

His Majesty's Canadian Regiment of Fencible Infantry 1803-16 (3)

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The first two parts of this article (*MI* Nos. 37 & 38) covered the history, and uniforms and equipment, of this Canadian regiment of the War of 1812. This concluding part covers the re-creation of the unit by Canadian re-enactors in the 1980s; and provides a few more of the photographs of the re-created regiment used to illustrate this series, which confirm the high standard of costume and equipment achieved.

In 1984 a group of military history enthusiasts from Eastern Ontario decided to re-create a Canadian corps from the War of 1812. Because of the role it played during this crucial time in Canada's history, the Canadian Regiment of Fencible Infantry proved to be the favoured choice. The group was adopted as a project of the Museum of Applied Military History, a Canadian organization of groups re-enacting periods from the Seven Years War to World War II. The Museum's purpose is to preserve and promote Canada's military history by 'living education'.

From its beginnings, the goal of the re-created Canadian Fencibles was to accurately portray the life of the Canadian regular in British service in the summer of 1812, thereby bringing greater awareness and understanding of that period to Canadians. Since eight of the ten companies of the Canadian Fencible Regiment were battalion companies the group decided to depict a battalion company.

Many re-enactment groups, when founded, tend to be top heavy: they misrepresent the number of officers and NCOs compared with the rank and file. Recognising this problem, the re-created Canadian Fencibles chose, for its first three years, to have only musketmen. Limited stratification began in 1988 when numbers and obvious historical reasons

justified the creation (by election) of non-commissioned officers. Presently, the 30 — member Canadian Fencibles consists of:
1 Sergeant
2 Corporals
1 Lance Corporal
2 Drummers
24 Privates

The regiment's policy continues to be to avoid the addition of commissioned officers to its ranks until numbers justify. This has created a peculiar problem for the group. At most re-enactments the group parades with a stand of colours, and historically the colours of a regiment were carried by subaltern officers. In order to maintain the current stratification policy while preserving historical accuracy, 'gentlemen volunteers' were created (clothed in the uniform of the ranks) to carry the colours. On the permission of the commander of the forces in America, a gentleman could enter the ranks of a regiment as a 'volunteer'. This improved the gentleman's chances for an appointment into an officer vacancy. Returns for the summer of 1812 show two volun-

The Canadian Fencibles helped organise the trip by more than 120 North American re-enactors to participate in the 1990 Waterloo commemoration, and provided the largest single unit, alongside drafts from the 37th, 41st and 49th Regiments, the Incorporated Militia, and the 19th Bn. of Dutch Militia. (All photographs, Janice Lang)

teers on the strength of the Canadian Fencibles.

The re-created Canadian Fencibles' ranks are a cross-section of Canadian society. The ethnic composition is strikingly similar to the original: there are musketmen of English, Scottish and Irish descent. There is a large percentage of French Canadians or of French Canadian descent in the group. In addition, there is a 'foreign' element of American expatriates and others from the United States, as well as members of German and Finnish descent. The group includes teachers, historians, curators, career military personnel, bureaucrats, professional military modellers, and other history enthusiasts drawn mainly from Ottawa and Toronto, Ontario.

COSTUME AND EQUIPMENT

As with any re-enactment group, procuring the 'clothing, arms and accoutrements on the same footing with line regiments' has been as difficult as for the original. The regiment has, however, gradually

secured suppliers for such necessities as universal shako plates, wool lace, madder red melton cloth for the coats, bayonet scabbards, and other items. In order to ensure quality and authenticity many of the items used have had to be made by members of the group itself. Such labour is undertaken by the membership on a voluntary basis; and the group now has members with expertise in producing belt plates, regimental buttons, wooden canteens (with a branded Board of Ordnance mark), coats, great-coats, trousers, cartridge pouches, buff leather cross-belts, and colours.

The equipment is based on original examples and/or primary sources. Access to the collections of and assistance from experts at the Canadian Parks Service and the Canadian War Museum have enabled the regiment to achieve and maintain a high standard of accuracy. For example, the regimental coats are made from a pattern based on an examination of originals; lace and showing seams are hand sewn, and cutting and construction tech-



niques of the period have been painstakingly maintained. Lastly, the two regulation sizes of buttons have been reproduced from surviving examples.

Each member of the re-created Canadian Fencibles finances his own uniform and equipment and must meet the standards set out by the organization. The average private incurs the following expenses (in Canadian dollars):

Musket & bayonet.....	600.00
Shako	55.00
Coat.....	100.00
Shirt, trousers, stock & gaiters.....	70.00
Pouch & bayonet belts.....	45.00
Cartridge pouch	80.00
Bayonet scabbard.....	35.00
Belt plate	35.00
Canteen	20.00
Haversack	5.00

The majority of these prices represent only the cost of the materials, which is a result of another group policy. Group members do not charge each other for labour. As a result, the

costly hobby of re-enactment has become significantly more affordable for the members without sacrificing historical accuracy. For example, each shako is sold at one quarter of its market value.

