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Willard E. Ireland

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## PRE-CONFEDERATION DEFENCE PROBLEMS OF THE PACIFIC COLONIES

By WILLARD E. IRELAND

*The Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, B.C.*

THE history of the colonial period of British Columbia is of unusual interest by virtue of its compactness. Within the brief span of twenty-five years, British Columbia advanced from the status of an unorganized tract of wilderness in process of exploitation by the Hudson's Bay Company to the dignity of a province of the Dominion of Canada. The rapidity of that advance has made it all the more difficult to trace trends and developments which are the more readily observable in the more mature eastern British American colonies in consequence of their slower evolution. Within the ambit of this paper it is hoped that at least a survey may be offered of the problem of defence—the problem which in Eastern Canada played so important a role in the federation of British North America.

In a very real sense British colonial activity in the Pacific North-West was the direct result of the Oregon "war panic" of 1845-6. The transmontaine boundary between British and American territories had been the subject of diplomatic negotiation for over thirty years.<sup>1</sup> Joint occupancy had been adopted as a temporary expedient and had been continued only in view of the great difficulty experienced in discovering a more satisfactory permanent arrangement. In the interim British interests in the region had been maintained by the Hudson's Bay Company, and, from a commercial point of view, so effectively that prior to 1840 American influence west of the Rocky Mountains was almost negligible. The infiltration of American missionaries, however, paved the way for that influx of American settlers in the period 1842-5 which made further postponement of the fixing of a permanent boundary an impossibility.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the British position in Oregon had been made all the more unhappy by the failure of the efforts of the Hudson's Bay Company to colonize the north bank of the Columbia with colonists from the Red River Settlement.

From a diplomatic point of view the situation was further complicated by the state of American public opinion. The election of James K. Polk in November, 1844, on the popular cry of "Fifty-Four Forty or Fight" had roused public enthusiasm to a high pitch. The British government could and did overlook much of the bombast of pre-election propaganda. But the passage of the Oregon Bill on February 3, 1845, by the overwhelming majority of 149 to 59 in the House of Representatives and the enunciation of a "clear and unquestionable" title to Oregon in President Polk's Inaugural provoked a revulsion of feeling in Great Britain. The press, led by *The Times*,<sup>3</sup> assumed a belligerent tone. Even Lord Aberdeen and Sir Robert Peel were moved to make stirring speeches in the British Parliament professing a determination not to

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of this prolonged controversy, see J. M. Callahan, *American Foreign Policy in Canadian Relations* (New York, 1937), 127-36, 215-36.

<sup>2</sup>Frederick Merk, "The Oregon Pioneers and the Boundary" (*American Historical Review*, XXIX, July, 1924, 681-99).

<sup>3</sup>*The Times* (London), March 27, 1845.

recede from their original demands.<sup>4</sup> The British Cabinet for some time had been alarmed by the situation in Oregon, and Peel, the Prime Minister, was inclined to question British supremacy in that quarter. His doubts were justified; for upon direct application, the Hudson's Bay Company presented extracts from Simpson's latest report which clearly indicated the preponderance of American influence.<sup>5</sup>

The preliminary "war panic" aroused the imperial government to action. Word of the passing of the Oregon Bill by the House of Representatives led to a request to the Admiralty that a war vessel should frequently visit the Oregon coast and that Rear-Admiral Sir George Seymour should himself visit the Columbia.<sup>6</sup> In consequence, H.M. sloop *Modeste*, which had visited the Columbia in the fall of 1844, was stationed off Fort Vancouver from November, 1845, until April, 1847. Rear-Admiral Seymour never made the suggested investigation but in February, 1845, H.M. frigate *America*, Captain the Hon. John Gordon commanding, was ordered to Puget Sound to procure information as to conditions on the Columbia. Gordon was a brother of the then foreign secretary, Lord Aberdeen, and he selected Lieutenant William Peel, son of the Prime Minister, to make the overland journey to Fort Vancouver. Peel's investigation was considered of sufficient importance to warrant his immediate despatch to London. His report of September 27, 1845, was presented to the Foreign Office on February 13, 1846.<sup>7</sup>

The report itself, other than indicating the preponderance of the American over the British elements in the population, contained very little information of military value. The presence in London of so recent a visitor from the disputed territory was of the utmost value to the British Cabinet, particularly in view of the fact that Lieutenant Peel, while on the Columbia, had met and discussed the whole situation with Lieutenants Henry J. Warre and Mervin Vavasour. These two officers had been despatched from Canada to conduct a military reconnaissance of British territory west of Canada generally and of the Columbia district in particular.<sup>8</sup> In the creation and forwarding of this expedition, the Hudson's Bay Company played an important role, although it is to be noted that their principal interest was the establishment of a garrison at Red River Settlement and that as a means of protection against the inhabitants rather than with reference to any impending difficulty with the United States.<sup>9</sup> From August 25, 1845,

<sup>4</sup>*Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, LXXIX, 115-23, 178-99.

<sup>5</sup>Public Record Office, F.O. 5, vol. 439, Pelly to Addington, Feb. 26, 1845, with enclosures. (Transcripts of the portions of this series pertaining to the North-West are in the Archives of British Columbia.)

<sup>6</sup>F.O. 5, vol. 440, Draft to Admiralty, March 5, 1845, confidential.

