rendered obsolete almost at the moment that the Act came into effect.

#### THE BRITISH WITHDRAWAL

25. This drastically altered policy belonged to the Gladstone Government which took office in December, 1868, and particularly to the new Secretary of State for War, Edward Cardwell. Yet there were leaders on both sides of the British House of Commons who regarded continued defence of a self-governing colony as an expensive anomaly. There were also other reasons to oppose retaining a British garrison in Canada. Some who were in position to judge could not anticipate any victorious conclusion of a war with the United States in Canada. In a somewhat lugubrious note to the Canadian Prime Minister shortly before he left, the British commander in North America, Lieutenant General Sir John Michel wrote:

The worst that could happen to  
Canada would be annexation to a free and prosperous  
country. To England, pecuniary ruin, & loss of  
prestige. 54

26. Cardwell's motive, however, was to make possible both a reorganization of the British Army and a reduction of its cost. This could be accomplished only by bringing troops home from colonial garrisons. He and his fellow Ministers



became indignant at the thought of British taxes being spent on colonies which used their autonomy to raise barriers against British goods. Introducing his first Army Estimates of 11 March 1869, Cardwell announced that the garrison in British North America would be reduced in that year from 16,185 to 6,249. Even the risk of war which followed American rejection of the Johnson - Clarendon settlement of the Alabama claims did not divert the Secretary.<sup>55</sup>

27. The official news of a substantial reduction of the garrison reached Canada in a despatch of 14 April 1869 from the Colonial Secretary, Lord Granville to the Governor General, Sir John Young. It began by dismissing the Fenian menace, the main previous justification for the presence of the British troops.

Her Majesty's Government trust that the annoyance arising from the organization of Fenianism in the United States is fast disappearing. This organization, founded on the hostile feelings entertained by numerous Irishmen in the United States against Great Britain derived its substantial importance from the circumstances that large armies had been recently disbanded and were not yet thoroughly absorbed in the pursuits of peace. Such a state of things must always contain elements of danger to a neighbouring country. and so far as Canadians suffer it they suffer not so much from their connexion with Great Britain as from an unhappy - I hope a passing accident of their geographical position." 56

In the course of the summer, Lord Granville warned, the bulk of the British troops would be withdrawn. 2,000 would garrison Halifax and 4,000 would remain elsewhere. But even this was to be temporary and Granville was disposed to agree with Cardwell that it would soon be unnecessary to maintain any British troops in Canada apart from those "required for the training of the Militia and Volunteers and the maintenance of Schools of Instruction." The Royal Canadian Rifles, the corps of older soldiers which had been localized in Canada, was to be disbanded - four companies that year and the rest later. The three gunboats on the Great Lakes would be fitted out again



that year if the Canadian Government so wished but any further naval force would be at her own initiative and expense.

The despatch recalled the guarantee for the fortifications loan and affirmed the new Government's willingness to redeem the pledge of its predecessor. The mood had changed, however, and there was no encouragement to the Canadian Government to undertake the project. Indeed, during the summer, Young was asked to sound out his Ministers as to their real feelings about the fortifications. It was evident that the British Cabinet would not be unhappy if no more was heard of them.<sup>58</sup>

28. The news was not popular in Canada but there was no particularly forceful objection. French Canadian newspapers displayed some bitterness at the brusque tone of the Colonial Secretary but most Canadians had short memories and many preoccupations. Those who felt anxiety were relieved by the speeches of the Governor General, who emphasized the British commitment to defend Canada to the limit of its resources. Much reference was made to the despatch from the Conference in 1865<sup>\*</sup> with its assurance, written by Cardwell himself, that the Imperial Government would be prepared to defend every part of the Empire.<sup>59</sup> Throughout the summer, British troops embarked for home and Sir Charles Windham, Sir John Michel's successor, attempted to re-deploy his reduced force. His decision to leave a small garrison at Toronto provoked a storm from the War Office. Evidently Cardwell did not share his colleague's belief in the disappearance of the Fenian menace for he protested at leaving a force at "an expensive and isolated position". There was, in fact, a Fenian scare in 1869 and when the Canadian Government at first refused to call out its Militia, Windham threatened to withdraw the men from Toronto. The Cabinet promptly reconsidered and promised to call out 3,000 Militia in the event of further threats.<sup>60</sup>

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\* c.f. supra



In its defence, the Cabinet was well aware that the disruption of normal life, the demands on the Volunteer force and the expense were making the periodic Fenian scares a more serious problem than the actual rare incursions.

