

HISTORY OF THE HAMILTON REGIMENT, 1778-1783

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TWO regiments have contributed greatly to the life and character of Pictou County, Nova Scotia, the 82nd and the 84th. Of the latter, the Royal Highland Emigrants Regiment, something, one can hardly call it a history, has been written; but of the former, nothing like a full account has ever appeared. Surely the history of that Regiment in which Sir John Moore—"the only man in Europe fit to contend with me", as Napoleon said—received his baptism of fire,—that Regiment to which we are indebted for the Carmichaels of New Glasgow, the Ives of Pictou, the McQueens of Little Harbour, and the Robertsons¹ of Barney's River, to mention only four of many distinguished families, should be better known. In the hope of making it so, I made some inquiries a few years ago, and the result is embodied in this paper.

The 82nd Regiment was a child of the War of the American Revolution. That war began, as we all know, in 1775, and at first was treated by the British authorities of that time much as the War of 1812 was treated a century and a quarter later. But by the end of 1777 the situation was threatening. Burgoyne had been defeated and forced to surrender at Saratoga, and the relations between Great Britain and France and Spain were strained almost to the breaking point. It became the obvious duty of the British Government to reinforce their troops in America. With that end in view the great cities of the three Kingdoms were each invited to raise a corps. Four took advantage of the offer and two of the four were Edinburgh and Glasgow. On the 5th of January, 1778, authority was given to raise the 80th Royal Edinburgh Volunteers of 1000 men; this regiment came on the establishment on the 17th of that month, to be followed later in the same year by the Glasgow Regiment, the 83rd, or Royal Glasgow Volunteers. Both of these regiments refused to admit Englishmen.

Between these two in point of time and place came the 82nd or Duke of Hamilton's Regiment. Whether, like the 80th and 83rd, it drew the line at Englishmen I cannot tell—I think it probably

1. It is stated in the preface to the second edition of *The Historical Geography of the Clans of Scotland* that Colonel James Alexander Robertson, one of its authors, was the last representative of the Robertsons of Lude. This is not so. A son of Robertson of Lude was in the 82nd and was one of a number of his descendants in Pictou County, N. S.

did—though some names on its roll in later years, like those of Robert Smith, and William Hodges, suggest that it was less exclusive. John Ives was certainly a native of England, but came to the Regiment through the north of Ireland. Like its sister Regiments, the 80th and 83rd, the 82nd was enlisted for the War of the American Revolution; its only service was in America, and with the close of that war their occupation was gone and all three were disbanded. The number of the 82nd was assigned to the Prince of Wales' Volunteers, now the 2nd Battalion the Prince of Wales' Volunteers or South Lancashire Regiment.

Its title the Duke of Hamilton's, or more briefly the Hamilton Regiment, suggests what is the fact, that it was recruited by the Duke of Hamilton. Douglas, 8th Duke of Hamilton, premier peer of Scotland, was in 1777 a young man of great energy and wide possessions who had just come of age. Fired with what proved to be a transitory passion for military glory he sent in proposals to the Government to raise a Regiment for immediate service. Lord North, the Prime Minister, accepted the offer and the Duke obtained the commission of Captain in the Regiment to be formed. One of his first acts was to send for his guide, philosopher and friend, John Moore, then serving as Ensign in the 51st at Morocco. Moore was advanced to the rank of Lieutenant and appointed Paymaster—a double appointment then most unusual. I need hardly say that this John Moore afterwards became the great Sir John Moore who fell gloriously at Corunna and over whose grave, as we learned in our salad days, "not a soldier discharged his farewell shot".

The work of recruiting, once begun, was carried on vigorously. The Duke offered substantial bounties and obtained many recruits from his own tenantry. The Burghs of Rutherglen and Hamilton, bounding on the Duke's estates, entered into the work of recruiting with great energy; and the Town Councils of both Burghs, in addition to offering special bounties, made any of their citizens who joined Burgesses of their native town, a distinction of no mean order in those days. A considerable number of recruits was also obtained in Glasgow, and the merchants of that city, who were very largely interested in the trade with the West Indies, Canada and America, with which the War was sadly interfering, were naturally most helpful.

