

Militia Myths

STUDIES IN CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY

Series editor: Dean F. Oliver, *Canadian War Museum*

The Canadian War Museum, Canada's national museum of military history, has a threefold mandate: to remember, to preserve, and to educate. Studies in Canadian Military History, published by UBC Press in association with the museum, extends this mandate by presenting the best of contemporary scholarship to provide new insights into all aspects of Canadian military history, from earliest times to recent events. The work of a new generation of scholars is especially encouraged and the books employ a variety of approaches – cultural, social, intellectual, economic, political, and comparative – to investigate gaps in the existing historiography. The books in the series feed immediately into future exhibitions, programs, and outreach efforts by the Canadian War Museum.

John Griffith Armstrong, *The Halifax Explosion and the Royal Canadian Navy: Inquiry and Intrigue*

Andrew Richter, *Avoiding Armageddon: Canadian Military Strategy and Nuclear Weapons, 1950-63*

William Johnston, *A War of Patrols: Canadian Army Operations in Korea*

Julian Gwyn, *Frigates and Foremasts: The North American Squadron in Nova Scotia Waters, 1745-1815*

Jeffrey A. Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War*

Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldiers' Families in the Great War*

Douglas E. Delaney, *The Soldiers' General: Bert Hoffmeister at War*

Michael Whitby, ed., *Commanding Canadians: The Second World War Diaries of A.F.C. Layard*

Martin Auger, *Prisoners of the Home Front: German POWs and "Enemy Aliens" in Southern Quebec, 1940-46*

Tim Cook, *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars*

Serge Marc Durflinger, *Fighting from Home: The Second World War in Verdun, Quebec*

Richard O. Mayne, *Betrayed: Scandal, Politics, and Canadian Naval Leadership*

P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *Battle Grounds: The Canadian Military and Aboriginal Lands*

Cynthia Toman, *An Officer and a Lady: Canadian Military Nursing and the Second World War*

Shaw, Amy J., *Crisis of Conscience: Conscientious Objection in Canada during the First World War*

Serge Marc Durflinger, *Veterans with a Vision: Canada's War Blinded in Peace and War*

James G. Fergusson, *Canada and Ballistic Missile Defence, 1954-2009: Déjà Vu All Over Again*

Benjamin Isitt, *From Victoria to Vladivostok: Canada's Siberian Expedition, 1917-19*

**Militia Myths:
Ideas of the Canadian Citizen Soldier,
1896-1921**

James Wood



UBCPress · Vancouver · Toronto

© UBC Press 2010

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without prior written permission of the publisher, or, in Canada, in the case of photocopying or other reprographic copying, a licence from Access Copyright (Canadian Copyright Licensing Agency), www.accesscopyright.ca.

20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in Canada on FSC-certified ancient-forest-free paper (100% post-consumer recycled) that is processed chlorine- and acid-free.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Wood, James A., 1978-

Militia myths : Ideas of the Canadian citizen soldier, 1896-1921 / James A. Wood.

(Studies in Canadian military history, ISSN 1499-6251)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7748-1765-3

1. Canada – History, Military. 2. Canada – Militia – History. 3. Canada – Forces – History. 4. Sociology, Military – Canada. I. Title. II. Series: Studies in Canadian military history

FC226.W65 2010

355.00971

C2009-907135-5

Canada

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada (through the Canada Book Fund), the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Publication of this book has been financially supported by the Canadian War Museum.

UBC Press

The University of British Columbia

2029 West Mall

Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

www.ubcpress.ca

TO MY MOTHER,

who taught me how to write this book;

MY FATHER,

for raising me to appreciate the finer points of Canadian life;

AND TO BOTH OF THEM,

*for sharing with me their deep respect and admiration
for the accomplishments of those who came before us.*

All the male inhabitants of Canada, of the age of eighteen years and upwards, and under sixty, not exempt or disqualified by law, and being British subjects, shall be liable to service in the Militia; the Governor-General may require all the male inhabitants of Canada, capable of bearing arms, to serve in the case of a levée en masse.

– “THE MILITIA ACT,” STATUTES OF CANADA, 1904,
CHAPTER 23, CLAUSE 11

Mere levée en masse clauses such as this or the corresponding ballot clauses of the British Militia Act are curses in disguise. They can be served out as soothing syrup for reformers, and that is positively the only use either Act is put to now. I doubt if one in a hundred of the young men in the West are even aware of their liabilities under the Act. But, under a democracy, a latent law which has not for the past generation run the gauntlet of public opinion, is no law. It carries no moral obligation home to the conscience of the individual. It cannot be sprung upon him at the last moment.

– GENERAL SIR IAN HAMILTON,
REPORT ON THE MILITARY INSTITUTIONS OF CANADA,
OTTAWA, 1913

Contents

Illustrations / ix

Acknowledgments / xi

Introduction: Canadian Ideas of the Citizen Soldier / 1

1 A Military Spirit in Canada, 1896-98 / 19

2 An Army for Empire, 1898-1901 / 51

3 “Don’t Call Me Tommy,” 1901-04 / 80

4 “Who Are You Going to Fight?” 1905-08 / 115

5 Continental Commitments, 1909-11 / 145

6 Involuntary Action, 1911-14 / 173

7 War and Citizenship, 1914-17 / 210

8 Victory and Vindication, 1918-21 / 241

Conclusion: A Citizen’s Duty in “Canada’s Century” / 269

Appendices

1 Total Canadian Militia Expenditures, 1894-1922 / 277

2 Canadian Militia Establishment and Numbers Trained, 1895-1914 / 278

3 Membership in Military and Civilian Rifle Associations, 1903-14 / 279

4 Membership in School Cadet Corps, 1908-14 / 279

5 Compulsory vs. Voluntary Service: Costs and Results / 280

Notes / 281

Bibliography / 327

Index / 339

Illustrations

Civil Service Rifles, 1865 / 21

Governor General's Body Guard in Toronto / 30

The militia church parade, 1871 / 35

Wimbledon rifle team, 1889 / 45

H.M. Queen Victoria, H.R.H. the Princess of Wales in the Diamond Jubilee procession, 1897, London, England / 59

Toronto public school cadet trip to Tampa, 1899 / 66

Eight-hundred-yard rifle range, located off Charlotte Street, Ottawa, ca. 1900 / 71

Personnel of Strathcona's Horse en route to South Africa aboard *S.S. Monterey*, 1900 / 88

Field hospital at Paardeberg Drift, South Africa, 19 February 1900 / 93

Return of the first Canadian contingent from South Africa, Ottawa, 3 November 1900 / 98

Frederick Borden / 104

Parade of mounted militia, Calgary, ca. 1915 / 125

Congrès Eucharistique, Ste. Thérèse, Quebec, 1913 / 126

Infantry detachments from Ontario in the Quebec Tercentenary military review, Montreal, July 1908 / 140

The Conference of Colonial Prime Ministers, London, England, April 1907 / 148

Brig. Gen. E.A. Cruikshank reviewing Boy Scouts, Calgary, 1915 / 154

First mounted review of Strathcona's Horse, Ottawa, 7 March 1900 / 156

Queen's Own Rifles in Armouries, Toronto, 1910 / 167

Militia dinner for the Honourable Sam Hughes, MP, minister of militia and defence, 1912 / 175

An international rifle match – Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, and Imperials, June 1916 / 188

- A highland regiment waiting to have supplies allotted before leaving Valcartier Camp, Quebec, 1915 / 215
- General Sir Sam Hughes watching the departure of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, Gaspé coast, Quebec, 1914 / 218
- Canadians training on Salisbury Plain, England, 1914 / 221
- Canadian troops passing Stonehenge, Salisbury Plain, England, 1914 / 221
- Canadian soldiers returning from trenches during the Battle of the Somme, France, November 1916 / 232
- Nursing Sisters at a Canadian hospital voting in the Canadian federal election, France, December 1917 / 238
- 28th Infantry Battalion marching past Sir Robert Borden, July 1918 / 245
- French-Canadian officers of the first French Canadian Battalion to be formed under conscription, 1918 / 248
- Fifth and Seventh Batteries arriving in Montreal for demobilization, 1919 / 255

Acknowledgments

THE RESEARCH AND WRITING of this book have taken place over several years, and in that time I have received a great deal of support. The initial research was funded by a Doctoral Fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, whose already generous funding was matched by that of Wilfrid Laurier University and the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies. I am honoured to acknowledge the contributions of these organizations and to recognize how fortunate I was to take part in the Tri-University program that is the joint effort of the history departments at Wilfrid Laurier, the University of Waterloo, and the University of Guelph.

Professor Roger Sarty supervised the research upon which this book is based and helped sharpen its focus. He spent hours reading the manuscript in various stages, offering carefully considered suggestions on how it might be improved, and did so despite a constant press of other demands on his time. Members of my advisory committee, Dr. Adam Crerar at Laurier and Dr. Alan Gordon of the University of Guelph, offered critical advice that proved enormously helpful. Thanks are also due to Dr. Stephen Harris of the Department of National Defence, whose questions during the defence uncovered new avenues to explore in this work. This book has similarly benefited from the advice of many individuals, most notably Tim Cook, Andrew Iarocci, Terry Copp, Mike Bechthold, Marc Milner, and Serge Durflinger. I am also pleased to acknowledge the encouragement of Arne Bialuschewski, Carolyn Kay, and Tim Stapleton of Trent University, where I had the great pleasure of teaching while revising the manuscript for publication. Finally, thanks are also due to editors Laraine Coates, Melissa Pitts, and Emily Andrew of UBC Press for their efforts in guiding the manuscript toward publication. This book has been made better owing to my association with these individuals; responsibility for its remaining faults rests with me alone.

Above all, I am thankful for the encouragement and support of my family. My wife, Natalie, supported this work from beginning to end with a most remarkable degree of understanding and patience. My parents, Marty and Jim,

once again shouldered the task of reading first, second, and subsequent drafts. They and the rest of our families in Ontario and British Columbia – Lyle and Kathy, Richard and Shirley, Michael, our grandparents – take pride in this achievement. And for that I thank them all.

Militia Myths

Introduction:

Canadian Ideas of the Citizen Soldier

Culture, Citizenship, and Military Service in Canada

“FOR THREE CENTURIES and a half Canadians have borne arms. Essentially a civilian people, an unmilitary people, they have, through historical necessity, fought to preserve their freedom and their identity.” So wrote George Stanley in his 1960 study of *Canada’s Soldiers*, adding that while “no men have fought better; no men have as quickly discarded the skills of war for the farms and factories of peace.”¹ This image of farmers and workers called to the colours in time of war is an enduring theme in the Canadian social memory of war. So is their long-awaited return from overseas, unbroken by their trials and eager to return to their families, their land, and the task of building a great and “peaceable kingdom” in North America.² As a recent study of the First World War in Canadian memory suggests, the citizen soldier became a central figure in the mythic version of that conflict; “the Canadian Corps was an army of amateurs, eventually commanded by the modestly successful Victoria insurance salesman, Sir Arthur Currie.”³ As a symbol, this image of the Canadian citizen soldier might be viewed as the reconciliation of otherwise conflicting societal values – in the public mind, disinterest in war and militarism combined with the citizen’s sense of duty and patriotism to create a distinctly “unmilitary” soldier.⁴ Yet, before this mythic figure could assume his place in our memory of the Great War – and even before the young man donned khaki and boarded troopships bound for England and then Flanders – he was already well known to the Canadian people.

This work examines Canadian ideas of the citizen soldier from 1896 to 1921, beginning with a time when Canada’s potential for peaceful expansion seemed unlimited, its population and industries growing, and its political leadership resolutely opposed to being drawn into the “vortex of European militarism.”⁵ It closes in 1921, with the country still recovering from four years of war and the ordeal of the conscription crisis. Although the First World War is still regarded as marking Canada’s birth as a nation, conscription for overseas service posed a fundamental challenge to long-established ideas about the citizen soldier. Conscription in 1917 overturned the home defence orientation that had previously characterized the citizen soldier ideal in Canada, and did so in the interests of prosecuting total war on a scale previously unknown in world history.

This is a study of these ideas and attitudes as they developed between 1896 and 1921, rather than an attempt at discovering how closely the reality of Canadian defence planning and wartime achievements approached the country's pre-war ideal of the citizen soldier. The focus here is on the literary and cultural elements of the amateur military tradition as it developed in Canada during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Armed forces create their own culture, distinct from that of civilian society but also influenced by it. In the sense that the term is employed here, "military culture" will refer to the ways in which armies organize themselves, each in its own way and for reasons that are very often dictated by the army's relation to civilian society and how it is expected to be employed in war.

What Canadians said and wrote about the citizen soldier before the Great War reflected the values and intellectual currents of the wider society, as well as their understanding of Canada's place in North America, the British Empire, and the world. In turn, how they acted upon these ideas formed the basis of a distinctly Canadian military culture, a system of beliefs and attitudes that drew heavily upon the inherited traditions of a late-colonial society, the cultural values of a North American nation, and the natural concern of a developing country for limiting government expenditure on the potentially dangerous luxury of a large standing army in peacetime.

The opening of the Laurier era was a time when Canada's potential seemed unlimited, but it was also a time when a growing minority of Canadians began to take a more active interest in the military development of their young country. For some, this reflected a conviction that Canada's maturation as a self-governing member of the British Empire entailed the assumption of imperial responsibilities, whether those consisted of relieving the mother country of its military burdens in North America or of taking on an active role in raising volunteer contingents for service in British wars overseas. For others, the military horizon lay much closer at hand, with the defence of Canada itself against an overbearing and sometimes belligerent neighbour taking precedence at a time when the Venezuela Crisis and the Alaskan boundary dispute were once again raising the old threat of American expansionism. The Venezuela Crisis of 1895 erupted when American president Grover Cleveland invoked the Monroe Doctrine to insist that the disputed boundary between Venezuela and British Guiana be submitted to arbitration led by an American commission. Realizing the industrial potential of the United States, Britain backed down and agreed to arbitration. In the 1903 Alaskan boundary dispute between Canada and the United States, Britain agreed to arbitration but supported the American claim against the Canadians. Both events exposed Canada's vulnerable position in the event that a British-American dispute turned into warfare. Situated on both sides of

the issue through imperial relations and geography, many Canadians simply enjoyed a good parade and felt, almost instinctively, that maintaining a national army was simply something that “grown up” nations did. The nascent militarism of these years cannot be understood in isolation from the nationalist optimism that led Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier to declare that whereas the eighteenth century had belonged to Britain and the nineteenth to the United States, the twentieth century would belong to Canada.⁶

Although it would be a mistake to link popular nationalism with a sense of military obligation and describe this as an unchanging characteristic of the modern nation-state, this particular interpretation of a citizen’s duty was gaining as much ground in late nineteenth-century Canada as it was throughout the rest of the English-speaking world.⁷ “The person who has nothing for which he is willing to fight,” wrote John Stuart Mill in 1868, “is a miserable creature and has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself.”⁸ In the same year Mill penned these words, the newly federated provinces of British North America enacted a militia act that continued the universal military obligations of the pre-Confederation colonies by holding all able-bodied males between the ages of eighteen and sixty liable to military service in the defence of Canada.⁹ The powers of conscription embodied in the new Militia Act fell short of those exercised in some provinces before Confederation, most notably in Nova Scotia, but the law of 1868 did provide for conscription by ballot if necessary to maintain the militia at full strength in peacetime.¹⁰ In practice, however, service in the Canadian Militia remained voluntary and conscription was never invoked, even under the threat of the Fenian raids of the 1860s and the Northwest Rebellion of 1885. By the opening of the Laurier era, the country was less than thirty years old, but the powers of conscription established in the Militia Act had remained dormant throughout that time. At the beginning of what many hoped would be “Canada’s century,” the old law still remained on the statute books, though most Canadians remained quite happy to leave the business of soldiering to the part-time soldiers of a volunteer militia.

