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# The Winter Costume of Soldiers in Canada

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René CHARTRAND

In a northern country such as Canada, keeping warm during the colder part of the year was a constant preoccupation of the early settlers. They devised, early on, various ways to cope with the problems of a Canadian winter. Besides measures to keep their dwellings reasonably heated, the clothing they wore in this new more northern land was of crucial importance. There soon evolved a practical and comfortable costume which was a mixture of European and Amerindian dress, worn from the 17th to the later part of the 19th century.

Soldiers were a common sight in early Canada, not only to those living in urban areas, but also to *Voyageurs* who would find them in remote little forts, and to farmers settled along the border with the United States. Indeed, some of the settlers had been soldiers themselves earlier in life and had elected to stay on when their service was over or their units had been disbanded in the country. Indeed, it is probable that most Canadians today—and nearly all French-Canadians—have soldiers in their family ancestry.

Soldiers were possibly more exposed to the rigours of winter than the civilians they were to protect. They had to mount guard in the coldest winter nights and one occasionally comes across accounts of frostbites and even death while mounting guard during extreme temperatures. In rarer cases, they would be found campaigning during the middle of winter, in what can only be described as an alien environment.

## **Soldiers of New France**

The surprising thing is that authorities in Europe, be they French or British, did not have any official measures for the dress of soldiers posted in Canada until the 19th century. But this did not mean, as we will see below, that soldiers went freezing in summer uniforms

in the middle of winter. Generally speaking, the French military quickly adopted the capot (see the article by Francis Back in this issue), wool cap, mitasses and moccasins, which seem to have been procured by the soldier at his expense as this was not part of the official clothing issue unless when sent on a winter expedition. This type of clothing was essentially similar to what had been adopted by the male civilian populace of New France. In 1665-1666, we find evidence of capots, mittens, moccasins and so on, issued to soldiers of the newly arrived 24 companies of regular infantrymen sent to subdue the Iroquois Indians. These must have been especially welcome by the four companies which had come up from the West Indies with the Marquis de Tracy. Record exists as to Captain's Monteil's company of the Poitou Regiment, fresh from Martinique, being issued capots.<sup>1</sup>

From the 1680s, the regular colonial *Compagnies franches de la Marine* were posted permanently to the colony. There can be no doubt that the capot became very common among soldiers of these "independent companies of the Marine".<sup>2</sup> This was apart from their regular uniform which consisted of a grey-white cloth coat lined with blue and trimmed with some five dozen brass buttons, grey-white breeches and stockings and a hat edged with "false gold" lace. In a letter dated April 7th 1692, the King made the rather surprising decision that henceforth, the soldier's clothing would be made "in the manner of the *coureurs des bois*. . ." according to a pattern coat which had been made.<sup>3</sup> This unusual order was implemented since we find 900 grey-white serge capots "garnished with blue Aumale serge and cuffs and buttons" sent to the troops in Canada in 1694.<sup>4</sup> The garrison of Acadia was also sent 40 suits of clothing à *la Canadienne* in

1. "Correspondance de Talon", *Rapport de l'Archiviste de la Province de Québec* [henceforth RAPQ], 1930-1931, p. 107; R. Leblant, "Le livre de raison de François de Tapie de Montiel, capitaine au régiment de Poitou (1661-1670)", *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, XIV, juin 1960, p. 109.
2. So called because they were troops paid and administered by the Ministry of Marine. Marine troops were organized into independent companies rather than into regiments like the metropolitan land army administered by the Ministry of War. The fleet and the American colonies being the responsibility of the Ministry of Marine, it had an establishment of marines for ships and colonial troops in Canada, Acadia, Placentia, the West Indies and French Guyana. For a summary of the various troops in North America, see: R. Chartrand, *The French Soldier in Colonial America*, Bloomfield, Ontario, 1984.
3. "Correspondance échangée entre la cour de France et le gouverneur de Frontenac pendant sa seconde administration (1689-1699)", RAPQ, 1927-1928, p. 87.
4. France, Archives Nationales, Colonies (henceforth AC), série F1A, vol. 8, fol. 207. "Despance pour l'habillement des soldats de Canada pour l'année 1694. . .".

1693.<sup>5</sup> The measure, whatever inspired the King to do it, was obviously not too popular with the recipients. As early as 1696, we find that the usual regular soldier's coats are once again sent to Canada and in 1701, word comes from Port Royal in Acadia that the Canadian style capot was no longer necessary there and the authorities were asked to send soldier's coats for the garrison.<sup>6</sup> So ended this first attempt to have a "Canadian style" uniform for the troops which would have been presumably suitable in the winter, certainly a good start. We suspect here that both soldiers, their officers and the officials alike wanted to look like military men (Figure 1).

Not that capots were unpopular. They keep appearing in documents concerning the French troops right up to the surrender of 1760. But it was an item either bought or made up from old soldier's coats or else issued to troops going out on campaign. Nor were capots, wool caps, mitasses, and so on, used only in the winter; there were various types of these garments, used in a variety of situations and seasons. However, it would have been unthinkable to spend a winter here without such clothing. Thus we find in 1752 three captured deserters wearing capots made from uniform coats.<sup>7</sup> When soldiers were sent on a winter raiding party, the King's stores would then issue to all participants a complete supply of clothing and equipment to protect them as much as possible from exposure. The lists unfortunately do not usually tell us what colours were used for these clothes. There are exceptions however, and in 1756 the Chevalier de la Pause of the Guyenne infantry regiment tells us that officers had white capots with red cuffs while their servants were issued brown capots.<sup>8</sup> It may be

