

GUERRILLAS IN OUR MIDST:

*The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, 1942-45*¹

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*He's so gaunt and old that he walks like a wishbone. His suit bags.
His white mustaches are the "Alf and 'Arry" kind.*

*But he topped the rocky ledge ahead of me like a goat. Below us
lay the wildest country on this continent: British Columbia. Deep
canyons, tangled forests, no roads. We'd come up an old Indian trail.*

*"You see, Ma'm," he said, "the ruddy little Japs could never make
it. You'd pick off a hundred yourself from this ledge, - and you could
stop for tea, at that ... Let 'em come. Hit'd be the second time I was
servin' 'Er Majesty." That's Victoria to you. He likes to pretend she's
still around because he was in her Royal Horse Artillery, Boer War.
He's 75. But a recent Sunday at the Rifle Club he popped the bull's
eye 92 out of 100. He's never dimmed his eyes with a lot of needless
reading.*

*Now he's one of the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers - the oddest
"army" on the Continent.*

*"BC Has 6,000 Rangers Ready to Welcome Japs," *Globe
and Mail* and *Vancouver Daily Province*, 22 May 1942*

WHEN THE JAPANESE OVERRAN PEARL HARBOR, Singapore, and Hong Kong in December 1941, the Pacific world no longer seemed pacific at all. British Columbians felt besieged – suddenly the comfortable notion that “it couldn’t happen here” no longer applied. There had been war scares in the past (Americans and Russians in the nineteenth century and Germans during the Great War), but technology and the disconcerting state of the Allied war

¹ Thanks to Jennifer Arthur, Dan Heidt, Patricia Roy, and two anonymous reviewers for the comments on earlier versions of this article. A special thanks to Kerry Steeves, with whom I am authoring a book on this subject, for sharing his correspondence and taped interviews with former Rangers in the late 1980s.

effort made the threat seem particularly acute in early 1942. Senior military authorities advised the federal government that the province's defences were adequate to meet any probable scale of attack, but popular hysteria demanded more visible military measures. "Cabinet listened to the frightened voters of British Columbia instead of to its military advisers," C.P. Stacey observed, "with the result that great numbers of men, great quantities of material and many millions of dollars were wasted in accumulating on the West Coast which were not needed there and whose presence there would have no possible useful effect upon the course of the war."² Events would prove that the military's assessment was better grounded than popular fears, but political considerations often outweigh military opinion when it comes to formulating and implementing defence policy.

The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers (PCMR), although a product of this same wartime pressure, should not be included in Stacey's dismal assessment. This unpaid force was designed to recruit men outside of the main cities who would not, for reasons of age, disability, or occupation, be able or eligible to serve overseas. By March 1943, nearly fifteen thousand BC trappers, loggers, and fishers had organized in 126 companies along the coast and well into the interior.³ Their duties were to patrol the local area, to report any findings of a suspicious nature, and to fight, if required, as guerrilla bands against any enemy invader. Although no Japanese invasion took place, the Rangers served various military and social functions in wartime British Columbia. The PCMR assuaged the public demand for grassroots defences more than it did any overriding military requirement for such a force. Nevertheless, the limited equipment and low costs associated with the Rangers helped to ensure that the defence of the province did not consume more military resources (financial and personnel) than it did. In these respects, they played a significant if largely unheralded role in wartime British Columbia.⁴

² C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1970), 133.

³ A PCMR company was also formed in Dawson City, Yukon, in early 1943.

⁴ If, traditionally, academic military historians have focused on high politics and overseas operations at the expense of domestic experiences, a recent proliferation of studies on the Canadian home front suggests that this balance is shifting. The Second World War has benefited from books like Jeffrey Keshen's *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), which critically examines broad social trends and re-evaluates accepted wisdom on a national level. Much work remains to be done to reveal experiences at the regional and local levels.

This brief history of the PCMR illuminates a part-time, decentralized militia that served in unorthodox but useful ways and that provided men who could not serve overseas with a domestic military space in which to operate and inscribe their identities. Given their special relationship with a particular environment, the Rangers were never meant to be deployed outside their home areas. Yet popular depictions of the force stressed how its members lived up to wartime masculine ideals. The popular press cast British Columbia's "guerrilla army" as the most rugged and "tough" that the province had to offer. Men too old or too young to serve overseas were constructively occupied in a suitably heroic role defending their homes and performing patriotic duties on the home front, and the Rangers bolstered morale and helped to build social consensus for the war effort. Men of all socio-economic backgrounds were represented in the Rangers' ranks, and its organizational structure stressed social equality over rigid military hierarchy. It also transcended racial lines: Chinese Canadians and coastal Aboriginal peoples, for example, participated in the force and received favourable media attention.⁵ While most scholarship on the domestic war effort focuses on national decision making and metropolitan centres, the Rangers represented a popular, democratic military response that helped to build social consensus for the war effort outside of British Columbia's main cities.

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If war came in the Pacific, William Strange explained in his 1937 book *Canada, the Pacific and War*, Canada would be involved by virtue of its ties to the United States and Britain. Geography and history determined Canada's fate. "The best defence of the Canadian Pacific Coast, beyond doubt, is the nature of the coast itself," he consoled readers. "It is extremely rugged. It possesses an intricate system of islands and channels, and the tide-rips are treacherous. To shoreward the country is difficult to the point of seemed impregnability."⁶ Indeed, British Columbians – like most Canadians in the interwar years – viewed their country, to borrow Senator Raoul Dandurand's famous phrase, as a

⁵ This observation reinforces the conclusions in R.S. Sheffield, *The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the "Indian" and the Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003).

⁶ William Strange, *Canada, the Pacific and War* (Toronto: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1937), 212-3. On British Columbia's defences on the eve of war, see T. Murray Hunter, "Coast Defence in British Columbia, 1939-1941: Attitudes and Realities," *BC Studies* 28 (Winter 1975-76): 3-28; Roger Sarty, *The Maritime Defence of Canada* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1996); and Peter Moogk, *Vancouver Defended: History of the Men and Guns of the Lower Mainland Defences, 1859-1949* (Surrey: Antonson, 1978).

“fireproof house far from inflammable materials.” Distance, isolation, and geography were natural ramparts against the incendiary passions of the Old World. Technology threatened this long-standing complacency as air power theorists predicted that long-range strategic bombers would be the face of modern warfare. Through the 1930s, however, most Canadians preferred to follow their prime minister and British leaders in appeasing dictators. The best defence was to simply avoid war, and Canadians celebrated their successful co-existence with the United States over the preceding century as a model for the world.

The winds of war were too strong, and they blew through Canada in early September 1939. The initial “Phoney War” in Europe precluded any immediate threat to North America, but Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King’s limited-liability war effort died with the Nazi conquest of Western Europe in mid-1940. As Britain braced for invasion, concerned citizens across Canada began to form local volunteer units in their communities to defend against sabotage or invasion. These paramilitary organizations did not have official military status or support, but their establishment highlights that Canadians wanted to take active, practical steps to protect their homeland.⁷ After all, citizens taking personal action when faced with the prospect of invasion had a long history in the British imagination, and irregular forces like the “frontier rangers” were entrenched in North American military lore.⁸ British Columbians had also organized paramilitary

⁷ For BC examples, see “Retired Men Want to Do Their Bit,” *Victoria Times*, 30 January 1940, 8; “Demand for Civilian Defence Corps Sweeps across Canada,” *Vancouver Sun*, 17 May 1940, 21; “Defence Corps in Fraser Valley,” *Victoria Times*, 18 May 1940, 8; and “Band Sharpshooting Hunters into Units in Skeena Valley,” *Vancouver Province*, 17 June 1940, 22. On civil defence in British Columbia more generally, see DHH 322.019 (D1) and British Columbia Legislative Assembly Sessional Clipping Books, Newspaper Accounts of the Debates, microfilm reel 15. A good example is the Victoria Fish and Game Protective Association, formed in 1939 to secretly patrol watershed areas around Victoria. See “Hunters Enlist in Civilian Corps,” *Victoria Times*, 4 April 1942, 9.

⁸ Anglo-American Rangers, “whether serving formally on the colonies’ and states’ defence establishments or in ad hoc companies that frontiersmen formed to fight Indians, were ubiquitous in the military affairs” of early North America, historian John Grenier explains. They first emerged on the colonial scene in late seventeenth-century New England in response to changes in indigenous tactics that rendered ineffective European models of war: “Early Americans came to understand war as the purview of rangers who burned Indian villages and fields and killed Indian combatants and non-combatants alike.” Members of “backcountry” communities fully supported these unconventional practices, and, “on the fluid frontier with ‘Indian Country,’ where raids against Indian villages provided the easiest military offensive option, rangers entered a pantheon of military heroes.” Ranger service did not facilitate advancement or acceptance within the British Army, but rangers did emerge as archetypal figures of the Indian-fighting frontiersman protecting hearth and home and, later, as frontier “pathfinders” lionized by James Fennimore Cooper. See John E. Grenier, “‘Of Great Utility’: The Public Identity of Early American Rangers and Its Impact on American Society,” *War &*

groups to defend against potential invasion in the past, and thousands had served as part-time “citizen soldiers” in reserve units before the war. As Peter Guy Silverman observed, however, the “temperament” of the population outside of urban areas precluded militia participation. Most men worked in staple industries such as forestry, fishing, and mining, “so that the very nature of their occupation prevented them from being able to come together” for summer training. “To the people of British Columbia particularly, discipline was offensive, [and] seemed out of place in a frontier civilization,” Silverman asserted. “Even to the militia’s supporters, soldiering was a pastime, much like fox-hunting or quadrilles.” Although the ideal of the “citizenry at arms” may have appeared anachronistic given modern military technologies and tactics, it still appealed to a society haunted by the spectre of spies, saboteurs, and Asian hordes waiting to flood into their homeland.¹⁰

As the war evolved, British Columbia attracted the particular attention of military planners. Axis Power advances in Europe and in the Far East highlighted the need for additional defences, and by October 1941, the Canadian military established a single Pacific Command to oversee operations in British Columbia, Alberta, Yukon, and the District of Mackenzie. Journalists began to speculate freely about the prospects of a Japanese offensive in the southwest Pacific and even the possibility of aggression in the North. The chief of the General Staff in Ottawa advised the minister of national defence that, if war broke out with Japan, the forces on the Pacific Coast would be “adequate for the purpose of meeting the anticipated forms and scales of attack.”¹¹

Society (Dunroothen), 21 (May 2003), 2-5, 11. Newspapers and PCMR literature made frequent reference to the Rangers’ predecessors, labelling them “Roger’s Rangers Mark 1942” or likening them to “the Western Scouts for Custer.” See, for example, A.G. MacDonald, “Men of the PCMR Reviving Frontier Tactics,” *British Columbia Lumberman* 26/11 (November 1942): 53-4; Hal Straight, “Pacific Coast Rangers Planning ‘Hornet’s Nest’ For Any Invader,” *Vancouver Sun*, 22 April 1942, 25. On the British amateur tradition, see Ian Beckett, *The Amateur Military Tradition, 1558-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).

⁹ On these units see, for example, R.H. Roy, “The Early Militia and Defence of British Columbia, 1871-1885,” *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 18/1-2 (1954): 1-28; P.G. Silverman, “A History of the Militia and Defences of British Columbia, 1871-1914” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1956); R.H. Roy, *The Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, 1919-1965* (Vancouver: History Committee, Seaforth Highlanders of Canada, 1969); and Moogk with Stevenson, *Vancouver Defended*.