The Glasgow *Mercury* of January 19th, 1778, has an advertisement and news item relating to the Regiment. The advertisement is as follows:

The Magistrates of Rutherglen hereby offer a reward of Six Guineas, over and above the bounty allowed by the recruiting

offer, for every able-bodied man raised in this town and parish, who shall offer himself to them to serve in Duke Hamilton's regiment.

The magistrates are hopeful that the spirit and generosity of the first subject of Scotland, who is himself to serve as Captain in this regiment will animate numbers of young men to distinguish themselves on this occasion by freely crowding to the standard to the honour of this country and public virtue.

The news item reads:

We hear from Strathaven that, on Saturday last, His Grace the Duke of Hamilton, attended by the four trades of the place with their stands of colours, and a number of the neighbouring gentlemen, made a grand procession through the town, and beat up for volunteers to serve in the regiment raising by His Grace. A number of young fellows were enlisted who received, besides His Grace's bounty, two or three Guineas from the different Societies to which they particularly belonged. There was a general illumination of the town in the evening, and plenty of liquor distributed to the populace.

From the same paper exactly ten days later, I copy the following news item:

On Thursday evening last, the Duke of Hamilton accompanied by several gentlemen of the Military Line made a grand procession through the streets of this city. They were attended with drums, flags, and a number of soldiers carrying flambeaux. He bid up for volunteers to serve in the Regiment at present raising under the auspices of His Grace, and the success he met with was altogether unexampled in so short a time. His Grace gave very high bounties to his recruits, and distributed porter to the crowd very liberally, besides throwing money among them. He went next morning to Hamilton, his principal residence, and to Strathaven for the same purpose, where his success likewise has been very great.

The same issue has the following advertisement:

Deserted from a recruiting party of the Duke of Hamilton's Regiment at Rutherglen, John Ross, by trade a shoemaker, and about twenty years, five feet eight inches high, of a fair complexion, fair hair, and blue eyes, pock-pitted. He had on when he left Rutherglen, a brown great coat, black coat, a striped red and white silk vest, black breeches, and white thread ribbed stockings. Whoever will take him up and give information so as to get him confined that he may return to the party will receive One Guinea of reward, over and above what is allowed by His Majesty, upon applying to Mr. James Farie at Rutherglen.

There was no John Ross on the roll of the Regiment when it was disbanded, so it is perhaps not unnatural to suppose that he was never taken and the reward never claimed.

Another desertion is reported in the *Mercury* of March 16th:

Deserted the 16th inst. from the recruiting party at Hamilton, belonging to Lieut. Graham of the Hamilton Regiment, David Simpson, a wright, born in Edinburgh, had on a pink coloured coat, a little faded, with steel buttons and a sword in the middle, white corded dimity vest, and a pair of black stocking breeches. Two Guineas reward over and above the usual bounty.

There was a David Simpson in the Regiment at the time it disbanded. He settled at Merigomish, N. S., and his descendants are still living there. He was a student at college when he enlisted and on "the morning after the night before" found himself with the King's shilling in his pocket. His friends tried to secure his release but failed. The David Simpson who deserted is described as a wright—probably a different person from David Simpson, student.

I have said that the 82nd probably declined to have Englishmen on its roll. It was willing to take on Highlanders, but the Highlanders were unwilling to be taken on. In spite of all the Duke's enthusiasm and generosity, in spite of the active assistance and support he received from Glasgow and neighbouring parishes, the ranks of his Regiment were not filled and he had to turn to the Highlands. A detachment of Highland recruits who had enlisted for the 42nd and 71st Regiments (respectively the Black Watch and the Fraser Highlanders), on arriving at Leith were told that they were to be drafted into the Hamilton Regiment. The men remonstrated and refused; an attempt was made to coerce them, with the result that a desperate affray took place in which an officer and nine men of a Fencible Regiment were killed, and thirty-one wounded. One of the casualties was the piper, who was shot in both legs. A Court Martial was held, and the men were charged with mutiny. Their defence was that they had enlisted as soldiers in a Highland Regiment wearing the Highland dress; their native tongue was Gaelic—they had never used any other, and were so ignorant of the English tongue that they could not avail themselves of it for any purpose of life; and they had been accustomed to wear only the Highland dress. After trial, the prisoners were found guilty and condemned to be shot, but received from His Majesty a free pardon. Whether these men after their pardon joined the Regiment, the historian from whom I have quoted does not say, and I do not know. But I believe they did—there were too many good Highland names on its roll, Robertsons, Frasers, MacDonalDs, MacNeils, MacQueens, MacKinnons, MacPhersons, Chisholms, and Camerons to believe otherwise. At any rate there were several Highlanders recruited.