In the context of late Victorian Canada, blessed by decades of peace with its only contiguous neighbour and enjoying the protection of the world’s most powerful navy, this interpretation of a citizen’s military obligation required little in practical terms. Although the Militia Act identified citizen soldiers as the country’s first line of defence against foreign invasion or internal disturbance, service in the militia was voluntary and remained primarily a social rather than military occupation. Amateur soldiers performed duties that only rarely exposed them to the hazards of armed conflict, the exception being when the militia was called out to maintain public order during periods of civil unrest.¹¹ With few

exceptions, thoughts of war rarely entered into people's daily lives. As the inheritors of a vast tract of the North American continent, the central task of these years remained the conversion of wilderness to civilization. Apart from two expeditions in the Northwest, the only significant Canadian conquests in these years were limited to the exploitation of the natural resources of the Canadian Shield and the breaking of virgin soil on the Prairies. When war did enter into the Canadian consciousness, it was usually understood as something that occurred at the far corners of the British Empire. For that reason, it was easy to proclaim one's loyalty and willingness to serve when most wars were fought elsewhere by a "thin red line" of professional soldiers recruited primarily in the mother country. That began to change with Canada's involvement in the South African War and even more so with the call to arms in 1914. Before the First World War, however, Canadians could be forgiven for believing that wars were something that occurred elsewhere and that the only real military obligation of citizenship consisted of an agreement in principle: a willingness to serve in the event of a war that nearly everyone hoped would never happen.

For those with only a slightly longer memory, however, thoughts of war raised images of a North American battlefield: the Niagara frontier in the 1860s, the siege of Batoche in 1885, or the massed citizen armies of the American Civil War, the same terrifying conflict that had originally given cause for the British North American provinces to band together for their common defence.¹² Carl Berger's chapter on militarism in *The Sense of Power* indicates the degree to which Canadian imperialists ordered their understanding of war according to British models.¹³ But there was also another military tradition at work in this country, one that owed less to the new imperialism of the late Victorian era than it did to traditions handed down to the North American colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Both the French-Canadian and Loyalist founders of Canada had a long history of militia service, and the English-speaking settlers, too, shared in an ancient tradition of strident opposition to standing armies. From the early modern era onward, English military traditions had developed on a separate trajectory from those of continental Europe, where standing armies gave force to royal authority and thereby undermined feudalism by providing an early foundation for absolutism and the modern nation-state.¹⁴ Isolated from these developments by the width of the English Channel, safe behind the "wooden walls" of the world's most powerful navy, the British Isles required only a navy for their defence against invasion. In England, an earlier military tradition thereby survived intact, preserving medieval obligations whereby men served in county militias under the local nobility and were required to serve only in the event of the country being invaded.¹⁵ During the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution of 1688, citizen militias and the

absence of a standing army combined to prevent the king from enforcing his will over Parliament. After the civil war, regular soldiers came to be regarded by the English with a mix of contempt and fear, Cromwell and his New Model Army having done much to establish an ideological connection between standing armies and tyranny.¹⁶ The militia, or “constitutional force,” meanwhile, became a symbol of English liberty.

These sentiments became less marked in Britain over the next two centuries, Parliament ultimately seeing the wisdom of establishing a small standing army under its own control. However, it was the older citizen soldier tradition that English settlers carried with them to the North American colonies, where it became one of the founding military traditions of both the United States and Canada. After 1784, citizen militias became the bulwark of the United States Army, the War of American Independence having inspired a belief that patriotic citizens armed for the defence of their homes and families represented the only protection a free people required.¹⁷ This was the view that William Jennings Bryan later espoused when he said that “if the United States were ever endangered, a million men would spring to arms overnight.”¹⁸ In Canada, an outward rejection of American democracy by the Loyalists did not entail a corresponding reversal of long-held military traditions; in fact, historians of early Upper Canada have shown that its inhabitants often remained far more grounded in their North American heritage and traditions than colonial governors sent out from England liked to admit.¹⁹ Among those traditions, the same dislike of standing armies and adulation of citizen soldiers that had initially taken root in the American colonies was successfully transplanted in British North America. For that reason, the contribution of citizen soldiers to the defence of New France during the Conquest and of Upper Canada during the War of 1812 became the unique symbol of a military culture that differed in few other respects from that of the United States and the other British settler colonies.²⁰ From that time until the outbreak of the Great War, this British North American variant of the citizen soldier ideal continued to exert a hold on Canadians, creating a widespread tendency to ignore the need for military training and preparation in peacetime, relying instead on the men who would “spring to arms overnight” were the country ever threatened.

By the late nineteenth century, the popular memory of the Seven Years War, the War of American Independence, the War of 1812, the American Civil War – indeed, every major armed conflict fought on North American soil since the arrival of European settlers – fostered a militia myth that held that citizens fighting in defence of their homes made the best soldiers.²¹ Just as William Jennings Bryan was ready to entrust the defence of the United States to a million patriotic volunteers, the *Toronto Globe* in 1870 suggested that “Canadians can

dispense with a standing army because they possess the best possible constituents for a defensive force in themselves. The finest soldiers are men whose own stake and interest in the conflict impell them to respond to the call to arms.”²² Although hastily raised volunteers had proven deplorably unreliable in every one of these conflicts until they became thoroughly seasoned and experienced, these shortcomings mattered little so long as the United States shared in the same militia myth as Canada and remained similarly ill-prepared for a major conflict. So long as both sides were equally unprepared, all that was required from Canadian citizens was an expressed willingness to serve if necessary. Only a few believed it ever would be, but throughout these years, part-time service in the militia afforded one of the few means of putting one’s patriotism and sense of duty on display before the public.

Some wanted to do more. Standing in direct opposition to those who assumed that mobs of patriotic volunteers could be forged into an army at a moment’s notice were officers of the fledgling Canadian Permanent Force, the British Army, and – much larger and influential in Canada during the Laurier era – an identifiable group of professionally minded militia officers whose efforts Canadian historians have mostly overlooked. The latter group is the focus of this work. Before 1914, their proposals for a citizen army represented a third option for Canada, a form of military organization that was somewhere between the standing armies of the professionals and the widespread apathy to military affairs of the population as a whole.

Prior to 1914, the efforts of the Canadian regulars and their British advisers centred on the creation of an effective peacetime military establishment, one consisting of a nucleus of trained soldiers, a small standing army that could be expanded in time of war by recruiting civilians to serve under trained officers and non-commissioned officers. The efforts of those few British officers who remained in central Canada after the withdrawal of the imperial garrisons in 1871, most notably the succession of British officers who commanded the Canadian Militia to 1904, have been ably described by Desmond Morton in *Ministers and Generals: Politics and the Canadian Militia, 1868-1904*. Meanwhile, the trials and tribulations of the Canadian Permanent Force are the subject of *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939*, in which Stephen Harris provides a detailed account of the early years of Canada’s regular army. As the works of Harris and Morton both make clear, the pace of technological change in the closing decades of the nineteenth century meant the amateur approach to military affairs was approaching obsolescence. At the dawn of the twentieth century, the armed civilian often stood in the eyes of military professionals as the very symbol and embodiment of chaos itself. As British general officers

commanding the militia struggled alongside a socially isolated cadre of Canadian regulars to establish the rudiments of military professionalism in this country, they usually faced the indifference and even hostility of a Canadian people for whom the cry of “standing armies” still evoked visions of “the man on horseback,” Cromwellian tyranny, and – perhaps most sinister of all – higher taxes. Their efforts found little favour among Canadians in these years.

Before the First World War, even the smallest steps toward an increased role for the Permanent Force at the expense of the militia met with howls of protest voiced in nearly every forum of public opinion.²³ Not the least of these complaints was that the Canadian Permanent Force had been created to serve as an instructional body to the militia and had no mandate from the constituted authorities to arrogate to itself the task of real soldiering, which remained the sole preserve of citizen soldiers.²⁴ While the aim of *Canadian Brass* is to describe the progress of military professionals in bringing the country’s defences in line with their informed opinions of military necessity, in Harris’ account, the weight of public opinion against which these officers struggled often seems to form an impenetrable wall blocking the road of progress. In *Ministers and Generals*, meanwhile, it is upon the rocks of patronage and politics that the ships of the commanding British general officers so often came to grief. The most successful generals in Canada were those who did the least to alienate the country’s elected officials or to offend its powerful militia lobby, a term traditionally applied to those MPs who also held commissions in the Active Militia. That term might be broadened for the purposes of this study to include all MPs who actively supported the Active Militia and opposed the development of a standing army in Canada.²⁵ Although the campaigns of these long-suffering regular soldiers have been described in detail, their activities represent only one aspect of Canadian military thought and culture in the years leading to the Great War.

While the professionals concentrated on establishing a highly trained force to serve as the backbone of an expanded wartime army, advocates of the citizen soldier ideal believed it was necessary first to teach basic military skills to as many young men as possible in order to facilitate their mobilization in the event of an emergency, and second, to create the kind of societal conditions in which an interest in soldiering could exist. The efforts of the professionals to achieve their ends have been examined in detail; one of the conclusions emerging from the works of Morton, Harris, and others is that the direction of their efforts went against the grain of Canadian society, evoking little sympathy or interest from the general public and drawing hostile reactions from serving militiamen and their supporters. In Canada, as elsewhere, the creation of an atmosphere in which military professionalism could thrive required that the profession of

arms be ordered in such a way as to provide a sense of unity among its members, thereby distinguishing between the regulars and their amateur counterparts.²⁶ It was an approach that almost required a display of condescension toward the militia, and one that created no small degree of animosity between amateurs and professionals throughout the period under study.

By contrast, citizen soldier advocates in Canada and elsewhere argued vehemently against the creation of a professional military caste. For them, the key to military efficiency lay not in isolating the army from society but, rather, in linking its development to that of the nation, stressing the social utility of military discipline, order, and the encouragement of patriotism among the citizenry that would become its defenders. Samuel Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* provides examples of these arguments from the United States before the First World War, when General Leonard Wood and his preparedness movement maintained that a citizen army should be used to further socially desirable objectives.²⁷ Wood believed the army should be an embodiment of the people in arms, and although military preparedness was never far from his thoughts, his efforts to organize military summer training camps for college students in 1913 had far more to do with stimulating virtues of patriotism, responsibility, devotion to duty, and manliness among American youths than it did with preparing the nation for war.²⁸ Significantly, at the same time that Leonard Wood was organizing these camps, a growing number of Canadian Militia officers, MPs, newspaper editors, school teachers, church leaders, temperance unionists, members of patriotic organizations, civilian rifle associations, and women's groups were also seeing the potential for military service to improve civilian society. In the decade before the Great War, their arguments sought to justify extensive and far-reaching military preparations in a country that seemed to lack any more immediate reasons for doing so. On the eve of the First World War, there were even indications that this connection between reform-minded militia officers and like-minded civilian interest groups might provide the best means of furthering their shared goals for the militia and society as a whole, as evidenced by the militia conferences organized by Sam Hughes in 1911 and 1913.

The opposition of part-time militia officers to the creation of a standing army in Canada has often been read as the self-interested response of a backward-looking militia lobby reacting against the only measures that might possibly have fostered military efficiency in the years before the Great War.²⁹ Doing so distorts both the motives and outlook of the citizen soldier advocates, whose foremost goal was to overcome public apathy and indifference by stressing the social utility of military training, and whose views on military efficiency and preparedness differed from those of professional soldiers in fewer respects than is commonly recognized. In many ways, they advocated a middle road between

two extremes: the hated standing army on one hand, and the danger of having no army at all on the other. Although they certainly disagreed with the professionals in their estimation of the time required to train a “real” soldier, the advocates of a citizen army for Canada fully recognized the limitations of inadequately trained volunteers, and they worked assiduously throughout this period to establish the country’s defences on a more solid footing. To that end, they concentrated their efforts on the militia, cadets, and paramilitary organizations like the rifle clubs, these forces representing the only form of defence preparedness that the mass of Canadian citizens before the Great War were willing to tolerate and pay for.

Carl Berger once described Canadian imperialism as a lost cause that has come to be known to posterity through the writings of its enemies. The same might also be said of the Canadian citizen soldier advocates. Their cause, however, much like the imperial movement with which it is so often confused, deserves to be rescued from the condescension of hindsight, if only so that we may understand the ideas and values that guided a generation of young men from the half-forgotten militia camps of antebellum Canada to the trenches of Flanders and the Somme. It was an ideal that made the militia a part of Canadian life before the Great War to a degree that is difficult for the modern reader to understand. Doing so requires a conscious effort to view the outward symbols of the citizen soldier ideal – the spring church parades and Thanksgiving sham fights, the weekend rifle competitions, the cadet movement, and the home guard associations of 1914 – according to the ideas, beliefs, and values that inspired the militia myth of these years.

This idea of the citizen soldier before the Great War was not founded primarily on “class interest,” “manliness,” “militarism,” or the “politics of patronage,” at least not in the way that a modern reader understands these terms with the negative connotations they have acquired. Understanding it in this way would be a disservice to our understanding of Canadian society in these years. Through a historicist lens, one that examines these questions within the social and cultural context in which they were raised, “manliness and militarism” become “citizenship and duty,” and the attitudes and mindset of the age become less foreign to our understanding. When the past is accepted on its own terms it becomes possible to appreciate how Canadian mothers came to view military service as an instrument of social reform. It becomes possible to read the *Toronto Telegram* of 1905 and understand why patronage, graft, and partisan politics were more closely associated with a professional standing army than a citizen militia. It even becomes possible to understand how the same writer could bitterly condemn the militarism of a small regular army in one sentence and in the next urge the adoption of universal compulsory military training in peacetime. What

emerges is a fundamentally different view of the militia, the cadet movement, and other forgotten elements of Canadian society before the Great War.

