

"Not Very Much Celebrated:" The Evolution and Nature of the Provincial Marine, 1755-1813

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"Our Navy...is worth [less] than nothing — the Officers are the greatest cowards that ever lived, and would fly from a single Bateau." So wrote the Reverend John Strachan at York in November 1812 as he summarized developments in the war on the border of Upper Canada. After applauding land successes at Detroit and Queenston, Strachan condemned the inability of the Provincial Marine to operate as an effective naval force, an opinion shared by Sir George Prevost and other key British officers.

The opinion of at least one individual on the quarterdeck of the Provincial Marine was different. Lieutenant James Richardson, a member of the service from 1809, observed in his memoirs:

Our little squadron, though not very much celebrated for exploits in the way of fighting, managed, however, to keep open the communications between the Eastern and Western Divisions of the Army...The importance of such services in the then uninhabited state of the country, and the lack of land conveyance owing to the badness of the roads must be obvious.'

Which view of the Provincial Marine is closer to the truth? The marine department, as it was also known, is an aspect of Canadian maritime history that has received little scholarly attention. W.A.B. Douglas discussed the "incompetence" of the department by presenting a few details about its early years and describing the activities of some of its prominent shipbuilders and officers. He argued that its leading officers had Royal Navy experience rather than being mere "provincials," as they were seen by officers arriving from England, and that "the military uses of the provincial marine had been a very real concern for many years before 1812."³ The incompetence about which Strachan complained, Douglas concluded, was caused by the fact that "the Provincial Marine, remarkable and praiseworthy that it was, had too many losers in its ranks." Only one other in depth investigation of the freshwater navy appears to have been done; Carol MacLeod completed a report for the Historical Research and Records Unit of Parks Canada in 1983, but it was not published.⁴ Although a rambling and uncritical examination of the service afloat, the manuscript was well documented and dealt with elements that Douglas ignored, such as the marine's traditional function as a carrier of commercial freight. In light of such limited availability of

research into the Provincial Marine, it is no wonder that recent studies of the War of 1812 have given it little attention or have perpetuated misconceptions about its abilities.'

This essay aims to settle the difference between the comments made by Strachan and Richardson by tracing the development of naval forces on the Great Lakes from their origins in the Seven Years' War to the autumn of 1812. The point will be made that the Provincial Marine, as it existed in 1812, had only a faint tradition of naval tactics since it, and the organizations that preceded it, had been primarily employed as a frugally operated transport service for the better part of five decades.

What were the beginnings of the Provincial Marine? When war broke out between Britain and France in North America in 1754, the British selected, as one of their first objectives, the capture of Fort Niagara, located at the mouth of the Niagara River on Lake Ontario. Since the French had three small warships operating on that lake, it was essential for the British to build armed vessels that could support the advance of an army on Fort Niagara. To that end, a dockyard was opened in the spring of 1755 at Oswego, where the British had maintained a trading post for nearly thirty years.^o

Funding to equip and man the warships came from two quarters. At the home government's direction, the Admiralty sent Commodore Augustus Keppel in the sixty-gun *Centurion* to act as commander in chief of HM vessels on the eastern coast of North America. Among the many tasks facing him when he arrived in Virginia was "to cause proper Vessels to be built and fitted upon the Borders of the Lake [Ontario] in the most frugal manner." The Navy Board delivered "a sufficient Quantity of Iron Work, Cordage, and Canvas on board the *Centurion* for One of them," as well as a draught for a sixty-ton vessel that Keppel was supposed to use. The Admiralty also directed the commodore to send ten swivel guns from his squadron to arm the vessels and a party of twenty-five or thirty men to sail them under the command of a Lieutenant Spendelow. Circumstances altered these arrangements, and Keppel detached Lieutenant Housman Broadley to New York with a Lieutenant Laforey (possibly the future Sir Admiral John LaForey) and perhaps two other junior officers.'

The treasuries of several of the colonies provided the second source of support for the Lake Ontario squadron.^o William Shirley, governor of Massachusetts and soon to be temporary commander-in-chief of British forces in North America, oversaw the hiring of artificers and seamen in the eastern seaboard ports. Keppel paid their wages and sent some armament and gear for a second vessel at Oswego, but the colonies picked up the bill for the rest of the supplies and equipment, which came from New York and Boston. During the summer of 1755 four vessels were launched at Oswego: the seventy-ton schooner *Oswego* (6, later re-rigged as a sloop); the seventy-ton sloop *Ontario* (6), and two twenty-ton schooners, *Valiant* and *George*, which were armed with swivel guns alone and were barely more than open rowing galleys. Broadley made a couple of brief voyages without contacting the French and laid up the vessels at Oswego when the intended campaign against Fort Niagara was postponed.