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5. AC, série B, vol. 16, fol. 139. "Estat des Munitions de Guerre et de bouche. . .", 14 January 1693.
  6. Archives de Rochefort, série 1E, liasse 599; AC, F1A, vol. 10, fol. 180. "Mémoire pour le fort Royal de l'Acadie. . .", 4 October 1701.
  7. Archives Nationales du Québec à Montréal, pièce judiciaire, Procureur du roi vs F. Boisrond, H. Davout, P. Beauvais, J. Gorell & J.-M. Ballet, 21-22 juillet 1752. This was the trial in Montreal, the accused having been captured near Fort Sandusky some time previously. I am indebted to Francis Back for this reference.
  8. "Les 'papiers' La Pause", RAPQ, 1933-1934, p. 210, 225. The Guyenne regiment, 2d battalion, was sent to Canada in 1755, one of eight battalions of metropolitan army troops sent to reinforce the colonial troops between 1755 and 1757. Four other such battalions were also sent to Louisbourg between 1755 and 1758. An example of what was issued to officers and soldiers of a winter party in February 1757 is published in Edward P. Hamilton, transl. & ed., *Adventure in the wilderness: the American journals of Louis Antoine de Bougainville, 1756-1760*, Nornan, Ok., 1964, p. 87.



Figure 1: A soldier of the French colonial troops (Compagnies franches de la Marine) wearing the grey-white capot with blue cuffs and lining issued in the 1690s instead of the regular coat. The man is in winter dress complete with mitts, mitasses covering the legs, moccasins and snow-shoes. Reconstruction by Francis Back (Canadian Park Service).

that the colours of the corps uniforms were applied to the capots, as the Guyenne regiment had grey-white coats faced with red. The *Compagnies franches* wore grey-white and blue and we have seen that soldiers used their old uniforms to make the capots. But while these are strong indications, there can be no formal conclusion as to the colours of such clothing from the information found thus far on the troops of New France.

### The Early British Garrisons

The early British garrisons in Canada were established in Newfoundland at the end of the 17th century. Upon the departure of Colonel Gibson's 28th Regiment of Foot in 1698, it was decided to keep a detachment of soldiers at Saint John's as an Independent Company. Early on, the question of keeping warm came up and in 1702, the authorities in London were asked to make the soldier's coats to "be substantiel & warm, & if it will only allow one coate that it may be large enough to double upon ye breast".<sup>9</sup> What was provided "for ye Company at Newfoundland" besides the usual uniform was a "surtout coat" and a pair of mittens for each man.<sup>10</sup> A few years later, when large expeditions were planned to invade New France, "Large Watch Gownes with Hoods" were provided but only for one in eight soldiers.<sup>11</sup> As this was also done for the army in Europe, we can in fact conclude that no real provisions were made for winter. The fiasco of the Nicholson expedition of 1710 and the wreck of Admiral Walker's troopships a year later put an end to the invasion projects. Oddly enough, the four companies at Placentia lost their substantial and warm surtouts. They received instead, 76 "Watch Gowns" for 320 men in 1713, a practice which probably lasted for a long time thereafter.<sup>12</sup>

The men obviously coped as best as they could but as the Seven Years' War raged in North America, there were some efforts to keep the troops warm as they came to colder climates. Captain Knox of the 43rd mentions a party of his regiment on its way from Fort Edward

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9. British Library (henceforth BL), Stowe MS, vol. 464, fol. 68. Michael Richards, engineer, to Mr. Thurston, agent, no date but 1702.
  10. Great Britain, Public Records Office (henceforth PRO), Treasury (T) 1/85, fol. 130. "An Estimate for ye charge of Clothing necessary 1702/3 to be forthwith provided for ye Company at Newfoundland".
  11. PRO, T1/132, fol. 79. Article of agreement. . . 2 March 1710; T64/126, fol. 9. Report of Mr. Harley. . . 15 March 1711.
  12. BL, Additional Manuscript 22616. "Accot of Cloathing for Four Independant Company's. . . 25th July 1713".

to Halifax with officers dressed in brown cloaks and the men in brown “watch-coats” during March 1758. By December, the Colonel of the regiment had been instructed to provide the men with “flannel under-waistcoats and leggers, or Indian stockings”, Knox tells us, adding that the “rigour of the winter here is inconceivable, yet every body is remarkably healthy”.<sup>13</sup> General Amherst had similar orders regarding flannel waistcoats, leggings, and flannel for “warm socks” to his army at Crown Point in September 1759.<sup>14</sup>

The British troops which replaced the French forces following the surrender of Montreal in 1760, adopted basically the same winter dress as their former foes. The capot was called a “blanket coat”, an obvious indication of the material used to make it, and seems to have been usually white with blue bars at the hood, cuffs and skirt. Deserters in the 1760s are occasionally mentioned wearing blanket coats but it is especially during the 1770s, at the time of the American War of Independence, that information becomes more detailed.<sup>15</sup> (Figure 2) During that conflict, a large number of regular British troops were posted in the country but also units hired by Britain in several German principalities and “Provincial” corps, some formed by Loyalists which had taken refuge in Canada.

During the siege of Quebec by the Americans in 1775-1776, the garrison of the city had blanket coats and caps to face the rigours of winter. It was undoubtedly in that costume that the defenders repulsed the American assault on the night of December 31st 1775, as the officers had been ordered to “. . .immediately provide their men with Makassins, Legons, Caps and Blanket Coats. . .” as of December 17th.<sup>16</sup> In the years to follow, all units invariably had this Canadian costume, even the highest ranking officers. Baroness von Reidesel, wife of the General commanding the corps of German troops in Canada, recalled finding her husband “dressed in Canadian fashion in a sort of cassock made of woollen blankets, from which the red and

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13. John Knox, *The Siege of Quebec and the Campaigns in North America, 1757-1760*, ed. by Brian Cornell, London, 1976, pp. 70, 97-98. Knox's journal was first published in London in 1769.
  14. William L. Clements Library, Amherst Papers, vol. 4. Amherst to Gage, Crown Point, 25 September 1759. I am indebted to Brian L. Dunnigan for this reference.
  15. For deserter descriptions see for example Arthur Doughty, *Report of the Public Archives for the year 1918*, Ottawa, 1920, p. 117; *Quebec Gazette*, 16 March 1765.
  16. National Archives of Canada (henceforth NAC), MG 23, K1, vol. 20. Order Book, Quebec, 17 December 1775.



