

# THE STANSTEAD MILITIA, 1854–1914

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*Below, you will find the 2004 Robin Burns lecture presented by Dr. Desmond Morton on 8 October 2004 at Bishop's University.*

*Vous trouverez ci-dessous la conférence Robin Burns telle que présentée par M. Desmond Morton à l'Université Bishop's le 8 octobre 2004.*

## **Abstract**

Since the official role of Canada's militia was to defend Canada from the United States, a border community like Stanstead, remote from Montreal and populated largely by Americans, posed a potential problem to 19<sup>th</sup> century Canadian militia authorities. The study of militia administration provides an original perspective on local social and political history, and Stanstead's military evolution from a community whose local military expert, Colonel Kilborn, thought a volunteer militia unworkable is more revealing than most.

## **Résumé**

*Puisque le rôle officiel de la milice canadienne était de défendre le Canada contre les forces armées américaines, une communauté frontalière telle que Stanstead, éloignée de Montréal et peuplée en grande partie d'Américains, présentait un problème potentiel pour les autorités militaires canadiennes du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle. L'étude de l'administration des milices offre une perspective originale de l'histoire politique et sociale de la région. L'analyse de l'évolution militaire de Stanstead, dont l'expert militaire local, le Colonel Kilborn, croyait qu'une milice bénévole serait irréalisable, est d'autant plus révélatrice.*

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**A**fter the year 1854 brought the British to their first major war since Napoleon, a conviction grew in England that Canadians should defend themselves. It was hardened when ungrateful Canadians levied tariffs against their free-trading mother country. In 1855, a mixed British-Canadian commission investigated Canada's militia system. After a visit to the United States, the commission reported that, in many states, volunteer units had supplanted the old militia obligation.

A new Militia Act for the United Canadas retained a universal militia obligation, and subdivided the Canadas into eighteen military districts, each with an unpaid colonel and staff to organize the local sedentaries.

Simultaneously, however, the Act authorized 5000 paid volunteers, organized in 16 troops of cavalry, 12 batteries or companies of artillery and 50 companies of infantry. A volunteer would collect five shillings a day for ten days' training a year (or twenty days for artillery). A captain could be paid up to 10/6.<sup>1</sup> Men flocked to the new units. In 1856, the Legislature doubled the force; the additional volunteers would be unpaid.

As traditionalists feared, the volunteer option virtually killed an already moribund sedentary militia. No muster of the old universal militia occurred until 1864. Instead, volunteer units appeared by the score across the Canadas in 1855, led by a field artillery battery in Quebec City.

What about Stanstead? Surely the frontier was the place for a volunteer infantry company and a troop of cavalry. Who was better suited than him, thought Major Amos Fox, after so many years of unrequited service, to become one of the new paid staff officers?<sup>2</sup> His superior, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Kilborn, offered no support. Like many in Lower Canada<sup>3</sup>, he was unimpressed with the whole idea of volunteering. Invited to organize volunteer units, he answered cautiously at the end of October 1855 that finding men would be hard "without greater inducements are offered [sic] than is contained in the present law."<sup>4</sup> He was right. Military enthusiasm seldom lasts long in Canada. Recession struck in 1858, funds evaporated, and so did most new volunteer units.

The visit of the Prince of Wales in 1860 brought a revival, at least in cities and towns allowed to welcome His Royal Highness with parades and guards of honour. The Trent Affair in 1861 and the renewed danger of war with the United States compelled Canada to arm. A reinforced British garrison provided staff, weapons, training and models for reorganized volunteer militia. In Sherbrooke, Captain W.E. Ibbotson had organized the first volunteer infantry company in the Townships. Now a second appeared, and a third at Bishop's. So did a battery of garrison artillery and a Sherbrooke troop of cavalry. William Henry Pope, M.P. for Compton from 1854 until his death in 1889, organized another cavalry troop in Cookshire. Such energy won the district a full-time brigade major and three British army drill instructors. At Stanstead, nothing much happened.

Stanstead County found only Kilborn's battalion. The other battalions had all evaporated. The 1863 Militia Act decreed that

henceforth enrolment of the militia was an added chore for municipal assessors and valuers. Counties, alone or linked, had to be able to enrol a 795-member service battalion. Brome was combined with Stanstead. The 1863 Act also urged militia officers to form clubs to learn their duties and to attend military schools to qualify for promotion. Since the schools were in Montreal, this was easier said than done. In 1886, the Militia report showed only seven Brome-Stanstead officers with certificates. Of forty-two regimental divisions in Lower Canada, only four had a poorer showing.<sup>5</sup> When more than ten thousand volunteers were called out in March and June of 1866 in expectation of raids by the Fenian Brotherhood (Irish veterans of the U.S. Civil War), Captain W.E. Ibbotson's rifle company mobilized in Sherbrooke. Stanstead had no volunteers to call.

