

LETTER

TO

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR

WITH REFERENCE TO

THE DEFENCE OF CANADA,

BY

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL JERVOIS, R.E., C.B.,
DEPUTY-DIRECTOR OF FORTIFICATIONS.

Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.



LONDON:
PRINTED BY GEORGE EDWARD EYRE AND WILLIAM SPOTTISWOODE,
PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY,
FOR HER MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.

1865.

[Price 1d.]

Letter with reference to the Defence of Canada.

MY LORD,

War Office, January 1865.

1. HAVING in accordance with your Lordship's desire visited the British North American Possessions during the autumn of 1863, to ascertain the condition of their defences, I pointed out to your Lordship in my report dated February 1864, as the result of my inspection in Canada, that the construction of certain works of fortification at Montreal and Quebec was essential to enable the British troops and local forces to resist an invasion by the Americans with any prospect of success. In obedience to your Lordship's further directions, I again proceeded to Canada in the beginning of September last, for the purpose of affording to Lord Monck and to the Provincial Government of Canada every information in my power as to the measures which it is desirable to adopt for the defence of that colony. I have now the honour to report as follows:—

2. I embarked at Liverpool for North America on the 3rd September last, and after visiting Halifax, Nova Scotia, and travelling through New Brunswick *en route* to Canada, I arrived at Quebec on the 23rd of the same month. I then communicated with Lord Monck with reference to the object of my mission. I also proceeded to Montreal to confer with Lieutenant-General Sir W. F. Williams, the General commanding the troops in British North America. Subsequently I had interviews with several members of the Government of Canada, who met at Quebec in October to take part in the Conference with the Delegates from the provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward's Island, and Newfoundland, with reference to the proposed confederation of the provinces of British North America.

3. On the 12th October I had a formal interview with the whole of the Executive Council, who then requested me to state my views with respect to the defence of Canada. A long conversation with the Council took place in consequence of my statement, which led to a paper of question being addressed to me by the Provincial Government. These questions rendered it necessary for me to make a detailed examination of several positions in Upper Canada. I accordingly reconnoitred the country about Kingston, Toronto, Hamilton, London, Paris, and other places. I then prepared a report on the defence of the whole of Canada, embodying my answers to those questions, which report I submitted to the Lieutenant-General commanding, who signified his approval in writing of the measures recommended therein. On my return to Quebec I placed my report in the hands of the Canadian Government. After interviews with the Governor General and some of the members of the Council, I left Quebec for New York and returned to England at the end of last November.

4. Although the proposals which resulted from my communication with the Canadian Government are stated in my report to the Council it may be convenient that I should state briefly in this place the views which I expressed at my interview with the Council.

5. I observed, that although, owing to the length and nature of the frontier of Canada, it was impossible to protect it throughout its whole extent, an enemy must nevertheless acquire possession of certain vital points before he could obtain any decided military advantage;—that there are only a few such points,—and that if proper arrangements were made for the defence of those places by the construction of fortifications, the provision of gun-boats, and the improvement of communications;—the militia and volunteer forces of the country, if properly organized, and aided by British troops, would be enabled to hold them during the period, (only about six months in the year), when military operations on a *large* scale could be carried on against them, and thus those forces could resist an attack with the best possible chance of success. I pointed out

that under this view, the positions of the greatest military importance in the country are Montreal and Quebec;— Montreal, because, being at the head of the sea navigation of the St. Lawrence and the focus of all communication by land and water between the eastern and western districts, it is the commercial and strategical capital of Canada, and, from its position on the frontier, is moreover the point upon which the enemy could most readily make a grand attack;— Quebec, as being the first point of military communication between Canada and Great Britain, and the point to which the British forces must retire, if overpowered. I stated that with those two points placed in a condition for defence, and the river between Montreal and Quebec commanded by iron-plated vessels, a successful resistance could be made to any attempt to subjugate the country so long as Great Britain had the command of the sea.

6. I observed at the same time that, although looking at the question from a purely military point of view, the defence of Lower Canada was by far the most important consideration, I was, nevertheless, aware of the objections that would be raised if no provision were made for the defence of the country to westward of Montreal. I remarked, that it was quite possible, under certain conditions and with sufficient men and means, to devise a scheme for the defence of Upper Canada; the conditions referred to being,—that efficient communication should be established with the Western districts; that the country between Lake St. Louis and Lake Ontario should be protected by naval, in combination with military means; that a naval depôt should be provided at Kingston, which place should be fortified so as to form a secure harbour for gun-boats on Lake Ontario. With the naval command of that lake, troops acting for the defence of the Western Peninsula of Canada might, if overpowered, fall back upon its shore at Toronto, where, if proper works were constructed, they might act in conjunction with the naval force for the defence of that position, either until reinforcements arrived from other parts of the country, or until the winter season obliged the enemy to retire.

7. The proposals for permanent defences contained in my report to the Canadian Government may be divided under two heads:— First, the defence of Canada so far as there is communication for ocean steam ships, *i.e.*, as far westward as Montreal inclusive. Second, the defence of the country to westward of Montreal.