Figure 2: British soldier at the time of the American Revolution wearing the white "Blanket coat" trimmed with blue, fur cap with a red crown, blue overalls and woollen mitts. Reconstruction by G.A. Embleton based on descriptions and a.c. 1777 drawing (Canadian Park Service).



blue borders had not been removed, and which were heavily trimmed with ribbons".<sup>17</sup>

One of the most complete descriptions of the clothing issued to the troops is given by Captain Pausch of the Hesse-Hanau Artillery detachment on November 8th, 1776:

One pair of long blue cloth over-alls. . . . These are fastened under the feet with a leather strap, and have five buttons on the outside of each leg. . . .

One large blue woolen cap.

One pair blue mittens lined with corduroy material.

One capacious under-jacket, the sleeves being made of strong white corduroy.

One Canadian overcoat with a cape and white sheeps wool, and bound with light blue braid. The cape itself is made of a whitish grey cloth a kind of melton. It is bound with light blue wooden ribbon, and in three places extending down in front to the waist it is fastened with rosettes - these latter being made of the same blue ribbon. This garment is called throughout all Canada a capot.<sup>18</sup>

There were variations to the above winter dress. An illustration *circa* 1777 shows a British sentry wearing a red cap trimmed with fur turban and tail, an item confirmed in an order for soldiers of the 29th Regiment of Foot in February 1782. Leggings and moccasins are also often mentioned instead of over-alls.<sup>19</sup> By and large however, the above winter dress was worn until the beginning of the 19th century.

It is not without interest to note how winter costume was procured in Canada. Regimental order books sometimes have entries which specify what officers were expected to obtain. For example, soon after the 5th Regiment of Foot arrived in Canada during the summer of 1787, the officers commanding the companies were ordered,

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17. *Baroness von Reidesel and the American Revolution: journals and correspondence of a tour of duty 1776-1783*, transl. & ed., Marvin L. Brown jr., Chapell Hill, N.C., 1965, p. 38. The incident occurred at Chambly on June 15th, 1777, but Reidesel was sick and "still had a fever, although it was summer" and wore his winter coat for warmth.

18. *Journal of Captain Pausch*, transl. & ed., William L. Stone, Albany, 1886, pp. 93-94.

19. Albert W. Haarmann and Donald W. Holst, "The Freidrich von Germann drawings of troops in the American Revolution", *Military Collector & Historian: Journal of the Company of Military Historians*, XVI, no 1 (Spring 1964), pp. 1-9; NAC, MG 23, K1, vol. 28, Order Book, 29th Foot, Montreal, 15 February 1782.

on August 2nd, to “make themselves acquainted with the kind of blanket watchcoat & trouser-leggings now used by the Garrison of Quebec & to provide the same for their companies without loss of time”. These articles were paid for by a deduction from the men’s pay as indeed was the rest of their uniform.<sup>20</sup>

As the 1790s arrived, and the beginning of the long Napoleonic wars which were to last until 1815, there was a desire to wear something more “military” than the Canadian capot in Canada. As early as 1791, there is evidence of the 6th Regiment of Foot in Fredericton having “a blue great coat. . . with a hood of blue shallon and white plain buttons”. A Sergeant of the 41st Regiment of Foot at Montreal in 1801 had on “a regimental blue great coat, fur cap, grey pantaloons and side arms” when he deserted. The Royal Canadian Volunteers, a two-battalion local regular unit, first had brown greatcoats in 1796 until replaced by grey ones four years later. Fur caps, mitts, and grey trousers were also worn.<sup>21</sup>

### Official Infantry Greatcoats

The authorities sitting in the War Office in London were also finally pondering on the subject of warm clothes for all enlisted men in the British Army. This may have been because other powers on the Continent had such measures. The substantial full-bodied coat of the early 18th century had become a fairly tight jacket with short tails by 1800. Thus, on the 23rd of April 1801, a royal warrant directed that “each man of our regiments of Foot Guards and Infantry of the Line” would be forthwith furnished with a greatcoat.<sup>22</sup>

The official British infantry military greatcoat had arrived. It was grey, double breasted and had a removable cape over the shoulders. Sergeants were allowed to have cuffs and collars of the facing colour of their regiment on their greatcoats. Until 1855, all enlisted men had white metal on their coats after which time brass became regulatory. The wearers in Canada soon complained that the greatcoat was not

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20. NAC, RG8, vol. C1203 1/2D, p. 17. Regimental Order Book, 5th Regiment of Foot 1787-1790.

21. *The Saint John Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, 20 January 1792; *Montreal Gazette*, 28 December 1801, NAC, RG8, C1167 1/2, Royal Canadian Volunteers, 1st Battalion, Order Book; MG 23, G2, vol. 17, Capt. La Bruyère Order Book. This unit was disbanded in late 1802.

22. War Office, *A Collection of Orders, Regulations and Instructions for the Army*, London, 1807, p. 450.

warm enough. In 1811, the men's greatcoats for North America were ordered to be made warmer and also issued every two years instead of every three years.<sup>23</sup> The most important change for the infantry greatcoat came in the mid 1820s when it was made single breasted. The grey became somewhat darker in the second half of the 19th century but basically this British infantry greatcoat remained the same into our own century.

