

NOTE

This is a preliminary narrative and should not be regarded as authoritative. It has not been checked for accuracy in all aspects, and its interpretations are not necessarily those of the Historical Section as a whole.

Ce texte est préliminaire et n'a aucun caractère officiel. On n'a pas vérifié son exactitude et les interprétations qu'il contient ne sont pas nécessairement celles du Service historique.

Directorate of History
National Defence Headquarters
Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0K2

July 1986

DIRECTORATE OF HISTORY
CANADIAN FORCES HEADQUARTERS

30 Jun 66

Canadian Militia prior to
Confederation

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION	1
PART I - EARLY CANADA	1
New France	1
Early British Rule	7
PART II - TWO CANADAS	16
Lower Canada before 1812	16
Upper Canada before 1812	26
Lower Canada in 1812	31
Upper Canada in 1812	34
Lower Canada, 1813-1814	41
Upper Canada, 1813-1814	44
Lower Canada, Post-war	47
Upper Canada, Post-war	48
Rebellion in Lower Canada, 1837	51
Rebellion in Upper Canada, 1837	54
Border Disturbances	57
Reduction of Provincial Corps	64
Militia Act of 1846	67
PART III - VOLUNTEER FORCE	69
Militia Act of 1855	69
Organizing the Volunteers	71

	<u>Page</u>
The American Threat	77
Inertia again	80
Improvements in training	83
Border Duty, 1864-1865	86
Fenian Raids	87
CONCLUSION	95
NOTES	96

REPORT NO. 6
DIRECTORATE OF HISTORY
CANADIAN FORCES HEADQUARTERS

30 Jun 66

Canadian Militia prior to
Confederation

1. This Report discusses the growth and development of the Canadian Militia from its beginnings in early New France until the Confederation of 1867, but it makes only passing reference to military operations. The Report is based mainly on a study of the material now available in the Manuscript Division of the Public Archives of Canada. The separate Militias of the Provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island will be discussed in Report No. 7.

I - EARLY CANADA

New France

2. Although the King of France did not send royal troops to protect the first settlers in Canada, the charters granted to all the early trading companies specified that protection should be provided. In practice, merely a few ex-soldiers were hired as guards for actual trading posts. When Montreal was founded in 1642 by the Sieur de Maisonneuve who had fought on many European battlefields, there were about 100 such old soldiers in New France. The militia companies formed on an impromptu basis by the inhabitants of Trois-Rivieres in 1651, and Montreal in 1663, received some rudimentary training.¹ Such meagre military resources, however, were insufficient to cope with the increasing menace presented by the Iroquois Confederacy of the Five Nations.

3. Fortunately the representations made to Paris fell on the receptive ears of the young King Louis XIV, who had just taken the task of government into his own hands. In 1663 he made New France a royal colony and placed it under the direction of Jean-Baptiste Colbert, who was Intendant de Finance and soon to become Ministre de la Marine. Two years later military help was forthcoming - companies of regulars or troupes de terre from each of the Regiments of Chambellé, Orléans, Poitou and Allier, and 20 companies of the Carignan-Salières, all under the command of the Marquis de Tracy. During the summer of 1665 forts were built along the Richelieu River, which was the usual route taken by war parties of Mohawk Indians of the Five Nations. A punitive expedition

organized during the following winter by Governor Courcelles accomplished little, because the French regulars were unaccustomed to the extreme cold and travel on snowshoes. Early in the autumn of 1666, however, the Marquis de Tracy struck into the heart of the Iroquois country with about 1200 regulars, Canadians and friendly Indians, and laid waste the towns and crops of the Mohawks. Waged on European lines and with no attempt at surprise, this campaign brought hostilities temporarily to an end and convinced the Iroquois that the French were in earnest at long last. According to the census of that same year, there were 3418 men, women and children living in New France. Almost half were town dwellers: 555 lived in Quebec, 461 in Trois-Rivières and 584 in Montreal.

