

The Princess Pats Return to Ottawa – 19 March 1919

On 11 November, 1918, the 7th Brigade, lead by the Black Watch, augmented by a company of each of PPCLI and The RCR, fought their way into Mons. WW I ended that day. But it was four long months after that that the Princess Pats (as they were widely known at the time) returned to Canada – and the Regiment was indeed fortunate, as most others waited far longer.

However, a lot happened between Mons and the Regiment's departure for Halifax from Liverpool in early March. The 3rd Division was not selected for the German Occupation Force. Maj A.G. Pearson, pressed into command when LtCol Charles Stewart was killed at the Battle of Canal du Nord, was replaced by a somewhat reluctant (it's a long story) LtCol Hamilton Gault. While Hamilton Gault was in London making arrangements for a possible visit by Princess Patricia, someone sent all the experienced officers and NCO's off on leave, and there were some difficulties. These were all resolved overnight when Hamilton Gault returned. The Regiment marched west for five days to St Leger, on the Belgian border, where they remained until end-January, when they learned that Canadians would be repatriated through Britain, and that the Patricia's, first in the field, would be among the first to leave.

On 28 January, 1919, the Camp Colour, the Ric-a-Dam-Doo which Princess Patricia had made and had presented in Lansdowne Park back in August 1914, and which the Regiment had carried into every battle, was consecrated on a parade in a snowy field and officially became the Regimental Colour. On 7 February, PPCLI sailed for Britain from Le Havre, where they had landed 50 months earlier. They had fought longer than any overseas fighting unit, and in fact longer than almost every British battalion.

They stayed at Bramshott Camp near Guildford, waiting for a ship to take them to Canada. On 21 February, her Regiment paraded there for Princess Patricia, just as they had at Lansdowne Park – only two officers (Hamilton Gault and LtCol Agar Adamson) and 42 NCO's and soldiers were on both parades. It was a Regimental family affair with no politicians or generals in attendance. Princess Patricia, who had been formally appointed Colonel-in-Chief almost exactly one year before, on 22 February 1918, placed a silver gilt wreath of laurel on the Colour. Engraved on it are the words:

To the P.P.C.L.I. from the Colonel-in-Chief
PATRICIA, in recognition of their heroic
service in the Great War, 1914 -1919

A week later, she married then-Commander Alexander Ramsay in Westminster Abbey, the first Royal to be married in the Abbey since Richard II in 1382. She left the Abbey as Lady Patricia Ramsay. Her Regiment of course was very present at the ceremony, and provided the Royal Guard of Honour. The surging crowds in the streets prevented the planned inspection by King George – and as the Colonel-in-Chief later mentioned: "This was the only occasion in history on which the Regiment lost its ground."

On 8 March, in Liverpool, PPCLI embarked on *S.S. Carmania* for the nine-day crossing to Halifax, arriving on the birthday of the Colonel-in-Chief. An invitation, sponsored by Andrew Carnegie, to travel to New York to march down Fifth Avenue, had to be declined, as was a similar invitation from the City of Montreal. The Patricia's boarded a train for the two-day trip to Ottawa, and were greeted en route with "uproarious welcome" as they moved along.

All Canadian regiments were to be returned to their place of formation for demobilization, but it was particularly fitting that the Princess Pats came back to Ottawa. Although today we think of PPCLI as a western Canada-based regiment, during WW I they were Ottawa's. Not only had they been formed in Lansdowne Park and were named after the very popular Princess, but they were the only face of the Canadian military in the heady days of patriotic fervor immediately after the declaration of war in August 1914, as they marched through Ottawa to train at Rockcliffe. The people of Ottawa had adopted the Princess Pats as theirs, and over 12,000 turned out, jamming into the Lansdowne grandstand for the unadvertised presentation of the Camp Colour by Princess Patricia on Sunday, 23 August 1914. They came out again in record numbers to see them off as they departed Ottawa for Europe several days later. They followed their battles, fortunes and casualty lists even more closely than those of the regiments which had been raised from the local population.

The Ottawa newspapers began reporting the impending return in breathless front page stories days before the scheduled arrival. At mid-morning on Wednesday, 19 March, the troop train entered Union Station in downtown Ottawa, with soldiers hanging out of the windows, laughing and waving. The *Ottawa Evening Journal* seemed to have little else in their 5 o'clock edition that day, and a very large headline announced: "A Welcome to You Pats – A Wave of Enthusiasm as Men in War Accoutrements Swing Along Route – Canada's Capital Extends Joyful Welcome to Corps That Won Enduring Fame". There were stories of WW I battles fought and won. There was a full-page listing of the names of the Originals.

