

A MILITIA HISTORY OF THE OCCUPATION OF THE VANCOUVER ISLAND COALFIELDS, AUGUST 1913

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FOR TWO WEEKS IN AUGUST 1913, well over a thousand troops from six BC militia regiments occupied the Vancouver Island coalfields and communities of Nanaimo, South Wellington, Extension, Ladysmith, Cumberland, and Union Bay in response to an outbreak of violence among striking coal miners, replacement workers, and colliery bosses. While remnants of the militia remained in the area for nearly a year, the military occupation captured contemporary attention as the ultimate abuse of power by the government and its allies, the colliery bosses, in their attempt to bring a swift end to a strike then entering its second year. The most notable instance of direct military intrusion into civilian life in BC history, this occupation has never been the subject of thorough investigation, despite the periodic attention it has received from historians of the labour movement in British Columbia.¹ A century after the end of the Vancouver Island coal strike of 1912-14, the

* The final stage of this paper was a team effort, and great credit must be extended to those whose experience, knowledge, and patience are seemingly without bounds. I owe my thanks to Dr. Richard Mackie and Dr. Graeme Wynn for sharing the wisdom necessary to tame and temper an otherwise youthful approach, and to Dr. Patrick Dunae, whose command of Vancouver Island's historical resources, and whose kind assistance in sharing them with me, are reflected on every page. Finally, I wish to offer my most heartfelt thanks to Dr. James Wood, under whose brief tutelage at the University of Victoria I learned to listen to the ever-quieting voices of our history.

¹ The basic sources are Paul Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver: BC Federation of Labour, 1967), 55-61; Patricia Wejr and Howie Smith, comps., "The Big Strike," in *Fighting for Labour: Four Decades of Work in British Columbia* (Victoria: Provincial Archives, 1978), 11-21; John Norris, "The Vancouver Island Coal Miners, 1912-1914: A Study of an Organizational Strike," *BC Studies* 45 (1980): 56-72; Lynne Bowen, *Boss Whistle* (Lantzville: Oolichan Books, 1982), 175-86; Lynne Bowen, "The Great Vancouver Island Coal Miners' Strike," *Journal of the West* 23, no. 4 (1984): 33-39; John Hinde, *When Coal Was King: Ladysmith and the Coal-Mining Industry on Vancouver Island* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 148-206. The story of the strike is also told in scattered fashion in Violet Johnson-Cull and Elizabeth Norcross, eds., *Chronicle of Ladysmith and District* (Ladysmith: New Horizons Historical Society, 1980), 84-89, 374-80. What is most egregiously lacking is a single published monograph concerning the strike, the occupation, and the militia in all the Island communities. Even Hinde's book deals largely with Ladysmith alone.

most recent narratives of the militia's occupation of the mid-island mining towns remain mired in local myth or skewed by a bias in support of the forces of labour. The miners' version of events has been privileged against that of the militia, reflecting the views of union leader Jack Kavanagh in 1913, when he declared: "No reptile ever evolved from the slime of ages resembles the spawn of filth now on Vancouver Island and known as the militia."² Similar sentiments are reported in much popular writing, including the famous poem "Bowser's Seventy-Twa," by R.W. Smith. This refers to the kilt-wearing 72nd Highland Regiment of Vancouver, which was deployed to the Island by British Columbia's attorney general William Bowser. It goes in part:

Oh, did you see the kiltie boys,
Well, laugh, 'twould nearly kilt you, boys,
That day they came to kill both great and small
With bayonet, shot and shell, to blow you all to hell.
A dandy squad was Bowser's seventy-twa.³

This article aims to correct a historical record that caricatures the militia, and all of the men within it, as a nefarious, malign, and monolithic entity. It also seeks to correct several errors of fact, identity, and interpretation that have become embedded in histories of the great coal strike. In the end there can be no doubt that the deployment of the militia in the strike zone served the interests of the colliery bosses (who were intent on returning to business as usual) at least as much as it ensured public safety. But I aim neither to determine the causes and consequences of the occupation nor to decide whether it was just. I seek simply to understand this episode as a military event. To do this I examine the forgotten and overlooked voices of militiamen like Walter Bapty, Arthur Currie, James Matthews, Tom Norris, William Rae, and F.A. Robertson, whose experiences and recollections survive in archival letters, diaries, and newspaper accounts. Newspaper stories were especially useful in allowing the construction of an accurate chronology of events.⁴

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² Kavanagh is quoted in "Union Men Indignant at Use Of Soldiers," *Vancouver Sun*, 21 August 1913.

³ R.W. Smith, "Bowser's Seventy-Twa" is reproduced in Phillips, *No Power Greater*, 59-60.

⁴ With the exception of the *Vancouver Sun*, most of the Island and Vancouver newspapers came out strongly on the side of the mine owners. In this article, I make every effort to reconcile their reports with each other. I compiled an Excel spreadsheet of all the major events of the occupation. It included several hundred coded "data points," which I was then able to organize by date, regiment, newspaper, letter, or recollection. Often I was able to triangulate events with corresponding references in newspapers.

By 1912, Vancouver Island coal miners had endured nearly four decades of hazardous work under harsh company rule. So appalling were the conditions that, according to union records, underground gas explosions killed no fewer than 373 men in the three decades leading up to the great strike of 1912-14.⁵ In June 1912, smouldering discontent within Nanaimo's mines erupted when two miners were laid off for reporting the existence of gas in Canadian Collieries' No. 2 mine at Extension.⁶ There were many relatively small clashes between strikers and provincial authorities through June and July, but on 12 and 13 August 1913 several hundred striking miners took to the streets of Nanaimo to protest the arrival of replacement workers destined for Canadian Collieries' No. 1 mine. After the replacement workers failed to appear, the strikers descended on the city quay to meet the noon arrival of twenty-five special police constables from Vancouver aboard the Canadian Pacific Railway's (CPR's) *Princess Patricia*. Two of the constables were disarmed and beaten.⁷ After forcing the constables and a handful of replacement workers back aboard the steamer, a large number of angry miners set off for Extension, liberating a hardware store of its firearms and ammunition as they went. Meanwhile, agitated strikers in South Wellington came to blows with non-union replacement miners ("scabs") and burned a number of their homes to the ground. Their terrified families fled to the relative safety of the surrounding forest.⁸ Other homes were damaged by axe-wielding vandals. A few kilometres west, in Extension, miners buoyed by the news that a group of Nanaimo strikers was en route, marched on the colliery to oppose forty reportedly armed non-union men who had holed up inside the mouth of the mine. A brief gunfight ensued. Local newspapers included harrowing accounts of grievous injuries and multiple deaths, but there is no substantive evidence of either; some of the agitators broke off from the mine entrance to loot and burn the nearby residences of known replacement workers, and, again, terrified families fled into the summer night seeking safety⁹ (Figure 1).

⁵ See J. Kavanagh, *The Vancouver Island Strike* (Vancouver: BC Miners' Liberation League, ca. 1913), 1. The best account of nineteenth-century Nanaimo is John Douglas Belshaw, *Colonization and Community: The Vancouver Island Coalfield and the Making of the British Columbian Working Class* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

⁶ Kavanagh, *Vancouver Island Strike*, 2.

⁷ "Policeman Relates Story of Violence," *Vancouver Sun*, 14 August 1913; "Trouble at Extension," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 14 August 1913; John Hinde, *When Coal Was King*, 181.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 179, 180, 186; "Serious News from Nanaimo," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 13 August 1913; "Strike Situation Assumes Serious Aspect," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 13 August 1913; "Riot at Ladysmith," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 13 August 1913; "Refugees Come from Ladysmith," *Victoria*



Figure 1. Officers of the British Columbia militia and guests standing amid remains of torched houses at Extension, August 1913. Photographer unknown. *Source:* Image D-03289 courtesy of the Royal BC Museum, BC Archives (hereafter BCA).

Twenty kilometres south, in the town of Ladysmith, between two and four hundred striking miners gathered outside the Temperance Hotel, where fifteen replacement workers had temporarily taken up residence. But it was the arrival of five more replacement workers that ignited the crowd to action. In the dim glow of a sixty-candlepower streetlight, the throng smashed the hotel's windows and offered, according to the *Victoria Daily Colonist*, "compliments, more forcible than polite," to those taking refuge inside.¹⁰

The tipping point of the violence occurred just after midnight on 13 August when a small explosion shook the Temperance Hotel. The strikers contended that the bomb was lobbed from within, with the intent of causing injury to those outside. However, detailed reports from both the *Nanaimo Free Press* and the *Victoria Daily Times* strongly suggest that the strikers detonated the bomb. Two hours after the first explosion, another small bomb was thrown through the bedroom window of the children of a known replacement worker named Alex McKinnon. Attempting to remove the bomb, McKinnon suffered serious injuries

Daily Colonist, 16 August 1913; "Victoria Troops Land at Departure Bay," *Victoria Daily Times*, 14 August 1913.