Under the first head it is proposed that permanent works of fortification shall be constructed for the defence of Montreal and Quebec. Under the second head it is proposed to fortify Kingston, and to construct certain permanent works for the defence of Toronto and Hamilton against an attack from the lake.

My report also contains suggestions with respect to the provision of gun-boats, the improvement of certain communications, and the construction of works of defence which might be thrown up in time of war.

8. I have had no official intimation of the course which the Provincial Government propose to adopt with respect to the suggestions which I had the honour to submit to them; but I have the best reason for stating that they concur generally in the whole of my proposals, and that they are ready to meet the mother country in a fair and becoming spirit in carrying out the measures which are requisite for the defence of Canada.

9. I regard the works for the defence of Montreal and Quebec as being of the most pressing importance.

I estimate the cost of those for Quebec at	-	-	-	£200,000
Those for Montreal at	-	-	-	£443,000
And that the armaments for the works at those places will cost about	-	-	-	£100,000

The works of fortification recommended at Kingston, Toronto, and Hamilton will cost about £500,000, and the armaments for those places about £100,000.

10. With respect to the condition of the local forces of Canada, I have the honour to state, for the information of your Lordship, that there already exist in the principal towns of Canada several corps of volunteer militia of the different arms of the service, according to the last reports amounting in the aggregate to 21,700* men: these frequently turn out for drill, and are paid by the Government for their services. I saw

* The returns of previous years showed a force of about 35,000 volunteer militia, but a large number have been struck off the roll during the past year, owing to their not having given sufficient evidence of a desire to become acquainted with their duty. Thus the number, which was nominally about 35,000, has been reduced according to the latest reports to 21,700.

several of the volunteer regiments turn out at Quebec; they were well dressed and appointed; their appearance was soldier-like, and they went through a field-day very creditably. I have reason to believe that the volunteer militia of Montreal, Toronto, and other places are at least equal in efficiency to the volunteers at Quebec. A great proportion of the officers of these corps have obtained certificates of proficiency from military boards before whom they have presented themselves for examination.

11. As regards the militia,* the attention of the Provincial Government has during the last year been directed chiefly to the establishment of military schools of instruction for officers. The Government rightly judged that it is of the first importance in providing for the efficiency of the militia service that there should be a body of officers acquainted with the duties of the military profession. Accordingly, two schools of instruction for officers are now in operation in Canada,—one in connexion with the 17th regiment at Quebec, the other with the 16th regiment at Toronto. The Lieut.-Colonels, (who are directors of the schools,) and officers of these regiments specially told off to teach, are paid for this service by the Provincial Government, and certificates are granted by the Colonels to the military pupils according to the degree of proficiency they have attained during the period allotted to each for instruction. A first class certificate is granted to an officer who has made himself acquainted with the interior economy of a regiment and who is capable of manœuvring a battalion; a second class certificate is given to one who has learnt to drill and take command of a company. On the 17th October last, 139 first class and 207 second class certificates had been granted. There were at the same time 764 applicants for admission. The formation of additional schools on the same principle as those which now exist at Quebec and Toronto, and for serjeants as well as officers, is much to be desired.

12. I should here observe that the prospect of the withdrawal of the imperial troops from the western districts in accordance with instructions from this country previous to the confederation movement, has a depressing effect upon the efforts that are being made for the improvement of the organization of the militia of those districts.

As I have already stated, a military school has been established at Toronto in connexion with one of Her Majesty's regiments, and with most satisfactory results. If the British troops were taken away from the western districts, the means of instruction for the militia in that part of the country would at the same time be withdrawn, and thus a very bad effect would be produced amongst the people of Canada generally.

13. I may observe, as an additional reason against the proposed withdrawal of the troops from the western districts, that an immediate expenditure of nearly 20,000*l.* for the accommodation of the troops in Lower Canada would be thereby rendered necessary, and that it would be unadvisable to incur this expenditure at the very time when it is proposed to provide additional barrack accommodation in connexion with the projected works of fortification at Montreal and Quebec. I should add that although the possibility of the troops being cut off would render it dangerous to leave a small and unsupported body of men in the western peninsula of Canada in time of war, the objection would be materially diminished if there were a large and efficient body of militia to act in conjunction with the regular force.

14. I beg therefore respectfully to represent to your Lordship that the troops at present in the Western Peninsula should not be at present withdrawn; but that, on the contrary, every encouragement should be afforded to the organization of the militia in that part of the country by the presence of an imperial regiment at such station as the Provincial Government may select for the formation of another military school on the same principles as those which have been established at Toronto and Quebec.

15. The estimated number of militia-men in Canada of all ranks, inclusive of the reserve men between 45 and 60 years of age, is 470,000. It therefore appears that, with a proper organization, a large force could be made available for the defence of the province, provided there were a sufficient staff of educated officers and non-commissioned officers to whom the men of the several battalions could be attached when called upon for duty. According to the latest report from the Province, the service Militia, so soon as the Government shall be in a position to take the ballot, will consist, exclusive of officers, of 88,245 men.

