

Queen's Rangers – First American Regiment
Raised in 1756 – their Activities are a Cross Section of Canadian History.
By H.M. Jackson, Captain, Queen's Rangers

The story of the Queen's Rangers, First American Regiment, Toronto infantry unit, is one in which Canadians from coast to coast have a proprietary interest. Particularly is this true of Canadians whose ancestors were Loyalists. The story of the Regiment is a cross section of the history of Canada itself. This is true of no other Canadian unit.

The Regiment took part in nearly every contest of the Seven Years War. It formed part of the battle picture in almost all engagements and in scores of skirmishes in the American Revolution. It was one of the factors which loomed largest in the settlement of Upper Canada.

The Queen's Rangers were once a part of the British regular army. They were never defeated in the Revolution. This fact has significance, because Canadians in general have suffered from a sense of inferiority over the results of that struggle. The story of the Regiment is a drama of successes from Louisburg to the Plains of Abraham in the Seven Years War, and from New York to Yorkton in the Revolution.

For one hundred and seventy-five years the Rangers have moved through the events of the history of the continent, victorious always, and exerting an influence of strength and vigour upon their times. In this portion of Ontario still live families descended from members of the Regiment - the Jarvises, the Powells, the Merritts, the McGills, the McNabs, and many more.

Raised originally in 1756 to take part in the Seven Years War, the Queen's Rangers consisted at first of a company of scouts under one, Robert Rogers. Eleven companies were finally organized to act as the eyes and ears of the army. They took part in the operations of 1757 and assisted in the defence of Fort William Henry in 1758. They were at Ticonderoga and later in that year several of the companies fought at the capture of Louisburg. With Wolfe's army in 1759 they participated in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham and in the capture of Quebec. The rest of the unit accompanied the army which took Ticonderoga and Crown Point.

In the campaign of 1760, the former part of the unit fought at Ste. Foye, at the defence of Quebec and then marched off with Murray's men to assist in the capture of Montreal. Other companies were present at the capture of Forts St. John and Chambly.

The journey of Rogers and two companies of the Regiment who were sent to receive the surrender of Detroit and Michilimackinac was not the least of the exploits of the unit in the Seven Years War. After the outbreak of the American Revolution, Rogers was ordered in 1776 to raise the Queen's Rangers again. At Marmaroneck, under Col. Rogers, they threw back a force of Americans. Early in 1776, Rogers was succeeded by Major Wemyss, under whom the unit began that series of successes that ended only with the cessation of hostilities. Striking here and there at will, acting now as advance guard to the army, and in retirement as rear guard, the Regiment fought a number of independent actions. They are stories in themselves, and space is lacking to give their details.

For their part in the operations against Philadelphia, they were mentioned specially in Howe's despatches. At Brandywine they defeated two whole brigades of Americans. At Germantown they held the right flank, helping to turn the retreat of the enemy into a rout.

After Germantown, where Wemyss was wounded, they got a new commanding officer, Lieut. Col. John Graves Simcoe, later to be Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada.

Their exploits from then on under that tactician and disciplinarian read like a novel. Now composed of cavalry, artillery and infantry, they distinguished themselves further at the Battle of Monmouth. One of their greatest exploits was the destruction of Washington's barges on the Raritan, after defeating several bodies of the enemy on the way. This jaunt, be it said, consisted of a march of eighty miles by the cavalry and thirty by the infantry through hostile country in one day and one night.

In April, 1780, the unit was with Clinton at his capture of Charleston. In the meantime, the Queen's Rangers' Huzzars rode in the raid on Hooper-town and Newbridge and later in the taking of Elizabethtown. With Arnold up the James River the Regiment was hotly engaged and with the Loyal American Regiment defeated a force of the enemy under Baron Steuben. They participated in the capture of Williamsburg. In this campaign they had not only the enemy with which to contend but lack of supplies and equipment. They frequently fought barefoot.

At Spencer's Ordinary, Simcoe's men defeated a force of 1,200 of the enemy with La Fayette not far away. When Simcoe learned that Cornwallis, hemmed in at Yorkton, had agreed to an armistice, he asked leave to fight his way out with his Regiment; but Cornwallis refused. The colors of the unit were not surrendered, however. They were smuggled out and now repose in the College Street Library, Toronto. Late in 1872, the unit was enrolled in the British Army as a regular regiment. It was disbanded in October, 1783, many of the officers and most of the other ranks moving north into Nova Scotia and Canada.

When in 1791, Simcoe was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, the Queen's Rangers was reorganized. In Upper Canada the unit did pioneer service. When Simcoe chose York as the seat of government, they built the first buildings of the present Toronto, a system of roads about Kingston, Ont., Dundas Street West from York, and Yonge Street north to Lake Simcoe.

During the Rebellion of 1837, under Lieut.-Col. S. P. Jarvis, son of a former officer, they fought at Montgomery's Tavern and were in garrison at Toronto until July, 1838.

And still the Regiment carries on the traditions, bearing the honours won in the French War, the Revolution and the Great War by its overseas battalions. Its uniform, buttons, badges and facings are similar to those the old unit wore in the days of the Revolution. And be it said, its spirit is in no way different.

(NOTE: Members of the Association having records, muster-rolls, etc., of any of the Loyal Provincial Regiments, or whose ancestors served in any of the Loyal Provincial Regiments are requested to communicate with the Convener, "Committee of the Loyal Provincial Regiments", United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada, 609 National Building, Bay Street, Toronto, Ont.)

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For further information, including a list of the Members of the Queen's Rangers who were included in the Surrender of Yorktown, October 1781, see *The Queen's Rangers* by George H. Locke and Margaret Ray, Global Heritage Press Inc., 31 pp., ISBN 1-897210-77-9