¹⁰ Hinde, *When Coal Was King*, 179, 180, 186; "Serious News from Nanaimo," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 13 August 1913; "Strike Situation Assumes Serious Aspect," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 13 August 1913; "Riot at Ladysmith," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 13 August 1913; "Refugees Come from Ladysmith," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 16 August 1913; "Victoria Troops Land at Departure Bay," *Victoria Daily Times*, 14 August 1913.

when it detonated in his hand. In a pamphlet published soon after the incident, the BC Miners' Liberation League leader, Jack Kavanagh, blamed McKinnon for the loss of his arm, claimed that he had made the bomb to throw at the strikers, and characterized him as a thief and a scab for allegedly collecting strike pay even as he continued to work for the mine in defiance of the union.¹¹ A year later, three local men whose connection to the strike remains unclear, were convicted of the bombing.¹²

By dawn on 13 August, officials recognized that the local police forces were simply overwhelmed, and Ladysmith's mayor, George Hillier, publicly admitted that his six-man police force had been outnumbered by a crowd of agitated strikers totalling some four hundred and that "the town [was] now controlled by the mob."¹³ The next logical step, according to Hillier, would be to call in the troops. By the end of the day, he and two of the city's justices of the peace – road superintendent Daniel Nicholson and realtor John Stewart – had completed the legal documentation necessary for that action.¹⁴ Nanaimo's chief constable, Charles Cox, on the other hand, sought to convince Nanaimo's mayor, John Shaw, that the situation could be calmed with the addition of a few more special constables and that calling on the militia should remain a last resort. While Shaw initially agreed with Cox, he took it upon himself to remind a meeting of strike leaders that, if they insisted "upon making further trouble[, he would] immediately send word to Victoria and ask for the militia."¹⁵

The militia came anyway. Many who see the mobilization as a bullying action by government have sought to determine how the aid to civil power force received its official invitation to the embattled region. On the afternoon of 13 August, a *Vancouver Sun* reporter questioned William Bowser, the BC attorney general (and acting premier while

¹¹ "About 2 am, as a small group of strikers were approaching the group of cottages wherein McKinnon's house was situated, another explosion occurred, blowing off the arm of McKinnon, who had the explosive in his hand, preparing to throw it into the street." See Kavanagh, *Vancouver Island Strike*, 9. On Kananagh's later career, see David Akers, "Rebel or Revolutionary? Jack Kavanagh and the Early Years of the Communist Movement in Vancouver, 1920-1925," *Labour/Le Travail* 30 (1992): 9-44.

¹² Hinde, *When Coal Was King*, 181. Both Hinde and Bowen often take Kavanagh's word as fact. Kavanagh's decidedly loaded narrative, which was contradicted by evidence at the trial, heavily influenced contemporary accounts and has been repeated for nearly a century with little recognition that its aim was to stir sympathy for the strikers.

¹³ Hillier is quoted in Hinde, *When Coal Was King*, 182.

¹⁴ "Ladysmith Requisition," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 27 August 1913; "Strike Situation Assumes Serious Aspect," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 13 August 1913; "May Send Troops," *Victoria Daily Times*, 14 August 1913.

¹⁵ "Day of Terror," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 14 August 1913.

Richard McBride was on a visit to England), about unfolding events. His response seems clear:

There is ... no truth in the report that the provincial government has given orders for the calling out of the militia. Such a thing is entirely beyond our powers. The law says that the militia can be called by two local magistrates and by them alone. The provincial government has nothing whatever to do with the calling out of the militia, should it be deemed necessary.¹⁶

But within hours Bowser had changed tack altogether:

We are going to keep order in Nanaimo and the district if we have to get the militia of the whole country to the place ... Tonight 300 regular Canadian militiamen from Victoria will leave the capital for Nanaimo. Tomorrow the city will be under martial law and the organization of Nanaimo, Ladysmith, South Wellington and those other places be perfected.¹⁷

As bold and reassuring as Bowser's second statement may have been, it illustrates just how out of touch he was with martial matters. In 1913, the "regular" militiamen to whom Bowser referred were the professional – full-time – members of the Canadian Garrison of Artillery, then stationed at Work Point in Victoria. It is not unreasonable to think that a force of some three hundred well-trained and equipped militiamen could have controlled this situation. The problem was that, by August 1913, owing largely to desertion for better-paying jobs elsewhere, the force had dwindled to below one hundred men.¹⁸ The mobilization would then have fallen to the non-permanent militia; however, without an official invitation by the two magistrates required in each town, Bowser would have no legal means to send them in. Two weeks after the deployment, the *Vancouver Sun* revealed that Bowser had ordered Albert Planta (former Nanaimo mayor) and George Thomson (former Dunsmuir employee, prominent businessman, and former Nanaimo MLA) to draft and sign a requisition as local justices of the peace.¹⁹ By midnight of 13 August, then, the troops had their orders, or at least orders enough, to go. If nothing else, the indecision over military action shows how unprepared

¹⁶ "Members of Cabinet Receive Urgent Call to Discuss Situation," *Vancouver Sun*, 14 August 1913.

¹⁷ "We Are Going to Keep Order," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 14 August 1913.

¹⁸ Peter G. Silverman, "Aid of the Civil Power," *Canadian Defence Quarterly* 4, 1 (1974): 46–52.

¹⁹ "Found That Bowser Called Out the Troops," *Vancouver Sun*, 28 August 1913; Elections British Columbia, *Electoral History of British Columbia* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1988), 47.

the government was to mobilize its forces against the strikers. Reflecting on the rushed mobilization of his men, the officer commanding the civil aid force, Colonel John Hall of the 88th Victoria Fusiliers, recalled: “As to the legal aspects of the employment of the militia in aid of the civil power ... my opinion is that so little had the executive thought that the militia could be effective, they had not taken the trouble to inform themselves what legal formalities were involved.”²⁰

What is certain is that the government had a good deal of firepower at its disposal. By August 1913, there were seven active permanent army or militia regiments in Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland. Victoria was home to the 88th Regiment Victoria Fusiliers (as well as the full-time 5th British Columbia Regiment of the Royal Canadian Garrison of Artillery [RCGA]) based at the Work Point barracks. In Vancouver, there were the kilted 72nd Regiment Seaforth Highlanders and the 6th Regiment Duke of Connaught’s Own Rifles (DCOR); in New Westminster, there was the 104th Regiment Westminster Fusiliers. Also on the Lower Mainland were the 19th Army Service Corps and the 6th Field Company, Canadian Engineers. Administratively, all fell under the command of Colonel Alexandre Roy of the federal 11th Militia District²¹ (Figure 2).

With the exception of the full-time RCGA and some of the engineering and support units, these regiments consisted of volunteer soldiers – white-collar professionals, businessmen, clerks, tradesmen, shopkeepers, and teachers, who could expect to dedicate one or two nights a week through the winter, and maybe a week or so during the summer, to their soldiery. Reginald Roy, a prolific military historian and veteran of the Second World War, provides, in his description of the Seaforth Highlanders, a fine illustration of the composition and nature of the average militia regiment in British Columbia:

²⁰ Silverman, “Aid of the Civil Power,” 47. For the career of John Albert Hall (1868–1932), see J.F. Boshier, *Imperial Vancouver Island: Who Was Who, 1850–1950* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2010), 329.

²¹ For the BC army and militia units on the eve of the Great War, see Margaret Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958), 377. For the DCOR, see Ron Leblanc, Keith Maxwell, Dwayne Snow, and Kelly Deschênes, *Swift and Strong: The British Columbia Regiment (Duke of Connaught’s Own) – A Pictorial History* (Vancouver: The British Columbia Regiment, 2011), 54–55. For the 72nd Seaforth Highlanders in August 1913, see John Graham Gillis, ed., “A Lovely Letter from Cecie”: *The 1907–1915 Vancouver Diary and World War I Letters of Wallace Chambers* (Vancouver: Peanut Butter Publishing, 1998), 143–44. On Alexandre Roy’s BC career, see Roger Sarty, “‘There Will Be Trouble in the North Pacific’: The Defence of British Columbia in the Early Twentieth Century,” *BC Studies* 61 (1984): 3–29.



Figure 2. A selection of officers of the Civil Aid Force at Nanaimo, August 1913. Seated, L-R: Captain P.M. Ferris, Colonel J.A. Hall, unidentified, Lieutenant Picton Ward. Standing, L-R: Lieutenant Ross Napier, Lieutenant W.J. McManus, Captain Milner, Lieutenant J.A. Clark, Captain Byng-Hall, Lieutenant Jessop, Lieutenant Cotton, Captain James Skitt Matthews. In overall command of the entire military operation in the coal mining districts of Vancouver Island, Colonel Hall was also commanding officer of the 88th Victoria Fusiliers. Photographer unknown. Identification by J.S. Matthews. *Source:* Image A-03137 courtesy of the Royal British Columbia Museum, B.C.A.

There would be, therefore, a thin layer of officers and men with some peacetime or wartime experience ... In a word, like most other militia units in Canada at the time, the 72nd Regiment was composed mostly of enthusiastic amateurs. Simple arms and foot drill, minor field tactics, some range work and lectures on military affairs took up most of their time. As potential peacekeepers – or indeed peacemakers – they had little knowledge and no experience.²²

Today, “the militia,” better known as reserve units, are often regarded as second best to the soldiery of the professional, full-time army units.²³ But, as James Wood illustrates in *Militia Myths: Ideas of the Canadian*

²² Reginald Roy, “The Seaforths and the Strikers: Nanaimo, August 1913,” *BC Studies* 43 (1979): 81–93. This is an after-action report written by the adjutant of the 72nd Regiment, Captain William Rae.

²³ This misconception persists even though many of Canada’s reserve units proved their worth in Afghanistan.

Citizen Soldier, the reverse was true during Canada's formative years. The robust Canadian militiaman, shaped by the rough conditions of the land on which he settled, could be readily called upon to perform the duty of a full-time soldier. Standing armies of professional soldiers were seen as inefficient and as producing lazy leaders who were far too constrained by bureaucracy. Moreover, citizen-soldiers were typically settlers and immigrants.²⁴ Recent British immigrants accounted not only for a majority of the regiment's numbers but also for the distinct character of the regiment itself. Vancouver's 72nd Highland Regiment naturally drew men of Scottish origin. Victoria's 88th Fusiliers and Vancouver's 6th DCOR were undeniably British in tone and temperament. Recruitment drives often included the proviso that only British subjects apply. Of course, at the time, all Canadian citizens were British subjects, but these regiments were formed at a time of massive pre-war immigration from the British Isles as well as at the high-water mark of popular jingoism and imperialism.²⁵ These regiments were therefore important parts of the cultural fabric of their host cities and, perhaps more important, were trusted by the population to protect them should the need arise (Figure 3).