¹⁰ On fears of Asians in British Columbia, see Patricia Roy, *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man’s Province, 1914-41* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003).

¹¹ “Defences at Pacific Command Well Prepared by Canada,” *Globe and Mail*, 4 December 1941; C.P. Stacey, *Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1957), 166-7; Terry Copp, “The Defence of Hong Kong: December 1941,” *Canadian Military History* 10, 4 (2001): 6. On earlier military assessments of the Japanese threat, see Gregory Johnson, “North Pacific Triangle? The Impact of the Far East on Canada and its

Infantry battalions were stationed in Prince Rupert, New Westminster-Vancouver, and Victoria-Esquimalt; a general reserve was established at Nanaimo; and Veterans Guard platoons were established at RCAF bases on the coast.¹² When Japan began offensive operations in December 1941, citizens in British Columbia felt less than assured that these forces met their security needs.

If the threat that Japanese forces might establish themselves in North America was “far-fetched militarily,” historian Desmond Morton has astutely noted, “it was politically all too real.”¹³ Coastal air-raid precautions suddenly seemed inadequate. Fearful expectations for the West Coast were fuelled by daily headlines that proclaimed Japanese forces overwhelming Allied possessions in southeast Asia. The navy expanded the Fishermen’s Reserve Service (popularly known as the “Gumboot Navy”), a reserve unit of volunteer fishers who conducted patrols along the coast using their experience and vessels.¹⁴ Citizens covered up their windows and shut off their lights, businesses shut their doors early, and radio stations went off the air to hinder navigation on the part of a would-be invasion force. The Victoria mayor reported that the Japanese were off the Aleutian coast (long before the Japanese actually captured Attu and Kiska in June 1942) and warned of imminent invasion.¹⁵ British Columbia had never been a major battlefield, but it represented a lot of ground to cover with limited military resources.

Mounting West Coast concerns led to ever-increasing popular demands for some form of local protection. In the anxiety-ridden context of early 1942, the “unthinkable” had already occurred: Britain’s Asian colonies had fallen. Parliamentarians like Howard Green (Vancouver South) observed that Japan had gained control of the Pacific in seven weeks; he predicted bombings and an invasion of British Columbia.

Relations with the United States and Great Britain, 1937-1948” (PhD diss., York University, 1989); and Timothy Wilford, “Canada and the Far East Crisis in 1941: Intelligence, Strategy and the Coming of the Pacific War” (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 2005).

¹² See DNH, AHQ Report no.3, “The Employment of Infantry in the Pacific Coast Defences (Aug 39 to Dec 43),” 12. On coast defence artillery, see Hunter, “Coast Defence in British Columbia.”

¹³ Desmond Morton, *Canada and War: A Military and Political History* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1981), 110.

¹⁴ On the FRS, see Donald Peck, “The Gumboot Navy,” *Raincoast Chronicles*, no. 7: 12-9; Carol Popp, *The Gumboot Navy* (Lantzville, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1988); W.A.B. Douglas, Michael J. Whitby, and Roger Flynn Sarty, *No Higher Purpose: The Official Operational History of the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, 1939-1943, vol. 2, part 1* (St. Catharines, ON: Vanwell, 2002), 338. The navy outfitted their boats with guns and equipment.

¹⁵ Patricia E. Roy, J.L. Granatstein, Masako Lino, and Hiroko Takamura, *Mutual Hostages: Canadians and Japanese during the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 75.

Reservists without rifles offered little security, and the generals would be forced to surrender the coast and its people unless the federal government bolstered its defences and organized “home guards.” While the chiefs of staff were convinced that the Japanese could not mount anything more than hit-and-run raids, the prime minister was besieged by editorials, letters from citizens, and citizens’ defence committee resolutions that demanded action.¹⁶ British Columbians flocked to enlist in the “active” and reserve army units and demanded home defence formations. Residents in outlying areas, anxious to “protect themselves and their loved ones,” polished their sporting rifles, pooled their arms, and envisioned mobilizing grassroots defences. Without official approval or support, voluntary organizations across the province began to train and drill.¹⁷ “There are thousands of men in civil life – war veterans, loggers, miners, fishermen, shipyard workers etc., who are hunters and capable marksmen, who could form the nucleus of such an organization,” one observer noted in the *Victoria Daily Colonist*. Men between sixteen and sixty-five could volunteer in various districts and act as a “guerrilla force.” The *Vancouver Sun* interviewed “informed civilians and former military officers” and proposed “Civil Defence Corps in every town, city and village in BC.”¹⁸ The public outcry demanded reassuring steps to bolster confidence in the Canadian armed forces’ ability to defend communities along the West Coast, particularly the towns and villages in exposed coastal areas. Ottawa had to demonstrate its commitment to British Columbia more generally.

In a total war setting, the federal government needed to carefully manage its human and material resources. Local volunteers could serve as useful auxiliaries, and their local knowledge would be vital in the case of an invasion, but their efforts would have to be harnessed so as to not detract from the general war effort. Government and military officials

¹⁶ Roy, *Mutual Hostages*, 87–8; *Hansard*, 20 January 1942, 152. BC Reservists were issued American rifles and Ross rifles by February 1942. On intelligence assessments, see Timothy Wilford, “Canada and the Far East Crisis in 1941: Intelligence, Strategy and the Coming of the Pacific War” (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 2005).

¹⁷ “Birth of the PCMR,” *The Ranger*, January 1944: 5; “History – Pacific Coast Militia Rangers,” DHH 322.009 (D298). Copies of *The Ranger* can be seen at DHH in Ottawa as well as the CFB Esquimalt Military and Naval Museum. There is lots of anecdotal evidence on citizens’ committees or individuals’ taking unilateral action to establish local defences. For example, Grand Forks, Stewart, Courtenay, and Victoria organized unofficial home guard units before Pearl Harbor. See “History – Pacific Coast Militia Rangers,” DHH 322.009 (D298); Kerry Ragnar Steeves, “The Pacific Coast Militia Rangers, 1942–1945” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1990), 24; *Victoria Times*, 5 July 1978; Donald G. Sword, unpublished draft of Gordon Sword’s biography (copy provided by Kerry Steeves).

¹⁸ Both newspapers cited in Steeves, “Pacific Coast Militia Rangers,” 15–9.

recognized that a careful balance had to be struck. “The essence of the problem,” historian C.P. Stacey explained, “was to provide adequate defence against probable scales of attack without at the same time lessening the effort in the decisive theatre of war.”¹⁹ The Allies would be fighting a war on several fronts, and Canada could ill-afford to redirect expeditionary forces to defend against a potential attack on the West Coast when its “effort must be directed to the ultimate object – the defeat of Germany.”²⁰ Even if the number of Canadian Army Active Force troops was increased substantially, military authorities recognized that they could not cover all vital points. Furthermore, journalists noted that soldiers hurried to British Columbia from the east could not possess enough knowledge about the region to defend it adequately.²¹

The Reserve units in the province were confined to settled areas and did not have the organization, knowledge, or operational experience to function outside of their immediate areas. By comparison, BC politicians and journalists suggested that Japanese fishers along the coast knew the area intimately and would serve the enemy. This logic, which equated Japanese Canadian sympathies with those of the Japanese enemy and treated this population as a monolithic block, was problematic.²² Nevertheless, the rhetorical justifications reveal the alarmism of the time and the profound fear that gripped the province. “In the present situation it is considered most important that everything possible be done on the West Coast to satisfy public opinion in respect to military security, provided it can be done without prejudice to our major war effort,” the chief of the general staff (cgs) in Ottawa explained to Pacific Command in January 1942. The latter point could not be stressed enough. The solution could not drain the human and financial resources needed to wage war overseas. At a number of coastal points on Vancouver Island and the mainland, national headquarters envisioned Home Guard platoons issued with uniforms and rifles to offer local protection. Time was of the essence, and the cgs knew that action along these lines

¹⁹ Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments*, 131.

²⁰ Parliamentary Secret Session, Notes on Canadian Defence Policy, 19 February 1942, DHH 112.3M2 (D495).

²¹ “History – Pacific Coast Militia Rangers,” DHH 322.009 (D298). The government considered the most damning indictment to be “The Derelict Defence,” a series of *Vancouver Sun* editorials that complained of outmoded defences, equipment shortages, a lack of cooperation, and the military’s “failure to adopt an aggressive spirit.” The newspaper was fined \$300 for its critique. See “Defence of Canada Forces,” 16 May 1950, DHH 112.3M2 (D363).

²² Recent studies on the subject include Roy, *The Oriental Question*; and Stephanie Bangarth, “The Politics of Rights: Canadian and American Advocacy Groups and North America’s Citizens of Japanese Ancestry, 1942–1949” (PhD diss., University of Waterloo, 2003), which provides a balanced overview of the historiography.

“would be very popular on the West Coast and would not interfere with our major effort.”²³

The British Home Guard was the obvious model. When the Low Countries and France fell to the Germans in mid-1940, a Nazi invasion of the British Isles became a real possibility. Winston Churchill took to the airwaves asking for local defence volunteers, and, by the end of June, the Home Guard units exceeded one million men. Initially composed of individual volunteers either too young or too old to serve in the regular army, or serving in vital wartime occupations, members were armed with whatever was available. If saboteurs and spies threatened domestic security, or if German airborne units tried to land, these “people in arms” were expected to delay their advance until regular army units arrived. These local defence units were given little training, and their defined role was unclear, but the British Home Guard provided citizens with an opportunity to serve their nation directly and satisfied public demands for action.²⁴

Pacific Command initially proposed the establishment of “Coast Defence Guards” to serve where it was impossible to establish Reserve army units. The guards’ value would be threefold. First, they would help to calm the populace and would provide a visible response to public demands for action. Second, they would be able to pass on information about suspicious individuals, vessels, and activities in their area. Third, if a small raiding party attacked their local area, they would be able “to take action against them in defence of their own homes and community.” The premier agreed wholeheartedly with this proposal, as did the provincial police commissioner. The regional army commander, Major-General R.O. Alexander, met with all of the members of the Legislative Assembly who represented coastal ridings and received their unanimous support and cooperation. They suggested that the Guards not be given military uniforms but only armbands; that they not be paid but be characterized as “the defenders of their own homes”; and that any training be carried out “in accordance with the local situation as regards place, type of country and type of men forming the unit.” General Alexander agreed that uniforms would be inappropriate

²³ CGS to ACGS and VCGS, 31 January 1942, DHH 112.1 (D35); Brigadier for CDS to General Officer Command-in-Chief, Pacific Command, 31 January 1942, DHH 322.009 (D298).