<sup>7</sup>F.O. 5, vol. 459, Peel to Gordon, Sept. 27, 1845. This report and related documents have been reprinted; see L. M. Scott (ed.), "Report of Lieutenant Peel on Oregon in 1845-46" (*Oregon Historical Quarterly*, XXIX, March, 1928, 51-76). For the activity of the British Admiralty in this quarter, see Major F. V. Longstaff, "Notes on the Early History of the Pacific Station and the Inception of the Esquimalt Royal Naval Establishment" (*Canadian Defence Quarterly*, III, April, 1926, 309-18).

<sup>8</sup>The documents relating to this expedition are to be found in F.O. 5, vol. 457. The more important have been reprinted, though unfortunately from imperfect transcripts; see J. Schafer (ed.), "Documents relative to Warre and Vavasour's Military Reconnaissance [*sic*] in Oregon, 1845-6" (*Oregon Historical Quarterly*, X, March, 1909, 1-99).

<sup>9</sup>This point has been ably developed in C. P. Stacey, "The Hudson's Bay Company and Anglo-American Military Rivalries during the Oregon Dispute" (*Canadian Historical Review*, XVIII, Sept., 1937, 281-300).

until March 25, 1846, these officers examined the situation west of the Rocky Mountains and, in general, they were not optimistic of the military outlook. The overland route used by the Hudson's Bay Company was found to be greatly inferior for the conveyance of troops to the South Pass route open to the Americans. Moreover, the numerical superiority of the American population made any defensive action all the more difficult. Nevertheless certain defence projects were undertaken by the Hudson's Bay Company on their advice. Their first report on Oregon affairs, written at Fort Vancouver, October 26, 1845, did not reach England until July 6, 1846, and had, consequently, no influence upon the boundary negotiations, but it is highly probable that Lieutenant Peel, who was fully cognizant of their views, placed similar information before the Foreign Office in his verbal communications.

The British government was now faced with irrefutable evidence of the ascendancy of American interests on the Columbia. In addition, larger national issues, particularly tariff and commercial policy, suggested the desirability of a pacific solution to the difficulty. Moreover, by its decision to move its headquarters from Fort Vancouver to Fort Victoria, the Hudson's Bay Company had demonstrated its belief that the success of the fur trade no longer required the occupation of the banks of the Columbia River. Under these circumstances negotiations were brought to a sudden conclusion and by the Oregon Treaty of June 15, 1846, the 49th parallel became the boundary, deflecting at the coast so as to include the whole of Vancouver Island within British territory.

Within three months of the signing of the boundary treaty the British government began preparations to forestall any further advance of the restless American frontier in the Pacific North-West. The opportunity was afforded by the receipt of an inquiry from the Hudson's Bay Company regarding the status of their holdings north of the new boundary line. The minute of the Colonial Secretary, Lord Grey, is illuminating: "This is a very difficult and important quest<sup>n</sup>. Looking to the encroaching spirit of the U.S. I think it is of importance to strengthen the B<sup>n</sup> hold upon the territory now assigned to us by encouraging the settlement upon it of B<sup>n</sup> subjects; & I am also of opin<sup>n</sup> that such settlement c<sup>d</sup> only be advantageously effected under the auspices of the Hudson's Bay Co. wh. I am therefore disposed to encourage."<sup>10</sup> The difficulties were, indeed, great. The proponents of free trade were apt to look askance at an arrangement involving the monopolistic Hudson's Bay Company. Current anti-imperialist sentiment, moreover, frowned upon the establishment of new colonies. In addition, both "colonial reformers" and "Little Englanders" were vehement in their denunciation of the enormous colonial military expenditures of the British Treasury. Yet Lord Grey was able to over-ride all objections. The Royal Grant of January 13, 1849, constituting the Crown colony of Vancouver Island was a masterpiece of the art of compromise. The "colonial reformer" was pacified by the provision for representative government and the modified application of the land theories of the "systematic colonisers." The "Little Englander" found that the new colony would impose no new demands upon the imperial purse, for the basic condition of the grant read, as follows: ". . . the said Governor and Company

<sup>10</sup>Public Record Office, C.O. 305, vol. 1, Minute, Sept. 10, 1846, on Pelly to Grey, Sept. 7, 1846. Subsequently Lord Palmerston, the Foreign Secretary, confirmed this opinion.

... should defray the entire expense of any civil and military establishments which may be required for the protection and government of such settlement or settlements (except, nevertheless, during the time of hostilities between Great Britain and any foreign European or American power)...<sup>11</sup>

The anomalies of the situation are patent. A governor was to be appointed by the Crown but the financial affairs of the colony were left largely to the discretion of the Hudson's Bay Company. A clash of interest was inevitable and led, eventually, to the resignation of the first Governor, Richard Blanshard, and his replacement by James Douglas who, at the same time, was Agent of the fur trade company.

The immediate problem of defence consisted in the protection of the small colonial population against the Indians. The visit of ships of war of the Pacific Squadron at rare intervals and for short calls gave scant comfort to the Governor.<sup>12</sup> As a result of continued Indian outrages, Governor Blanshard in September, 1850, appealed to the Colonial Office for military assistance. "I would beg to press on your Lordship's consideration, the necessity of protecting this Colony by a garrison of regular troops, in preference to a body of pensioners, for as the principal service that they would be called on to perform would be to repress and over-awe the natives, a moveable force would be necessary and I think that marines would be better calculated for the duty than Troops of the Line."<sup>13</sup> The response of the Colonial Office was a categorical refusal to garrison the island, coupled with the announcement that the government would not undertake to protect British subjects who voluntarily exposed themselves to the treachery of the native tribes.<sup>14</sup> It is to be noted that this policy was in perfect keeping with the new imperial military policy announced by Lord Grey in his famous despatch to Lord Elgin on March 14, 1851.<sup>15</sup> The Governor was, consequently, left to his own devices in dealing with the Indian problem. The official correspondence reveals many incidents and in most cases recourse was made to assistance from the naval forces, which, after 1852, appeared with greater regularity in the waters of Vancouver Island.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from the danger of Indian outrages against individual settlers an even more serious condition existed, occasioned by the frequent migration of large numbers of northern Indians to the settled portions

<sup>11</sup>*Parliamentary Paper*, 1849, no. 103, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup>C.O. 305, vol. 2, Blanshard to Grey, Aug. 18, 1850. (The official correspondence relating to the Pacific colonies is also preserved in the Archives of British Columbia.)

