

# James E. Candow. *The Invisibles: A History of the 149 Royal Newfoundland Companies*

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James E. Candow. *The Invisibles: A History of the Royal Newfoundland Companies*. St. John's: Breakwater Books, 2019. ISBN 978-1-550-81795-9

In his new book, James E. Candow moves one step further from looking at the specific history of Signal Hill, as he did in *The Lookout* (2011), to a more encompassing view of the original military group to inhabit the St. John's garrisons, the Royal Newfoundland Companies. Candow's specific expertise in this area comes from a career with Parks Canada and his many publications have made him an authority within Newfoundland historiography. His effective and concise treatment of the companies, which existed in Newfoundland from 1824 to 1862, is long overdue, making his title *The Invisibles* an apt depiction of the way they are remembered by both historians and Newfoundlanders.

The book weaves through the active years of the Newfoundland Companies in thematic chapters that allow readers to see life inside the garrison, the rank and file, companies in action, and, finally, the greater effect the presence of the companies had on the political and social history of Newfoundland. The first chapter shows where the Royal Newfoundland Companies fit into the larger picture of the British army. Here, we are introduced to the struggle between Crown and Parliament in the nineteenth century and the way it translated into the struggle between the companies' intersecting command from Halifax and their command from the colonial governor. The second chapter deals with the myriad factors that created a need for year-round companies to be stationed in St. John's. Namely, this was a result of the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812, which ushered in a period of increased French and American vessels in Newfoundland waters. As a result of those same wars the creation of veteran detachments, like the Royal Newfoundland Companies, was a suitable way to deal with the high number of pensioners. The end of the chapter considers the eventual merging of the Royal Newfoundland Companies into the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment and the effective

end of the companies, so that readers have a short summary of their existence.

In Chapter 3 we are introduced to the rank and file of the garrisons. Here, the nationality of the men, pay, living conditions, diet, routines, and punishments are explored. Candow discusses the important but conflicting (in the eyes of army traditionalists) presence of women and children in the garrisons and explains how the companies' presence could sometimes provide a kind of respite from the familial poverty experienced in St. John's. Moreover, the habitual visits to taverns and businesses outside of the garrison provided a significant amount of cash poured into the community. Candow does not overstate this point, though, as the end of the chapter demonstrates the conflict that garrison soldiers often created when socializing in St. John's. The necessary use of quantifications in this chapter could be made more manageable with the use of a graph or table, especially for the numbers given on pages 28–30.

Chapter 4 provides fascinating insight into the connection between the army officers in St. John's and the middle class. The officers' inclination to be perceived as traditional British gentlemen created a situation with the potential to benefit all classes in St. John's: "charitable giving, participation in the Agricultural Society and Mechanics Institute, the regimental band, garrison theatricals, cricket, and horse racing" were all contributions by army officers to the town (85). This chapter shows how at least some of Newfoundland culture was imparted as a result of the Newfoundland Companies. Nevertheless, as Candow rightly points out, this was not merely due to the goodwill of the army officers; rather, their behaviour mirrored an expectation for officers to model themselves after British gentlemen (65). Chapter 5 focuses on the responsibilities of the companies, especially during the two fires that ravaged St. John's in the nineteenth century, while Chapter 6 dives into the complex context of the religious and political landscape that created the election riots of 1861 and recounts the most memorable part of the Royal Newfoundland Companies' history, when they fired upon rioters, killing three. This chapter takes a step

back from looking at the specifics of the garrisons, instead analyzing how the companies responded to the situation on the Avalon Peninsula and the role they played in its political and social creation.

Though this book focuses on the Royal Newfoundland Companies' operations in Newfoundland, we are also offered insight into the Halifax garrisons. The Newfoundland Companies, after all, were an extension of the military forces in Halifax and within their command. Though Candow does not explicitly state it, this connection reinforces and promotes the understanding of Newfoundland in a North Atlantic context. If this connection and methodology had featured more prominently, the book perhaps would have appeal to a wider audience, both as research in North Atlantic studies and to a broad readership in areas outside of Newfoundland. This is only reinforced by the fact that much of Candow's primary research came out of Nova Scotia archives. On the one hand, the decision to market this book as a popular history is a good one. As Candow points out in the introduction, too many Newfoundlanders are inclined to remember the tragic role their soldiers played in the Battle of Beaumont Hamel as the only military history of the island. In this book, however, Candow provides a resource that can help broaden the public understanding of Newfoundland's military history. On the other hand, however, while Chapters 1 through 5 pose no problem for this "popular," Newfoundland-centred approach, the complex nature of the events explored in Chapter 6 seems to assume some foreknowledge of this period in Newfoundland history.

Ultimately, this book does alter and diversify the public perspective of Newfoundland's military history. If the Newfoundland Companies were invisible before now, James Candow has helped illuminate them.

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