²⁴ S.P. Mackenzie, *The Home Guard: A Military and Political History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1995), 32, passim; David K. Yelton, “British Public Opinion, the Home Guard, and the Defense of Great Britain, 1940–1944,” *Journal of Military History* 58, 3 (1994): 461–80. The British Home Guard was stood down in December 1944 and disbanded on 31 December 1945. BC journalists also made reference to guerrilla units around the world. See, for example, “The Guerrillas,” *Vancouver Sun*, 9 April 1942, 4.

and that an overly formal military structure, medical examinations, and qualifications would be more a hindrance than a help to the new organization. Ideally, the men would serve as a sort of auxiliary police armed with sporting weapons issued to them as members of civilian rifle associations in about fifteen coastal communities.²⁵

This proposed organization would have violated the 1907 Hague Convention and thus required revision. Under international law, local civilians or police could not defend their homes and communities against a military attack without making themselves liable to punishment as unlawful combatants. Consequently, the “Guards” would need to have formal military status: if the army gave them steel helmets, distinctive armbands, and some training, they would constitute legitimate units. The general officer commanding-in-chief (GOC-in-C) Pacific Command was instructed to proceed with the creation of coastal guard units, and, although the final structure was uncertain, the plans were sufficiently developed to allow a public statement. On 23 February, British Columbia’s daily papers announced that every coastal town and strategic point in the interior would be guarded by subunits of the Canadian Army Reserve, which would vary in strength depending on the strategic importance of the place they were defending.²⁶ The existing reserve structure was not designed to cover extensive areas with a low population density, so a new model was required to utilize the experience of prospectors, trappers, loggers, and fishers who knew local conditions best.

The task of turning vague concepts into organized reality fell to Lieutenant-Colonel T.A.H. “Tommy” Taylor, a staff officer at Pacific Command Headquarters. His past employment in British Columbia included land surveying, timber cruising, and railway construction, and he recognized that the home defence organization had to be designed to reflect the diverse geography and people of the province. “Only experienced rugged men accustomed to rugged, timbered country could adequately undertake much of the work” required if the Japanese gained a foothold. His force required the hardy “woodsmen” with strength of character who populated the coast and the interior. “Strangely enough,” Taylor explained, “the initiative and energy possessed by many of these men would not fit them for the life of an ordinary soldier where

²⁵ Alexander to Secy, DND, 7 February 1942, DHH 159 (DI).

²⁶ ACGS to CGS, 10 February 1942; CGS, “note for file,” 23 February 1942, DHH 112.1 (D35). On Canada and military law, see Chris Madsen, *Another Kind of Justice: Canadian Military Law from Confederation to Somalia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999).

unified action is imperative.”²⁷ Their ability to work independently and creatively would be essential to the proper functioning of the new irregular force.

Given the geography and demographic composition of the Pacific region, Taylor realized that the first step was to build networks of support at the provincial and local levels. He immediately forged relationships with representatives from key sectors to assist with organization and the imminent recruiting drive. Reassurances from the BC Police, the attorney general, the minister of lands, the game department, the forestry department, and the surveyor general gave Taylor the resources of a cadre of civil servants. He also recognized that the private sector, particularly the resource sector, would be a vital ally. When approached, key BC lumber and fishing associations pledged their full support.²⁸

The name of the force was important and helped to correct some of the distortions propagated in the media. Early military and newspaper sources referred to BC “guerrilla” units formed to wage unorthodox local defence.²⁹ This latter designation, while colourful for journalists, was particularly problematic in legal terms. “Guerrillas” – members of independent, irregular armed forces that adopt harassment and sabotage tactics to resist against a stronger foe – had no status under military law. Similar to early discussions about uniforms and weapons, the name of the new corps had to reflect its official military status within the Canadian Army. The name “(Civilian) Auxiliary Defence Corps,” used by Taylor in early proposals, was vague and uninspiring. In mid-March, the name was changed from “Guards” to “Rangers” when a Pacific Command staff officer met with senior officials in Ottawa. During a visit to Victoria in early April, Minister of National Defence J.L. Ralston chatted with Taylor and became convinced that the “Rangers” designation was fitting. After all, they would “range”

²⁷ “Taylor, Thomas Alexander Hatch,” Library and Archives of Canada (hereafter LAC), RG 150, accession 1992-93/166, box 9549; Marion J. Angus, “The Rangers,” *National Home Monthly*, July 1943: 28.

²⁸ “A Brief on the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers,” 3, DHH 159 (D1).

²⁹ The popular enthusiasm for the proposed force was immediate, as journalists revealed in supportive articles. “Army of Woodsmen and Miners Could Make BC Impregnable,” a *Vancouver Sun* headline proclaimed on 6 March. The description of this “guerrilla corps” stressed that it would tap into the indigenous strengths and knowledge of the province. “Indians, with knowledge of trails that are charted imperfectly, could thus be given a chance to do heroic work in defense of a province ... against the yellow menace through intelligent, understanding manning of its contours and natural barriers.” Wild horses in the Cariboo, long slated for destruction, could be harnessed for use by “cavalry Commandos.” It was the strong-willed, independent man that could use mobility and rapid communications in familiar territory to defeat enemy aggression and outsmart the Axis “grand strategy.”

over the coastline and interior rather than simply “guard” fixed points. The word “Militia” ensured that the corps could not be construed as a civilian organization. As a result, military authorities settled on the official name “Pacific Coast Militia Rangers” or “PCMR.” The members would colloquially refer to themselves simply as “the Rangers.”³⁰

In mid-March 1942, Taylor distributed a memorandum that defined the organization in detail. The ideal Ranger recruitment scheme would not compete with the Active or Reserve Forces. Furthermore, Ranger duties would “not conflict with their normal civil employment” unless a state of emergency arose and they were called out on active service. Their operational role was threefold. First, the Rangers were expected to “possess up-to-date, complete and detailed knowledge of their own area,” which could be provided to Pacific Command headquarters and to local military commanders if required. Second, as the “eyes and ears” in their areas, they were to report suspicious vessels and any unusual occurrences that might be subversive or “fifth column” activities. Third, in case of emergency, they would repel an enemy invasion or attack from the sea or air, by themselves and in conjunction with Active Army units.³¹ If necessary, they could take anti-sabotage measures and employ guerrilla tactics to delay enemy advances. In the interior, PCMR units would also protect vital lines of communication like major railways and the “Trans-Canada Highway” from Chilliwack to Golden.³²

To make this vision a reality, the organization had to take shape across British Columbia. The initial focus was on coastal communities, where the threat of invasion seemed most acute.³³ Interest was immediate

³⁰ A.G. MacDonald, “Men of the PCMR Reviving Frontier Tactics,” *British Columbia Lumberman*, November 1942, 54; T.A.H. Taylor, “Memorandum [Coast Defence Reserve Militia],” 18 March 1942, DHH 159 (D1); “History – Pacific Coast Militia Rangers,” 2, DHH 322.009 (D298). In Britain, a debate over whether the Home Guard was expected to wage “guerrilla” warfare or static defence was never completely settled during the war: the War Office advocated a static defence role in which units would “fight to the last” to defend their community, while many Guards and their political supporters favoured greater mobility, which would allow them to “take to the woods” to conduct partisan warfare after an invasion. See Mackenzie, *Home Guard*, 112–29. No such controversy erupted in British Columbia, where the Rangers were often referred to in the press as the province’s “guerrilla army” and were encouraged to adopt whatever tactics were necessary to repulse an invasion.

³¹ Memorandum V-2-27-1, 18 March 1942, DHH 159 (D1).

³² “A Brief on the PCMR,” 5–6, DHH, 159(D1). Although the phrase “Trans-Canada Highway” seems anachronistic, it was used in this 1945 report as well as others generated during the war. See, for example, “Highways to be Designated as Military Routes,” 26 May 1942, DHH 112.21009 (D204).

³³ The 5 March 1942 press release stated that initial organization proceeded in Port Renfrew, Alberni, Tofino, Port Alice, Zaballos, Kelsey Bay, Alert Bay, Queen Charlotte City, Massett, Bella Coola, Ocean Falls, Mill Bay, Kitimat, Port Essington, Port Simpson, Stewart, and Saanich North. DHH f.112.1 (D35).

and intense. Art Boyd of Jordan River revealed his sense of the local situation just before the Rangers were created:

There are several, probably about 20 to 30 men, in this immediate area who are preparing themselves for an attack by the Japs. They are experienced woodsmen and hunters. Some are veterans or guides ... They have acted individually in this matter – for their own self interest as much as for any reason – there is no organization – some have guns and ammunition, maps and other equipment but others are lacking in rifles and none of them have any authority or even recognition from the military or public.

In his opinion, the situation was grave. Port Renfrew represented a potential landing spot, but the regular forces would be “helpless” without local assistance. “It is almost beyond belief, that the troops out here can be so green,” Boyd wrote. “They are Ontario boys and can’t even make a beach fire. If they went [fifty feet] from the highway they would be lost and their effectiveness is strictly limited to settled areas.” He wanted to secure military status for local residents as a “unit of guerrillas,” as well as rifles and ammunition, but did not know where to turn. After all, he understood that Army Headquarters at “Work Point [Barracks in Victoria] is a maze of red tape and buck passing.”³⁴ His concern about an overly bureaucratic process was understandable. Armies are complex organizations laden with administration and hierarchical control, and this seemed anathema to a citizen-soldier force rooted in communities.

Once notice of the Rangers hit newspapers, applications from across the province quickly flooded in requesting a local unit. Taylor called upon community leaders to organize meetings of local citizens, and within two weeks about forty companies with a paper strength of more than four thousand Rangers had been formed. When Lieutenant-General K.C. Stuart arrived to take acting command of Pacific Command, the tempo of expansion was so intense that he referred to the groundswell of popular support as the “Ranger Movement.”³⁵ In light of his obvious zeal and competence, Major Taylor (who had been slated for another appointment) was appointed special officer in charge of the PCMR and given a promotion. He would continue to strengthen his Ranger empire for the duration of the war.

³⁴ Boyd to William, 20 March 1942, DHH 159 (D1).

³⁵ “Historically Speaking,” *The Ranger*, October 1945: 6; “A Brief on the PCMR,” 4, DHH 159 (D1). On local organizing efforts see, for example, James Edward Kingsley, *Did I Ever Tell You About ...* (Parksville: J.E. Kingsley, n.d.), 55-6, and his diary at the British Columbia Archives (BCA), MSS-256.