* In 1863, two Militia Acts were passed by the Canadian Legislature; one, "An Act respecting the Militia;" the other, "An Act respecting the Volunteer Militia Force." The word "Militia" when used alone refers to the former.

16. It appears advisable that some suggestions should be made with regard to the application of funds which the Provincial Government of Canada may hereafter obtain from their Legislature for militia purposes. I have, therefore, consulted with Colonel McMurdo, the Inspector-General of Volunteers in Great Britain, on this subject, and beg to submit the following suggestions :—

17. It is proposed that the force should be organized throughout the country so as to bear as equally as possible on the population of the several districts ; that, in order that the officers and men may be acquainted with each other, the officers should be chosen so far as practicable from those districts, and that their appointments should be conditional on their qualifying themselves either at the schools of instruction, which have proved of so much value, or in any other way that might lead to the desired result, which should be tested by examination. The force thus organized should be told off in companies and battalions, somewhat on the principle of the administrative battalions of volunteers in Great Britain. The companies would be drilled at their respective head quarters, and might be assembled at central points for battalion instruction without necessarily involving an absence of the men from their homes for more than a day at a time.

18. There should be storehouses for arms, accoutrements, and clothing at the head quarters of the several companies, under the care of a serjeant-instructor, who should be permanently appointed to each company. The storehouses may be of an inexpensive construction, and, for the sake of security of the arms, should be surrounded with a palisade or other enclosure. It would obviously be a great advantage to have arms available at all times for the practice of the men of the several companies who might be disposed to profit by their use. With a view, therefore, to afford encouragement both to officers, non-commissioned officers, and men to work at rifle instruction and prize shooting, there should also be a range provided in a convenient locality for each company, or portion of a company, as the circumstances of the locality rendered desirable. By these arrangements the men would obtain a fair knowledge of company drill and musketry practice, which would much facilitate their instruction as a battalion.

19. The permanent staff of the battalion should consist of an adjutant and a serjeant-major for the battalion, with a serjeant-instructor for each company. The adjutant should in the first instance be an experienced officer from the regular army, and should from time to time visit the several companies at their respective localities.

20. It is recommended further that the country should be divided into convenient districts for the concentration of the battalions into brigades and divisions, and that the several corps should be assembled, if practicable, in camps for exercise. A brigade and division staff should be appointed for this purpose.

21. The permanent charges for this organization would be the pay of the adjutants, the serjeant-majors, and serjeant instructors ; the cost of erecting storehouses ; the provision of arms, accoutrements, and clothing ; the pay of such battalions as might be called out annually for drill ; and the outlay requisite for the education of officers and serjeants at the schools of instruction, as already established.

22. It is for consideration whether, when not embodied, the principle of a capitation grant in proportion to the certified efficiency of the members of the several companies would not be desirable. (See Order in Council, pages 36 to 43 of Volunteer Regulations for Great Britain ; also Articles 259 to 278 of the same Regulations as regards the rules under which the capitation grant is distributed.)

23. It is believed that an organization on these principles would afford the means of applying the funds at the disposal of the Canadian Government for militia purposes to the best account, and with the least amount of inconvenience to the widely scattered population of the country.

24. Whether, however, this or any other possible arrangement be made for the organization of the militia of Canada, it can scarcely be expected that the force that could be mustered at an outbreak of hostilities would be equal to withstand the enemy in the open field. Works of defence are, therefore, essential to enable our comparatively small forces to hold the points against which the main attacks would be directed. It is at the commencement of a war that the greatest danger is to be apprehended, and it is submitted that it is only by availing ourselves of the advantages afforded by fortifications that we can provide against our troops being overpowered at the first onset, or that time can be obtained for rendering the militia available for the defence of the country.

The question appears to be ;—whether the British force now in Canada shall be with-

drawn, in order to avoid the risk of its defeat, or whether the necessary measures shall be taken to enable that force to be of use for the defence of the province.

25. The sum required for the construction of the proposed works and armaments at Montreal and Quebec would only be about one year's expense of the regular force we now maintain in Canada.

It is a delusion to suppose that that force can be of any use for the defence of the country without fortifications to compensate for the comparative smallness of its numbers. Even when aided by the whole of the local militia that could at present be made available, it would, in the event of war, be obliged to retreat before the superior numbers by which it would be attacked; and it would be fortunate if it succeeded in embarking at Quebec, and putting to sea without serious defeat. On the other hand, if the works now recommended be constructed, the vital points of the country could be defended, and the regular army would become a nucleus and support, round which the people of Canada would rally to resist aggression, and to preserve that connexion with the mother country, which their loyalty, their interests, and their love of true freedom alike make them desirous to maintain.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's obedient, humble Servant,

WM. F. DRUMMOND JERVOIS.

The Right Hon. Earl de Grey and Ripon,
Secretary of State for War,
&c. &c. &c.

LONDON:
Printed by GEORGE E. EYRE and WILLIAM SPOTTISWOODE,
Printers to the Queen's most Excellent Majesty.
For Her Majesty's Stationery Office.