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War Along the St. Lawrence River: The Canadian Fencibles at Prescott, 1812-1814

by Robert Henderson

Rolls from drums beating the alarm shattered the stillness of the night. In a pitch-black barracks room, men leaped from their births and, seizing their muskets from the arms racks, were soon spilling out of the tight blockhouse door unto the parade square. Their normally colourful red coats with yellow cuffs and collar now appeared sombre in the darkness. Officers and sergeants swirled about pushing men into their positions in the respective company formations. The cold November night air refreshed the tired and confused young soldiers. Many had never seen battle; however their apprehensions were eased by the years of training that triggered a Pavlovian-like response to the orders of their officers.

Once formed up, their portly commanding officer, Major Cockburn directed his four company commanders to take the men up high onto the fort's earthworks around the newly-constructed blockhouse and ready themselves for an attack by the Americans. Quickly reaching the top, the men of the Canadian Fencibles were met with the sudden sound concussions from the blasts of the fort's artillery and from the cannons below at the shore battery. Dispensing with the safety precaution of sponging the piece with water after each round, the gunners of Royal Artillery rapidly loaded and fired the large garrison guns. The sound and shock from firing eight pounds of gun powder from each cannon was enough to break glass hundreds of metres away, and the wooden gun carriages holding the cannon barrels recoiled several feet back with great ferocity along the tilted naval-style gun platforms. After each round, the blue and grey clothed gunners rushed with their hand spikes to "run the gun up." With each blast the silhouettes of gunners appeared and disappeared in a light and sound show that was dazzling to Cockburn's men watching from their defensive positions. They viewed in amazement and with new respect as, even in the dark, the Royal Artillerymen were still getting off two or three rounds a minute.

In the distance, mortar shells and spherical case shot exploded in the air lighting up the St. Lawrence River below. With each explosion, faint lines of hundreds of boats could be made out. Around the earthworks of Fort Wellington, the Canadian Fencibles watched and listened to the distinctive rattle of columns of British troops and Canadian militia scrambling down the roads and paths from the barracks buildings and encampment north and west of the fort. Everyone in the garrison knew where they were supposed to be in the event of an alarm and if they weren't in the right place, there would be hell to pay from the garrison's Commander, Col. Thomas Pearson. Not long after the barrage of artillery had commenced an order arrived to Artillery Captain Jackson. Receiving a salute from the militia dragoon courier, Jackson turned to his gunners and ordered the guns to be elevated.

Hand spikes were quickly inserted to raise the breech of the each heavy iron barrel, and each wedge-shaped wooden quoin was pulled back to achieve the proper angle. Soon round shot was whistling through the air into the American town across the river. The boats were empty, and the American Army had chosen to avoid Prescott's guns and march overland south of Ogdensburg. Such was the situation on the upper St. Lawrence a few days before the famous battle of Crysler's Farm on November 11th, 1813.

With limited numbers of professional soldiers in British North America at the opening of hostilities of the War of 1812, regiments like the Canadian Fencibles found their unit broken up and distributed throughout the numerous border posts. In addition, regular troops in the first two years of the war were obliged to carry out extra tasks as marines, gunners, militia administrators and instructors. The purpose of this study is to illustrate the results of the crisis management practiced by military officials upon the above mentioned regiment, with the Prescott garrison as a focus point to illustrate the defence requirements of a military post in Upper Canada.