The Citizen Soldier: Rhetoric, Myth, and Reality

People, when they talk of military plans, seem to forget that in Canada military thought is dominated by the citizen soldier or by the friends of the citizen soldier ... The native of this continent is not a peace soldier to any extent; he will not soldier for the sake of soldiering.

— “IMPERIAL DEFENCE,” *CANADIAN MILITARY GAZETTE*, 6 MAY 1902

The first objective of this study has been to document the existence in Canada of a structure of ideas, opinions, and attitudes that it is convenient to label the “idea of the citizen soldier,” a concept that may be defined as a belief in the inherent virtues of military training conducted on a part-time basis and a conviction that good citizens should provide for their own defence. With this as a starting point, it has become possible not only to identify a sizable body of Canadians during the years 1896-1917 who accepted this idea but also to gain a fair indication of why they did so. It has also become possible to understand the significance and legacy of these beliefs during the final year and aftermath of the Great War.

Three reasons dictate the need for scholarly attention in this area. The first comes from the observation that Canadian ideas of the citizen soldier have not been the subject of systematic analysis by historians. Although its armed forces are often dismissed as being militarily backward and irrelevant before the Great War, the sheer volume of material preserved in Canadian militia and defence periodicals in this period constitutes tangible evidence of a military culture that remained unique to Canada even as it drew upon currents of thought originating in Britain, the United States, and elsewhere. Canada may have been a peaceable kingdom in comparison to some – and it is true that most Canadians in this period seldom concerned themselves with questions of national or imperial defence – but this perception of an unmilitary people can easily be taken too far.³⁰ A number of excellent works capture the spirit of Canadian militarism in this era of yellow journalism and bellicose national imperialism, Carman Miller’s *Painting the Map Red* and Carl Berger’s *The Sense of Power* being two outstanding examples.³¹ Yet, there have been no studies dedicated to understanding the citizen soldier as an ideal and symbol by which Canadians ordered their understanding of armed conflict and their notions of a citizen’s duty to serve. Before 1914, few countries demonstrated a greater corporate indifference to their own defence than Canada, and for the citizen soldier advocates who are

the subject of this work, it was that very indifference that represented the first obstacle to their particular vision for the country. Far from being backward or irrelevant, they sought to create the kind of societal conditions in which a citizen army could flourish. Though military reformers such as William Hamilton Merritt, Frederick Borden, Sam Hughes, and a host of others seldom agreed on how best to proceed – and where they disagreed, they disagreed with vehemence – this study demonstrates the surprising degree of sophistication that attended their thinking on the role and function of the citizen soldier.

A second area in which this study complements the existing literature is in providing depth to the militia myth as an explanatory device, a term that comes to us as one of the great and tired expressions of Canadian military history. In its Canadian context, the militia myth refers to a dangerously faulty memory of the War of 1812 and the ill-founded confidence of Canadians in the abilities of amateur citizen soldiers. Premised on a mistaken belief that it was the Canadian Militia alone that repelled the American invasion of Upper Canada during the War of 1812, the militia myth fostered a sense of complacency on the part of the Canadian people. For more than a century afterward, it allowed them to be fooled into believing that there was no military contingency so serious that it could not be met by the citizen soldiers of a volunteer militia.³² Even a passing glance at the collected works of professional military historians, from C.P. Stacey and John Mackay Hitsman to Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein, reveals this myth as an enduring source of frustration to those few Canadians who concerned themselves with military affairs in peacetime. It was also a notion that historians writing during the Cold War found positively dangerous; writing in an era when “the next war” was likely to be won or lost in a matter of weeks rather than years, their studies of the Canadian military past have usually portrayed amateur soldiers as slightly comical anachronisms, holdovers from an earlier, pre-industrial era when war could be approached as a hobby or seasonal occupation. Here, the works of Canadian historians have echoed trends in the wider historiography of military professionalism.³³ Notwithstanding defeats suffered by the French in Algeria, the Americans in Vietnam, the Soviets in Afghanistan, and today’s ongoing difficulties in that region and in the Persian Gulf, many military historians still find it difficult to view the history of armed conflict outside a professional mould in which civilians are clearly and easily distinguished from soldiers.³⁴ If anything, events of recent years have taught us that whatever designation is used – soldiers, insurgents, terrorists, tribal militias, bandits, or worse – failure or refusal to conform to the standards of regular soldiers does not necessarily render an adversary any less dangerous.

Finally, it is my hope that this study sheds light on a citizen soldier ideal that has had a profound influence on the Canadian experience of war. It proceeds

from the assumption that, misguided or not, any ideal that was so consistently and vocally expressed by Canadians in the years leading up to and throughout the Great War is inherently worth studying. To that end, it addresses a vitally important set of ideas that exerted an enormous influence on the military policies of both the Laurier and Borden governments and that did much to determine the character of Canadian participation in both the Boer War and the Great War. Although there was no single, monolithic Canadian idea of the citizen soldier, there were major currents of thought that touched on this subject before, during, and immediately after the Great War; this study examines how these perceptions of the citizen soldier were influenced by the beliefs and values of Canadian society.

Whether we refer to it as an ideal or a myth, there is no doubt that Canadians have displayed a long-standing attachment to citizen soldiers, patriotic volunteers, and the amateur military tradition in general. In the 1840s, the Reverend John Strachan employed his famous stretching of the truth to claim that only thirty years earlier the Canadian Militia had delivered Upper Canada from the hands of American invaders, receiving the slightest of assistance from British regulars in doing so.³⁵ In 1862, the *levée en masse* and the idea of the nation in arms guided the hand of John A. Macdonald when as minister of militia he drafted and redrafted the defence policies of the Province of Canada.³⁶ Toward the end of the nineteenth century, a vociferous newspaper editor from small-town Ontario challenged the claim of a British general that he, a militia colonel, was unfit to serve alongside British regulars in South Africa. To that, the impertinent Colonel Sam Hughes replied to Maj. Gen. Edward Hutton: “Why? Could I not surrender fast enough to the Boers?”³⁷ By the outbreak of the First World War, Sam Hughes was minister of militia in the government of Robert Borden. In the autumn of 1914, he gave full meaning to the term “amateur enthusiasm” when he discarded the established mobilization plans of his professional staff and instead called for an army of volunteers, the Canadian Expeditionary Force, to gather at a yet-to-be constructed camp outside Valcartier, Quebec. Over the next four years, 628,462 Canadians were enrolled and 424,589 served overseas in a war that changed the country forever – this from a country of only 8 million people who had no previous experience of raising a wartime army of more than ten thousand soldiers.³⁸

From the above, it is probably fair to say that if we are going to talk about the militia myth, we need to recognize that it has certainly “misled” a lot of people in this country. In two world wars, the overwhelming majority of Canadian soldiers were recruited directly from civilian life following the outbreak of hostilities. In the wars of 1914-18 and 1939-45, these citizen soldiers and their allies met and defeated the soldiers of imperial and then Nazi Germany –

enemies that Canadians in both conflicts viewed as the very symbol of military professionalism and/or militarism.³⁹ That these wars and the soldiers who waged them are remembered in such a way, highlighting the essentially civilian nature of Canadian soldiers and contrasting it with the imagined nature of their enemies, speaks volumes about our understanding of war and of the wider society in which these ideas were formed.

This book has three aims: First, to locate and describe the written records of Canadian thinking on the idea of the citizen soldier and the citizen's social obligation to render military service when called upon to do so. Second, to link these ideas to the society from which they sprang, explaining how Canadians followed or departed from their own traditions and the examples of other nations, as well as how they employed the language of social reform, party politics, history, economics, and imperialism in proclaiming the virtues of a citizen army. Finally, this study attempts to uncover how these ideas changed over the course of twenty-five years, from 1896 to 1921, a time when Canadian society itself was undergoing a rapid and profound transformation. With these goals in mind, the concentration is on analyzing and differentiating between the many and varied Canadian interpretations of a citizen's military obligations in war and peace. Although before the Great War most Canadians could agree that a militia was inherently superior to a standing army, their reasons and justifications for doing so varied greatly, reflecting the many influences – internal and external – that played a role in shaping these attitudes.

The *Canadian Military Gazette* has been used extensively to provide insight into the thoughts and attitudes of Canadian citizen soldiers throughout the period under study. As the widely distributed organ of the non-permanent militia, this biweekly news magazine published continually throughout the period under study, providing an independent and non-partisan commentary on military affairs and development in all parts of the country. Founded in 1885 as the *Illustrated War News*, the first issues of what became the *Gazette* appeared in Toronto during the final stages of the second Northwest rebellion. Amid the alarm and general excitement of “Canada's first real war,” *Illustrated War News* experienced enormous initial success in its very short life. It featured eyewitness accounts of the campaign and full-page sketches of the Canadian Militia at war in the Northwest, but it then ceased publication after a third issue, which contained a full report of Canada's victory over Louis Riel's forces at Batoche. With the war having been fought to a successful conclusion, the owner predicted there would be no market for his paper in peacetime and that a military news sheet would be hard pressed to survive in Canada for even twelve months beyond the end of the present hostilities.⁴⁰ Despite the growing stature of contemporary service periodicals in Britain and the United States, in 1885 the *Illustrated War*

News was sold to J.D. Taylor, a veteran of the Northwest campaign, who moved the paper to Ottawa and changed its name to *Canadian Militia Gazette*.⁴¹

After 1885, the *Militia Gazette* gradually evolved into the primary forum of militia opinion in Canada. In 1893, Taylor sold his struggling paper to two young militia officers from Montreal, E.J. Chambers and Edward Desbarats, who renamed it the *Canadian Military Gazette*. Chambers, a major in the 6th Fusiliers of Montreal, had served in 1885 as a war correspondent in the Northwest and was now a member of the *Montreal Star*'s editorial staff. Desbarats, a lieutenant in the 3rd Victoria Rifles, was the advertising manager for Colonel John Bayne Maclean's Montreal publishing enterprises. Colonel Maclean initially took little direct interest in their paper. Years later, he explained that his decision to acquire the *Canadian Military Gazette* was in part because

in 1895 our national problems were becoming increasingly serious as Canada and the Militia grew. The politicians at Ottawa had no real understanding of the great work Militia officers were doing and the difficulties they had to face ... Even Prime Ministers like Sir Mackenzie Bowell and Sir Charles Tupper showed no sympathy for our military problems. At times, Sir Mackenzie was antagonistic. Important men in the public service were equally unfriendly to the volunteer or non-permanent Militia, and none more so than the Headquarters staff, then under the control and direction of Imperial officers. Among the latter were many good men who were being sent to Canada in those days. A few of them eventually attained great success, but to nearly all of them we were "mere Colonials."⁴²

In 1895, Maclean purchased the rights to the *Canadian Military Gazette* from Desbarats and Chambers, his intention being to provide "mere Colonials" like himself with an independent voice in the nation's military affairs.

Although staunchly Conservative himself, Maclean always insisted upon the non-partisan status of the *Canadian Military Gazette*, a policy he maintained for all his publications. Even his initial decision to buy the paper was motivated by his concern that Chambers was being overly cautious as editor of the *Military Gazette* owing to his position on the staff of Hugh Graham's *Montreal Star*, a paper with close ties to the Conservative party.⁴³ In 1895, however, the Canadian Militia was still reeling from deep cuts to its annual budget. Faced with the recent cancellation of all training for the rural corps and a one-third reduction in the annual pay provided to urban regiments, a delegation of prominent officers went to Ottawa to present their case before George Foster, the minister of finance. When their requests failed to gain even the minister's sympathy, let alone his support, the entire delegation of militia officers, Liberal and Conservative, promised to oppose the Tory government in the next election. One

of the immediate results of this break was that a subsequent by-election in Montreal confirmed that the Conservatives had lost the support of both militia and civilian voters in that city. A second was that members of the militia delegation to Ottawa – including Colonel J.M. Gibson, then a member of the Ontario Liberal government; Colonel George Taylor Denison of Toronto's Governor General's Body Guard; and Major Labelle of the French-Canadian 65th Regiment – together approached John Bayne Maclean with the suggestion that he acquire the *Canadian Military Gazette*. Maclean agreed, and although Desbarats continued as business manager and Chambers remained managing editor, they no longer took public responsibility for the editorial policies of the *Gazette*. From this point on, Maclean insisted that the paper be devoted exclusively to advancing the interests of the non-permanent militia.

At its height from the time of Maclean's acquisition to the outbreak of the First World War, the *Canadian Military Gazette* contained comprehensive coverage of military affairs in the Dominion, reprinting newspaper articles from across the country that reflected a broad spectrum of political viewpoints, the sources ranging from Toronto's *Mail and Empire* and the *Montreal Star* to Goldwin Smith's *Toronto Weekly Sun*, as well as providing extracts from British and American service periodicals such as *Broad Arrow* and the *United Service Magazine*. Its coverage ranged from reprinting debates from the House of Commons and commenting on how recent decisions might affect the militia to the latest scores of rifle matches shot on the Bedford range near Halifax or the results of a militia baseball tournament in Vancouver. On other occasions, it might contain revelations of scandals and mismanagement by the Department of Militia and Defence, or perhaps a candid opinion of the headquarters staff, much of this provided in the form of editorials and anonymous letters to the editor that usually occupied the first two or three opening pages.

Under Maclean's ownership, the *Canadian Military Gazette* reached a much wider audience than it had previously, and it wielded growing influence beyond the ranks of the militia. For a brief period after 1900, Maclean even expanded the title to *Canadian Military Gazette and Gentleman's Magazine* and began printing book reviews and a regular report on men's fashion in London in an effort to broaden its appeal. Circulation figures are unavailable, but by Maclean's own account its revenues seldom exceeded a thousand dollars annually. Yet, these figures provide only the most conservative measure of its influence when the readers of a single issue might range from an individual subscriber to a few hundred members of an enlisted men's mess. Further, beyond its readers, the *Canadian Military Gazette* was widely quoted in the military columns of newspapers across the country and in the *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs*.⁴⁴

After 1897, the editorship passed from Ernest Chambers to Maj. F.S. Dixon, then to James S. McDonnell in 1900, and finally to Lt. Col. Andrew T. Thompson, the former MP for Haldimand County, Ontario, in 1906. Throughout this period, the *Canadian Military Gazette* continued with its sharp criticism of government policies, its first successful campaign resulting in the removal of an incompetent commandant general at Royal Military College, one who also happened to be the brother-in-law of Sir Charles Tupper. Its controversial role at the time of the Boer War is well known: in the fall of 1899, the *Canadian Military Gazette* printed a leaked report that included plans for a Canadian overseas contingent, a story Wilfrid Laurier dismissed as “pure invention” but that nonetheless contributed greatly to the mounting public pressure for Canadian participation in the Boer War. That war in turn provided a considerable boost to the *Canadian Military Gazette* when F.S. Dixon, now serving at the front, wrote a series of letters for the *Gazette* that were subsequently reprinted in daily papers across the country.