29. Through 1869, pressure continued in British political circles for the complete withdrawal of the garrisons from the colonies and, on 12 February 1870, another despatch was sent from the Colonial Secretary to the Governor General of Canada to warn him that Parliament would expect the intentions announced in the previous year to be carried to a conclusion. For the present, a battalion of infantry and a battery of garrison artillery were to remain at Quebec and there would still be a garrison at Halifax although it would be reduced from 2,000 to 1,500. The remainder were to be withdrawn. Their fortifications and barracks would become the property of the Dominion but should Imperial troops ever come again to Canada, either at the request of its government or to serve a colonial interest, Canada would be obliged to furnish them with barracks or lodgings to the satisfaction of Her Majesty's Government. There was some solicitude for the surviving Canadian defence forces. The 43,870 rifles on loan to the Canadian Government outright. The Secretary of State for War was even willing to facilitate the formation of a Colonial regiment and if the members of an entire British Battalion would volunteer to transfer, he would allow it, returning only the Headquarters and a nucleus to reform the unit in Britain. Finally, the despatch stated that the arrangements were contingent on the continuance of peace and would not alter or diminish the mutual obligations of Britain or Canada in the event of a foreign war. There was a reference to the fortifications loan guarantee in the despatch -- a demand for a further pledge that the Dominion was prepared to go ahead.<sup>61</sup>



30. The news was not officially transmitted to the Canadian ministers for some time, as Sir John Young waited for the arrival of a promised draft of the British bill authorising the guarantee of the fortification loan. Undoubtedly, however, the Canadian Government had considerable time to ponder a decision which was revolutionary. The reduction of the garrison had been inevitable but to remove it altogether was to create a state of affairs which no one could recall. It was also unexpected. The British Government, after all, had spent a considerable sum building three new forts at Levis. The despatch did renew the promise to defend Canada in the event of war but it was doubtful that this was an utterly reliable guarantee. White settlers in New Zealand had seen their last British battalion depart as the Maori War reopened. The ultimate result was fortunate for New Zealand but it caused consternation at the time. The despatch, of course, had carefully specified a "foreign" war but the Gladstone Government -- or some of its members -- later showed in the Treaty of Washington negotiations how little they were prepared to risk that contingency.<sup>62</sup>

31. The Canadian reply was written by Sir George Etienne Cartier and was presented to the Governor General on behalf of the Cabinet. It was a restrained but firm protest. The Fenians were still in existence and:

... if the British Government should feel it necessary to withdraw the Troops, as they appear to have determined on doing, the Canadian Government trusts such a determination will not be fully carried into execution until after an entire cessation and disappearance of the hostile feelings shown by that organization, which the Imperial Government is aware have not yet taken place.

Other points in the British Despatch of 12 February 1870 were answered in detail. The proof of the Fenian threat was that several thousand of the Canadian militia had been called out in the previous month to meet a rumoured invasion and Habeas Corpus had been suspended. There were also difficulties



at the Red River. If the decision to withdraw was irrevocable, Cartier could not understand why a garrison was not placed at Quebec, a more strategic place than Halifax and the most heavily fortified place in the Dominion. On the proposal to form a colonial regiment, Cartier seems to have misunderstood Cardwell's intention, assuming that the headquarters which would go back to England would continue to command the regiment in Canada. Such an idea could not be recommended. The fortification loan guarantee was still wanted. The works would be spread over a period of five years and would be begun, in the first instance, at Montreal, Kingston and St. John, New Brunswick. Canada accepted the barracks, fortifications and landed property of the War Department in Canada on the terms offered. There was gratitude for the 43,879 rifles and for the decision not to withdraw 25,000 Snider rifles, an agreement reached with some difficulty after the arrival of the British despatch. Above all, the Canadians were pleased with the reiteration of the commitment of 17 June 1865:

... that the Imperial Government fully acknowledged the obligation of defending every portion of the Empire with all the resources at its command, in the reciprocal assurances given by the Canadian Ministers then in London, that Canada was ready to devote all her resources, both in men and money, to the maintenance of her connection with the Mother Country."<sup>63</sup>

32. The Canadian protest did not deflect the British government. Neither did a series of abortive Fenian raids at the end of May. The only concession was that the Rifle Brigade would not leave Montreal until the 60th Rifles had returned from the North West.<sup>64</sup> During the summer, the Canadian Postmaster-General, Alexander Campbell was sent to London and the British withdrawal was prominent on his list of problems. He particularly sought the retention of a garrison at Quebec as a proof of continuing British support. The British refused. With the summer had also come the Franco-



Prussian War and new apprehensions among the British about the state of their home defences. As the winter of 1870-1871 approached, there was only one battalion left in central Canada together with artillery, engineers and administrative remnants.<sup>65</sup>

33                   Amongst the military authorities, there were many backward glances. Lieutenant General the Hon. James Lindsay,<sup>\*</sup> who had replaced Sir Charles Windham, proposed to send two companies of the battalion to Ottawa for the winter. This was promptly vetoed by Cardwell.<sup>66</sup> When Lindsay had returned to England to become Inspector-General of Reserve Forces, he was replaced by Sir Hastings Doyle, who had been commanding in Nova Scotia. Doyle was made aware that, with the withdrawal of the British troops, there would be no provision for the instruction of the Militia and he acceded to the urging of the Canadian Government that a school be established at Montreal. Doyle agreed to send a company to Montreal on condition that there would be no expense to the Imperial Government and that quarters would be provided. He reported his decision to the Military Secretary at the Horse Guards, adding, for the comfort of the Duke of Cambridge, that since the detachment could reach Quebec in twelve hours by rail, the principle of concentration had not been lost.<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately Doyle had neglected to inform the civil side of the War Office nor had he discussed the order with his own administrative officers. The Deputy Controller, Colonel Martindale, who was deeply involved in the administrative arrangements of closing out British establishments, learned that a company would be going to Montreal only through General Orders. Either Doyle was unaware that the administrative facilities had largely been dismantled at that city or he was unaware of their necessity. In five days, Martindale