Brendan Kennelly, a former guerrilla warfare specialist with the Irish Republican Army and the PCMR training officer for its first sixteen months, later criticized Taylor's haphazard method of organizing units and selecting leaders. Taylor's aim was to encourage the spread of the Rangers throughout British Columbia, Kennelly recalled after the war, "regardless of the tactical importance of each area and in direct contradiction to the policy laid down by General Alexander." Taylor sent out officers to canvas interest in various areas, briefing community members "to create interest and publicity." These "organizers" then interviewed the most influential or, at least, the most vocal individuals until one consented to act as a local Ranger captain. "Many of these selectees proved excellent officers," Kennelly observed, "but many, too, were misfits." When poor leaders secured control, a unit failed – regardless of the quality of the personnel – and diverted scarce resources and attention from other units "in more exposed areas."³⁶

Giving local command to local officers was prudent; the men who would fill the ranks would already know their officers, at least by reputation, and only residents would know their region intimately enough to hold off an enemy attack. As a result, the Rangers were rooted in their home communities and operated autonomously for most of the year. While the wartime media uniformly applauded this self-guidance, it was not always beneficial. Kennelly reminisced after the war:

The Regiment is what a Commander makes it! Ranger companies were even more susceptible. The Ranger Captain was "god" – too often a "tin god." If he was a misfit he picked personnel about him who were equally misfit and what good men he might have gravitated downwards and dissipated their talents in obscure positions. This could have been altered in devious ways. Competent seconds-in-command would have been provided. However, badly-led units were allowed to remain badly-led.³⁷

Kennelly saw rampant problems in half of the units, where "unsatisfactory (and arbitrarily set-up) Ranger Captains jockeying to retain control" influenced the appointment of officers and junior leaders. As training officer he had tried to inculcate tactical skills at the local level, but he was disillusioned that his lesson plans were often "sabotaged by Commanders," resulting in "flagrant absurdities." In his view, too many Ranger officers laid claim to more territory than they could handle, "lest

³⁶ Kennelly to Minister of National Defence, 21 April 47, DHH 112.1 (D161), 1-2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

he might lose the prestige he claimed to have from the unwarranted numbers he nominally commanded.”³⁸

Kennelly’s sour assessment reflected his strict military standards and expectations more than the abilities of most Ranger companies to carry out their modest wartime roles. It is clear, however, that local Ranger leaders exercised tremendous power over their units. The organization was deliberately elastic to allow for local variance and to capture the “personality” of a community.³⁹

The basic Ranger unit was the “company,” commanded by a Ranger captain; this designation was deliberately based upon the infantry model to reinforce the PCMR’s military nature. In turn, each company was broken down into “detachments” led by a lieutenant. These were further subdivided into “groups,” roughly equivalent to infantry sections and led by a corporal. Although the original plans provided for companies with a maximum of five detachments and seven officers, this establishment did not always meet requirements, and the staff at Pacific Command adapted the regulations creatively in the interests of “keeping the number of companies to a minimum and making a more compact organization.”⁴⁰

If military resources were stretched in response to domestic cries for Pacific defences, it was not because the Rangers were overpaid or over-equipped: they were unpaid and received a limited scale of issue.

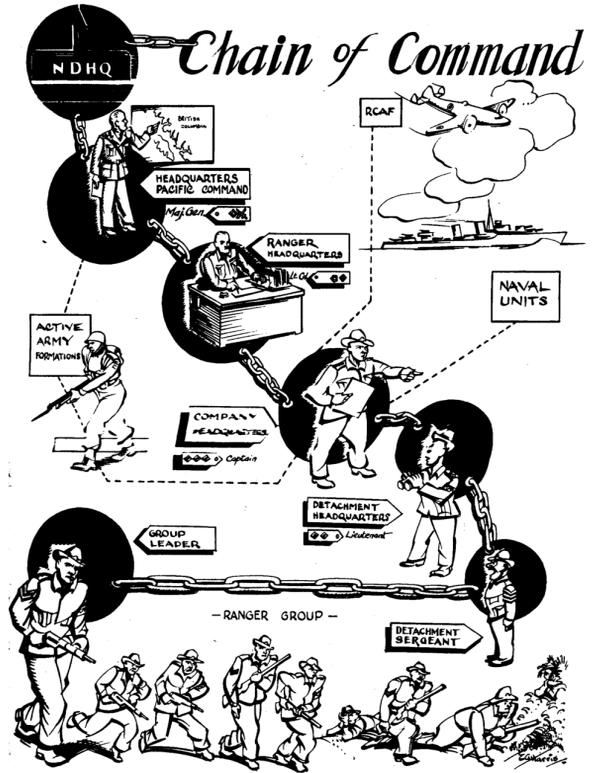


Figure 1: PCMR chain of command (1942). The Ranger (1942).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, DHH II.2.1 (D161), 2.

³⁹ *The Ranger*, 4, 1 (1944): 10.

⁴⁰ Taylor to Colonel R.S. Carey, 31 May 1944, DHH f. 322.009 (D24).



Figure 2: Map of P.C.M.R. units, 1943. Map by Jennifer Arthur-Lackenbauer based upon map, "Location of P.C.M.R. Company Headquarters," n.d. (c.1945) DHH 159 (D1).

The government did not provide them with horses or saddles, vehicles, clothing, or regimental equipment; for the most part, these volunteers were expected to use their private assets for transportation and subsistence. So that they would be distinguishable from ordinary civilians, the original directive recommended that members be given armbands and steel helmets but not military uniforms. Furthermore, they were to receive limited supplies of arms and ammunitions to carry out their

tasks.⁴¹ Service rifles were in short supply in 1942, and the Rangers, a lower priority than Active or Reserve units, had to wait.⁴²

By the end of May 1942, the organization of the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers was well under way. Non-existent at the beginning of the year, almost ten thousand members – equivalent to a division of soldiers – enlisted in a few months. This meteoric growth attested to the tremendous enthusiasm for voluntary cooperation in defending the Pacific Coast, and few units remained idle until they got their weapons. “Throughout the whole province, Rangers set to [work] with a will and made the best of what was at hand,” a triumphant article in *The Ranger* magazine celebrated. “For sheer ingenuity in overcoming equipment shortages and for their ability to ‘scrounge’ necessary material, PCMR men gained enviable prestige in the eyes of military authorities.”⁴³ Despite the obvious bias of this magazine, which was created for and circulated to the Rangers as a training guide, it provides insight into the self-perception and ethos of the Rangers, which stressed ideas of self-sufficiency and ingenuity.

Journalists, caught up in the Ranger “hype,” published a flurry of publicity stories throughout the province and the country – often complemented by photographs of Rangers bearing their rifles. They were cast as “BC’s Rugged Defenders,” BC’s “Guerrilla Sharpshooters” or “Cariboo Commandos.”⁴⁴ The language used to describe them included phrases such as “colourful,” “ingenious,” and “experienced,” while the anecdotes fixated on the most unlikely military personnel in their ranks: the loggers, trappers, hunters, and ancient veterans – men whose skills in bushcraft were described as “legendary.” Their local lore made them “tough” defenders who could repel any enemy attack through cunning and creativity.⁴⁵ “The organization is one that places a premium on individual drive and resourcefulness,” Staff Officer Taylor explained

⁴¹ Taylor, 18 March 1942, DHH f.322.009 (D298).

⁴² See, for example, “Rangers Appeal Directly to Ralston to Send Guns,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 2 July 1942, 2; “Island Rangers Keen to Train for Emergency,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 11 August 1942, 8. In due course, the Rangers were issued Sten submachine guns, .303 and .30-06 service rifles, and .30-30 US sporting rifles on a general scale as well as khaki denim “Drybak” uniforms and distinctive armbands.

⁴³ *The Ranger* 4, 1 (1944): 6, 11.

⁴⁴ See, for example, “BC’s Rugged Defenders,” *Vancouver Sun*, 15 September 1942; “Canada’s Newest Western Army Shaping Up Rapidly,” *Hamilton Spectator*, 14 April 1942; “BC Guerilla Sharpshooters Guard Coast,” *Hamilton Spectator*, 27 March 1943; Gordon Magee, “Cariboo Commandos,” *Vancouver Sun*, 27 June 1942.

⁴⁵ See, for example, “Guerrilla Army to Guard BC Urged by Stevens,” *Vancouver News-Herald*, 20 February 1942; “Army of Woodsmen and Miners Could Make BC Impregnable,” *Vancouver Sun*, 6 March 1942; Hal Straight, “Prowess in the Woods Their Chief Weapon: Coast Rangers in a Class by Themselves,” *Vancouver Sun*, 21 April 1942; “A Lease-Lend Army: Rangers

to one reporter. The Rangers had to, “above all else, be self-sufficient, ready to act on the dictates of their own common sense, and prepared to operate for indeterminate periods without the assistance of supporting services.”⁴⁶ The archetypal Ranger was undaunted by inclement weather or swarms of mosquitoes, could stealthily manoeuvre in some of the “roughest, wildcat terrain in the world,” and had a “horse-sense” finely attuned to his local environment.⁴⁷ This was not a sportsman’s “modern wilderness” engineered for middle-class urbanites to selectively encounter the natural world:⁴⁸ it was a military theatre in which all but the most knowledgeable would perish in the face of Japanese invasion. If British Columbia’s self-identity embraced stereotypes of frontier masculinity,⁴⁹ the Rangers were a striking example of this identity in practice.

The imagery of the rugged and individualistic Rangers was thoroughly masculine, and it reveals how identities are constructed and reinforced through interaction with and response to particular environments. “Gender identities,” geographer Rachel Woodward observes, “are not neutral to space, but shape the ways in which different social spaces are perceived and the ways in which they are discursively constructed and politically controlled.” By extension, military masculinities are geographically constituted, and the idea of the “inhospitable outdoors is used not just as the location and device for developing physical fitness but also as the location for the inculcation of particular mental attitudes and attributes deemed central to some aspect of soldiering.”⁵⁰ During wartime, masculine stereotypes were evoked to cajole, and at times coerce, men to volunteer for overseas service. If the litmus test of patriotism was military service, then men ineligible to serve in the military for reasons of age or employment faced an identity crisis for which the Rangers provided some relief.

Goats; Crack Shots,” *Vancouver Daily Province*, 22 May 1942; “BC Has 6,000 Rangers Ready to Welcome Japs,” *Globe and Mail*, 22 May 1942.

⁴⁶ A.G. MacDonald, “Men of the PCMR Reviving Frontier Tactics?” *British Columbia Lumberman* 26/11 (November 1942), 54-5.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Angus, “The Rangers,” 30-1; Jack Strickland, “Vigilance Is Their Motto,” *Vancouver Daily Province Saturday Magazine*, 7 April 1945, 1.

⁴⁸ Tina Loo, “Making a Modern Wilderness: Conserving Wildlife in Twentieth-Century Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 82, 1 (2001): 92; see also Loo, “Of Moose and Men: Hunting for Masculinities in British Columbia, 1880-1939,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 23, 3 (2001): 296-319.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race and the Making of British Columbia 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); and Christopher Dummitt, “Risk on the Rocks: Modernity, Manhood, and Mountaineering in Postwar British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 141 (Spring 2004): 3-29.

⁵⁰ Rachel Woodward, “Locating Military Masculinities,” in *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State*, ed. Paul Higate (London: Praeger, 2003), 46.

General Order 320 (which created the Rangers) provided that “membership will not be limited as to age or physique, but will be open to any who are considered suitable or can be of use.”⁵¹ Recruits did not need to take a medical examination: if they could carry out Ranger duties, they were acceptable. Marion Angus discovered that the list of Rangers included former Canadian Expeditionary Force officers Colonel “Cy” Peck, VC, and Brigadier E.J. Ross, MC; “a fur trader with fifteen years bush training, familiar with Indian (BC and prairie) dialects and northern transportation methods, whose hobby is amateur radio”; an eighteen-year veteran of the Royal Navy whose familiarity with small sea-craft and gunnery were well suited to his community; and an “aggressive and reliable” thirty-five-year-old Coast Indian who had been a councillor in his village for a decade and who was “captain of a fish-packer and [knew] the coast waters like a book.” In describing this “democratic army,” one could also cite bakers, heavy equipment operators, game wardens, fishery inspectors, cowboys, loggers, and farmers.⁵² The actual ranks reflected open criteria: the youngest member of the PCMR was thirteen and the oldest eighty-six, and the median age of the Rangers in 1943 was nearly fifty.⁵³

No one in wartime Canada wanted to be seen as a slacker or coward, and eager youth “saw war as a heroic, thrilling experience.” Historian Jeff Keshen has observed that underage boys were envious as their older friends signed up, and commentators at the time worried that, without an outlet for their energies, adolescent males were growing “‘restless’ and in order to prove their readiness for action sometimes struck out in a ‘spectacular’ manner.”⁵⁴ The Rangers provided such an outlet. “Young lads” in outlying areas proved “extremely valuable,” an official summary recognized. “Boys’ of 15 years and up proved to be good shots, could handle an axe, and were valuable as guides to city-bred men.”⁵⁵ Several Ranger companies used “boys platoons” as runners (or bicyclers), signallers, and messengers.⁵⁶ Former Ranger David Whittaker explained that, as young men, he and his friends were being “socialized into the role of men ... and into the role of soldiering, and the adventure and

⁵¹ Para. 3(t), GSO 320, 12 August 1942.

