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THE QUEEN'S RANGERS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION IN THE YEARS 1776 TO 1784

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Department of Veterans Affairs

FACED with the need for waging war against the type of fighter developed by the French and their Indian allies in the Seven Years' War, the New England settlers evolved a corps whose hardiness, toughness, and skill against their opponents have been bywords ever since. This corps was Rogers' Rangers, the predecessors of the unit with which this paper is concerned, the Queen's Rangers.

The first Rangers raised by Robert Rogers in 1756 comprised one company, 65 strong.¹ They were drawn from a band of scouts who served with Rogers under Sir William Johnson the preceding year. Rogers' Rangers have been termed the eyes and ears of the army, and likened to Sir John Moore's Light Brigade. Among their more important duties were those of securing and conveying intelligence, serving as guides, protecting convoys through leagues of forest and exposed waterways, harassing the enemy, frequently taking prisoners in the very teeth of their antagonist, and engaging him wherever they found him. Although they were often in action in the Seven Years' War, fighting was not the most important of their duties. Their chief function was undoubtedly procuring intelligence. When the armies of both sides went into winter quarters, the Rangers were just as active as though the watercourses were open, and their use of "skaits" and snowshoes has been repeated recently in the training carried on for the invasion of Norway in 1940. It was essential that the commanders should have information of the activities of the enemy and this the Rangers provided. In actual combat the Rangers were generally posted as or with the advance-guard; in a withdrawal as or with the rear-guard. They were at both sieges of Fort William Henry, at the capture of Louisbourg, and at Ste. Foy; and in 1760 when the three British armies converged on Montreal, some of the then eleven companies accompanied each army, Rogers leading the advance up Lake Champlain. When the war ended the Rangers were disbanded and Rogers, after a chequered career as commandant of Michilimackinac and inmate of a debtors' jail, settled down with his memories and his bottles until the outbreak of fighting in America brought him out of obscurity.

Rogers returned to America in the summer of 1775. As a retired officer on half pay, he was regarded by the Americans with suspicion, if not as a spy. Hence he was arrested by order of Congress, but shortly afterwards was released on parole. He told Washington that he desired to settle his private affairs² and was interested in the acquisition of lands, and there is documentary proof of this; but he was arrested again late

¹Authorized by William Shirley, Commander in Chief of the British forces in America, March 23, 1756.

²P. Force, *American Archives*, 4th Series (Washington, 1843), IV, 266, Rogers to Washington, Dec. 14, 1775.

in June, 1776, on Washington's orders.³ Considering that this relieved him of adhering to his parole, he escaped⁴ and openly espoused the Loyalist cause. On August 6, 1776, he was commissioned by General Sir William Howe as lieutenant colonel commandant and ordered to raise a provincial corps, the Queen's Rangers.⁵

This paper will not attempt to tell the complete story of the Queen's Rangers in the Revolutionary War, but will mention three types of operation in which they were frequently engaged: the pitched battle, in which they participated with the army; the foray, of which there are numerous examples; and the engagement fought almost exclusively by the regiment.

Before the end of the war, the Queen's Rangers consisted of eleven companies of foot, including a grenadier company, riflemen, light infantrymen, and a highland company wearing the MacNab tartan; troops of dragoons and hussars; and some guns.⁶ Rogers's command was relatively short lived. He suffered a defeat at Mamaroneck in the operations about New York when his command of approximately 100 men was surprised by 750 of the Americans.⁷ He was succeeded in February, 1777 by Lieutenant Colonel French, and the latter was followed in May, 1777 by Major James Wemyss. Under the latter the regiment formed part of General Howe's army in its advance against Philadelphia.

At the battle of Brandywine Creek in the operations preceding the capture of Philadelphia,⁸ as part of General Knyphausen's division, the Queen's Rangers, attacking the American left at Chad's Ford, broke and dispersed both Waggoner's and Porterfield's brigades, resulting in the withdrawal of Wayne's division.⁹ The victory at Brandywine cost the

³Jared Sparks, *The Writings of George Washington* (Boston, 1833-7), III, 400.

⁴Force, *American Archives*, 5th Series (1848), I, 33, 136.