Despite the growing success of his paper, Colonel Maclean’s involvement with the *Canadian Military Gazette* began to lessen over time. In 1904, he broke with the other four members of the editorial staff because, despite being a Conservative himself, he believed the paper had been overly critical of Laurier’s Liberal government during its very public dispute with Lord Dundonald, the last British general officer commanding of the Canadian Militia.⁴⁵ Two years later, Maclean sold the paper to a group headed by his friend, Lt. Col. Andrew T. Thompson, of the 37th Haldimand Rifles regiment. Although Thompson’s position as a recent member of the Liberal government might have called into question the non-partisan status of the paper, his commitment to the interests of the militia combined with the reorganization of the *Military Gazette* as a joint-stock company whose membership included both Tories and Grits helped ensure that it continued to present a range of viewpoints. For his part, Thompson stated that the editorial position of the new *Canadian Military Gazette* would remain as before: “Its proprietors are, to a man, business men, rather than professional soldiers, many of them very leading persons in the commerce of this country, and they strongly oppose an advance to a large standing force and a burdensome European military system ... They believe that an efficient citizen-soldiery is a national life insurance.” As for the *Gazette* itself, Thompson declared that should its future be “great or small, it will never consent to be the donkey engine of any party, but will devote its articles, according to its light, to the promotion of militia interests and to nothing else.”⁴⁶ Several military periodicals appeared and disappeared in Canada between 1896 and the outbreak of the First World War, but the *Canadian Military Gazette* was the only one that published continually throughout the period under study.⁴⁷ Throughout that time, it remained

committed to advancing the interests of the Non-Permanent Active Militia as these were understood by its owners, editors, and contributors. It played a key role in providing the militia with a sense of its own corporate unity as an army of citizen soldiers, making it the single most valuable record of the amateur military tradition in Canada during this period.

In approaching this study, I follow a roughly chronological format, with each of the chapters organized around a clearly defined theme. Chapter 1 describes the Canadian militia ideal as it existed before the Boer War; being firmly grounded in a home defence tradition, citizen soldiers in this period looked to North American examples, including the American Civil War, in an attempt to define their wartime role, a role they expected would place an overriding emphasis on marksmanship. Chapter 2 argues that Canadian opposition to standing armies often hindered efforts at military reform along lines suggested by British advisers, until Major General Hutton, an imperial officer sent to command the militia, learned to phrase his suggestions in terms that he calculated would appeal to Canadians. By calling the Canadian Militia a national army, for example, Hutton garnered support for a program of military reform that he hoped would prepare Canada for a more active role overseas, an effort that was cut short only when the outbreak of the Boer War exposed his imperial agenda more clearly and effectively ruined his relationship with the Laurier government. Chapter 3 assesses the impact of the Boer War in Canada, arguing that British defeats on the South African veldt, Canadians' admiration and respect for their Boer opponents, and the widespread perception that colonial troops had performed exceedingly well during the conflict together created a groundswell of support for a Canadian "citizen army," a concept that lay at the foundation of the revised Dominion Militia Act of 1904. Chapter 4 follows the efforts to make this citizen army a reality during a period when friendly relations with the United States and growing tensions in Europe were simultaneously beginning to undermine the traditional justification for the militia, thereby creating a growing split between the proponents of a home defence versus an overseas orientation. Chapter 5 explores how the threat of war in Europe became an overriding focus for Canadian Militia officers, yet the renewed strength of the imperial bond did not immediately undermine the citizen soldier ideal, despite its being founded in home defence. Instead, debates surrounding the organization of citizen volunteers in Britain, the campaign for British conscription launched by the National Service League, and Australia's adoption of universal military training in peacetime all became prominent in Canadian debates. From 1911 to 1914, the period covered by Chapter 6, Canadians debated the merits of compulsory training versus voluntary military service, finally resolving the issue in favour of a voluntary militia supported by compulsory cadet training only

months before the outbreak of the First World War. Chapter 7 discusses Canadian participation in the war overseas, arguing that the character of Canadian participation in the war was largely determined by pre-war ideas of the citizen soldier and that these conceptions of military service and citizenship underwent dramatic changes as a result of the conflict. In the Canadian memory of the Great War, the Canadian Corps was indeed an army of amateurs, but the transition from the militia's former home defence function to an expeditionary role, the enactment of conscription for overseas service, and the eclipse of the Active Militia by the Canadian Expeditionary Force as the backbone of the nation's defences brought about a fundamental change to the Canadian citizen soldier tradition as it had existed before the war. Finally, Chapter 8 examines the consequences of this transition in the immediate postwar era, including the decline of the amateur militia, the early growth of a professional army, and the virtual abdication of citizen soldier advocates from their former role in military affairs. Between 1914 and 1918, the self-sacrificing young man who had answered the call to arms in 1914 and gone directly from civilian life to the army overseas had succeeded in taking the place of the long-serving pre-war militiaman as the archetypal Canadian citizen soldier.

In the two decades between the election of Wilfrid Laurier as prime minister and the conscription crisis of 1917, Canada faced the test of raising an army to fight overseas, a climactic event in the life of the young nation that was bound either to introduce a strong element of sincerity and conviction to Canadian adulation of the citizen soldier or cause it to be discarded. Before the Great War, Canadian fears of British decline coincided with the rise of American expansionism. Throughout these years the belief that Canadian men could be instantly called to arms in defence of their homeland represented a faith in latent military strength – it provided the inexpensive sense of security that is one of the attractions of a citizen army. On another level, the belief that military drill and discipline could play a useful role in educating young men to good citizenship resulted in the proliferation of cadet corps across the country, organizations that reflected the concerns of military planners and social reformers alike. Overall, the climate of opinion in these years established a commitment to the ideal of the citizen soldier that persisted throughout the years leading up to the Great War and later provided the measure by which Canadians judged their contribution to that conflict. During the war and in its immediate aftermath, this understanding of a citizen's obligation to serve became entrenched as one of the foundations of our social memory of war and our understanding of armed conflict in “Canada's century.”

1

A Military Spirit in Canada, 1896-98

It seems to me that the most satisfactory evidence of the existence and steady growth of a military spirit in Canada is to be found in the fact that such a force as we have now in this country is, under the present conditions, maintained at all. Neither to the officers nor the men ... does it afford anything of profit or advantage, either social, political, or pecuniary. In every kind of business or industrial pursuit membership in it is a drawback. To officers in particular it involves a loss of time and money, as well as a considerable amount of labour ... Yet under such conditions it exists and flourishes. Why?

– LT. COL. W.E. O'BRIEN, MP,
TO THE CANADIAN MILITARY INSTITUTE, TORONTO, 24 MARCH 1892

IN THE LATE NINETEENTH century, it was common for the people of Britain and its colonies to describe themselves as a warlike race but not a military one – always ready to fight but seldom prepared for war. No people, it was said, sympathized more keenly with their soldiers in time of war and yet so promptly forgot them upon the return of peace.¹ Victories gained on the battlefield were lived vicariously by the “nation of shopkeepers” and its colonies – people who never actually saw a weapon fired in anger, and who then, upon the conclusion of hostilities, quickly returned to their old habit of ignoring soldiers as much as possible. Throughout much of the Victorian era, wearing the red coat of an enlisted man was regarded as a mark of social inferiority. Service in the ranks of Britain’s regular army, an organization recruited from the underclasses of the British Isles, could scarcely be regarded an honourable profession, and the English-speaking peoples of the nineteenth-century world were notorious among nations for their lack of interest in soldiering and military preparation, the exception being when some emergency stirred them from their time-honoured indifference.

In late Victorian Canada, traditions inherited from the mother country helped establish a comparable mood of public indifference to the military, an attitude that was only intensified by local conditions, including a very real sense of North American isolationism. As the senior Dominion of the British Empire, responsible for its own internal affairs but not yet fully emerged from colonial status, Canada’s military commitments involved only the maintenance of internal

order and the defence of its own territory in the event that Britain should become involved in a war with another power. Yet herein also lay the difficulty of the young country's position: the only nation in a position to really threaten its territory was the United States, and in any such conflict Canadians could expect to make only a limited contribution to a much larger British war effort. The Fenian raids of the 1860s had shown that their country might become a victim of aggression owing not to any wrongful action on their own part but, rather, because Canada was a portion of the Empire that was inherently vulnerable to attack from the republic to the south. Past wars shaped Canadian attitudes in subtle yet profound ways. Repeated invasions of Canada in the Seven Years War, the War of American Independence, and the War of 1812 indicated that the outcome of a renewed North American struggle was unlikely to be determined on a Canadian battlefield; victory or defeat would be the result of a series of naval actions fought off the eastern seaboard of the United States, followed by bitter negotiations at the bargaining tables of Europe. None of this was conducive to fostering a military spirit in Canada.

Given the difficulties of the country's position between Britain and the United States, it is tempting to ask why Canada maintained an army at all after the withdrawal of the British garrisons in 1871. Many Canadians in these years did exactly that. In reference to the militia, even its own officers could not always resist the urge to poke fun at themselves and amateur soldiers in general: "A few enthusiastic persons like to employ themselves in playing at soldiering. It amuses them, and it does not hurt the country; but, after all, what is it but a mere pastime? The only possibility of war is one in which we should be powerless. Any attempt at resistance would be useless. We should be as a child in the hands of a giant, and immediate submission would be our inevitable lot."² Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the traditions of "warlike" but "unmilitary" England were mirrored in Canada, with the latter of these two characteristics, quite understandably, shining through with even greater intensity.

Yet, at the same time that many Canadians were exercising their God-given right as British subjects to ignore the military in peacetime, a sizable minority of their countrymen continued to "play at soldiering" in the Active Militia, the country's voluntarily enlisted force of approximately thirty-five thousand part-time soldiers. A far greater number could be expected to enlist should there be a demonstrated need for them to do so. Although their usefulness in a sudden emergency would be questionable, the same traditions inherited from England meant that Canadians easily equated citizenship with an obligation to serve in time of war.³ Given the conditions prevailing in Canada in the early 1890s, however, a time when economic circumstances dictated that only limited resources could be devoted to defence, it is not surprising that the public adhered to its



Civil Service Rifles, 1865. Although the Militia Act of 1868 held all male citizens liable to military service in time of war, in peacetime these powers of conscription remained dormant. The Active Militia consisted of about 35,000 part-time volunteers in peacetime but in time of emergency might be augmented by patriotic volunteers like these members of the Civil Service Rifles, formed in 1865. *Library and Archives Canada / C-001262*

time-honoured belief that an inexpensive militia of citizen soldiers was eminently preferable to a regular army modelled after that of Great Britain.

With this in mind, many regarded any effort to establish a standing army – such as the expansion of the Canadian Permanent Force in the 1880s and early 1890s – as an attempt to graft an expensive and unnecessary military aristocracy on the democratic institutions of the country. In the early 1890s, the annual cost of the militia to Canadian taxpayers amounted to less than 25¢ per head of population, representing no serious burden on the resources of the country. And being a purely voluntary force, military service itself affected only those who willingly shouldered the task.

Why they did so, and the means by which a voluntary militia maintained itself in the midst of an otherwise indifferent society, is one of the first questions that arises from a study of Canadian military culture prior to the Boer War. In the quotation that opens this chapter, the commanding officer of Simcoe County's 35th Battalion, speaking to the Canadian Military Institute in 1892, asked his audience why militiamen served, and indeed, why the militia flourished despite the absence of social, political, or financial rewards for its officers and men. "Flourished" might be too strong a word; this chapter examines the documentary record of militia opinion in the late 1890s in order to advance the following conclusions about the militia ideal in this period: First, that militia officers and like-minded civilians genuinely believed a citizen army to be ideally suited to the conditions of the country, an opinion that often drew less upon financial considerations than it did upon a collective estimation of the country's military requirements and the capacities of amateur soldiers. Second, that the rewards militiamen hoped to gain by their service consisted mostly of enjoyment of military training, the sense of camaraderie derived from it, and hope of securing public recognition for voluntary performance of a duty they believed was an obligation of good citizenship. Finally, this survey of contemporary speeches and writings indicates that although many Canadian soldiers drew their understanding of modern war from North American examples, such as the American Civil War and the War of 1812, securing the social recognition upon which a voluntary militia depended very often required ceremonial displays of martial prowess intended to attract public interest. In these displays, a symbolic connection to the British Empire is what served to establish the authenticity and believability of the performance. Despite the militia conceiving of its wartime role as an irregular force of riflemen and horsemen, in peacetime the force felt obliged to ape the ceremonial functions of the British Army of the 1860s owing to the wider public's belief that "real soldiers" wore red and modelled themselves after imperial regulars.

From the Venezuela Crisis of 1895-96 to the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898, the threat of war with the United States contributed to a revival of military interest and provided direction for the efforts of reform-minded Canadian Militia officers. In this period, a North American conception of war lay at the foundation of these efforts to reorganize the country's amateur militia into a real citizen army. Action on these lines, however, remained hindered by the same antiquated ceremonial functions that allowed a voluntary militia to exist, and even "flourish," amid an otherwise indifferent society. This chapter examines the state of the Canadian Militia in 1896 and the response of citizen soldier advocates to a war scare that brought renewed vigour to their efforts to place the Active Militia on an effective footing.

The Canadian Militia to 1896

The Militia Act of 1855 retained the old militia system as the foundation, every man from eighteen to sixty being held to be a militiaman in the sedentary or reserve militia ... The great change was the authorization of an active force of some 7,000, to be drilled ten days in each year, for which pay was given. This force was to be properly equipped with the best modern arms. It was primarily to be composed of volunteers, but if a difficulty was found in obtaining volunteers, there was power given to ballot. This principle has been in force ever since, and since sufficient volunteers have always been obtained, the power to ballot has been a dead letter.

— LT. COL. GEORGE T. DENISON,
SOLDIERING IN CANADA: RECOLLECTIONS AND EXPERIENCES, 1900

In 1896, the Canadian Militia was not an army but a collection of amateur military formations scattered widely across the Dominion: battalions of infantry, batteries of artillery, and a few regiments of cavalry. The term "army," meanwhile, implied a more integrated force, one organized in such a way as to allow these individual component parts to have some conception of how they might operate together in time of war. This was manifestly impossible, contemporary critics charged, in a country where Militia Headquarters in 1896 consisted of a staff of only eight officers, many of whom were believed to have been handpicked for their political connections rather than professional competence.⁴ Before Confederation, this incomplete assembly of local militia formations was all that the provinces of British North America seemed to require. In the event of war, the Canadian Militia would be integrated into a British field army; regular soldiers would be expected to bear the brunt of the fighting, leaving the militia to act as an armed auxiliary, much as it had during the War of 1812.