While the greatcoat was now universal issue, all the other items were still needed to face the Canadian winter. A drawing of 1806 shows a soldier of the 6th Regiment of Foot wearing the new grey greatcoat without the short cape but with the fur cap, the "long over-alls" apparently similar to those worn in 1776 except for being grey, and mitts. A list of 1827 gives the following items necessary for each soldier of the 66th Regiment of Foot: "1 Fur Cap, 1 pair of fur gloves, 2 flannel shirts, 1 pair of Moccasins, 1 pair of creeper straps, Altering the collars of the Great Coats so as to protect the face & ears from the Weather, 2 pairs of flannel drawers".<sup>24</sup> Later illustrations seem to indicate that the grey trousers introduced from 1812 were worn with the greatcoat. For headwear, the regulation army shakos seem to have been worn late in the season as can be seen from illustrations of the operations of the army in Lower Canada late in 1837. However, fur caps were worn for severe weather. Army shoes would also be changed at one point of the season for winter boots called "Beef

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23. NAC, RG8, C30, p. 44. Warrant authorizing a new species of Great Coat for the troops in Canada and Nova Scotia, 28 May 1811. A note on "Great Coats" of 2 November 1812 mentions that a mark was to be placed on the great coats intended for Canada to distinguish them from "those intended for General Service". PRO, War Office (henceforth WO)62/44, p. 48.

24. NAC, RG8, C579, p. 231. "Estimate of Outfit. . .". For the 104th's march from Fredericton to Quebec in the winter of 1813, "The officers provided themselves with flannels for clothing from head to foot, besides fur-caps, mitts, and collars. The men were also provided with flannels, fur-caps, and fur mitts" and all had moccasins and snow-shoes. John Le Couteur, "A winter march in Canada", *United Service Magazine*, 1831, Part 3, p. 179.

Boots".<sup>25</sup> The patterns of these items remain somewhat obscure especially since none seem to have survived in collections. Fur caps in the 1830s, for instance, seem to have been usually peaked with turn-down ear and back skull covers which could be tied under the chin. Later on, the crown became more rounded in some cases while others adopted a wedge shape which seems to have been the more fashionable and favourite type.<sup>26</sup>

### Infantry Officers

Officers had not been forgotten. They had to procure their uniforms at their own expense according to patterns described in the regulations. In the case of winter dress, there seems to have been an unofficial understanding in the various corps in British North America and capots were worn by officers. With the arrival of changing fashions in the 1790s, a blue greatcoat seems to have been the proper dress for the fashionable officer in winter and this was recognized in the regulations concerning the dress of British Army officers in North America by the General Orders of July 1st, 1800:

The Great Coats of the Officers are invariably to be made of blue cloth double breasted with Regimental Buttons and edged throughout with the colour of the lappel of the Regiment, those only excepted whose lappels are blue and the edging of whose Great Coats will therefore be scarlet. The Sword and Sashes are always to be worn outside and the Gorget of Officers for duty suspended from the upper buttons of the lappels - Whenever Officers are ordered to appear in Great Coats on the Parade of for duty they are to wear over hose [overalls] of pepper and salt

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25. A District General Order, Montreal, 11th December 1814, gives a good description of the soldier's winter footwear: "The Beef Shoes are not to be worn over the Common Shoes, The Men's feet are to be well wrapt up, in some woollen stuff and the Beef Shoes then drawn over the wrappers. Worn out Great Coats are to be given up to the Men for the above purpose. . ." NAC, RG8, C687, p. 8. The 1848 *Standing Orders* for Halifax mention, p. 92. "The Boots to be made of stout Shoe Hide, grain side out, and unblacked, the Vamps closed in with a tongue, stout double soles, length of the leg 15 inches, and wide enough to admit the trousers inside, and large enough in the foot to allow of two pairs of worsted socks being worn".
26. *Standing Orders for the Regulation of all Duties in the Garrison of Halifax, Nova Scotia*, Halifax, 1848, p. 93, mentions "The Cap to be wedge shaped 8" high and made of Muskrat, Fitch, or black sealette, with Ear covers and turn down over the neck".

[grey] colored Cloth or Kerseymere with the Regimental Buttons strapped with black leather and covered at the bottom also with black leather so as to shew similar to an half boot.<sup>27</sup>

With this, "large fur caps" and "immense tippets of fur round their neck" might be worn by dandy young officers such as John Lambert saw at Quebec during the winter of 1806-1807.<sup>28</sup> (Figure 3).

A sort of soft leather high boot, shown in Lambert's print, was popular for a long time with officers. On November 29th, 1811, the great-coat was ordered to be double breasted and Sir George Prévost, the Governor General, wished that the officers observed strict uniformity in the future.<sup>29</sup> On December 24th 1811, a general order to the whole army issued in London specified that the greatcoats be grey.<sup>30</sup> The effect was that the officers were ordered to wear greatcoats similar to those of the men. Some officers had other preferences but they were reminded in an 1815 garrison order, that "when Great Coats are Worn, they are to be Military Great Coats and not such as may be dictated by Capricious fancy. . .".<sup>31</sup> The 1820s saw the officer's regulation greatcoat reverting to being a dark blue, single breasted garment with a high "Prussian" collar but this was not a true winter coat. It was in fact the very popular frock coat which was worn from the spring to the late fall. For winter dress in Canada, officers do not seem to have been bound by strict regulations until 1848.<sup>32</sup>

The 1837 Rebellions eventually brought about official changes

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27. NAC, RG8, C223, p. 264. General Orders, July 1st, 1800.

28. John Lambert, *Travels through Canada and the United States of North America in the Years 1806, 1807 & 1808*, London, second edition, 1814 (2 vols), I, p. 306. Lamberts adds: "I would not be surprised if these delicate young soldiers were to introduce muffs; they were in general use among the men under the French government. . ."

29. NAC, RG9, 1A1, p. 484. General Order, Quebec, 29 November 1811.

30. NAC, RG8, C30, pp. 130-132. General Order, Horse Guards, 24 December 1811.

31. NAC, RG8, C1203 1/2 O, p. 94. Garrison Order, Quebec, 17 June 1815. There must have been a number of 'dandies' in garrison for the order goes on to say that ". . .The Commandant could have scarcely believed it possible, had he not known the individuals, that two Officers of the Garrison could have appeared in the Streets yesterday afternoon Completely in coloured Clothes, which if it happens again will be duly noticed. . .".

