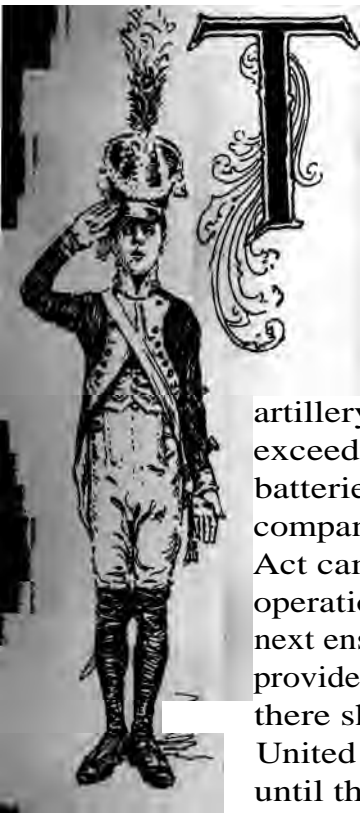


CHAPTER IV

I

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE THIRTEENTH BATTALION



TWENTY YEARS of unbroken peace elapsed, during which the necessity for any armed force in addition to the regular troops in garrison was scarcely obvious. The war with Russia caused a revival of military ardor, and in 1855 an "Act to regulate the Militia" was passed by which the enrollment of volunteers as active militia was authorized, and the provinces were divided into military districts for that purpose. "The active militia," this act read, "shall consist of volunteer troops of cavalry, field batteries and foot companies of artillery and companies of infantry armed as riflemen, but not exceeding in the whole sixteen troops of cavalry, seven field batteries of artillery, five foot companies of artillery and fifty companies of riflemen, not to exceed five thousand men." The Act came into force on July 1st, 1855, and was to continue in operation "for three years, and from thence until the end of the next ensuing session of Parliament of the Province and no longer, provided that if, at the time when this act would otherwise expire, there should happen to be war between Her Majesty and the United States of America, then this Act shall continue in force until the end of the session of the Provincial Parliament next after the proclamation of peace between Her Majesty and the said United States."

Until then, the annual muster and inspection of the County Militia, comprising practically the whole male population of the country, between the ages of 18 and 45, continued to be held, to the great inconvenience of all concerned, particularly in the rural districts where many persons had to travel great distances to attend, and lose several days' time. It had become a wretched burlesque. Neither officers or men, with perhaps a few exceptions, were armed, equipped,

or in any way instructed in the military duties they were presumed to perform. The organization consisted solely of a list of officers. The new act was so far successful that the full number of corps authorized were organized and equipped (largely at their own expense), and in many cases appear to have attained a creditable degree of proficiency in troop or company drill, under instructions from the regular service.

Hamilton was one of the first cities to take advantage of the act. Two rifle companies and a field battery were organized before the end of the year, and in 1856 a Highland company of infantry was added, chiefly by the exertions of Captain (afterwards Lieut.-Colonel) James Aitchison Skinner, who uniformed it at his own expense.

Another militia act, which became law in 1859, provided for the organization of battalions of infantry and rifles wherever practicable. The prospect of hostilities with the United States, in consequence of the outrage on the steamer Trent, occasioned great excitement, and gave a decided stimulus to the volunteer movement all over Canada. The Governor-General appointed a Royal Commission to report on the most effective means of organizing the militia for the defence of the country. The Commissioners strongly recommended that a force of 50,000 men should be embodied and trained for twenty-eight days every year.

The excitement had not altogether subsided when the general order of December 13th, 1862, was published, authorizing the formation of a battalion of infantry in Hamilton, designated as the Thirteenth. The two existing rifle companies, then commanded by Captains James Edwin O'Reilly and Stephen T. Cattley, were incorporated in the battalion as numbers one and two, and the Highland company, under Captain Skinner, as number three company. Four new companies were formed under command of Captains John Brown, George Herve Ming-aye, Donald McInnes and Thomas Bell. Hon. Isaac Buchanan, the most eminent public man in the city, was gazetted as Lieutenant-Colonel Commanding, Captains Skinner and O'Reilly were promoted to be Majors almost immediately. The ranks were soon filled with enthusiastic volunteers, and on the 19th of December, 1862, an eighth company was added under Captain John McKeown, and on the 9th of January, 1863, a ninth, commanded by Captain Robert Law. The former company was, however, disbanded on the 10th of July, 1863.

A fund of \$4,000 was rapidly raised by public subscription, and in March, 1863, the construction of a commodious drill shed was begun, which was completed in time for a battalion parade on the 4th of June. It was designed by, and constructed under the supervision of an officer of the battalion, Lieutenant (afterwards Major) Alexander H. Askin.

The use of the motto " Semper Paratus " was authorized, and on the 1st

of September, 1863; the Battalion was presented with colors by Mrs. Buchanan, wife of the commanding officer. The escort on that occasion was commanded by Captain John Stewart Henderson, Ensigns Watson and Buchanan being detailed to carry the colors. These were duly consecrated by Reverend J. Gamble Geddes, the Rector of Christ's Church, and received from Mrs. Buchanan by Major Skinner.