Traditionally, colonies do not possess armies of their own, and for more than three decades after Confederation the Canadian Militia retained all the trappings of its ancient auxiliary status, regardless of the young country's claims to nationhood. During the difficult years of the 1870s and 1880s, a period when more Canadians left the Dominion to take up residence in the United States than the numbers of those arriving in the country as immigrants, the deprived state of the militia seemed eminently suitable given the gloomy forecasts for the country as whole. By the mid-1890s, however, circumstances were beginning to improve, economically and demographically, inspiring some to establish the nation's defences on a more solid basis. While these visions of a "Canadian army" remained centred on the militia – and thus firmly grounded in the citizen soldier traditions that mythmakers traced to the War of 1812 and the early days of New France – the mood of the times seemed to require an army as a symbol of national status.

Amid improving conditions for the country as a whole and the stirring of Canadian nationalism, it was not difficult for Canada's amateur soldiers to imagine themselves as heirs to a tradition handed down from the final days of New France and the early years of the British regime. In the 1890s, Benjamin Sulte, an amateur historian with a keen interest in the military heritage of New France, wrote a series of papers and delivered lectures on the French-Canadian militia before and after the Conquest. In these lectures, Sulte recalled the formation of *Canadiens* in the St. Lawrence valley into militia companies for the purpose of defending the isolated settlements of Quebec, Trois-Rivières, and Montreal against the Iroquois Confederacy. Like the militia of the nineteenth century, the *Canadien* militia of the seventeenth and eighteenth existed as a collection of independent companies acting under the direction of the governor, with captains appointed by him but deriving their real authority from the positions they held within their respective communities. From the late seventeenth century, every man in the colony between the ages of sixteen and sixty was considered enrolled in the militia, and the captains were selected from among the inhabitants of each parish. In the seventeen years of warfare that preceded the conclusion of a lasting peace with the Iroquois in 1701, the *Canadien* militia served alongside contingents of regular soldiers arriving from France, and continued to do so throughout the early decades of the eighteenth century in a series of bitter conflicts with the English colonies to the south. Although Sulte concluded in his study of the Canadian Militia under the French regime that the French-Canadian militia ceased to exist upon the surrender of New France, this did not preclude its continuing symbolic relevance to Canadians in the late nineteenth century, hungry as they were for traditions that could serve as a foundation for their emerging nationalism.⁵

For those seeking a symbolic connection between the Canadian Militia before and after the Conquest, the defence of Quebec during the American invasions of 1775-76 provided a necessary link to the militia traditions of the French regime. In 1775, Sir Guy Carleton reinstated Canadian officers according to the provisions of their old laws and called out the militia to defend Quebec City during Montgomery's siege in the winter of 1775-76. Although the response of French Canadians to Britain's call to arms can hardly be described as a resounding declaration of loyalty to King George III, remembering the few who answered the call made a far more satisfactory contribution to the Canadian militia myth of later years than did the indifference and even hostility of most French Canadians, the majority of whom regarded the war as a fratricidal struggle between the English and their American colonists.⁶

It is significant that even English Canadians in the late nineteenth century turned to the Conquest and the War of American Independence for a symbolic connection to the military traditions of New France, but it was undoubtedly the participation of the Canadian Militia in the War of 1812 that provided the greatest inspiration and most often-cited symbol of the militia myth prior to the Great War of 1914-18. In late Victorian Canada, the battles of Queenston Heights, Chrysler's Farm, Châteauguay, and Lundy's Lane continued to stir a very real sense of pride among Canadians because the collective memory of these events seemed a testament to the capacity of citizen soldiers fighting in defence of their country. "Just as the period of the War of 1812-1815 was the heroic age of Canada," wrote Captain Ernest J. Chambers in 1902, "so it was the most vital epoch in the history of the Canadian Militia. The supreme test of war proved the practical value of the militia as a defensive force; revealed certain defects but more points of strength in the system; and clearly demonstrated that so long as Canadians are determined to preserve their independence of the republic to the south of them, they can do so."⁷

Historians have often traced the origins of the Canadian militia myth to the War of 1812; however, it is important not to mistake the myth with its symbols. It needs to be recognized that there was nothing uniquely Canadian about this faith in citizen soldiers, a belief that is more properly regarded as the common cultural heritage of the English-speaking world. Attributing the militia myth to the War of 1812 does not explain its persistence in Britain and the United States, countries where this particular conflict looms much less largely in the popular memory.⁸ Nor does it account for a comparable myth in Britain's other settler colonies of Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.⁹ In the late nineteenth century, all of these countries maintained militia forces comparable to those of Canada, indicating that although the War of 1812 continued for more

than a century afterward to have relevance as a symbol for Canadians, it did not create the militia myth.

Much the same might be said of the Rebellions of 1837-38, the Fenian raids, the Red River expedition, and the Northwest Rebellion of 1885. Each of these conflicts could be interpreted in such a way as to lend credence to the myth, regardless of any deficiencies that Canada's amateur soldiers exhibited in each of these conflicts. With the exception of the 1885 campaign in the Northwest, Canadians had always acted as auxiliaries to imperial regulars and been dependent on British leadership and administrative structures. On its own, the Canadian Militia lacked even the ability to provide its troops with ammunition, provisions, and medical attention. Before their departure from Canada in 1871, the British garrisons had also provided schools of instruction to the militia, a function that was subsequently filled with only partial success by the Canadian Permanent Force, an organization that in the 1890s was alternately regarded by Canadians as the nucleus of a hated standing army or a patronage-ridden den of inefficiency and political appointments.¹⁰

The Northwest Rebellion, however, inspired even greater confidence in the militia and did much to convince Canadians that they no longer required the protection of the British Army. In March 1885, the Métis under Louis Riel formed a provisional government at Batoche, in modern-day Saskatchewan, their intention being to force recognition of their land rights and other demands, all of their previous claims having been resolutely ignored in Ottawa. Anticipating the arrival of the North West Mounted Police to disarm them, toward the end of the month Métis insurgents occupied the community of Duck Lake and then defeated a force of NWMP and citizen volunteers that was being sent to relieve the town. Having badly neglected the situation until now, Ottawa moved to contain the rebellion. In the absence of British troops, Prime Minister Macdonald mobilized the militia, calling for volunteers from every province of the Dominion and dispatching them to the Northwest under the command of Maj. Gen. Frederick Middleton, the British officer then commanding the Canadian Militia. In less than a month, nearly three thousand volunteers from eastern Canadian militia regiments were organized and transported some two thousand miles by rail, a remarkable achievement given the country's lack of preparation for raising a force of this size.

In the Northwest, militia regiments from Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia joined volunteers from Manitoba and the territories for a total of 5,334 soldiers mobilized during the insurgency.¹¹ After a frustrating campaign during which Middleton was frequently annoyed by the shortcomings of his colonial volunteers, consequently employing them only with extreme caution, the Métis were surrounded at Batoche and brought under siege. For their part, militia officers

bridled at Middleton's inaction and grew indignant over his lack of confidence in them, particularly when it was rumoured that British regulars would have to be sent for in order to dislodge Riel's forces from their stronghold.¹² On the afternoon of 12 May 1885, during a second attempt at carrying out a diversionary manoeuvre that had already broken down in confusion earlier that morning, troops from rural Ontario advanced to their given objectives, but then kept going. Led by Col. A.T.H. Williams, Conservative MP for Durham East, the Midlanders drove through the first line of Métis rifle pits, followed closely by troops from Toronto and Winnipeg. When Middleton realized what was happening – that his diversion had suddenly turned into the main assault – he reinforced the attack with artillery and a Gatling gun. With the Canadians breaking through toward the centre of Batoche and the defenders running short of ammunition – many of the Métis now reduced to firing stones and bits of metal from their rifles – the surviving defenders escaped into the woods. After the surrender of Batoche and the capture of Riel three days later, the rebellion began to collapse. It was the Dominion's first real war, at least insofar as it was fought without the assistance of imperial troops, and the experience had only seemed to confirm that the militia was equal to the sort of demands that were likely to be made of it. If anything, this first test of the militia effectively reinforced the dangerous state of unpreparedness in which it had been found at the opening of the campaign.

As a result, by 1896, some twenty-five years after the departure of the British garrisons and a decade since the campaign in the Northwest, the Canadian Militia had made few steps toward finding a suitable replacement for the loss of the British regulars. Although the Militia Act of 1868 had confirmed the male citizen's liability to military service, in peacetime these powers of conscription remained dormant and were largely forgotten.¹³ Defence of the country and the maintenance of internal order still rested in the hands of the Active Militia, a part-time force with an authorized establishment of forty thousand volunteers but seldom approaching this strength. Little was done to establish even the skeleton of a wartime structure, and by 1896 this force remained much the same as it had been in the past: an assortment of component parts, with individual soldiers and independent formations ranging in skill from poor to excellent, and with officers and men animated by a desire to serve. On the whole, each unit was tied to the locality in which it was raised, and the Canadian Militia remained what it had always been: a useful adjunct to the British Army – an organization that had left the country twenty-five years ago.

In 1896, the Canadian Militia consisted of approximately thirty-five thousand officers and men. The majority of the force was of infantry, with artillery accounting for only about five thousand personnel and cavalry less than three

thousand. Aside from the eight hundred officers and men of the Permanent Force, most of these soldiers served in the Active Militia, the designation given to non-permanent units of the force. In turn, the Active Militia was further subdivided into 10,000 officers and men of the city corps, who trained mostly on weeknights in urban armouries, while the remainder belonged to the rural corps, whose training was conducted at twelve-day training camps during the summer months.¹⁴ This meagre participation of 35,000 from among a total population of some 5 million showed that a majority of Canadians considered peacetime service in the militia far less important than a willingness to do so in an emergency. In peacetime, the primary focus was on developing the resources of the country, a task from which not a man could be spared.

Public Apathy and a Voluntary Militia

A prominent officer of one of the [Ottawa] city corps was on his way home after drill with several other civilians on the back of a streetcar. To them came the conductor with a polite request for fares. One after the other handed out their five cents, but when the officer tendered his, the conductor put it back. "I don't want anything from you," he said. "Why not?" asked the surprised militiamen. "You ought to know," said the conductor with some scorn, "that you can travel free. You haven't been in the business long, have you?" "I don't understand," queried the officer as he glanced at the interested faces of his fellow passengers. "You're a letter-carrier, aren't you?" replied the conductor. "No," replied the officer ... and he looked very much disgusted at the snickers of his fellow passengers.

— "DOINGS AT HEADQUARTERS,"

CANADIAN MILITARY GAZETTE, 1 AUGUST 1896

It might be argued that in the two decades before the Great War, the indifference of the Canadian public to their own defence represented the first and greatest obstacle to an efficient citizen army. Apathy to defence preparation was deeply ingrained at this time; many needed only to hear that they could best "do their part" by developing the resources of the Dominion and they would be happy to ignore the military completely. To prevent them from doing so, parades and other social activities formed the basis of the militia's efforts to remain in the public eye, generating interest in the force and drawing new recruits to its ranks. At the same time, militia officers themselves admitted the near uselessness of these events for training purposes, but felt bound to continue them as a means of maintaining public interest in the militia. Although solutions to the problem of public indifference ranged from impractical calls for peacetime conscription to an expensive and unpopular regular army – isolated from

society and therefore immune to the public mood – some regarded an active peacetime social role for the militia as the best means of encouraging the more active participation of a Canadian public that otherwise exhibited little direct interest in soldiering.

As an organization, the Canadian Militia before the Boer War was more deeply involved in its social role than its military function. This is because serving in the militia in these years offered few rewards beyond public recognition and a sense of camaraderie among its members. As C.F. Hamilton wrote in the *Queen's Quarterly* in 1902, "No country exhibits greater corporate indifference to her defence than does Canada. Few countries possess a defence force of so keen a soldierly spirit as the Canadian militia. Legally the force is a militia, subject to rather stringent liabilities. Practically, it is a voluntary force; its cohesive power arises neither from self-interest nor from encouragement from the government."¹⁵ Because this citizen force was bound to act in accordance with the will of both its soldiers and the wider public, social activities and public events by necessity remained at the centre of the militia's peacetime role of maintaining the force by voluntary enlistment.

Why members of the Canadian Militia served in peacetime has always been less clear than the reasons behind the wider public's long-standing attachment to an inexpensive citizen army. A cynic might attribute public support for the militia to a quiet belief that the defence of a lost cause should be limited to token gestures, doing no more than the bare minimum necessary to maintain a semblance of national pride. However, service in the militia throughout these years involved significant sacrifices of time and money by its members. Officers, in particular, were required to spend between \$300 and \$500 purchasing their own uniforms, this being only the first in an ongoing list of expenses that attended the holding of commissioned rank in the Canadian Militia.¹⁶ Officers of the rural regiments were held accountable for equipment that went missing during their battalion's annual training, while those in the city corps spent large amounts of money during the drill season treating their soldiers to a drink at the end of a parade night. In the late 1890s, this practice became so common as to be almost obligatory, leading some to complain that men were being stirred to enlist by a promise that "the captain puts up the drinks."¹⁷ This is to say nothing of the time these amateur officers devoted to the force; recruiting efforts alone required enormous amounts of their time and energy, particularly for the rural captains who canvassed agricultural townships every winter enlisting recruits for the summer's annual training. Meanwhile, non-commissioned members of the urban militia often donated what meagre pay they received to the regimental funds that paid for the often elaborate social calendar of the city regiments. Members of the rural regiments, on the other hand, were required



Governor General's Body Guard in Toronto. The musical band of the Governor General's Horse Guards added "brilliance and merriment" to parades and social functions in their home city of Toronto. With strong connections to the Denison family of the city, the Horse Guards counted many sons of wealthy families among its ranks. *Postcard, personal collection of Andrew Thomson*

to be absent from home for a period of twelve days each year, representing no small hardship for those who owned farms or businesses.¹⁸

In the late nineteenth century, the wide range of the militia's social activities compensated for these hardships to some extent. These events were so widespread and took place with such frequency that it is difficult to glance through a season's coverage in the daily newspaper of most Canadian cities without finding numerous references to them. Every year in Toronto, a procession of close to two thousand soldiers from the Queen's Own Rifles, Royal Grenadiers, Governor General's Body Guard, and the 48th Highlanders made its way through streets crowded with spectators during the garrison church parade. Thanksgiving sham fights in the Don Valley entertained thousands each November, until agitation led by the militia resulted in the adoption of an October date for the Canadian holiday in the hopes of enjoying better weather and larger audiences.¹⁹ In Ottawa, Protestant and Catholic regiments paraded together in the streets before attending their separate divine services. Annual sleigh rides

and “snowshoe tramps” enlivened the winter season in Quebec City, and in the spring the *Voltigeurs* of the 8th Regiment participated in a ceremony at the chapel of the Sisters of Charity.²⁰ In Montreal, the 65th Battalion provided an honour guard for the holy sacrament during the Corpus Christi procession, as it had done regularly since the late 1870s, the only exception being in 1885 when the regiment was serving in the Northwest.