⁵² Angus, “The Rangers,” 28. Further evidence of its “democratic” nature included the ability of company members to dismiss and elect their own commanding officers. See, for example, “Defence Force Elects Heads,” *Victoria Colonist*, 21 April 1942, 5.

⁵³ Larry Worthington, “Worthy”: *A Biography of Major-General F.F. Worthington* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1961), 205; Steeves, “Pacific Coast Militia Rangers,” 37-41.

⁵⁴ Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, 22, 206, 214.

⁵⁵ “A Brief on the PCMR,” 15.

⁵⁶ Steeves, “Pacific Coast Militia Rangers,” 48.

the excitement ... We felt part of the world of men, and it gave us a lot of self-confidence in terms of adolescents wanting to belong.”⁵⁷ This exposure to military life and training motivated many to join the regular army as soon as they reached sufficient age. “Quite a large number of Rangers are graduating into the Armed Forces and their younger Brothers, in many cases, are joining the [PCMR] as soon as they are old enough to so that they can follow the example ... and get into the Armed Forces,” Major-General J.P. Mackenzie, the army inspector for Western Canada, noted during a visit to Chilliwack in December 1943.⁵⁸ In the end, more than twelve hundred Rangers volunteered for general service overseas.⁵⁹

On the other side of the demographic spectrum, older men beyond service age who would never be eligible for overseas service still had skills that would allow them to outpace and outsmart those unfamiliar with their surroundings. The knowledge they had amassed during imperial campaigns in Asia and Africa, or during the Great War, was integral to the Rangers. Indeed, South African War veterans had been among the most strident lobbyists for BC commando units in the months after Pearl Harbor, and the PCMR gave them their chance to serve.⁶⁰ “I think that we were lucky ... that we had the old vets of the First World War,” Ranger Lloyd Cornett later recalled. “They were too old to serve in the Second War but they had many years in the trenches, a lot of them, and many of them had decorations for bravery ... They were very fine guys who knew the hard end of soldiering and they passed those skills and attitudes along to us [younger Rangers] and we benefited greatly.” The Rangers gave these veterans “a chance to feel involved again ... to return to that spirit of comradeship that every military organization has.”⁶¹ As the opening anecdote to this article suggests, the aged veteran with wisdom and experience became the quintessential stereotype of the Rangers. “On autumn Sundays, dignified businessmen can be seen crawling on their stomachs in a manner reminiscent of long ago boyhood

⁵⁷ Quoted in Steeves, “Pacific Coast Militia Rangers,” 78.

⁵⁸ Major-General J.P. Mackenzie, Report on Chilliwack Rangers, 8 December 1943, LAC, RG 24, reel C-4992, file 8328-1178.

⁵⁹ “A Brief on the PCMR,” 16.

⁶⁰ “Veterans Keen on Plan for Civilian Corps,” *Vancouver Sun*, 24; “South African Vets Want Commando Units for Defense of Canada,” *Vancouver Daily Province*, 28 February 1942, 3; “Recruiting to Start ‘At Once’ for Guerrilla Forces to Protect BC Coastal Areas,” *Province*, 28 February 1942, 23; “Paardeburg Veterans Ready to Take Up Arms in Commando Groups throughout the Province,” *Vancouver News-Herald*, 28 February 1942, 4; Editorial, *Comox District Free Press*, 2 April 1942.

⁶¹ Kerry Steeves, interview with Lloyd Cornett, former member of No. 89 Company PCMR, Burnaby, 29 November 1988.

days when they played Indian scouts,” one reporter described. “They shinny over waterfalls or ford streams with the elasticity of youth.”⁶² Their bodies were considered too old for the battlefields of Europe, but experience made them more than suitable home guards.

Although the Rangers were “naturally” familiar with their “home turf,” they needed some training to make their world legible to military planners and vice versa. To provide the army with vital intelligence, for example, they needed to speak the same language.⁶³ The earliest training activities, held in community halls, Legion halls, and church basements, were very informal. The local Ranger captain would get “the boys” together and identify individual members who had particular expertise in a given subject area. Nearly every company counted veterans of the Boer War and the Great War, for example, who possessed specialized (if antiquated) knowledge about military subjects. They could offer guidance to those without service experience. Former navy signallers taught in private homes, revealing to their Ranger comrades the secrets of Morse and Semaphore, while engineers and “ham” radio operators shared their expertise.⁶⁴ Although British Home Guard units were ordered not to produce homemade weapons because of several tragic accidents, Rangers in British Columbia were actively encouraged to do so.⁶⁵ Machinists furnished weapons in their spare time, using the scrap metal and facilities offered by machine shop owners. Men interested in electronics improvised signalling equipment, bird enthusiasts trained their own homing pigeon messengers, while chemists concocted “Molotov cocktails” using empty beer bottles, homemade hand grenades, and tracer bullets. Inventive members of 29th Company in Chilliwack built a “Sten electric ray gun” out of scrap metal (which used photoelectric cells to fire light instead of bullets) to facilitate indoor practice and to avoid “wasting” precious ammunition.⁶⁶ Rangers also set to work

⁶² Angus, “The Rangers,” 30. See also Sid Godber, “Disbanding Ranger Unit Acclaimed,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 October 1945, 13.

⁶³ *The Ranger* 4, 1 (1944): 7. Rangers had to learn army terminology to work with the regular forces and had to convey information in an efficient manner. Good communications and reconnaissance also required reliable maps. Much of the isolated country over which they roamed remained unmapped, however, and Ranger companies responded by making their own maps, which proved vital to planning, training with other military units, and organizing searches for lost aircraft. See “Historically Speaking,” 6.

⁶⁴ *The Ranger* 4, 1 (1944): 7-8.

⁶⁵ Members of Home Guard units who did not feel that the War Office supplied them with sufficient weaponry ignored the order and manufactured “everything from armoured cars to soup-tin grenades.” See Mackenzie, *Home Guard*, 66.

⁶⁶ See, for example, “Rangers Snipe with Futuristic Ray Gun,” Casey Wells PCMR Scrapbook; T.A.H. Taylor, Pacific Coast Militia Rangers – Circular Letter No. 30, 20 October 1942, CFB



Figure 3: PCMR Company Captain Archie “Pop” McKelvie, a former member of the Vancouver Police Ballistics Bureau, making Molotov cocktails in a home laboratory. Group Leader Frank Smith, a logger, watches Pop. Reporters often lauded the Rangers’ ingenuity in developing their own training tools and weapons. PCMR Publicity photo WRC-2953, private collection.

building local training facilities – on their own initiative and generally out of their own pockets. Before the war, there were five military-owned rifle ranges in British Columbia. By the war’s end, they had constructed another 163.⁶⁷

While this expertise and home-grown inventiveness was important, modern combat demanded more professional training than local initiative alone could provide. In June 1942, Pacific Command authorized “travelling instructors” to visit the companies and detachments to conduct field training.⁶⁸ Owing to the wide dispersal of the units, the small

Esquimalt Naval and Military Museum, box 33; and *The Ranger* magazine throughout the war.

⁶⁷ “Historically Speaking,” 6.

⁶⁸ The Ranger organization that Taylor envisioned exceeded original plans, but he was given approval to form a small staff to help with administrative responsibilities at Pacific Command headquarters. Major W.S. Bartson, a Great War veteran, was appointed his assistant in late March 1942, and Lieutenant Brendan Kennelly, who had served in the Irish Army and trapped in the Peace River district, assumed the role of training officer. They were later joined at headquarters by a quartermaster. In due course, Taylor also selected six “field supervisors” to oversee the organization throughout the province, based on criteria that matched his vision for the force itself. All had familiarity with and experience working in the province, and

number of instructors (eventually eight) found it difficult to reach every Ranger, but there were other ways to encourage preparedness. Members of the three regular services and the Canadian Legion supplemented Ranger training, as did special lecturers like Bert “Yank” Levy, a forty-five-year-old Canadian-born soldier of fortune who had fought as a Loyalist guerrilla leader in Spain and had become a Home Guard instructor in Britain and the United States.⁶⁹ Beginning in September 1942, headquarters also distributed a copy of *The Ranger* magazine to every member. Featuring regular columns on irregular warfare and bushcraft, its pages taught reconnaissance, map reading, field sketching, first aid, and aircraft recognition. It stressed that the foremost weapons in the Rangers’ arsenal were “common, garden horse-sense; a sense of values in relationship with an everyday knowledge of the world and its people and resources; determination to apply themselves to their task; and the ability to combine these three consistently without faltering or fumbling.”⁷⁰ Even in the winter months, when the prospect of outdoor training was less attractive, Rangers were encouraged to train indoors in local schools, community halls, and private residences.⁷¹

Because the Rangers were considered to be “men of action,” their officers emphasized “realistic,” outdoor training.⁷² They prepared for war in the bush, recognizing that their familiarity with British Columbia’s dense forests would provide cover and concealment and allow them to

all had served overseas during the First World War. Captain George Baldwin, MC, was a forest ranger; Captain B.T. O’Grady, MC, was a civil and mining engineer; Captain. S.M. Gillespie was a timber cruiser and surveyor; Captain B. Harvey was a game warden; and Capt. J.B. Acland was a former brigade staff officer and member of the tank corps.

⁶⁹ “Guerilla: ‘Yank’ Levy preaches the art he has practiced,” clipping in Casey Wells’ PCMR Scrapbook.

⁷⁰ *The Ranger*, 15 November 1942, 6. See also “Rangers Publish Corps Magazine,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 10 October 1942, 8.

⁷¹ Ivan E. Phillips, “Salute to the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers,” Okanagan Historical Society 29th Annual Report (1965), 149–50. To facilitate teaching at the community level, the army also trained instructors within the PCMR’s own ranks. Company commanders selected individual Rangers to attend a two-week “Ranger Training School” at the Royal Canadian Engineer training centre at Sardis (Vedder Crossing) near Chilliwack. Members of the Active and Reserve armies gave lectures and demonstrations on a range of subjects, from the use of weapons and demolitions explosives, to field defence and bridge building, to bush tactics. Equally important, the training camp encouraged mutual awareness and understanding between the Rangers and other military branches, allowing them to forge a community of interests and lay the groundwork for effective cooperation. A steady stream of recruits proved willing to sacrifice their vacation time to learn lessons and gain experiences that they could relay to their home units. *Ibid.*, 149; G.W.L. Nicholson, “Interview with Major W.N. Barton, PCMR, HQ Staff, 25 January 1944, DHH 322.009 (D298); Macdonald, “Eyes and Ears,” 54–5.