That was enough humiliation. Ignoring a conjectural war with the United States was one thing in the Townships; inability to fend off Irish Catholic freebooters was something another matter. Elsewhere, success against the Fenian threat gave the Canadian militia a good opinion of itself; in the Townships; it gave volunteering a solid rationale. Writing her history of the Eastern Townships in 1867, Mrs. C.M. Day found volunteer companies taking shape in Stanstead, Coaticook and other communities.<sup>6</sup> On 11 October 1867, Militia General Orders reported a new 58<sup>th</sup> "Compton" Battalion of Infantry, with companies in Robinson (soon re-named Bury), Gould, Marston, Marbleton, Massawippi, Coaticook and Stanstead Plain. It joined



*Canadian Volunteers at 1870 Fenian Raid, Missisquoi County.*

*Source: ETRC, Eastern Townships Heritage Foundation Fonds, P0201, 77-12-6.*

Brome County's 356-member 52<sup>nd</sup> Light Infantry, with headquarters at Knowlton and six companies scattered across the county. The Fenians helped turn Ibbotson's company into a 596-member 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, with five companies in Sherbrooke and a sixth at Magog. A 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion, with headquarters at Melbourne, commanded four companies in Richmond and Wolfe counties.<sup>7</sup> An 1867 acquittance roll showed that two sergeants, a corporal and 25 privates of the 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion drilled that summer at Stanstead, earning a total of \$168.50.<sup>8</sup>

Lieutenant-Colonel W.E. Osborne Smith, newly-appointed deputy-adjutant general of the new Dominion's 5<sup>th</sup> Military District, comprising English-speaking volunteers in Montreal and southern Quebec, reported that drill sheds had been erected at Sherbrooke, Marbleton, Knowlton, Sutton, Abercorn and St-Armand in the Eastern Townships. Every corps had been armed with the breech-loading Snider-Enfield rifle. The Cookshire and Sherbrooke Troops of Cavalry and the 58<sup>th</sup> (Compton) Battalion had all received new uniforms during 1866–67.<sup>9</sup> On 1 October 1869, Osborne Smith came to Robinson to inspect the 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Lt. Col. J.H. Cook had assembled 32 officers and 399 other ranks, though, the Stanstead Company, with the farthest to come, had not appeared. Smith gave a glowing report: "This is a magnificent body of men and, after further training, will be as efficient a battalion of militia as can be expected. The conduct, spirit and physique is admirable."<sup>10</sup> In 1871, Lt. Col. Cook brought his battalion all the way to La Prairie, with 42 officers and 429 men, plus a band of 21 musicians. This time, Stanstead's 8<sup>th</sup> Company participated, though it brought only 42 of the necessary 55 men.<sup>11</sup> In 1872, the 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion traveled only as far as A.P. Terrill's farm near Sherbrooke, some by train but mostly on foot. Captain J.D. Ramage marched his 55 men a full 72 miles from Lake Megantic; other companies marched from Robinson, Gould, Stornaway, Marbleton, Compton, Coaticook, and Eaton Corners. Captain M. McAuley's Stanstead company mustered only two officers and 35 other ranks. While the inspecting officer reported "exemplary conduct", he found that the battalion's uniforms and equipment were worn out after four years of hard service, and a good many of their Snider-Enfield rifles were defective.<sup>12</sup>

Relief was not in sight. As a world-wide depression crossed the Atlantic and the Fenian threat faded, Ottawa had to economize. In 1873, annual camps were cut to only eight days. Alexander Mackenzie, who formed a new Liberal government in 1873, was a major in the militia, but his government forced drastic retrenchment on the force. To save training pay, Ottawa shrunk militia companies from 55 to 42

men, and authorized rural battalions to attend camp only in alternate years (city regiments drilled every year but only at their own armoury or shed). In 1876, when Lt. Col. Cook mustered the 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Sherbrooke, he had twelve days, but his brass band was cut to fourteen members and was described as only “fairly proficient”. Uniforms were only “fair”. Captain James K. Gilman’s Stanstead company was absent from all three camps between 1876 and 1880.<sup>13</sup> At Lingwick that year, only five companies appeared, though, thanks to Major Ramage, the 58<sup>th</sup> was praised as “a fine body of strong, stalwart Highlanders”. The battalion’s new Glengarry caps gave them “a smart appearance”.<sup>14</sup>

If Stanstead’s infantry company was frail and uncertain, Major Isaac Wood’s forty-member cavalry troop, formed in 1872, was healthier. That year, the Stanstead cavalry won a silver cup for being the “cleanest and best dressed troop” in camp, an honour it would win again in 1898 under Major Ben B. Morrill. In September 1877, Militia General Orders authorized a new 5<sup>th</sup> Provisional Regiment of Cavalry, with smart blue and white Dragoon uniforms. It united the Cookshire and Sherbrooke cavalry troops with troops in Stanstead, Compton and Sutton, under the command of Lt. Col. John Henry Taylor. Cavalry units, even the newest, were senior to any infantry. Respectable farmers and their sons were happier to ride than to march to camp, and the higher pay for a cavalry trooper included compensation for bringing his own horse.<sup>15</sup>

During the 1880s, the 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion normally camped near Sherbrooke, marching or taking the train from scattered company headquarters across the county. In 1884, the 58<sup>th</sup> went to St-Jean, where the ill-tempered General R.G.A. Luard found their band only “fair” and their rifles out of repair. Colonel Taylor added his support in 1884 to proposals to hold a camp in Stanstead since there was a good space with plenty of water close to the railway, and the 5<sup>th</sup> Dragoons were granted permission.