The Island militia got a good head start on the more distant mainland regiments. As news of the impending mobilization spread through Victoria on 13 August, men belonging to the city's 88th Fusiliers quickly rushed home from their callings to gather their livery and report for duty at the drill hall at the corner of Johnson and Government streets. By ten o'clock that evening, over four hundred men had gathered under the watchful gaze of their officers. Colonel J.A. Hall led the 88th and Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Currie stood before his fifth Regiment of the RCGA.²⁶ If there was any order in the rapid assembly of these men, credit might belong to the regiment's senior non-commissioned officers. Sergeants like Frederick Newberry, a working carpenter, would have checked the fit of his men's boots, adjusted haversacks, and confirmed supplies, all in an effort to ensure their comfort and effectiveness in the coming weeks. With the men sorted, and with twenty rounds distributed to each man, it was finally time to depart.²⁷

²⁴ James Wood, *Militia Myths: Ideas of the Canadian Citizen Soldier* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

²⁵ The classic study of the Canadian brand of British imperialism is Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970). Barman estimates that some 175,000 British immigrants settled in British Columbia in the thirty years after 1891. See Jean Barman, *Growing up British in British Columbia: Boys in Private School* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984), 2.

²⁶ For Currie's career, see Boshier, *Imperial Vancouver Island*, 220-23.

²⁷ For the names of members of the newly formed 88th Victoria Fusiliers, see the *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 12 December 1912. I owe this reference to Patrick Dunae.

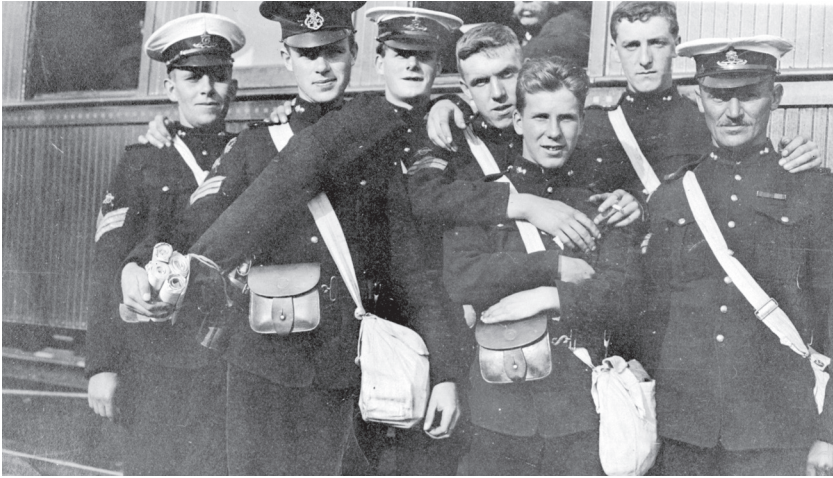


Figure 3. Junior non-commissioned officers of No. 1 Company of the 88th Victoria Fusiliers at the E&N train station at Extension, August 1913. Photographer unknown. Source: Image D-03291 courtesy of Royal British Columbia Museum, BSA.

Shortly after midnight, in the small hours of 14 August, a caravan of troops and materiel snaked its way to Victoria's outer harbour to meet a waiting CPR liner, the *Princess Alice*. Not all who gathered to see the 88th off were supportive, however, and those sympathetic to the strikers' cause hissed and jeered as they passed through the dim, lamp-lit streets. One onlooker threw a lit string of firecrackers onto a cartload of twenty-four thousand rounds of ammunition intended for one of the 5th's Maxim guns, fortunately to no effect (Figure 4). Without any further disturbances, the *Princess Alice* steamed out of Victoria Harbour shortly after 1:00 AM. Before boarding, Colonel Roy remarked soberly on his task to a reporter of the *Victoria Daily Colonist*: "The object of the soldiery is not to kill, but as you can see we have guns with us."²⁸

After a four-hour journey from Victoria, the *Princess Alice* slipped into Nanaimo in the pre-dawn glow of a warm August morning. Closing in on the harbour, Lieutenant-Colonel Currie directed the ship's captain to alter course and land his contingent 3.2 kilometres (2 miles) north of the city at the Brechin Mine wharf in Departure Bay.²⁹ If the handful of regular passengers on board were not utterly surprised by the last-minute boarding of the armed force, surely they were now less than

²⁸ "Troops Depart for Nanaimo," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 14 August 1913.

²⁹ "Excerpts from Historical Records of Col. F.A. Robertson," unpublished ms., 1925, Ladysmith Archives (hereafter Robertson Excerpts). Robertson's memoirs are also the basis of J. Cass, "Troubled Times, 1912-1914," in Johnson-Cull and Norcross, *Chronicle of Ladysmith*, 85-88.

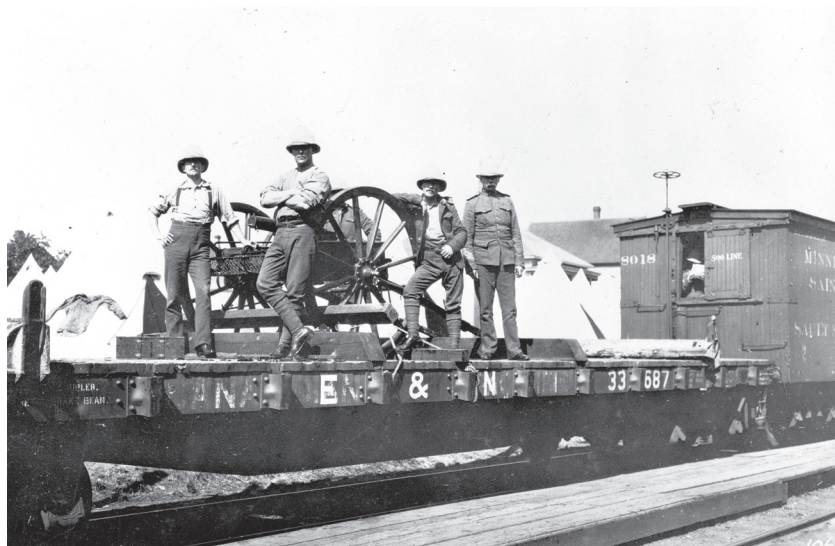


Figure 4. The Maxim gun of the Victoria-based 5th British Columbia Regiment of the Royal Canadian Garrison of Artillery on a flatcar of the E&N Railway, August 1913. Photograph by Frederick Victor Longstaff. *Source:* Image A-03159 courtesy of Royal British Columbia Museum, BCA.

thrilled by the last-minute diversion.³⁰ After hurriedly unloading their kit at Departure Bay, the troops made a hasty march south and within two hours of landing, the scarlet-clad regulars of the 5th Regiment led the column into Nanaimo. Here, they occupied the government wharf and set up their headquarters at the Esquimalt and Nanaimo (E&N) train station, an important hub of communication³¹ (Figure 5). The only significant hurdle surrounding the initial landing was feeding the troops for, although they had received a small meal on the boat, it was many hours before the regiment's support units arrived to set up field kitchens.³²

With Nanaimo more or less protected, the next task was to secure the strike-battered town of Extension, some eight kilometres south. After scraping together a meal, Major Angus and Major Winsby gathered a company each from the 5th and 88th and set off at around 2:00 PM for Extension.³³ The combination of fully loaded haversacks and minimum

³⁰ "Robertson Excerpts."

³¹ "Troops Depart for Nanaimo," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 14 August 1913; "Firecrackers Used to Annoy Troops," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 15 August 1913; "Strike Situation Still Serious," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 15 August 1913.

³² Walter Bapty, "Memoirs of Lt.-Col. Walter Bapty," 36-37, ms. 1283, British Columbia Archives (hereafter Bapty Memoirs).

³³ For William Norman Winsby (1874-1957), see Boshier, *Imperial Vancouver Island*, 794.

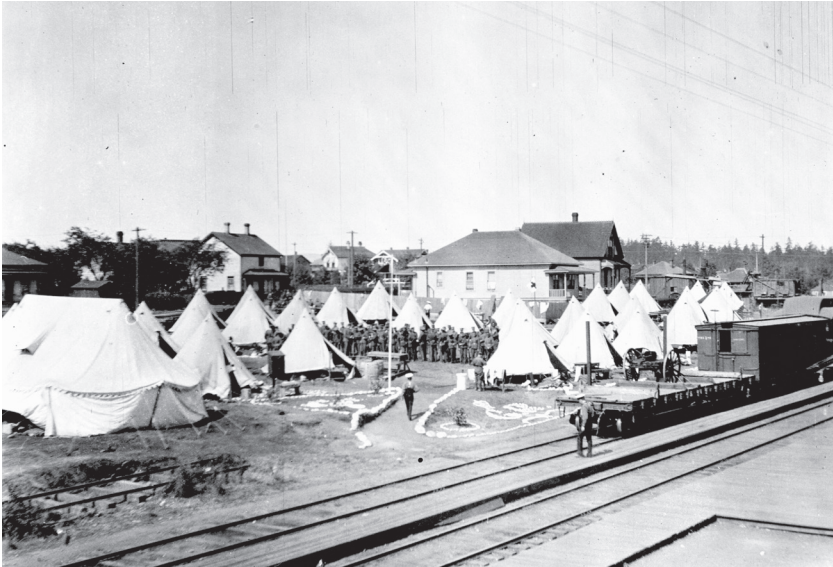


Figure 5. The main camp of the Civil Aid Force at the E&N Railway station, Nanaimo, August 1913. “Nanaimo Station Camp” was the base of the two Victoria-based regiments, the 5th British Columbia Regiment of the Royal Canadian Garrison of Artillery (RCGA) and the 88th Victoria Fusiliers, as well as the 6th Regiment Duke of Connaught’s Own Rifles (DCOR) from Vancouver. Note the Maxim gun parked at right and the rocks painted white and arranged into a patriotic crown above the initials “GR,” which stood for King George V (Georgius Rex). Photograph by Frederick Victor Longstaff. *Source:* Image A-00981 courtesy of Royal British Columbia Museum, BCA.

sleep and food meant that the midday sun took its toll on the weekend warriors.³⁴ Dr. Walter Bapty, a Boer War veteran and then a young medical officer attached to the 88th, remembered one of his more curious cases:

In the heat of the sun we had to march a few miles, presumably to rescue someone who was beset by the strikers. My reputation was made when a sick man was brought to me at one of the halts with severe abdominal pains ... The examination of the abdomen did not reveal any signs of peritonitis, so a large dose of aromatic spirits of ammonia in water was given; one of the few medicines in my haversack. The man swallowed his draught with difficulty and stood there with a most anxious expression – followed by a loud and prolonged belch, then a smile of relief and for this I had a most critical and curious audience.³⁵

³⁴ “Much Doubt Exists,” *Vancouver Sun*, 15 August 1913.