Two colonial councils in the autumn of 1755 produced a plan to fortify Oswego more strongly and to pay for the building of more vessels there. In July and August 1756 the sloop *Mohawk* (12), brigantine *London* (18), and snow *Halifax* (18) were launched, but difficulties in procuring and transporting stores, arms and men to Oswego safely meant that the vessels were never properly equipped. Broadley again commanded the squadron with LaForey and one or two other RN officers, but Shirley also contracted two merchant masters

Jasper Farmer and William Bedlow, to act as lieutenants in command. The undertaking came to a inglorious end when Montcalm captured Oswego in August and sailed the prized vessels to Fort Frontenac. The French took no advantage of their naval might and in 1758 Lieutenant Colonel John Bradstreet destroyed all but two vessels when he captured the fort; the pair that he employed to transport captured stores back to Oswego were destroyed at that place, thereby putting an end to the first British warships on the lake.¹⁰

About the time that Bradstreet razed the ramparts at Fort Frontenac, Captain Joshua Loring, RN, was launching the twelve-gun sloop *Earl of Halifax* on Lake George, NY. Loring (1716-1781) was a native of Massachusetts who became a privateer in the early 1740s and gained a lieutenant's commission in the Royal Navy (with the help of Governor Shirley's influence) in 1745. He went on half pay in 1749 and returned to active service as a master and commander and the agent for transports at New York and Boston in 1756. His effectiveness in that role, and some involvement in sending supplies to Oswego, won Loring promotion to post captain and supervision of all naval construction on the lakes late in 1757. The full title of his appointment became "His Majesty's Commissary for building and Expediting the Vessels and boats for the Several Lakes in North America."

Loring's task on Lake George was similar to Broadley's in that he was to build armed vessels that could cover the advance of a British army, in this case commanded by General James Abercromby, into French territory. Besides *Earl of Halifax*, several rafts, dozens of whale boats and scores of batteaux, Loring also launched two row galleys and a radeau, a box-like floating battery, named *Land Tortoise* (7), the work being done by colonial artificers, militia and regular soldiers; there is no evidence that Loring commanded any Royal Navy personnel at this time. The armed vessels sailed north to the outlet into Lake Champlain, but Abercromby's attack on the French Fort Carillon was unsuccessful and he withdrew to his Lake George base."

In 1759 Major General Jeffrey Amherst succeeded on Lake Champlain where Abercromby had failed by causing the destruction of Fort Carillon and pushing his army north to the smoking ruins of the abandoned French fort on Crown Point, 110 kilometres south of the next French post at Isle aux Noix, on the Richelieu River. Before proceeding any further, Amherst needed naval support (the French had four armed vessels on the lake) and turned to Loring to oversee the work. At the new British base at Fort Ticonderoga (adjacent to the remains of Fort Carillon), Loring built the brig *Duke of Cumberland* (20) and the sloop *Boscawen* (16), while the radeau, *Ligonier* (8) was launched at Crown Point. Apart from Loring's presence, the Royal Navy seems to have had no part in these preparations, which were funded by the army and the colonies and completed by artificers hired on the seaboard or taken from the ranks of the army. Indeed, when Loring's little squadron finally sailed north in October (much to Amherst's impatience), military officers who had been given commissions afloat commanded and served on them. It was by this avenue that Lieutenant Alexander Grant (1734-1813) of Montgomery's Highlanders, the 77th Regiment of Foot, returned to the naval life (he had briefly by a midshipman) and commenced a career on the lakes that would last for more than five decades."

Before the 1759 campaign ended, Captain Loring captured three French sloops on Lake Champlain. The next year he went with Amherst to Lake Ontario (leaving Grant behind in charge of the squadron on Lake Champlain) to re-establish a naval presence there in preparation for Amherst's descent of the St. Lawrence River to Montreal. While Amherst collected his army at Oswego, Loring superintended the building of the snow *Apollo* (18).

soon renamed *Onondaga*) at Fort Niagara, which the British had captured in 1759 and where they had built another snow, *Mohawk* (16), in the French dockyard the previous autumn. The records indicate that ninety seamen crewed each vessel, many of them drawn from the regiments. Amherst had hoped "to have full employment for the Provincial Troops during the campaign...[and to avoid being] obliged to spare any for the navigation of the Vessels." Accordingly, he asked Loring "to raise a corps of real good seamen...if you [Loring] could meet with any such at Boston or places contiguous there to." While some of the mariners came from the Atlantic ports, shortages forced another one hundred hands to be taken from the 1st and 3rd New York Regiments.

A Philadelphian named Peter Jacquet built the new vessels on Lake Ontario with companies of colonial artificers and assisted by a New York army contractor names John Dies, and the bills being paid by Amherst and the colonies. Military lieutenants, such as Charles Robertson (77th Foot) and Patrick Sinclair (42nd Foot), and at least a couple of hired merchant masters, William Deering and Nathan Tibbols, served as officers in the vessels. The affiliation of several other officers (Lieutenants Thomas Thornton, David Phipps and Roderick McCleod) is less certain, but when Loring was seriously wounded during the attack on the French rearguard at Fort Levis (near Prescott, Ontario) on 23 August 1760, there was no Royal Navy officer to replace him. Amherst appointed Robertson to act as senior officer on Lake Ontario in Loring's absence. The general, rather than senior Royal Navy officers on the seaboard, maintained control of the overall activity of the vessels and each commander was subject to such orders as: "You will unload your cargo, and deliver over the same to the commanding officer of said fort, putting yourself and vessel under his command, and obeying all such orders as you shall from time to time receive from him."¹⁵

The French surrender at Montreal in September 1760 ended the fighting in Canada, but consolidation of the suddenly increased British holdings required the maintenance of naval forces on Lakes Ontario and Champlain and the development of one on Lake Erie and the waters above it. Although still nominally in charge of the vessels on the lakes, Loring spent most of 1761 recovering from his wound, so it was Lieutenant Robertson and John Dies, with shipwrights and an armed detachment, who opened a dockyard on Navy Island (originally named Dies Island), one mile above the brink of Niagara Falls. Loring arrived on the scene in 1762, by which time the eighty-ton schooner *Huron* and the 100-ton sloop *Michigan* had been launched, the first of six or seven sloops and schooners that would be built at Navy Island.¹⁶