Ideally, militia camps were held in June, after crops were planted. If the parliamentary vote was delayed, so was the camp. Before camp, soldiers drew their uniforms, rifles and kit from a shed in their village or town. They wore their uniforms night and day, and, at the end of training, handed in their entire kit of weapons, coats, hats, trousers, belts and overcoats, to be reclaimed without benefit of dry cleaning, two years hence. At camp, companies pitched their tents in long rows, drilled in the morning and spent the afternoon at the ranges or in sports and games. Soldiers ate boiled beef and vegetables for dinner at noon and, in the evenings, retired to privately-run canteens on the outskirts of camp until buglers sounded retreat. The final day was



*Militia camp, Stanstead, Quebec.  
Source: Stanstead Historical Society*

celebrated with a grand review or a sham battle with plenty of space for spectators. Colonel C.F. Houghton thanked the YMCA for providing a tent with ice-water, writing materials and reading matter for his men.<sup>16</sup>

Tragedy struck on 28 June 1888 when, despite a ban on swimming, Private McKay of the 58<sup>th</sup> ignored orders, escaped the heat, went swimming in the rain-swollen St. Maurice river, and drowned. Colonel Cook's successor, Lt. Col. Frederick Moore Pope, diverted one hundred and thirty dollars subscribed by his officers for sports equipment and prizes, to McKay's impoverished father. The old man had lost his only support in his old age.<sup>17</sup>

When the United Provinces first formed a paid volunteer militia in 1855, they faced a more urgent problem than military defence. Frontier society was turbulent. Lacking police, any meeting, procession, strike and even a private argument easily degenerated into mob violence. Any two magistrates could requisition armed force, and the Canadian volunteers replaced an increasingly reluctant British garrison. Before and after Confederation, militia answered scores of calls to suppress real or apprehended violence, whether in election riots in Montreal, pitched battles between Irish and French-speaking labourers in Quebec City or illegal boxing matches on the Lake Erie shore.<sup>18</sup> In the 1870s, Sherbrooke's 53<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was summoned to Montreal because of expected Orange riots. The 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion's only active service, however, occurred much closer to home in the autumn of 1888.

The Hereford Railway troubles closely resembled other post-

Confederation episodes of aid of the civil power. By 1887, the Canadian Pacific Railway had bought and rebuilt John Henry Pope's International Railway as a "Short Line" across Maine to New Brunswick. As Minister of Railways and Canals, Pope approved a plan by his son Rufus and other local notables to build a railway from Cookshire through Sawyerville to Beecher's Falls on the Vermont border.<sup>19</sup> Work started in August 1888 but two months of unseasonable rain delayed construction. When the railway's directors refused to compensate the contractor, the principals of the firm, Shirley & Corbet of Ottawa, absconded to the United States, taking the August and September payroll for their seven hundred largely Italian workers.<sup>20</sup> Heavily in debt to local storekeepers and furious at doing two months hard work in the pouring rain for nothing, the indignant Italians allegedly went on an angry rampage, wrecking property and terrorizing the local population.

Compton magistrates responded swiftly. On Wednesday, September 26, Colonel Pope's 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion and Colonel J.H. Taylor's 5<sup>th</sup> Dragoons were mustered into service.<sup>21</sup> Eager for excitement, newspapers despatched reporters. To underline his determination to suppress disorder, Colonel Pope let newsmen know that he had wired Colonel Houghton in Montreal for ten thousand rounds of ammunition.<sup>22</sup> Having drilled only three months earlier, the 58<sup>th</sup> was in good order, though members of the Cookshire Company, who had also failed to turn out for camp, balked at the meagre pay for their services, 50 cents a day, and argued for a dollar.<sup>23</sup>

As usual in such disputes, the railway labourers knew their protest would be nullified if other workers stayed on duty. Equally, the forces of order were determined to protect anyone who wanted to stay on the job. With eighty of his men, Colonel Pope rode a train south from Sawyerville and encountered two hundred strikers at a point where they had pulled a few rails off the newly-laid track. After his men deployed, Pope climbed on a stump, took out his watch, and invited a magistrate to read the Riot Act. *The Gazette's* reporter took up the story:

Col. Pope gave the Italians ten minutes to disperse but they refused, saying that they might as soon die at the hands of the soldiers as from starvation. When the ten minutes had expired, Col. Pope told the train hands to stand aside as the troops were going to fire. The train men got out of the way and the Italians, seeing themselves covered by the soldiers' rifles, broke and ran."<sup>24</sup>

That seems to have been as close to violence as the Hereford strike came. Pope established his headquarters in the house of William

Sawyer, a railway director in Sawyerville, and distributed his troops along the railway line from Cookshire to Hall's Stream on the Vermont border wherever the strikers might do damage. Taylor's cavalry troop provided patrols along the region's execrable roads. Colonel Houghton reached Cookshire by CPR and joined Pope on the night of the 28<sup>th</sup>. Meanwhile, an Italian foreman went to Montreal, met with Signor Carlo Mariotti, the Italian consul, and wired that the men would return to work if paid their back wages. He and the consul would come to Cookshire. Within hours, it was apparent that the labourers had been "more sinned against than sinning", reports of violence had been almost wholly imaginary, and the railway directors even agreed to despatch a carload of bread to ease the strikers' hunger.<sup>25</sup> If the food does not get through, claimed the *Gazette's* reporter, blame the soldiers "who seem to be very comfortable in the tents and huts vacated by the Italians".

By September 30, labourers at the Sawyerville end of the line had resumed work and Colonel Houghton moved himself, his staff, the cavalry troop and fifteen soldiers to a large hotel in Paquetteville near the border. Outside the hotel, they encountered fifty strikers, all claiming eagerness to get back to work. Desperate to resume construction before winter, the local railway directors promised the men at least part of their back wages, and a sudden cold snap reminded everyone that the working season might soon be over. Once Consul Mariotti and most of the local directors were on hand, a compromise was patched up. By October 3, Colonel Pope's men were free to go home and wait for the County Council to find the \$4000 it had cost to call out the troops.

The Hereford Railway was completed by 6 January 1889, adding close to fifty miles of line to southern Quebec's railway system. Militiamen were still waiting for their pay. "It is four month sense [sic] we sign the pay role" Sgt. James Martin complained on 22 January 1889, "[...] such a thing would not happing [sic] in H.M. Regular army." As a veteran, he knew.<sup>26</sup> Like most episodes of aid of the civil power, a show of force sufficed to suppress disorder, and the militia was equal to its modest responsibilities.

In 1890, a mood of reform followed the disgrace of the elderly Major-General Sir Fred Middleton over the Bremner fur scandal. His replacement, the youthful and ambitious Major-General Ivor Herbert, was determined to mould a force that could aid Britain in its far-flung imperial military commitments. Herbert focused most of his reforming zeal on the tiny permanent corps, reorganizing them into royal regiments of dragoons, artillery and infantry. Bilingual and Catholic,



he also gave some badly overdue attention to Quebec's francophone militia units, and sought to impose age and term limits on militia colonels, some of whom had held their commands since the 1860s. At the same time, Herbert was eager to shrink an organization that had too many officers and too many regiments and battalions for its budget. Little of this was popular with men who had come to see their commands as personal or family property.<sup>27</sup>

Typical of the new regime was a demand that colonels explain why officers had been absent from camp without prior leave. Of three officers absent from the 5<sup>th</sup> Dragoons' 1891 camp in Compton, Colonel Taylor supported Major C.W. Shepherd, whose rheumatism and sprained ankle, as attested by a local militia surgeon, had caused him to miss his first camp in twenty-six years, and Lieutenant A.A. Pomroy, whose father's death had left him to cope with the family's big stock farm. He did not excuse Lieutenant G.W.L. French, who merely claimed a dangerous illness in his family.<sup>28</sup> Taylor's troubles were not over. His regiment's five troops, at Cookshire, Sherbrooke, Compton, Stanstead and Sutton, were an anomaly when most militia cavalry regiments had only four troops, two had six, and one, in Quebec City, had only two. Eliminating the Sutton troop in southern Brome County, the weakest of the five, seemed a logical solution at Militia Headquarters until the June 1896 election, when Canadian voters gave the Liberals a majority, and Sir Wilfrid Laurier chose Brome's M.P., Sydney Fisher, as his new Minister of Agriculture. Suddenly the safety of the border, from Lake Champlain to Lake Memphremagog, was jeopardized by the loss of its sole cavalry troop. Perhaps there was another troop Taylor would sacrifice, but the colonel had made himself scarce. In the end, Sutton lost its troop, but the remaining troops of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dragoons grew to be squadrons, all in the name of giving part of the Townships' frontier a stronger defence. Gaining a few more cavalry cost Stanstead the transfer of its unsuccessful infantry company to nearby Beebe Plain.<sup>29</sup>

