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J. Brent Wilson
University of New Brunswick

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"That Vast Experiment"

The New Brunswick Militia's 1865 Camp of Instruction

J. Brent Wilson

In July 1865, almost 1,000 New Brunswick militiamen assembled in Fredericton for a twenty-four day Camp of Instruction. This was the first time peacetime militia training on this scale was ever attempted in British North America. At the time, and since, the camp was praised as a notable achievement. New Brunswick's lieutenant-governor and provincial commander-in-chief, Arthur Hamilton Gordon, wrote: "The entire success of this experiment is admitted with an unanimity which is remarkable, because rare in this Province."¹ Although the uniqueness of the camp has been the subject of some interest, it has never been subjected to more in-depth analysis. This article moves beyond generalizations to examine the purpose of the camp and what actually transpired. The Camp of Instruction tells us a great deal about the nature and character of New Brunswick's militia on the eve of Confederation, and its outcome helps to explain why the province moved toward political union as an answer to the inadequate state of its defences.

Revitalizing the Militia

By the early 1860s, the need to reform the late colonial militia system in New Brunswick was evident. Improved relations with the United States a decade earlier had led the provincial legislature to suspend those sections of the militia law affecting annual drills, making it impossible to carry out training. Interest in reviving the militia received a boost in the late 1850s, when the growth of the volunteer movement in Britain and then British North

America led to the formation of some 20 Volunteer companies within the New Brunswick militia by the end of 1860. However, the threat of war with the United States resulting from their Civil War, especially after the Trent Crisis of 1861-1862, and Britain's growing desire to withdraw from British North America made it obvious that the province had to strengthen its defences, particularly the effectiveness of the militia. The new lieutenant-governor, Arthur Gordon, spearheaded this effort.²

When Gordon arrived in October 1861, the province's first line of defence against a possible invasion from the south was provided by British military forces. Royal Navy warships operating out of Halifax defended the coast while a British infantry battalion, split between Fredericton and Saint John, and Royal Artillery contingent based in Saint John, provided land defence, especially of the vital overland winter route that ran between Saint John and the St. Lawrence River. New Brunswick's contribution to its own defence was its militia system. At the time, it consisted of a small, underfunded Volunteer corps made up of various poorly organized and drilled companies; the county militia which existed mainly on paper and functioned more as a social club than a military force; and an inadequate headquarters staff.

Drawing on his earlier experience as colonel of a Scottish Volunteer regiment, Gordon undertook several measures aimed at rejuvenating the militia system, including revamping the officer corps, especially among the Volunteers, and re-staffing headquarters. In

1862, Gordon oversaw passage of a new act designed to revive the militia. Among its chief features was the reorganization of the force into two basic categories: active (fit men between 18 and 45) and sedentary (fit men between 45 and 60). Each category was further divided into sub-classes. In the case of the active force it consisted of Class A (the Volunteers), Class B (single men and widowers without children), and Class C (married men and widowers with children). The Volunteers, composed of an all-arms corps organized into companies, with short periods of training would be kept fit for active service. The remaining classes of the active militia would be mustered and enrolled one day a year. The sedentary militia represented simply a reserve of manpower; it would assemble only occasionally for enrollment and would be called out only in wartime. The new militia act would remain in effect for three years and then would have to be renewed. By placing the Volunteers at the centre of the revitalized militia, New Brunswick took the lead in militia reform among the British North American provinces with passage of the 1862 act.³ Unfortunately, the militia appropriation attached to the bill was severely reduced by the government.

Following passage of the law, Gordon undertook further reforms directed mostly at the Volunteer companies, including improving the quality of the officer corps, providing arms and facilities for drilling, and securing more financial aid for the Volunteers. By 1864, the Volunteers numbered some 1,700 troops. They consisted of three troops of cavalry (one organized as hussars and the others as mounted infantry); seven batteries of artillery; one company of engineers, located in Saint John; and 21 companies of infantry (six formed the Saint John Volunteer Battalion, and the other 15 were attached to the county battalions).⁴ However, they remained confined mainly to urban areas, they were small in numbers (leaving aside the New Brunswick Regiment of Artillery, the Saint John Volunteers and the 1st Battalion of the York County Regiment from Fredericton, more than half the companies numbered fewer than 50 men), and they were short of modern weapons and equipment, particularly field artillery.⁵ Despite these shortcomings, by 1864 Gordon was reasonably satisfied with the state of the Volunteer force.⁶

The remainder of the active force, however, – the B and C Class men – continued to be a serious problem. Being called out only on muster day for enrolling, it had once again become a paper force, with many of the 38 battalions lacking officers. Gordon appointed some new officers and provided them with basic training, and organized annual call outs, but local political opposition to the militia appropriation and uneven popular support for militia service contributed to its ongoing ineffectiveness. Gordon pointed to the fundamental problem of implementing this militia system in a largely rural, agricultural province when he wrote:

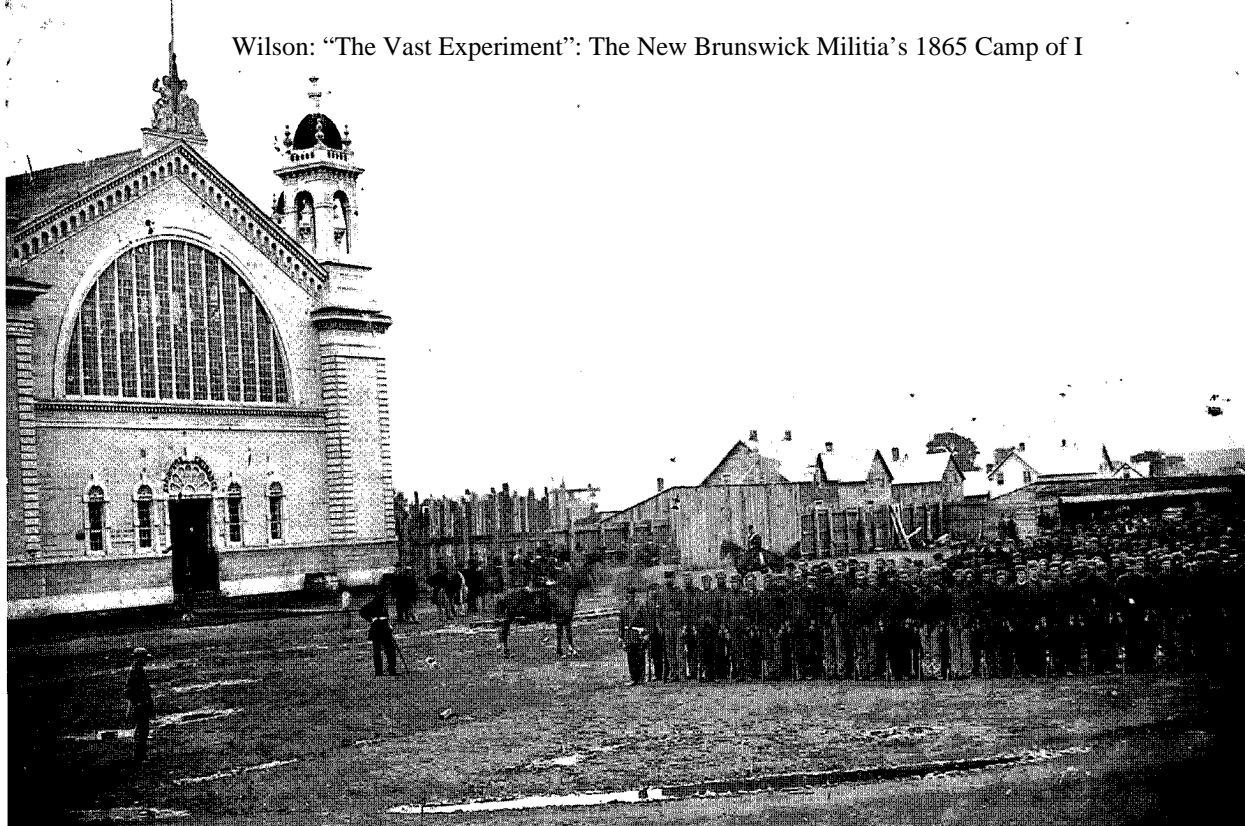
...to call the whole male population together for any long period, the rich merchant from his counting house – the needy settler from his half cleared farm – the lumberer from the woods – the ploughman from the field – the boatman from the river, would be as oppressive as it is in fact impracticable. As it is, the pecuniary sacrifice entailed by one day's muster is great.⁷