⁷² G.W.L. Nicholson, “Interview with Lt. Col. T.A.H. Taylor SO i/c PCMR,” 26 January 1944, DHH 322.009 (D298). See also Peter Madison, “British Columbia’s Guerilla Army,” *Vancouver Sun*, 23 January 1943.

neutralize even large enemy forces. Coastal platoons practised with naval and combined operations units. Others pondered urban warfare. "House-to-house street fighting is the finest sport on earth," Rangers read in their magazine. "It is just the sort of close-quarter scrapping Canadians should enjoy."⁷³ One Ranger from the Kootenays reflected that this military training was "the most valuable part" of most members' association with the Rangers. "Many men took part in activities with which they had never had any previous experience," he explained. Training in signals, map reading, and direction finding all provided practical skills that Rangers felt they could use in their civilian lives. Furthermore, "many a young fellow of high school age became acquainted with the proper method of handling a rifle under competent supervision."⁷⁴

Concurrently, the Rangers replicated forms of recreation enjoyed by many BC men. Even those whose work kept them behind desks were "without exception ... outdoor men by practice and inclination."⁷⁵ If there was a close connection between hunting and middle-class masculinity in British Columbia, as one scholar suggests, it was not confined to urban "bourgeois" tourists venturing into a controlled "wilderness" to impose civilization's "conveniences and conventions."⁷⁶ Working men who lived outside of the cities, "from fishing banks, from logging camps and from tiny coastal stump farms" had "owned fire-arms since childhood."⁷⁷ Venturing into the bush was not a bourgeois distraction from their daily lives but, rather, the essence of it. "Many British Columbians had made 'guns' their hobby for years," a *Ranger* magazine article noted in 1944, while others had been bitten by the "signalling 'bug'" or were interested in explosives, engineering, or map reading. The "hobby-appeal" of Ranger training added incentive and interest for the men, and this, combined with patriotic responsibilities, helps explain their keen interest and applied creativity.⁷⁸

⁷³ "Tanks are Vulnerable at Close Quarters," *The Ranger*, 1 December 1942: 8. Given British Columbia's terrain, journalists suggested, armoured vehicles would not be much use elsewhere. See "BC Has 6,000 Rangers Ready to Welcome Japs."

⁷⁴ "The Average Ranger Says...," *The Ranger*, October 1945: 8.

⁷⁵ Macdonald, "Eyes and Ears," 54-5.

⁷⁶ Loo, "Of Moose and Men."

⁷⁷ "Formidable Units of Coast Rangers Being Organized on Island," *Victoria Daily-Colonist*, 14 April 1942, 3.

⁷⁸ *The Ranger* 4, 1 (1944): 9. According to geographer Rachel Woodward, the idea of the "inhospitable outdoors is used not just as the location and device for developing physical fitness but also as the location for the inculcation of particular mental attitudes and attributes deemed central to some aspect of soldiering." See Rachel Woodward, "Locating Military Masculinities," in *Military Masculinities: Identity and the State*, 46.

Was patriotism the primary motivation to join? “Rubbish,” the staff officer-in-charge of the PCMR told a reporter in April 1945: “These men are banded into a close-knit body with a single purpose – actual defense of their own homes.”⁷⁹ Reporter Marion Angus observed this sentiment among the Coquitlam Rangers in July 1943:

After [the company exercise] was over, I asked one of the men, “Why have you joined the Rangers?” “To defend my home,” he said simply. “My home and my family.” A minute later three small tots came running up and a childish treble piped, “Did you get the Japs, Daddy? Did you kill them?”⁸⁰

For many a Ranger, the desire to play one’s part and defend one’s home against Japanese “savagery” was sufficient motivation to volunteer. To disaggregate this motive from patriotism or from community service, however, is erroneous. The Rangers became a key part of wartime social life in small cities, towns, and work camps. Rangers organized Victory Loan drives, supported road-breaking treks, joined in church parades, searched for lost children, and even hunted wolf dogs terrorizing the community of Haney.⁸¹ The Ranger detachment at Moosehide, near Dawson City, Yukon, hosted a “War Dance” that featured “Native war dances, old-time square dances, red river jig,” and other dances as well as local Native children singing “God Save the King” in their “Native tongue,” all to raise money for the Imperial Order of the Daughters of Empire book fund.⁸² As a grassroots force, they were inextricably bound to the social fabric of their communities and built social consensus.

Women were notably absent from the ranks of the PCMR: the rugged landscape and individualism that imbued the force with its sense of purpose was male terrain. The logic of the day held that guerrilla warfare would be no place for a woman: men’s wartime role extended the “male breadwinner norm,” which promised “uninterrupted domesticity” for women and young children,⁸³ to include defence of hearth and home. Women nevertheless “played no small part in the Ranger scheme of

⁷⁹ Quoted in Jack Strickland, “Vigilance Is Their Motto,” 1.

⁸⁰ “The Rangers,” 31.

⁸¹ See, for example, O.V. Maude Roxby, “The Caravan of Hope,” *Okanagan Historical Society* 37 (November 1973): 62-3; “Haney Wolf-Dog Hunt a Wow,” *Vancouver Daily Province*, 22 February 1943, 20.

⁸² “War Dance,” *Dawson News*, 23 January 1945; “Moosehide Benefit Affair Successful,” *Dawson News*, 27 January 1945. See also “Militia Rangers Sponsor Successful Dance at Chase,” *Kamloops Sentinel*, 27 October 1943, 2.

⁸³ Adele Perry, “Bachelors in the Backwoods,” in *Beyond the City Limits*, ed. R. Sandwell (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 181.

The RANGER — November 1, 1943



"... And I'll give you some lessons you won't forget if you come around here again with your blankety-blank street fighting!"

Figure 4: Although this cartoon depicts a woman reprimanding Rangers for practising in her yard, BC women supported the PCMR in several unofficial capacities. *The Ranger*, 1 November 1943.

things," trumpeted official Ranger publications. In pivotal supporting roles, women looked after "farm, ranch or office when their men were away training or out on some Ranger activity."⁸⁴ Cartoons may have depicted the angry housewife armed with a rolling pin (see Figure 4), but the more general impression was one of cooperation. "On many occasions," one writer reminisced, "the Ranger, returning cold and damp from creeping through rain-wet bracken, has been

cheered by a welcome cup of coffee."⁸⁵ Women volunteered to work with the Red Cross in mobile canteens, helped organize dances, and even participated in Ranger shooting competitions.⁸⁶ It was a communal effort.

If there was room for wartime cooperation in British Columbia's mixed population, historians have amply documented how people of Japanese descent – regardless of place of origin or citizenship – were cast as the enemy "other" after Pearl Harbor. In this, the Rangers shared the biases, prejudices, and concerns of other British Columbians. Patricia Roy suggests that much prewar angst towards Asians can be understood as fears of Asian superiority,⁸⁷ and wartime descriptions of Japanese forces fed such insecurities. According to one *Ranger* article, "Physically, he

⁸⁴ "Historically Speaking," *The Ranger*, October 1945: 7.

⁸⁵ "These Are Our Friends," *The Ranger* (Stand Down Number), October 1945: 16. See also James Edward Kingsley, *Pacific Coast Militia Rangers Diary, 1942-1946*, BCA, MSS 2516, vol. 2.

⁸⁶ In Dawson City, Yukon, J.J. Vanbibber's wife went out shooting with the Rangers and won all the shooting prizes. "There was no Ranger who could touch her," her husband explained. Author interview with J.J. Vanbibber, Dawson City, 11 August 2007.

⁸⁷ Patricia E. Roy, "British Columbia's Fear of Asians, 1900-1950," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 13, 25 (1980): 161-72; and Roy, *Oriental Question*.

[the Japanese soldier] is hard and well trained and has remarkably good powers of endurance.”⁸⁸ The Rangers were expected to apply lessons that the Allies had learned in other theatres of war and to study up on how to discern the “Jap Fighting Man” from the Chinese.⁸⁹ The enemy was not to be taken lightly, and given the “secrecy” and “treachery” of Pearl Harbor, Rangers were reminded that no one of Japanese descent was to be trusted. Japanese Canadians, therefore, were excluded from the Rangers, as they were from the Canadian military more generally. Of course, few resided on the coast after the spring of 1942, and Ranger units in the BC interior had the additional task of monitoring the Japanese Canadian internment camps in their regions.⁹⁰

Peter Ward has observed that British Columbia’s ethnic boundaries formed rigid social categories: “race was a fundamental criterion for inclusion, as only very infrequently did non-whites join the organizations of the white majority.”⁹¹ This statement describes Japanese Canadian exclusion from the PCMR but not the experiences of Chinese Canadians, Native peoples, and other “allied” ethnic groups” who were welcomed into the Rangers and whose contributions were celebrated. Rangers learned that when Chinese storekeeper Wong Toy and his sons went out on Ranger exercises “with the rest of his friends,” he hung a sign in his window that read: STORE CLOSED FOR MANOEUVRE PRACTICE. In the small BC town where he lived, Toy was seen as another loyal community member committed to protecting his family. “The threat of Japanese aggression probably bulks very large to a Chinese, may be more so than [to] the average white Canadian,” *The Ranger* magazine offered. “Perhaps the Chinese Ranger has known the grim details of Japanese brutality across the Pacific, and rape, murder and torture mean more to him than it might to the rather complacent people who live behind the barrier of the Rockies.”⁹² Chinese Canadians, acutely aware of the implications of invasion, shared a common threat and could therefore participate in domestic defence.

In newspaper accounts, BC Natives were considered “natural” Rangers and their patriotism held up as a model for all Canadians to emulate. Journalists mobilized popular stereotypes to trumpet their loyalty, as

⁸⁸ *The Ranger*, 15 December 1942: 1.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 1 September 1942, 1.

⁹⁰ Steeves, “Pacific Coast Militia Rangers,” 79-99.

⁹¹ Peter Ward, “Class and Race in the Social Structure of British Columbia, 1870-1939,” *BC Studies* 49 (Spring 1981): 17-35.

⁹² “And Their Work,” *The Ranger*, April 1945: 9. For another example of a Chinese shopkeeper in Yale, see Steeves, “Pacific Coast Militia Rangers,” 58-9. For discussions on the acceptability of Hindus with previous British army service in the PCMR, see DNH 112.21009 (D204).

they did with regard to Indian contributions across the country.⁹³ “Up and down the length of British Columbia’s Coast, both on the main reservations and at many an isolated inlet and forest hamlet besides, the Indians have taken a very keen interest in the war,” a *Victoria Colonist* editorial proclaimed on 3 April 1943. “Where they could serve, they have joined the colors. Where they could not, they have left no stone unturned to assist those who are engaged in the war effort.” Their dedication seemed unmistakable. “Indicative of the way the Indians are backing the war effort,” one reporter described, “was the 102-year-old Dog Creek Indian who offered his services as a guide or marksman and pointed back to a long, successful career as suitable qualifications.” He was made an honorary Ranger for his sincere offer.⁹⁴

It would be as inaccurate to generalize about Aboriginal participation as it would be to do so about the participation of other BC residents, but a case study provides insight into Native people’s active interest and participation. The Nisga’a had lived on the Northwest Coast since time immemorial, and they wanted to defend their villages in the Nass Valley – “the closest part of the Canadian mainland to Japan and a long way from the cities to the south” – from Japanese invasion. Nisga’a representatives approached the Indian agent at Prince Rupert in mid-1942 and told him that they wanted to be organized into a PCMR company. The agent confirmed their enthusiastic interest in volunteering.⁹⁵ When Ranger instructor Brendan Kennelly arrived by boat at Kinconlith Bay in February 1943, he was greeted by eighty “Kitkatla” Rangers flying the Union Jack as well as a twenty-five-piece brass band and forty members of the Indian Women’s Red Cross society. The officer commanding the “all-Indian” Ranger company, fisher Arthur Nelson, marched the procession through “the village to the sounds of martial music & the beating of drums.” The Nisga’a community was patriotic and engaged, with “Indian chiefs of their respective districts” serving as Ranger officers. Although these leaders were strongly against the conscription of their young men for overseas service, fearing that this would deplete their communities of young males and violate Crown

⁹³ On this subject, see Sheffield, *Redman’s on the Warpath*.