⁵Sparks, *Washington*, IV, 520; E. B. O'Callaghan (ed.), *Colonial History of New York* (Albany, 1856), VIII, 687, Governor Tryon to George Germain, Sept. 27, 1776; Lorenzo Sabine, *The American Loyalists* (Boston, 1847), 576; (1864), II, 233.

⁶Alexander J. Wall (ed.), *Uniforms of the American, British, French and German Armies in the War of the American Revolution, 1775-1783* (New York Historical Society, 1926); paintings and descriptions by the late Charles M. Lefferts.

⁷Sparks, *Washington*, IV, Appendix. Rogers's career was not yet finished, for on May 1, 1778, he was authorized by Sir Henry Clinton to raise a new regiment of two battalions. Under his brother, Major James Rogers, this unit, the King's Rangers, served in Quebec with headquarters at St. John (one battalion only), and played its part in keeping the Lake Champlain route of invasion into Canada closed and in securing intelligence. In addition, James Rogers and several of his officers took part in the "Vermont Negotiations." (Public Archives of Canada, Haldimand Papers, B 213 (B.M. 21, 873); B 54 (B.M. 21, 820).) Vol. B 160 is entirely devoted to correspondence concerning this unit, about which the writer has been unable to find anything in print. Other volumes in this series also containing relevant material are: B 63, 149, 150, 161, 162, 166, 167, 177-1, 184-2, 190, and 230 to 232.

Of the King's Rangers, 120 officers and other ranks, 47 women, 118 children, and 14 servants (288 in all), settled in Township No. 3, Cataraqui. ("General Abstract of Men, Women, and Children settled on the New Townships on the River St. Lawrence, etc.," Haldimand Papers, B 168 (B.M. 21, 828).)

⁸W. C. Ford, *The Writings of George Washington* (New York, 1890), VI, 67, Washington to Congress, Sept. 9, 1777.

⁹H. B. Carrington, *Battles of the American Revolution* (New York, 1876; re-issued, New York, 1877).

Rangers a fifth of the entire British casualties, 72 killed and wounded, including 14 of the 21 officers.¹⁰ "I must be silent as to the behaviour of the Rangers," said Knyphausen in writing of the conduct of the unit, "for I want words to express my own astonishment, and to give an idea of it."¹¹

As a recognition of their conduct in this action, General Howe issued an order that all future promotions should "go through the unit." It was also granted the right of being the only provincial regiment which could enlist Old Countrymen and deserters from the enemy, a measure which resulted in the nationality of the personnel gradually changing from entirely American to largely European. It should be kept in mind, however, that it was the original Loyalists who constituted the source from which the regiment took its *esprit de corps* and discipline, for these men served from conviction and in defence of their homes, and they were proscribed for their attachment to the Crown.

Further casualties were suffered in the ensuing battle of Germantown;¹² the Queen's Rangers took part in the final attack which routed the American forces. Among the wounded was Major Wemyss. On October 15, Captain John Graves Simcoe of the 40th Foot was appointed to command with the provincial rank of major. By the end of that month the regiment consisted of the eleven companies of foot mentioned, plus a mounted division. A three-pounder gun was added early the following year. On May 2, 1779, a general order was issued¹³ which gave the unit its subsequent designation, "First American Regiment."¹⁴

¹⁰W. O. Raymond, "Loyalists in Arms" (*New Brunswick Historical Collections*, II, 1904, 202); Muster Rolls, Nov. 24, 1777, in James Hannay, "History of the Queen's Rangers" (*Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 3rd Series, II, Section II, 1908, 133-7).

¹¹General Orders had the following to say on Sept. 13, two days after the engagement: "The Commander-in-Chief desires to convey to the officers and men of The Queen's Rangers his approbation and acknowledgement for their spirited and gallant conduct in the engagement of the 11th instant, and to assure them how well he is satisfied with their distinguished conduct on that day. His Excellency only regrets their having suffered so much in the gallant execution of their duty."

¹²The regimental Muster Rolls of Nov. 24, 1777, for the previous three months, show total casualties of 139, including 24 killed in action or dead of wounds, but many wounded at Brandywine had since reported for duty, so are not included.