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, Blanshard to Grey, Sept. 18, 1850. This incident also reveals the clash of interest implicit in the Royal Grant. James Douglas, the Company's representative, writing of his relations with the Governor, remarked: "True it is we differ in opinion as to public matters—as for example he is anxious to have a military force stationed on the Island—which is unquestionably a proper measure, but as an agent of the Company who would have to maintain that force I have endeavoured to show that there was no positive necessity for it" (Hudson's Bay Company Archives, D 5/30, Douglas to Simpson, May 21, 1851, private). Extracts from this source are published with the kind permission of the Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company.

<sup>14</sup>Public Record Office, C.O. 410, vol. 1, Grey to Blanshard, March 20, 1851. This policy was confirmed in *ibid.*, Grey to Douglas, Nov. 5, 1851.

<sup>15</sup>C. P. Stacey, *Canada and the British Army, 1846-1871* (London, 1936), 79-81.

<sup>16</sup>To mention but a few incidents, C.O. 305, vol. 3, Blanshard to Grey, Aug. 4, 1851; Douglas to Pakington, Nov. 11, 1852; vol. 4, Douglas to Pakington, Jan. 21, 1853. See also Major F. V. Longstaff, "Notes on the History of the Pacific Station" (*Canadian Defence Quarterly*, IV, April, 1927, 295-7).

of the island. On one occasion, in 1853, such a visitation prompted Governor Douglas to request a delay in the departure of the naval vessel, then about to sail, until the natives had dispersed.<sup>17</sup> With the outbreak of the fierce Indian War in the adjacent American territory in 1855, the presence of these natives in the vicinity of Victoria constituted a serious menace. That year no less than two thousand hostile Indians arrived. To meet this danger the Legislative Council on June 21, 1855, resolved "That a Company of ten, to consist of 8 Privates, 1 Corporal, 1 Sergeant, besides a competent officer to act as Commander, be immediately raised and maintained at the public expense until the Northern Savages leave the settlements; . . ."<sup>18</sup> Actually the Governor only created a police force of four men in consequence of the presence of naval protection, but he took occasion to suggest to the Colonial Office the desirability of equipping a regular force of twenty to thirty men.<sup>19</sup> Such action was sanctioned by the home authorities on the distinct understanding that the expense involved would be assumed locally.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently the Legislative Council authorized the Governor to raise a force of thirty men.<sup>21</sup> The Governor, fortunately, was able to secure men at a lower rate of pay than the Council had anticipated, it having been doubtful, in their opinion, "whether men could be raised in this Colony for the public service without the stimulus of high pay."<sup>22</sup> In no way could this action be considered as the creation of a permanent militia. It was raised to meet an immediate situation and in all probability was disbanded with the dispersion of the Indians.<sup>23</sup>

The Indians did not, however, constitute the sole defence problem of the infant colony. During the winter of 1851-2 Governor Douglas was faced with the prospect of American inroads into the Queen Charlotte Islands where gold had been discovered. It was reported that the Americans planned "to establish an independent government until by force or fraud they become annexed to the United States."<sup>24</sup> The Governor immediately applied for assistance and as a result a war vessel was ordered to remain at Vancouver Island<sup>25</sup> and Douglas received a commission as Lieutenant-Governor of the district. American activity in the region was effectively prevented by the hostility of the Indians.

Of a more serious nature was the situation created by the Crimean War. On the Pacific coast the relations between the Russian and British possessions had been most amicable since 1839.<sup>26</sup> Any change in that relationship, as presaged by the growing tension in Europe, though vitally affecting the colony, was completely beyond its control. Several

<sup>17</sup>C.O. 305, vol. 4, Douglas to Newcastle, Oct. 24, 1853.

<sup>18</sup>*Minutes of the Council of Vancouver Island* (Archives Memoir no. II, Victoria, 1918), 27.

<sup>19</sup>C.O. 305, vol. 6, Douglas to Russell, Aug. 21, 1855; Douglas to Molesworth, Dec. 12, 1855.

<sup>20</sup>C.O. 410, vol. 1, Labouchere to Douglas, Nov. 12, 1855.

<sup>21</sup>Feb. 27, 1856 (*Minutes of Council*, 28).

<sup>22</sup>C.O. 305, vol. 7, Douglas to Sir G. Grey, March 1, 1856.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, Douglas to Labouchere, Sept. 6, 1856. In an expedition in September, 1856, against the Cowichan Indians a force of 400 seamen and marines with 18 volunteers from Victoria was used.

<sup>24</sup>C.O. 305, vol. 3, Douglas to Grey, Jan. 29, 1852.

<sup>25</sup>C.O. 410, vol. 1, Pakington to Douglas, March 18, 1852; Pakington to Douglas, Aug. 2, 1852.