The uniform of the men was scarlet with black facings. The uniforms, long preserved in Hamilton Palace, are now hanging along with those of so many other Scottish regiments in St. Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh; they should be in the Church at Little Harbour, Fife County. They are very beautiful and in excellent preservation. One thing very noticeable about them is that in the Union on both the Royal and the Regimental colours the cross of St. Patrick has no place.

As soon as six companies of the Regiment had been raised and trained they sailed from the Bromielaw, Glasgow, for Halifax, where the 50th or Royal Edinburgh were already on Garrison duty. Moore was with them, but the Duke of Hamilton was not. The public historian says that he was not permitted to accompany them, very much to the dissatisfaction of the men and of himself. The fact is that he had married and claimed the privilege of the soldier of Israel—that within one year of his marriage he need not go forth to war. The command of the Regiment was given to Brigadier General MacLean¹ who for some years had held high rank in the Portuguese service. He was an officer of rare merit, a trusted friend and adviser of the British Commander-in-Chief, Sir Henry Clinton. One historian of the War of the American Revolution goes so far as to suggest that Sir Henry Clinton's failure as Commander-in-Chief was in some measure due to the loss of General MacLean's advice. And Moore always believed it a great privilege to have served under him. He had a splendid military library of which Moore made extensive use. But his health had been undermined by his long residence in Portugal and he did not live to see the War through. He died in Halifax late in 1779.

On the Western wall of the vestibule of St. Paul's Church in Halifax is a memorial tablet bearing this inscription:

To the much regretted memory
of
Brigadier General Francis MacLean
a gallant officer and an
honest man.
This humble tribute is inscribed by the
hand of a sincere lamenting friend.
Major General James Patterson
his successor *anno domini* 1782.²

¹ As a Lieutenant in the Scottish Brigade he had greatly distinguished himself at the siege of Bergen op Zoom in 1747. See Stewart's *Highland Sketches* Vol. II p. 56.

² This probably means his successor in command of the Garrison; his successor in the Regiment was Lieut-Colonel John Dunning—an uncle, I think, though possibly a cousin, of the Duke of Hamilton.

In the Church itself hangs his shield: surely it is unique to have two memorials to the same person in one Church.

General MacLean lived long enough, however, to lead his regiment in the performance of a signal exploit. The dull routine of its Garrison duty in Halifax was relieved when an order came from Sir Henry Clinton to take possession of the Bay of Penobscot in the State of Maine, and there to build a fort as a maritime station to interrupt the trade of Boston, and to provide a settlement home for the distressed loyalist refugees. Accordingly in June 1779 Brigadier General MacLean embarked from Halifax with 600 men, including six companies of his own regiment, the balance being drawn from the 74th or Campbell's Regiment then also on Garrison duty there. Intelligence of this design soon reached Boston, where the prevailing hostility towards the loyal New Englanders, who had left the city with Howe, at once suggested an expedition to mar the work of MacLean. By means of large bounties and an embargo, three thousand troops were quickly raised and placed under the command of Brigadier General Lovel. The artillery was commanded by the celebrated Paul Revere,¹ but no American poet has enjoined his children to listen to any tale of his doings in this campaign. Nineteen ships with twenty-four transports were armed and fitted out. It was expected that service would be brief and easy, and the expedition triumphant. The building of the fort was but little advanced when on the 21st of July MacLean heard of the preparations in Boston; whereupon, abandoning the completion of the permanent works, he employed his troops night and day in raising defences to secure them against assault. On July 25th, when the walls of the fort were not yet breast high, the American fleet was descried steering to the mouth of the Penobscot. It sailed up the river and anchored nearly opposite to the unfinished fort; but the intervening woods concealed the operations of the British. Next day, after a cautious examination of the coast, some troops were put into boats to make a descent. But on approaching the shore they were fired at by a party concealed behind trees; this fire arrested the Americans, who rowed back to their shipping. Similar ineffectual attempts to land were made on the two subsequent days. At length the Americans, instructed by these miscarriages, made preparations to overcome all opposition and to disembark their whole force. Early in the morning three ships of war, arranged with their broadsides towards the shore, opened a heavy fire of round and double-headed shot upon the wood.