¹³"That His Majesty, anxious to reward their faithful service and spirited conduct, on several occasions, had been pleased to confer upon them the following marks of His Royal favour—. That the officers of the Provincial Corps shall rank as juniors of the rank to which they belong, and if disabled in service, shall be entitled to the same gratuity as officers of the established army; and, to distinguish the zeal of such Regiments as shall be complete, His Majesty will, upon recommendation of the Commander-in-Chief, make the rank of those officers permanent in America, and will allow them half-pay, on the reduction of their Regiments in the same manner as officers of British reduced Regiments are paid." In consequence of this order, and with the approval of the King, the regiment was styled and numbered "The First American Regiment."

¹⁴Of the fifty or more provincial units, four others were honoured in the same manner. The Volunteers of Ireland, later absorbed in the regular army as the 105th Regiment of Foot, now the 2nd Battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, became the 2nd American Regiment; the New York Volunteers the 3rd; the British Legion the 4th, and the King's American Regiment the 5th.

On assuming command Simcoe had the opportunity of putting some of his own ideas into effect. Considering that a light corps such as his, constantly employed in the outposts of the army, had little opportunity of absorbing instruction, he concentrated on teaching the men the necessity for eternal vigilance, activity, and patience under fatigue. He believed that only a few of the manual exercises were necessary, but insisted upon the most rigorous instruction in musketry, and even more attention to the use of the bayonet in order to inculcate complete confidence in that weapon. The custom of "sizing" companies was not followed, but it was directed that two files in the centre and two on each flank of a company consist of seasoned soldiers. While a roster of duties was not maintained, it became the practice that the selection of an officer for any duty was based upon his ability to discharge it. It was likewise established that the relative precedence of a duty was not to be measured by the numbers employed upon it, but by its own importance in relation to the existing circumstances. Sergeants' guards were eliminated, and every guard was placed under command of an officer, to which fact Simcoe attributed the fact that no sentry or guard of the regiment was ever surprised.

As a corps formed during active service cannot acquire the habits of strict discipline as easily as in times of peace, the inculcation of discipline and steadiness and the perfection of the interior economy of the unit were made of first importance. It was stressed that, as regularity in messing and cleanliness in every respect tended to the health of the soldier, the commanding officer would base his estimate of the capacity of an officer on his attention to these details. Written orders were avoided wherever possible, a practice reminiscent of that of the Second World War, but daily after parade the officers met and received their orders verbally. All written orders were, however, read to the men on company parades. It was as a result of Simcoe's efforts that the Queen's Rangers as a unit came to possess that quality so essential yet difficult of achievement for any military body, cohesion. Like the *arme blanche* of the cavalry, where rider, horse, and sword become one weapon, the Rangers were trained to act so as to carry out the orders of their commander in a thoroughly integrated manner.

While the Rangers were stationed at Richmond on Staten Island in October, 1779, word came that the Americans had gathered a large number of boats on carriages at Middlebrook on the Raritan, New Jersey, for use in a projected attack on New York. Simcoe suggested a plan to destroy them and after consultation with Lord Cornwallis, Sir Henry Clinton ordered that the scheme be put into operation, although the intervening country was alive with Jersey militia and its inhabitants were solid supporters of independence. In addition, Colonel W. H. Lee, the American cavalry commander, was nearby. At 8 P.M. on October 25, the troops, consisting of 300 infantrymen, the regimental artillery, and cavalry including the Bucks' County Light Dragoons under Captain Sandford and some Staten Island Mounted Militia under Lieutenant Stuart, marched

from Richmond for Billing's Point, and thence proceeded by boat to the Jersey shore.

At Perth Amboy Simcoe explained to the officers the operation and his plan for the various portions of his detachment. He intended to march with the cavalry to Middlebrook by the shortest route, to destroy the boats, and moving up the Millstone River to Hillsborough, to cross and return by New Brunswick, circling to avoid the town. When he reached the heights east of New Brunswick, he planned to draw the enemy into an ambush prepared by the Ranger infantry close by South River bridge. Directly the cavalry moved off, Major Armstrong, with the infantry and artillery, was instructed to proceed with the greatest secrecy and speed to South River bridge, seven miles from Perth Amboy, prepare his ambush, and await Simcoe's return with the cavalry. For the identification of runners, the countersign was "Clinton and Montrose."