4. During 1668 the greater number of the regular troops were withdrawn from Canada to participate in Louis XIV's current European war; most of the remainder became settlers. Responsibility for the defence of New France devolved upon the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales, which recruited four small companies for garrison duty. Resumption of the Iroquois menace in 1683 caused the Governor to request reinforcements from France. The 150 officers and men then dispatched belonged to companies maintained by the Ministère de la Marine for naval duties. These so-called troupes de la marine were henceforth to provide garrisons for all the forts in New France and a trained nucleus upon which the defence of the colony was to depend. They were sometimes called troupes de la colonie.²

5. A Canadian Militia had been organized in accordance with instructions issued by Louis XIV on 3 April 1669. With a few exceptions, such as Crown officials, former military officers, and clerics, all physically fit males between the ages of 16 and 60 were organized into companies and drilled once a month. Once or twice a year the several companies of each of the districts of Quebec, Trois-Rivières and Montreal might be brought together for manoeuvres, under the command of the respective militia colonel, who was assisted by a major and an adjutant. When on active service, powder and ball were supplied from the royal stores and muskets lent to those who did not possess their own. Uniforms were not supplied, but during the closing years of French rule distinctive items of clothing were made an issue to those actually serving: different coloured tuques and scarves were worn by militiamen from Quebec, Trois-Rivières and Montreal. Militia companies varied in size, from 30 to 50 men, depending on the number of eligible males available: towns boasted several companies and even the larger rural parishes might have more than one company. Several companies were formed around the more than 400 officers and men of Le Régiment de Carignan-Salières settled in New France. Discharged veterans of the troupes de la marine and other ex-soldiers arriving in Canada as settlers continued to provide a small trained leaven as the years passed.³

6. Since the captain, lieutenant and ensign of each militia company had been commissioned by the Governor, rather than by the King of France, they possessed no authority over

regular troops of any rank. Militia officers on active service might even have to take orders from non-commissioned officers of the troupes de la marine. In most instances, however, companies were required to furnish only a specified quota for service. Once the selection was made by the captain, either by having his men draw lots for the duty or by allocating those who had not recently served, his function was fulfilled.

7. This capitaine de milice had other important duties to perform in rural parishes. As the unpaid representative of the Governor and Intendant, he supervised the corvée - work on roads or bridges and the transportation of supplies - published edicts, administered minor justice and acted as a notary. In return, he had the privileges of walking immediately after churchwardens in religious processions and of receiving before other parishioners the bread blessed by the priest and distributed during the solemn high mass. He was far more likely to be the most capable habitant in the parish than an ineffectual seigneur.⁴

8. Although the marksmanship of the militiaman was of importance in the conduct of la petite guerre of hit-and-run raids, skirmishes and ambushes against the American frontiersmen and their Iroquois allies, his principal duties seem to have been transporting supplies by canoe, bateau or sleigh, and building fortifications or roads. For such arduous, compulsory service the militia received no pay and there was always the fear that it might interfere needlessly with the planting and harvesting of the annual crop, which was barely enough to sustain the colony even in the best of years.

9. In 1685 the chronic labour shortage, and a temporary lack of funds to pay the troupes de la marine, persuaded the Intendant, Jacques de Meulles, to permit soldiers to work as tradesmen and day labourers for Canadian entrepreneurs who became responsible for their wages and keep. However, this temporary expedient proved difficult to control, because civilian wages were higher than military pay and officers found it financially advantageous to grant leaves of absence to their men.⁵ When Frontenac tried to assemble a field force in 1691, a large number of the troupes de la marine were engaged in civilian tasks and larger numbers of militiamen had to be requisitioned. Another Intendant, Jean Bochart de Champigny, then complained:

It is very aggravating for the poor habitants of this country to find themselves continually ordered out for the war when the majority of the soldiers are not; they have never yet refused to march, but they, as well as their families, are reduced to such a miserable state, I believe it to be urgent that they be employed in some other manner for fear of disheartening them completely and casting them into the depths of despair. It was apparent to me during my last trip that some of them were very discontented at always being called out while many of the soldiers remained working.⁶