<sup>26</sup>Donald C. Davidson, "Relation of the Hudson's Bay Company with the Russian American Company on the Northwest Coast, 1829-1867" (*British Columbia Historical Quarterly*, V, Jan., 1941, 33-51).

months before the rupture Governor Douglas had been requested to report on the defences of Vancouver Island. His report revealed not only the complete absence of any military protection but also the absence of the necessary power to raise such levies of men as might be required. The possibility of raising an irregular force of whites and Indians was brought forward, and a requisition for equipment for five hundred men was made, coupled with the request for increased naval protection. With this force Douglas was confident that the colony could be made secure from attack and might even take the field against the adjacent Russian American possessions. The Governor, quite properly, assumed that the expenses involved would be defrayed by the imperial government.<sup>27</sup>

The Legislative Council took an entirely opposite point of view. In their opinion to arm the Indians was a dangerous policy and, moreover, the small number of whites in the colony made it impossible to offer any effectual resistance. In consequence it was decided "to leave the defence of the Colony against the attempts of Russia to the care of Her Majesty's Government, and not to call out the militia of the Colony."<sup>28</sup> It was agreed, however, that until such time as the imperial government took action, the Hudson's Bay Company Propeller *Otter* should be armed and manned. In the meantime the Colonial Office had decided it was both "unnecessary and inadvisable" to comply with the request for arms for five hundred soldiers. More frequent visits of the naval vessels were considered sufficient protection.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, they further refused to sanction or admit responsibility for the outlay involved in the equipping of the *Otter* as a guard ship,<sup>30</sup> although upon reconsideration this charge was later assumed by the imperial Treasury.<sup>31</sup>

The defenceless state of the colony was alarming to the inhabitants. But for a short visit from the fleet on its return from the disastrous attack on Petropaulovski, the colony had not been visited by any naval vessels since the declaration of war.<sup>32</sup> The news of the neutrality agreement between the Russian American and Hudson's Bay Companies was consequently hailed with enthusiasm in the colony.<sup>33</sup> The Crimean crisis produced no effective improvement in the military condition of the colony. From the naval point of view gains were made, for in response to the request of the commander-in-chief of the Pacific Squadron, a naval hospital had been erected at Esquimalt, thus laying the basis for the future naval establishment.

The problem of defence became more serious in 1858. The gold rush to Fraser River and the flare-up of the dispute over the possession of San Juan Island are well-known historical incidents but from a military point of view they are significant in that they resulted in the despatch of imperial forces to the Pacific coast for the first time.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>27</sup>C.O. 305, vol. 5, Douglas to Newcastle, May 16, 1854.

<sup>28</sup>July 12, 1854 (*Minutes of Council*, 25). See also C.O. 305, vol. 5, Douglas to Newcastle, Aug. 17, 1854.

<sup>29</sup>C.O. 410, vol. 1, Sir G. Grey to Douglas, Aug. 5, 1854.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, Sir G. Grey to Douglas, Dec. 18, 1854.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, Molesworth to Douglas, Aug. 3, 1855.

<sup>32</sup>C.O. 305, vol. 6, Douglas to Sir G. Grey, Feb. 1, 1855.

<sup>33</sup>C.O. 410, vol. 1, Russell to Douglas, June 20, 1855; C.O. 305, vol. 6, Douglas to Russell, Sept. 21, 1855.

<sup>34</sup>Another detachment of Royal Engineers composed of 65 non-commissioned officers and sappers under Lieutenant-Colonel J. S. Hawkins, R.E., had been sent to the Pacific North-West in the summer of 1858 in connection with the North American Boundary Commission.

To meet the situation created by the large migration of alien miners to the unorganized territory bordering on Fraser River, British Columbia was organized as a separate Crown colony by Act of the imperial Parliament on August 2, 1859.<sup>35</sup> Prior to this event, Governor Douglas had kept the Colonial Office informed of the events taking place on the mainland beyond his jurisdiction. While naval vessels might offer adequate protection to the coastal areas, a military force was essential in the interior and, in Governor Douglas's opinion, a single company of infantry would suffice.<sup>36</sup> The Colonial Office was likewise aware of the altered circumstances and, in consequence, a detachment of the Royal Engineers, amounting in all to 165 officers and men, was sent to the new colony under the command of Colonel R. C. Moody.

This force, however, could hardly be considered a military garrison. Lytton, the Colonial Secretary, himself admitted, "This force is sent for scientific and practical purposes and not solely for military objects."<sup>37</sup> The instructions issued to both Governor Douglas and Colonel Moody suggest that civil rather than military functions were uppermost in the minds of the Colonial Secretary.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the entire expense of their maintenance, save only the regimental pay, was charged against the colony.<sup>39</sup>

The Royal Engineers played an important part in the opening up of the country. Their surveys and road constructions were of vital importance to the well-being of the colony but their military service was almost negligible. The famous "Ned McGowan War" at Hill's Bar in January, 1859, provided almost the only occasion for their employment in a military capacity. The expense involved in the maintenance of the force was considerable and constituted a serious drain on colonial funds. The Colonial Office, working upon the assumption that a gold colony would immediately have at its disposal large revenues, insisted that British Columbia should be self-supporting,<sup>40</sup> whereas, in reality, the colony was faced with enormous outlays of capital in order to make the gold regions accessible.<sup>41</sup> Almost from the outset Governor Douglas was doubtful of the wisdom of the experiment of uniting civil with military duties. In October, 1859, he wrote:

Could the Royal Engineers be wholly and solely employed in civil labor, I doubt not that their services would be invaluable, but when it is considered that their military duties must be attended to, and that under all circumstances strict Military Discipline must prevail, it is easy to comprehend how restricted their services in reality becomes, and how expensive is the cost of their labor, . . .<sup>42</sup>

<sup>35</sup>Imperial Statute, 21 & 22 Vict., c. 99.