The first object, that of the destruction of the boats, was achieved, but unfortunately only eighteen of the boats had been left at Middlebrook. The second object, that of arousing the country, was accomplished on the return journey. In a skirmish with American troops near New Brunswick, Simcoe's horse was killed, and he was captured.¹⁵ But the American cavalry was dispersed, the infantry thrust back, and the Rangers' cavalry detachment reached South River bridge at four. Here the Americans were scattered by Armstrong's party, already in position, and by evening the united force had returned to Richmond.

With only one brief halt for a meal, the Ranger cavalry had covered more than eighty miles in enemy country that day, avoiding his troops wherever possible, or dispersing them; while the Ranger infantry had marched thirty miles during a night and a day.¹⁶ Admittedly they had lost their commanding officer but he subsequently returned to the Queen's Rangers on exchange. Much more had been accomplished than the destruction of a few boats and the capture of prisoners. The exploits of the Rangers caused alarm throughout the country. General Anthony Wayne was detached from Washington's army in the highlands and marched with his division of light troops fourteen miles that night, and thirty the ensuing day, in an attempt to cut off the raiders. In Monmouth County, Colonel Lee also tried to intercept them, without success. The fact that the Queen's Rangers could thus sweep through enemy country

¹⁵Rivington's *New York Gazette*, Nov. 3, 1779.

¹⁶In his memoirs of the war, Colonel W. H. Lee says that this enterprise was considered by both armies "among the handsomest exploits of the war. Simcoe executed completely his objective then deemed most important: . . . What is very extraordinary, Lieut.-Col. Simcoe being obliged to feed once during the night, stopped at a depot of forage collected by the Continental Army, assumed the character of Lee's cavalry, waked up the Commissary about midnight, drew the customary amount of forage, and gave the usual vouchers, signing the name of the legion Quartermaster without being discovered by the American commissary or his assistants. The dress of both corps was the same, green coatees and leather breeches; yet the success of the stratagem is astonishing." (Appendix to *Simcoe's Military Journal* (New York, 1844), 324-5, a quotation from Lee's *Memoirs of the War*.)

at will, brushing aside or overcoming all opposition, illustrates the high state of efficiency of the Queen's Rangers and the lack of it among the rebels. It also shows that while time, geography, and general strategy were on the side of the Americans, the British were masters of tactics and of the fighting generally.

After fighting in the Carolinas and Virginias in 1780-1, in June of the latter year the regiment found itself with a strength of 447 infantry and 163 cavalry, a total of 610, excluding the cavalry in South Carolina. Acting as rear-guard of the army in Virginia on the march to Williamsburg, the Queen's Rangers, on June 26, fought an action at Spencer's Ordinary, near the junction of the Jamestown and Williamsburg roads. At this point the infantry was awaiting the arrival of the cavalry, which had been engaged in the collection of cattle in the neighbourhood. Suddenly a shot rang out from the sentries of the highland company, and galloping towards a wood on the left, Simcoe reached high ground in time to observe Captain Shank and the cavalry moving swiftly forward in close pursuit of the enemy cavalry. Shank broke them completely, so that they did not again appear on the field.

At this moment, however, the American infantry arrived and the fight grew hotter. Simcoe ordered up the Ranger infantry, less one company; the light company with Captain Ewald's detachment of Yagers was commanded to move directly to its front and to occupy a wood on the right, while the riflemen moved to the left in order to relieve the cavalry and to hold the enemy in check there. Information was then sent to Cornwallis that the Americans were in force and that Lafayette, Wayne, and Steuben were not far distant. As yet only the American advance-guard commanded by Colonel Butler was actively engaged, but Wayne's main body was close behind.¹⁷ Under cover of the protection afforded by the Ranger infantry as it extended to the right and advanced toward a ridge and woods in front, the cavalry withdrew to the Jamestown Road, near which it formed a mobile reserve ready to help the infantry on the left or Ewald on the right. Covered by the highland company, the three-pounder was posted so as to sweep the roadway. An attempt by American infantry to turn the British left was defeated by a charge of Shank's cavalry. Meanwhile the Ranger infantry drove the Americans from the fences and woods in front, and Ewald and his Yagers turned their left. Shank then led his cavalry through the enemy columns and fought his way back. Captain McGill's grenadier company suffered severe casualties, while Captain Stevenson's light infantrymen were obstinately opposed but carried all before them, although losing one-quarter of their strength. On the 28th, Army Orders contained encomiums of the conduct of the unit in this action.¹⁸

¹⁷*Simcoe's Military Journal*, 229.

