



CHAPTER I

THE CANADIAN MILITIA OF THE FRENCH REGIME

ALTHOUGH as it at present exists, the Canadian Militia* system bears the impress of the influences of the old militia organizations of England rather than that of those of New France, there are many points of connexion entitling the present Militia of the Dominion of Canada to claim some sort of relationship to the gallant Canadian Militia of the French Regime. The Act of Capitulation of Montreal, cancelling the authority of the King of France in Canada, of course voided, or to be more accurate, for the capitulation, was subject to subsequent treaty, suspended that sovereign's commissions in the colony, including those of the officers of Militia. But the ink upon the document in question was scarcely dry before the British authorities provided for the recommissioning of such of the militia officers as would take the oath of allegiance. True, the object of the British was to obtain the services of the officers of the old Canadian Militia in their civil rather than in their military capacities. But it was the old militia organization which was temporarily revived under British authority, nevertheless. After the formal cession by treaty of Canada to Britain the French commissions were cancelled by ordinance, but the authorities appear to have availed themselves of the good offices of the militia captains, and it was they who were relied upon to raise and command the first British Canadian

armed force raised in Montreal, Quebec and Three Rivers in 1764 for use in the operations against the western Indians. Similarly it was the officers of the old French militia who raised and officered the most of the volunteer corps which served, not only in repelling the American invasion of 1775-76, but rendered good service with the Loyalist armies during the revolutionary campaigns in what is now the United States. And when the first colonial acts respecting the organization of a militia under the British rule were drafted the militia laws and practices of the old regime were taken into consideration and had a marked effect on the legislation in question. As to the personnel of the first Canadian militia under British rule, the muster rolls of that period could be easily mistaken for those of the splendid but poorly appreciated militia that rendered such fine service under Montcalm and de Levis, so many of the officers who had fought so valiantly to uphold the fleurs-de-lis, accepting similar appointments under the Union Jack. To all effects and purposes the first Canadian militia organized under the British regime was the same body as had served the Bourbons so well before the Capitulation of Montreal.

Few people realize what a powerful force the militia of the old French colony was. The year of the first battle of the Plains of Abraham, 1759, Montreal contained 4,000 inhabitants, and yet the militia organiza-

*The word "militia" (from the Latin *miles*, a soldier) is generally considered by encyclopedists and historians as meaning that portion of the military strength of a nation enrolled for discipline and instruction, but local in its organization, and engaged in active service only in case of emergency, the organized national reserve in fact. Clearly, from the derivation of the word, this present acknowledged meaning was not its original one, and we know from parliamentary history that old English representatives

in the House of Commons, realizing the national dread of military dictatorship, objected to the application of the term "militia" to the constitutional and popular branch of the defensive forces of the country. In the generally accepted sense referred to the term is now a misnomer applied in the defensive force of Canada, for what we call the "Active Militia" is the Dominion's first line of defence, and includes a force (small it is true), of permanently embodied troops—regulars—with a complete permanent staff.