

Regimental History

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Why were the 78th Fraser Highlanders raised?

Struggles between Britain and France

The final phase of the 150-year struggle between Britain and France in North America began in 1754. It became clear that large-scale military action in the colonial conflict was needed if Britain was to prevail. This would require sending British regulars to North America.

Authority was granted for the raising of two Highland Battalions, the 62nd Regiment of Foot (Montgomery's Highlanders) and the 63rd Regiment of Foot (Fraser's Highlanders), for service in the New World.

Clan Fraser fights under command of former enemy

Simon Fraser, Master of Lovat, son of the 11th Lord Lovat, who was executed for his part in the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745-46, was commissioned Lieutenant-Colonel Commandant. When someone high in authority questioned the wisdom of arming former rebels, General Wolfe replied, "If a Highlander gives his oath, he can be completely trusted."

Regiment assembles at Inverness

The 78th assembled at Inverness, and soon recruited to full strength. In fact, when the regiment embarked at Glasgow in April 1757, it was accompanied by so many volunteers that three additional companies were authorized. When another company was added in 1758, the unit had a formidable strength of 1,542 all ranks. {mospagebreak title=Action in North America}

What action did the Regiment see in North America?

The first battles

The Frasers spent their first North American winter, that of 1757-58, in Connecticut. In spring of 1758, the regiment joined the force being assembled for the assault of Louisbourg that led to the surrender of the fortress in July 1758. Fraser's Highlanders then moved to New York, where they were to pass the winter, but were transferred first to Boston and then, as a result of the disaster at Ticonderoga, to Albany.

General Wolfe and the Plains of Abraham

Fraser's Highlanders joined General Wolfe's Quebec expedition in the spring of 1759, and served with distinction throughout the campaign. They were the only Highland troops present, and they formed the largest Regiment at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham.

Three Highland Regiments Together

The Regiment remained in Quebec during the trying winter of 1759-60, and took part in the Battle at Sainte Foy on 29 April 1760. Subsequently, the 78th accompanied General Murray's force in the advance on Montreal, where it met with the 42nd (Royal Highland) Regiment (The Black Watch) and the 77th (Montgomerie's Highlanders) Regiment, both of Amherst's force. Here, for the first time, the three Highland Regiments serving in North America during the Seven Year's War came together. {mospagebreak title=After the 7 Years War}

What happened when the 7 Years War ended?

Disbanded

When the Seven Years War was over, the Regiment was disbanded, the order being received December 1763, at Murray Bay on the lower St. Lawrence. The Fraser Highlanders were the only Highland Regiment ever disbanded off Scottish soil.

Settlement in Quebec

Since a number of the men spoke French (due to their Jacobite connection) and were Catholic, they were well respected by the French Canadians in the area. Many decided to stay on land grants and married into French Canadian families. During their short stay in Quebec, members of the Regiment:

- established the first Presbyterian church in Canada;
- established the first Masonic Lodge; and,
- introduced the game of curling on the frozen rivers and lakes.

About 150 of the men settled in the Fraserville or Riviere-du-Loup area.

A remarkable legacy

Many of the men and their descendants became fur trade merchants and explorers of the Canadian and American West. During the American Revolution, veterans of the 78th re-enlisted in the 84th Regiment, Royal Highland Emigrants, and some received land grants on Prince Edward Island.

Others returned independantly to establish business concerns, notably in the fur trade, where they or their descendants explored and opened the continent naming such rivers as the MacKenzie and the Fraser.

The influence of the original 1,500 men of this Regiment on Canadian and North American history is still evolving. New historical discoveries are still being made which further indicate that this Regiment deserves a special place in our military tradition.

The 78th Regiment, Second Highland Battalion of Foot, commonly called Fraser's Highlanders was raised in Scotland in 1757, specifically for service in North America. It played a daring and romantic role in the major battles of the Seven Years' War, a war which ultimately dertermined Canada's future. Although the regiment was disbanded in Quebec in 1763, it was the only Scottish regiment ever to be disbanded on foreign soil. The men of the 78th were first among the many thousands of "red-coated" settlers who remained in Canada. Since that time, their family trees have flourished placing their descendants throughout the country and the continent.

At the behest of Lord Chatham, Colonel Simon Fraser, Master of Lovat, raised the Regiment under Warrant for King George II. The 1,500 men were recruited largely from clansmen, who, a dozen years earlier had fought for Bonnie Prince Charlie in the War of '45. When an official high in authority questioned the wisdom of arming former rebels, General James Wolfe defensively replied, "If a Highlander gives his oath, he can be completely trusted".

The Regiment sailed from Scotland, via Ireland, to Halifax before moving north to lay siege and then capture the mighty French Fortress Louisbourg in 1758. The men wintered in Connecticut and southern New York State before undertaking the Quebec campaign throughout the summer of 1759. It was the largest regiment on the Plains of Abraham and suffered the heaviest casualties.

Within the walls of the old fortified city, the bitter winter of 1759-60 played heavily on the health of the soldiers. Tradition holds that the Ursuline Nuns came to the Highlanders aid by knitting longer hose to reduce their exposure to the elements!

The next spring, despite a French victory at St. Foy, just outside of Quebec, the British Army, now under the command of General Murray, moved onto Montreal, which was surrendered in September 1760. For the first time since the onset of the War, the 78th was garrisoned with the other two Highland Regiments in the campaign, the 77th Montgomery's and the 42nd, The Black Watch.

Even the men who went home to Scotland after the War could not forget their North American experience. Many returned to fight in the American Revolution under Major-General Simon Fraser forming the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 71st Regiment (Fraser's Highlanders). In Canada, Lt. Colonel Allen Maclean raised the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 84th Regiment (Royal Highland Emigrants) from soldiers who had fought in the previous war.

RE-RAISING OF THE REGIMENT

During preparations for Montreal's EXPO'67, the Montreal Military & Maritime Museum (now called The David M. Stewart Museum) revived two historic Regiments - La Compagnie Franche de la Marine and The 78th Fraser's Highlanders. Through the leadership of Colonel J. Ralph Harper and Colonel David M. Stewart, research was undertaken to reproduce the uniform and equipment of these 18th century soldiers. With the prototype in hand, the call was issued, and the ranks were quickly filled with eager university, college and high school students.

Since the 1960s these two corps have paraded daily throughout the summer months at the Old Fort on St.Helen's Island, Montreal. This exhibition of living history has been enjoyed by tens of thousands of visitors. The Fraser Drill company has demonstrated its piping, drilling and battle formation skills in numerous Canadian and US. cities and historical sites. The squad has also distinguished itself by acting as Guard of Honour to H.M. Queen Elizabeth II on three occasions.

The squad is composed entirely of students mainly from the Montreal area, although some young men have come from

outposts as far away as Calgary and Atlanta. These young men already play bagpipes or drums, and are required to learn highland dancing and the 18th century manual of drill with the Brown Bess musket. The aim is to provide healthy and stimulating summer employment which stresses military tradition and discipline. Their training includes a strong introduction to 18th century history and military life. Since its inception, the squad has been supported entirely through private donations from individuals, members of our garrisons and corporations. The annual budget is in excess of \$75,000 which includes salaries and scholarships, along with uniform and equipment maintenance. The Museum provides a professional support staff including gunsmiths and seamstresses.