³⁵ “Bapty Memoirs,” 36–37. As a fifteen-year-old, Bapty had volunteered for the Canadian contingent in the Boer War. See the Walter Bapty Fonds at the University of Victoria Special Collections and Boshier, *Imperial Vancouver Island*, 222.

Two hours later, the combined force of Victoria militiamen finally reached Extension. “Extension was under such a cloud of smoke it was impossible from the point of the hill to see anything,” recalled Lieutenant F.A. Robertson of the view of the town from a small knoll.³⁶ Eight houses had been completely destroyed, rails and mine carts torn apart, and a host of other equipment in and around the mine set alight. Major Angus ordered his company to surround the mine property by setting up a rough perimeter while Major Winsby led a small company of the 5th down to the entrance of the mine. Here, a handful of troops entered the mine in search of survivors while the remainder formed a bucket brigade to control fire outside. Remaining elements of the 88th, who had been left at the entrance to the mine property, searched the woods and hills nearby. One of the first to emerge from hiding was the Campbell family, who had fled at the outset of violence the previous day. Over the next two hours, twenty-four women and children, ranging in age from sixty years to a few days old, emerged from the cover of the surrounding forest.³⁷ After learning that these families had spent a day and a night in the woods, the militiamen opened their haversacks and shared what rations remained after their hasty breakfast in Nanaimo. These beleaguered and now homeless residents of Extension were escorted to Stark’s Crossing where they were loaded into two waiting boxcars on the E&N line destined for Victoria that night.³⁸ This plan quickly unravelled when it became clear that the strikers had cut telegraph wires, felled trees across the rails, and, according to Lieutenant Robertson, attempted to separate the rails in several places.³⁹ Changing destination and behind schedule, the train finally made it into Nanaimo that evening, and suitable accommodation in the city’s hotels was found for the ragged passengers. With the fires extinguished and the locals in safe hands, Major Angus’s contingent also withdrew from Extension to Nanaimo.

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It is worth noting – and correcting – a persistent error found in a handful of contemporary and subsequent accounts regarding the arrival of the militia. Bowen’s *Boss Whistle*, which relies heavily on retrospective oral narratives belonging to local union members and strikers, details

³⁶ “Robertson Excerpts.”

³⁷ “Wild Work,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 17 August 1913; “Robertson Excerpts.”

³⁸ Tom Norris to Marianne Norris, 14 August 1913, Marianne Norris Collection, British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA); Bapty Memoirs, 36-37; “Situation Still Serious,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 15 August 1913; “Wild Work of Mob,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 17 August 1913.

³⁹ “Robertson Excerpts.”

Colonel Hall's landing as follows: "Early on the morning of August 14th, fifty soldiers of the Seventy-second Regiment Seaforth Highlanders under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel A.J. Hall disembarked in Departure Bay, which at that time was outside Nanaimo city limits."⁴⁰ Save for the fact that Victoria's militia did land at Departure Bay on the fourteenth, every other detail of this account is incorrect. Colonel Hall was the officer commanding the 88th Victoria Fusiliers, not the 72nd. The mixed-force landing on the morning of 14 August was composed entirely of the 5th and 88th Regiments from Victoria, not the Seaforth Highlanders from Vancouver. While it is almost certain that newspapers and oral accounts inflate troop numbers, we know that not fifty, but hundreds, of troops and tonnes of equipment, including at least one Maxim gun, landed that morning. Finally, the 72nd disembarked at Union Bay, not Departure Bay, and they did so on the 15th, not the 14th.

* * *

Mobilization of the Vancouver militia – the kilted 72nd and the 6th DCOR – took a full twenty-four hours longer than the swift deployment of the Island regiments. In the early afternoon of 14 August, just as Major Angus was leaving Nanaimo for Extension with his men, the 72nd and 6th received orders from Militia District II commander, Colonel Roy, to begin deployment to the strike region. Like the men of Victoria's 88th, very few of the Vancouver militia were professional soldiers, and on this weekday afternoon, most were toiling away in banks, schools, or sawmills. Muster orders were received by hand, word-of-mouth, or read about in the local papers, which is why it took until 10:00 PM to assemble twenty officers and 167 men of the 72nd (Figure 6). The regiment's Maxim gun was prepared for transport and twenty rounds of ammunition distributed to each man, but no blankets or kit outside of that carried on each soldier's back was brought along – an oversight that would take its toll in the coming days.⁴¹ At the same time, the 6th Regiment managed to muster six officers and one hundred men at its drill hall, and soon after these men assembled, they hastened to the government wharves via Pender, Seymour, and Cordova streets. The regiment whistled the popular song of the summer of 1913, Harry Carroll's romantic ballad, "The Trail of the Lonesome Pine," as they marched.⁴²

⁴⁰ Bowen, *Boss Whistle*, 175-76. The incorrect date for the arrival of the 72nd is also found in Bowen's "Great Vancouver Island."

⁴¹ Roy, "Seaforths and Strikers," 83.

⁴² "Vancouver Troops Depart for Strike at Midnight Hour," *Vancouver Sun*, 15 August 1913.



Figure 6. Members of the 72nd Regiment, Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, and their canine mascot at their Prideaux Street camp in Nanaimo, August 1913. Nicknamed “the kilties,” “the kiltie boys,” and “Bowser’s Seventy-Twa,” the 72nd Regiment consisted largely of men of Scottish origin or ancestry from Vancouver. Photograph by Frederick Victor Longstaff. *Source:* Image A-03183 courtesy of Royal British Columbia Museum, BCA.

Waiting for them at the dock was Major Moore’s 19th Company Army Service Corps, who would be responsible for feeding and clothing the contingent now assembling in the mid-Island. Also joining the force were an officer of the Canadian Engineers and an officer and five men of the Canadian Army Medical Corps.⁴³ Shortly before midnight, the men of the 72nd Regiment arrived at the Vancouver waterfront behind their highland pipers. As in Victoria, the spectacle drew hundreds of onlookers, including a great many whose sympathies were with the striking miners and whose angry send-off included taunts like, “Going to shoot your brother?” and “Off to kill the women and children?”⁴⁴ The *Princess Patricia’s* crew leaned in favour of the strikers for, once they learned that they would be carrying militiamen destined for the strike zone, they threatened to strike right then and there. Urging his crew otherwise, the ship’s captain reminded them: “No matter where [your] sympathies might be, as the ship was under British register [we] must

⁴³ Roy, “Seaforths and Strikers,” 83.

⁴⁴ “Tells of Situation in Strike Zone,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 21 August 1913; Roy, “Seaforths and Strikers,” 83; “More Troops Dispatched,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 16 August 1913; “Much Doubt Exists as to Who Called the Militia to Nanaimo,” *Vancouver Sun*, 15 August 1913.

carry anybody.⁴⁵ With the officers occupying its dining room and the remaining ranks crammed into the ship's passageways and saloons, the *Princess Patricia* finally left Vancouver for Nanaimo in the early hours of 15 August.

Five hours later, the *Princess Patricia* arrived in the coal port of Union Bay, some ninety kilometres north of Nanaimo, to offload its martial cargo.⁴⁶ Union Bay was the coal-shipping facility for Canadian Collieries' mines at nearby Cumberland. Immediately a small force of men was sent inland by train, and just after 7:00 AM on 15 August, Major Tait and his kilted men of the 72nd reached Cumberland, where Tait penned a brief dispatch to Colonel Hall:

I have been here two hours, arriving safely at 7 o'clock. I have issued full instructions to the magistrate in all his duties and to be in waiting at all times. Everything is perfectly quiet here. I closed all the saloons within a radius of twenty miles. Am sending one company of the 6th [back] to Union [Bay] [under] charge of Captain Gardiner. Arrested two men for attempting to blow up the railway trestle at Union this morning. We will sleep in the schoolhouse and do our cooking on the field.⁴⁷

Compared to the open-air camp being established in downtown Nanaimo, Tait's Seaforths found comfortable accommodation in a newly built schoolhouse alongside a football (soccer) pitch and established a more-than-suitable cookhouse with the assistance of the municipality. A field house some 275 metres from the troops' barracks served as a suitable billet for the Seaforth's officers. Sentries armed with signal lamps and trained in Morse code served as the line of communication between the two structures.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, in Nanaimo a twenty-year-old student of law from Victoria named Tom Norris and the rest of the 1st Company of the 5th Regiment awoke bleary-eyed on 15 August. Owing to the long marches and excitement at Extension the previous day, they were "dusty, bedraggled, and blackened from head to foot," noted the *Victoria Daily Times*.⁴⁹ Norris had little time to sit easy, however, as his company quickly assembled into two widely spaced ranks that stretched between the E&N rail depot

⁴⁵ "Additional Militiamen for Strike," *Vancouver Sun*, 16 August 1913.

⁴⁶ Roy, "Seaforths and Strikers," 83; "Attempt to Blow Up Bridge," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 16 August 1913.

⁴⁷ "Attempt to Blow Up Bridge," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 16 August 1913.

⁴⁸ Roy, "Seaforths and Strikers," 84.