32. *Regulations for the Dress of General, Staff, and Regimental Officers, 25th April 1822, Revised and Corrected 25th December 1826*, London, 1826, p. 82. A blue cloak lined with scarlet, "walking length" was also prescribed. See below for the 1848 General Order.



Figure 3: “An Officer of the British Army and a Merchant of Quebec in their Winter Dress” in 1807, from John Lambert’s *Travels*. . . The officer (left) wears the 1800 regulation dark blue greatcoat with the fur cap in the shape of a shako, boots, mitts and a fur tippet (National Archives of Canada, C-113668).

to the winter dress of officers (Figure 4). It was probably at that time that fur trimming added to the collar and cuffs of the greatcoats became very popular. Finally, during the summer of 1848, the Commander of the Forces in British North America appointed a Board of officers to determine a common winter uniform for officers. The approved conclusions of the Board were issued as general orders at Montreal on August 30th of the same year. Infantry officers were ordered to wear:

#### **Cap**

To be Wedge shaped, eight inches high, to close flat when off the head, to be made of dark Otter Skin, Peak of the same material, with ear covers, and turn down over the neck.

#### **Coat**

Grey double breasted Frock Coat as nearly as possible the same colour as the Great Coat worn by the Soldier, the Collar to be turn'd down, lined with Grey Astrackan Lamb Skin, - and made sufficiently deep to turn up over the face and ears, if required. Button - Black Horn, with Crown and Regimental Number, or as may be Established Regimentally. Black Sling sword Waistbelt. Sash of the Regular Pattern.

#### **Winter Boots**

Of unblackened Leather of the Country to come up as high as the bind of the knee for company officers, for Mounted officers to come over the knee, and to be worn at the discretion of officers Commanding Regiments.

This remained the standard infantry officers' winter dress well into the 20th century with fairly minor variations such as cord added on the breast from about 1860.

There were also other arms of the service and while they were generally wearing fairly similar winter dress to that of the infantry, there were some differences, especially with regards to officers.



Figure 4: British infantry at St-Hilaire de Rouville in 1837 during the Rebellions in Lower Canada. The troops campaigning generally still wore their shakos (protected by a black cover) with their grey greatcoats as late as December instead of fur caps. Coloured Lithograph by Lord Charles Beauclerk (National Archives of Canada, C-41999). Gauntlets [gloves] of dark otter skin which will prevent the necessity of having fur round the Cuff of the Frock Coat.<sup>33</sup>

### Rifle Regiments

Occasionally, a rifle regiment would be posted to Canada. These troops were to act as skirmishers and were armed with the slower to load but much more accurate rifled muskets. They wore dark green uniforms and black accoutrements. At first, there was little to distinguish their winter dress from that of the line infantry; officers of the 2nd Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps, in Canada from 1844 to 1847, had a frock coat of dark grey or black cloth trimmed with black astrakhan fur, the same fur for the cap and mitts, and long black boots.

33. NAC, RG8, C1194 B, p. 424. General Orders, Head Quarters, Montreal, 30 August 1848. On 26 September, (*ibid.*, p. 436) officers serving on the General Staff were ordered to wear black Astrackan caps with ear covers and peak of the same, five and a half inches high and the crown nine inches in diameter; blue cloth double breasted greatcoats with five black cord loops on the breast "and one row of olivett buttons on each breast", black lamb skin lappels and stand and fall collar "5 inches deep"; black lamb skin gauntlet gloves.



The enlisted men appear to also have had a dark grey greatcoat and black cap with peak and ear flaps. When the 4th Battalion of the corps arrived in 1861, the officers took to wearing black patrol jackets trimmed with black astrakhan fur as well as a round black fur busby, a dress also adopted by the officers of the 1st Battalion in 1867 except for a black fur wedge cap.<sup>34</sup> The 1st Battalion of the Rifle Brigade marched overland from Saint John, New Brunswick, to Rivière-du-Loup, Québec, during January 1862 wearing “greatcoats, fur caps and moccasins. . . the cape of the greatcoat being turned up and tied with a woollen conforter outside. Over all, a blanket with a hole cut for the head as a ‘poncho’. . .”.<sup>35</sup>

The Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment was a regular regiment formed in Canada from veterans of the British Army during 1840-1841, and served here until disbanded in 1870. These veteran soldiers were posted mostly along the border with the United States and they also wore the dark green of the other rifle regiments. The officers adopted a “grey great coat made double-breasted, with grey fur collar and cuffs” probably at the time of the formation of the regiment.<sup>36</sup> (Figure 5) In 1848, we find that the officers of this unit were to wear the grey greatcoat trimmed with fur “directed generally to be worn by all Officers of Infantry”.<sup>37</sup> This had hardly changed by 1865, the winter uniform of the officers then consisting of a black busby of “astrakhan or other fur with covers for the ears”, a double breasted grey greatcoat with horn buttons and trimmed with grey astrakhan fur, “Canadian” boots and fur gloves.<sup>38</sup> Except for the black busby, this was the 1848 dress for infantry officers quoted above. The enlisted men had the usual infantry grey greatcoat as the line infantry with fur cap, flannel waistcoat and drawers, and a pair of long boots. The cuffs and collars of the Sergeant’s greatcoats were of dark green cloth in rifle regiments.<sup>39</sup>

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34. Lewis W.G. Butler, *The Annals of the King’s Royal Rifle Corps*, London, 1913, vol. 6, pp. 34-35.
35. Sir William H. Cope, *The History of the Rifle Brigade (The Prince Consort’s Own) formerly the 95th*, London, 1877, p. 458.
36. *The Regulations for the Dress of General, Staff, and Regimental Officers of the Army, 1st April 1846*, London, 1846 (Repr. 1971), footnote on p. 154, mentioned that the officers of this unit already had this winter dress.
37. PRO, WO 3/107, p. 464. Adjutant General, Horse Guards, 26 September 1848.
38. War Office, *Army Equipment, Part V, Infantry, June 1865*, London, 1865, p. 32.
39. *Standing Orders of the Royal Canadian Rifles, issued May 1861*, Montreal, 1861, pp. 30-31.