Canadians before the Great War loved a good parade, and the occasions mentioned above represent only a small fraction of those in which the militia took part. The ceremonial functions of the force provided officers and troops with an opportunity to be seen in full dress uniforms, scarlet red, navy blue, and rifle green tunics modelled after those of the British Army. These visible links to the British Empire displayed their martial vigour before family, friends, and the wider community. Although militia officers below the rank of major were usually too embarrassed to use their military titles in civilian life, fearing that to do so might appear presumptuous, they exhibited no such hesitation when it came to finding a wide range of occasions in which to appear before the public dressed in full military regalia, often mounted on horseback, and always leading a formation of soldiers.²¹ Highland uniforms were increasingly in fashion at this time, and kilt-clad soldiers of Toronto’s 48th Highlanders and other “Scottish” regiments were exceedingly popular among Canadian audiences, just as they were in Britain and the United States. Social activities and ceremonial functions occupied an inordinate amount of time and attention at this time, but any regiment that neglected these functions did so at its own peril. Without such inducements, the poorly paid or virtually unpaid soldiers of a voluntary militia would simply quit.

Among the many processions in which the Canadian Militia took part, including the Queen’s birthday, reviews by imperial visitors, annual inspections, visits by American National Guard regiments, and civic holidays, Sunday church parades appear to have been the most frequent. These military and religious ceremonies have been largely forgotten as a feature of Canadian society before the Great War, but they provide telling insight into the character of the pre-war militia and the martial spirit that existed in some segments of the community. During a typical church parade, soldiers formed up in ranks at their armoury or another gathering place, such as Montreal’s Champ de Mars, before making their way to church along streets that were very often lined with crowds of spectators. Smaller towns might see only a single regiment in the procession, but in larger centres it was not uncommon to see close to two thousand participants in the line of march, which might include not only the local militia corps but also a visiting regiment from another city in Canada or the United States, youth organizations such as the Church Boys’ Brigade or the cadets, as

well as civilian organizations, like the Veterans of 1866 Association. Many militia regiments at this time had strong ethnic and religious affiliations, so individual regiments would often go their separate ways before attending church services according to the denomination of the soldiers. In Montreal, for example, the Victoria Rifles might listen to a sermon delivered by their Anglican chaplain at Christ Church Cathedral while the predominantly French-speaking 65^{ème} Régiment Carabiniers attended a mass officiated by Jesuits and the 5th Royal Scots and Highland Cadets sang hymns in St. Andrew's Presbyterian.²² Services typically opened with music and a round of "God Save the Queen," followed by a sermon on any number of topics but that very often included some effort to reconcile Christian faith with the function of an army.²³ For example, a sermon on "a true soldier of Jesus Christ" might justify violence and bloodshed by pointing to a soldier's duty to nation and empire; indeed, in 1898 the rector and congregation of St. James Church in Toronto agreed to house and display the regimental colours of the Royal Grenadiers so that all "who saw them would recall the men who had carried them in battle" and remember that "God himself had made war one of his instruments in converting the world."²⁴ At the conclusion of divine services, the church parade typically re-formed outside the church and the soldiers marched back to their respective drill halls, at which point they were dismissed.

These parades, with their scarlet tunics and highland pipe bands, their patriotic speeches and martial display, helped attract new recruits for the militia. This recruiting function also served as the justification for the parades, since the corps that neglected ceremonial display in favour of more practical training compromised its standing in the community. The officers feared that should this be allowed to occur, potential recruits would simply join another battalion. Together with the personal influence of officers and the active social lives of the regiments themselves, these ceremonial functions were the means by which a voluntary militia established links with the wider community. Before the Great War, they served as the primary means of stirring the martial interest of an otherwise indifferent society.

"Unmilitary" Canadians were kept well informed of these activities by the daily newspapers, whose owners and managers were often directly associated with the force, two well-known examples being Col. John Bayne Maclean of Toronto and Col. Edward Morrison of the *Ottawa Citizen*.²⁵ Both the *Mail and Empire* and the *Toronto Telegram* carried regular military columns; the *Telegram* in particular was quite outspoken in its tirades against the Canadian Permanent Force and any attempt to expand this little standing army at the expense of the Active Militia. A "Military Happenings" column appeared every Saturday in the *Montreal Star*, while "Military Matters" typically occupied a full page of

the *Montreal Gazette*.²⁶ The *Vancouver Province* carried a weekly militia column recounting the military life of a growing “city of young men,” hundreds of whom were believed to have once been connected with the militia in eastern Canada and who were being actively encouraged to re-enlist by a city council that in 1897 proposed to exempt serving militiamen from the revenue tax.²⁷ Even in smaller centres such as St. Thomas, Woodstock, Belleville, and Brantford, Ontario, people displayed enough concern for their local regiment that the local papers carried a Saturday militia column.²⁸ Reading these accounts, one finds mention in cities and towns across the country of regimental dinners, military tournaments, band performances, officers’ formal balls, lectures on military topics delivered to the YMCA, and topics discussed in the recently established military institutes in Toronto, Montreal, Winnipeg, and Windsor. Local sports columns carried the scores of military and civilian rifle tournaments, military indoor baseball leagues, and even the occasional militia euchre tournament. Despite most Canadians being uninterested in offering their own time to serve in the militia, any account of “public indifference” in these years needs to be tempered by recognition of the active role the militia played in the social life of cities and towns across the country.

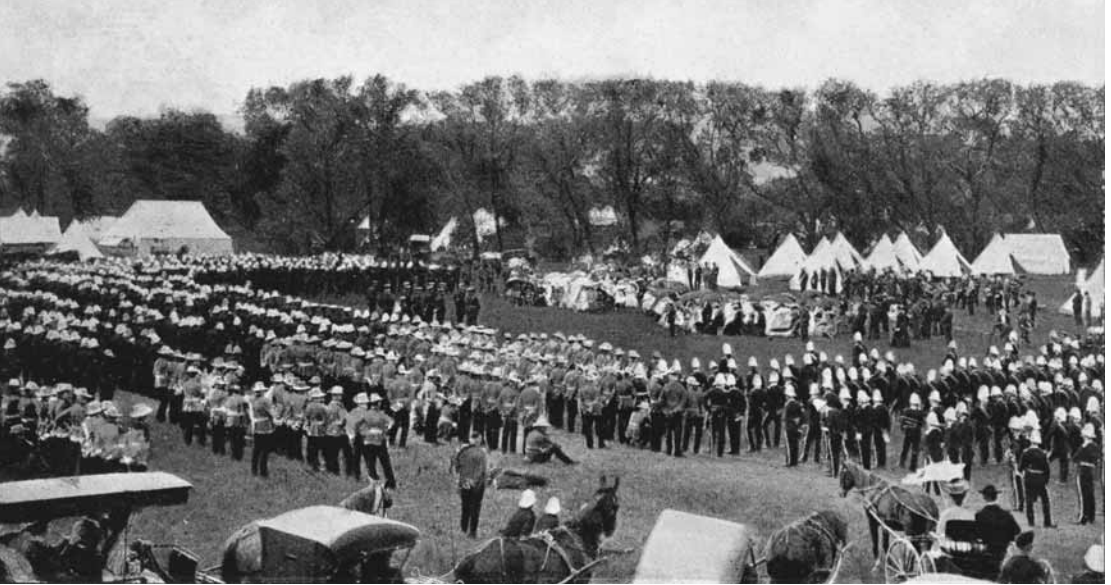
Colonel O’Brien’s claim, at the opening of this chapter, that Canadian soldiers derived no advantage by their service – that in every kind of business or industrial pursuit membership in the force was a drawback – clearly needs to be qualified by an appreciation of the advantages that membership in the militia afforded. Although officers did incur substantial expenses owing to their service, belonging to the officer class bestowed a certain prestige in an otherwise middle-class country that offered few opportunities for social advancement besides those directly related to the pursuit of wealth.²⁹ The pay militiamen received hardly presented much incentive to join – particularly when most or all of it was donated to regimental funds – but access to a well-appointed armoury, complete with billiard tables and bowling alleys, carried its own rewards, not to mention having access to inexpensive alcohol in the mess at the end of a parade night. The following account from St. Thomas, Ontario, provides some indication of the benefits militiamen might enjoy owing to their service in the local regiment:

The club is thoroughly and essentially a military one ... It was established less than three years ago under anything but favorable circumstances, and at a time when the corps was a great deal weaker than at present. Its inauguration is due to the efforts of that indefatigable worker and militiaman, Lt. Col. John Stacey (president of the Stacey Hardware and Mfg. Co.), commandant of the 25th Batt. Lt. Col. Stacey saw where the interests of the corps and militia generally could be advanced by the establishment of a club, where the members could be given an

opportunity to avail themselves of various amusements. Rooms were secured on Talbot Street, in the very heart of the city, and consequently are most centrally situated. A gymnasium, with every possible appliance, was fitted up. Three baths, with hot and cold water, were also put in. On the second floor a large room was devoted to various recreations: a pool table interests many; daily papers and magazines were abundantly supplied; card tables were provided, and also a piano. Here non-coms. and men were wont to congregate. The officers had a small room to themselves ... The wisdom of this establishment soon became apparent, and the rooms were visited by the members of the corps and their friends in large numbers. Every member of the 25th Battalion has the privilege of going in and out as he pleases. The corps has grown. To-day it is away over strength, and during the year the idea of seeking larger quarters became a necessity ... Now the regiment glories in having what is said by outsiders to be the most complete military club in Western Ontario at least – possibly the whole of the province.³⁰

Contrary to O'Brien's view, St. Thomas was not the only town where it becomes difficult to maintain that Canadian soldiers derived no advantage by their service. Carman Miller's account of the pre-war Montreal militia as a social institution describes the wide range of recreational facilities that were made available to serving militiamen. Miller points out that comparable facilities offered by the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association were often beyond the means of young white-collar workers: besides a \$15 membership fee, "prospective members [in 1907] faced long waiting lists and an additional ten dollar entrance fee. In contrast, service in the militia was free."³¹

Nor should we believe for a moment that commanding the 25th Battalion of St. Thomas represented only a "drawback" and an "expense" to the business pursuits of Lieutenant Colonel Stacey of Stacey Hardware and Manufacturing. A great many prominent merchants and manufacturers served as militia officers in these years, and many of them also happened to represent the local riding in the House of Commons.³² Recruiting efforts very often hinged upon the personal influence of the officers, as was certainly the case in St. Thomas. These officers, in turn, enjoyed the prestige of commanding a successful corps, complete with a well-appointed armoury equipped with a variety of amusements for the men.³³ Although the lanes of the armoury bowling alley might, on occasion, be converted by the more practically minded into an indoor shooting range, even a modern and well-equipped armoury could never produce effective soldiers; instead, one of the primary "military" functions of these installations consisted of keeping these amateur soldiers entertained and happy. In a country protected by oceans on two sides, a frozen wasteland to the north, and the



The militia church parade. Summer militia camps ran annually for twelve days per year and represented the only training rural regiments received in a given year. Officers of the unit, many of whom were prominent businessmen or manufacturers, typically bore a significant portion of the costs associated with these camps. Church sponsorship also contributed, recognizing the citizenship qualities instilled by militia discipline. The *Canadian Military Gazette* noted the Niagara camps were particularly successful. *Postcard, personal collection of Andrew Thomson*

longest indefensible border in the world to its south, the social function of the Canadian Militia is what kept an ember of military enthusiasm smouldering, if not burning, in the absence of other incentives.

As a rule, lavish armouries and year-round social activities remained the exclusive preserve of the city corps, which paraded only on weekday evenings and during special events, such as church parades and sham fights. In the mid-1890s, these units represented roughly one-third of the Active Militia. The remainder was composed of the rural corps, which was active only during the summer training period when regiments were concentrated at camps, such as the ones at Niagara, Lévis, and Barriefield. From 1891 to 1895, cuts to the militia budget resulted in many of these rural camps being cancelled or held only at two-year intervals, an economy that had the effect of focusing militia resentment in the direction of the Permanent Corps when the money saved on the militia cutbacks allowed the regulars to undergo their first regimental training

manoeuvres. That is, until the summer of 1896, when Dr. Frederick Borden, the newly appointed minister of militia and defence, announced that the entire rural militia would attend camp that fall.

Traditionally, these annual training periods for the rural corps consisted of twelve days away from home, representing a substantial demand on the time of its members. Although the rural militiamen customarily kept their pay, they drew only 50¢ a day in a country where unskilled labourers could earn \$1.00. Indeed, many of their officers even incurred an expense for their service. Nevertheless, Borden's revival of the camps in 1896 was met with sincere approval throughout the militia. The *Canadian Military Gazette* declared that "business methods" would now characterize the Militia Department under its progressive new minister and that "the rural battalions who go into camp this year will get a good course of instruction, besides the benefit which two weeks in camp gives to officers and men alike. It freshens and braces the love of soldiering, which is too often allowed to flag and eventually die out altogether."³⁴

For the rural militia, the enjoyment of camp life performed a function comparable to the armoury entertainments available to the city regiments. Similar to the messes maintained by the city regiments, canteens established at the camps sold alcohol at discount prices, allowing the soldiers to enjoy beer and other drinks after a long day of training – and to do so without fear of encountering disapproving family members or being lectured by moral reformers. Many soldiers at the camps undoubtedly drank more than they were accustomed to at home, though the requirement of waking up the next morning at dawn did much to prevent their revelry from getting out of hand.