DISPLAYS AND COMMEMORATIONS

Besides attention to outfitting, considerable effort goes into ensuring the historical accuracy of the regiment's public presentations. The unit's drill is drawn from a variety of sources; Dundas' *Principles of Military Movements* (1788), *The Manual and Platoon Exercises* (1804), and the *Rules and Regulations for the Manual and Platoon Exercises, Formations, Field-Exercise, and Movements* (1807). In addition, the *Rules and Regulations for the Formation, Exercise and Movements of the Militia of Lower Canada* (Quebec 1812) has also been studied to provide a better understanding of the military drill of the period. Regular drill

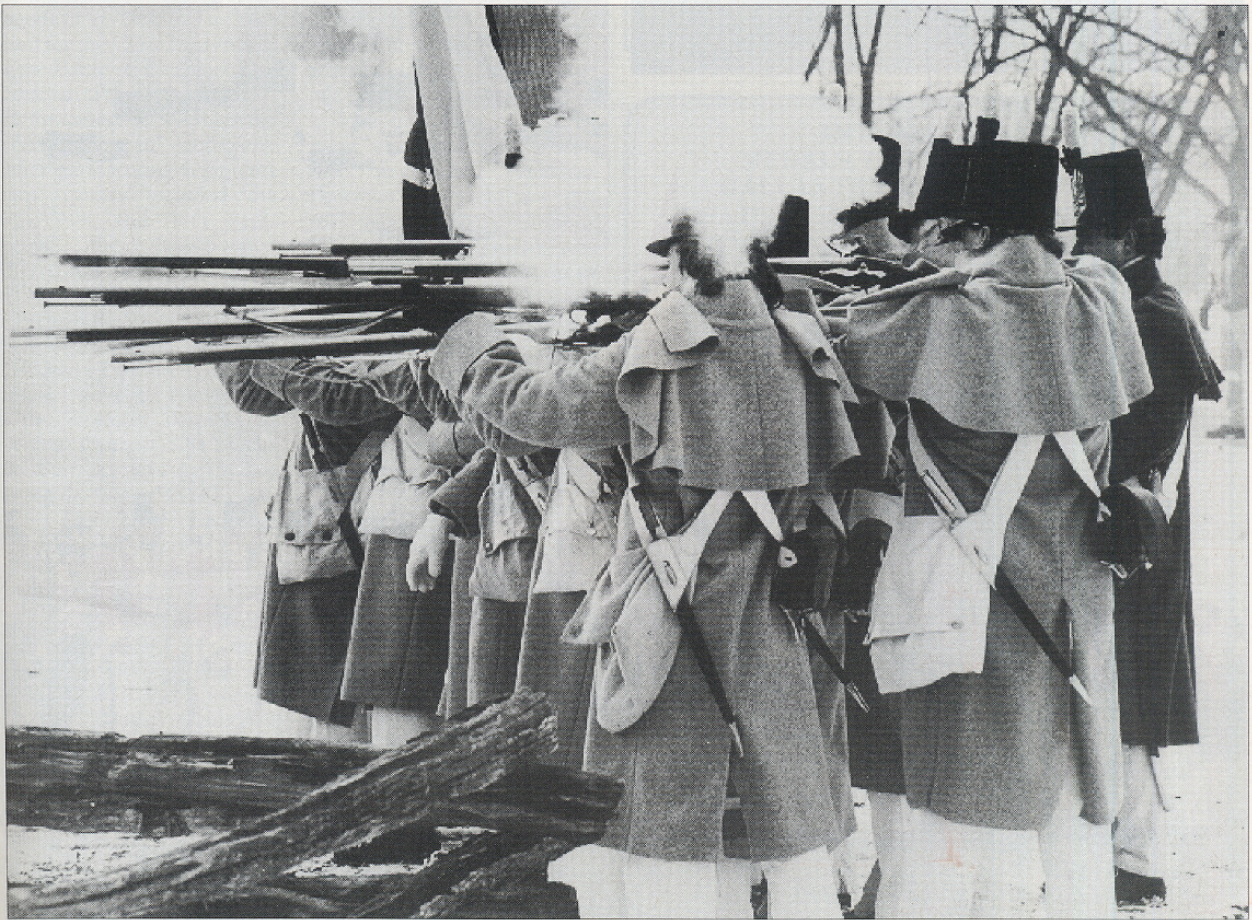
practices are held to maintain the drill standards of regulars of the time, and to educate new recruits. A comprehensive, illustrated manual of the drill of the period has also been produced by one of the members.