After its Hereford Railway excitement, the 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion continued uneventfully, with the Stanstead company still its weakest link. Paradoxically, when Colonel Pope retired, Stanstead's Major Malcolm McAuley, succeeded to Pope's command in November 1889, and Major Edward S. Baker, formerly of the Cookshire company, became McAuley's second-in-command. Both officers had the necessary first-class Volunteer Board certificates required for their rank and, as a former subaltern in Her Majesty's 22<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, Baker did not even need to pass the exams.<sup>30</sup> Lacking a certificate in equitation, McAuley was, in fact, less qualified than his subordinate though he seemed to

manage his responsibilities quite adequately through the 1890s. An 1898 inspection report by Lt. Col. Gerald Kitson, a British officer and commandant of the Royal Military College at Kingston, reported the unit “fairly smart and efficient” and the men “especially fine”. He added, a little bluntly: “The colonel, though very untidy, knows his work better than the others. Several of the Company officers are useful, determined men, though not of a high class”.<sup>31</sup> Kitson’s judgement probably applied to many rural militia battalions, but marked improvement was unlikely while colonels held their commands for as long as they liked.

In 1898, another British reformer, Major-General Edward Hutton, took command of the militia with what he interpreted as a mandate from London to render the force efficient enough to defeat an American invasion. In 1895–1896, the Venezuela Crisis had brought Britain and the United States close to war. Now was the time to enforce age and tenure limits, but what if better replacements were not available? By Kitson’s report, McAuley might be untidy but he knew his job. Major Baker might know it better but, at 59, he was already over-aged. While Hutton waged a number of politically-damaging battles to get rid of politically-influential colonels, his solution for the 58<sup>th</sup> was to squeeze an equitation course out of Colonel McAuley as the price of an extension, holding Baker in reserve if McAuley failed to act.<sup>32</sup> In 1900, Captain Samuel Botterill of the Cookshire company, who had taken his first class certificate at the Royal School of Infantry at St-Jean, succeeded McAuley. Meanwhile Colonel Taylor, who had commanded the 5<sup>th</sup> Dragoons since their formation, finally gave way to his second-in-command, Major John Learned in 1899 after almost a quarter-century.<sup>33</sup>

General Hutton’s impolitic zeal to despatch Canadian contingents to the British war in South Africa tried the patience even of his imperialist minister, Dr. Fred Borden, and cost him his job. It also established Canada’s military role in the new century: responding to the military needs of her old colonial masters, Britain and France, and the perceived threat of her continental neighbour, the United States. That did not happen at once. Hutton’s mission to reform the militia had been motivated by alarm at President Theodore Roosevelt’s openly imperial republic, and fears that Canada might have to defend itself. Perhaps the most significant consequence of the Venezuela Crisis was the decision in Britain’s War Office that the army’s main role in a new American war would be to land at Boston or New York and “make vigorous offensive gestures”. Canada’s militia would be on its own, without the British to provide generals, organization, plans and even

ancillary medical, logistical or communications support. A frank and critical study on the state of Canada's defences by the British commander-in-chief at Halifax, Major-General E.P. Leach, in 1898, included a final section, hidden from the Canadians who had paid for the study, advising the British to steer clear of Canadian defence until the colonists had met their costly and extensive responsibilities.

To their credit, the Laurier government did a lot more than any of their predecessors, starting in 1900 with creation of a Canadian Army Medical Corps, followed soon by an Army Service Corps, Ordnance Corps, Signals Corps and a Corps of Guides to lead troops through Canada's largely unmapped frontier regions. In 1909, a rising mood of militarism made it easier to make cadet training virtually compulsory for high school boys in all provinces but Saskatchewan. Nowhere in Canada was cadet training longer-established than in the *collèges* of Quebec. Peacetime military districts, with their accidental array of cavalry troops, artillery batteries and infantry battalions, were gradually reorganized for war, into divisions and brigades capable, at least in theory, of taking the field against an invader.

