

The Royal North West Mounted Police / The Canadian Corps / Hill 70



Ex-RNWMP members form up as new recruits to the Lord Strathcona Horse Regiment at Camp Sewell in southern Manitoba in 1915. (photo credit – RCMP Historical Collections Unit – Depot Division)

Both patriotism and volunteerism have been hallmarks of the RCMP since its inception in 1873. However at no time in its history were these attributes more in evidence than during the First World War.¹ At the outbreak of hostilities, many former members of the Force stepped forward to fill key positions in the rapidly expanding Canadian Army that was being assembled in Valcartier Quebec. One of these was fifty-year-old **Sir Archibald Cameron Macdonell**, an 11-year veteran of the North West Mounted Police who had served as an Inspector with the Force in Western Canada. Three years into the First World War, Macdonell would become the Commander of the First Division of the Canadian Corps and it was his troops who would go on to capture the vital summit of Hill 70 during this battle in the summer of 1917.

With only 1,268 personnel in 1914 to cover the vast expanse of Canada while at the same time meeting the demands of a country at war, *The Royal North West Mounted Police*² was quickly augmented by a temporary reserve of 434 new recruits.³ A year later, when the need for such measures had eased, these new members were furloughed.⁴ According to the Force's Comptroller in 1915, nearly all immediately volunteered for overseas service with the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF).⁵ Indeed such was the enthusiasm to join up that other members sought discharges as well in order enlist in the CEF. One of these was **George Randolph Pearkes** who paid \$50.00 in 1915 to purchase his release from the RNWMP.⁶ Wounded five times in action, Pearkes would fight at Hill 70 and was awarded the Victoria Cross at the Battle of Passchendaele three months later. He would eventually become the Minister of National Defence in 1957 and Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia in 1960.

As the First World War progressed and increasing numbers of the *RNWMP* flocked to join the CEF as their terms of recruitment expired, the Canadian Government was forced to institute a ban on further enrollment into the armed forces by those who remained in the *RNWMP*.⁷ This caused such widespread discontentment among the ranks that Commissioner of the Force, **Bowen Perry**, threatened to retire unless the Government relented in its policy.⁸ Eventually it did so and a special *RNWMP* cavalry draft was raised to augment the CEF in May 1918, though again, it had to be curtailed due to the overwhelming number of applications received.

By the end of the war, over 2,500 RNWMP members had served with the CEF.⁹ Of these, 146 were killed or died of their wounds.⁹ Sadly such exemplary service to this country remains unknown to most Canadians today, much like the Battle of Hill 70 itself.

Footnotes to Appendix 3

1. *RNWMP: Volunteerism & Patriotism In World War I*; Sheldon Boles, posted November 5, 2017 on the RCMP Veterans' Association – Vancouver Division website: <http://www.rcmpveteransvancouver.com/rnwmp-volunteerism-patriotism-in-world-war-i/>
2. *The North West Mounted Police*, which was established in 1873 by Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald, was retitled as *The Royal North-West Mounted Police* in 1904, before finally adopting its current name as *The Royal Canadian Mounted Police* in 1920.
3. *RNWMP: Volunteerism & Patriotism In World War I*; *Ibid*
4. *Ibid*
5. *Ibid*; also see “*RNWMP Veterans: Distinguished Themselves in World War I*” Sheldon Boles, posted November 5, 2017 on the RCMP Veterans' Association – Vancouver Division website: <http://www.rcmpveteransvancouver.com/rnwmp-veterans-distinguished-themselves-in-world-war-i/>
6. *RNWMP: Volunteerism & Patriotism In World War I*
7. *Ibid*
8. *Ibid*
9. *Ibid*