⁹⁴ Angus, “The Rangers,” 30. Contrast these depictions of Aboriginal Rangers with Loo’s characterization of Native imagery in “Of Moose and Men.”

⁹⁵ Thomas Boston, *From Time before Memory* (New Aiyansh, BC: School District No. 92 [Nisga’a], 1996), 240; O’Grady to SO PCMR, 19 July 1942, and Gillett to Taylor, 8 April 1943, DHH 169.009(D77). On the reserve system in British Columbia more generally, see Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002).

assurances against compulsory service,⁹⁶ the Nisga'a freely supported defending their homeland. "All the Indians of these parts are strongly and enthusiastically (almost too much) for the Ranger organization," Kennelly reported. "They see in it their opportunity to do their bit & to be prepared to help in home defence in country (and this was emphasised) and in terrain & surroundings with which they were familiar and in which they would be most useful." Over thirty more Rangers joined up during his visit, bringing the strength of the Kinconlith unit to more than two hundred.⁹⁷ The following month, the *Globe and Mail* reported that two coastal Indian companies "meet regularly to drill and study the tactics of modern war ... fully aware of the role they will play if the Japanese attack the west coast and imbued with the spirit of their warrior forefathers, they take their training seriously."⁹⁸ In due course, the Rangers in

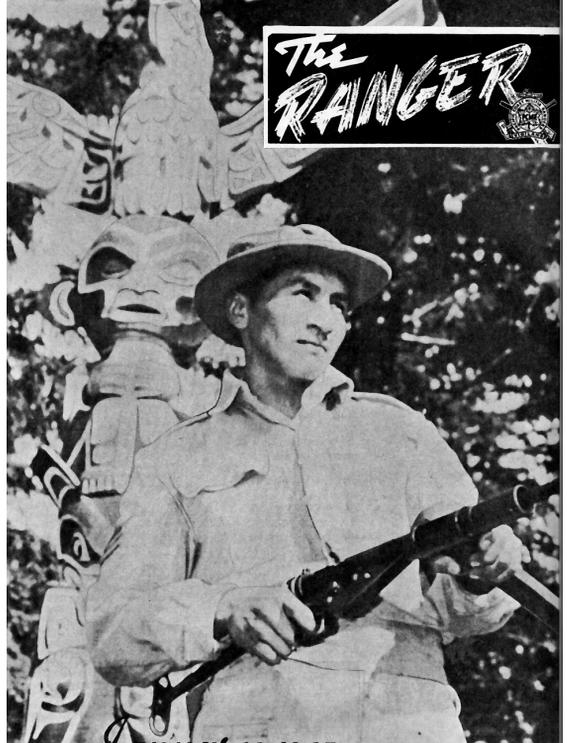


Figure 5: "Though standardized to some extent, Ranger units did not lose their 'local color,'" *The Ranger* magazine noted in its January 1944 issue. "This Indian fisherman in native setting typifies the unit 'personality' found throughout the whole corps." This picture was reprinted as the cover of its January 1945 edition.

⁹⁶ See, for example, P.J.C. Ball, Indian Agent, Report on Vancouver Indian Agency, December 1942, and Percy B. Ross to H.W. McGill, 10 February 1944, LAC, RG 10, vol. 6769, file 452-20-3.

⁹⁷ On Brendan Kennelly's visit to Kinconlith, see his memorandum to SO Rangers, 28 February 1943, DHH f.169.009 (D94). On brass bands as cultural performance along the Northwest Coast, see Susan Neylan, "Here Comes the Band!": Cultural Collaboration, Connective Traditions, and Aboriginal Brass Bands on British Columbia's North Coast, 1875-1964," *BC Studies* 152 (Winter 2006/07): 35-68.

⁹⁸ Kennelly to SO Rangers; *Globe and Mail*, 26 March 1943. Captain Kennelly reported that on one occasion "several of the Indians travelled 52 miles on foot over the frozen surface of the Naas River to tidewater, then rowed eight miles to meet him." The leaders of the Aiyansh, Greenville (Laxgalts'ap), and Canyon City (Gitwinksihlkw) Rangers were anxious to discuss guerrilla tactics with the instructor, who "pleased them by saying we advocated the Rangers train to fight like 'Indians' and not like soldiers & they began to recall their forefathers' days of fighting with the Alaskan and outer island tribes."

the Nass River communities elected their own officers and non-commissioned officers by secret ballot, and these appointments were approved by the respective Indian councils and the Indian agent.⁹⁹ Although Native peoples were disempowered by the Canadian political system, they had a measure of self-government in running their Ranger units during the war.

Aboriginal communities' support for the Rangers must be understood within the context of their entire wartime experience. While the existing historiography stresses that Canadian First Nations peoples served in greater numbers per capita than did any other group,¹⁰⁰ high rates of voluntary enlistment among BC bands were confined to southern areas. In terms of conscription, authorities encountered problems finding individuals living in isolated northern and coastal areas, never mind registering them under the *National Resources Mobilization Act*. The seasons when many were out hunting, fishing, or working in canneries did not match timelines set by the bureaucrats in Ottawa. Given the strident opposition to conscription by Indian bands across the country, BC Indian agents unsuccessfully sought a blanket exemption for their "wards."¹⁰¹ Fears that the PCMR could be an "underhanded way" to enlist personnel for the active army plagued some early Ranger recruitment efforts,¹⁰² but once Native peoples learned that such rumours were false, their inhibitions seemed to disappear. Queen Victoria's representatives had told the Aboriginal people at Port Simpson, Kitkatla, and Metlakatla that "they would never have to fight unless they wanted to." Assured that this would remain the case, they were "very proud of their Ranger association."¹⁰³ The government eventually gave up trying to conscript Native men, and the PCMR allowed coastal Indians to serve in defence of their homeland without going overseas.

On the whole, Aboriginal people represented a minority of the PCMR's total membership, but their per capita participation was disproportionate

⁹⁹ O'Grady to SO Rangers, 1 November 1942, DHH f.169.009(D94); D'Arcy to S.O.i/c, PCMR, 30 June 1943, DHH f.169.009(D77).

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, "Veterans" in Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), *Final Report*, vol. 1: *Looking Forward, Looking Back* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1996); Fred Gaffen, *Forgotten Soldiers* (Penticton: Theytus Books, 1985); Janice Summerby, *Native Soldiers, Foreign Battlefields* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1993).

¹⁰¹ See Michael D. Stevenson, "The Mobilisation of Native Canadians during the Second World War," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 7 (1996): 205-26. On BC responses, see LAC, RG 10, vol. 11289, file 214-4. Even when BC Indians registered, low mobilization rates reflected that most were exempted on medical grounds.

¹⁰² See Lieutenant-Colonel T.A.H. Taylor to Indian Commissioner for BC, 26 February 1943, LAC, RG 10, vol. 11289, file 214-4.

¹⁰³ Kennelly to Taylor, 28 February 4(?), DHH f.169.009(D94).

to the rest of the population and they made vital contributions along the vulnerable Pacific coastline. When six Nisga'a Rangers attended the training school at Sardis, reports of their exceptional performance so impressed the commander of the army's Mountain and Jungle Warfare School that he requested they serve as instructors for soldiers who came through to train.¹⁰⁴ In the Rangers, indigenous skills were valued, and Aboriginal peoples' dispersed reserves, dotting the province's periphery, placed them at key strategic points. In wartime, their intimate, ancestral ties to the land invested them with a shared desire to defend their homeland.

Articles published during the war proclaimed that the teamwork embodied in the Rangers also transcended class lines. Historian Kerry Steeves used local data to analyze Ranger membership, concluding that it was representative of the entire population. In No. 73 Company (Yale), for example, the Rangers included members from all social strata and a variety of occupations. Similarly, he found no anomalies regarding marital status, religion, or labour union membership.¹⁰⁵ Anecdotal evidence provides similar insight into a broad social consensus. Major-General F.F. Worthington, the chief commanding officer in the Pacific at war's end, proclaimed that "the PCMR was of necessity a great 'leveller' – the labourer and the banker worked together. The logging boss found himself in a group or detachment commanded by one of his truck drivers. All had just the one idea. They were 'Rangers' – all working together toward the one common end ... A fellowship of man was created in the Rangers and it will carry on."¹⁰⁶ While such celebratory rhetoric could be dismissed as self-serving, reporters frequently highlighted similar themes regarding men from all backgrounds unified for a single purpose. Hyperbolic excess aside, the Ranger ideal was one of unity and camaraderie.

Tying military masculinity to this sense of communal identity that transcended socio-economic and cultural lines encouraged a strong sense

¹⁰⁴ Hendrie to HQ 6 Canadian Division, 30 October 1944, DHH f.169.009(D94), also quoted in Steeves, "Pacific Coast Militia Rangers," 57.

¹⁰⁵ Steeves, "Pacific Coast Militia Rangers," 34-50, 81-2, 120. Although he speculated that class may have been an issue, given that representatives from two companies indicated that they did not want to be considered for any postwar strike-breaking role, this is not convincing evidence of a persistent cleavage in the Rangers. No other contemporary evidence suggests that the PCMR was divided between working-class and "bourgeois" members, and Steeves concedes that "in virtually all industries both management and the union fully supported the PCMR." See Steeves, "Pacific Coast Militia Rangers," 33. On the general debate over the salience of class in BC history, see Ward, "Class and Race," Rennie Warburton, "Race and Class in British Columbia: A Comment," *BC Studies* 49 (Spring 1981): 79-85.

¹⁰⁶ "Historically Speaking," 7.

of unit cohesion. Colonel Taylor considered this synergy – to borrow current military parlance – to be the most important ingredient in the PCMR's success. "The fact that each unit was made up of men who lived in the same district, and therefore understood each other, made it all the more easy for 'esprit de corps' to develop," the *Ranger* magazine exulted in early 1944: "The common bond established through the Ranger organization even brought together people who had had personal grievances for years. Those who had got along well with others in their community now had even more reason for long-lasting friendships."¹⁰⁷ While this image is surely exaggerated, it spoke to intense communal and personal connections. Indeed, corps morale and satisfaction could translate into a greater sense of individual self-worth. Ranger "Andy" Rigors, who wrote a regular column in the *Kamloops Sentinel*, observed that the Rangers bolstered confidence among members of his community:

There seems to be no doubt about it: members are looking and walking better than ever before as a result of the self-imposed training. Sparkling eyes, shoulders thrown back, clear complexions, and talking with an enthusiastic vigor they did not possess previously, are sure signs of ... a new lease on life, which by the way, is the most valuable thing on the face of the earth: a possession that can easily be wasted, especially in the evenings, by "collapsing" in an easy chair.¹⁰⁸

A year after their creation, the Rangers had become an integral part of Pacific Command's defence focus. When the Japanese threat waned, however, the Rangers felt the reverberations. The corps peaked in August 1943 at a strength of 529 officers and 14,320 other ranks. That fall, Pacific Command reduced its number of troops in light of the lessening threat to coastal North America. As a result, the PCMR was capped at ten thousand members in 123 active companies. In theory, this was done to increase efficiency by "raising the standards" and forcing units to drop individuals who were too busy to attend training or who had proven unsuited to the job.¹⁰⁹ When rumours circulated that it was done for reasons of economy, however, journalists recalled Colonel Taylor's exhortation that "not since the days when settlers organized to protect

¹⁰⁷ *The Ranger* 4, 1 (1944): 8.