Gordon also faced pressure from another direction. By 1864, the issue of militia reform had taken on greater importance within the context of imperial politics, as the British government had begun pushing British North America more firmly toward political union and toward self-defence.⁸ In spite of Gordon's efforts, Edward Cardwell, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, was dissatisfied with the state of the local force, writing in October 1864, that "the progress of the Militia in New Brunswick does not at present in any degree correspond with the spirit of patriotism and spirit of loyalty by which the inhabitants are known to be animated."⁹

Gordon replied with a lengthy despatch, detailing the measures he had taken over the last three years to re-organize both the Volunteers and militia. He went on to remind the Secretary that, although self-defence was an important provincial duty,

it must be remembered that the very maintenance of self-existence imperatively requires the outlay of the greater part of the Provincial Revenue on objects and institutions which, in an older country, have been already established, or are maintained by private enterprise.¹⁰

Cardwell, somewhat mollified by this report, nevertheless again urged Gordon to move



(Public Archives of New Brunswick (PANB) P5/378)

New Brunswick militiamen parading beside the Fredericton Exhibition Building during the Camp of Instruction. Each soldier received a government-issued red flannel tunic and blue flannel cap, but wore his own trousers and boots, which "did not always make for uniformity."

forward with further reforms, informing the lieutenant-governor in December that "it must be borne in mind that self-defence is the first duty of every free people."¹¹

With pressure from London mounting Gordon moved ahead with plans to revitalize the rest of the active militia. In January 1865, he assembled a commission, made up of senior militia officers, that recommended changes to the militia system. Foremost among these was a twenty-eight day Camp of Instruction to be held annually for a representation of the active militia gathered from across the province. The force would be composed of 64-man companies drawn from each of the 36 battalions in the province, making a total of 2,204 troops. They would be composed of volunteers or if that proved inadequate of men selected by ballot.¹²

The purpose of the camp was left vague, the commission's report stating only that it "would be of permanent benefit to the Militia Force of this Province."¹³ However, it was generally assumed that its purpose was to provide a select number of militiamen with intensive training under drill instructors and they would then

return home to act as a cadre to improve the standard of training throughout the rest of their battalion.¹⁴ Heartened by the commission's report, Gordon introduced several of the recommended changes in the new militia bill being prepared to replace that of 1862, which was due to expire, including the Camp of Instruction.

The decision to hold this extended camp met with strong opposition both from local sources and from within official circles. The Fredericton newspaper, the *New Brunswick Reporter*, a staunch enemy of the government, described the camp as "this most outrageous measure," and opposed it for several reasons. Reacting to the method to be used for recruiting the troops, especially the provision for drafting by ballot, it stated:

men will not submit to be forced from their homes, their business and their merchandise, in order to gratify a ridiculous whim of the belligerent Executive Council; and they have no idea of being placed in a Camp of wild and perhaps dissolute young men at a time when there is no necessity whatever, especially when it is to be feared that the instruction in immorality

and drunkenness will be more rapid than in military drill and discipline.

Moreover, it objected to recruiting from what it described as a "loose and floating population which, although it is here to-day may be away tomorrow." It feared that these "birds of passage" would not be available in an emergency or that in some cases they might use their military training against the state.

The *Reporter* also argued against the scheme of drilling a select group of troops in a single place.

If the young men now in Camp could on their return home be employed as so many drill instructors in their own districts, the system would work admirably; but this it is not pretended they will become and consequently whatever military advantage may be obtained on the present occasion can only be communicated by the commissioned officers in their several districts...

It would have been far better, it stated, if these officers had been assembled at headquarters and "under a thorough system of instruction so drilled as to render them competent to spread the military leaven throughout the whole Province." They supported the recommendation made by others within the province for a School of Instruction for militia officers as a more economical and effective option.

Finally, the paper opposed the camp on financial grounds, arguing that in the current period of economic decline and given the "embarrassed" state of the province's finances, the "situation" facing the province did not warrant the expenditure of such a large sum of money.¹⁵

Perhaps more importantly, the British military also opposed the camp. Calling it "that vast experiment," Major General Sir Hastings Doyle, the Commander of the British Forces in the Lower Provinces, believed the funds might have been better used instructing a larger body of officers and men for a shorter period. Doyle's chief concern was that the militiamen would object to the discomfort of such prolonged service and the imposition of stricter military discipline. He feared that the experience would leave the men disgusted with the militia service.¹⁶

The War Office in London also voiced similar concerns about the training scheme. Earl de Grey, the Secretary of State for War, referred the militia commission's recommendations to senior officers for their opinions. The Inspector General of Militia believed that it would be preferable to have the funds devoted to the annual training of the whole regiment for a lesser number of days. Similarly, the Inspector General of Volunteers wrote that, assuming the purpose of the camp was to obtain a sufficient number of trained men to act afterwards as drill instructors of the battalion, he believed it would have been better for the regulars to furnish the required instructors. Moreover, following the proposed plan would require several years to drill all the companies of the battalion, since only one would be instructed each year.¹⁷

These fears aside, the major source of concern was the limited availability of funds. As Gordon saw it, the alternative before the legislature was,

whether they would call out a large body of men for a short time, or a smaller body for a more lengthened period. I think they chose wisely in determining on the latter course, as it will certainly enable more to be effected with the limited grant at my disposal for Militia purposes, than any other plan, though, had that grant been larger, I am not prepared to say that a measure having a larger field of operation would not have proved more beneficial.

Caught in the middle between the Colonial Office pressing for greater provincial responsibility for self-defence and local opposition adverse to spending more money on the militia, Gordon concluded that the Camp of Instruction was the best possible arrangement, given the limited funds, for providing "real effective training."¹⁸

The new Militia Act became law in late May 1865, again placing New Brunswick in the forefront of the movement to reform the militia throughout British North America. As David Facey-Crowther pointed out in his study of the New Brunswick militia, Gordon's efforts "created for the province a militia system that the Dominion's new minister of militia [Sir George-Etienne Cartier] was to call the best in Canada."¹⁹

Despite the fact that the militia appropriation attached to the law was dramatically increased

to \$30,000, the scale of the camp was to be reduced considerably.²⁰ It was decided to hold the camp in Fredericton in early July. On 1 June the Adjutant General of the Militia, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Anderson, issued orders to various battalions directing them to furnish a company for the camp, generally consisting of a captain, lieutenant, ensign, 60 privates and a bugler. The soldiers would receive a tunic and cap but were expected to furnish everything else, including clothes (pants, shirts and stockings), boots, towel and blanket, and eating utensils. Officers would supply their own uniform and equipment.

