

NOTE

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July 1986

DIRECTORATE OF HISTORY

CANADIAN FORCES HEADQUARTERS

1966
4 July 1944Militia of Nova Scotia,
New Brunswick and Prince
Edward Island

1. This Report stresses the organizational features of the militia of the separate provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island prior to Confederation and should be read in conjunction with Report No. 6, which dealt with the Canadian Militia. Both reports are based primarily on the material available in the Manuscript Division of the Public Archives of Canada. External danger was not a major consideration for most of the period under review, because of the considerable strength of the Royal Navy in North American waters, and the provincial appointments of Adjutants General of Militia tended to be sinecures for the British half-pay officers lucky enough to acquire them.

Nova Scotia

2. As early as 1720 Colonel Richard Philipps appointed captains of militia at the fishing settlement of Canso. Although his commission as Governor of Nova Scotia empowered him to "levy, Arm, Muster, Command and Employ all Persons whatsoever" for the defence of that province or any other in North America, there was little need for action.¹ Great Britain experienced almost two decades of peaceful expansion under the parliamentary leadership of Robert Walpole and the small garrison of regulars at Annapolis Royal, belonging to Philipps' own regiment,* proved sufficient to overawe the resentful Acadians and local Indians.

3. The discharged sailors and soldiers who were the first settlers of Halifax in 1749 were mustered as militia in December of that year and an alert was maintained during the ensuing winter because of (ill-founded) rumours of French and Indian preparations to attack the new settlement.² A militia system modelled on New England practice was introduced by Governor Hopson's proclamation of 22 March 1753. This proclamation required "all Planters, Inhabitants and their servants between the ages of Sixteen and Sixty," residing in the Halifax area, to appear with muskets and ammunition whenever ordered to muster.³ During October 1758 the first elected Assembly of the province approved "an Act for establishing and regulating a Militia."⁴ This Act applied to the inhabitants of the out-settlements

* Philipps' Regiment was raised in 1717 from the eight independent companies garrisoning Annapolis Royal and Newfoundland. It was the first British infantry regiment to be stationed in any part of the present Canada. It became the 40th Regiment of Foot in 1751. It is continued in British Army by The Lancashire Regiment (Prince of Wales's Volunteers).

as well as those of Halifax and its immediate vicinity, and its clauses closely adhered to existing American practice.

4. In New England the able-bodied men had initially elected their own officers, but the granting of commissions had gradually been taken over by the General Court of each colony. This, it should be emphasized, established the militia as an avenue to political prominence for any ambitious colonist. It was only natural for officers to be chosen from amongst the more affluent citizens, often merchants as well as landowners, whether or not these had had any experience of warfare. The elaborate drill movements then performed to perfection by European armies were beyond the capabilities of farmers, fishermen and artisans, whose only fighting was likely to be in wooded country or from behind fortified positions. Socially, however, each training day provided a change for the average citizen from the dreary toil of earning a living and a chance to enjoy some rum with neighbours after parade had been dismissed. Local militia companies were intended primarily to register and train men. Whenever there was an emergency, the legislature usually assigned quotas to every district. Although these were usually met by volunteers, local authorities could embody enough men who had been selected by ballot (i.e. by lot) to complete their draft. Service was normally restricted to defence of the colony, but it was clearly recognized that expeditions might have to proceed farther afield.⁵

5. The large New England element in the population of Nova Scotia by 1775 did not emulate the example of turbulent Massachusetts. The inhabitants of Halifax were largely dependent on British military and naval expenditures for their livelihood; like large numbers of people in the American Colonies, they wanted to remain aloof from armed conflict. The majority of the people in the small and scattered out-settlements was definitely determined upon pursuing a neutral course that would permit them to live in peace and continue to trade with their kinfolk in New England.⁶

6. Following receipt of the news that Americans had invaded Canada during the early days of September 1775, Governor Francis Legge convened a special session of the Legislature. It passed a new Militia Act.⁷ On 5 December martial law was proclaimed and a Revenue Act was passed to provide funds for the militia. Plans were made to call out one-fifth of the militia, selected by ballot wherever there should be insufficient volunteers.⁸ Militia men were needed to guard the naval yard and stores at Halifax, because the British regular garrison had been denuded to reinforce Lieutenant-General Thomas Gage at Boston. The widespread opposition that quickly arose, however, startled Governor Legge. Petitions poured in from the out-settlements suggesting that many inhabitants were recent settlers who could not afford to pay any tax in specie and that the sole family breadwinner could not be spared for militia service.

The petition from the township of Truro included what was to become a favourite argument:

... should a number of our Industrious Inhabitants, who have large families Depending upon them for support, be called away into any other part of the provinces, their Lands would lie uncultivated and neglected, and perhaps their property may be carried away or Destroyed in their absence to the ruin of private families, the distress of the Society, and hurtful to the province in general.⁹

Malcontents spread rumours that, once embodied, the militia were to be collected at Halifax and transported to New England to serve as soldiers against their kinfolk. Many militia companies refused to assemble and there were several local disturbances.¹⁰ In consequence, Governor Legge and his Executive Council agreed on 8 January 1776 that militiamen might remain at home unless there should be an actual American invasion of Nova Scotia and that no attempt would be made to collect taxes levied by the recent Revenue Act.¹¹ Legge's circular letter of 12 January directed militia officers to reassure their men that they would be required only for local defence in the event of actual invasion: a provincial regiment of volunteers would be recruited "purely for the defence of the Province."¹² Actually the military situation had been greatly improved by the arrival at Halifax of the 27th Regiment of Foot and other detachments of regulars to reinforce its garrison, so it did not greatly matter that the Loyal Nova Scotia Volunteers never seems to have had an effective strength of more than 242 rank and file.¹³ This provincial corps obtained most of its recruits from English and Scottish settlers who had recently arrived in Nova Scotia, as did the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Highland Emigrants.

7. Unknown to Governor Legge, General George Washington wrote to Congress on 30 January 1776 repeating his earlier condemnation of a proposal to despatch an American expedition to liberate Nova Scotia. Washington did not have the troops to spare for any operation that was not defensive in nature; moreover, any such scheme was impracticable since an invading force was certain to be cut off from its base by warships of the Royal Navy.¹⁴ Despite a later and personal rebuff by Washington,¹⁵ an expatriate Nova Scotian named Jonathan Eddy did lay siege to Fort Cumberland on the Isthmus of Chignecto during the following November, but this farcical attempt at invasion was ended by the arrival of vessels of the Royal Navy with reinforcements for the garrison.¹⁶

8. Small detachments of provincial troops or militia were intermittently stationed in the various out-settlements, but these proved too small to be of much practical use and merely provided an excuse for New England privateersmen to plunder and burn, whenever and wherever they landed. The situation existing at Liverpool has been preserved in the diary of Simeon Perkins. On 31 May 1778 he described how alarmed the leading citizens were by a rumour that American privateers were in the vicinity. This led them to agree that "ye fort ought to be dismantled, and that we keep up a guard of two or three men, to give notice of the approach of any Privateers, in which case