The Regiment formed up in the railway station concourse, wearing their helmets, carrying their rifles with bayonets fixed, and the now-Regimental Colour, shrapnel holes clearly showing, in front. Mayor Harold Fisher mounted a dais. Hamilton Gault called the Patricias to attention, turned to the Mayor, saluted, and announced: "Present, Sir!". And according to the *Journal* reporter: "The effect was stupendous – for an instant the crowd, which had cheered itself hoarse as the men detrained – stood in silence – then burst forth a mighty crescendo of acclaim, of cheers with a sob behind them, cheers for the men present with duty done, sobs for those who remained behind whose battles had been fought and won, who had paid the price and earned the victory and the glory". The Mayor spoke and Hamilton Gault responded, the Chaplain-General said a prayer, and Hamilton Gault marched the unit out of the train station.

Greeted by a crowd which the newspapers called the largest ever assembled in the nation's capital, the Regiment was lead out by the Patricia's Old Comrades, already an association of veterans who had been invalided home. They marched to Connaught Square, and very fittingly formed up in the place which is now the site of the National War Memorial. Hamilton Gault again called the Regiment to attention, and this time reported to the the Duke of Devonshire,

the Governor General. Speeches were made, and Hamilton Gault introduced each officer to the Governor General.

He spurned the offer of a horse to ride, and despite his artificial leg, marched in front of his Regiment from Connaught Square to Parliament Hill and then through the streets of downtown Ottawa to Lansdowne Park. Again according to the *Journal*: "It was a triumphal procession, a welcome befitting the battalion in whose honour it was arranged, worthy of the men whose achievements have gained for Canada an enviable place in the records of the Empire's heroic sacrifice".

Hamilton Gault had asked that he be allowed hold a special dinner at which he planned to thank and say farewell to the soldiers who had served so well. However, the local military staff told him that this would be impossible. As soon as the Regiment was dismissed, the demobilization machine would begin its work and most would have left Ottawa by train by day's end. Clearly upset, Hamilton Gault addressed his Patricia's:

"The memories of our fallen Comrades who have so gallantly given their lives for the great cause in which we have been engaged will ever be present in our lives. To these men and a host of others the Regiment owes its all, and it will ever be with affection and pride that their names will be recalled in the years to come.

"I believe we have all returned to Canada better fitted to take up the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in the Country we love so well."

The Princess Pats cheered their Commanding Officer and Founder for several minutes, and then, gathering himself, Hamilton Gault dismissed his Patricia's.

On 20 March, 1919, J.E. Duggan* wrote a letter. It is quoted on page 372 of Bob Zubkowski's wonderful book *As Long as Faith and Freedom Last*, a collection of stories and antidotes taken from the Regimental Archives:

"I remember the last glimpse of Col Gault in Ottawa the day the Battalion was disbanded. The rumour was that he wanted to keep the battalion together for another day or so, so that he could give the boys a good-bye farewell dinner, but he had been refused by higher-ups. I saw him sitting in a small room with his head in his hands, and I believe he was crying. His heart was in that Regiment. I might have taken more notice at this time, but I was looking for a Sgt whose teeth I had promised to knock out."

Library Archives Canada have produced a short documentary called *PPCLI Returns to Canada, 19 March, 1919*. It can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dK2rOqPp7Ho>

* Pte Joseph E. Duggan was a 22-year-old Private who had joined the Army in Ottawa in May 1916, went overseas in Jun 1917, and joined the Patricia's only in Feb 1918. His service records indicate that he served with the Regiment until his release on 20 Mar 1919. One hopes that Duggan could surprise the sergeant in question, as when he joined, he was only 5'4" with a chest measurement of 33". However, during the fighting of the last 100 days, he had been awarded the Military Medal. Unfortunately, after March 1918, citations were no longer required, so absent a lot more searching, the circumstances are unknown.



The Princess Pats formed up in Connaught Square, being welcomed home by the Governor General, the Duke of Devonshire. The crowd which had gathered clearly brought downtown Ottawa to a standstill.



The Duke of Devonshire welcomes the Princess Pats. No other regiment received such a welcome. Hamilton Gault can easily be identified. The Ric-A-Dam-Doo is just out of the photo, to the left.



Hamilton Gault leads the Princess Pats en route to Lansdowne Park, probably on Sparks St.



Two Patricias display the Ric-A-Dam-Doo, with the Laurel Wreath and shrapnel holes clearly evident, in Lansdowne Park, in front of the Mechanics Building, which had been the Headquarters when PPCLI were formed in Aug 1914