

THE GRAND TRUNK RAILWAY BRIGADE

by

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Canada has never lacked for variety in its military units. In times of crisis such as the rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada in 1837-1838, the Fenian threats of 1866 and 1870, and the North-West Rebellion of 1885, numerous *ad hoc* units were quickly raised and quietly disappeared when the crisis had passed, leaving few records of their actual existence, location, personnel or service. As a result, many have almost been forgotten. One such unit was the Grand Trunk Railway Brigade, the first to combine rail and militia duties.

On 30 December 1864, Charles John Brydges, managing director of the Grand Trunk Railway, advised his friend John A. Macdonald (at that time the Canadian Minister of Militia) that if railwaymen were compelled to leave their jobs in the impending militia draft, it would be extremely difficult to keep the railway open and that in the event of what he termed "actual difficulty", the smooth operation of the railway would be as important as having troops in the field. As an alternative, Brydges suggested the formation of a special unit. He proposed "that in order to keep our men together for the military use of the road, and to have efficient drilled bodies of men at our large Stations ...

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the Company be authorized to form a railway regiment or battalion. Headquarters to be at Montreal — companies at Point Lévis, Sherbrooke, Richmond, Brockville, Kingston, Belleville, Toronto, Stratford and Sarnia. The intermediate stations to be drafted into the companies formed at the larger Stations".¹

Macdonald recognized the necessity and agreed with Brydges' suggestion. He replied that, on looking at the Militia Act, "I find that Volunteer Corps of Engineers can be formed at any time. I shall bring the subject before His Excellency tomorrow morning and hope to get his consent that all the Railway employees should be formed, under their own officers, into Companies".²

On 24 March 1866, Brydges informed Colonel P. L. MacDougall, the Adju-

1. *Public Archives of Canada, Macdonald Papers, Manuscript Group 26, A, 1(b), Vol. 191, pp. 79460-79462. It is interesting to note that in 1861, when Brydges was still general manager of the Great Western Railway, a proposal was made that a unit to be known as the Great Western Light Infantry be raised at Hamilton and that Brydges be the lieutenant-colonel commanding. No evidence was found to show that the unit was ever actually formed. (P.A.C., Record Group 9, ICI, Vol. 171, No. 711).*

2. *Macdonald Papers, Vol. 510, p. 187. Macdonald to Brydges, 1 January 1866.*

tant General, that the men were strongly in favour of being formed into a body of Rifles.³ MacDougall replied that he did not think that the government would object to a unit of Rifles but he strongly hinted that Garrison Artillery would be preferred.

"If accepted as garrison artillery they would be taught, besides the general drill of the infantry, the heavy gun drill for which we are now making provision. They would have more to do as Garrison Artillery than as Rifles... I should like this explained to them before the denomination of the force is finally decided".⁴

Macdonald submitted a memorandum to Council on 20 April recommending the organization of railway employees into special volunteer corps of Engineers and Artillery, with a limited number of Rifles or Infantry. He further recommended that, as in the case of the Civil Service Rifle Regiment, it be understood that "the Railway Corps shall not be called away from the lines of Railway, except in cases of emergency of which Your Excellency as Commander in Chief must be the sole judge".⁵ The recommendations were accepted and embodied in an Order-in-Council passed on 23 April.

By Militia General Order of 27 April, the Grand Trunk Railway Corps

3. *P.A.C., Adjutant General's Office, Letters Received. Record Group 9, ICI, Vol. 131.*

4. *P.A.C., Adjutant General's Office, Letterbooks. Record Group 9, ICI, Vol. 236, pp. 146-147. MacDougall to Brydges, 13 April 1866.*

5. *P.A.C., Adjutant General's Office, Letters Received. Record Group 9, ICI, Vol. 240, No. 3457.*



Public Archives of Canada

An enlargement of the badge of the Grand Trunk Railway Brigade. It will be noted that the word "Regiment" is used, and although this designation was officially changed to "Brigade" in 1867, the badge apparently was never altered.

was formed.⁶ The Corps almost immediately became known as the Grand Trunk Railway Regiment and on 22 February 1867 it was redesignated the Grand Trunk Railway Brigade. The appointment of Brydges as lieutenant-colonel commanding was announced in a Militia General Order dated 11 May 1866.

As originally organized, the corps consisted of five battalions, two of which were Garrison Artillery and

6. *Three railways emulated the Grand Trunk's example in the same year but each raised only one company: the Ottawa and Prescott on 15 June, the Brockville and Ottawa on 6 July (became a battery of Garrison Artillery on 27 July) and the Great Western on 17 August. The latter had intended to form a battalion of 350 men earlier in the year but the plan apparently never materialized (P.A.C., Adjutant General's Office, Letters Received. Record Group 9, ICI, Vol. 240, No. 3521).*

three were Rifles. The first battalion was Garrison Artillery and all of its seven batteries were at Montreal. One of the batteries was actually an Engineer company. The second battalion — a Rifle Battalion — was composed of three companies at Montreal, one at Richmond, one at Sherbrooke and one at Point Lévis. The third was also a Rifle Battalion. Three of its companies were at Montreal, two at Brockville and one each at Kingston and Belleville. All six batteries of the Fourth Battalion, Garrison Artillery, were at Toronto. The Fifth Battalion had three rifle companies at Brantford, one at Stratford, one at St. Mary's and one at Sarnia. On 27 July 1866 a new company was formed at Port Hope and another was added at Belleville. Authority for new companies at Sarnia and Montreal was published in General Orders on 10 August and 7 September, respectively.