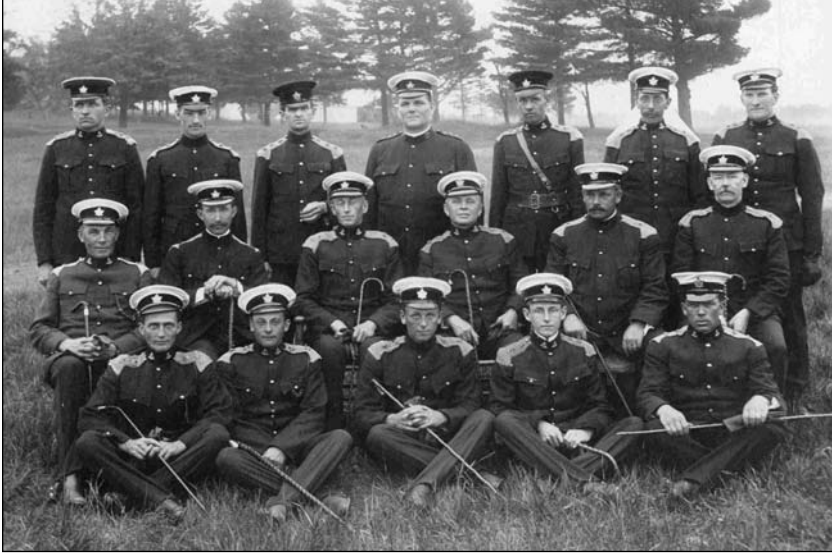
The Boer War easily persuaded Canada's defence planners that mounted troops were the answer to frontier defence. Armed with modern rifles, their own sturdy horses, years of hunting experience, and knowledge of their country, Boer farmers had humiliated British regulars in the early months of the war and maintained resistance against overwhelming odds until 1902. Canadians could do no worse. When Lord Dundonald, a Scottish peer and South African war hero, replaced Hutton in 1902, his reforms included creating new mounted units to defend the Eastern Townships. The 5<sup>th</sup> Hussars and the 58th Compton Battalion were reconfigured as the 7<sup>th</sup> Hussars, with squadrons at Bishop's Crossing, Bury, Scotstown and Cookshire. Their number (5<sup>th</sup>) and seniority were grabbed by Ottawa's cavalry troop, the Princess Louise Dragoon Guards, which became a regiment. Orphaned in the new arrangement, Stanstead's squadron was attached as an outlying unit, to Montreal's 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Connaught's Royal Canadian Hussars, along with other cavalry troops along the international border. A more durable solution was to transform Brome County's 52<sup>nd</sup> Regiment into the new 13<sup>th</sup> Scottish Light Dragoons under Lt. Col. C.A. Smart, a Montreal businessman.

Expansion of cavalry created a shortage of qualified officers for the new regiment, and Brome M.P. Sydney Fisher soon discovered that Colonel Smart had turned to many fellow Tories for help, including Dr. Wilfred Pickel, the mayor of Sweetsburg, whose chief qualification for a commission was that he owned a convenient rifle range. Fisher

managed to be acting minister of militia when Smart's list of nominees arrived. He struck off Pickel's name but accepted the rest. When he learned the news, Dundonald exploded at a militia officers' banquet in Montreal. Five days later, the story leaked. Armed with a secret statement from Dundonald, the Tories believed they had a marvelous scandal in an election year. In fact, the issue was soon spun into Imperial meddling, Dundonald's vanity and a minister's duty to exclude an unqualified officer.<sup>34</sup> The Laurier government fired their general, called an election for 3 November 1904, and won the same 47 per cent of voters they had collected in 1900. Still, the Pickel scandal produced systemic change. Given that the first of the eight British officers commanding the militia since 1874 had completed his term, Canada welcomed a British decision to replace its commander-in-chief with an Army Council. In 1905, the Liberals created a Militia Council, with a civilian minister in full control, and responsibilities shared among officials and generals.<sup>35</sup>

By 1906, the Eastern Townships formed part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Divisional area, commanded from Montreal by Colonel Septimus Denison, an ex-Torontonian. Major Morrill's Stanstead's squadron of the 6<sup>th</sup> Hussars became part of Smart's 13<sup>th</sup> Scottish Light Dragoons, with other squadrons in Cowansville, Mansonville and Stanbridge, where the squadron commander was former Sergeant Eddie Holland of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, one of three Canadian Victoria Cross winners at Lilliefontein. The 13<sup>th</sup> Scottish Light Dragoons and the 6<sup>th</sup> Hussars formed the 4<sup>th</sup> Eastern Townships Mounted Brigade, also under Colonel Smart. For the rest of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, Sherbrooke's predominantly English-speaking 53<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, joined by the Francophone 54<sup>e</sup> *Carabiniers de Sherbrooke*, formed the 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade; four other francophone regiments formed the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade and three posh Montreal units, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Victoria Rifles, 5<sup>th</sup> Royal Highlanders and 65<sup>th</sup> *Carabiniers* Mont-Royal, formed the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade. The 5<sup>th</sup> Divisional area ran south from Quebec City to the Townships. Its cavalry component, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Eastern Townships Mounted Brigade under Lt. Col. E.B. Worthington, included the 7<sup>th</sup> Hussars (formerly the 5<sup>th</sup> and 58<sup>th</sup>) the 11<sup>th</sup> (Sherbrooke) Hussars (which included a Magog squadron) and the 28<sup>th</sup> Dragoons, all of them essentially new.

In July 1908, Quebec's Tercentenary celebrations included the largest militia review in the short history of Confederation. Over eight thousand volunteers assembled on the Plains of Abraham. To participate, the Eastern Townships formed a composite cavalry regiment, a golden opportunity for officers to share their grumbles, not the least of which was the bewildering series of reorganizations, and



*26<sup>th</sup> Stanstead Dragoons.  
Source: Stanstead Historical Society*

the fact that men of Stanstead County now contributed to three different units and had none of their own. At the cavalry camp in Farnham in 1910, squadrons from Magog, Coaticook, Hatley and Stanstead formed a composite regiment under Major A.C. Hanson of the Coaticook squadron. Since a proper cavalry brigade needed three regiments and the Militia Department budget was growing, the arguments for a new regiment found ears. In 1910, Militia General Orders announced the new 26<sup>th</sup> Stanstead Dragoons, to wear scarlet tunics and black facings. Hanson would be the colonel, and the four squadrons were those which had worked together at Farnham. For an honorary colonel, the young regiment reached high, and persuaded Field Marshal Sir John French, soon to be commander-in-chief of the British Expeditionary Force in France, to give his name.