¹⁸"Lord Cornwallis desires Lieut.-Col. Simcoe will accept his warmest acknowledgements for his spirited and judicious conduct in the action of the 26th instant, when he repulsed and defeated a superior force of the enemy. He likewise desires that Lieut.-Col. Simcoe will communicate his thanks to the officers and soldiers of The Queen's Rangers and to Capt. Ewald and the detachment of the Yagers."

When it was known that Cornwallis's army, blockaded in Yorktown, had no choice but surrender, Simcoe volunteered to fight his way out with his regiment, not because he had any desire to add to its laurels, but because Loyalist members had been previously roughly handled when captured by the rebels. He was informed that the Queen's Rangers must abide by the fate of the rest of the army. Their colours were not, however, surrendered. They remained in the hands of the Simcoe family for more than one hundred years, until the estate was sold in 1923. They were then bought by Mr. F. B. Robbins and presented to the city of Toronto, where they are on display in the Reference Library.

The strength of the regiment at the surrender at Yorktown, as shown by the return of October 25, was 47 officers and 556 other ranks, exclusive of Captain Saunders's troop of dragoons, who in Virginia and South Carolina rendered many valuable services.¹⁹ In addition, the following casualties are recorded among the other ranks in the Yorktown operations: killed, 28; died of wounds, 1; missing, 30. Simcoe was allowed to sail for England shortly after his arrival in New York. Representations to His Majesty succeeded in making the rank of the officers, hitherto held only in the scene of action, universally permanent on December 25, 1782, and the Queen's Rangers, 1st American Regiment, were enrolled as a regular unit of the British Army.²⁰

Since it was decided that disbanded Loyalist regiments should be settled in Nova Scotia on Crown lands, Major Armstrong made a return in April, 1783, showing that provision should be made for land grants to a total of 575 all ranks, apart from those who did not desire settlement, those who had sailed for England, and others on leave in America. On October 13, the Queen's Rangers were disbanded at Saint John. The men received grants of land in York County,²¹ particularly in the parish of Queensbury which was named after the regiment: and the officers went on half pay. In peace-time, in a new country, the former officers of the regiment gave as good service as they had in war. Simcoe, of course, displayed his qualities as head of the new province of Upper Canada. Of his officers, one served twice as administrator of a province, one as a member of an Executive Council, six as members of Legislative Assemblies, four as provincial administrative officers, two as judges, three as magistrates or justices of the peace, one as adjutant-general in 1812, one as a general in the British Army, one as a lieutenant general, one as a major general, one as a colonel in the British Army, and one as a colonel of militia. This takes no account of many others who served their new provinces in minor capacities, both civil and military.

It is evident from the few examples given that the Queen's Rangers of the Revolutionary War period deserve the description of the American

¹⁹Muster Rolls, Oct. 24, 1781. See Hannay, "History of the Queen's Rangers," 166-76.

²⁰War Office, Sir George Yonge to Simcoe, Jan. 21, 1783, and Army List.

²¹A return of Sept. 25, 1784, by Thos. Knox, shows that 210 men, 64 women, 64 children, and 23 servants of the regiment settled in the province, the largest body of Loyalist soldiery to do so.

General Lee: that they were the most efficient single unit on either side. Their discipline, *esprit de corps*, and fighting efficiency were proverbial. They proved the efficacy of long years of training and discipline. In no war has the British higher command ever been worse; in few wars has junior leadership been better. During the American Revolutionary War a number of brilliant junior officers emerged, among them Simcoe. It is a nice question whether, had such men as Simcoe and Tarleton been in more senior appointments, the course of the War of Independence might have been different.

It is especially significant that like Robert Rogers with his famous "Plan of Discipline" or system of tactics in the Seven Years' War, Simcoe had a scheme of training and of fighting which he had determined to try with colonial troops before obtaining his own command.²² This plan he used with the Queen's Rangers, and its effect is a matter of record. The result was regimental efficiency and such effectiveness that there is a great, and almost an entire, absence of those blunders and errors which may be expected in actual warfare. It was achieved not only because Simcoe sought that type of command and was a military enthusiast, but also because of his upbringing and character. In his administration of Upper Canada in later years, he showed the same qualities as in his Revolutionary War command and his ideas for betterment of the new province were only extensions of those he evolved and used with his Rangers.