Figure 5: An officer and two Privates of the 83rd Regiment of Foot, ca. 1843. The officer wears a fur trimmed coat while the two enlisted men give a very good view of the standard grey greatcoat which remained almost the same from the 1820s to 1903 (National Archives of Canada, C-98765).

## Artillery & Engineers

The personnel of the Royal Regiment of Artillery provided detachments of gunners in various parts of Canada (and the rest of the colonies) on a permanent basis. Until the middle of the 19th century, artillerymen generally wore the same winter dress as infantrymen. Blanket coats were worn at the time of the American Revolution and probably until the advent of the grey greatcoat in the early 1800s. According to an order issued on November 29th, 1807, the officers were to wear a single breasted blue greatcoat but this was changed to the standard grey double breasted model worn by the rest of the army January 11th, 1812.<sup>40</sup> This greatcoat became the dark blue frock coat in the 1820s as in the infantry. The officers, for their winter dress in Canada, opted for dark blue greatcoats trimmed with black fur from about the late 1840s. In the middle of the 19th century, a fairly radical change took place for the enlisted men. The greatcoats became dark blue, with scarlet collars for sergeants in 1851. By 1860, the privates had the scarlet collar as well. There appears to have been little change thereafter until 1899.<sup>41</sup>

The officers of the Royal Engineers and their enlisted men called Royal Sappers and Miners until 1855 were especially active in Canada during the first part of the 19th century supervising the construction of such works as the citadels of Halifax and of Quebec City, Fort Henry in Kingston and the Rideau Canal. Their winter dress was, by and large, the same as that of the artillery, the greatcoats of the men being grey with brass corps buttons until 1853 when they became dark

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40. Adrian Caruana, "The dress of the Royal Artillery in North America, 1775-1783", *Military Collector & Historian: Journal of the Company of Military Historians*, XXXV, no 3 (Fall 1983), p. 125; John Kane, *List of Officers of the Royal Regiment of Artillery. . . to which is added an appendix: containing. . . extract and memoranda relative to the dress of the Officers and men, &c. &c.*, Greenwich, 1815, not paginated.

41. D. Alastair Campbell, *The Dress of the Royal Artillery*, London, 1971, p. 49; water-colour dated "February 1850 Montreal" in the David M. Stewart Library, Montreal. Drivers of the Royal Artillery were issued "Blue Guard Coats" in March 1814 but their uniform was different than that of the gunners - NAC, RG8, C 745, p. 101.

blue, with scarlet collars for sergeants, the privates only having the scarlet collar in 1861. This remained practically the same until 1902. The evolution of the officer's greatcoats was similar to those of the artillery.<sup>42</sup>

### Cavalry

Few cavalry regiments served in Canada. The only mounted unit recorded during the French Regime was the *Corps de Cavallerie*, a local effort which lasted from May 1759 to September 1760. If they had a winter dress, it was in all probability the capot. During the War of 1812, part of the 19th Light Dragoons arrived in Canada in 1813 and served here until 1816. Instead of greatcoats, cavalrymen in Europe had long cloaks and the 19th soon found theirs not quite up to a Canadian winter. So their dark blue cloaks were transformed "into coats with sleeves" since the accoutrements had to be worn constantly over the coats in the "peculiar climate" of Canada.<sup>43</sup> From 1838 to 1843, the 1st (King's) Dragoon Guards and the 7th Hussars served in Canada. The very ornate dress of cavalry at that time proved utterly unsuitable for winter and a warm "uniform" was adopted. This consisted, for the King's Dragoon Guards, of a fur cap with ear flaps, a dark blue double breasted "Pea Jacket", fur mitts and long boots lined with sheepskin. The 7th Hussars had a similar dress but used their fur lined pelisse instead of the pea jacket.<sup>44</sup> The next, and last, British cavalry unit to serve in Canada was the 13th Hussars from 1866 to 1869. The officers had a dark blue pea jacket braided and trimmed with black

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42. P.H. Kealy, "The uniforms of the Corps of Royal Engineers up to 1914", *Royal Engineers Journal*, June 1934, pp. 186-208; December 1934, pp. 504-513; September 1935, pp. 403-418. *Regulations for the Provision of Clothing, Necessaries, Great Coats, Cloaks, & Appointments for the Royal Regiment of Artillery and the Corps of Royal Sappers and Miners. Dated the 19th of December 1824*, London, 1825, pp. 5, 13, 28. We have not seen a specific reference to the Canadian winter dress of the officers but it was in all likelihood similar to that of the officers of the Royal Artillery.
43. Michael Mann, *A Particular Duty: The Canadian Rebellions, 1837-1838*, Salisbury, UK, 1986, p. 164, quoting George Cathcart.
44. John Luard, *A History of the Dress of the British Soldier*, London, 1852, p. ix; see also Mann, *A Particular Duty*. . . , pp. 93, 99, 163-164; NAC, RG8, C1036, p. 168. A. Shirley to Military Secretary, Montreal, 29 August 1842, complains that the pea jackets sent to the 7th Hussars were unsuitable in the previous three winters. The pelisse were heavily ornamented with yellow cord and rows of brass ball buttons. They were red in the 7th Hussars until ordered to be blue in 1841: Richard Cannon, *Historical Record of the Seventh or The Queen's Own Regiment of Hussars*, London, 1842, p. 86.

astrakhan fur, dark blue thick cloth pantalons with two white stripes, long boots, black astrakhan fur gauntlet gloves and fur cap with white crown embroidered with gold “and the fur cap made loose so as to be well pulled over the ears”. Over all this was the long dark blue cavalry cloak which protected the horse as well as the rider. The enlisted men probably had the same type of dress but without the astrakhan fur and gold lace.<sup>45</sup>

### Militia

Besides the soldiers of the regular forces, there was the Militia, composed of all men of the population able to bear arms during the 17th and 18th centuries. There was a small number of volunteers which were usually in the towns and the “Sedentary Militia, occasionally called up (Figure 7). After the War of 1812, the Militia became dominated completely by volunteers. Following Confederation, the “Sedentary” or “Non Service Militia” all but vanished. The volunteers of the 19th century, especially the units composed of wealthy men, loved to dress in fine uniforms which sometimes had even more lace and embroidery than those of the regular troops they were supposed to assist.