¹ For his conduct in this affair Revere was on his return to Boston haled before a Court Martial and after a trial that dragged its weary length for three years was grudgingly and reluctantly acquitted.

The roaring of the guns, the falling of the trees, and the crashing of their branches, astounded the young soldiers; when suddenly the commanding ceased, and boats full of troops were towed off to the beach.

It happened on that day that a company of the Hamilton Regiment formed the picket to oppose the landing, and Lieutenant Moore was posted on the left with only twenty men under his orders.¹ The captain who commanded, unused to action, ordered the soldiers not to fire until the enemy landed; so the Americans undisturbed rowed briskly till their boats grounded; then, giving a shout, they sprang ashore. The British, who were only recruits, saw the great superiority of the numbers of the enemy; they fired a volley, and ran back in disorder. Lieutenant Moore called to his small party:

"Will the Hamilton men leave me? Come back, and behave like soldiers". They obeyed and recommenced firing. The Americans returned the fire, without venturing to advance into the wood. Moore observed their commanding officer flourishing his sword, and encouraging his men. He levelled his piece, for subalterns then carried fuzils, and he believed that he could have killed them; but he replaced his firelock to his shoulder without discharging it. While this resistance was persevered in on the left, the rest of the detachment reported to General MacLean that the enemy had landed in great numbers and forced the picket to retreat. "But where is Moore?" said the General. "He is, I fear, cut off". "What then is the firing I still hear"? The Captain of the 74th could not tell.

The General then commanded Captain Dunlop, also of the 74th, to march to the shore with his Company and repel the enemy, or bring off Lieutenant Moore. Moore was found by Captain Dunlop at his post, still holding the Americans at bay. But as they were advancing on both flanks, Dunlop saw that it was necessary to retire to avoid being surrounded. He therefore ordered Moore to form in the rear of the column the remains of his party—his seven out of twenty had fallen; then the detachment marched back to the fort in good order.

In a letter to his father, Moore wrote:

I was upon picket the morning the rebels landed. I got some little credit, by chance, for my behaviour during the engagement. To tell you the truth, not for anything that deserved it, but because I was the only officer who did not leave his post too soon. I confess

¹ A little of the ground close to this spot is still known as Moore's Hill, and on it is erected a large obelisk with an inscription telling of Moore's part in the action.

that at the first fire they gave us, which was within thirty yards, I was a good deal startled, but I think this went gradually off afterwards.

On the return of the detachment the general received from Moore particulars of what had occurred, and he expected that the Americans flushed with success would immediately storm the unfinished works while the garrison were in consternation owing to the cannonade and the repulse of the pickets. Measures for defence were immediately adopted; the works were lined with troops and the officers were given instructions for every contingency. That night the General gave Moore the command of fifty men, posted in reserve, with orders, "That should the enemy rush forward as soon as they got into the ditch of the fort, he should sally out and attack them on the flank with fixed bayonets". But the Americans were not so enterprising, and being somewhat disconcerted by the loss which they had sustained they took up a position out of reach of the guns of the fort, and remained tranquil.

For some days they were busied in landing artillery and stores for a regular siege, and only skirmishing occurred. At length they broke ground and raised a battery at about twelve hundred yards from the fort; this opened early in the morning, and the new levies of which the garrison was composed were much alarmed. The General, hearing of this, came forth from his tent, and observing that the officers and men, none of whom had ever seen service before, were stooping their heads at every shot, he reproached them sharply; then calling for his aides-de-camp went to the gate, and commanded it to be thrown open. Then walking erect towards the battery, he examined it with a spy glass: "You see", he said, "there is no danger from the fire of these wretched artillery-men". After this observation he returned deliberately and ordered the gate to be closed. This behaviour of their General inspired the garrison with so much courage that there was no risk afterwards of their shrinking from their duty.