⁴⁹ "Nanaimo Now Quiet," *Victoria Daily Times*, 15 August 1913.

and the hotel where the homeless women and children from Extension had lodged for the night. Under the gaze of a small but friendly crowd, the refugees from Extension slipped from between the protection of the ranks and into the train destined for Victoria.⁵⁰ Immediately afterwards, the men were relieved and Norris took a moment to write home:

Dear Mother

Everything quiet here today. While we were at Extension ... [T]he strikers started a little rough work but our return at night evidently made things more quiet. The Extension strike breakers had a pretty tough time. There was a pitched battle between them and the strikers the night we were on our way up [on the *Princess Alice*]. No casualties reported but several wounded and the strike breakers were forced to spend the night and next day [in the] wood. All their houses, furniture, clothes etc were burned. We brought them into Nanaimo and put a guard over them all night ... I don't know how long we will be here. We haven't had any encounters with strikers yet. I think they realize that they ought to be quiet. The miners themselves appear to be a first rate crowd, but the iww [Industrial Workers of the World] and umwa [United Mine Workers of America] people have impressed them with the idea that they are very much wronged, that it is very necessary that the umwa should be recognized by the owners. Love to all,

Your Loving Son

Tom⁵¹

Norris would write home almost every day during his two-week deployment, and his letters serve as an important record of the military occupation and a barometer of the tensions between the militia and strikers. While the works of Hinde, and to a lesser extent Bowen, suggest acrid relations between the two factions, Norris's private letters suggest a generally more tolerant and humane tone.⁵² Norris read the newspapers, and, in his letter of 15 August, offered a valuable perspective on their coverage of the military occupation:

⁵⁰ "Keep Depot Grounds Clear," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 16 August 1913.

⁵¹ Tom Norris to Marianne Norris, 15 August 1913, Marianne Norris Collection, BCA.

⁵² Norris's contemporary analysis stands in stark contrast to the retrospective analysis of John Hinde, who rejects the possibility of civil relations between the militia and civilians. To Hinde, amicable relations are a "myth" that must be disproven: relations were invariably poor and characterized by hostility. "The second myth is that the presence of the militia was welcomed by the general public ... on the contrary, from the outset, the arrival of the militia was highly controversial ... [M]iddle class observers also criticized the extreme, oppressive tactics of William Bowser." (Hinde, *When Coal Was King*, 186).

I suppose the papers have been coming out with bloodthirsty reports of real warfare and bloodshed in Nanaimo. The Vancouver papers at any rate are full of such hot air. In reality everything here has been quiet and almost dead since we came. The strikers and the non-union men are not only peaceably inclined towards us but are even friendly and courteous. They have had a bad time in Extension, houses burnt, Shaft set on fire etc; indeed there were real battles there but it's all over now. We were there yesterday afternoon, the offenders breaking up on our arrival. We did a little walking yesterday but that was all. I don't think there will be any more trouble while we're here.⁵³

But the sense of tranquility evoked by Norris was ephemeral. While he composed his letter to his mother, the strikers were reassembling at Extension, where they proceeded to burn down the home of Canadian Collieries mine manager J.H. Cunningham, who had taken flight to Port Alberni earlier that day.⁵⁴

Later in the day, Victoria's 5th Regiment arrived at Ladysmith, site of the bombings at the Temperance Hotel and the McKinnon residence. Parts of Nos. 2 and 3 companies disembarked at the E&N station under Captain Woolison,⁵⁵ who promptly set up his headquarters across the street in the smoking room of the Abbotsford Hotel. He then sent word to Lieutenant-Colonel Currie in Nanaimo that he had secured the town and that Currie could therefore bring the remainder of Nos. 2 and 3 companies to Ladysmith. That afternoon, Ladysmith's mayor George Hillier hesitantly handed control of his city to Currie and his men, though he refused to read the riot act.⁵⁶ Not long afterwards, Currie gathered his formation before the Abbotsford Hotel to address the residents who had gathered to watch the spectacle. Currie addressed the people of Ladysmith as follows:

We are very sorry to come here. We are volunteer soldiers who have had to leave our homes and offices, and it is putting us to much inconvenience, as we do not know when we shall be able to go back to our homes. However, we have been sent here to keep order. We hope for the least possible trouble. We shall not trouble you if we can help it. But, we are here to keep order, and we *intend to do it*.⁵⁷

⁵³ Tom Norris to Marianne Norris, 15 August 1913, Marianne Norris Collection, B.C.A.

⁵⁴ "Further Outbreaks of Serious Nature in Spite of Troops," *Vancouver Sun*, 16 August 1913.

⁵⁵ This is Henry Howlett Woolison (1870-1936), a Victoria businessman (and scoutmaster) who was also "British Columbia agent for a number of British chinaware and pottery manufacturers." See Boshier, *Imperial Vancouver Island*, 798.

⁵⁶ Silverman, "Aid of the Civil Power," 47.

⁵⁷ Major James Skitt Matthews, *Early Vancouver* (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011), 7:33. Emphasis in original.

Returning to his men, Currie bellowed out the order to load their rifles: "With five rounds ball, load."⁵⁸ Soon thereafter, the sound of a single shot triggered by a soldier's errant and nervous hand pierced the warm morning air, after which, James Skitt Matthews (then a captain in the 6th DCOR) recalled: "Before one could say Jack Robinson ... the crowd took to their heels in one grand rush. They were gone."⁵⁹

A turning point in the role of the combined militia contingent came on 16 August. Up until then, the militia had been little more than a buffer between angry strikers, replacement workers, and company men. However, with warrants newly in hand, the troops took a much more active role on 16 August and rounded up hundreds of strikers in Nanaimo, Extension, and Cumberland.⁶⁰ This must have been the work of the Vancouver regiments, the 6th and the 72nd, because Tom Norris did not mention such activities in his letters home. He wrote on 16 August:

We will probably go to Extension today. After we had left there on Thursday [14 August] the strikers came out of the woods and burned the house of the mine manager, Cunningham. Their attitude is peaceful while we are around, but as soon as we leave the rioting is likely to start. Nanaimo at present is as quiet as possible, a large number of the miners having gone to Extension and Ladysmith. There is no disorder here at present and little for us to do but the Sixth Regiment has come over from Vancouver as the district is too large for those that came here first to cover. If you don't hear from me for some time you will know that stamps have run out.

Love all
Tom⁶¹

Norris's letter also shows signs that the initial excitement of the deployment was wearing off and that the monotony of camp life was showing.

In Cumberland, the morning of 16 August brought a heavy downpour that drenched the men of the 6th and 72nd. The regimental officers spent as much time seeking refuge from the rain as carrying out their supervisory duties, but eventually they did provide a series of lectures in the confirmation of combat knowledge. The day inside may have provided the men with some needed rest because the next morning began

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid; "Protest from Nanaimo," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 16 August 1913; "Refugees Come from Ladysmith," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 16 August 1913.

⁶⁰ "Hundred Warrants," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 16 August 1913.

⁶¹ Tom Norris to Marianne Norris, 16 August 1913, Marianne Norris Collection, BCA.

with a 2:00 AM reveille. A majority of the Cumberland men, including the 72nd's HQ section, then proceeded to Union Bay to board the CPR's *Charmer* for Nanaimo.

Meanwhile the remnants of the mainland regiments were still arriving on the Island. On 15 August, a mixed contingent arrived in Victoria via CPR steamer and travelled up-Island to Nanaimo on the E&N. This group of around 150 included approximately eighty 6th DOR men under Major Hulme and Captains Boulton, Ferris, Morrison, and Latta; seventy-three 72nd men under Captain Eric Hamber (a banker turned lumberman who would become lieutenant-governor of British Columbia in the Second World War); and a handful from the 6th Field Company, Canadian Engineers of Vancouver under the guidance of Captain Ward, and a few of the 19th Company Army Service Corps under the mustachioed Major Moore⁶² (Figure 7).

By 17 August, Nanaimo was well and truly a garrison city. A *Vancouver Sun* correspondent describes the martial scene:

Rolled greatcoats, haversacks and tooth brushes composed the equipment of most of them, except of course for bayonets and rifles. Nanaimo might as well be Russia, so rigid has military discipline become. On the dock stood a detachment of the 72nd with fixed bayonets [and] stood at intervals on either hand.⁶³

The 88th provided a guard of fifty men and three officers at the Nanaimo city wharves to oversee arrivals and departures of the *Princess Patricia*. The 6th dispatched a similar party to the railway station to inspect all trains coming and going. However, one of the most contentious intrusions into Nanaimo's citizenry took place in the offices of the government telegraph and telephone companies. An officer of the 88th monitored incoming and outgoing messages at the telegraph office, while another listened in on telephone calls, "especially long distance ones," noted the *Daily Colonist*.⁶⁴ Colonel Hall's attempt to extend his authority over the press would not be known publicly for three full days. When finally called to task by the *Nanaimo Free Press*, Hall denied his involvement in prying information from the media, offering a rather

⁶² Roy, "Seaforths and Strikers," 83-84; "Attempt to Blow Up Bridge," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 16 August 1913; Hinde, *When Coal Was King*, 185; "Further Outbreak of Serious Nature in Spite of Troops," *Vancouver Sun*, 16 August 1913; "Hundred Warrants Issued," *Victoria Daily Times*, 16 August 1913. For Eric Werge Hamber (1879-1960), see Sydney Jackman, *The Men at Cary Castle: A Series of Portrait Sketches of the Lieutenant-Governors of British Columbia from 1871 to 1971* (Victoria: Morriss Printing, 1972), 139-46.

⁶³ "Find That Bowser Called Out Troops," *Vancouver Sun*, 18 August 1913.

⁶⁴ "Censorship Likely," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 20 August 1913.



Figure 7. Feeding the troops. Soldiers of the 19th Company of the Army Service Corps in their supply tent, Nanaimo, August 1913. Responsible for feeding and clothing the militia on Vancouver Island, the Vancouver-based Army Service Corps had arrived at Union Bay on 15 August 1913. Photograph by Frederick Victor Longstaff. Source: Image A-03176 courtesy of Royal British Columbia Museum, B.C.A.

ungainly explanation of his actions. “A man did come to me voluntarily and show me some stuff [i.e., information derived from intercepted telephone or telegraph messages]” he recalled, “and I appointed a man to look it over. He was not compelled to do this. When I begin a censorship I will not consult anybody, but take steps to see that it is effective.”⁶⁵

Tipped off by sympathetic employees at both communications offices, the strikers knew that someone was listening in, so the strike organizers in Cumberland and Nanaimo briefly took to communicating in Gaelic in an attempt to cipher their correspondence. Their efforts were for naught, however, as the 72nd Regiment’s pipe major and quartermaster, John Gillies and Lieutenant D.C. McGregor, respectively, happened to be fluent in that language and were promptly placed at each end of the line to decode their transmissions.⁶⁶

Colonel Hall played a pivotal and decisive role here, as elsewhere, in the occupation. A powerful figure in Victoria and a chemist by profession, he had emigrated from England in 1893 and established Canadian Explosives Limited on James Island, near Sidney.⁶⁷ His cen-

⁶⁵ “Col. Hall Denies Reports of Censorship,” *Nanaimo Free Press*, 23 August 1913.