A little book by Major William Melrose of the Hatley squadron records some of the spirit and mood of the brand new unit. By 1914, the 26<sup>th</sup> Dragoons had made regular appearances at the annual Stanstead Fall Fair, and an Annual Cavalry Ball was a fixture in Hatley. The Coaticook squadron specialized in marksmanship and the Magog squadron each year collected the best horses, either bays or blacks. Recruits were urged to ensure that their red serge jackets fitted well and to take them to a tailor if they did not. "Buy yourself as good stout pair of high tan shoes", Melrose directed, and "[s]ee that your cap is snug and comfortable." Above all, he advised, pick three chums and train

together as a section of four. Comradeship was the key to happy soldiering but "We don't want any man who drinks, is intemperate or a booze fighter. [...] We don't want any foul-mouthed, swearing, indecent man in the regiment; they are only in the way, and spoil the good times of our respectable boys who do try to conduct themselves properly." "We outgrow our old teachers", Melrose confessed, "but until the sword is exchanged for ploughshares, the soldierly traits of grit, courage, decision and strict attention to business will continue to be admired in men."<sup>36</sup>

Militarism was very much in style in the first years of Stanstead's first county regiment. Across Canada, a mixture of nationalism and imperialism spread cadet training through the schools, expanded the volunteers, and, in another form, defeated Laurier and Reciprocity in the 1911 election, elected Robert Borden's Conservatives and made Colonel Sam Hughes the Minister of Militia. A Canadian Defense League, formed in 1909, mobilized editors, academics and politicians to urge Swiss-style universal military training for Canadian men. The Empire could have too little militarism, warned Principal Maurice Hutton of the University of Toronto, it could never have too much.<sup>37</sup>

By 1914, Melrose's arguments were at least controversial. A severe depression followed the Borden victory. "Drill Hall" Sam's spending on armories, drill shed and new militia units had become at least as controversial as his determination to drive liquor from militia life. In the spring of 1914, the Defense League folded for lack of funds, and Principal Hutton's university, like others, hesitated to accept contingents of the new Canadian Officers' Training Corps. Still, Hughes had continued to spend while government revenues were shrinking, and the militia had grown from its nineteenth century ceiling of 40,000 to well over 60,000 men, with thousands more registered in rifle clubs. Ironically perhaps, it was the British and Americans who discovered the century of peace along the Canada-United States border between 1814 and 1914. Somehow, with their memories of Hunters' Lodges, the Civil War and the Fenians, Canadians had not noticed. Still, the government belatedly created a Canadian Peace Centenary Association, and on 26 June 1914, Sherbrooke's citizens met to organize a Sherbrooke Peace Centenary Committee.

Two days later, the Austrian Archduke, Franz Ferdinand was assassinated at Sarajevo and the world slid rapidly down the slope to the most terrible war Canadians have ever known.

## NOTES

- 1 G.F.G. Stanley, *Canada's Soldiers: The Military History of an Unmilitary People* (Toronto: Macmillan, 3rd ed. 1974), 211–213.
- 2 R.G. 9 I C 1 vol. 13, Jun-Dec, 1855, Major Fox to de Salaberry, 25 July 1855.
- 3 The terms “Upper” and “Lower” Canada were retained in Militia administration after the United Canadas were distinguished as Canada East and Canada West.
- 4 R.G. 9, I C 1 vol. 12, 7 October 1855, Lt. Col. M.C Hanson memo 39.
- 5 29 Vict. Sessional Papers 1866, no. 4, Militia Report, p. 63.
- 6 Mrs. C.M. Day, *History of the Eastern Townships, Province of Quebec, Dominion of Canada : civil and descriptive* (Montreal: John Lovell, 1869).
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- 8 R.G. 9 I C 1, C 3 vol. 18, Independent Companies, SI-ST. Most of the soldiers collected \$8 for their training. Only two of the members were illiterate and needed witnesses that they had collected their pay.
- 9 Canada, Sessional Papers, 31 Vict., no. 35, Militia Report, 1867, pp. 22, 113.
- 10 Canada, Sessional Papers, 30 Vict. 8, Militia Report, 1870.
- 11 *Ibid.*, C.S.P. 8, 1872, pp. 106–7.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 36 Vict. C.S.P. 9, p. 183. Though breech-loading, the rifles were not easy to keep clean and a winter in a damp shed encouraged rust and fouling.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 37 Vict. C.S.P. 7, 1873, pp. 17–18; *ibid.*, 39 Vict. C.S.P. 7, 1876, pp. 136–7; *ibid.*, 41 Vict C.S.P. 8, 1878, pp. 134-5. Gilman is recorded as J.K. Gilman. James K. Gillman became a tavern-keeper in Derby Line.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 43 Vict., C.S.P. 8, 1880, p. 39.
- 15 Militia General Orders, 30 November 1877.
- 16 52 Vict., Sessional Papers, no. 13, Militia Report, 1889, p. 29.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- 18 See Desmond Morton, “Aid to the Civil Power: The Canadian Militia in Support of Social Order, 1867–1914”, *Canadian Historical Review*, LI, 4, December, 1970; and *ibid* “No More Disagreeable or Onerous Duty: Canadians and Military Aid of the Civil Power, Past, Present and Future” in David DeWitt and David Leighton Brown, *Canada's International Security Policy*, (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1995), pp. 129–145.