During the French Regime, the militiamen usually wore their own civilian winter clothes and when the government did issue some for winter expeditions, it was the same type of garment: wool caps, capot, mitasses, moccasins and so on.<sup>46</sup> This did not change with the advent of the British who basically continued the same policy as the French with regard to the Militia. Following the adoption of the grey great-coat by the regular army in 1801, the authorities started issuing these to units of “Embodied Militia”—units composed of men drafted for regular service.<sup>47</sup>

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45. *The Volunteer Review and Military and Naval Gazette*, Ottawa, 4 March 1872.

46. See Francis Back and René Chartrand, “Canadian Militia, 1750-1760”, *Military Uniforms in America*. Company of Military Historians, 1984, Plates nos 553 and 554 [This is a series of colour plates accompanied with a text published quarterly since 1949].

47. See for instance: NAC, RG8, C1218, p. 381. N. Freer to W.H. Robinson, Quebec, 5 September 1812; PRO, CO 188/19, p. 76. “Return of Clothing. . .” for the New Brunswick Militia, 1813.



Figure 6: "Quarters of the Army (Quebec) 20 below zero, 6 A.M.". This print of a private on guard gives an idea of the kind of exposure to the cold sentries had to endure. He is dressed in the standard army winter uniform. This print was published in London on January 1st, 1851. It shows a private of the Reserve battalion of the Rifle Brigade which served at Quebec during 1847-1848 (National Archives of Canada, C-112).



Figure 7: During the War of 1812, a number of “Sedentary Militia” units were called up for temporary duty in rural Lower Canada. Some saw action against the Americans in late 1813. They came dressed in their civilian clothes and were issued arms and accoutrements. Reconstruction based on descriptions and prints by G.A. Embleton (Canadian Park Service).

After the war with the United States which ended in 1815, the activities of the Militia came to a standstill until the Rebellions of 1837-1838. During this major crisis, the old Militia organization in Lower and Upper Canada collapsed and numerous corps of "Loyal Volunteers" were raised and kept in service for various periods of time.<sup>48</sup> The winter costumes they adopted were either the capot or the pea jacket. In Québec city, most of the volunteer units adopted capots trimmed in various colours and made a very handsome appearance according to contemporary artwork (Figure 8). In Montreal, the volunteers usually opted for the dark blue pilot coats.<sup>49</sup> In Upper Canada, the grey greatcoat was used by a number of infantry units embodied in late 1837 such as the 1st and 2nd Frontenac and the 1st and 2nd Addington regiments at Kingston. On the warmer Niagara Frontier, the Queen's Niagara Fencibles had grey coats and trousers with the usual fur caps, mitts, etc. but no greatcoats. The battalions of incorporated Militia which served from 1838 to 1843 had the standard grey greatcoat. Blue jackets were also worn, notably by cavalry troops.<sup>50</sup>

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48. The numbers of men embodied in the Canadas was high: in 1838 it was 10,676, in 1839 over 21,162 reduced to 4,879 in 1840 and 2,766 for 1841 and 1842. PRO, W01/538, p. 613. R. Jackson to Lord Somerset, Montreal, 1 December 1842.
49. McCord Museum, Montreal, J.S. McCord Militia & Rebellion Papers, Box 3, Lt. Col. Griffin to Col. McCord, 20 November 1838; Peregrine Pouchbelt and Rodrick Ramrod, *The Quebec Volunteers*, Quebec, 1839 [prints of the volunteers in uniform by Sir James Archibald Hope]. NAC, Picture Division, Powell's Scrapbooks, vol. 1.
50. Sir Richard Bonnycastle, *Canada, as it was, is, and May Be*, London, 1852 (2 vols), I, pp. 310-311; NAC, RG9, 1B1, vol. 25. Board of Officers to Governor General [May 1838]. The Queen's Niagara Fencibles were to have red coats faced blue but obtained grey because of a shortage of red cloth. PRO, W01/538, p. 175. Militia General Order, Toronto, 31 October 1838. The troop orders of the Frontenac Light Dragoons given at Kingston on 14th December 1837 called for "Winter Clothing" of "a plain Blue Pilot Cloth or Flushing round about Jacket, single breasted, without pockets, and one row of Ball buttons with Prussian Collar with hooks and eyes. Pantaloons of the material to button in front with welt to cover the buttons, without pockets, buttons for straps at bottom - A fur Scull Cap with leather Peak" - NAC, RG8, C1203 1/2, p. 7.





Figure 8: The Quebec Volunteers, raised in 1837-1838, wore a mixture of winter costumes in which the Canadian capot figured very prominently. Here we have two members of different companies of the Quebec Light Infantry no doubt considering the warming virtues of wine. The volunteer to the left wears a capot embellished with wings—a distinction of elite regular soldiers—at the shoulder, shoulder straps and a peaked cap. The volunteer to the right wears a dark blue greatcoat trimmed with black fur with shoulder knots. Not at all what was worn by regular soldiers but these improvised *à la militaire* styles obviously pleased the volunteers. Lithograph by Sir James Archibald Hope (National Archives of Canada, C-40757).