Formally titled 'the Canadian Regiment of Fencible Infantry' and often referred to simply as "the Canadian Regiment", the study regiment was first raised in Scotland in 1803 as an emigration strategy from the Highlands to British North America. The idea was that the unit's enlisted soldiers were first to serve in defence of the colonies then retire as settlers. However due a number of mishaps and abuses, the first unit fell into mutiny and was disbanded. In 1805, the regiment began to rebuild itself but this time by recruiting from the Canadian populace. In Upper Canada, recruiting parties initially focused on the Glengarry Highlander settlers of Eastern Ontario. However after finding little interest amongst the former Scottish soldiers to re-embrace the military life, the Canadian Fencibles focused most of its efforts in Quebec and Montreal to get the bulk of its soldiers. By the outbreak of war, and after overcoming numerous recruiting and training difficulties, the Fencibles were ready. "Fencible" units are often confused with militia. A Fencible regiment was an army corps that was recruited, clothed, paid, equipment, trained, and disciplined like a regular professional regiment. The only difference was the unit's service was restricted to the defence of a specific geographical region; North America in the case of the Canadian Fencibles.¹

The strategic significance of Prescott during the War of 1812 should not be underestimated. Situated on the St. Lawrence River at the upper end of a 50-mile stretch of rapids, the town of Prescott served as a key stop-over for supply and troop transports destined for Kingston. The necessity to protect the top of these rapids was not lost on the French over 50 years earlier, who realized having a fort at this point in the river was important not only for safe-guarding supply boats but to the protection of Montreal, downriver. With a thriving American community, Ogdensburg, already well established in the area, its influence and the strength of its garrison had to be countered. Prescott was that counterbalance.

Although vital to maintaining the war effort in Upper Canada, the protection of the supply line along the St. Lawrence River was surprisingly left entirely to local militia. Entrusting defence of this vital spot to the militia at the outset of the war was a decision founded on the overconfidence of officials who believed that the enthusiasm of the militia would translate into equal ability. Working with slender

military resources, officials in Lower Canada happily accepted local militia officer assessments of the safety of the region. Case in point was Richard Cartwright at Kingston who in July 1812 informed Governor General Prevost that “the Militia of the several counties between this place and the Lower Province appear to be extremely well disposed and have made applications for larger quantities of arms and ammunition.”² Later that month Prevost assured Major General Brock that the communication line between Montreal and Kingston could be maintained with its present resources. Though incredibly enthusiastic, the militia failed to become an effective fighting force in the opening year of the war. Pre-occupied with constructing roads, escorting bateaux from station to station, building fortifications, and continuing his civilian occupation and family life, the militiaman had little time to practice field exercises.

The ill-prepared state of the militia was soon made abundantly clear. On September 21st, 1812, the bold North Carolinian Captain Benjamin Forsyth with his company of riflemen and some New York militia attacked the sleepy St. Lawrence village of Gananoque, near Kingston. After firing a ragged volley, the local Leeds militia broke and fled when the Americans countered with a charge. Gananoque’s military stores were seized or burnt and Forsyth’s force returned to the U.S.³ Following this success, Forsyth was transferred to Ogdensburg, across from Prescott, for the purpose of harassing British supply boats. The failure of the militia to protect themselves much less safeguarding desperately needed supplies, sent military officials in Quebec scrambling to deploy trained professional soldiers to the upper St. Lawrence region.

The day following the raid on Gananoque, Captain James Pentz of the Canadian Fencibles received orders in Montreal for his company of 50 men to serve as marines in the supply boats leaving for Kingston.⁴ Pentz probably greeted the news of being called into a war zone with some regret. Pentz, a 43-year-old German, came from a long line of soldiers with his father and uncle serving in King George’s Hanoverian army during the Seven Years War. Instead of following in his father’s footsteps, Pentz joined the British Army in 1783 at the end of the American Revolution. During the 1790s Pentz had the unhappy duty of helping to suppress rebellion in Ireland. In 1803, he received a commission in the Canadian Fencibles but was accused of making false promises to enlist Scottish recruits. By 1812, Pentz was tired and worn out and wished to be removed to a Veteran Corps. However the army refused his application for a transfer and Pentz now faced the fatigues of active service in a war. Bidding goodbye to his wife Anne, Pentz loaded into the bateaux and began the rough and dangerous trip up river.⁵

Around Captain Pentz were the men of the Canadian Fencibles. The regiment was a microcosm of British North America at the time with little over half French Canadian and the rest a mixed bag of English, Scots, Irish, American immigrants and loyalists. His two sergeants were Scottish Highlanders from the first attempt to raise the regiment and were bilingual only in English and Gaelic. While the average age of the men was 27 years old, there some interesting older veterans in the boats that day.