- 19 On the Hereford Railway, see John Derek Booth, *Railways of Southern Quebec* (Toronto: Railway Enterprises Ltd, 1985), vol. II, pp. 106–108; on the International Railway, see Harold A. Innis, *A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 135; Jean-Pierre Kesteman, *Histoire de Sherbrooke tome II, De l'âge de la vapeur à l'ère de l'électricité (1867–1896)* (Sherbrooke: Éditions GGC, 2001), pp. 72–74, 79; J.I. Little, *Nationalism, Capitalism and Colonization in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001). The Line also extended across the CPR track to Lime Ridge, to serve lime deposits owned by Pope's son-in-law, W.B. Ives, another partner in the Hereford Railway.
- 20 As reported in the Montreal *Daily Star*, 26 September 1888.
- 21 Though not without difficulty. Men of the 58<sup>th</sup>'s Cookshire company allegedly demanded a dollar a day for service, not the regulation 50 cents. The Coaticook, Hatley and Stanstead mustered a total of 75 men, not the 132 that represented full strength. (The Montreal *Gazette*, 29 September 1888).
- 22 Getting the ammunition to Cookshire was easier said than done. Houghton sent it by Grand Trunk but that railway decreed that it was illegal to ship it by passenger train and returned the boxes to Montreal where the Dominion Express Company transferred it to a more obliging Canadian Pacific Railway. See *ibid.*, 26 September 1888.
- 23 Montreal *Gazette*, "A Very Critical Moment", 29 September 1888, p. 8. On the absence of no. 10 Company from camp, see Militia Report, 52 Vict. S.P. 13, 1889, p. 24.
- 24 Montreal *Gazette*, "A Very Critical Moment", 29 September 1888.
- 25 "Sawyerville" insisted that the Italians had been entirely peaceful and that "it would be very difficult to find a company of men who would bear such misfortune any better than they have." (*Gazette*, 29 September 1888, p. 8.) Colonel Pope insisted that he and his troops were in sympathy with the workers "but at the same time they have made up their mind not to stand any nonsense". (*Daily Star*, 30 September 1888).
- 26 National Archives, R.G. 9, II, B, 1, file 102-10, docket 24975, Martin to Adjutant General, 11 January 1889. Militia officers often had to sue the local governments that had ordered their call-out to pay their men.
- 27 On Herbert, see Desmond Morton, *Ministers and Generals: Politics and the Canadian Militia, 1868–1904* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), pp. 94–111.



- 28 R.G. 9, II B 1 Box 129, docket 2/2613, Lt. Col. J.H. Taylor to Adjutant-General of the Militia, 15 May 1892, 21 July 1892.
- 29 R.G. 9 II B 1 box 179, Col. Eugène Panet to General Officer Commanding, 1 October 1898, Col. Roy, DOC MD 6 to Adjutant-General, Ottawa, 21 November 1896, docket 71798; *Militia Lists*, 1889, 1895, 1896, 1897.
- 30 On Major Baker, see R.G. 9 II B, 1, vol. 193, R.H. Pope M.P. to F.W. Borden, 16 Dec 1898, Docket 77967; Major-General E.T.H. Hutton to Deputy Minister of Militia, 27 February 1899, *ibid.*
- 31 *Ibid.*, box 203, 1898–99 Inspection Report, 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion, docket 82886.
- 32 *Ibid.*, vol. 193-8 DOC M.D. 6 (Colonel Roy) to Adjutant-General (Lord Aylmer, 28 November 1898; Adjutant General and Chief Staff Officer to Colonel Roy, 2 December 1898 and 19 January 1899; docket 77967). Colonel MacAuley went to the Gunnery School in Kingston and secured his equitation certificate (Colonel Roy, 2 March 1899).
- 33 *Militia Lists*, 1899, 1901.
- 34 On the Dundonald affair, see Morton, *Minister & Generals*, pp. 188-192.
- 35 *Ibid.*, pp. 193–194.
- 36 Melrose, *Stanstead Cavalry*, n.p.
- 37 Morton, *Military History*, p. 129.