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<sup>\*</sup> Only as commanding the troops in Ontario and Quebec.



improvised arrangements, chiefly by delaying the retirement of superannuated clerks and storekeepers and by rearrangements of his small administrative staff.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, he directed an angry letter to his superiors in London. For the civil side of the War Office, this was the first intimation of a reversal of Cardwell's intentions. There had apparently been no communication from the military side.<sup>69</sup> A strong countermanding order was immediately despatched. In the meantime, the proposal had, in fact, died through the unwillingness of the Canadian authorities to meet the expenses of the school.<sup>70</sup>

34. Throughout 1871, the withdrawal and closing of British stations continued. The stores were handed over to the officials of the Militia Department and little if any material was returned to England. Still the Canadian Government failed to realize that the British were determined to renounce all obligation for Canadian defence. Since the Canadian Militia had been armed successively with the Enfield and the Snider Rifle at the expense of the Imperial Government, there was an effort to commit the British to replacing the Snider at no cost when it should become obsolete. This was promptly refused.<sup>71</sup> In April, 1871, Cartier made one last attempt to persuade the British to retain a garrison at least temporarily in Quebec. The abandonment of the fortress should at least be deferred, he wrote, until the Intercolonial Railway had been completed and it would be possible for a part of the Halifax garrison to be sent up in an emergency.<sup>72</sup> It was to no avail. On 11 November, 1871, the 60th Rifles, with the last detachments of artillery and engineers, embarked on the transport Orontes. A great crowd watched the ship drop down the St. Lawrence.<sup>73</sup>



FILLING THE GAP

35. The final departure of the British troops was a moment of great historical symbolism, possibly greater than 1 July 1867. It was the moment of tangible proof that Canada would have to stand alone with her neighbours and with the world at large. However, to Canadians in 1871, defence was not a matter of primary concern nor, save for a small minority, was sentimental imperialism a governing emotion.

36. The British departure left some very immediate gaps to be filled. There were fortifications and stores and barracks to be taken over. Without constant care, these would deteriorate rapidly. Masonry heaved and cracked in the extreme Canadian climate. Muskets and cannon rusted. Leather harness and equipment dried out and decayed. Canvas rotted. Munitions deteriorated in such a variety of ways that only a highly trained technician could be expected to manage them. There was also the problem of training the Militia. The Militia Act of 1868 required that those who wished commissions should be qualified. Until 1870 the most common method was attendance at schools run by British battalions. It was this gap which Hastings Doyle had tried so ineffectively to fill at the end of 1870. Almost as effective an influence in training the Militia was the presence of a large body of trained, regular troops. It was possible for a great number of Canadians to know how soldiers were expected to behave. The most important gap was the structure of the Volunteer Militia itself. In two years, it was promoted from an auxiliary to full responsibility. No longer would there be a British garrison to look after the auxiliary services of supply, transport, stores or medical care. The Lieutenant General Commanding in Canada had been a military adviser to the Canadian Government in time of peace and a commander of the Militia in time of war or



emergency. He would now be departing to Halifax to a lesser and rather different role.

37. The British were not completely indifferent to continued Canadian military needs. The only condition on which they were adamant was that these needs must not impose any further burden on the Imperial Treasury. In his despatch of 12 February 1870, Granville had referred to the willingness of the War Office to facilitate the formation of a Colonial regiment and the transfer of officers and men to the Canadian service. As has been seen, this offer was misunderstood by Cartier and turned down. The intention, as Granville later tried to explain, was that a wholly distinct regiment might be formed by Canada and that only the skeleton of the British battalion would be returned home, to reform under its old name and colours.<sup>73</sup> This explanation did not apparently make the offer more acceptable. The British also passed over virtually the whole of their property in British North America except for Halifax. When Lord Kimberley replaced Lord Granville at the Colonial Office, he took the trouble to ensure that a spirit of generosity prevailed during the transfer of stores.<sup>74</sup> Admittedly, it would have been difficult for the British to take their land and fortifications back to England while even the ordnance and stores were not of the newest of most modern pattern in what was then an age of rapid military obsolescence.

38. The officer who took the future plight of the Canadian Militia most seriously was Lieutenant General Lindsay. Coming out to Canada early in 1870, he later reported that he "lost no time in making every effort to be of assistance to Canada in the handing over of responsibility."<sup>75</sup> Throughout the spring and summer, he bombarded the Governor General, Sir John Young, and through him, his Ministers, with suggestions and recommendations. His first proposal was that Canada