⁶⁶ Roy, “Seaforths and Strikers,” 85.

⁶⁷ Boshier, *Imperial Vancouver Island*, 329.

sonship at Nanaimo was not limited to direct communications, and for a brief time he considered requiring his approval for all stories filed by journalists in the area. At first he did this quietly by prodding individual reporters, but, under questioning by a correspondent of the *Victoria Daily Times*, Hall revealed his intentions:

I made this proposition to the *Times* and to other papers ... [I]f the reporters would let me see what they intended to publish and allowed me to cross out what I did not want that I would guarantee that the press would be present at any event of interest which could possibly be foreseen. Otherwise I declined to assist them in gathering any information ... Immense harm has been done by the publication of news and the movements of troops and the country has been cost a good many thousands of dollars thereby. Whenever the newspapers announce where my troops are, I am compelled to move them elsewhere, as the present situation is a battle of wits between me and the men who would create disorder.⁶⁸

Hall even proposed to embed the press within his units, offering them kilted uniforms and unfettered access to the day's news in return for granting approval over all stories filed.⁶⁹ No newspaper accepted the offer.⁷⁰

* * *

Meanwhile, the militia, even with one thousand men, experienced difficulties in occupying such a large part of Vancouver Island. With a large number of his colleagues from the 72nd in Nanaimo, young Lieutenant Wilson in Cumberland received word that a group of agitated strikers was gathering at Union Bay. Aware that most of the militiamen had left the area, and noting his vulnerability, Wilson confined his men to their Cumberland barracks to avoid provocation and dispatched Lieutenant Goodall and twenty of his men to Union Bay to show the strikers that the militia was still in place. Realizing that Cumberland was now guarded by only a handful of men, he devised a clever deception to give the impression that he still had at least the firepower necessary to quell any violence. Although the contingent's Maxim gun had been taken to Nanaimo, its horse-drawn gun carriage remained, so with a

⁶⁸ "Col. Hall Denies Censorship," *Victoria Daily Times*, 22 August 1913.

⁶⁹ "Request Reporters to Wear Uniforms," *Vancouver Sun*, 21 August 1913.

⁷⁰ Roy, "Seaforths and Strikers," 83-84; "Where the Troops Are," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 16 August 1913; "Find That Bowser Called Out Troops," *Vancouver Sun*, 18 August 1913; "Special Police to Scene," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 17 August 1913.

blanket draped over some bulky item put in place of the gun, Wilson routinely marched the toothless carriage through Cumberland's streets as a less than gentle reminder of the militia's presence. Any humour evoked by this defanged machine gun carriage episode dissolves when one considers that civilians were the object of this early psychological operation. Captain Cecil Merritt arrived the following day from Vancouver to relieve the creative and resourceful Lieutenant Wilson.⁷¹

The reason for the build-up of militiamen in Nanaimo became clear on 18 August. Large enough to house hundreds at a time, the Nanaimo Athletic Hall on Chapel Street, near the waterfront, had become a gathering point for meetings between the union representatives and the strikers. On the night of 18 August, a large gathering took place that included, depending on the source, between seven hundred and thirteen hundred strikers.⁷² The opportunity for a surprise dragnet search of everyone present was apparently irresistible to the provincial and military authorities. At 11:00 PM, over four hundred militiamen moved from their camps around the city to surround the Athletic Hall. Forming up shoulder-to-shoulder, rifles loaded and bayonets fixed, the 72nd took up positions along the sides and back of the hall, while the 6th blocked the opposite approaches and lined two blocks of Chapel Street down to the courthouse. The shimmer of streetlamps on bayonets betrayed the location of militiamen down the ravine behind the hall and back up the other side to Skinner Street. With a secure perimeter established, Colonel Hall entered the hall and ordered out one of the delegation's leaders. Escorting him around the cordon, the *Daily Colonist* noted, Colonel Hall aimed to make clear "the utter folly of resistance."⁷³ Hall explained later that, among other things, he feared a rush on the troops and that firing would then be inevitable. Therefore, at each blow of a whistle, ten striking miners were ordered to exit the building and were guided between the rows of 6th militiamen to the courthouse, where they were searched for weapons, identified, and, if a warrant existed for their arrest, placed in custody. With each batch of men taking roughly ninety seconds to process, it took nearly three hours to clear the hall. Sensing the effects of a particularly cold night, Colonel Hall instructed the 72nd's kitchens to prepare hot coffee and biscuits for distribution to the troops and prisoners, and, although many received the refreshments

⁷¹ Roy, "Seaforths and Strikers," 88.

⁷² The low number was provided by the 72nd Regiment's adjutant, Captain William Rae, the high numbers by Kavanagh and Hinde.

⁷³ "Commanding Officer Eulogizes Troops," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 26 August 1913.

thankfully, some were “very bitter and refused to touch it.”⁷⁴ By 3:00 AM on 19 August, the Athletic Hall was clear and forty of the strikers had been incarcerated. Colonel Hall then ordered a thorough search of the hall. Bowen states correctly that the “floors were turned up in a fruitless search for guns.”⁷⁵ Indeed, contrary to Colonel Hall’s own eyewitness reports that the men inside were passing around revolvers and rifles, no arms were ever found in the Chapel Street Athletic Hall.⁷⁶

A prelude to the incident at Nanaimo Athletic Hall was the discovery and seizure, on the afternoon of 18 August, of twenty-four thousand rounds of ammunition from Mr. Hughes’s hardware store in Ladysmith. Major Harris and Lieutenant Smith of Currie’s 5th Regiment confiscated this small arsenal of cartridges,⁷⁷ and a few days later Currie defended the seizure in an open letter to Hughes:

Dear Mr. Hughes.

I was much annoyed to see in the press such an exaggerated account of the taking of the ammunition from your store. As you know all there was to it was that, as soon as I phoned you, you came down to the [Abbotsford] hotel and we agreed that the best place under the conditions prevailing in Ladysmith at the time was for the ammunition to be stored somewhere in charge of the troops. It is ridiculous to say that we had to surround your store or that you protested against our taking the ammunitions.

Yours faithfully,

A.W. Currie.⁷⁸

This routine seizure was not a motivating factor for the Athletic Hall roundup.⁷⁹

For some labour-oriented historians the Chapel Street ordeal stands as a tangible symbol of the province’s use of “excessive force.”⁸⁰ Hinde

⁷⁴ Roy, “Seaforths and Strikers,” 86.

⁷⁵ Bowen, “Great Vancouver Island,” 38.

⁷⁶ “Athletic Club,” *Nanaimo Free Press*, 29 August 1913; “No Trouble Caused When Troops Make Arrests,” *Vancouver Sun*, 19 August 1913; “Troops Surround Hall,” *Vancouver Sun*, 19 August 1913; “Commanding Officer Eulogizes Troops,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 26 August 1913; Roy, “Seaforths and Strikers,” 86–87; Bowen, “Great Vancouver Island,” 38.

⁷⁷ These are Alexis Ernest Harris (1883–1944), a career soldier, and Joseph Gordon Smith (1874–1951), a journalist. See Boshier, *Imperial Vancouver Island*, 337–38, 683–84.

⁷⁸ “Mr. Hughes Explains,” *Ladysmith Chronicle*, 23 August 1913.

⁷⁹ See Silverman, “Aid of the Civil Power,” 49. For Silverman, see also Tim Cook, *Clio’s Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006).

⁸⁰ Hinde, *When Coal Was King*, 189.

and Bowen point to the militia's use of a Maxim gun aimed at the hall's rear exit to intimidate those considering escape while a sadistic Colonel Hall barked orders that strikers had "two minutes to clear the place."⁸¹ Although Captain William Rae, the subject of Reginald Roy's narrative, says nothing of the presence at the hall of one of the 72nd's machine guns, thanks to the wily Lieutenant Wilson, we know that one had been removed from Cumberland the previous day. Reginald Roy concluded that the militia commanders understood that "the machine gun had a great morale effect on the strikers,"⁸² and this in itself supports accounts that the gun was positioned at the hall. However, the viciousness inherent in the myth of the Maxim gun originated from the testimony of union leader Jack Kavanagh – who was not present on the night in question – in a speech in Vancouver some days later.

On this night, there took place one of the most brutal things I ever heard of by a brutal military commander with the intention of shooting down innocent men. Some 1200 to 1300 men had gathered at the Athletic clubhouse to discuss a proposition made by one of the companies. No sooner had they gathered than Colonel Hall had the building surrounded with troops with fixed bayonets and placed a maxim gun at the back door. He sent for the chairman and told him that he would give him two minutes in which to order the hall to be cleared in single file, and that if it was not cleared within ten minutes he would clean out the hall with the machine gun. Cries of shame, this under the Union Jack, it's worse that Russia ... I would rather see my son dead in his grave than in the militia or in that cradle of the militia, the boy scouts.⁸³

Although Colonel Hall later denied that his instructions were so forceful, he did admit that he leaned towards intimidating the strikers. "This type of striker is very prone to find encouragement and satisfaction in numbers," he recalled with military understatement, "and the little walk in small parties for about one hundred yards inside a double row of fixed bayonets with the unknown something to face at the end of the little walk, caused a marked change in attitude."⁸⁴

With most major strike leaders now in custody, the militia's tempo of operation slowed considerably. The troops now found ample time

⁸¹ Bowen, *Boss Whistle*, 178.