Likely being aware of some of the misgivings about the camp, the Adjutant General further instructed: "It is desirable that the Men for the Camp should as far as possible be selected from people who are residing in the District, and not from the Migratory Population."²¹ Commanding officers responded quickly to these orders and within a short time the quotas were filled by enthusiastic volunteers, without having to resort to the draft. The men were then organized into the companies that would attend the camp.

The Camp of Instruction

The troops that entered the camp in Fredericton on 5 and 6 July came mainly from the various militia battalions of the central and southern counties of the province (Carleton, Charlotte, Kings, Queens, Saint John, Sunbury, and York).²² Contingents also came from the Saint John Volunteers, the New Brunswick Regiment of Artillery and the New Brunswick Regiment of Yeomanry Cavalry. New Brunswick's railroad network was still in a rudimentary state in the mid 1860s, and so many of the troops followed a circuitous route to reach Fredericton. Those from the southern region railed to Saint John and Woodstock, and then boarded steamers for the trip along the St. John River, stopping as they went to pick up detachments at river landings. Within a few days 947 all ranks had gathered in the capital.

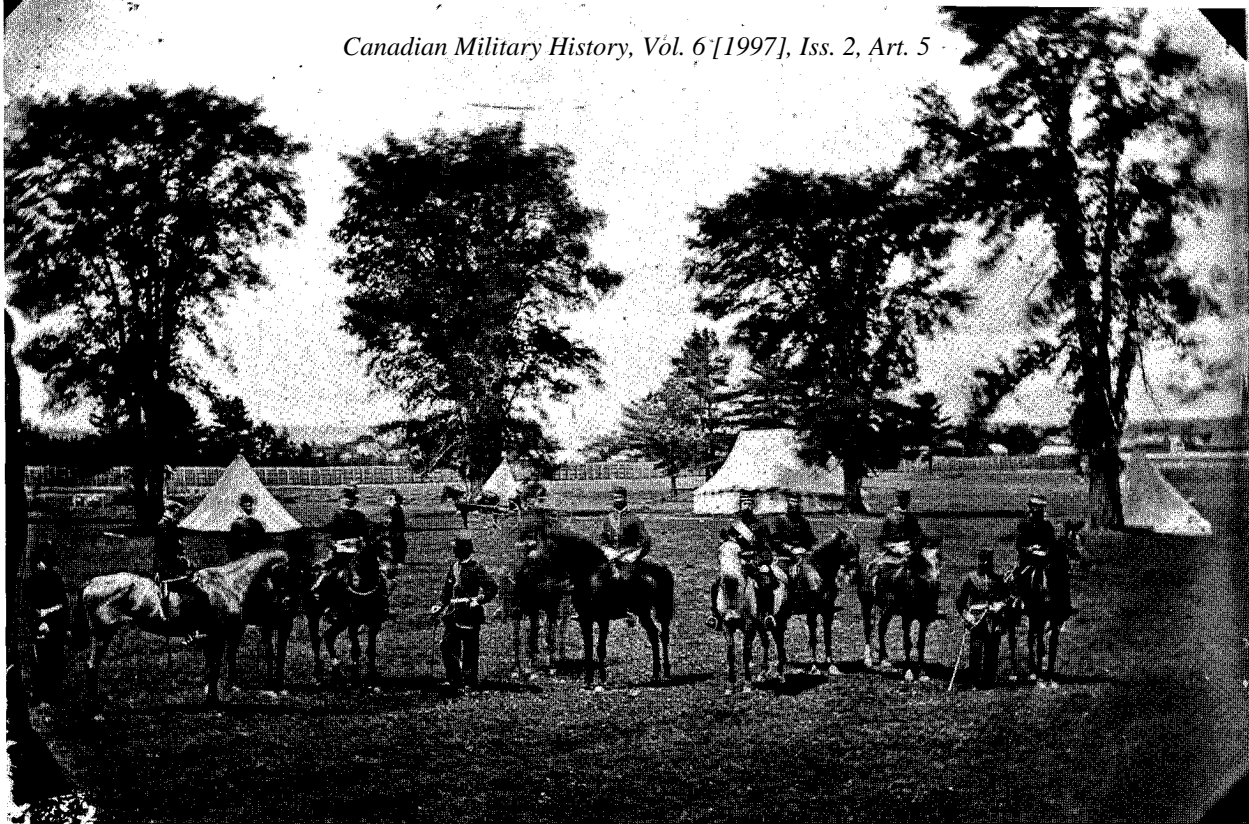
Once assembled, most of the troops went into barracks provided by the recently constructed Exhibition Building of the Agricultural Society of York County at the corner of Saunders and York Streets at the rear of the city. The

handsomely arched and domed building furnished comfortable quarters for about 620 men. The ground floor provided sleeping space for many of the troops, as well as orderly rooms, paymaster's office, quartermaster's store, and reading room filled with books, magazines and copies of most of the province's newspapers. Some of the men also slept in berths located in the extensive galleries below the dome. Windows were removed to provide ventilation during the height of Fredericton's summer heat. The remainder of the troops stayed in the adjacent outbuildings.

The officers either slept in town or in large tents set up on the surrounding grounds, which consisted of a three and a half acre show yard and a 50-acre level piece of ground ringed by a mile long race course that stretched south from behind the Exhibition Palace toward the foot of the heights behind the city and to the west past present-day Westmorland Street. The hospital marquee and medical officer's tent were located at the far end of the track. For the further enjoyment of the troops, a canteen that sold beer, porter and general store articles was set up by a Fredericton keeper just outside of the agricultural grounds. A sergeant was posted here to prevent drunkenness, and the authorities threatened the proprietor with heavy penalties if he sold spirits.

The troops were formed into two active service battalions of seven companies, complete with field officers and staff, who ran the interior management of the battalions according to regular army standards. The first battalion was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel the Honourable Lemuel Allan Wilmot, a Supreme Court justice and future lieutenant-governor, who commanded the 1st Battalion of the York County Militia based in Fredericton. The second battalion was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel William T. Baird, who was commanding officer of the 1st Battalion of the Carleton County Militia located upriver in Woodstock and the deputy quartermaster general.

In order to improve the overall training of the militia's officers corps – "the key stone of the entire Militia movement," according to General Doyle²³ – additional officers were called for, and so 45 officers served as private soldiers in an "Officers Company" commanded by Lieutenant-



(PANB P5/711A)

Many of the militia officers attending the Camp of Instruction slept in tents pitched on the extensive ground ringed by the Fredericton race course.

Colonel the Honourable John Hamilton Gray, the attorney general and future Father of Confederation, who was also commanding officer of the Queen's New Brunswick Rangers from Loch Lomond near Saint John. The presence of this Officer's Company, together with the battalions' field and company officers, meant that a substantial number of the militia's officer corps were present at the camp.²⁴

The camp staff and drill instructors were provided by the British regulars garrisoning the city, the 15th Regiment of Foot, and the provincial militia's permanent staff. They included a camp commandant, Capt. H.J. Hallowes of the 15th, serving with the temporary rank of lieutenant colonel of militia, quartermaster general, brigade major, paymaster and medical officer.