<sup>36</sup>Public Record Office, C.O. 60, vol. 1, Douglas to Stanley, July 19, 1858.

<sup>37</sup>Public Record Office, C.O. 398, vol. 1, Lytton to Douglas, July 31, 1858.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, Lytton to Douglas, Oct. 16, 1858; Lytton to Moody, Oct. 29, 1858, enclosed in Lytton to Douglas, Nov. 1, 1858.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, Lytton to Douglas, Sept. 2, 1858.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, Lytton to Douglas, Sept. 2, 1858; Lytton to Douglas, April 12, 1859; Newcastle to Douglas, Oct. 28, 1859; Newcastle to Douglas, May 11, 1861.

<sup>41</sup>C.O. 60, vol. 1, Douglas to Lytton, Nov. 1, 1858; Douglas to Lytton, Dec. 7, 1858; vol. 5, Douglas to Newcastle, Oct. 24, 1859; vol. 10, Douglas to Newcastle, Jan. 26, 1861; vol. 11, Douglas to Newcastle, Nov. 30, 1861; vol. 13, Douglas to Newcastle, May 13, 1862.

<sup>42</sup>C.O. 60, vol. 5, Douglas to Newcastle, Oct. 24, 1859.



Later, in January, 1863, he returned to the question when discussing the expenses of the detachment:

I am merely dealing with the Financial question. I do not desire to touch the abstract one of how far a Colony should assist the Mother Country to support troops stationed in the Colony for Imperial purposes. To old and settled Colonies such a function may have a relation, but to a young Colony struggling against most extraordinary difficulties, it can have but little application. In proportion as it is applied, so will it progress; the more rapid its progression, the sooner will it be in a position to require the least amount of Imperial assistance.<sup>43</sup>

Under these circumstances it is not difficult to find reasons for the disbandment of this force in the summer of 1863.

The defence measures undertaken by the imperial government were not confined to the despatch of the Royal Engineers. Simultaneously with the organization of that force in England, the Admiralty ordered the transfer of a body of supernumerary Royal Marines from China to Vancouver Island.<sup>44</sup> They reached Esquimalt on board H.M.S. *Tribune* on February 13, 1859,<sup>45</sup> while the main body of the detachment of the Royal Engineers did not arrive until April 12, 1859.<sup>46</sup> Immediately upon the arrival of the latter force, both units were sent to the mainland, although a small party of the marines was retained in Victoria by Governor Douglas. The Royal Marines assisted the Royal Engineers in the execution of civil duties such as road construction, but their presence was soon regarded as unnecessary and their withdrawal was ordered in July, 1859. Fortunately this order was not immediately carried out, for at that moment the San Juan dispute assumed an alarming aspect. Inspired by Brigadier-General W. S. Harney, large forces of American troops were landed on San Juan Island in the summer of 1859. To detail the intricacies of this dispute at this opportunity is impossible, but suffice it to say that eventually a joint military occupation was decided upon, and in March, 1860, the Royal Marines were established as a garrison on San Juan Island,<sup>47</sup> where they remained until 1871.

Moreover the imperial government was also desirous of stimulating colonial self-reliance in matters of defence. The detachment of Royal Engineers included several officers experienced in cavalry and artillery drill, and these were to form the nucleus of any additional military force that might be required. In Lytton's own words: "From England we send skill and discipline, the raw material, (that is the mere men) a Colony intended for free institutions, and on the border of so powerful a neighbour as the United States of America, should learn betimes, of itself to supply."<sup>48</sup> Governor Douglas, however, did not avail himself of the opportunity thus afforded and consequently prior to the recall of the Royal Engineers neither local militia nor volunteer forces were

<sup>43</sup>C.O. 60, vol. 15, Douglas to Newcastle, Jan. 10, 1863.

<sup>44</sup>C.O. 398, vol. 1, Lytton to Douglas, Sept. 2, 1858.

<sup>45</sup>C.O. 60, vol. 4, Douglas to Lytton, April 11, 1859.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, Douglas to Lytton, April 25, 1859.

<sup>47</sup>C.O. 305, vol. 13, Douglas to Newcastle, March 27, 1860.

<sup>48</sup>C.O. 398, vol. 1, Lytton to Douglas, Oct. 16, 1858.

raised on the mainland.<sup>49</sup> The reasons for this apparent negligence are clearly set forth by the Governor.

The population of British Columbia would as you correctly surmise zealously come forward, if required, for their own protection but it has always appeared to me a most dangerous policy to put the sword into the hands of aliens who have no love for British institutions, and who might turn it against the government whenever it suited their purpose. The geographical position of British Columbia must be remembered, & it also must not be forgotten that until lately British Subjects formed but a small portion of the multitudes that poured into the country, . . . The difficulties attendant upon the employment of a volunteer force are consequently great; but apart from other considerations there is one very grave objection which particularly presents itself. In a gold producing country men cannot & will not render their services to the government gratuitously, and the amount of recompense they expect is exorbitant.<sup>50</sup>

Governor Douglas, consequently, preferred to remain dependent upon the moral influence the presence of the Royal Engineers was able to effect upon the inhabitants of British Columbia.