In battle re-enactments, some historical accuracy has necessarily been sacrificed in the interest of safety. The group does not use ramrods in opposing-line situations, and limits each cartridge's powder charge to 100 grains. A flash guard and a leather hammer stall (cover) are required for each musket. Liability insurance for the group is provided under a policy issued to the Museum of Applied Military History. Such measures allow the group to enjoy re-enactment events without endangering the safety of its members or the public.

Each year, War of 1812 commemorations are held at a large number of sites in North America including New Orleans, Chrysler's Farm, Fort Niagara, Prescott, Fort

Malden, Sackets Harbour, Fort Meigs, and North Point (Baltimore). The Canadian Fencibles participate in a large number of these events, and offer a variety of tactical battlefield displays. The re-enactment of the Battle of Stoney Creek, Ontario, in June demonstrates His Majesty's troops' successful night attack on American positions in 1813. As a unit the Canadian Fencibles brave -25°C temperatures and snow to re-create the February 1813 British and Canadian attack on American fortifications at Ogdensburg, New York. In +30°C temperatures in August, the group commemorates the ill-fated storming of the American garrison at

Nice rear view of a two-rank line firing a volley in the snow at an Ogdensburg, NY, re-enactment commemorating the action in February 1813. This event can involve temperatures of -25°C. The grey woollen campaign trousers one might expect to see were apparently not issued to the regiment until the following summer.





Colour photographs opposite:

(A) His Grace the Duke of Wellington at the 175th anniversary celebrations of the construction of Fort Wellington at Prescott, Ontario. At this commemoration the Canadian Fencibles provided the honour guard, and demonstrated tactics of the War of 1812. The historical regiment was one of the first units posted to the fort after its construction in 1813.

(B) The Canadian Fencibles in winter dress, about to fire a volley on American positions at the Battle of Ogdensburg.

(C) The Canadian Fencibles march off in column after the 175th anniversary celebrations on the field of Waterloo in June 1990; see 'MI' No.32 for an account of this event. Note the brightness of the polished muskets: accounts mention that the historical regiment habitually polished their arms bright, to the point of weakening several of the barrels — which is unsurprising considering the abrasiveness of the materials used, ebony paper and a mixture of brick-dust and lard. (All photographs, Janice Lang)

Fort Erie, Ontario, in 1814.

In 1990 two members of the Canadian Fencibles undertook to organize a trip for over a hundred and twenty North American re-enactors to Belgium for the 175th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo. The Canadian Fencible Regiment was the largest single unit in the North American contingent. Other participating regiments from Canada included the 37th, 41st, and 49th Regiments, the Incorporated Militia, and the 19th Battalion of Dutch Militia.

Perhaps the most distinctive event organized by the Canadian Fencibles is the annual regimental dinner held at the Stockade Barracks in Prescott, Ontario. The Stockade Barracks was garrisoned during the War of 1812 by soldiers like the Canadian Fencibles, and served as a hospital. It is now a museum. For dinner, the building's first-floor barracks room is converted into a candlelit period mess decorated with portraits of King George III, the regiment's colours, and other regimental items. A five-course period meal is first enjoyed by the members. Following the meal, the toasts begin. Initiated with one 'to the King', the toasts continue into the early morning hours.

In addition to drill and battlefield tactics the Canadian Fencibles portray camp life of the War of 1812. Commissariat store returns and accounts during the war show the wide use of five-man square tents by troops in Canada. These tents were left over from the American Revolution and were in poor condition. The bell-shaped Duke of York's pattern, or Flanders tent, introduced into the British army in the 1790s was not supplied to troops in North America until after the war had started. Therefore, since the re-created Canadian Fencibles portray the regiment during the summer of 1812, its members have chosen to use the old-pattern square tents. Because of the way they were issued the original tents were probably not marked regimentally. They may, however, have displayed regimental markings from the previous occupants serving in the American Revolution. In addition to streets of square tents, camp colours, tin and iron kettles on camp fires, and various boxes and baggage all add to the regiment's portrayal of a period encampment.

Without the aid of government or corporate sponsors, the re-created Canadian Fencibles have achieved and maintained very high standards in clothing, equipment, and drill. The group's attention to authenticity and its strict standards have created a very dedicated membership. **MI**

Acknowledgements

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Interested readers may contact the Museum of Applied Military History c/o: R.R.No.1, King City, Ontario, Canada LOG 1K0.



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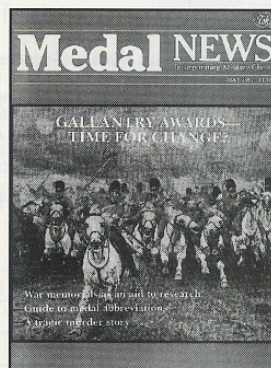
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