The government furnished each soldier with a red flannel tunic and blue flannel forage cap, but each man wore his own trousers and boots. As J. W. Millidge, a Volunteer from a Saint John battery of the NB Regiment of Artillery, wrote sardonically this arrangement "did not always make for uniformity."²⁵ The gunners from the Regiment of Artillery wore blue tunics. Each man also received his rations, a straw mattress, a bolster or narrow pillow, field blanket and rifle rack. The volunteers were paid for the duration

of the camp, the amounts ranging from 50 cents a day for privates to \$3.00 for field officers and adjutants, plus a dollar for forage.

The training programme began almost at once and followed a progressive schedule. The troops began with basic drill, including facings, marching the goose step and forming fours. It was found that about two-thirds of them were completely undrilled and, of the remainder, only a few had received more than a week's instruction. Not surprisingly, the first few days of drill were difficult. On 7 July, the first full day of camp, the *New Brunswick Reporter* stated: "Of course they do not as yet present a very military appearance. Many of them are rather awkward, while some few have not music enough in their souls to learn to beat time, and will never make soldiers..."²⁶

On the 10th and 11th each soldier received a rifle, bayonet and waist belt, and now "begins to feel himself a soldier."²⁷ For the next week they moved through more rigorous training. They began with manual exercises, where they were taught the 30 motions required to load and fire their weapons. At first, the drilling was interminable, but after a few days of counting, "the hammers came down with remarkable precision."²⁸ They then moved on to company

drill directed by drill instructors from the 15th or the most competent NCOs from among the volunteers. Simple battalion movements under command of their colonels then followed, when according to Millidge, the Saint John Volunteer artilleryman, "the fun commenced, companies finding themselves unexpectedly in awkward situations."²⁹ However, the troops quickly mastered the intricate movements, as the *New Brunswick Reporter* noted.

One of the most difficult manoeuvres on parade is considered to be wheeling in solid column, and this was attempted on [the 11th] by Col. Wilmot's battalion, the movement was steadily executed, the men came round beautifully, and during the wheel elicited the repeated 'well done' of their delighted commander.³⁰

They also drilled briefly as a brigade consisting of the two militia battalions and the 15th Regiment under the commandant.

On the 18th the troops' first major test came when the brigade was inspected by Governor Gordon and General Doyle, who was accompanied by the Marquis and Marchioness of Drogheda. The troops, "looking somewhat sun-burnt and weather stained, but all the more like their work," received the reviewing party with a general salute and march past.³¹ Doyle then addressed the troops in complimentary terms.

Training resumed with platoon exercises until the 22nd, when a grand review of the brigade was held. Hundreds of civilian onlookers watched as the brigade commanded Col. J.

Amber Cole of the 15th marched past in quick time led by the regulars. Following this the volunteers formed two sides of a square and looked on as the 15th trooped the colour and presented bayonet exercises. The brigade then reassembled and carried out a long list of manoeuvres, including forming mass columns and wheeling into contiguous columns. Afterwards, Cole congratulated them on their conduct at camp, and assured them their performance on the parade ground equalled that of other militia regiments he had inspected.³² The brigade then marched back to barracks in close columns, "to the soul-inspiring music of the band."³³

The busy schedule continued on the 24th, when the militia force and the band of the 15th participated in a March Out under the commandant. The troops filed out of the grounds led by the Officer's Company, which formed the advance guard and skirmished where the ground permitted a company to advance in extended order. They moved through town to the river bank, where they halted, piled arms and stood easy. After a time they returned to barracks.

Over the last few days of the camp the volunteers heard a series of lectures on such subjects as the destructive power of the new arms that had replaced the Brown Bess and recent military events, including the Relief of Lucknow during the Indian Mutiny and the Defence of Kars. These lectures were supposed to show the volunteers what a small number of well-disciplined troops under a gallant and

Panoramic view of the camp training field. The militiamen forming square in the centre are framed by the hospital marquee in the foreground and the domed Exhibition Building in the background.



determined commander could accomplish under the most difficult circumstances.³⁴

On the 27th, the force assembled on the parade ground for the last time and then marched back to the Exhibition Building where they surrendered their rifles. They were then addressed by Governor Gordon who complimented them on their progress and their conduct in camp, and noted that he possessed officers whom he could look to confidently in an hour of need.

The next day the troops marched to the river to board steamers for home. They were seen off by Col. Cole, the officers of the 15th and the citizens of Fredericton.

How Successful was the Experiment?

At the time, the camp was seen generally as a great success. Gordon wrote to Cardwell, that the camp, "notwithstanding the many difficulties incident to a first attempt of the kind, was attended with even more complete success than I had, when most sanguine, ventured to anticipate."³⁵ Cardwell later replied that, "Her Majesty's Government have observed with satisfaction the success which appears to have attended the Meeting of the first Camp under the provisions of the recent Militia law of the Province."³⁶ This might be considered high praise, given the tone of their correspondence a year earlier. Even the *New Brunswick Reporter*, which had strongly opposed holding the camp, wrote:

Whether the late experiment will prove successful in its designs or not, it is satisfactory to state that the Volunteers have attained an astonishing proficiency in their drill, time being considered, and their exemplary conduct as a whole, taken as they were from all ranks of young men in New Brunswick, reflects the highest credit, not only on themselves, but on the Province at large.³⁷

Clearly, many of the concerns raised before the troops assembled did not arise during the camp. First, the militiamen, seemingly displaying the spirit of patriotism and loyalty Cardwell had been calling for, came forward willingly in adequate numbers, thereby avoiding the negative consequences of having to draft men by ballot. Second, rather than being "birds of passage,"

the men were "veritable sons of the soil," according to *The Head Quarters*.³⁸ In fact, they represented a rather select segment of the population. As Gordon noted, "...the men generally who had volunteered for duty were permanent residents in the country, with fixed occupations and settled places of abode, and not drawn from the more migratory part of the population."³⁹ Almost half of them listed their trade or occupation as farmer or farmer's son. The rest included everything from labourers and carpenters, to blacksmiths and shoemakers, clerks, students and some with no calling. Over a third were Anglican by religion, another quarter were Methodists and Baptists, and the rest were Presbyterians and Catholics. It is also likely that a significant number of them were literate.⁴⁰ Nor did the experience contribute unduly to the men's immorality and drunkenness. Gordon, among others, noted that the troops were well-behaved and the provost sergeant was relatively inactive.⁴¹ And finally, the camp was run very economically, with at least \$8,500 left over from the province's \$30,000 appropriation.⁴²

Nevertheless, a closer analysis shows that some of the weaknesses endemic to the militia force of the period surfaced at the camp. First, the troops who attended the camp did not represent the entire province as had been called for by the militia commission. Because of the financial constraints imposed by the province, Gordon decided to collect the force from those counties that were within easy access of Fredericton. Therefore, those present came mainly from the Western District, representing the central and southern portions of the province, and the eastern and northern units, especially from the francophone areas, were absent.⁴³ This also meant that the size of the force was less than half the number recommended by the commission. Consequently, the benefits of the training were confined to only part of the province's militia force.

