

## The History of Royal Newfoundland Regiment of Fencible Infantry 1803-1816



*Grenadier private of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment of Fencible Infantry,  
1803-1816*

In June, 1803 Brigadier-General John Skerrett, still in command of His Majesty's troops in the Colony of Newfoundland, was ordered to raise a fencible regiment. This call to arms was consistent with similar arrangements throughout the British Empire in response to aggression by Napoleonic France. Fencible regiments were raised for service in specific colonies.

Skerrett was ordered to raise ten companies many of whom were recruited from the Royal Newfoundland Regiment that had been only recently disbanded. The new Regiment was to be the Newfoundland Regiment of Fencible Infantry

By 1806, the regiment numbered nearly seven hundred men and were renamed The Royal Newfoundland Regiment when the title "Royal" was conferred by King George III. The next year they were loaded aboard transport ships and sent to Halifax, Nova Scotia where they remained in garrison for one year before being sent to Quebec in 1807.

That same year the British Government began the practice of stopping all ships on the high seas, fearing that some might be providing supplies to France. Many Americans were outraged and by 1812 the United States declared war on Great Britain.

Because of their extensive experience as both soldiers and sailors, over half of the regiment consisting of five companies, were posted to Kingston, Upper Canada. They served aboard ships. The remaining companies were assigned to detachments at Quebec, Prescott, Fort George and Fort York.



*RNR Regimental and King's Colours*

In May 1812, weeks before outbreak of the war with the United States, Major-General Sir Isaac Brock, Commander of his Majesty's Forces in Upper Canada, divided up the regiment into smaller companies and placed them in defensive positions from Prescott to Amherstburg (at the mouth of the Detroit River). Some were even employed as Marines onboard naval vessels on the Great Lakes, and these troops were identified as His Majesty's Provincial Marine.

Battles in which elements of the regiment took part included:

- Skirmish at River Canard (River Canard, Ontario) - July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1812
- Battle of Detroit (Detroit, Michigan) - August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1812
- Battle of the River Raisin or Frenchtown, (Michigan) - January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1813
- British raid on Ogdensburg, New York - February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1813
- Battle of York (Toronto, Ontario) - April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1813
- Operations in northwest Ohio, including the Battle of Maumee in the spring of 1813
- Battle of Fort George (Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario) - May 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup>, 1813
- Raid on Sacket's Harbour, New York - May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1813
- Provided soldiers who served as marines in the Battle of Lake Erie - September 10<sup>th</sup>, 1813
- Battle of the Thames or Moraviantown (Moraviantown, Ontario) - October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1813
- Battle of Michilimackinac or Mackinac Island (Michigan) - August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1814 and
- As part of the capture of American naval vessels *Tigress* - September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1814 and *Scorpion* on Upper Lake Huron on September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1814.

The regiment was distributed throughout the war zone as attached sub-units and not as a formed single unit battalion. It was disbanded in 1816.

**For more history of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment of Fencibles**, visit [www.rnflr.ca](http://www.rnflr.ca)  
 Muster sheets of officers, non-commissioned officers and of all ranks of first to fifth companies, who served during the War of 1812, are posted on this website.

**Modern day re-enactment units depicting War of 1812 companies of the regiment include:**

Bulger's Company ([www.battleofgeorgianbay.huroniac.com/rnrsite/](http://www.battleofgeorgianbay.huroniac.com/rnrsite/))

Skinner's Company - Greg Renault ([Renault@covenanthouse.ca](mailto:Renault@covenanthouse.ca))

Whelan's Company - Rick Peterson ([petersonr@rogers.com](mailto:petersonr@rogers.com))

## Monuments to the Royal Newfoundland Regiment of Fencibles

Ottawa:

The War of 1812 Monument, situated on Parliament Hill, across from the National War Memorial, features a soldier of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment of Fencibles, firing his musket. It is one of the seven bronze figures depicted on the monument.

It was inaugurated on November 6th, 2014.



Toronto:

A monument depicting a toy soldier of the 1813 Royal Newfoundland Regiment of Fencibles, standing over a fallen American toy soldier was unveiled in Toronto (Bathurst Avenue at Lakeshore Boulevard, south of Fort York) in November 2008.

## Scouts and the Royal Newfoundland Regiment of Fencibles

Scouts started re-enacting as the regiment back in the early 1980's. It was founded by Bruce Sellers.

Re-enactments began at Fort York, sleeping right under the Gardener Expressway. At night you could hear the thump thump...thump thump as cars passed over the expansion joints of the highway.

Once the camp was moved to Fort George in Niagara-on-the-Lake, the Scouts camped right outside of the fort walls for the first few years. Due to growth of the event, the camp was moved to the fields of Butlers Barracks.

Also, the regiment is active in the Scout Brigade winter campaigns, in which the scouts mess in Navy Hall and sleep in the wooden barracks.

### Regimental lore

- Our mascot is our bronzed codfish, made by Scouter Sandy MacNaughton (Captain)
- Our cheer is **COD! COD! COD!**
- Our motto is **IN COD WE TRUST!**

Our past sub-camp chiefs (colonels) include:

- Scouter John Christie, known for pillaging Niagara-on-the-Lake.
- Scouter George Samples, known for Georges Bridge.
- Scouter Ron Peddler known, the longest serving colonel
- Scouter Kevin Windsor, the dandiest colonel
- Our present colonel is Scouter Peter Barber

**THREE CHEERS FOR OUR PAST & PRESENT COLONELS.  
HUZZAH! HUZZAH! HUZZAH!**