With gray hair peeking out from underneath his cap, Private Gilbert Sibley stood out from the rest. Born in the then newly founded port of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Gilbert began his military career in the Loyalist corps Butler’s Rangers in 1776 and fought throughout the American Revolution, receiving a gunshot wound in the thigh. Being a settler must not have appealed to him because in the 1790s he

enlisted again, this time in the Royal Canadian Volunteers. Discharged from the army again, Gilbert sought to continue in the only life he really knew, and was re-enlisted into the Canadian Fencibles, even though he was technically too old to take the King's shilling again. Having picked up the trade of a tailor during his army career or during the time between regiments, 60-year-old Gilbert played the role of meander and fitter of his comrade's uniforms. The wound in his hip and the aches and pains of his aging body must have made his tailoring work challenging; the most common work position being seated cross-legged on a table. In the bateaux, Gilbert was again expected to fight as he did 36 years earlier.⁶

While the supplies were on broad flat-bottomed bateaux, Pentz's men were placed in light boats so could deploy and re-position quickly if any part of the convoy they were shepherding came under attack. They were ordered not to row the boats, and be ready to fire at a moment's notice. After ten days of climbing the rapids, at times pulling the boats by ropes while standing waist deep in the river, the convoy finally arrived near Prescott and a more navigable part of the river on October 2nd. Their relief and the calm waters around them were immediately disturbed by the splashes of round shot. The flotilla was under attack from the cannons of Ogdensburg. One well placed 12 pound cannon ball could sink a bateaux, and take with it to the bottom of the river, its desperately needed cargo of military supplies. The gun emplacements of a shore battery at Prescott answered the cannonade from Ogdensburg by hurling waves of shot at US positions. Under the cover of Prescott's guns, Pentz, Gilbert and the rest of the Canadian Fencibles slipped past the barrage and out of danger, and then continued on without incident to Kingston. Handling his intoxicated and misbehaving lieutenant appeared to be Pentz's only other challenge during the voyage.⁷

After the attack on Pentz's convoy, the aging commandant of Prescott, Colonel Lethbridge decided, without consulting his superiors, to attack Ogdensburg. With the arrival of additional regular troops, Lethbridge loaded his force of six hundred men into small boats and headed across the river on October 4th. Before reaching the other side the invaders were met with a barrage of grape shot and other projectiles from the US artillery and were forced back to Prescott. Less than a week later, Lethbridge was recalled to Montreal, replaced by the young, battle-hardened Lt. Col. Thomas Pearson.

Pearson arrived at his new command accompanied by a flotilla of supply bateaux, two gun boats and more soldiers including fourteen Canadian Fencibles, whose job was to man one of the gunboats and protect supply boats climbing the rapids between Prescott and Montreal. Because of limited accommodation in Prescott, a community of only a handful of houses, the Fencibles were stationed at Coteau du Lac in Lower Canada while doing this duty. With rumours of enemy troop concentrations in Plattsburg, NY, Pentz's men were re-deployed to the south shore of Montreal to meet the threat of invasion. By the end of 1812 only the small detachment at Coteau du Lac remained on duty along with the St. Lawrence, eventually returning to their regiment after winter had set in.

The situation on the upper St. Lawrence altered considerably during the winter of 1812-13. The arrival of winter brought ample opportunities for the training of the militia by the regulars. One account describes the Royal Newfoundland Fencibles training the Stormont flank companies in light infantry drill

on the ice in front of Prescott. By February the militia at Prescott had improved considerably in field manoeuvres. Soon their training would be put to the test.

