Fort Havoc (Wallace Hale)

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Hundred and Fourth Regiment

And Its Famous Winter March During the War of 1812.

The King's New Brunswick Regiment, organized by Governor Carleton for the defence of the province during the war with France in the year 1793, was disbanded in 1802, peace having been proclaimed. The peace was of short duration, for war broke out again the following year. By the efforts of Major General Hunter, a new provincial corps was raised called the New Brunswick Fencible Regiment. It was in this corps that Capt. John Jenkins, the hero of the battle of Ogdensburg, began his military career, his commission as ensign being dated September 19th, 1804. The regiment soon attained a good degree of efficiency and the province was justly proud of it. The House of Assembly at their session in 1807 voted fifty guineas for the purpose of providing the corps with a silver trumpet, with the arms of New Brunswick engraven thereon, and also for the purchase of such instruments for the regimental band as the colonel should think proper. In acknowledging the gift Lieut.-Col. Johnston said, "I am confident it will be highly prized by every member of the corps, and I trust that whenever the regiment is more actively employed they will imitate the conduct of the donors (many of them veterans of the old revolutionary war), whose valor was proved in innumerable instances, and whose attachments to his majesty's person and the British connection led them to forsake their dearest interests." The Colonel concludes his reply by expressing his belief that "The steadfast loyalty of the inhabitants of this colony in the present eventful war, carried on for the liberties of the civilized world, will not be surpassed by any of his majesty's subjects."

The efficiency of the New Brunswick Fencibles was such that on February 8th, 1811, the corps was gazetted as the 104th Regiment of the British line.

At the opening of the legislature in January, 1813, Major Gen. G. Tracey Smyth in his speech to the House of Assembly, said: "While we deplore the infatuation that has induced our neighbors (blind to their own interests) to lend their aid in support of that spirit of tyranny and universal dominion which Great Britain has so long gloriously resisted, we are called upon vigorously to exert ourselves in defence of all that is dear and valuable to men." The House of Assembly in their reply said, "The people of this province are ready and determined to repel every aggression which the infatuated policy of the American government may induce it to commit on the soil of New Brunswick." The House voted a large sum for the purposes of defence, militia laws were amended, volunteer corps organized, and about 800 men embodied for active service to take the place of the 104th regiment when it was ordered to proceed to Upper Canada.

It may be observed in passing that the war of 1812 was very unpopular throughout the whole of New England. Shortly after its commencement the governors of Maine and New Brunswick issued proclamations forbidding any display of hostility along the border. In consequence the relations between the people at Woodstock and Houlton, St. Stephen and Calais, and other places similarly situated continued for the most part undisturbed.

The 104th Regiment assisted in the construction of the Martello Tower at St. John in the winter of 1812-13. They left St. John the 11th day of February, 1813, on their way to Canada, the people helping them out as far as the roads were passable, in sleighs. At Fredericton they were joined by that portion of the regiment stationed at the capital, and on the 14th February the memorable snow shoe tramp to Canada began. The men were sent in successive detachments in order that the track made by each detachment might harden for the benefit of those that were to follow. The first detachment, 100 strong, was under command of Lt.-Col. Halkett. He had four Indians to act as guides to Riviere du Loup. Each succeeding day a company set out until ten divisions, comprising 42 officers and 1,000 men were plying their snow shoes up the St. John on their way to the seat of war.

The House of Assembly, Feb. 15th, on motion of Capt. Stair Agnew, adopted this resolution:

> "Resolved, That the House of Assembly of New Brunswick cannot view the departure of the 104th Regiment from this province without feeling every solicitude for a corps raised in this country and destined they trust long to continue its pride and ornament; the House have observed with peculiar pleasure that the merit of the officers and men of this regiment has been such as to have induced His Majesty to confer upon it a high mark of his favor and approbation in numbering it with the *line*, and the House takes this occasion to express the high sense they have of the conduct of the regiment during its continuance in this province."

At Fredericton, as at St. John, the citizens turned out with their sleighs and carried the men one day on the road. Each man of the regiment was supplied with a pair of snow shoes, moccasins, and a blanket. The supplies were taken on toboggans, one toboggan for every two men; on this were strapped two muskets and ammunition, two knapsacks and fourteen days rations. Each toboggan was drawn by one man in front and pushed (or held back as necessity required) by one man in rear by means of a stick made fast Indian fashion to the stern of the toboggan.

The winter was a very severe one; on this point we have the impartial evidence of old Parson Dibblee's diary:

> "Feb. 1st. — Snow drifted roads well nigh impassible.
>
> March 1st. — Snow four feet deep on a level.
>
> March 19th. — No church on account of the storm; never, never, was there such a season. Drifts in some places ten feet above the fences. Lately a succession of storms; people five days getting to Woodstock from Fredericton; roads shovelled only to drift again."

As the several companies marched forward day by day they were obliged to halt about the middle of the afternoon to prepare their encampment for the night. After passing Woodstock, where they were treated with great hospitality by the settlers, the only places where they could find any proper accommodation were at the old military posts at Presquisle and Grand Falls. When they encamped in the woods they dug away the snow, using their snowshoes for shovels, spruce bushes were placed so as to afford shelter, hard wood cut for fires, camp kettles hung on, and then an onslaught made on the tea, pork and biscuit. With such severe exercise the standard ration of a pound of pork and ten ounces of biscuit did not go far and the consumption of provisions proceeded at an alarming rate. The men lay down at night on cedar and spruce boughs wrapped in their blankets beside the huge fires, some of the built fourteen feet long and four feet high. So intense was the frost, the snow walls behind them stood like marble. Occasionally the brush would catch fire and rouse the sleeping soldiers, and on one occasion the regimental colors were with difficulty saved from the flames. The bugle sounded *Reveille* two hours before day when having breakfasted the men started off as soon as it was light enough to travel. As long as the travelling on the river was good they got on fairly well, although snow storms sometimes obliterated the tracks of the preceeding day but wherever rapids or open water was found, they had to climb steep banks and make their way through the forest. They kept up their spirits amazingly, however, all things considered. One of the officers describing the journey writes:— "Our poor fellows with empty stomachs had hard work hauling the toboggans up the steep hills, although the load was light, the provisions being nearly finished, and all of us on short rations for several days, yet in the midst of our privations we had some hearty recreation. Some of the men would slide down the hills on the toboggans, and capsizes were of frequent occurrences. Our big black drummer straddled the big drum, which was lashed on a toboggan, to try the experiment of a slide but it jumped the track shooting him off at a high velocity and the sable African came up some distance from where he disappeared a *white man* from head to foot."

Hunger was the worst thing they had to face. The hard effort of tramping some twenty-five miles daily through the snow and climbing steep hillsides, the thermometer often twenty degrees below zero, created such voracious appetites that a pound of pork (bones included) and ten ounces of biscuit seemed to many of the hundred and fourth a mere flea bite. It is doubtful whether any but the hardy forest pioneers of New Brunswick could have performed such a march with less loss and discomfort. Another thing should be mentioned namely that during the entire march the men were without the daily ration of *rum* at that time served in the British army. We are assured, notwithstanding, by Col. Playfair (who was at that time a lieutenant in the regiment) there was *no grumbling* but all were cheerful and good tempered.

In our next article we shall give an account of Capt. Charles Rainsford's famous march from Temiscouata to the St. Lawrence.

W. O. Raymond

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