Douglas, as Governor of Vancouver Island, received instructions to impress upon the colonists "the necessity of providing themselves with arms and of learning to use them."<sup>51</sup> The San Juan crisis in 1859 had led to a tentative proposal for the creation of a local militia but lack of equipment and objection to gratuitous service prevented its fulfilment.<sup>52</sup> By 1860, however, the first local volunteer corps was organized under the name of the "Victoria Pioneer Rifles Corps," which organization, oddly enough, was composed of the negro inhabitants of the colony.<sup>53</sup> In February, 1861, the Governor reported the willingness of the white residents to enroll themselves and suggested that in view of the limited colonial resources imperial assistance in the form of a grant of 500 stand of arms would enable him to form a volunteer force that would be "no discredit to the Empire."<sup>54</sup>

The outbreak of the Civil War in the United States conditioned in no small degree the response of the British government to this request. Arrangements were made for the shipment of the 500 stand of rifles for the use of the volunteer forces of Vancouver Island<sup>55</sup> and, in addition, the project of sending an infantry regiment to garrison the island was also discussed and two gun-boats were actually sent to the colony.<sup>56</sup> The outbreak of the war created no particular concern in the colony, although it did give a great impetus to the volunteer movement. By

<sup>49</sup>British Columbia, *Blue Books*, 1859, 1860, 1861, and 1862.

<sup>50</sup>C.O. 60, vol. 4, Douglas to Lytton, July 2, 1859.

<sup>51</sup>C.O. 410, vol. 1, G. C. Lewis to Douglas, Oct. 17, 1860.

<sup>52</sup>MS., Archives of British Columbia, Geo. W. Heaton to Douglas, Aug. 15, 1859, and Aug. 20, 1859.

<sup>53</sup>An invaluable record of the history of early military units is to be found in Lieutenant-Colonel F. A. Robertson, *5th B.C. Regiment Canadian Garrison Artillery and Early Defences of B.C. Coast*, a typescript in the Archives of British Columbia. The details regarding this particular corps, and other colonial units, are to be found in this work.

<sup>54</sup>C.O. 305, vol. 17, Douglas to Newcastle, Feb. 19, 1861.

<sup>55</sup>C.O. 410, vol. 1, Newcastle to Douglas, June 14, 1861.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, Newcastle to Douglas, June 25, 1861.

August, 1861, the "Vancouver Island Volunteer Rifles" and a similar corps at Nanaimo, had come into being. These organizations, together with the coloured corps, brought the total number of effectives to 367. The Governor, in consequence, requested a further 500 stand of arms as well as certain artillery pieces.<sup>57</sup>

The critical turn of events arising out of the *Trent* affair created little excitement in the colonies, but it did lead temporarily to the adoption of a more realistic attitude on the part of the British government. The colonial newspapers viewed the situation with a calm verging on complacency.<sup>58</sup> The Governor, in a confidential despatch reporting the means of defence at his disposal, stated his belief that even with the volunteers the frontier could not be protected against militia or volunteer forces from the United States but with more British troops on hand an offensive campaign against advance posts on the Columbia might well be attempted.<sup>59</sup> The immediate effect of the "war panic" in England was the shipment of additional equipment for the volunteer forces<sup>60</sup> and arrangements to land heavier defence pieces from the naval vessels on the coast.<sup>61</sup>

Once the *Trent* crisis had subsided the British government appears to have lost all interest in the problem of defending its far-distant Pacific colonies. The projected infantry regiment was never sent to the colony.<sup>62</sup> Indeed the withdrawal of the Royal Engineers from British Columbia in November, 1863, is ample illustration of the attitude of the imperial government. In thus dispensing with the services of regular troops the Colonial Office announced its decision "to place reliance on the readiness of the Inhabitants and the Colonial Govt. to form any Volunteer Force that may be requisite."<sup>63</sup> In New Westminster the response was immediate, for the "New Westminster Volunteer Rifles" was organized in November, 1863.<sup>64</sup>

The colonists, for the most part, continued to be unperturbed throughout the duration of the Civil War. To be sure there were occasional flurries on both sides of the boundary caused by unfounded rumours,<sup>65</sup> but the events transpiring on distant battle-fields aroused little immediate concern. By midsummer of 1862 the volunteer forces of Vancouver Island had begun to disintegrate.<sup>66</sup> In 1861 a vote of £250 had been provided for the use of the volunteers by the Legislative Assembly but a portion of it remained unexpended<sup>67</sup> and a similar vote did not appear again until the estimates for 1865 were presented, and then only for \$2,540.<sup>68</sup> The mainland colony reflected much the same condition of inactivity.

There was criticism of the British government for its failure to

<sup>57</sup>C.O. 305, vol. 17, Douglas to Newcastle, Aug. 8, 1861, and Aug. 26, 1861.

<sup>58</sup>Victoria *British Colonist*, Dec. 6, 1861.

<sup>59</sup>C.O. 305, vol. 17, Douglas to Newcastle, Dec. 28, 1861, confidential.

<sup>60</sup>C.O. 410, vol. 1, Newcastle to Douglas, Feb. 20, 1862.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, Newcastle to Douglas, March 21, 1862.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, Newcastle to Douglas, April 30, 1862.

<sup>63</sup>C.O. 398, vol. 2, T. F. Elliot to the Under-Secretary of State for War, enclosed in Newcastle to Douglas, July 10, 1863.

<sup>64</sup>MS., Archives of British Columbia, Wm. Fisher to Douglas, Nov. 18, 1863.

<sup>65</sup>C.O. 305, vol. 20, Douglas to Newcastle, Jan. 15, 1863, and July 22, 1863.