Second was the level and nature of their training. The camp routine made allowance for much training at all levels, and many of the troops achieved a high degree of proficiency in a short time, especially those companies that had an experienced officer or drill instructor attached to them.⁴⁴ However, the officers reviewing the troops, perhaps detecting an exaggerated sense of accomplishment, but not wanting to dampen

spirits, hinted that their training was still at a basic level. On the 18th, Doyle congratulated the troops on the competence of their drill, but in comparing them to the Nova Scotia militia he stated: "Now, I cannot say that you excel them, but this I may say, that you come so near them that I think you must be their first cousins."⁴⁵ Similarly, Col. Cole of the 15th qualified his remarks by stating that the militia's performance on the 22nd equalled that of other troops he had inspected that had been called out "for ordinary

stark contrast to the Fredericton camp. Every ten days four or five militia battalions arrived in camp to receive light infantry training and practical field instruction, learning, for example, how to strike, pitch and pack tents. They also fired 20 rounds of blank ammunition by file and volley, and were taught how to move with the regulars across country to attack strong positions. The camp was organized by Colonel Garnet Wolseley, the Assistant-Quartermaster-General of the British troops in Canada, who wrote, "My chief aim was to afford officers and



(PANB P5/60)

Militiamen practice forming square on the training field.

training – I do not mean permanently embodied."⁴⁶

More importantly, although the troops were taught to manoeuvre alongside the regulars in a brigade formation, it appears that most of the movements, such as forming squares, were based on conventional tactics that would likely be of limited use in British North America. This was made especially clear by the recent American experience on the battlefield, where modern weaponry compelled them to experiment with new tactics based on fire and movement and field entrenchments. Nor is there any indication that the troops gained real familiarity with their weapons by engaging in musketry practice or sham battles using blank ammunition.

The camp of training and observation held in Thorold, Ontario a year later in the wake of the debacle at the Battle of Ridgeway stands in

men instruction in the practical work which real war presents, and to avoid repeating drill-book manoeuvres which never could be required in Canada such as forming squares, etc."⁴⁷

As well, training in Fredericton was limited exclusively to the infantry. Contingents from the NB Regiment of Artillery attended with four cannon, but aside from the review on the 18th, when they demonstrated their gun drill, they trained mostly as foot soldiers.⁴⁸ Similarly, the mounted cavalry was no where in evidence, and they too trained as infantry.⁴⁹ A chief weakness of the militia had always been that it was predominantly an infantry force and the camp did little to redress this imbalance. Third was their standards of fitness and discipline. Several observers noted that the men remained quite fit throughout the camp and the doctors had little to keep them busy.⁵⁰ And as was noted above, the troops were well-behaved both while in camp

as well as in town, despite provocations from some of Fredericton's young men.⁵¹

However, these observations glossed over some problems. If the sick list was short, it is also evident that not everyone could withstand the rigorous training; for as the camp quartermaster general noted, by the end of the camp more than 60 men had been discharged under medical certificates as being unfit for duty.⁵² Their march discipline also left something to be desired, as was seen on their March Out on the 24th. It was an excessively hot day and, perhaps not surprisingly, they did not march in good order. As Col. Baird pointed out, when the troops halted by the river, they made a mad dash to gulp down water, loosing equipment in the process. The disorder continued on the return march. Alluding to the Union army's recent drive to the sea through Georgia and the Carolinas, Baird wrote:

the break from Sherman's ranks, in his celebrated march through Virginia [sic] on the hen roosts and piggeries, were cast in the shade by the raid of our fellows on the wells and springs in the line of march...paper shirt collars strewed the road...and when at two and a half miles below Fredericton the command 'Halt, front' was given, the idea to officers of the straggling of an army was fairly understood.⁵³

Finally, although the camp took on the routine of the regular army, it is apparent, Gordon's claim notwithstanding, that the standards of camp discipline for the volunteers were considerably relaxed. Millidge recalled:

...one day, a captain of a rural company came to the Commandant, in a state of great excitement, saying that one of his men had just deserted, and wanting to know what was to be done. 'Nothing,' said the Commandant, 'let him go.'⁵⁴

The fourth subject of concern was the level of training and leadership skills possessed by the officers of the militia. Millidge, for one, was very skeptical about Gordon's assessment of the quality of his militia officers. He stated that the tactical knowledge of the battalion commanders "left much to be desired," and concluded that the governor's generous comments "led us to believe that he was either saying the thing that was not, or that he had seen very little of this country's defenders."⁵⁵

However, Gordon was not blind to some of the weaknesses still facing the militia's officer corps. Despite the large numbers of officers present at the camp from some units, Gordon himself noted the absence of many others and cautioned in his Militia General Order No. 43 issued at the end of the camp:

that the Officers of the Militia at large will not neglect the opportunity afforded them of becoming acquainted with their duties, and His Excellency desires it to be distinctly understood that the acceptance of a Commission renders it obligatory on the individual accepting it to qualify himself for the duties it imposes.⁵⁶

It is very likely that some of the observers simply decided to ignore or downplay many of the same problems that had affected the militia force for years, and instead chose to praise their finer qualities, perhaps excessively and misleadingly.

What were the longer-term effects of the camp? In the fall of 1865 many of the Volunteer and militia units were called out. For example, Millidge noted that after the camp he joined the Saint John County Militia and in the autumn his battalion attempted to put into practice what had been learned in Fredericton. Bills were posted everywhere ordering the militia to muster, and uniforms, weapons and equipment were gathered up. He noted that nearly 2,000 troops assembled throughout the district and the rolls were called. The officers then put them through basic company and battalion drill.⁵⁷ Militia officials drew at least two conclusions from these turnouts.

First, there was little doubt that the numbers of men parading in the above example was very impressive and an important longer-lasting effect of the camp was the boost it gave to militia recruitment and turnout. As Gordon observed:

I am convinced that, apart from the instruction (by no means inconsiderable) which Officers and Men have received, a vast amount of popular prejudice has been dissipated, and spirit introduced into the Districts from which the men were drawn, which will be productive of the best results.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, this impressive display was not uniform throughout the province. For instance, on 4 October, the Class A companies of the active



The brigade, consisting of the 15th Regiment (at left) and the two militia service battalions, being inspected, probably during the review by General Doyle and Governor Gordon on 18 July 1865. (PANB P5/63)

