

THE ROYAL ENGINEERS AND THEIR WORK IN BRITISH COLUMBIA.

Paper by Lieut.-Colonel R. Wolfenden, read at a Meeting of the Veterans' Association of Vancouver Island, 23rd November, 1900, reported in the Victoria "Daily Colonist" of the following day.

Revised November, 1907.

ANTICIPATING the treat that was in store for them, a large number attended last evening's meeting of the Veterans' Association of Vancouver Island, including a number of officers and non-commissioned officers of the regular forces stationed here. Colonel Wolfenden's paper on the Royal Engineers, and Dr. Potts' review of the Chinese troubles, both proved very interesting. Major Richardson occupied the chair. Colonel Wolfenden's paper follows:—

It was owing to the discovery of gold in large quantities in 1858, in what was then termed New Caledonia, that Mr. (afterwards Sir James) Douglas, Governor of Vancouver Island, reported to the Home Government that, in his opinion, it would be advisable that a Governor should be appointed to administer the new territory, in case of a sudden rush of miners to the new gold fields. His advice was accordingly acted upon, and on the news being received in England in August that large numbers of miners were arriving in the country, "Her Majesty was pleased to appoint Mr. Douglas Governor of the new Colony of British Columbia, as it was now for the first time called. It being also necessary that the Governor should be supported by a proper military force, it became incumbent on the Colonial Minister to select and send out a body of men on whom proper trust and reliance could be placed. It at once occurred to Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, the Colonial Minister, that great advantage would accrue to the Colony could a body of men be sent out possessed at once of military and scientific acquirements, inasmuch as, while in their military capacity they could give all the necessary support to Governor Douglas, their mechanical and scientific labours would contribute in a most important degree to the improvement and colonisation of the country. For such a body he turned to the corps of Royal Engineers, where the call for volunteers was speedily responded to, and the *London Times* shortly afterwards, speaking of the corps with reference to the present expedition, said in a leading article on the subject: 'Whenever Her Majesty's Government wants a body of skilful, intelligent, and industrious mechanics to perform any task requiring peculiar judgment, energy and accuracy, such as the arrangement of a great exhibition, the execution of an accurate national survey, and so on, or even the construction of houses, roads and bridges in a new colony, they have only to turn to the corps of Royal Engineers and they find all the material they want.'

Six officers were appointed to the expedition, viz.: Colonel R. C. Moody, in command; Capt. J. M. Grant, Capt. R. M. Parsons, Capt. H. R. Luard, Lieut. A. R. Lempriere, and Lieut. H. S. Palmer; also Dr. Sedall, as medical officer.

From the large number of volunteers, 150 non-commissioned officers and men were selected, about 30 of whom were married men, and were allowed to bring out their wives and families. The men were composed of surveyors (men who had been employed on the ordnance survey of Great Britain), astronomers, engineers, draughtsmen, architects, accountants, clerks, printers, lithographers, carpenters, boat-builders, masons, bricklayers, blacksmiths, shoemakers, tailors—in fact, men of every trade and calling.

The first detachment—composed mostly of surveyors—sailed from Southampton on the 2nd September, in the steamer "La Plata." On this occasion Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton went on

board the steamer when she was off Cowes, and addressed the party under the command of Capt. Parsons, R. E., at some length, impressing on them the interest he felt in their welfare, and how much the ultimate success of the new colony depended on the exertions of themselves and their comrades.

The second detachment of the expedition, chiefly carpenters, under Capt. Grant, sailed shortly afterwards, both detachments proceeding by way of Panama.

The main body, consisting of Capt. H. R. Luard, Lieut. A. R. Lempriere, Lieut. H. S. Palmer, Dr. Sedall, 118 non-commissioned officers and men, 31 women and 34 children, sailed from Gravesend in the ship "Thames City," on the 10th October, 1858, and arrived at Esquimalt on the 12th April, 1859, after a long and weary voyage of six months, although varied considerably through calling at the Falkland Islands (where Col. Moody had formerly been Governor) for fresh water and provisions, nearly a fortnight being spent there. The ship also put in at Valparaiso for a few days.

As may be imagined, it was hard to fill in the time during so long a voyage, but, owing to the foresight and kindness of a Capt. Marsh, R. E., means were furnished for the publication in manuscript of a weekly paper named "The Emigrant Soldiers' Gazette and Cape Horn Chronicle," from which I have already quoted, and which has greatly assisted me in preparing this brief, although I hope not altogether uninteresting paper. "The Emigrant Soldiers' Gazette" was edited by Second Corporal Charles Sinnett, who had been elected to the position, ably assisted by Lieut. Palmer. The reading of the paper by Capt. Luard, every Saturday night, was eagerly looked forward to, and was a source of great amusement, as it contained many interesting as well as scientific articles, such as the Natural History of the Voyage, correspondence upon almost every conceivable subject, Naval and Military Intelligence, Births and Deaths (but no Marriages), Songs, Poetry, Charades, Conundrums, Advertisements, etc., etc.; in fact the paper was full of intelligence, wit and humour from beginning to end. As an example of humour, I will read to you the account of a horrible murder which was supposed to have taken place—in reality it was only the killing of a sheep:—

"ALLEGED MURDER AND MUTILATION OF THE BODY.

"On Monday last considerable excitement prevailed in the vicinity of Longboat Alley in consequence of the discovery of the body of a middle-aged gentleman suspended by the heels, with his throat cut from ear to ear. An inquest was immediately held on the body. It was at first thought that the unfortunate gentleman had committed jimmycide, and, but for the position of the body, such doubtless would have been the verdict. One of the witnesses (a respectable townsman of ours, formerly a butcher, but who, finding business not sufficiently remunerative, wisely retired) said in his evidence that the ruffian or ruffians had endeavoured to sever the jugular vein, but, not succeeding in their horrible purpose, had tried to find its whereabouts by inserting a finger into the wound, and had actually poked the vein in question out of the way, thereby causing several unsuccessful attempts at decapitation by more formidable instruments. Three knives were found near the body; one, that doubtless by which the first cut was inflicted, answered the description of a glazier's putty knife (great sensation); the second bore evident marks of having lately been used to cut up salt junk; the last was a horrible looking weapon measuring three feet six inches and one-eighth in the blade. The name of the deceased is at present unknown. One of the witnesses said that he