

Where are the Red Coats?



Members of the Northumberland Militia were used to protect local land and liberty

Photo: Garnet McPherson

While the popular perception of the British Army of 1812 is of the Red Coat, in fact very few if any Red Coats probably were found at Presqu'île during that war. Our records indicate two military groups were here and neither wore red.

The regular troops here were the Glengarry Light Infantry, raised at the beginning of hostilities from former British (Scottish) Soldiers that had settled in Ontario's Glengarry County. They were given 'bottle green' uniforms based on the 95th Rifles of the British Army. How often

they were actually on the peninsula is not known but they spent considerable time in the area as records indicate they were often in Carrying Place, guarding supplies, or moving through between Kingston and SW Ontario.

The Northumberland Militia, under the command of Lt-Col. Peters, were the other unit here. They would have guarded supplies going west and prisoners going east and kept a general lookout to warn of any invasion from across the lake.

The following extract from an 1813 letter by the British Commander in Upper Canada indicates this locally raised unit may have had a nearly permanent presence at Presqu'île.

"I sent down directions to Lt. Col. Peters to post a Captain with 50 men at Newcastle..."

~ Roger Sheaffe, April 7th 1813 (Newcastle was the name of the town that had been planned for Presqu'île but was abandoned after the sinking of the *Speedy* in 1804.)

Being a militia they would have worn whatever clothes they had, with only their arms and some equipment being supplied by the British army. Some of the officers may have had red coats to wear, but more sombre colours would have been the norm.

The only other group that were likely here were the sailors of the Provincial Marine, who were in the area until 1813 and would have been involved in guarding any supplies or prisoners cached in the Presqu'île area. They would have worn blue, as would have sailors of the Royal Navy who were present on Lake Ontario after 1813.

Not all British soldiers wore red and here at Presqu'île they would have been decidedly scarce, but all contributed to the war effort, whatever the colour of their dress.