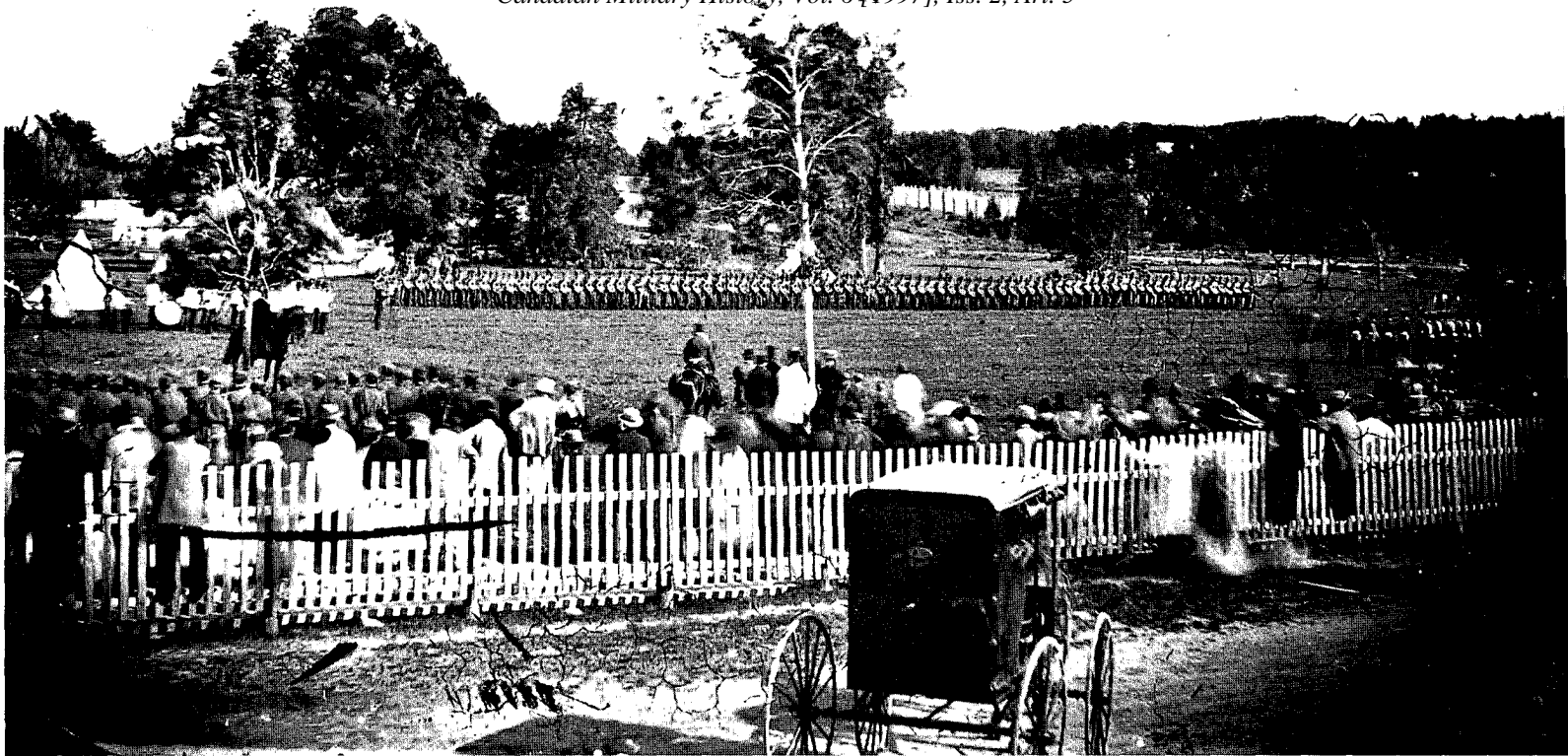
militia from Fredericton and the surrounding districts of York County mustered for the purpose of calling the roll and ascertaining numbers. Some of the companies assembled in good numbers, but others had hardly quarter strength. Moreover, some officers appeared in uniform according to regulations, while others were without any badge of rank.⁵⁹ In fact, a close analysis of the annual inspection report of Volunteer companies reveals uneven results.⁶⁰ The units from the Eastern District, which were not present at camp, were small in numbers, although they had some new recruits who had joined recently. As well, some of the units from the Western District that had been represented at camp also had low turnouts compared with the actual strength of the unit. For example, Lieutenant-Colonel George Maunsell, the Acting Adjutant General, noted that attendance at the Sunbury County Militia company's turnout was low because many of the men were absent in the woods. Clearly, the camp had had positive effects on annual inspection callouts in some cases, but in others they remained strictly limited, and uneven attendance continued to plague the militia force even after Confederation.

As was seen above, although not stated explicitly, it was assumed generally that the troops were supposed to return home with knowledge and skills they could pass on to their

comrades who were unable to attend camp. How successful were the troops in imparting useful military training over the long-term? Maunsell concluded that this objective had been met successfully. He wrote:

During my tour of inspection in the Western District, I observed with much satisfaction the benefits derived from instruction received at the Camp of Instruction at Fredericton. Members of Companies who previous to joining the Camp, had some knowledge of drill, are now enabled by practical experience to impart instruction to others; whilst of those who had no such previous knowledge, many have displayed a remarkable aptitude for its acquisition, and interest in maintaining it when acquired.⁶¹

A commendable example of this process in action was provided by the 3rd Battalion of the Kings' County Militia, which was inspected by its commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Andrew C. Otty in late September. Otty, who had been a member of the militia commission and second-in-command of the 1st Service Battalion at the camp, did his best to pass on the benefits of the training learned in Fredericton to the rest of his troops. Following the inspection, he called out the men who had been on duty at the camp and exercised them as a company in the presence of the battalion. He was pleased to find, he informed the Adjutant General, that "they had not forgotten that which they had acquired at



The 15th Regiment on parade, probably during the trooping of the colour on 22 July 1865. The regimental band stands at the left, while the militiamen look on in the left foreground. (PANB P5/66)

Camp.” Moreover, on his own initiative Otty invited two other area units – the Sussex Rifles and Saunders’ Mounted Rifles – to join his battalion for a field day. He formed them into a large corps and put them through various infantry evolutions.⁶²

However, it is unlikely that many others followed Otty’s example. The York County Militia’s callout was only for mustering, and Millidge’s unit’s turnout was probably too large to have learned much in a single day. Again, the inspection report revealed mixed results. The level of training found in some units, especially among the more technically specialized units like the artillery and engineers, was high, although it was difficult to link this to the camp, there being only one direct example of camp instruction being passed on to the other troops being cited. However, the state of training in some units, especially in the eastern and rural areas was indifferent. It was very likely therefore, that some of these turnouts were not much more successful than the muster days of the sedentary militia of the earlier period.

Indeed, Doyle, despite his praise for the camp, questioned what lasting effects the camp would have on the active militia. At the end of August, he cautioned Gordon that,

further exertions are necessary to place the Militia of the Province generally in condition to defend their homes...No doubt great advantage has been derived by the return to their homes of those who were instructed in the Camp at Fredericton...by arousing a popular feeling in favour of the Militia...That object having been gained, I should wish to impress upon Your Excellency the necessity of affording instruction to the whole of the Militia in New Brunswick...

Doyle believed that until more money could be raised to train a larger body of the militia the province remained in a “comparatively defenceless state.”⁶³

Moreover, the force continued to face problems related to training that camps of instruction could not solve, in particular the absence of proper drilling facilities and modern weapons and equipment. This situation prompted the inspector of the artillery regiment to conclude that “for all practical purposes, the force, as it is at present constituted, would be but a broken reed in an emergency.”⁶⁴

In the event, these warnings about the continued shortcomings of the militia and the relatively defenceless state of the province were put to the test in April 1866, when the Fenian crisis struck New Brunswick.⁶⁵ After months of

rumours and alarms about an impending descent on the province, members of the Brotherhood burned the customs house on Indian Island in the Bay of Fundy in mid April. Subsequent raids were turned back by the combined forces of the regulars and Volunteers, and by the end of May the crisis had passed.