The approach of the Bostonians was much retarded by the skill of General MacLean; yet a train of heavy artillery and superior numbers might at last have prevailed. But after a siege of three weeks Commodore Sir George Collier, apprised of the danger, arrived off Penobscot Bay with a line-of-battle ship and a few frigates. Before this squadron could be seen from the shore it was discovered from the topmasts of the American ships; and in the course of the night the besieging army hastily re-embarked. Next morning the American fleet drew up in line, making a show of resistance. On the approach of the British, however, this resolu-

tion was relinquished, and an attempt was made to escape up the river. But their ships of war intermingled with the transports, were closely chased and driven on shore. Some were captured, others set on fire by their own crews, who leaped out and fled into the woods. Yet these disasters did not soon terminate; for the women and the soldiers accused each other of cowardice. They fought; many men were killed, others perished by famine, and the remainder reached Boston in miserable plight. General MacLean having finished the construction of the fort, left in it a sufficient garrison from the 74th and returned to Halifax with the Hamilton Regiment.

I have dwelt at great length upon this expedition to Maine both because it was the most successful venture of the kind made by the British during the whole course of the war, and, especially, because it is the only affair of arms in which the 82nd was engaged of which I can give any detailed account. Try as I would, I could find recorded little about their doings subsequent to their return to Halifax from Maine. The present Duke of Hamilton very courteously agreed to my request to have the family papers of that period examined, in the hope of obtaining some information. The examination discovered nothing. Through the kindness of a Scottish friend and the generous assistance of the United Service Institution, I have had the records in the War Office searched, but have found nothing. As one correspondent wrote, the War Office towards the end of the eighteenth century was too busy getting ready for the next war to pay much attention to the records of the past one. In Fortescue's *Monumental History of the British Army*, it was not to be expected that there should be many or extended references to any individual Regiment; but to it perforce I was obliged to go to learn anything of the part the 82nd played during the remaining years of its existence.

The Regiment was moved from Halifax to New York during 1780. In the autumn of that year it was incorporated in a force of more than two thousand men, including some German mercenaries, sent from New York under General Leslie to the Chesapeake and up the James River to the support of Lord Cornwallis, then engaged in his hopeless task of freeing the Carolinas. This force arrived at Charleston, one of the British bases, from the Chesapeake, on December 14th, 1780, and the major part of it, including six companies of the 82nd was sent to Winnsborough, to join Cornwallis. These companies were with Cornwallis at his great fight at the Clouds Court House on March 15th, 1781, and no doubt also in the retreat to Wilmington following that fight. When rested and

refreshed he took the field again on the 25th of the next month; at least the Light Company of the 82nd was with him and remained with him through all his activities in Virginia till he joined the main body of the British forces at Peterboro' in that State. Before leaving, Cornwallis ordered Major Craig (afterwards Sir James Henry Craig, K.C.B.) of the 82nd to withdraw the remainder of the Regiment with the rest of the garrison to Charleston, so soon as he himself should have passed the Roanoke. From the day Cornwallis reached Peterboro' the 82nd passed out of recorded history, as far at least as my researches have carried me. As it was not with Cornwallis at Yorkton, I assume that it was sent to Sir Henry Clinton in response to his repeated demands on Cornwallis for reinforcements.