Critics charged that these annual camps were incapable of producing trained soldiers. Of the twelve days spent in training, two were required for travelling to and from the training area, while another two were occupied with making and breaking camp – pitching tents, digging latrines, filling them in again, and then packing the tents away for another year. Sundays, meanwhile, were a day of rest and the occasion for a church parade. This left the instructors with only one week in which to teach basic military skills to the newcomers or to review what the others had forgotten since they last attended training.³⁵ At the end of 1896, the *Winnipeg Tribune* criticized the camps on account of their failure to produce trained soldiers, citing the impossibility of doing anything worthwhile in the twelve days provided for the task. It was a valid argument, and the *Tribune* was not alone in making it; even those who supported the camps were aware of their limitations.³⁶ In responding to these criticisms, however, the *Manitoba Liberal* defended Borden's decision and elaborated on the intent of the rural camps, countering the *Tribune* with an explanation of what the training was actually intended to achieve:

The contention that a twelve days' drill once in two years is useless shows that our friend has not studied the spirit and intention of the Militia Act. The object of the system is not to make a few well-drilled soldiers, but to teach large numbers of our youth the rudiments, the ABCs as it were, of military training, so that in the face of danger much valuable time could be saved in placing a force in the field. The training which the officers receive ... is also of great benefit, as in almost every town and village of our broad Dominion there are to be found men capable, in an emergency, of organizing and drilling their fellow citizens for purposes of defence, if nothing more.³⁷

The *Liberal's* willingness to accept the militia for what it was, viewing it not as an army in being but rather as the raw material for one, is symbolic of its recognition that maintaining a voluntary militia in a country like Canada required concessions to the will of a democratic community. Although not all of these concessions were conducive to military proficiency, the high annual turnover in personnel did provide long-serving officers with one significant advantage: plenty of experience in training raw recruits, and these were the very same class of soldiers that would form the bulk of an expanded Canadian field army in time of war. Having much in common with the Volunteers and Yeomanry of Britain and the National Guard in the United States, the Canadian Militia was an organization in which individuals were free to achieve whatever level of competency and expertise their time and interests allowed. In some cases, it would have been difficult to distinguish the best of these amateurs from regular officers.³⁸ For the rest, however, the militia served only to impart basic military skills, attempting to reach as many young men as possible by making the force attractive.

In the absence of external threats, Canadians had little interest in maintaining an expensive professional army in these years, the exception being the minority who foresaw a role for Canadian contingents in other parts of the British Empire or who considered regular troops better suited to the thankless and repugnant task of strike breaking. Calling militiamen out to act against their neighbours and co-workers was nothing short of demoralizing. Most citizen soldiers would have been happy to turn this task over to the regulars if given the opportunity. Besides these tasks, the seeming absence of threats at home did not mean that emergencies would not arise in the future, only that when the time came there would be enough forewarning and enough young men familiar with the fundamentals of military training that they could be organized quickly into a citizen militia. Here, a population familiar with the fundamentals of military training, fired by the patriotism inspired by parades and the memory of a glorious past, was held by the most committed proponents of the militia myth as the only

defence the country required. Militia officers were not blind to the difference between trained troops and enthusiastic volunteers, but they were bound by the conditions of the country to concentrate their efforts and resources on maintaining enthusiasm rather than thoroughness of training.

War and Peace in North America

We do not understand the merit of making a mystery of what we are doing, or of hesitating to name the quarter from which we might most reasonably anticipate an attack ... The country whose geographical position affords the most favorable opportunities for attacking us is the territory of the United States of America. The invasion of Canada is a threat heard commonly there, and although the educated classes look upon the project with ill favor, they are wholly without influence should the masses determine upon an attack.

— CAPT. R.J. WICKSTEED, *THE CANADIAN MILITIA*, 1875

Those who ... have been unable to see that there was any ill-will against our empire among the Americans as a whole ... have had a rude awakening at last. It is impossible to explain the universal furor of delight with which the press across the border hailed the startling message of President Cleveland as anything else than the voicing of a long suppressed hatred of Britain ... Given a national hatred, ... the smallest incident will fan the spark into the blaze of war.

— “THE CONQUEST OF CANADA,”
CANADIAN MILITARY GAZETTE, 1 JANUARY 1896

In the spring of 1896, the editor of the *Canadian Military Gazette* remarked that the Venezuelan Affair was doing wonders for the Canadian Militia. The threatening tone adopted by President Cleveland in the crisis, as well as the outpouring of American threats that Canada would be forcibly annexed upon the outbreak of war between Britain and the United States, had done much in recent months to awaken public concern over the dilapidated state of Canada’s defences. With Cleveland’s invocation of the Monroe Doctrine over a seemingly irrelevant South American boundary dispute, Canadians suddenly felt themselves closer to war with the United States than they had been since the long crisis of the 1860s. In 1896, the Canadian government reacted quickly to ensure that the militia was rearmed and reorganized after a long period of neglect. The first step was the hurried purchase of forty thousand Lee-Enfield rifles and several batteries of twelve-pounder guns from Britain, preparations that would “prove of the greatest use in any sudden emergency.”³⁹

The election of the Laurier government that summer is often viewed as a turning point for Canada, an interpretation that holds true for military historians as it does for those concentrating on social and political developments. Although the years following Sir John A. Macdonald's death in 1891 are often described as a political dark age for the Conservative party, moving as it did through a succession of five leaders, these were arguably even more depressing years for the militia. During this period, five new ministers succeeded Sir Adolphe Caron as minister of militia and defence, Caron having held the office from 1880 to 1892. During the departmental interregnum of the early 1890s, annual training camps were cancelled for lack of funds, antiquated rifles and equipment deteriorated without replacement, various cadet corps and the University of Toronto's rifle association disappeared for lack of interest, and tightening economic circumstances ensured that military spending found scant favour among the general public.⁴⁰

The Venezuela Crisis of 1895-96, arising as it did over disputed Latin American mining rights, held little interest to Canadians except insofar as the crisis brought with it the threat of war with the United States. Even at the height of the crisis, a significant number of Canadians believed President Cleveland was merely posturing for his electorate and that the crisis would soon blow over. However, others responded to his threats by declaring Canada's resolve in the face of crisis and its determination to remain British. Laurier's subsequent appointment of Dr. Frederick Borden as minister of militia and defence brought an ardent imperialist and long-time militia surgeon to the post. As MP for Kings County, Nova Scotia, Borden was an astute politician and a fairly good debater, albeit one who had never considered himself a military expert. At forty-nine years of age, his only claims to expertise that might suit him to the defence portfolio were his years of militia service coupled with his enthusiasm and interest in military affairs. Given the lacklustre performance of recent ministers, however, his appointment was welcomed by the militia and on both sides of the House with words of praise and approval. In 1896, this good-natured and hard-working doctor, businessman, and politician from one of the largest rural constituencies in Nova Scotia took his place as Laurier's minister of militia and defence at the very moment when tensions arising first from Venezuela, then by the Klondike gold rush and the Alaskan boundary dispute, helped ensure that militia reform became a priority for the new administration.

Given that the threat of war with the United States figured prominently in the renewed militia enthusiasm of 1896, it is worth taking a moment to examine the character of the Canadian response, and particularly how this reaction was influenced by the anticipated nature of the next North American war. While

many undoubtedly agreed, silently or otherwise, that the Dominion would “be as a child in the hands of a giant,” others held that if Canadians were not prepared to defend their own country they should not have undertaken to build one. A minority of press opinion in the country bitterly derided the United States as a “mobocracy” in which power resided in the hands of the yellow press and society’s worst elements. They pointed to Cleveland’s recent pronouncements as a presidential appeal to the lowest common denominator of American public opinion. Others adopted a less insulting tone, claiming only that Canada was determined to give no offence but would steadfastly resist an invasion of its territory until help arrived from Britain. What is significant here is the comfort Canadians drew from a belief that even though their own country lay virtually defenceless, the United States was equally unprepared for war. This, in turn, facilitated a response to the crisis in which the modern service rifle and trained marksmen were identified as the best, and possibly the only, defence that Canada could hope for in the event of war with the United States. The purchase of new rifles for the militia was only the most obvious manifestation of Canadians’ faith in the magazine-loading rifle and marksmanship; in 1896-98, the threat of annexation encouraged widespread interest in rifle shooting as the one field in which citizen soldiers might truly excel, an enthusiasm that remained a central element of Canadian militarism in the two decades preceding the Great War.

“WE ARE AT THE MERCY of Yankee tugboats,” warned a January 1896 editorial in the *Canadian Military Gazette*, its author pointing out that anyone in the United States with the means to cross Lake Superior could burn a few trestles of the Canadian Pacific Railway and effectively cripple this great transcontinental link in the “chain of imperial defence.”⁴¹ Significantly, the letter made no reference to an invading *army* crossing the lake, an omission that probably said as much about the author’s view of American preparedness for war as it did of Canada’s. At the time of the crisis, it was not uncommon for the US Army to be described in British and Canadian sources as a rabble, one that could scarcely be regarded as capable of taking to the field on short notice.⁴² But herein also lay the danger for Canada. Given that the United States was manifestly unprepared for war, the only action it might reasonably take against Britain was the conquest of its northern neighbour. “Twice threatened and attempted,” warned a letter written at the height of the crisis and in reference to past invasions of Canada, “their third effort will be a desperate one. We must not forget that our five millions, backed up by all the troops the rest of the empire can spare us, will confront seventy million people whom we must not make the mistake of despising.”⁴³

While bellicose imperial patriots took little heed of these warnings, beating their chests and declaring that “a fortnight after a declaration of war would find the American flag swept from the seas” and “another British army at Washington dictating terms of peace to the blatherskite senators,” those who were only slightly less impressed by the preponderance of British military power quite reasonably advised caution.⁴⁴ Having little to argue with in terms of America’s unreadiness for war, a Halifax author declared his expectations of the conflict:

Much valuable information for our guidance is to be obtained from a study of the early part of the great civil war in the United States, and the disasters which befell the Federals at the outset, owing to the operation of the very causes which will unquestionably produce similar results with us, unless we move carefully and wisely at the outset. The United States volunteers, who formed the great bulk of their field force, were in character and constitution a force very similar to what our reserve militia would be ... The Federals, among whom men and officers alike were totally ignorant of military life, or discipline, were for many months *armed mobs*. Bitter experience alone made soldiers of them.⁴⁵

Regardless of the fears individual authors had for their country in the event of war with the United States, in 1896 the unpreparedness of both nations was a recurring theme in the Canadian response to the crisis. This, in turn, facilitated references to past wars in North America, including the American Civil War, by those discussing the anticipated nature of the coming conflict. Amid the imperial enthusiasm of the 1890s, Canadians might otherwise have been expected to turn their attention to the British Empire overseas when discussing military affairs, particularly if we accept that Canadian Militia officers were the most ardent imperialists in the country. Yet, the scale of the American Civil War ensured that, even three decades later, this massive struggle maintained an important place in the Canadian understanding of war.

Although many in the mother country dismissed the American Civil War as a conflict fought between opposing hordes of poorly disciplined amateurs, its lessons therefore unsuited to the regular army of Great Britain, these very same reasons pointed to its continuing relevance to Canada in the 1890s.⁴⁶ George Taylor Denison III’s *Modern Cavalry* (1868) and *A History of Cavalry* (1877) represent only two of the best-known examples of a Canadian author drawing military lessons from the American Civil War. British Maj. Gen. Sir Patrick MacDougall is also known to have formed his opinions on military reform while serving in Canada during the 1860s, as did Sir Garnet Wolseley.⁴⁷ But there were others as well. To the Canadian Military Institute in 1895, R.E. Kingsford delivered a paper called “Some Lessons to be Learned from the American Civil War”:

Two distinct types of nationality are growing up in North America, steadily diverging ... but in essentials they [the United States] are not unlike us, and any experience of theirs is very likely to be an experience of ours in a similar case. Military critics in Europe refuse to admit that lessons can be learned from the American Civil War, because, they say, their armies were only “armed mobs.” But while this criticism is to some extent true when comparisons are drawn with the armies of the Continent or the regular army of England, it is not true when the armies of the North and South are compared with the Militia or Volunteers of Great Britain and her colonies. Especially for us it is not true. What happened to them would happen to us in a similar case, and perhaps worse.⁴⁸

By the time of the Venezuela Affair, the lessons Kingsford and others like him drew from the American Civil War centred largely upon the defensive power of rifled small arms and the useful employment of poorly trained but enthusiastic volunteers, many of them drawn directly from civilian life and only a few having any previous military experience. Modern rifles and ammunition were changing the face of nineteenth-century warfare, conferring a decided advantage to the defender.⁴⁹ During the Civil War, the increased rate of fire and range of modern rifles had proven so devastating that an attacking force could hope to force a decision on the battlefield only through immense sacrifices of its own manpower.⁵⁰ Kingsford remarked that one feature of the fighting had been “the use made by both armies of earthworks or brush entrenchments. Both armies did the same. The moment they came in contact they defended their front by cutting brush ... or by entrenching.” The tendency, he said, was to make soldiers always look for cover: “Where there is so much brush as we have on this continent we must be prepared for this style of fighting ... A stand-up fight like Waterloo or the Crimea is not likely to happen here.”⁵¹ In a defensive battle of this kind, it was held to be of little concern whether the entrenched defenders consisted of green troops or seasoned veterans so long as they could effectively fire their rifles. For that reason, much of the Canadian discussion of the Venezuela Crisis and the threat of war with the United States centred on the employment of modern rifles by volunteer soldiers of a fundamentally different sort than the long-serving regulars of the British Army.