On February 16th 1813, retaliating for a raid on the US shore, Forsyth and his U.S. Riflemen again went on the offensive, crossing the frozen river and attacking Elizabethtown (Brockville), a village west of Prescott. The detachment of Leeds Militia were easily routed and the town taken over. The jail was emptied and Forsyth returned to Ogdensburg with a number of prisoners in tow. After being insulted by Forsyth while visiting Ogdensburg under a flag of truce to complain about Forsyth's actions during his raid, the temporary commander at Prescott, Lt. Col. "Red" George MacDonell was burning for a fight. Acting against Prevost's orders, MacDonell on February 22nd attacked Forsyth's troops in Ogdensburg with a spirited charge across the frozen St. Lawrence. With little difficulty, the Prescott garrison evicted Forsyth and his riflemen from Ogdensburg, and leaving MacDonell with not only US army cannons and supplies, but with Forsyth's silver mounted dress sword.⁸ With Forsyth gone, the supply line was free from interference. Besides removing the enemy from the region, the engagement marked a noticeable improvement in the steadiness of the militia under heavy fire. Further incorporation of the militia with the regulars to improve their reliability became a major task of regular regiments stationed at Prescott throughout 1813.

While the threat to the supply line diminished, Prescott still remained a key military station and always considered a target for the enemy since its capture would cut off Upper Canada. For this reason part of the Canadian Fencibles were back at the garrison in May, this time as part of the Grenadier Battalion. At the outbreak of the war, military officials decided to merge all the elite troops (the Grenadier and Light Companies) of the regular regiments together into an entity called the Flank Battalion. While a common practice for the British Army fighting in Spain and Portugal, it was the first time it was done in Canada during the Napoleonic Wars.⁹ The Grenadiers and Light Infantry of the 1st, 8th, 49th, 100th, 103rd, Royal Newfoundland and Canadian Regiments of Foot were included initially in this military unit. During its brief existence of a year, the Flank Battalion altered continually as regiments were ordered to the Niagara Peninsula. The composition of the Grenadier wing, with the loss of the 8th, 49th and Royal Newfoundland Grenadiers had considerably changed when it was arrived in Prescott under the command of Major Peter William De Haren¹⁰ of the Canadian Regiment.

What a magnificent scene it must have been to see the bearskin-capped Grenadiers parading on the green beside the newly-begun Fort Wellington. Upon the Grenadiers' arrival, Captain Edward Cartwright of the Canadian Fencibles was placed in command of the Embodied Militia at Prescott. With a military career extending back to the American Revolution, Cartwright possessed the military experience to do an effective job. Militia Company returns were ordered to be delivered to Captain Cartwright or the senior Lieutenants of the 'Canadian Grenadiers', as they were then called. With the majority of the Embodied Militia under canvas, Cartwright addressed the immediate concern about the dirty conditions in crowded quarters. Orders followed calling for "Blankets unto be frequently aired and to be shaken and folded up and the rooms swept. Men in tents unto lay out their blankets back of the [tents] and clean out the dust." Attempts were also made to improve the appearance of the militia by ordering the men to shave more frequently. To increase the Captain's control over the whereabouts of the Militia officers, their movements were restricted to within one mile of their quarters.¹¹ While these

steps seem minor in the eyes of the modern-day reader, they were critical to developing the esprit de corps necessary to make the militia a more reliable fighting force.

In addition to the instruction and regulation of the Embodied Militia, Major De Haren and the officers of the Grenadiers were made responsible for a battalion company of the Royal Scots and a company of the Glengarry Light Infantry at Prescott. The maintenance of discipline and interior regulations of the Royal Scots was especially necessary since its commander Captain Wilson, was pre-occupied with his command of the Native Allies at the garrison. Being the elite units of the British Army, the Grenadiers were given the honour of staying in the best accommodations in the garrison: the newly constructed Blockhouse of Fort Wellington.¹²

The duties of the Grenadiers at Prescott came to an end in early June with the Flank Battalion's disbandment. The Canadian Grenadiers returned to Lower Canada while Major De Haren continued on to the Niagara region.¹³ To maintain the strength of the garrison, the 100th Regiment of Foot, a corps primarily filled with Irishmen, was ordered to replace the Grenadiers at Prescott. When Lt Col Hamilton of the said regiment took over command of the garrison, he immediately established alarm posts, in case of an attack, that mixed regular soldiers with the Canadian militia.¹⁴ British military officials had figure out that to develop and maintain the militia as an effective fighting force, they had to have constant exposure to professional soldiers. The training received by the Incorporated Militia at Prescott would serve them well later in the war when they would fight like regulars at the Battles of Crysler's Farm and Lundy's Lane.