⁸² Roy, "Seaforths and Strikers," 88.

⁸³ "Union Men Indignant at Use of Soldiers," *Vancouver Sun*, 22 August 1913.

⁸⁴ Hall is quoted in Silverman, "Aid of the Civil Power," 49.

to read accounts of their work in their local newspapers or, like Tom Norris on 20 August, to catch up on letters home:

Dear Mother

At Extension now and things are pretty quiet. I am enjoying it here as we are sleeping in the mine warehouse and having pretty fair grub. Much better all around than at Nanaimo. The only disagreeable part is the sentry duty. You barely get to sleep when you are promptly waked [*sic*] up and told to do your shift. We usually have four to six hours every night, two hours at a time. Cunningham's and the other wrecked house are a sight. Cunningham's house has been totally destroyed along with the exception of three houses ... If you address a note c/o no 1 co. Fifth Reg't Nanaimo it will get to me here. Love to all.

Your loving son Tom.

P.S. Send a few stamps if you have time as I borrowed these.⁸⁵

In a foreshadowing of the coming war, the militia stationed in the strike zones soon realized the weaknesses of their equipment. In another letter home, Norris observed: "My boots went on the blink three days ago but I found an old pair in a house here and they are very comfortable. The government is sending us boots tomorrow."⁸⁶

While the militiamen did not physically suffer from their hasty deployment, their time away from their daily trades or professions occasionally wore on their employers, some of whom began to take action. Tom Norris explained the plight of a number of his colleagues after an absence from Victoria of less than ten days:

We understand that a number of bank clerks who belong to the regiment have been informed that they will be transferred to small towns in other parts of the province so that they will have to leave the regiment. You can understand that it will mean a large number of the fellows having to leave home simply because they belong to the regiment. I understand that the Royal Bank is the worst offender.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Tom Norris to Marianne Norris, 20 August 1913, Marianne Norris Collection, BCA. This letter was written atop a Canadian Collieries timesheet, indicating the level of contact between the militia and the company.

⁸⁶ Tom Norris to Marianne Norris, 22 August 1913, Marianne Norris Collection, BCA. Canadian troops first discovered their boots' poor quality while training on Salisbury Plain in England. See Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2007).

⁸⁷ Tom Norris to Marianne Norris, 22 August 1913, Marianne Norris Collection, BCA.

Other employers used more overt tactics, such as threatening to fire militia members unless they returned at once to their offices, schools, or markets. In response, militia officers protected their men and even charged (and convicted) the secretary of the Victoria School District, William Pope, with intimidation of a member of the militia. Pope had given notice to a schoolteacher, then on duty with the militia, that his position would be filled if he did not return to work immediately. The attorney general personally offered to ensure that each man's employer obeyed the law and gave the "public spirited citizen who had done his duty the chance which he deserve[d] of showing that he [could] at the same time be a good employee and a good citizen."⁸⁸ A lieutenant serving with the militia in Nanaimo, T.V. Scudamore, recalled his time with the militia as follows:

They will most probably be told by those who did not answer the call that they seem to have enjoyed themselves all the time. This last remark, in spite of, or perhaps because of the risks they ran and the knowledge they have done their duty as good citizens, will be absolutely correct.⁸⁹

While the militia and government protected soldiers threatened by their employers, they could not protect militiamen from being expelled by their unions. In Victoria, on 21 August, the Trades and Labour Council (TLC) adopted a resolution that "considered the position [of the militia] incompatible with the position of working people"⁹⁰ and banned them from the TLC's membership. Three days later, at a Victoria theatre, Christian Sivertz of the British Columbia Federation of Labour resolved that:

Whereas the main object of the maintenance of the militia is for the purpose of breaking strikes by intimidating the strikers and if necessary shooting the strikers into submission. Therefore be it resolved that this meeting of workers of this city call on all labor unions to expel any man from their organization who is a member, or continues to be a member of the militia.⁹¹

⁸⁸ "Will Back Soldiers against Employers," *Vancouver Sun*, 30 August 1913; Tom Norris to Marianne Norris, 22 August 1913, Marianne Norris Collection, BCA; "Militiamen's Duties," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 22 August 1913; "Urge Their Return," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 23 August 1913; "Under Militia Act," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 30 August 1913. On the militia's fear of losing jobs, see also Hinde, *When Coal Was King*, 189.

⁸⁹ Scudamore is quoted in Desmond Morton, "Aid to the Civil Power: Canadian Militia in Support of the Social Order, 1867-1914," *Canadian Historical Review* 51, 4 (1970): 407-25.

⁹⁰ "Another Protest Is to Be Lodged," *Victoria Daily Times*, 22 August 1913.

⁹¹ "Calls on Union to Expel Militiamen," *Victoria Daily Times*, 25 August 1913.

Inevitably, Tom Norris – son of an attorney general of British Columbia – weighed in and offered his thoughts on the declaration to his mother in Victoria:

I see that the federation of Labour has ordered from their membership all men belonging to the militia. Talk about the oppression of the mine owners. It strikes me that the men are more oppressed by the grafters that are at the head of the Federation and the UMWA. I see that Christian Sivertz et al have condemned the militia for their work here. If they were sincere in their declarations that they wish to prevent violence etc. etc. they would support the militia as all that it has done has been to prevent further violence and to arrest all those both union and non-union who have broken the law both by direct violence and by inciting others to riot. So much for hot air.⁹²

Nevertheless, the appeal had a national following, and other unions across the county swiftly adopted similar, if temporary, resolutions.⁹³ The militiamen soon found themselves in an uncomfortable position of being embattled on three sides: some felt the pressure to return to work, those involved in trade unions faced ejection, and, after the great Athletic Hall roundup of 18 August, all found themselves despised by those even casually associated with the strikers. “Since the arrests, we haven’t been on such good terms with the strikers,” wrote Norris on 22 August: “The women are a long sight worse than the men, and at Nanaimo they were continually telling us that we would get it in the neck.”⁹⁴

With little to do, baseball became a common staple of entertainment among the men and, in one case, the strikers. In Ladysmith, the 5th Regiment managed to assemble a commendable “nine,” even managing to topple that town’s regular team, which was, however, missing its regular pitcher and catcher, who had been incarcerated for unlawful assembly.⁹⁵ In Extension, the sergeants of the 5th squared off against their junior ranks. After watching the first game, local schoolchildren decided they were up to the task of having a go at the sergeants.⁹⁶

After nearly ten days in the field the troops must have reeked of soot, sweat, cooking fat, and a host of other indescribable odours. Anyone

⁹² Tom Norris to Marianne Norris, 25 August 1913, Marianne Norris Collection, BCA.

⁹³ “Brandon Labour Men against Militarism,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 29 August 1913.

⁹⁴ Tom Norris to Marianne Norris, 22 August 1913, Marianne Norris Collection, BCA. On the role of women in the strike, see Hinde, *When Coal Was King*, 199–204.

⁹⁵ “Military Control Strongly Apparent,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 23 August 1913.

⁹⁶ Tom Norris to Marianne Norris, 26 August 1913, Marianne Norris Collection, BCA.

who has had the pleasure of serving in the field knows the combination and the importance of basic hygiene. Bathing was promptly enforced.⁹⁷ John Hinde's *When Coal Was King* includes a photograph of nearly naked but jovial militiamen standing atop a steam-train's watering tank. Framing the militia's occupation of Vancouver Island's coal districts as unnecessary, Hinde includes the caption "Soldiers of No. 1 Company, 58 Regiment 'lolling' about in the sunshine in a water tank at Extension, August 1913." He also incorporates the term uncritically into his text: "Those soldiers not lolling about in the sunshine were kept busy enough."⁹⁸ The original archival copy of this photograph includes a handwritten note attributing these "lolling" militiamen to a 58th Regiment, but of course there was no such thing as a 58th Regiment in British Columbia. The photograph depicts men of either the 5th or 85th regiments. They were not "lolling about" but obeying orders to bathe in the only water source available to them.⁹⁹

On Sunday, 24 August, Nanaimo was filled with the sounds of martial divinity. By 10:00 AM, four hundred soldiers gathered in front of the court house to take part in a special service delivered by Archdeacon Scriven and Canon Silva-White (Figure 8). Together, the congregation belted out martial hymns, including "Onward Christian Soldiers" and "Fight the Good Fight." In the evening, Reverend McLennan delivered a sermon to those of the "old covenanting faith" (i.e., Presbyterianism) to the mostly Presbyterian and Anglican men of the 72nd.¹⁰⁰ The Sabbath offered a break from routine patrolling and illustrated the humanity and common faith of the militiamen to a previously guarded citizenry. On their way to St. Andrews Church, the "kilties" paraded in fine form, with pipers and drums blaring, to the apparent pleasure of those who lined the street to watch. In Ladysmith, music also bridged the gulf between public and military as the Sunday afternoon arrival of the 5th's instruments was celebrated with an open-air concert for all to enjoy.¹⁰¹ Such performances suggest that the presence of the militia had taken on a routine appearance. Although it is difficult to assess the extent of public appreciation of the militia, there is much to suggest that their presence was tolerated by the Islanders, unless they were directly associated with

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Hinde, *When Coal Was King*, 189.

⁹⁹ "Military Control Strongly Apparent," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 23 August 1913. The original source of the "lolling about" quotation is the 16 August edition of the *Vancouver Sun*, and the article in question does not advocate the removal of the militia from Extension but, rather, criticizes its absence.

¹⁰⁰ "Soldiers' Sunday," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 25 August 1913.

¹⁰¹ "Highlanders Parade Today," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 25 August 1913; Roy, "Seaforths and Strikers," 88; *Ladysmith Chronicle*, 26 August 1913.