The next three years were difficult for the wilderness outposts, at first faced with the hostile native nations and then subject to the reductions of British forces following the Peace of Paris in 1763. Captain Loring remained as commissary of the lakes force until 1765, when he was finally granted permission to return to England. Major General Thomas Gage, who replaced Amherst in 1764, had refused Loring's previous requests to leave the lakes because he intended to put the naval department "upon a Settled Footing on each of the lakes respectively; many Regulations to be made and some new Craft to be built" and he wanted Loring present to advise him.¹⁷ To replace Loring, Gage appointed Lieutenant Alexander Grant, who had remained in command on Lake Champlain.

Gage's scheme to develop a properly outfitted marine department on the lakes did not come to fruition. By 1767 there were only four vessels in operation, the schooner *Brunswick* (launched in 1765) on Lake Ontario, the sloop *Charlotte* (1764) on Lake Erie, the schooner *Gladwin* (1764) on Lake Huron and the sloop *Musquelonau* (prized from the

French in 1759) on Lake Champlain. Besieged by soaring costs, the British government had greatly reduced the garrisons at its frontier outposts and in 1767 contracted out the management of the naval force to John Blackburn, an army contractor in England. For a sum of £3200 per year, Blackburn agreed to employ, feed and clothe twelve officers and forty seamen, keep the vessels in repair and turn them back to the government in the event of war. Gage discharged Alexander Grant and the others from the service, most of whom were hired by Henry White, Blackburn's agent at New York; Grant became the "on site" superintendent of the vessels.¹⁸

Given the tenuous nature of the few vessels on the lakes, the profit margin of Blackburn's contract would seem to have been very slim and hardly worth his while, except for the fact that he could expect to make money by carrying private cargo in the vessels. The rim of the lakes was still only sparsely populated, but the fur trade continued to thrive, new merchants had arrived at the outposts and the pace of commercial traffic was gradually increasing. Some authorities had suggested that a government-run marine department could be funded by making the vessels available as carriers and charging fees for the service, but Gage opposed this idea. "The carrying of Merchants Goods must be precarious," wrote Gage in 1766, "as nothing of that kind could be permitted, till the Provisions, Stores, Etc. were transported; And it might interfere too much with the Service – A Latitude of this kind given to the Masters of the Vessels may be perverted to bad Uses. Some are suspected now of playing tricks." I⁹ Gage's opinion did not prevail, however, and the Board of Trade, with the King's blessing, ordered in 1768 that one of the duties of the naval force would be to give "all Facility and Protection to the Trade of His Majesty's Subjects."²⁰

In 1769 the first privately-owned vessel on the lakes, the sloop *Enterprise*, was built at Detroit by Phyn, Ellice and Company of Schenectady, New York. Alexander Grant got into the private shipping business at Detroit in 1771 with the launch of *Beaver* and over the next three years built or bought two sloops and two schooners for work on the upper lakes and a sloop for Lake Ontario. Under contract from Henry White, Grant also constructed the 154-ton schooner *General Gage* and the 106-ton schooner *Earl of Dunmore* for the government to replace the worn out vessels operating above Niagara Falls.²¹ Though built to carry heavy ordnance, the vessels spent their early careers carrying men and supplies for the government and every type of merchandise for private citizens and companies. They barely resembled naval vessels, as was revealed in 1773 by the complaint of James Andrews, master of *Gage*, that his vessel was in a "defenceless state having on board only eight useless Muskets without Pistol, Sword or Pike and only about two pounds of Powder for the carriage guns."²² Andrews had served in the Royal Navy, but relegated to half pay with no hope of an appointment, he had left the navy to seek steady employment on the lakes. Other half-pay officers appear to have done the same, while a few former military officers still served in the vessels. Their war years behind them for the time being, the officers took up residences at the various posts, as Alexander Grant did, married and raised their families. In the process becoming as "provincial" as any of the other Europeans settling on the lakes.

War with the rebellious colonies abruptly changed the organization of the freshwater force.²³ In August 1776, Major General Sir Guy Carleton, commanding at Quebec, took control of the vessels contracted to Blackburn (two on the upper lakes, one on Lake Ontario and one on Lake Champlain). In order to maintain regular communication among the outposts while still meeting the needs of the merchant trade, Carleton hired eight private vessels. five of which belonged to Alexander Grant. and then forbade any other craft

under sail, an edict that would remain in effect until late in the 1780s. He enlisted the crews of the public vessels and gave commissions to their officers, making Grant the commissioner of the squadrons on the Great Lakes in 1777.²⁴ The vessels were armed and prepared to meet the rebels, but nothing beyond the occasional skirmish happened in that quarter.