The need for the relief of regulars destined for the Niagara frontier at summer's end in 1813 brought the Canadian Fencibles back to the Prescott garrison. On August 22nd four companies of the Canadian Fencibles under Major Francis Cockburn were ordered to march to Prescott to relieve the 2nd Battalion of the 41st Regiment of Foot. Cockburn came from a well placed family in British society with his grandfather serving as King George III's tutor when the King was a child. His elder brother George would become famous for commanding the burning of Washington during the war. His wife Alicia became a person of infamy amongst Quebec society. Like the pages from a Jane Austin novel, Alicia had an open affair with one of Sir George Prevost's aide-de-camps, Captain Henry Milnes. Prevost's daughter Anne was infatuated with the young Guards officer Milnes, but this infatuation ended when "he was bewitched by Mrs. Cockburn."¹⁵ Alicia was ten years older than the young Captain and Major Cockburn seemed to tolerate the affair. In a twist of irony, Major Cockburn arrived in Prescott only days before his wife's lover was killed up river in a skirmish amongst the Thousand Islands.

His marital difficulties aside, Cockburn was an able officer with experience from both the South American and Peninsular campaigns. After the war, he would go on to organize the military settlements along the Rideau River and accompanying the Duke of Richmond in his tour of the settlements in 1816, which ended with the Duke's sudden death from rabies.¹⁶ Accompanying Major Cockburn to Prescott was one Captain, three Lieutenants, three Ensigns, eight Sergeants, six Drummers, and 196 Rank and File of the Canadian Fencibles.

In tallying up the returns of the Canadian Fencibles at Prescott there was one Lieutenant that had gone missing along the way, Archibald Kennedy Johnson. Born in Williamstown (Glengarry County)¹⁷, Archibald was the son of Sir John Johnson, the famous commander of the King's Royal Regiment of New York during the American Revolution. However Archibald seemed to lack the military ability of his father. After becoming a Canadian Fencible officer, Archibald was given the opportunity to become a Captain in the Glengarry Light Infantry Fencibles by recruiting men from York. In the summer of 1813, Archibald, for some unknown reason, abandoned his attempt to raise men in the Glengarries. Maybe the burning of the town he was recruiting in soured his view of life in the military. In August Archibald attempted to resign his commission in the Canadian Fencibles but was refused and that is when he went AWOL. After being arrested for desertion, the matter was finally settled, probably with behind-the-scenes work by his father, and Archibald was allowed to resign.¹⁸

With the reinforcement of the Canadas by the 13th, 70th, 89th and 101st Regiments along with the Swiss Regiments de Meuron and de Watteville, the numbers of regulars at Prescott continued to climb. The composition of the Prescott garrison in September 1813 presented the commanding officer with an unusual problem. Lt. Col. Pearson's orderly room was composed of German and French speaking officers of De Watteville's Regiment, French speaking Voltiguer officers and the English speaking officers of the rest of the garrison. Needless to say, the communication of orders became difficult. To solve this problem, Pearson ordered the Canadian Fencibles to provide one or two men to the orderly room who understood English and German or French. Every morning these orderly men aided Pearson in transmitting orders to his subordinates.¹⁹