Figure 8. Looking south along Front Street, Nanaimo, August 1913, showing the camp of the 72nd Regiment, Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, on the grounds of Nanaimo Court House, with St. Paul's Anglican Church behind and the Hotel Windsor at left. Photographer unknown. *Source:* Image A-00980 courtesy of Royal British Columbia Museum, BCA.

the strikers in Extension, Nanaimo, and Ladysmith. In Ladysmith one such accepting group was a women's service club, which saw the militia's arrival as the perfect opportunity to further its fundraising causes, as these stanzas of a poem written during the occupation reveal:

Stop! Look! Listen, Oh Military Man,
 Come to our aid, you really can,
 Assist us in this matter,
 So stop and listen to this chatter.

Long months ago in our fair town,
 Some ladies with progressive air,
 Walked slowly round and up and down,
 And said, "this town must be more fair."

They thought, they wrought with might and main,
 Collections, dances all were tried,
 Slowly, surely went on the game,
 "Three hundred dollars at last," they cried.

But ah, here comes the bitter part,
 Two hundred more is needed yet.
 The town is poor yet in their heart,
 They know the contract must be met.

So here is where they ask your aid,
 And cash, Oh Military man!
 So help them see the debt is paid,
 And come assist them all you can.¹⁰²

Comfortable as the routine may have become, many troops began questioning the necessity of their presence. On top of the daily monotony, the soldiers had yet to receive their pay of \$2.50 to \$3.00 per day.¹⁰³ By 28 August, the *Nanaimo Daily Press* reported that an air of desertion lingered among many. This is unlikely, but two days earlier Tom Norris had noted: “We have received no information as to when we are to go home, but they have advanced us two dollars on our pay for pocket money.”¹⁰⁴ The issue of the men’s pay lingered, and many had to wait for some time after their return from the strike zone for what was due to them. Upon hearing of this disgrace, J.S.H. Matson, the proprietor and editor of the *Victoria Daily Colonist*, lent the regiment five thousand dollars to disperse among the non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and men of the 88th and 5th.¹⁰⁵ However Matson heard about the government’s delinquent pay, his loan demonstrates the close union between the Island militia and the Island press – an association worthy of further investigation given the inference, drawn occasionally, that the collieries may have had a role in paying the militia.¹⁰⁶

On 25 August, Colonel Hall and Captain Paul Villiers travelled to Victoria to negotiate a withdrawal plan with the attorney general.¹⁰⁷ According to the plan, three-quarters of the contingent would be

¹⁰² Author unknown, *Ladysmith Chronicle*, 26 August 1913. For an excellent exploration of the varied roles of women both in the strike zone and in the domestic spheres at Ladysmith, see John Hinde, “Stout Ladies and Amazons’: Women in the British Columbia Coal Mining Community of Ladysmith, 1912–14,” *BC Studies* 114 (1997): 33–57.

¹⁰³ “Troops,” *Nanaimo Free Press*, 28 August 1913.

¹⁰⁴ Tom Norris to Marianne Norris, 26 August 1913, Marianne Norris Collection, BCA.

¹⁰⁵ “Portion of Troops Return,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 30 August 1913; “Is Proud of the Regiment’s Showing,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 30 August 1913; “Recall of Troops Fails to Receive Approval of Some Nanaimo Citizens,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 30 August 1913.

¹⁰⁶ For John Samuel Henry Matson (1867–1931), who had worked with Currie as an insurance salesman in Victoria, see Boshier, *Imperial Vancouver Island*, 221, 482.

¹⁰⁷ This is Paul Frederic Villiers, a graduate of Harrow and Sandhurst, who had served in India, Somaliland, Nyasaland, and British East Africa. See Boshier, *Imperial Vancouver Island*, 752–53.

withdrawn, leaving one hundred men in Nanaimo, fifty in Ladysmith, fifty in Cumberland, and twenty each in Extension and South Wellington. On the afternoon of 28 August, acting premier Bowser accepted the plan, and the appropriate demobilization orders were issued. Against the protests of many prominent citizens, the Nanaimo militia immediately dismantled its camps at Prideaux Street and the E&N depot. At an evening parade, Colonel Hall addressed his men:

[I] never felt any doubt that the troops would perform any duty, no matter how unpleasant that duty might be, in a way that would bring credit to His Majesty's regular army. The force has rendered a service to humanity which few can appreciate, and for which the chief reward will be the pride which each soldier feels in simply performing his duty.¹⁰⁸

All regiments then asked for volunteers to stay on. Thirty men of the 5th, most of them single, remained in Ladysmith under the command of Captain Clark,¹⁰⁹ while another fifty stayed at Extension and South Wellington. One hundred of the 72nd were split between Nanaimo and Cumberland, while the Royal Canadian Garrison Artillery and the 6th DCOR each left fifty men for extended duty in Nanaimo.¹¹⁰ The 88th furnished just enough men to maintain a presence. Among those who stayed behind for the 88th were privates Victor and Rupert Hobday, twins born in India in 1895, whose father, the mercurial Colonel E.A.P. Hobday, and grandfather were members of the Imperial Colonial staff.¹¹¹

The swift demobilization appears to have been met with both relief and concern, but perhaps those most concerned about the departure of the troops were the local children, who had grown accustomed to a martial presence that the *Nanaimo Free Press* considered "had livened up the neighborhood."¹¹² About 8:00 PM on 29 August, the 5th Regiment's band met the E&N troop train in Victoria. With garbled syntax, Colonel Currie warmly addressed his men at the Victoria drill hall: "I feel sure that I am only doing what the officer commanding the troops

¹⁰⁸ "Portion of Troops Return," *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 30 August 1913.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Percy Clark (1874-1932), a Victoria businessman. See Boshier, *Imperial Vancouver Island*, 189.

¹¹⁰ "Recall of Troops Fails to Receive Approval of Some Nanaimo Citizens," *Victoria Daily Times*, 30 August 1913; "Troops," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 28 August 1913; "Exit Military," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 30 August 1913; "750 Soldiers," *Victoria Daily Times*, 29 August 1913; "Soldier Sent Back," *Vancouver Sun*, 30 August 1913.

¹¹¹ Edmund Arthur Ponsonby Hobday (1859-1931), a former Indian Army officer as well as a talented painter and playwright who had a peculiar fascination with adapting classic theatre to burlesque plays. See Boshier, *Imperial Vancouver Island*, 352-54.

¹¹² "Exit Military," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 30 August 1913.

would desire to do, were he, namely to express his appreciation of the manner in which every member of the force under his command has carried out his duty.”¹¹³ Members of the 72nd and 6th left Nanaimo for Vancouver on the afternoon of the next day. In echo of their departure from Vancouver, the Seaforths marched up Pender Street to the tune of their pipers.¹¹⁴ The next time they answered the call of duty, a great many would never return, and those who did would be altogether different men.

* * *

Those who served in Nanaimo were, with few exceptions, among the first to volunteer for overseas service when war broke out in August 1914. Indeed, the regiments that served on Vancouver Island in 1913 formed the basis of British Columbia’s military contribution to the war in Europe. Perhaps the militiamen volunteered believing the war to be another adventure, similar to that of Nanaimo, but surely no one can fault them for not realizing the scale of the horrors they were about to witness. Captain Cecil Merritt, who took over from the wily Lieutenant Wilson in Cumberland, was killed at Ypres in 1915; his body was never found. Wilson won the Distinguished Service Order, returned home after the war, and eventually took command of the Seaforths. Lieutenant Sydney Goodall and Captain Robert Latta were both killed at the Battle of the Somme. Lieutenant James Sclater, then promoted to major, participated in the assault on Hill 70 and Vimy Ridge, where he died and is buried. Walter Bapty was gassed at Vimy Ridge while serving as medical officer with the 102nd Northern BC Regiment and ended the war in charge of all military hospitals on Vancouver Island. Sergeant Newberry, responsible for checking his men’s kit before the departure from Victoria, was taken prisoner at Second Ypres and spent the rest of the war working a salt mine in Germany. The Hobday twins both volunteered for service and, along with their father, fought at Messines, though in different regiments. In 1917, Victor was killed there while serving with the West Yorkshire Regiment. Nearly three-quarters of one company of the 88th present at Nanaimo, volunteered for service in Europe. A quarter were killed and well over half were injured or taken prisoner. Tom Norris served as an artillery officer, and his actions earned him a commission and two Military Crosses. He survived, and upon his return to British Columbia resumed his career in law. In 1959, he was

¹¹³ “Portion of Troops Return,” *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 30 August 1913.

¹¹⁴ “Return to the City,” *Vancouver Sun*, 30 August 1913.

selected to sit on the Supreme Court of British Columbia and, two years later, on the Appeals Court of British Columbia. The efficient Colonel Hall, formerly of Canadian Explosives Limited, joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Victoria in November 1914 and, after a short time in France, joined the Imperial Munitions Board, where he became inspector of all munitions factories in Great Britain.¹¹⁵ Colonel Arthur William Currie ended the war as a general and commander of the four divisions of the Canadian Corps in France. He was knighted in 1919.¹¹⁶

While the militia would remain on duty in some form for the next year, those sixteen days in August 1913 saw over one thousand militiamen arrive in the collieries and coal towns of central Vancouver Island. Their duty required them to leave their families, homes, and work. Most of them held down jobs in the professions and trades as bankers, businessmen, teachers, clerks, or shopkeepers; they were reserve volunteers, not professional soldiers, and in some instances risked loss of work or union membership by their service in the militia. The imposition of any military organization on a purely civilian setting is, and should be, highly contentious, and historians of military occupation should consider the range of social consequences for all participants. Thanks to the letters left behind by Tom Norris and others, we are allowed a brief glimpse into the day-to-day life of British Columbia's militiamen of 1913.

Perhaps now, at the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, it is time to revisit this chapter of history with some regard for the choices and sacrifices of the British Columbians who served in Vancouver Island's mining towns on the eve of the Great War. Much remains to be explored in this story, especially the paradox that many Vancouver Island men who resisted the aid to civil power force soon found themselves fighting side by side in a common cause with the former militiamen in the vile trenches of the Western Front.

¹¹⁵ Boshier, *Imperial Vancouver Island*, 329-30.

¹¹⁶ For Currie's later career, see Tim Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher: The Sensational Wars of Sam Hughes and General Arthur Currie* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2010).