The situation on Lake Champlain was markedly different. The fifty-ton sloop *Betsey* had been launched at the British post at St. Jean on the Richelieu in 1771 and was the only armed vessel on duty (apparently with a crew of seven) when Benedict Arnold led an assault on the base in May 1775 and seized it. Late in the summer an American army proceeded down the Richelieu to pursue its ill-fated campaign against Quebec. When the Americans finally withdrew from British territory the following spring, Carleton's land forces quickly re-occupied the banks of the Richelieu and began an industrious effort to establish a naval force that could support the army's advance on rebel strongholds in the Champlain valley. The Royal Navy was fully involved in this undertaking as Carleton relied upon Commodore Charles Douglas, commanding the squadron at Quebec, to detach 400 officers and men from his command and a further 250 from the transports on hand. They dismantled two schooners to their water lines at Chambly, located at the foot of the rapids below St. Jean, and hauled them up to St. Jean while shipwrights took down a 200-ton vessel on the stocks at Quebec, the parts of which were transported to St. Jean for assembly. A Royal Navy master builder named Jonathan Coleman supervised this work, which resulted in two schooners, an eighteen-gun ship, a large radeau, a heavily-armed gunboat prized from the Americans and twenty single-gun gunboats (some of which had been sent from England in pieces).²⁵

The British squadron sailed to meet the Americans during the first week of October 1776. Captain Thomas Pringle from HMS *Lord Howe* in Douglas's squadron was in command and the vessels appear to have been manned exclusively with Royal Navy officers and seamen, with some of Carleton's regulars acting as marines. Pringle engaged Arnold's squadron anchored in Valcour Bay on the morning of 11 October and pursued it for two days afterward, leaving the Americans beaten and with only four armed vessels afloat. In 1777 Captain Skeffington Lutwidge, RN, commanded the Lake Champlain squadron which destroyed or captured the rest of the rebel vessels during General John Burgoyne's campaign prior to his defeat at Saratoga.

With the American naval threat apparently nullified, Carleton decided in 1778 to institute a new organization for the operation of the government vessels on the lakes. To supervise the reorganization, Carleton chose Lieutenant John Schank, whose conduct in the Lake Champlain squadron he had observed. Schank (1740-1823) had gone to sea as a child and joined the Royal Navy as a seaman in 1757.²⁶ He was rated a midshipman in 1761 and passed his lieutenant exam five years later, but had to wait until 1776 for promotion to lieutenant, when he took command of *Canceaux* under Douglas's command. Carleton wanted his freshwater navy to be independent of the Royal Navy and asked for Schank to be seconded from the Admiralty while he held the office of "commissioner of His Majesty's Naval Yards and Docks upon the Lakes." After some hesitation, the Admiralty Lords gave their permission and, by so doing, severed the formal link between the Royal Navy and Carleton's fledgling marine department: although for the balance of the Revolutionary War, Royal Navy personnel manned the Lake Champlain vessels, while others were sent to the Great Lakes.

Schank's 1778 appointment as commissioner marked the formal beginning of the department that would become known as the Provincial Marine. Under the direction of

Carleton and his successor, Sir Frederick Haldimand (who arrived at Quebec in 1778), Schank enacted regulations based on Royal Navy procedures that defined expectations for each facet of the department's operation from rations to the monthly reading of the Articles of War." The lakes service was divided into three divisions: Lieutenant William Chambers, RN, commanded on Lake Champlain; Master and Commander James Andrews commanded on Lake Ontario; and Alexander Grant continued on the upper lakes. Schank's job was to ensure that each division operated according to the standard, a task he found especially difficult at Detroit, where Grant's authority had grown considerably over the years since he was accustomed to acting independently rather than waiting for instructions and approval from Québec.²⁸ When Schank was absent, the local officer from the quartermaster general's office on each station passed along directives from Quebec and issued orders for the deployment of the vessels; this was a throw back to the arrangements put in place by Amherst after the Seven Years' War.

The end of the Revolutionary War brought the same type of reductions that had occurred after 1763, with the number of officers and men employed in the department falling from 468 to 202 and the dockyard staff going from forty-seven to twelve." In 1784 Schank and Haldimand left Canada, and the muster of the Provincial Marine shrank to about 100 individuals operating three vessels on Lake Ontario, three on the upper lakes and only the 1776 schooner *Maria* on Lake Champlain. Without a commissioner overseeing affairs, the commanders in each division, who soon began to be referred to locally as "commodores," took their orders from the senior members of the quartermaster general's department at their bases.

The Provincial Marine struggled through the 1780s as Loyalist immigrants settled in pockets along the British rims of Lakes Ontario and Erie. The naval department continued the traditional role of transporting men and munitions for the government but also carried large amounts of commercial cargo, seemingly at a loss; a report in 1789 showed that of the £23,505 in fees charged for private freight between 1777 and 1783, only £9096 was ever collected." By the mid-1780s merchants were complaining of abuses in the system of shipment and the inadequacy of government vessels to handle the flow of commerce. Beginning in 1785, private vessels reappeared on the lakes, although a formal suspension of Carleton's 1778 regulation prohibiting such craft did not come until 1787. Most of the armed vessels launched during the Revolutionary War wore out and were replaced by schooners of about 100-tons in burthen and by decked gunboats. By the time Colonel John Graves Simcoe arrived in 1792 to become the first lieutenant governor of the new province of Upper Canada, the marine department was in poor shape. His first impression was that it was "without any discipline or obedience...the refuse of the Merchants' seamen [are] picked up at a bounty to remain for three years and who are the most profligate men I have ever heard of."³¹ Simcoe's wife observed that "the men who navigate the Ships on this Lake [Ontario] have little nautical knowledge and never keep a log book."³²

In response to the threat of war with the United States, Simcoe made ambitious plans to reshape the Provincial Marine, which he considered "well calculated for the purpose of Transport [but]...of little Military Service."³³ He wanted to man the existing vessels fully, which meant more than tripling their current complements, arming them properly and building ten new warships. Simcoe was displeased with the inconsistencies in operation among the stations, blaming it on the fact that all orders from Quebec had to be channelled over long distances through local deputy assistant quartermaster generals. To remedy this

problem, he proposed that a commissioner be appointed to act as John Schank had; Simcoe even tried to have Schank reassigned to Canada. His recommendations received serious notice in Britain, but came to nothing when tensions with the United States relaxed and Simcoe left Canada in 1796.