On September 3rd the battalion, commanded by Major Skinner, numbering about three hundred officers and men, took part in a review at Brantford,



THIRTEENTH BATTALION OF INFANTRY ON PARADE GROUND, MAY 24TH, 1891).

where nearly 2,300 volunteers of the district were inspected by Major General George Napier. The Thirteenth was the strongest battalion on parade, and was equally distinguished for general proficiency in drill. The officers present were Major Skinner, Captains Henderson, Cattley, Mingaye, Bell and Law, Lieuts. Papps, Macrae, Askin, Hilton, Biggar and Wink, Ensigns Watson, Buchanan, Irving, Jamieson and Inkson.

On the 13th of January, 1864, Lieut.-Colonel Hoste, C. B., R. A., was appointed Inspector of Militia for the district, and made the first official inspection

of the Battalion a few weeks later. On December 30th of that year Lieut.-Colonel Buchanan retired from the command, and on January 27th, 1865, was succeeded by Lieut.-Colonel Alfred Booker, who had commanded the Hamilton Field Battery since its organization in 1855, and enjoyed the reputation of an energetic and efficient officer. In April of this year, three Administrative Battalions for frontier service were organized mainly to prevent a recurrence of inroads upon the territory of the United States, by refugees from the South, similar to the famous St. Alban's Raid. Lieut.-Colonel Booker was then selected for the command of the second of these battalions, having its headquarters at Niagara, and he appointed Captain (afterwards Lieut.-Colonel) Henry Erskine Irving, *of* his own battalion, to be Adjutant, Captain John Henery succeeding him. A company composed of volunteers from the Thirteenth was enlisted, and officered by Captain Cattley, Lieut. Watson and Ensign Jamieson. It was sent to Prescott, where it formed part of the Eastern Administrative Battalion, and remained in garrison until November, when its term of service expired. Another company was immediately formed to take its place by Captain Irving, having Ensigns Grant and Hebden as his subalterns, and proceeded to Windsor. Ensign Grant was appointed Adjutant of the Western Administrative Battalion during his term of service.

On the 10th of November, 1865, No. 7 company, and, on the 15th of December, No. 8 company, were disbanded, and the establishment of the battalion reduced to six companies of fifty-five non-commissioned officers and men, No. 9 becoming No. 3.

During the autumn of 1865, and the following winter, rumors prevailed of formidable preparations for an invasion of Canada from the United States by bodies of men professing to act under the instructions of the Executive of the Fenian or Irish Republican Brotherhood, who were known to have collected large sums of money for some such purpose. As nearly a million of soldiers lately engaged in the civil war had just disbanded, many of whom were naturally disinclined to return to a life of peaceful toil, a formidable army of well trained men, it was confidently expected, could be easily assembled for any enterprise that promised adventure or profit. To many enthusiasts the conquest of Canada doubtless seemed an easy undertaking at the time. The reports of consuls and other confidential agents in the principal American cities satisfied the Canadian Government that there was genuine cause for alarm, and on the 7th of March, 1866, the Executive Council determined to call out 10,000 volunteers, which was done that day by telegraph. The entire Thirteenth Battalion was included in this force, but permitted to remain at its headquarters, performing daily drills and mounting guards at the drill shed, artillery gun sheds, magazine, and the Mountain View Hotel, in constant expectation of being moved to the frontier.

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Everywhere throughout the province the most admirable spirit was displayed by the mass of the people. Commenting on this subject only two days after the call for volunteers was issued, the Governor-General, Lord Monck, wrote to the Colonial Secretary :

" I may also mention that offers of service continue to be received at headquarters to an extent far beyond the number of men required, and I have no doubt, should the occasion unfortunately arise, the supply of volunteers who would present themselves for the defense of the country would be limited only by the numbers of the male population capable of bearing arms."

It was generally expected that the 17th of March would be distinguished by the first hostile movement, and as that day passed without any attempt at invasion, the alarm gradually abated. A few days later a General Order was published, relieving the volunteers on service at their regimental headquarters from daily parade, but requiring them to perform two days' drill in the week, and to continue in readiness to move at a moment's notice.

On the 8th of May, 1866, the Battalion was inspected by Major-General Napier, who was so well pleased with its appearance that he caused Lieut.-Colonel Durie, the Assistant Adjutant-General, to write the following letter to Lieut.-Colonel Booker :

TORONTO, 8th May, 1866.

SIR, I am directed by Major General Napier, C. B., commanding 1st Military District, C. W., to express to you the gratification he felt at the very creditable and soldierlike appearance made by the Volunteer Militia Force under your command, when inspected by the Major-General this day. Their steadiness under arms, and the manner in which they moved on parade, merits this expression of the Major-General's approbation, which you will be good enough to convey to the force under your command."

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