¹⁰⁸ *Kamloops Sentinel*, 23 June 1943, 3.

¹⁰⁹ PCMR strength returns from DHH 322.009(D99); DMO&P to GOC-in-C Pacific Command, 13 November 1943, DHH 322.009(D592). On reductions in Pacific Command more generally, see Army Headquarters Report No. 3, "The Employment of Infantry in the Coast Defences (August 39 to December 1943), 94-109.



Figure 6: The original caption to this publicity photograph reads: "Typical of the terrain of the Pacific Coast which these men patrol is this scene. These men may spend three or four days 'on the trail' without blankets, sleeping in improvised shelters." PCMR publicity photograph, November 1942, private collection.

themselves from Indians has there existed such an economical form of defence."¹¹⁰ At scant cost to the public purse, the Rangers continued to play valuable roles in keeping isolated parts of British Columbia and the coast under constant surveillance, searching for lost planes and people in the mountains, and even tracking down escaped prisoners of war or army deserters.¹¹¹ In December 1944, however, as Allied offensives in the European and Pacific theatres pushed the Axis powers back on their

¹¹⁰ Arthur Mayse, "Ranger Units to Be Cut," *Vancouver Sun*, 18 October 1943, 1-2. On the "changed psychology that has come over Canada's west coast theatre of operations" in the fall of 1943, see Norman MacLeod, "Coast Rangers Disband," *Victoria Times*, 30 October 1943, 2.

¹¹¹ "BC Rangers Trap 28 Paratroopers," *Vancouver Sun*, 14 October 1944; Steeves, "Pacific Coast Militia Rangers," 85; "Canadian Ranger Organization" (c. August/September 1947), DHH 324.009 (D542).

heels, the minister of national defence approved a proposal to disband all but twenty-nine Ranger companies located on Vancouver Island, the Queen Charlotte Islands, the northern mainland coast, and Yukon.¹¹² A circular was distributed to the Ranger units to this effect, but, because of a new Japanese threat, no action was taken.

As the Allied war machine began to overwhelm its enemies, the Japanese tried to bolster their national morale by launching bomb-bearing balloons designed to fall on North America. The first operational balloons were recovered in the United States, and in mid-January 1945, one of these delivery systems released several bombs near Minton, Saskatchewan. There were no casualties in Canada, but these incidents reminded people that the war was not over. This saved the Rangers from being abolished. In cooperation with the RCMP, provincial police, forest rangers, trappers, and bomb disposal squads, the PCMR visually detected and reported balloons and ensured that they were safely disarmed or destroyed. The fear that balloons could carry biological agents made this a serious assignment, as did press and media censorship designed to deprive the enemy of intelligence.¹¹³ Given the Rangers' dispersal throughout the province, their careful control and reporting of information through formal military channels was their crowning operational achievement.¹¹⁴

By August, the Allies had defeated the Nazis in Europe, and the diversion of more forces to the Pacific promised to bring imminent victory over Japan. The threat to North America now seemed remote, and the newly appointed chief of the General Staff recommended that the Rangers be reduced to nil strength. The minister agreed. Japan formally surrendered on 2 September, and at the end of that month the official Ranger "stand down" ceremony was held in Vancouver. Additional parades were held to stand down Ranger companies

¹¹² Taylor to Brigadier, General Staff, Pacific Command, 12 October 1944, DHH 322.009 (D24).

¹¹³ "The Japanese Balloon Enterprise against North America," Army HQ Historical Section Report No. 28 (15 October 49), 1-10. Although there were no deaths in British Columbia, six people were killed when a child triggered a balloon bomb hanging from a tree in Oregon. See Bert Webber, *Retaliation: Japanese Attacks and Allied Countermeasures on the Pacific Coast in World War II* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 1975).

¹¹⁴ The "log" of balloon incidents in Pacific Command disclosed that "the activities of the PCMR perhaps exceeded the combined activities of all other organizations used for counter-measures against balloons." See "A Brief on the PCMR," 13. Major-General F.F. Worthington later recorded that "the Japanese [had] hoped to start a holocaust of forest fires but, except in a few cases, the effects were negligible." The press and the public remained largely silent about the bombs, despite widespread knowledge of their existence. See Worthington, "Worthy," 206. Thus deprived of intelligence on their initiative, the Japanese launched their last balloons in April 1945.

across the province, and by 15 October all had disbanded.¹¹⁵ General Worthington's biographer noted that the Pacific Commander "hated to see them disperse. To him, such a force was of value in peace as well as in war, patrolling Canada's sparsely settled regions. He advocated retaining a nucleus on which to rebuild if the need were ever recognized, but his recommendation was turned down."¹¹⁶ Instead, in recognition of their voluntary and unpaid services, Rangers who had served for more than ninety days were allowed to keep their uniforms and could purchase their rifles for the nominal sum of five dollars.¹¹⁷ British Columbia settled into the peace that the Canadian soldiers overseas had helped to earn.

* * *

Painter Emily Carr reflected in her journal how "war halts everything, suspends all ordinary activities."¹¹⁸ In reality, of course, the Second World War effort could not stop everything. Miners still needed to mine, fishers to fish, and loggers to log. Essential industries remained essential, and the more than eight hundred officers and fifteen thousand other ranks who served with the PCMR from 1942 to 1945 were not plucked from their communities or their everyday jobs.¹¹⁹ British Columbians living outside of the main cities feared that "it could happen here," and they proved willing to play a voluntary role to defend their homes. Pervasive concerns about enemy sabotage and infiltration of the West Coast translated into few tangible threats (balloons notwithstanding), and the Rangers were never called out on active service. Nevertheless, the PCMR played an important – if modest and peculiar – part in British Columbia's home defence and surveillance network during the war, allowing young and old men, and those in vital economic sectors, to make a contribution that freed other personnel for overseas service. "What each unit accomplished depended almost entirely on the initiative

¹¹⁵ "Interior Rangers 'Stand Down' in Colourful Pr. George Rites," *Vancouver Daily Province*, 15 October 1945, 22.

¹¹⁶ Worthington, *Worthy*, 207. See also S. Godber, "Disbanding Ranger Unit Acclaimed," *Vancouver Sun*, 1 October 1945.

¹¹⁷ PCMR Circular Letter No. 103, 5 October 1945, DHH 112.3S2009 (D232); GOC-in-C Pacific Command to Secretary, DND, 11 September 1945, DHH 322.009 (D24).

¹¹⁸ Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands*, quoted in Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, rev. ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 261.

¹¹⁹ "Notes on the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers," DHH 145.2P(D1).

of its members,” the *Ranger* magazine boasted in January 1944: “Success was measured by willingness.”¹²⁰

If the primary objective of the PCMR was to meet the public demand for action, it served this purpose admirably. General staff statements in early 1942 stressed that it was “most important that everything possible be done on the West Coast to satisfy public opinion in respect to military security,” but authorities recognized that Active Force troops could not adequately cover all the ground. Reserve Army elements in Pacific Command were concentrated in metropolitan areas. As a staff summary succinctly noted, the military needed “an organization of men with a knowledge of British Columbia born of experience from living in the rocky country along the rugged coast line, and the thick, barely penetrable bush” of the interior timberlands.¹²¹ The Rangers provided this experience and the impression of security. During the Second World War, the threat of enemy operations on Canadian soil changed the outlook of British Columbians. No longer was the military an abstract expeditionary force. The PCMR brought it home to citizens in outlying areas, and by its very nature provided a “contact between ‘Mr. Citizen’ and the military that did not exist before and which no amount of ordinary propaganda ... can produce.”¹²²

The PCMR provides regional support to Michael Stevenson’s conclusions that the wartime mobilization of Canadian resources was partial, decentralized, and conciliatory.¹²³ Rather than confirming his assessment that this represents an inherent shortcoming, however, the opposite conclusion might be drawn. Partial commitment did not force the military to squander additional scarce resources on local defence that, in the end, prepared for an enemy attack that never came. A decentralized structure that drew upon grassroots leadership and organization was imperfect, but it accommodated a zealous voluntary effort by citizens who remained in their communities. While the PCMR might not have been up to the fighting standards of Canada’s soldiers in the European theatre, it was adequate and proportionate to the threat at hand. In the end, it was a unifying force, provided reassurance to a jittery BC populace and made tangible contributions to Canada’s war effort.

¹²⁰ *The Ranger* 4, 1 (1944): 10.

¹²¹ “Pacific Coast Militia Rangers,” n.d., DHH 322.009 (D24).

¹²² Lieutenant-Colonel T.A.H. Taylor to Colonel A. Duguid, 4 April 1945, DHH 322.009 (D24).

¹²³ M.D. Stevenson, *Canada’s Greatest Wartime Muddle* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 3-4, 173-6.

“While the Rangers are now being disbanded, the Ranger idea will not die,” the final issue of *The Ranger* magazine stated in 1945: “If this land of ours is ever again threatened, to make it solid again in total defence, it will be the Rangers who will fill the gaps and supply the link to fit the regular soldier to this rough, rugged country which we love.”¹²⁴ As contexts changed, Major Taylor again pushed for the re-establishment of his beloved Rangers at the end of the war, organizing a civilian PCMR association to perpetuate its “ideals and activities” in peacetime.¹²⁵ Although he was rebuffed in his early attempts to secure military status for the association, a new organization – the Canadian Rangers – was established in 1947 to serve as the military’s “eyes and ears” from sea to sea. Taylor grew disillusioned when the military refused to allow him to recreate his full Ranger Empire in peacetime, insisting on much smaller units confined to isolated coastal and northern areas. By the 1960s, the Rangers in British Columbia had become moribund, and the units were disbanded in 1976. Re-established in 1991, 4 Canadian Ranger Patrol Group now oversees twenty-two patrols in BC communities. The Canadian Rangers thus continue to serve the country in coastal and northern parts of the province, and their role, mission, and identity remain inextricably linked to the Pacific Coast Militia Rangers of the Second World War.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ “Historically Speaking,” 7.

¹²⁵ “Societies Act”: Pacific Coast Militia Association – Declaration, 5 April 1946; Pacific Coast Militia Rangers Association Bulletin No. 1, 1 May 1946; LAC, RG 24, Accession 83-84/215, vol. 321, file 2001-1999/0, vol. 1; “Ranger Set-Up Protest ‘Surprise’ to Ottawa, *Victoria Colonist*, 28 June 1947, 2.

¹²⁶ The author is completing a book-length history of the Canadian Rangers that will cover the postwar era. A skeleton overview of the BC experience may be found in “The Future of the Canadian Rangers,” 20 April 1989, 1201-260/4 (D Res 3-2), Esquimalt Military Museum, file: Canadian Rangers.