<sup>66</sup>C.O. 305, vol. 19, Return of the Militia and Volunteer Corps of Vancouver Island, enclosed in Douglas to Newcastle, Aug. 1, 1862.

<sup>67</sup>Victoria *British Colonist*, March 26, 1862.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, Jan. 14, 1865.

provide adequately for the defence of the colonies but in the beginning it did not have its origin in the situation created by the American Civil War.<sup>69</sup> The editorial comment of the New Westminster *British Columbian* at the time of the withdrawal of the Royal Engineers typifies colonial opinion: "This is the reason why we so warmly advocated the formation of a volunteer rifle company, which is now, happily, progressing most favourably, but although such a company even in its incipient stages, is undoubtedly better than nothing, it obviously fails to meet the case in the present state of the Colony. We ought to have here a military force or a ship of war, either of which would have the desired effect upon the Indian tribes."<sup>70</sup> It is, perhaps, curious to note that the only serious Indian affray—the Chilcotin War—broke out within a few months of the departure of the Royal Engineers. The repercussions of that disaster are to be seen in the reorganization of the volunteer forces in both Victoria and Nanaimo in the island colony and greater activity on the mainland, though, oddly enough, the expeditionary forces sent to quiet the outbreak did not contain units from the existing volunteer forces.<sup>71</sup>

As the Civil War drew to a close, however, the question of defence came more prominently before the colonists. Upon the retirement of Governor Douglas, whose judgments had been based upon the experience of a lifetime spent on the North-West Coast, two new Governors took office—Arthur Kennedy in Vancouver Island and Frederick Seymour in British Columbia. To their eyes the defence situation was most unsatisfactory. Governor Seymour expressed his views in the following manner: "I have been struck since my arrival in this Colony with the change of policy adopted towards it by Her Majesty's Government. Formerly, everything was done to afford protection against Indians or alien immigrants. Now the Colonists considerably reduced in numbers are left almost entirely to depend on their own resources."<sup>72</sup> Both Governors assiduously attempted to encourage the expansion of the volunteer system.<sup>73</sup> The reaction of the colonists to the conclusion of the Civil War is probably best reflected in the editorial columns of the Victoria *British Colonist*.

The American war is, however, at length over, and the immense army, according to the European theory, will require employment on new battlefields. . . . While elaborate preparations are being made for the defence of the British territory east of the Rocky Mountains—while the English Government are willing to contribute £200,000 toward erecting fortifications at the various strategic points in Canada—Vancouver Island and British Columbia are left pretty much to take care of themselves. Before the advent of the American war our well manned and ably commanded naval vessels would have been ample for every emergency; but that day has gone by. . . . In fact as we at present stand, we would have no recourse but to surrender, and the whole of British territory west of the Rocky Mountains would fall like an over-ripe apple

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, June 9, 1863, Nov. 26, 1863, and Nov. 27, 1863.

<sup>70</sup>New Westminster *British Columbian*, Nov. 14, 1863.

<sup>71</sup>C.O. 60, vol. 18, Seymour to Newcastle, May 20, 1864.

<sup>72</sup>C.O. 60, vol. 21, Seymour to Cardwell, March 13, 1865. See also vol. 18, Seymour to Newcastle, May 20, 1864; vol. 21, Seymour to Cardwell, March 14, 1865, confidential.

<sup>73</sup>C.O. 305, vol. 26, Kennedy to Cardwell, Aug. 15, 1865.

into the lap of the United States. . . . If we wish to retain possession of these colonies, we must, or rather the mother country must, adopt a more effective means of defence.<sup>74</sup>

The creation of the Esquimalt Naval Station by Order-in-Council on June 29, 1865, was a partial answer to the colonial demand, but the Colonial Secretary, Edward Cardwell, was committed to the policy of retrenchment in colonial military expenditure, and consequently no additional protection was afforded the Pacific colonies. Nor did the colonists themselves take active measures to provide for their own defence, other than the organization of the volunteer forces already mentioned. The estimates of British Columbia for 1866 carried only \$750 for aid to the volunteers.<sup>75</sup> The attitude on Vancouver Island verged on open hostility for in May, 1866, Governor Kennedy had the unfortunate experience of having a bill to regularize the volunteer forces thrown out by the Legislative Assembly without discussion.<sup>76</sup> The responsibility for this action, however, must in large part be laid to the violent political quarrel which dominated Kennedy's governorship.

For a brief time during the summer of 1866 the Pacific colonies were aroused by the possibility of a Fenian invasion and attention once again focussed on the defenceless state of the colonies. To quote the New Westminster *British Columbian*:

It is not surprising that in our present emergency, there should be some hard things said about the cold neglect of the Parent Government, which leaves its youngest and most helpless child, not yet out of its swaddling clothes, exposed to the fury of an enemy with which we have no quarrel. . . . We confess we feel that neglect keenly. The treatment which this Colony has received at the hands of the Imperial Government in the matter of protection is utterly unworthy of a great and powerful nation, as it is wholly inconsistent with our idea of a liberal and paternal colonial policy.<sup>77</sup>

The immediate result of the rumours, which were entirely without foundation and so regarded by the colonial Governors,<sup>78</sup> was the organization of two additional volunteer forces in New Westminster—the "Home Guards" and the "Seymour Artillery Company." The enthusiasm of the mainland residents was fairly matched by the island colonists.

The editorial comment of the *Victoria British Colonist* on the whole question of colonial defence at this time merits reproduction.