A Militia General Order of 6 July 1866 removed the regiment from any of the existing brigade districts and placed it directly under the Militia Department. It was subject to the Militia Act and to all regulations governing the active militia force. Uniforms were supplied by the department and were the same as for Rifle, Engineer and Artillery units of the regular militia.

The Fenian threats of 1866 and 1870 proved to be the *raison d'être* of the GTRB and its personnel were engaged in guarding bridges, terminals, shops and roundhouses at Sarnia, Point Edward, Goderich, Dunnville, Brantford, Ridgeway, Port Colborne, Fort Erie, Toronto, Port Hope, Belleville, Kings-

ton, Brockville, Mallorytown, St. Anne, Vaudreuil, St. Lambert, Montreal, Point St. Charles and the Victoria Bridge in 1866, and at Fort Erie, Port Colborne, Ridgeway, Brantford, Toronto, Port Hope, Kingston, Brockville, Prescott, Cornwall, Vaudreuil, St. Anne, Lachine, St. Lambert, Montreal, Point St. Charles and the Victoria Bridge in 1870. They were eligible for (and many received) the Canada General Service Medal. One volunteer received his medal for service at St. Armand and Eccles' Hill and another had been detailed for duty at Pigeon Hill and Hemmingford.⁷

When the threat of Fenian invasion passed, the Brigade languished. A Militia General Order of 2 June 1874 announced that "the several corps composing the Grand Trunk Railway Brigade are hereby removed from the List of Corps entitled to pay on completion of drill authorized for the year 1874-75."

Pennyman W. Worsley, who succeeded to the command of the GTRB in 1874 when Brydges became one of the commissioners of the Intercolonial Railway, requested an explanation for the Brigade's removal from the list. Colonel Walker Powell, the Adjutant General, replied that this was because insufficient funds had been voted and priority had to be given to county battalions.

"It was evident that any training ordered for it [the GTRB] could not be in Camps of exercise. It was therefore a question as to whether the GTB should be placed on the

⁷. P.A.C., *Medal Registers, Record Group 9, IIA5.*

list in lieu of an equal number of County Battalions.

"Having a Force such as that now organized in Canada, which has been so useful in the past, it was very difficult to make selections as to which Corps should be retained on the list for drill pay this year. You must therefore bear in mind the difficulty of the position and I feel quite sure that you will agree with me all things considered that no more satisfactory result could have been attained for a necessary reduction than that adopted"⁸

On 31 August, Worsley requested authority to disband the militia organization of the Grand Trunk Railway

but this was not formally accomplished until 17 June 1881.⁹

Thus ended the experimental combination of railroading and military service in Canada, not to be revived until the First World War.¹⁰

⁸. P.A.C., *Adjutant General's Office, Letterbooks, Record Group 9, IIB1, Vol. 455, p. 926. Powell to Worsley, 16 July 1874.*

⁹. P.A.C., *Adjutant General's Office, Letterbooks, Record Group 9, IIB1, Vol. 456, p. 379.*

¹⁰. *For an account of the services of Canadian Railway Troops during the First World War, see Nicholson, Colonel G.W.L., Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919, Ottawa, 1962, Chap. XVI.*

France and the Nuclear Weapon

The nuclear weapon does not permit France to become one of the world's giants, but it does permit her to be a quantity to be reckoned with as soon as her vital interests are at stake.

That is why the Americans and the Russians are hostile to the appearance of national nuclear forces which make their policy of hegemony more difficult and risk compromising its results; that is why the nuclear armament of France is at the heart of French-American relations.

Later it will come into the forefront of European policy, for Europe cannot build itself into an entity merely on the basis of economic and technical communities, although these are necessary. In order for Europe to exist, it will have to assume the bur-

den and the responsibility of its defence and, for that, possess nuclear weapons. When we reach that point, we shall see that France's possession of national nuclear weapons will be a keystone in the building of Europe and, by reason of this, the subject of the most impassioned debates.

It is easy to draw the conclusion from this article: the dominant characteristic of our military policy is the decision taken by General de Gaulle to give France a nuclear arsenal, and this decision has such consequences that it will direct the destiny of our country for a long time to come.—*Pierre Messmer, Minister of the Armed Forces of France, in "France's Military Policy" (Military Review (U.S.), August 1963).*