If the citizen soldier occupied a central place in Canadian military culture at this time, the rifle might be described as one of his foremost symbols. In the 1860s, growing enthusiasm for rifle shooting encouraged the formation of both military and civilian rifle associations in each of the provinces, organizations that were grouped into the Dominion of Canada Rifle Association in 1868-69.⁵² Although the civilian associations occupied no formal place in the militia

structure at this time, the Department of Militia and Defence viewed rifle shooting by civilians as a useful form of training and provided grants to encourage its development.⁵³ By the 1890s, even though the militia department exercised little direct influence over the rifle associations, it was not uncommon for them to be regarded as a sort of unofficial adjunct of the militia. Indeed, at the time of the Venezuela Crisis, the absence of strict discipline in both the military and civilian associations was counted as part of their appeal. In February 1896, Prime Minister Mackenzie Bowell spoke to a meeting of the Dominion Rifle Association (DRA) on the merits of rifle shooting as a form of military training: "We are a democratic people, and our volunteer force partakes of that character ... they have to be treated in a different manner to those countries where people do not take upon themselves voluntarily the same duties."⁵⁴ For Bowell, a former lieutenant colonel in Belleville's 49th Battalion, marksmanship and the assumed character of the Canadian citizen soldier became tied to expectations for the rifle clubs. He and others stressed the importance of individual marksmanship and practical drill over the "spit and polish" of regular troops, as did a certain Quebec militia officer:

We cannot expect to make our volunteers, with their thirty-six hours annual training, comply with the requirements of rigid parade ground inspection, and also fighters with a knowledge of fire discipline, and how to shoot. We must choose between the two ideals ... And as for shooting, what a terrible power a regiment of good shots would be ... As the surface of our Dominion is much broken by forests and streams, the battalions should be practiced as much as possible over broken country ... Should war occur, the militia would necessarily do much fighting in the bush ... Here good shooting and the individual ability of leaders of small groups would tell.⁵⁵

In the spring of 1897, Capt. John Ross said much the same thing in reference to the Canadian Militia:

Reliance on drill is apt to beget a false confidence which will prove a delusion and a snare, and lead to military disaster. The arms and tactics of the chief military powers of Europe mean high proficiency in the art of war, abundant supplies of costly material, and a strong reserve of well trained officers. For Canada, such a condition is hardly possible nor yet desirable. All military history up to the latest time has shown that for a courageous people, destitute of experience and resources, the best chance of successfully resisting a well-trained force lies in irregular, evasive warfare. The severest reverses suffered by disciplined British troops in

America, Asia, and Africa – from Braddock’s defeat on the Ohio to the recent disasters in Afghanistan and the Transvaal – have always been fighting against active irregulars who used their own arms and methods. It is generally acknowledged that it was owing to their execrably bad shooting that the British suffered so severely in the Transvaal ... The British army was then nothing but a well-drilled human target.⁵⁶

Finally, the following comments on “A Militia System” for Canada provide a similar perspective on the role amateur soldiers imagined they would play in the opening stages of a North American war:

A man who can ride from one place to another, who, when he arrives at his destination, can use a rifle, and who on the way can ... destroy sundry telegraph and railway lines, will in the first few days be remarkably useful and will be rapidly becoming a good soldier, even if he cannot keep in line well and cannot be depended upon to charge unshaken infantry ... The federal “cavalry” who did such good service in 1865 in the closing scenes of the Civil War around Richmond were just such mounted infantry ... Why not get the farmers of the country to form a rough and ready mounted infantry, able to keep rank when marching and to shoot straight when dismounted, and organized so that at the call to arms each regiment would be able to get on horseback and ride to the frontier at once? Of what service might not 10,000 such men be in the priceless opening days of the struggle?⁵⁷

In time of crisis, the discursive elements of Canadian reaction to the American threat helped engender enthusiasm for rifle shooting and marksmanship as the foundation of “real soldiering” in North America, as opposed to the ceremonial variety indulged in by parade-ground soldiers. Conveniently forgetting the many ceremonial functions of the Canadian Militia, whose spring church parades and Thanksgiving sham fights were a highlight of the social scene in cities such as Toronto and Montreal, when faced with the threat of war with the United States, Canadians readily seized upon individual skill with a rifle as an achievable goal for their militia and a particular strength of amateur soldiers. Reaching at straws, they believed that “a free, patriotic, intelligent and high spirited people, the majority of whom have already some familiarity with firearms, can be formed with great rapidity into fair infantry.”⁵⁸

As the principal forum of militia opinion at the time, the *Canadian Military Gazette* of 1896-98 was replete with references to rifle shooting and marksmanship, as were contemporary militia debates in the House of Commons. Foreign



Wimbledon rifle team, 1889. Champion shooters from the various militia regiments were sent to Britain for imperial competitions, including this team, sent to Wimbledon in 1889. Most volunteer militia regiments took part in competitive shooting activities, and civilian rifle associations were even more numerous than their militia counterparts. *Library and Archives Canada / C-000665*

as it may seem to the modern reader, technical comparisons of different service rifles quite often became the subject of lively debates in the House of Commons, debates that ranged from the more arcane details of muzzle velocity to graphic conversations on wound ballistics.⁵⁹ The acquisition of new rifles for the militia had become a priority, resulting in the purchase of Lee-Enfield magazine-loading rifles to replace the obsolete Snider-Enfield single loaders acquired at the time of the Fenian raids. As for the older weapons, someone proposed that they be sold at public auction, as “a district planted with these old Sniders would be filled with rough and ready marksmen accustomed instinctively to judge distances, take cover, and shoot quickly and accurately; they would be recruits worth having if their country needed them.”⁶⁰ The same letter went on to attribute the “victories of England’s archers, ... the strength of the New England colonies in 1775, and the prowess of the Southerners in 1861” to the same class of individual skill at arms that the author believed could be fostered through the encouragement of rifle shooting in Canada. His letter added, only half

jokingly, that “the liberties of the state depend upon each citizen being able to drop his man at two hundred [yards].”⁶¹ Another letter stated simply, “The rifle possibly may be the means of a radical change ... We are getting back to the old days, and Braddock’s tactics are more useless than ever,” a comment intended to reinforce its advocacy of marksmanship by referring to the disaster that befell a column of British regulars in 1755 at the hands of the French and their native allies.⁶²

These may have been overstated expressions of Canadian opinion, but they were not isolated ones. By the end of the century, readers of the *Gazette* might even have been familiar with the predictions of Ivan Bloch, a Russian financier and industrialist who believed that modern rifles had become so deadly that armies in the future would be deprived of their mobility: “Mutual advance must now continually be exploited by means of earthworks and trenches. Modern bullets have become so infernal in their effects, to say nothing of smokeless powder and the ghastly engines of destruction which accompany it, that any campaign must now result in a stealthy caution necessitating weeks and months where hours and days were of old sufficient.”⁶³ In the late nineteenth century, technological development was changing the face of warfare, rendering obsolete the close order formations of the Napoleonic period and conferring a decided advantage on entrenched infantry firing long-range, magazine-loading rifles. For that reason, one of Frederick Borden’s first acts as minister of militia and defence was to authorize the provision of free ammunition to civilian members of the DRA, an act that could not have been justified on the grounds of military necessity had it not been so widely accepted that skill with a rifle was both the foundation of soldierly skill and something that could be mastered by the average citizen with only limited practice.

In 1896-97, however, this was clearly an enthusiasm that needed direction, and many militia officers took an active interest in seeing that it was. It was one thing for the male population to be educated to arms but quite another for them to reject the merits of training and discipline entirely. In September 1896, a justice of the Nova Scotia Supreme Court complained that riflemen returning from the Bedford ranges had taken to using a railway mile post near his home for target practice, recklessly firing their weapons down a public road.⁶⁴ In Stratford, Ontario, residents complained that the new Lee-Enfield – with its two-mile range and capability of piercing average-sized pine trees clean through – was being misused to illegally hunt rabbits.⁶⁵ Before long, these and other incidents were contributing to a growing impression that the rifle movement, by its emphasis on individual skill over group cohesion, was inherently subversive of military discipline. The following extract provides something of the tone of these criticisms:

The D.O.C. and D.S.O. [District Officer Commanding and District Staff Officer], who were present at the meeting of the [Nova Scotia Provincial Rifle Association], were intentionally ignored, and men, some of whom have only joined the militia within a few months, were placed in responsible positions that should only be held by men in authority. The spirit shown at this meeting gives just grounds for complaint to those who claim that ... rifle associations and the management of the rifle associations tend to weaken discipline, and create a spirit not conducive to the best results in an organization where obedience is the first principle and respect for authority a most important element.⁶⁶

These objections notwithstanding, the most frequent charge Canadian officers levelled against the rifle movement was that pinpoint accuracy on the range was an entirely different matter from shooting under battle conditions. Even before the Boer War, government-supported civilian rifle associations were often criticized on account of the provincial and national matches being dominated by a handful of “pot-hunters” – prize shooters who used fragile optical instruments, or who made a supposedly lucrative profession of winning these competitions. Although the DRA was founded in 1869 as a sort of paramilitary adjunct to the Canadian Militia – the principle being that the encouragement of rifle shooting among civilians represented a real contribution to the armed strength of the Dominion – by the 1890s its military function appeared to be taking a backseat to a more purely recreational interest in prize-shooting. “The D.R.A. meeting is not for the purpose of demonstrating what one or two men can do under the most favorable circumstances,” argued one critic, “but for the purpose of encouraging rifle shooting among the men who would be required to use a rifle in action ... It will be remembered that during the Northwest Rebellion, 1885, many of these crack shots, who had received honors and cash for their skill at the ranges, did not go to the front.”⁶⁷ Meanwhile, that same conflict in the Canadian Northwest offered further support for the militia’s interest in shooting. In 1885, Métis riflemen had amply demonstrated the defensive power of entrenched infantry during the Canadian siege of Batoche. Another letter described that kind of marksmanship as the most important skill the citizen soldier might acquire – “if properly carried out, we could easily become capable of holding our own against neighbors who appear to think it such an easy business to annex us at any moment.” However, the author of this letter went on to argue that competitions needed to be carried out under “service conditions” in order to be truly effective.⁶⁸

In 1896, Lt. Col. William Otter of Toronto, the militia’s inspector of infantry, acted on these criticisms by inaugurating the first marching and firing competition for the city’s militia regiments at the Long Branch range.⁶⁹ The competition

proved exceedingly popular and soon spread to other districts, including Montreal, Halifax, and Vancouver. The object was for teams of twelve soldiers to march eight miles before forming up in a single rank approximately 600 yards from a line of targets. Firing commenced at 550 yards and ended at 250, with each team being given fifteen minutes in which to fire sixteen rounds while advancing on the targets.⁷⁰ These events could be physically demanding and intensely competitive, and they counter the belief that the militia performed little practical training before the Boer War. At the Vancouver competition of 1897, the winning team “marched” seven miles in one hour and eleven minutes – a running pace that was maintained while carrying rifles and equipment – and was presented with a silver cup before a gallery of spectators.⁷¹ Otter likely adapted his idea from a similar competition developed in England by Gen. Henry Evelyn Wood, and the popularity of marching and firing competitions in Canada owed much to the soldiers’ enjoyment of practical training, their enthusiasm for rifle shooting, and the crowds of spectators who gathered at the start line of the race and were then conveyed to the ranges by special train.⁷²

In some respects, military and civilian enthusiasm for marksmanship in the late nineteenth century demonstrates a uniquely Canadian dynamic at work. Canadians responded to the threat of annexation by pointing to the disorganized state of the US armed forces and decrying the populist nature of American democracy. Ironically, however, they then adopted a course of action that sought to capitalize on comparably individualistic and democratic tendencies in Canadian society. While a minority held that the best means of countering the overwhelming strength of the United States lay in the establishment of a professional nucleus of well-trained soldiers, others maintained their traditional opposition to standing armies and insisted that the only successful defence of Canada would consist of irregular, evasive warfare fought by “hedgerow riflemen.” It was left to others to guide this enthusiasm into useful channels; the militia, they argued, had to be about more than putting holes in canvas targets (or rabbits, or road signs, as at least one Halifax judge would have been quick to add). Although the potential fighting population of the country was numerically inferior to that of its only possible invader, the magazine-loading service rifle offered some hope of counterbalancing this overwhelming weight of numbers, provided only that military discipline was not discarded along with the old stacks of rusty Snider rifles and antiquated forms of ceremonial drill. Here, officers like Otter were not alone. In an 1897 address to the DRA, Sir Richard Cartwright said that “shoulder-to-shoulder fighting and bayonet charges have gone for all time among civilized foes. The infantry of the future must be highly trained men, intelligent skirmishers, and good shots.”⁷³ This was a sentiment that could easily find agreement among many Canadian soldiers and civilians

at the time. However, the question remained of whether the new enthusiasm for marksmanship would outlast the most recent outbreak of troubled relations with the United States.

In the winter of 1897-98, the war fever began breaking up, and several US National Guard regiments received invitations to again take part in parades alongside the Canadian Militia, a sure sign that cross-border relations were returning to normal. That spring, the United States declared war on Spain after the explosion of the USS *Maine* in the port of Havana, effectively bringing to an end any remaining Anglo-American tension and the annexationist talk that had done so much to excite Canadian martial enthusiasm over the past two years. It also cleared the way for the 2nd National Guard Regiment of Connecticut to visit Ottawa during the queen's birthday celebrations, and that summer a Canadian order-in-council permitted the 1st Regiment of the Illinois National Guard to carry arms during its parades in Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, Ottawa militia regiments helped celebrate the Fourth of July in Burlington, Vermont, enjoying themselves so thoroughly that they even carried the American flag at their head while marching from the railway station to the drill hall upon their return home.⁷⁵ Montreal's Royal Scots also visited Portland, Maine, where their highland dress drew immense crowds during Independence Day ceremonies.⁷⁶ At a Seattle military banquet held in honour of visiting militia officers from Vancouver, "wine flowed like water and the much-talked-of Anglo-American alliance was ratified by two score of Canadians and a half dozen loyal Americans who sat at the same table and drank as one nation [to] the healths of Queen Victoria and President McKinley."⁷⁷ Marksmanship and rifle shooting remained central to the Canadian Militia in years to come, though it is fitting that at roughly the same time that cross-border relations began to improve, it was decided that the old Snider rifles, which had once been considered useful for cultivating a generation of "rough and ready marksmen" in the frontier districts, were about to be sold to a consortium of dealers in the United States.⁷⁸

There is nothing new in the claim that the militia enthusiasm of 1896 was conditioned by the threat of a war between Britain and the United States, whose primary battleground would be in Canada. In 1965, Norman Penlington's *Canada and Imperialism, 1896-1899* concluded that rising tensions in these years encouraged Canadians to seek closer relations with Great Britain. Penlington argues that Britain capitalized on Canadian fears of the United States to stimulate a program of militia reform, yet an examination of the militia's own literature indicates the degree to which the Canadian response departed from established British models. What many studies of the Canadian imperial movement have missed is the degree to which Canadian ideas of war and militarism

were conditioned as much by their North American heritage as the imperial connection. Vastly outnumbered as they would be in any conflict with the United States, Canadian militiamen might otherwise have been expected to imagine themselves playing the role of the “thin red line,” holding back a seething horde of savages on the frontiers of empire. Some of them did, though there was also a growing reaction against scarlet tunics, polished brass, the Canadian Permanent Force, and other symbols of the British regular army. In concluding his study of imperialism, Penlington argues that as much as English Canadians wished not to belong to the United States, they wanted to be like Americans, and this affinity helped condition their understanding of Canada’s national destiny. He is far from being the only historian to conclude that the country cannot be understood apart from its continental context.⁷⁹ Although Canadian citizen soldiers viewed Americans as their only potential enemy, they considered themselves to be like them in character, and they looked to the same North American heritage for their understanding of what a war fought by opposing mobs of citizen volunteers would look like. Despite the threat of war with the United States providing only one of several means of convincing the public that militiamen were doing something more than playing at soldiers, this understanding of Canada as a North American society had a very real influence on the approach to soldiering in this period. The Venezuela Crisis helped bring new conviction to the ideas of the citizen soldier advocates, whose thoughts on reforming the militia emphasized marksmanship over military discipline and sought to make military service in Canada amenable to the wider society. However, it remained to be seen whether this new-found interest in reform could be maintained in the absence of strained relations with the United States.