If the inhabitants of Vancouver Island had nothing else to defend but the Government of the colony, they would open their arms tomorrow to any power that would relieve them of it. Fortunately, however, there is still an attachment to British institutions, and a disposition to put forward every effort, if need be, for their defence. While the naval force stationed in our waters is always ready to maintain British supremacy on the seas, the inhabitants of Vancouver Island will be found equally willing to do their duty

<sup>74</sup>Victoria *British Colonist*, May 9, 1865.

<sup>75</sup>British Columbia *Government Gazette*, Feb. 10, 1866.

<sup>76</sup>C.O. 305, vol. 28, Kennedy to Cardwell, May 12, 1866. See also *Victoria Daily Chronicle*, May 8, 1866 and May 10, 1866.

<sup>77</sup>New Westminster *British Columbian*, June 16, 1866.

<sup>78</sup>C.O. 60, vol. 25, Birch to Cardwell, July 9, 1866; C.O. 305, vol. 28, Kennedy to Cardwell, June 4, 1866, separate.

on the land. In the course of a very few years our destiny may be thrown into that of the colonies east of the Rocky Mountains. We may by even Imperial desire become part of a confederation either connected with or independent of Great Britain. Under any circumstances it is right we should prepare ourselves, as well as our numbers and means will admit of, for our defence. Fenianism is neither here nor there in the matter, . . .<sup>79</sup>

The breadth of vision of this editorial and its almost uncanny foreshadowing of the future position of the British Pacific colonies is remarkable.

In November, 1866, the two Pacific colonies were united. The impetus for that action was derived from the increasingly difficult financial position of the colonies and the ill-success of the experiment of representative government in the island colony. The question of defence does not appear to have in any way affected the decision. Indeed from 1867 onward the whole defence issue became comparatively insignificant. Even the acquisition of Alaska by the United States in 1867 only drew from Governor Seymour the comment, that: "Our Republican neighbours are now sending Military garrisons to the Territory recently purchased from Russia and I can assure Your Grace that the Colonists are beginning to contrast not over favourably the manner in which they are treated by the Imperial Government with that accorded by the Authorities at Washington to the remotest citizen of the United States."<sup>80</sup> The various volunteer forces in existence at the time of the Fenian scare continued to function until Confederation was accomplished. But from 1867 onward no money was expended in their behalf,<sup>81</sup> and it was not until March 9, 1869, that the legislation providing a statutory basis for the organization of volunteer forces was passed.<sup>82</sup>

British policy towards the Pacific colony after 1867 was formulated more with an eye to the future status of the newly organized Canadian Confederation than to the purely local issues. Union with Canada was seriously considered by the Colonial Office to be the ultimate destiny for British Columbia as early as September, 1867. *Minutes* by two prominent Colonial Office officials make this quite apparent. Sir Frederick Rogers, Permanent Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, wrote: "I suppose the question to be (in the long run) is B.C. to form part of the U.S. or of Canada; and if we desire to promote the latter alternative what form of expenditure or non-expenditure is likely to facilitate or pave the way for it."<sup>83</sup> The Parliamentary Under-Secretary, C. B. Adderley, was even more direct: "It seems to me impossible that we should long hold B.C. from its natural annexation. Still we should give and keep open for Canada every chance and if possible get Seymour to bridge over the present difficulties till we see what Canada may do."<sup>84</sup> Once Canada evinced a willingness to remove the difficulties which prevented immediate union, the alternative of annexation to the United States ceased to be of any importance.

<sup>79</sup>Victoria *British Colonist*, June 13, 1866.

<sup>80</sup>C.O. 60, vol. 29, Seymour to Buckingham, Sept. 28, 1867.

<sup>81</sup>British Columbia, *Blue Books*, 1867, 1868, 1869, and 1870.

<sup>82</sup>*Revised Statutes of British Columbia*, 1871 (Victoria, 1871), 377-82.

<sup>83</sup>C.O. 60, vol. 28, Minute, Sept. 16, 1867, on Seymour to Buckingham, July 15, 1867.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, Minute dated Sept. 17, 1867.

From 1867 to 1871 British Columbia stood at the crossroads, but with the *imprimatur* of the Colonial Office on Confederation and with Canada anxious to obtain a Pacific outlet, her ultimate destiny was seldom in doubt. Local issues could be but an ineffectual brake to the external and irresistible forces which were impelling British Columbia into Confederation.

**BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:** The standard history of British Columbia is F. W. Howay and E. O. S. Scholefield, *British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1914), 2 vols. The historical events mentioned in this paper are dealt with at greater length in I, chaps. 13-17; and II, chaps. 1-18.

#### DISCUSSION

*Mr. Martin* said that he was interested in *Mr. Ireland's* emphasis upon the prospects of defence during the Oregon trouble. Was it not a fact that settlement was the only feasible method of permanent defence? The divorce of diplomatic history from the history of defence and settlement has been unfortunate. In discussing the history of the west coast, it must be remembered that there was no feasible plan for permanent British settlement at Fort Vancouver comparable to what was being initiated by Congress, which was offering a whole section of free land to prospective settlers. The failure of Simpson to make the Puget Sound Agricultural Company work and to promote settlement from Red River was a tragedy. It is true that American settlement was almost altogether south of the Columbia before 1846, but there were no prospects of sufficient British settlement at that time even north of the Columbia to hold the country against the deluge of prospective settlement from the United States. In that sense the diplomatic issue was settled by *potential* settlement. *Mr. Martin* also remarked on the parallel between events in British Columbia and in Canada during the early 1860's, where similar decisions were made to withdraw and defend Canada only by sea and, later, to reverse this policy and reinforce defences on land.