After a period of calm, the mid 1850s saw a revival of activity in the volunteer militia, especially after the 1855 Militia Act in the Canadas which provided some pay for drill as well as weapons. From 1863 on, the basic clothing was issued as well. However, articles such as greatcoats, fur caps and boots (as well as backpacks, canteens, etc.) were only provided by the government to troops called upon active service, a situation which prevailed until the 20th century. These supplies were similar to those used in the British army described above and could be bought by the units from the Department of Militia. The officers of the Canadian Volunteer Militia obtained winter clothing similar to that worn by officers in the regular service.<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusion

This study could go on in greater detail, cite more orders and descriptions, and show many more illustrations than are actually shown here. A great many corps have been left out and the period after 1870 has only generalities. However, this overview will suffice to show the existence and evolution of the winter costumes of both the military men posted in this country, and of the civilian volunteers who assisted them. Perhaps the most important feature to be observed is that up until the end of the 18th century, it was Canadian clothing made on the spot that was worn by those posted here. Certainly an outstanding example of a distinctively local feature imposing itself on the military apparel of the soldiers serving in Canada between 17th and the 19th centuries.

The beginning of the 19th century marks the arrival from England of the standard army greatcoats. We also note in the 1840s an officer's winter uniform becoming the regulation winter dress in which fashion had a big part. This uniform was trimmed with astrakhan fur—a type of fur which originated in Asia—presumably imported to Canada, land of the furs, for this purpose (Figure 9). However, for all these European and even Asian intrusions, the winter dress of the officers and men

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51. NAC, RG9, 1C4, vol. 2. Militia General Order, Toronto, 11 October 1856, offered British army greatcoats at half price but few units reported this item in 1862 although a number mostly in Canada East (Québec) mentioned wedge caps. The 1st and 4th Montreal Cavalry troops also reported a winter dress of dark blue jacket trimmed with black fur and cords and black fur caps - NAC, RG9, 1C8, vol. 3.

of the units serving in Canada cut a very handsome and fine looking silhouette which became associated with the country as a part of its distinctive costumes.

In closing, I take pleasure in thanking the many librarians, archivists, curators and other observers of costume who have helped me in various ways to bring this documentation together.

Service canadien des parcs

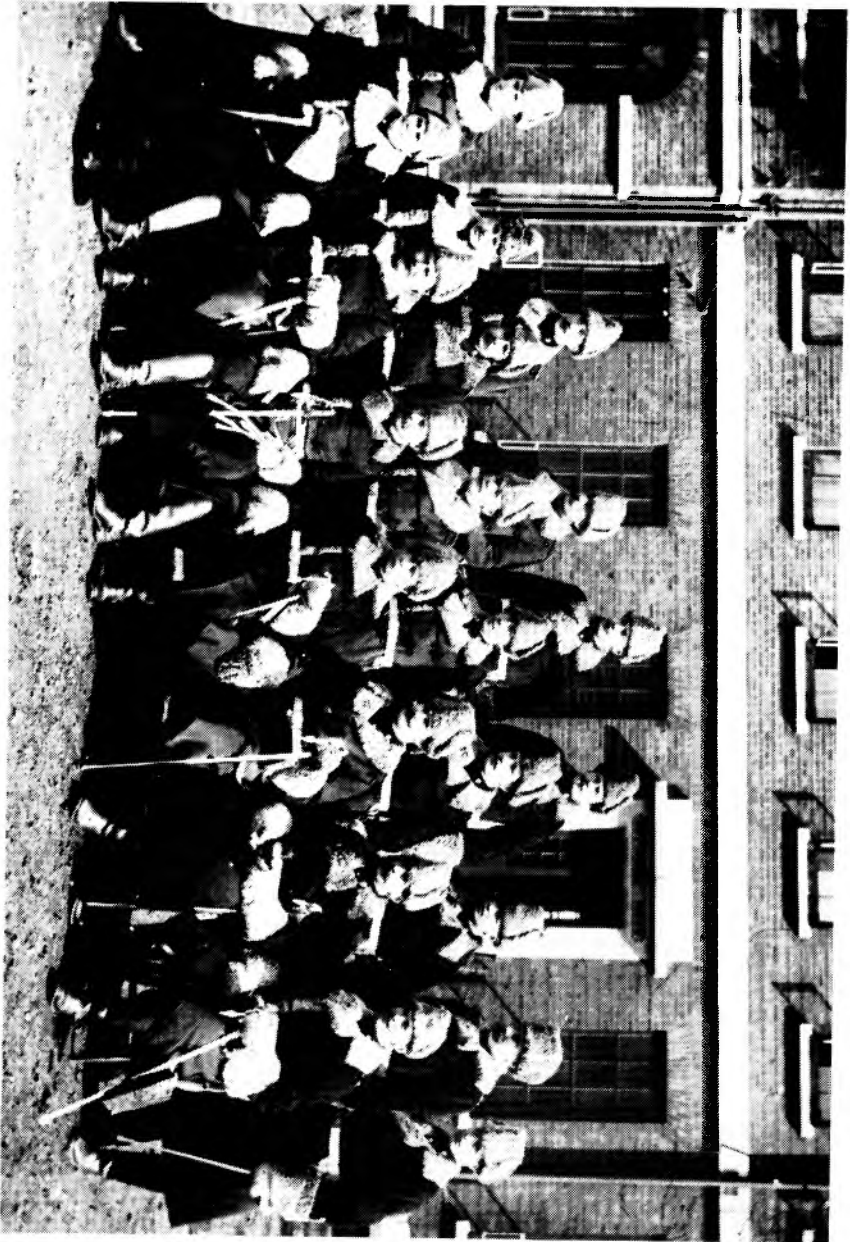


Figure 9: Officers of the 1st Battalion, Leinster Regiment, photographed in Halifax in 1900. Note that the winter uniform has remained identical since the 1860s (National Archives of Canada, PA-28437).