During this emergency the government followed the old colonial tradition used to turn back the threat from the south of relying on the regulars stationed in the province as well as army and navy reinforcements called in from Halifax, augmented by the Volunteers and militia. Gordon called out on active service a force of about 1,000 Volunteers from several battalions and organized some of the militia into home guards. At Saint John and several stations along the frontier, including St. Stephen and Woodstock, the New Brunswickers stood guard and drilled, performing their defensive duties admirably. However, despite the Adjutant General's claim that the crisis had put the Volunteer system "to a severe test," and that it had "come up to the expectations of its most ardent admirers, and proved of infinite value in the hour of need,"⁶⁶ it was hardly a true test of their efficiency and training.

In the light of this crisis, the continued inadequacies of the province's defences became clear and over the next year this helped to move New Brunswick, as well as the rest of British North America, toward Confederation and its promise of common defence, as a more realistic response to the security needs of the country. As John Hamilton Gray, a provincial delegate to the Charlottetown Conference and the commanding officer of the Officer's Company at the 1865 camp, wrote the Fenian scare "essentially proved the necessity of that military organization which, it was alleged, would spring from Confederation."⁶⁷

Conclusion

Clearly, the vast experiment of the Fredericton Camp of Instruction had been an impressive achievement. Despite its novel nature, the camp was thoroughly organized and efficiently run, laying to rest much of the opposition levelled at it. In the short-term it had provided those militiamen who attended the camp with a degree

of intensive training and, more generally, had increased enthusiasm for militia service in some places. If its broader purpose was to provide a cadre of trained militiamen who would pass on their new knowledge to their comrades, however, its success had been more limited. Moreover, it was also apparent that, despite several years of reform, many of the traditional problems facing the militia still existed.

Perhaps it would have been unrealistic to have expected anything other than this outcome. As Gordon himself stated, a month-long camp for a select portion of the active militia was the only real alternative open to him, given the shortage of funds, and it was only part of an ongoing programme aimed at upgrading the overall effectiveness of the militia.

Nevertheless, militia officials continued to see value in the camp system in 1866. The Adjutant General wrote:

A desire appears to exist amongst all ranks of the Militia for further advancement in the knowledge and practice of military duties. This desire has increased during the past two years, chiefly by the results of the Camp of Instruction; although it may not have met the expectations of all...it cannot be doubted that the Camp of Instruction has been a means of diffusing a good practical knowledge of drill throughout the Province, and showing the system by which the interior economy of a Battalion is conducted, to those who otherwise would have no opportunity of obtaining such information.⁶⁸

So in the last year before Confederation, the government decided to repeat the experiment, although on a reduced scale and with certain modifications. The 1866 Camp of Instruction was held at Camp Torryburn near Saint John in late June.⁶⁹ The turnout numbered only 450 men, less than half the numbers assembled in Fredericton. However, some lessons had been learned from the first camp. In particular, the limited geographic representation of the 1865 camp was rectified, with several contingents attending from the Eastern District.⁷⁰ As well, this camp moved toward the kind of approach called for by the critics of the 1865 experiment, in that a much larger number of officers attended camp (305 in total), with one of the two battalions being composed entirely of officers selected from every battalion in the province. The lieutenant-governor was particularly pleased

with the turnout and performance of the officers at camp, writing:

That Officers, – many of them well advanced in years – some of them Field Officers in the Militia – two actually in command of Regiments, and nearly all engaged in professional pursuits from which their presence could now ill be spared, should cheerfully devote a month to learn their duties, and submit to the restraint and drill of private soldiers, must be a source of gratification to all who desire the Militia to become of practical utility and a means of safety to the Province.⁷¹

However, this would be the last time the camp system was employed in the province. In 1867, summer training for the militia was held on a much reduced scale, and it would be many years before the post-Confederation Canadian militia undertook regular training on the scale of the New Brunswick Militia's 1865 Camp of Instruction.⁷²

Notes

1. Lieutenant Governor Arthur Hamilton Gordon to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Edward Cardwell, 14 August 1865, *Journals of the House of Assembly of New Brunswick (JHA)* (1866), p.26. See also William T. Baird, *Seventy Years of New Brunswick Life - Autobiographical Sketches* (Saint John, NB: Geo. E. Day, 1890; repr. by St. Annes Point Press, 1978), p.240. For a more contemporary statement of this view, see Douglas How, *The 8th Hussars: A History of the Regiment* (Sussex, NB: Maritime Publishing, 1964), p.23.
2. J.K. Chapman, *The Career of Arthur Hamilton Gordon, First Lord Stanmore, 1829-1912* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), pp.21-22. For a detailed examination of Gordon's reforms, see David Facey-Crowther, *The New Brunswick Militia, 1787-1867* (Fredericton, NB: New Ireland Press and the New Brunswick Historical Society, 1990), pp.92-119.
3. Facey-Crowther, *New Brunswick Militia*, p.101.
4. Although these companies had special status and received separate funds, they nevertheless formed an integral part of the battalion to which they belonged, and came under the control of the battalion commander.
5. A detailed breakdown of the numbers of troops in each class can be found in "Report on the Militia of the Province of New Brunswick for the Year Ending 31 October 1864," *JHA*, (1865), pp.4 and 23; and C.F. Hamilton, "The Canadian Militia: The Maritime Provinces," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, VI (October, 1928 to July, 1929), pp.475-76.
6. Facey-Crowther, *New Brunswick Militia*, p.112.
7. Gordon to Cardwell, 21 November 1864, *JHA*, (1865), p.43. See also, "Report on the Militia of the Province of

- New Brunswick for the Year Ending 31 October 1864," p.6.
8. For more detail on the imperial context, see Facey-Crowther, *New Brunswick Militia*, pp.103-4, 112-13.
9. Cardwell to Gordon, 1 October 1864, *JHA*, (1865), p.41.
10. Gordon to Cardwell, 21 November 1864, *JHA*, (1865), p.44.
11. Cardwell to Gordon, 10 December 1864, *JHA*, (1865), p.44.
12. See "Report of the Militia Commission," *JHA*, (1865), pp.45-47. The report did not state clearly which classes of the active militia were eligible for training; it is assumed here that the camp volunteers came from all classes of the active force.
13. "Report of the Militia Commission," p.45.
14. For example, the Adjutant General wrote that the camp "will be of great value in providing men, not only drilled themselves, but capable of imparting instruction to others..." "Report on the Militia of the Province of New Brunswick for the Year Ending 31 October 1864," p.5.
It is likely that Gordon was himself the originator of the idea of a lengthy Camp of Instruction. In mid-November 1864, six weeks before he convened the militia commission, he wrote to Cardwell that "It is my intention to propose to my advisors before the next meeting of the Provincial Parliament, a scheme...which will have for its object the training of a certain portion of the Militia for several consecutive days in each year." Gordon to Cardwell, 21 November 1864, *JHA*, (1865), p.44.
15. *New Brunswick Reporter*, 16 June 1865, p.2; 7 July 1865, p.2; and 14 July 1865, p.2.
16. Major General Sir Hastings Doyle to Gordon, 30 August 1865, *JHA*, (1866), p.198.
17. RG 7, G8B, vol. 45, Minutes from the Inspectors General of Militia and Volunteers, 16 and 18 February 1865.
18. Gordon to Cardwell, 3 July 1865, *JHA*, (1866), p.195.
19. Facey-Crowther, *New Brunswick Militia*, pp.93, 111 and 130.
20. Section 24 of the Act stated: "Companies of the Active Militia, to the number of at least fifteen, shall be annually exercised at such convenient time and place as may be appointed by the Commander in Chief." See "An Act relating to the Militia," in *Acts of the General Assembly*, (1865), p.15.
21. Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Anderson, Adjutant General of Militia, to Lieutenant-Colonel Otty, Commanding 3rd Kings' Regiment, 1 June 1865, Letter Book of the Kings' Co. Militia, 3rd Battalion, 1862-1869, pp.73-74, Records of the New Brunswick Militia, RG 1 Reel RS 599.
22. The following description of the camp is based on the "Report of the Commandant of the Camp of Instruction to His Excellency the Hon. Arthur H. Gordon, Commander-in-Chief," 5 August 1865, *JHA*, (1866), pp.11-20.
23. Doyle to Gordon, 30 August 1865, *JHA*, (1866), p.198.
24. In his Militia General Order of 27 July, the Governor singled out the 3rd Battalion of the King's County Militia, who had 14 of their 25 officers in attendance. See "Militia General Order, No. 43," 27 July 1865, *JHA*, (1866), p.21.
25. Rev. J.W. Millidge, "Events of the Decade, 1860-1870," *Collections of the New Brunswick Historical Society*, IV, (1919), p.322.
26. *NB Reporter*, 7 July 1865, p.2.
27. Baird, *Seventy Years of New Brunswick Life*, p.232.
28. *Ibid.*, p.232.
29. Millidge, "Events of the Decade," p.323.