Early in October, an American Army under General Wade Hampton at Plattsburg, NY began its offensive against Montreal. To confuse his enemy, Hampton decided to head west away from the traditional Richelieu River invasion route and down the Chateauguay River. Meanwhile General Wilkinson was assembling his army at Sacket's Harbor for his descent down the St. Lawrence. Hampton's move west and enemy activity near the head of the St. Lawrence convinced Pearson that the target for the American offensive was Prescott. For this reason alarm posts were revised and the forces of the district were concentrated in Prescott. Cockburn's detachment of Canadian Fencibles along with the Sappers and Miners of the post were placed in charge of the newly-constructed earthworks and blockhouse of Fort Wellington. The Incorporated and Embodied Militias were assigned to meet the enemy wherever they may attack. In addition, a sergeant and 20 privates of De Watteville's were assigned to the artillery to act as gunners.²⁰

This belief was further encouraged by the arrival of 180 troopers of the 1st US Dragoons in Ogdensburg on October 11th. Pearson's response to the presence of dragoons across the river was a sharp cannonade of Ogdensburg. To avoid further alarming the enemy, Colonel Lockett and his dragoons retired from the town to the back country. The dragoons were then distributed in small parties along the river for the purpose of examining the country and preventing the British from obtaining information and supplies from that side of the river.

Learning that one of these parties was stationed eight miles downriver at Red Mills, NY, Pearson ordered Major Cockburn and a detachment of Canadian Fencibles to capture it. In a letter dated October 17th, Cockburn described the enterprise in detail:

I have the honour to inform you that in compliance with your instructions I left this place about ten o'clock last night and proceeded with a detachment of the Canadian Regiment to the Red Mills where I succeeded in capturing a piquet of the enemy's dragoons consisting of one lieutenant and seven privates. I also brought away with me nine horses with their bridles and saddles, &c. Owing to the folly of the enemy in firing upon us from the house in which he was posted one of his serjeants and one private was killed and one private was badly wounded.²¹

Commenting on this successful endeavour, Major General Francis De Rottenburg expressed his pleasure "for the spirited and judicious manner in which it appears to have been performed."²²

Life at the garrison remained on high alert. With two armies massing on the border, the steadiness of the men was brought into question by military officials and discipline became paramount. In Montreal, a number of deserters, including Canadian Fencibles, were condemned to the firing squad as a sort of "terror by example."²³ In Prescott, irregularities were met with harsh consequences. Louis Lachesete of the Canadian Fencibles was caught stealing pork and in a quick regimental court martial was ordered to receive the maximum sentence of 300 lashes that could be awarded by that military judicial body. Waiting his sentence in 'the black hole' Louis likely was smuggled some rum or gin to fortify himself so he did not cry out during the punishment.

At the appointed time, Louis was brought to a triangle of bounded Sergeant pikes. His shirt was removed and he was tied at the hands and ankles to the pikes. Then the 8 drummers of the regiment were brought forward. Their shirts were as well removed so as not to be stained with splattered blood during the punishment. The rest of the Canadian Fencibles were lined to form a square to watch the inflicting of the punishment. The ranking drummer brought forward the instrument of punishment, the cat-o-nine tails. Each drummer then took turns lashing the convict 25 times each. At about a hundred, the blood usually flowed freely and the prisoner's back became like a puddle, splashing the drummer with every hit. When it was over, the convict was taken down and escorted to the hospital.

By the end of October, Wilkinson had finished assembling an army of close to eight thousand, and was ready to descend the river upon Montreal. British forces along the river were placed in a state of alarm. In Prescott, Major Williams of the 49th Regiment with the regiment's light company arrived to reinforce the garrison. On his arrival, Williams was placed in charge of the light troops of the garrison. On the night of November 6th Wilkinson's Army arrived west of Ogdensburg. Concerned about the guns of Prescott, Wilkinson had his army disembark from the flotilla of 300 boats and march around Ogdensburg. The empty vessels were then floated down the river up the cover of darkness. While artillery barrage from Prescott was intense, little damage was done to the armada. However, the garrison at Prescott had bought valuable time for Anglo-Canadian forces to prepare for Wilkinson.