But some, shall I call them traditions, still prevail among the descendants of the men of the Regiment, traditions that I feel sure can be accepted and trusted. One of these is to the effect that the whole Grenadier Company, save only eighteen men, was lost in the wreck of a transport on the coast of New Jersey, near New York. Of the eighteen who were saved, one John Small was afterwards taken prisoner by the Americans. He made his escape with fifteen others, and passing through the American lines reached the shore. Thence he swam to a British man-of-war, lying off the coast. Strangely enough, he was years afterwards drowned at the rear of his farm, near the mouth of Sutherland's River, N. S. Another is that while in the Southern States a whole detachment of one hundred and eleven men, with the exception of another eighteen, was cut off by fever. One of the survivors, John Fraser, lived to a ripe old age at Fisher's Grant, and was one of the first elders of the Presbyterian Church at Pictou. It may be taken for certain that some of them languished for a time in an American prison, and that the Regiment as a whole was roughly used. I do not mean in the shock of actual conflict, for from all that can be gathered it was well able there to take care of itself; but it was at times ill-fed, ill-clothed, improperly protected from the weather, and continuously exposed in its long marches to what we should now call guerilla attacks. At any rate, the soldiers of the 82nd retained to their dying day a feeling amounting to positive hatred of the Americans, whom perhaps unjustly yet not unnaturally, they blamed for their sufferings. One of them in describing the battles, sieges, fortunes they had endured used to become excited. A favorite expression in describing a battle was "smash 'em". The point of land jutting out from Big Island into Merigomish Harbour on which he lived is to this day known as Smashem Head.

The war ended, the Regiment sailed in October 1783 from New York to Halifax, and immediately on its arrival was disbanded. But by this time, and at such a distance from its home, Regiment was too grand a name for a body of troops that had in most cases shrunk to the size of two or three full companies. A large tract of land ever since known as the 82nd Grant was set apart for them in Pictou County, N. S. It embraced the shore on the south side of Pictou Harbour and from the Upper Part of Fisher's Grant around the coast, almost to the County line, including Fisher's Grant, Chance Harbour, Little Harbour, Merigomish, The Ponds, with the exception of the Wentworth Grant, and extended into the interior to the depth of three or four miles. It was said to contain in the whole 26,030 acres—allowance being made for a town plot, common glebe and schools, and for other public uses—and was divided as follows: to the Major who was the acting Colonel, Alex. Robertson, the island now known as Big Island, but formerly called after him, Robertson's Island, estimated at fifteen hundred acres, but containing considerably more; to one Captain, seven hundred acres; to four other officers, five hundred acres each, and to another, three hundred; to thirty-two non-commissioned officers, two hundred acres each, and to twelve others, one hundred and fifty acres each; and to one hundred and twenty privates, one hundred acres each. The ground reserved for a town plot at Fisher's Grant was laid out to contain every public convenience then known and was named Walmsley, though why, I have never been able to ascertain.¹ The land was surveyed and divided into lots, which were numbered. The men were drawn up in the barracks square at Halifax, and each man drew his lot by number.

The attempts made in the Colonies to form settlements by disbanded soldiers have not always been successful. I would be far from saying, and it would be far from true to say, that this settlement of the 82nd was not successful. But this can, without fear of contradiction be said, that it was not the great success it should have been. Life in barracks and in the field had unfitted many for the work a pioneer must do. Some came, looked at the land they had drawn, returned to Halifax without cutting a tree, and re-enlisted. Others sold their lands for trifling sums, and moved away. The 82nd was not what is known as a "married regiment". The unmarried men, and they were in the majority, saw no prospect of attaining the honourable estate of matrimony

¹ In 1783 St. Andrew's Lodge A. F. & A. M. granted a dispensation to form a Lodge in the 82nd Regiment to be known as Thistle Lodge; when the members settled on their lands in Pictou County they again (Dec. 7th, 1785) applied for a warrant for a Lodge to be known as "Walmsley" "to meet at John Fraser's in the township of Walmsley".

if they remained in Pictou, where of marriageable females there were not enough to go around. But there was a residue, a very substantial residue—I make it over fifty¹—of steady, industrious, God-fearing men, ready as the Scot generally is,

To gather gear by every wile
That's justified by honour;

men who realized that

To mak' a happy fireside clime
For weans an' wife
Is the true pathos and sublime
Of human life.

They suffered the usual hardships of the pioneer, but triumphed over them, and dying, bequeathed to their children a noble heritage in lands and possessions, and that good name which is better than riches.

¹ A list of the Grantees with short notices of many of those who became permanent settlers will be found in Appendix F to Patterson's *History of Pictou County*.