Between Simcoe's term in Upper Canada and the War of 1812, little changed in the operation of the Provincial Marine. Through the 1790s shortages in manpower persisted to the point where the vessels were occasionally laid up for want of hands. Of 189 seamen hired between 1794 and 1801, fifty deserted and most of the rest left after their three-year terms (some to join private vessels where the pay was better); as a result, squads of soldiers were sent on board the vessels as crews from time to time. The problem continued past the turn of the century, with a return in June 1803 showing only thirty-nine seamen on Lakes Ontario and Erie. A similar report in 1811 revealed little improvement in the situation: on all the lakes there were only nine commissioned officers, ten warrant officers, sixty-seven seamen and five dockyard officers, and only a single seaman was on the books at St. Jean, where he acted as a watchman on the badly decayed schooner *Royal Edward*.'

Alexander Grant continued as the senior officer on the upper lakes through this period, while a succession of individuals commanded on Lake Ontario? David Betton held that post from 1781; he had first been commissioned to serve on Lake Erie by Amherst in 1763. Jean-Baptiste Bouchette, an ex-merchant mariner, who held a commission in the marine department for a period during the Revolutionary War, took over when Betton died in 1794 and lasted in the position until 1803, his tenure being marked by frequent conflicts within his command. John Steel was the next "commodore" on Lake Ontario. After serving in the Royal Navy from 1776 until 1785 without promised promotion, he accepted a better paying appointment as commander of the provincial schooner at Quebec. Steel's term on Lake Ontario was from 1803 until January 1812, when Major General Isaac Brock negotiated his retirement at age seventy-five. Hugh Earl took over the reins next as the senior officer, a reward for having served on the lakes since 1793. All the "commodores" appear to have had experience at sea before joining the marine department, some of them having been in the Royal Navy. Long service on the lakes separated them from their seafaring days, however, as they became prominent members in their Canadian communities; Hugh Earl, for example, married one of Molly Brant's daughters in 1793 and was a property owner and proprietor in Kingston after the War of 1812. Similar stories could be told about the junior officers on the lake from the 1790s onward, and when several young men were recruited in 1812, they came from Ancaster, York and Kingston with no naval training?'

Without a commissioner to oversee operations, the quartermaster general's department at Quebec directed activities on the lakes through its deputies at the various posts? The commissary and storekeeper general's department gradually became more involved in the handling of stores and cargo on the vessels and the collection of fees for private cargo and passengers (the increase in private shipping reduced this aspect of the marine's activity). In 1806, however, all Provincial Marine matters were placed solely in the hands of the quartermaster general in order to avoid difficulties that had developed between the two departments? When new vessels were ordered, the marine officers offered their advice, but it was the military officers who made the decisions. They enlisted men at Quebec for the service, submitted returns, monitored the work in the dockyards, wrote up estimates for materials and expenses and solved disputes. Although documents abound regarding the building and equipping of vessels from the time of Simcoe until 1812 little effort appears

to have been made to develop the Provincial Marine into a fighting force. When a war scare with the United States caused apprehension in Upper Canada in 1809, Lieutenant Governor Francis Gore expressed regret about "the want of seamen as well as the deficiency of proper artillery" for *Camden* and *General Hunter* on Lake Erie." When guns were found for the vessels at Fort George, however, they were too heavy to be mounted on the frail and worn out *Camden*. The twenty-gun corvette-sloop *Royal George* was built at Kingston that spring, but after the war clouds dissipated it remained uncommissioned for two years. Carronades arrived at Kingston in the summer of 1811 for arming *Royal George* and other vessels, but no one there could figure how to set them up. "There ought therefore to have been a Plan and description for the Slide sent along with them," wrote Andrew Gray, the acting deputy quartermaster general the following January.⁴⁰ In addition to an extreme shortage of hands, Gray stated in January 1812 that "the Officers serving in this Division of the Province [Kingston] are in some instance extremely in-efficient.""

On the brink of war, Hugh Earl replaced John Steel and Lieutenant George Hall took over from seventy-eight-year old Alexander Grant, some junior officers were commissioned, a few dozen seamen were enlisted at Quebec, and at least two companies from the Royal Newfoundland Fencible Regiment were sent on board the squadrons, but without much improvement in the competence of the department.⁴² In October 1812 Sir George Prevost complained to the home government that he needed a detachment of Royal Navy officers and men to take over the Provincial Marine squadrons because their "officers are deficient in experience and particularly in that energetic spirit which distinguishes British seamen."⁴³ The following January Gray inspected *Royal George* and *Earl of Moira* at Kingston and found "the greatest want of attention to cleanliness and good order...the state of the *Moira* was *bad* and that of the *Royal George* [Hugh Earl's flagship] worse." Gray asked for the men to be sent to quarters and the guns fired to scale them, but the procedure took fifty minutes because the vents of the guns were choked with debris.