The Revolution as a whole is an object lesson proving that it is useless to win battles when the general strategy is poorly planned. The Queen's Rangers and other units like them might perform prodigies of valour and win tactical victories almost without number as long as the fighting lasted, but their efforts were largely stultified by the incredible stupidity of the over-all planning. And incidentally the career of this regiment during the American Revolution is only one more proof that, given good leadership and training, the citizen soldier makes as good a fighting man as can be found anywhere in the world.²³

APPENDIX

A partial record of the careers of some of Simcoe's officers after the Revolutionary War.

Agnew, Rev. John, D.D. Member of the Legislative Assembly for Sunbury.
 Agnew, Stair. Son of John. For more than 25 years the member for York in the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly.

Allen, Adam. Settled in Saint John, N.B. Poet; author of a poetical description of the Great Falls of the River St. John.

²²"He was a man of letters and like the Romans and Grecians cultivated science amid the turmoil of camp. He was enterprising, resolute and persevering; weighing well his project before entered upon, and promptly seizing every advantage which offered itself in the course of execution." (Lee, *Memoirs*, quoted in Appendix to *Simcoe's Military Journal*, 323.)

²³The discussion which followed this paper appears on page 40 at the end of the paper given by Sam H. S. Hughes in the same session.

Armstrong, Richard. In command after Yorktown until disbandment. A magistrate in New Brunswick, Lieutenant Colonel in York County Militia and finally Lieutenant General in British Army.

Grimes, John Randolph. Agent for the prosecution of Royalist claims to Virginia estates.

Jarvis, William. First Secretary of Upper Canada.

McGill, John. First settled in New Brunswick. Rejoined the regiment on its reorganization in 1791. In 1793, Commissioner of Stores, Upper Canada; in 1805 Inspector-General of Accounts, and in 1818 Receiver-General. Member of Legislative Assembly.

McKay, Hugh. Member of the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick for Charlotte County for more than 30 years from 1792. Colonel of Militia (the only "full" Colonel in the province). Senior Justice of Court of Common Pleas for Charlotte County.

McLeod, John. Afterwards General Sir John, G.C.B.

MacNab, Allan. Sergeant-at-Arms of the Upper Canadian Assembly, father of Sir Allan MacNab.

Merritt, Thomas. Raised and commanded the Niagara Dragoons in the War of 1812. His son was the projector of the first Welland Canal.

Moorehouse, Daniel. Magistrate and Major of Militia, Queensbury County, N.B.

Ormond, George. Settled in New Brunswick in 1783.

Robinson, Christopher. Called to the bar and practised law in Kingston. Deputy Ranger of His Majesty's Woods and Forests, Upper Canada. Benchler of the Law Society and member of the House of Assembly for Lennox and Addington.

Saunders, John. In 1790 succeeded Judge Putnam on the Supreme Court of New Brunswick.

Shank, David. Re-entered the active list when the regiment was reorganized in 1791 for service in Upper Canada. In 1796 on Simcoe's return to England, he assumed command of the troops in Upper Canada. In 1803 appointed to command the Canadian Fencibles; Colonel, 1808; Major General, 1811, and Lieutenant General, 1821.

Shaw, Aeneas. On the reorganization of the regiment in 1791 he marched a detachment from Fredericton, N.B., to Montreal on snowshoes in the winter. In July, 1793, with 100 of the Queen's Rangers, began the first clearing of the present city of Toronto. Member of Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada, 1793. Lieutenant Colonel in the Army, 1791. Placed in command of the First Division of Militia by Major General Brock in 1812 as Colonel. Appointed Adjutant General April 29, 1812, with rank of major general.

Smith, Samuel. Settled in New Brunswick at the peace, but went to England and the Continent, accompanied the reorganized regiment to Upper Canada. In command 1796-8. Member of Executive Council of Upper Canada in 1815, and Administrator for 14 months between the terms of Governors Gore and Maitland, and again later.

Spencer, George. Deputy Quartermaster General, accompanying Simcoe to Upper Canada.

Whitlock, John. In 1791 a Lieutenant Colonel of Queen's County, N.B., Militia and a justice of the peace.