The following day a British force arrived by boat at Prescott from Kingston. On board were the 49th and 89th Regiments under the command of Col. Morrison. To this corps d'observation the garrison

added the 49th light company, a detachment of Canadian Fencibles, Canadian Voltiguers, and militia under the direction of Pearson. Prior to the arrival of Morrison, Pearson had sent along the shore a mounted battery of Royal Artillery, who annoyed Wilkinson's flotilla at every opportunity and buying time for Morrison's boats to catch up. On November 11th, Morrison force, now landed, engaged the rear guard of Wilkinson's Army near the farm of John Crysler. The exact position and number of the Canadian Fencibles at the battle is unclear. One historian contends the Canadian Fencibles number 80 men and acted in conjunction with the 49th Regiment Grenadier and Light Companies, which challenged enemy gun positions.²⁴ This would explain the high casualty rate the regiment experienced in the victorious battle and the deaths of the only company officers present, Lieutenant Guillaume De Lorimier and Ensign Henry Armstrong.²⁵

The loss of De Lorimier was particularly tragic. Two weeks earlier his father and brother-in-law in the Indian Department had served at the Battle of the Chateauguay, while one of his brothers had been captured fighting in the Niagara Peninsula. Guillaume, who was half French Canadian and half Iroquois,²⁶ was a newlywed and his wife Louise was eight months pregnant when he fell mortally wounded on Crysler's field. The following month his widow gave birth to a boy whom she named after his father.

Meanwhile back at Prescott, the significant depletion of regular infantry and artillery in a time of emergency further increased the burden of tasks on the troops of the garrison. Apart from their regular duties, night time guard duty was increased and troops were ordered to remain dressed at night for 10 days, ready to turn out at a moment's notice. The Canadian Fencibles that were left behind were ordered to provide "12 active young men for the purpose of being instructed in the great Gun exercise." Certainly the Garrison order of November 17th must have been met with a sigh of relief by the under strength post: "The troops in the Fort are permitted to undress themselves and go to bed except one third of each Regiment or detachment who are to lie down with their accoutrements."²⁷ With Wilkinson's withdrawal after his defeat at Crysler's Farm up Salmon River across from Cornwall, and Hampton's return to Plattsburg after being checked along the Chateauguay, the tension along the St. Lawrence subsided.

On November 23rd, Cockburn's detachment of Canadian Fencibles was ordered to Cornwall, replaced by Morrison's 89th Regiment. With the 2nd Battalion of Royal Marines, 103rd Regiment, and detachments of the 89th and Canadian Regiments at Cornwall, Wilkinson's bottled-up force remained inactive for the rest of the year. Upon hearing of Wilkinson's withdrawal in early 1814, Cockburn's Canadian Fencibles and parts of the 89th and 103rd Regiments crossed the river and up Salmon River just in time to capture one hundred sleighs of supplies and harass the rear guard of Wilkinson's army as it retired overland to Plattsburg. Soon after this, Cockburn's detachment was withdrawn to Lower Canada, thus ending their very active service along the St. Lawrence.

The need to juggle regulars between the different border stations subsided in the spring of 1814 with the arrival of thousands of Peninsular Army veterans from Europe. With this large influx of regulars into the Canadas, dependence on the militia quickly diminished. The duties of training and administering them followed suit. Divided up for most of the war, the Canadian Fencibles was re-unified

in June 1814 when it was ordered into Upper Canada. In July the Canadian Regiment, in its entirety, was back in Prescott, but its stay was short and it was soon on to Kingston.²⁸ By 1814, the role of the regular soldier had certainly changed from its multi-purpose nature of the previous two years. Gone was the need for the infantryman to also play the role of marine, militia trainer, gunner, sailor, and construction worker, and no longer was it necessary to spread a single regiment across hundreds of miles of terrain.

¹For more information on the history of the unit see Robert Henderson “*His Majesty's Canadian Regiment of Fencible Infantry, 1803-1816*”, Military Illustrated (June 1991).

²Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Record Group (RG) 8, I, vol. 676 Cartwright to Prevost 5 July 1812.

³For more on this raid read Robert Henderson, “A Tranquil River No More: The Raid on Gananoque, 1812” The War of 1812 Website. 2009. <http://www.warof1812.ca/Gananoque.htm>

⁴LAC, RG 8, I, vol. 1168, p. 280 General Order, 22 September 1812.

⁵LAC, RG 8, I, vol. 700, p. 37 Memorial of James Pentz; LAC, RG 8, I, vol. 1218 p. 181 Reply to his memorial.

⁶PRO, WO 97, Vol. 1173, No. 324. Researched by Gavin Watt.

⁷Lieutenant Thomas Gunter was cashiered (dismissed) from the army for his behaviour. National Archives, UK, WO 28/307 p. 149-151.

⁸This sword is now on display at Fort Wellington NHS in Prescott.

⁹This practice dates back to the Seven Years War with the most famous example being “the Louisbourg Grenadiers” who fought under General James Wolfe on the Plains of Abraham in 1759.

¹⁰De Haren was a German who had served previous in the 60th Regiment of Foot before joining the Canadian Fencibles.

¹¹LAC, MG 19, A39 Duncan Clark Papers, Militia Order Book, p. 49. Garrison Order, Prescott May 22nd, 1813

¹²Ibid. pp. 51-59.

¹³At Beaver Dams, Major De Haren accepted the surrender of the American forces.

¹⁴LAC, MG 19, A39 Duncan Clark Papers, Militia Order Book, p. 61.

¹⁵Anne Prevost’s Diary. Prevost Family Collection. Quoted online at:

<http://www.galafilm.com/1812/e/people/milnes.html>

¹⁶Cockburn’s diary is the primary source for information on that tragic event. LAC, MG24, A14.

¹⁷At Sir John Johnson House National Historic Site in 1792.

¹⁸LAC, RG 8 I, vol. 797, pp. 129-132, pp. 164-165, p. 210; vol. 1221, p. 61; vol. 1171, p. 110, p. 174.

¹⁹LAC, MG 19, A39 Duncan Clark Papers, Militia Order Book, p. 123.

²⁰Ibid. pp. 133-134.

²¹LAC, RG 8, I, vol. 680, p. 225. Cockburn to Pearson, Prescott, October 17, 1813.

²²LAC, MG 19, A39 Duncan Clark Papers, Militia Order Book, p. 136.

²³Williamson, John The elements of military arrangement, and of the discipline of war adapted to the practice of the British infantry. (London , 1791) Vol. 2 p. 153

²⁴Ernest Cruickshank, “Record of the Services of Canadian Regiments in the War of 1812” Royal Canadian Military Institute, Selected papers from the transactions, Nos 11 &12, 1902-1903. Don Graves in his book Field of Glory (Toronto, 1999) suggests that the Canadian Fencibles were with Pearson next to the river, but admits that there is a lack of evidence concerning their exact numbers and location on the field. Finding the basis of Cruickshank’s conclusions may hold the key in solving this puzzle.

²⁵Henry Armstrong was the son of the Surgeon of the 10th Royal Veterans, also serving in Canada, and died of his wounds the following day. LAC, RG 8, I, vol. 1220, p.160-161.

²⁶De Lorimier was not the only Metis officer in the Regiment. Born in Fort Chipewyan in North Alberta, Lieutenant John MacKenzie had a native mother, possibly Cree or Chipewyan. MacKenzie may have been part of the detachment sent to Prescott. Interestingly enough his brother-in-law led the force that captured Fort Astoria in Oregon Territory, the only military event of the war on the west coast.

²⁷LAC, MG 19, A39 Duncan Clark Papers, Militia Order Book, p. 143.

²⁸After the regiment is disbanded in Montreal in 1816, many of the soldiers returned to Eastern Ontario to settle land grants in the military settlements of Lanark.