There is no doubt that the Provincial Marine was ill-prepared to act as a naval force because there is little, or no, evidence that "the military uses of the provincial marine had been a very real concern for many years before 1812."⁴⁵ A more salient point is that the military leadership failed to assess the department's weaknesses early enough and to take steps to put it on a better footing as war loomed. The fault lay not only in the office of the quartermaster general's department but also on the heads of commanding officers, such as Isaac Brock, who had been familiar with the nature of the Provincial Marine for years. As a transport service, the marine helped to support the army as it fought off the invasion attempts at Detroit and Queenston, a worthy contribution that Lieutenant John Richardson believed "must be obvious," except to those who expected some kind of magical power to suddenly turn a transport service into a fighting machine.

To summarize, British squadrons appeared on the lakes until the Seven Years' War, but they were not organized into a formal marine department 1778. The Royal Navy played a small part in the beginning and commanded the Lake Champlain squadron during the Revolutionary War. Some of its officers and seamen found jobs in the Provincial Marine, but army personnel and merchantmen took up just as many positions, especially in the early years. From the end of hostilities in 1777 on Lake Champlain, there were no further opportunities for the Provincial Marine to develop expertise in naval tactics, and after the Revolutionary War any connection between the Royal Navy and the marine faded and disappeared as aging mariners left the service. Apart from limited activity in the Seven

Years' and Revolutionary wars, the marine department was devoted to providing a transport service for government personnel, munitions and stores, while also playing a valuable role carrying private freight for commercial interests around the lakes. Consistent through all the peacetime years was a shortage in manpower and the lack of a naval commissioner to oversee the entire operation; instead, orders from Quebec were implemented by military officers at the dockyards. After war erupted in June 1812, the age-old transport service continued to function as well as it ever had, much to the surprise of contemporaries who demonstrated their narrow thinking by expecting that the Provincial Marine would somehow transform itself into a potent naval force.

NOTES

- * Robert Malcomson is a writer and researcher who lives in St. Catharines, ON. His latest book, *Warships of the Great Lakes, 1754-1834* was published in the spring of 2001. His *Lords of the Lake: The Naval War on Lake Ontario, 1812-1814*, won the John Lyman Book Award in 1998 and has just been re-issued in paperback.
1. George Spragge (ed.), *The John Strachan Letter Book, 1812-34* (Toronto, 1945), 27-28, John Strachan to James McGill, November 1812; National Archives of Canada (NAC), Manuscript Group (MG) 11, Colonial Office (CO) 42/147/215, George Prevost to Henry, Earl Bathurst, 17 October 1812; and NAC, Record Group (RG) 8/1/729/28, Andrew Gray to Noah Freer, 16 January 1813.
 2. John Richardson, "Memoirs," in Robert Malcomson (ed.), *Sailors of 1812: Memoirs and Letters of Naval Officers on Lake Ontario* (Youngstown, NY, 1997), 22-23.
 3. W.A.B. Douglas, "The Anatomy of Naval Incompetence: The Provincial Marine in Defence of Upper Canada Before 1813," *Ontario History*, LXXI (1979), 22.
 4. Carol MacLeod, "The Tap of the Garrison Drum: The Marine Service in British North America, 1755-1813" (Unpublished manuscript, Parks Canada, Historical Research and Records Unit, 1983).
 5. Little is to be learned about the Provincial Marine in Kevin Crisman, *The Eagle: An American Brig on Lake Champlain during the War of 1812* (Annapolis, 1987); Crisman, *The Jefferson: The History and Archeology of an American Brig from the War of 1812* (Ann Arbor, 1989); John R. Elting, *Amateurs, To Arms! A Military History of the War of 1812* (Chapel Hill, 1991); Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Chicago, 1990); and David Curtis Skaggs and Gerard T. Altoff, *A Signal Victory: The Lake Erie Campaign, 1812-1813* (Annapolis, 1997).
 6. W.L. Grant, "The Capture of Oswego in 1756," *New York State Historical Association Proceedings*, XIII (1914), 338-367.
 7. Admiralty to Augustus Keppel, 1754, in Stanley Pargellis (ed.), *Military Affairs in North America, 1748-1765* (Boston, 1969), 48-53.
 8. John Charnock, *Biographia Navalis. Or Impartial Memoirs of the Lives and Characters of Officers of the Nvy of Great Britain, from the Year 1660 to the Present Time* (6 vols., London, 1794-1798), IV, 319 The biography of Sir John LaForey indicates his appointment as lieutenant in 1748, commander in 1755 and the absence of further records until his appointment to the sloop *Hunter* in Admiral .Boscawen's fleet at Louisbourg; No similar data could be unearthed for Houseman Broadley. A few words on the 1755-1756 events at Oswego appear in William L. Clowes, *The Royal Navy: A History From the Earliest Times to the Present* (7 vols., London, 1897-1903; reprint, London, 1997), III.
 9. MacLeod, "Garrison Drum," 14-17.
 10. Edward P. Hamilton (ed.), *Adventure in the Wilderness: The American Journals of Louis Antoine de Bougainville, 1756-1760* (Oklahoma, 1964), 4-28 and 276-279; and "Bradstreet, Edward," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (DCB), 4:83.
 11. NAC, MG 13, Amherst Papers, War Office (WO) 34/65/139, Jeffrey Amherst to Joshua Loring, 21 May 1760; "Loring, Joshua," *DCB*, IV, 486; Charnock, *Biographia Navalis*, IV, 259; and MacLeod, "Garrison Drum," 27-30.