30. *NB Reporter*, 14 July 1865, p.2.
31. *The Head Quarters*, 19 July 1865.
32. *The Head Quarters*, 26 July 1865.
33. Baird, *Seventy Years of New Brunswick Life*, p.235.
34. *Ibid.*, p.237.
35. Gordon to Cardwell, 14 August 1865, *JHA*, (1866), p.195.
36. RG G8B, vol. 45, Cardwell to Maj. Gen. Sir Hastings Doyle, 29 September 1865.
37. *NB Reporter*, 28 July 1865, p.2.
38. *The Head Quarters*, 16 August 1865, p.2.
39. Gordon to Cardwell, 14 August 1865, *JHA*, (1866), p.196.
40. Among the camp facilities provided for the troops was a well-stocked reading room. According to William Baird, the troops made considerable use of the room. See Baird, *Seventy Years of New Brunswick Life*, pp.230-31.
41. In his Militia General Order, Gordon noted, "I cannot speak too highly of the general conduct of the Force. Insubordination and drunkenness were almost unknown; the number of absentees at tattoo did not average more than two, and they usually came in shortly afterwards. The willingness of the men to learn, their aptitude in learning, and their ready and cheerful submission to the necessary discipline, (which was carefully enforced) I own surprised me..." "Militia General Order, No. 43," *JHA*, (1866), pp.20 and 22.
- According to the commandant's report, the average daily number of prisoners in each battalion was not more than two, and the crimes were relatively minor, with punishment consisting of stoppage of pay or confinement to barracks. "Report of the Commandant," p.14.
42. *The Head Quarters*, 16 August 1865, p.2.
43. Gordon to Cardwell, 14 August 1865, *JHA*, (1866), p.195. By 1865, units of varying strengths existed in Albert, Gloucester, Kent, Northumberland, Restigouche, Victoria and Westmorland Counties. By a rough count, they would have made up about a third of the militia battalions in the province.
44. "Report of the Commandant," p.15.
45. *The Head Quarters*, 19 July 1865.
46. *The Head Quarters*, 26 July 1865.
47. Quoted in Erereton Greenhous, *Semper Paratus: The History of The Royal Hamilton Light Infantry (Wentworth Regiment) 1862-1977* (Hamilton, ON: RHLI Historical Association, 1977). For details on the controversial subject of Civil War tactics, see Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson, *Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage* (University, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1982); and Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1989).
48. *The Head Quarters*, 19 July 1865.
49. How, *The 8th Hussars*, p.24.
50. "Report of the Commandant," *JHA*, (1866), p.13; Gordon to Cardwell, 14 August 1865, *JHA*, (1866), p.197.
51. *The Head Quarters*, 14 July 1865.
52. Captain Moody to Colonel Hallows, 4 August 1865, *JHA*, (1866), p.18.
53. Baird, *Seventy Years of New Brunswick Life*, p.237.
54. Millidge, "Events of the Decade," p.323.
55. *Ibid.*, p.323.
56. "Militia General Order, No. 43," *JHA*, (1866), p.21.
57. Millidge, "Events of the Decade," p.234.
58. Gordon to Cardwell, 14 August 1865, *JHA*, (1866), p.197.
59. *The Head Quarters*, 4 October 1865, p.2.
60. See "Inspection Report of the Volunteer Companies of the New Brunswick Militia, 1865," *JHA*, (1866), pp.33-42.
61. "Report upon the Militia of New Brunswick, for the Year Ending 31st October 1865," *JHA*, (1866), p.5.
62. Otty to Lieutenant-Colonel George Maunsell, Acting Adjutant General of Militia, 1 November 1865, Letter Book of the Kings' Co. Militia, 3rd Battalion, 1862-1869, p.87, Records of the New Brunswick Militia, RG 1 Reel RS 599.
63. Doyle to Gordon, 30 August 1865, *JHA*, (1866), p.199.
64. "Inspection Report of the Volunteer Companies of the New Brunswick Militia, 1865," p.37.
65. For a detailed description of the military dimensions of the Fenian crisis in New Brunswick, see Facey-Crowther, *The New Brunswick Militia*, pp.119-28.
66. "Report on the Militia of New Brunswick, 1866," *JHA*, (1867), p.5.
67. Quoted in George F.G. Stanley, *Canada's Soldiers: The Military History of an Unmilitary People* 3rd. ed. (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), p.233; on the link between the Fenians and Confederation in New Brunswick, see W.S. MacNutt, *New Brunswick, A History: 1784-1867* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1984), ch.16, especially p.450.
68. "Report on the Militia of New Brunswick, 1866," *JHA*, (1867), p.10.
69. The following description is based on the "Report of the Commandant of the Camp of Instruction," *JHA*, (1867), pp.35-45.
70. They included a battalion contingent from Albert County, two each from Northumberland and Kent, and three from Westmorland County.
71. "Militia General Orders, No. 48," 23 July 1866, *JHA* (1867), p.44.
72. In the early 1870s, many units trained for the full sixteen days authorized by the Militia Act of 1868, and in 1872 experimental 6,000-man divisional camps were held. However, declining interest in the militia and an ongoing economic crisis forced a drastic curtailment in training. In 1876 summer camps were abolished, leaving city units to train eight days a year locally, while rural units virtually ceased training. See Stephen J. Harris, "Confederation to the Boer War," in John Marteinson, *We Stand On Guard: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Army* (Montreal: Ovale, 1992), pp.38-40.

J. Brent Wilson is the Senior Researcher at the Centre for Conflict Studies at the University of New Brunswick and Manuscript Editor of *The Journal of Conflict Studies*. He also teaches military history courses in the Department of History at UNB. He is co-editor of *Military History and the Military Profession* (1992), and *The Soldier and the Canadian State: A Crisis in Civil-Military Relations?* (1996).