12. Russell P. Bellico, *Sails and Steam in the Mountains: A Maritime and Military History of Lake George and Lake Champlain* (Fleishmanns, NY, 1992), 59-114.
13. "Grant, Alexander," DCB, V, 363; and George F. MacDonald, "Commodore Alexander Grant (1734-1813)," *Ontario History*, XXII (1925), 167-181.
14. NAC, MG 13, Amherst Papers, WO 34/65/133, Amherst to Loring, 6 March 1760; and MacLeod, "Garrison Drum," 53.
15. NAC, MG 13, Amherst Papers, WO 34/65/155, Amherst to Nathan Tibbols, 30 August 1760; WO 34/65/153-167. "Instructions and Commissions by Amherst, August to November 1760;" "Sinclair, Patrick," DCB, V, 759; MacLeod, "Garrison Drum," 43-59. Ernest Green, "Corvettes of New France," *Ontario History*, XXXV (1943), 29-38; Malcolm Macleod, "Fight for the West Gate," *Ontario History*, LVIII (1966); Brian L. Dunnigan (ed.), *Pierre Pouchot: Memoirs on the Late War in North America Between France and England* (Youngstown, NY, 1994), 250-320; and Captain John Knox, *An Historical Journal of the Campaigns in North America for the Years 1757, 1758, 1759 and 1760* (Toronto, 1914), 536-555.
16. Roland L. Nafus, *Navy Island: Historic Treasure of the Niagara – Heritage – Archaeology – Folklore*, (Youngstown, NY, 1998), 31-43; and Brian L. Dunnigan, "British Vessels in the Upper Great Lakes 1761-1796," *Telescope*, XXXI (1982), 92-98. A sloop named *Victory* appeared in the records in 1763, after which *Huron* was no longer listed, prompting the thought that it might have been renamed to commemorate the end of the war. See also MacLeod, "Garrison Drum," 64-73. And Howard Peckham, *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising* (New York, 1947).
17. Clarence Edwin Carter (ed.), *The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage with the Secretaries of State, 1763-1775* (8 vols., London 1933), I, 62, Earl of Halifax to Gage and Gage to Halifax, 10 August 1765; and 225, Halifax to Gage, 8 June 1765.
18. Carter (ed.), *Gage Correspondence*, II, 427, Gage to Grey Cooper, 22 August 1767; II, 446, Gage to Cooper 12 May 1768, I, 138, Gage to Lord Hillsborough, 5 November 1772, I, 338; and MacLeod, "Garrison Drum," 90-91.
19. Clarence W. Alvord and Clarence E. Carter (eds.), *The New Regime, 1765-1767* (Springfield, IL, 1916), 234, Gage's response to a plan by Viscount Barrington, 10 May 1766.
20. Carter (ed.), *Gage Correspondence*, II, 61, Hillsborough to Gage, 15 April 1768.
21. NAC, RG 5/A 1/1/35, Gage to unidentified, 8 April 1771.
22. *Collections and Researches made by the Pioneer and Historical Society of the State of Michigan* (Lansing, 1892), XIX, 304, James Andrews to Henry Basset, 15 June 1773; NAC, Series Q, 11/226, Alexander Grant, "Return of Shipping on the Lakes," 12 June 1775; and Brock University, Sir Frederick Haldimand, Unpublished Papers and Correspondence, 1758-1784 (HP), 21801/30, Andrews to Frederick Haldimand, 3 October 1778. Other half pay officers appear to have followed the same route as noted in HP 15, Parker Morrison to Haldimand, 4 September 1778. Andrews' family and other information about various officers in the marine department are mentioned throughout Arthur B. Smith, *Legend of the Lake: The 22-Gun Brig-Sloop Ontario, 1780* (Kingston, 1997).
23. Bellico, *Sails and Steam*, 137-203; Howard Chapelle, *The History of the American Sailing Navy: The Ships and Their Development* (New York, 1949), 100-114; Clowes, *Royal Navy*, III, 355-370. William M. Fowler, Jr., *Rebels Under Sail: The American Navy during the Revolution* (New York, 1976); Robert Gardiner (ed.), *Navies and the American Revolution, 1765-1783* (London, 1996); and William J. Morgan (ed.), *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* (10 vols., Washington, DC, 1970), V.
24. HP, 21804/20, Guy Carleton, Memorandum, 2 July 1777; 21804/59, Colonel Bolton's Opinions in Regard to the Naval Department, 10 May 1778; and 21804/66, Regulations, by Bolton, Grant, Andrews, Bouchette, et al., 13 May 1778. Grant's position as commissioner on the lakes, dated 23 October 1777 was mentioned in *ibid.*, 21801/3; *Collections and Researches*, XIX, 333, Masson Bolton to Andrews, 25 May 1778; and MacLeod, "Garrison Drum," 106-163.
25. NAC, RG 8, 1/722/1-47, various British records.
26. "Schank John" DCB VI 694

27. HP, 21804/74, General Orders and Regulations..., n.d. [July 1778]; *ibid.*, 21804/162, Queries and Regulations Proposed by Schank, 30 April 1779; NAC, RG 8/1/722/1-13, Various Regulations Regarding Artificers, Musters and Pay, May and June 1779; *ibid.*, RG 8/722a/91, Regulations for the Naval Armament, 23 July 1781; and *ibid.*, RG 8/722a/94, Instructions to Captain Grant, 8 September 1781.
28. Haldimand was deeply concerned about the amount of money Grant spent at Detroit. Grant was in Quebec in 1781 to explain his accounts. *Collections and Researches*, XIX, 431, Haldimand to Schank, 11 June 1779; XIX, 432, Haldimand to Dederick Brehm, 13 June 1779; XIX, 436, Haldimand to Bolton, 18 June 1779; XIX, 450, Schank to Haldimand, 16 July 1779; XIX, 649, and Grant to Haldimand, July 1781. Grant was also prone to challenge the orders given by Schank, XIX, 480, Grant to Bolton, 22 November 1779; XIX, 555, Schank to Grant, 10 August 1780; and XIX, 556, Grant to Bolton, n.d. [August 1780].
29. HP, 21805/90, John Schank, "A Return of the Men to be Discharged...", 22 May 1783.
30. E.A. Cruikshank (ed.), *Records of Niagara 1784-9* (Niagara-on-the-Lake, n.d.), No. 40, 74, James McGill, Remarks on the Inland Navigation Ordinance, 19 January 1789; and *ibid.*, 80, Report of Committee on Inland Navigation, 9 February 1789. An examination of accounts and outstanding fees owed by merchants for freight carried on government vessels is in five volumes of account books and reports covering the period 1778-1793. See NAC, RG 4/B13/1-5.
31. NAC, MG 11/Q/279/1, John Graves Simcoe to Lord Dorchester, 4 November 1792.
32. Mary Quayle Innis (ed.), *Mrs. Simcoe's Diary* (Toronto, 1965), 74.
33. E.A. Cruikshank (ed.), *The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe* (Toronto, 1923), I, 340, Simcoe to Clarke, 31 May 1793; and NAC, MG 11, CO 42/97/170-172, Dorchester, Return of Marine Establishment...and Return of Additional Armed Vessels eventually proposed to be built, by Dorchester, 24 October 1783; *ibid.*, 98/1, Dundas to Dorchester, 8 January 1794; *ibid.*, 96/160, Simcoe to Dorchester, 31 May 1793; and MacLeod, "Garrison Drum," 174-197.
34. NAC, RG 8/725/169, Shekleton, Return of Seamen entered in Marine Department, by Shekleton, 24 June 1802; 73/169, Muster of Soldiers..., 1797; Soldiers employed as seamen, 1798; 724/22, Charles Shekleton to Green, 27 June 1801; 725/32, William Robe to Henry Green, 3 June 1803; and 726/43, Alleyne Pye, Return of the Effective Strength of the Provincial Marine, 21 June 1811; on this return, one commissioned officer and ten seamen were shown on board the provincial schooner *St. Lawrence* at Quebec.
35. NAC, RG 8/1/722/70, "A List of Officers...", 1779; 723/122, John Steel, Memorial, November 1797; 739/32, Hugh Earl, Memorial, 24 March 1817; 528/77, Gray to Prevost, 29 January 1812; 723/59, "A List of Officers...", 6 July 1796; and "Bouchette, Jean-Baptiste," DCB, V, 100. For Earl, see also Richard A. Preston (ed.), *Kingston before the War of 1812* (Toronto, 1959), 13n and 251n; Plan of Kingston 1815, 280a; and Lois M. Huey and Bonnie Pulis, *Molly Brant: A Legacy of Her Own* (Youngstown, NY, 1997), 105.
36. NAC, RG 8/1/723/62, James Hunter, Memorial, n.d. [(1796)]; 723/117, William Baker, Memorial, October 1797; 724/6, James Fleet, Memorial, n.d. [1799]; 727/91, Pierre Michel Fortier, Memorial, 5 December 1807; 738/162, Frederick Rolette, Memorial, 8 October 1816; 739/127, Francis Gauvreau, Memorial, 17 August 1818; 729/92, Oliver Grace, Memorial, 7 December 1812; 729/106, Timothy Shay, Memorial, 6 March 1813, 6; and "Richardson, James, Jr.," DCB, X, 615.
37. A sample of documents demonstrating the role of the quartermaster general's department includes NAC, RG 8/1/723/152, Charles Spencer to Green, 6 September 1798; 724/8, James McLean to Green, 2 February 1799; 724/79, Bouchette to Spencer, 27 July 1799; 725/3, McLean to Green, 2 February 1801; 726/21, Holt McKenzie to Green, 28 March 1803; 726/81, Robe to Green, 27 September 1803; and 726/55, Pye to Brock, 5 February 1807.
38. MacLeod, "Garrison Drum," 216-217.
39. NAC, RG 5/A1/9/3688, Francis Gore to James Craig, 20 February 1809; and 9/3830, James Kempt to Gore, 2 April 1809.
40. NAC, RG 8/1/728/77, Gray to Prevost, 29 January 1812.

41. *Ibid.*

Bathurst, 17 October 1812.

42. Robert Malcomson, *Lords of the Lake: The Naval War of Lake Ontario, 1812-1814* (Toronto, 1998), 29-30.

44. NAC, RG 8/1/729/28, Gray to Freer, 16 January 1813.

43. NAC, MG 11, CO 42/147/215, Prevost to

45. Douglas, "Anatomy," 22.