

**NATIONALITY, SOCIAL BACKGROUND,
AND WEALTH IN A MID-VICTORIAN
HIGHLAND REGIMENT: THE OFFICER
CORPS OF THE 78TH HIGHLAND
REGIMENT, 1869-1871**

his paper proposes to examine the make-up of the officer corps of the 78th Highland Regiment of Foot between the years 1869 to 1871 (when they were stationed in Halifax, Nova Scotia) with respect to national origins, social backgrounds, and financial circumstances. Based upon a close examination of the personal records of all the officers who served with the regiment in these years, it provides detail and raises issues concerning themes that have received a fair amount of historical attention over the last thirty years or so, but concerning which, in the opinion of this author, the 'definitive' study remains to be written.

The 78th Highland Regiment discussed here was that raised in 1793 by one Francis Humberston Mackenzie, chief of the clan Mackenzie and a descendent of the earls of Seaforth. Its associations were all with the clan Mackenzie and it bore no relationship

to the earlier 78th Highland Regiment that fought at Louisbourg and Quebec under Wolfe. The latter's associations were all Fraser, and probably merits C.P. Stacey's description of it as "less a British regiment than a war party of the clan Fraser."¹ This unit was of course disbanded at the conclusion of the Seven Year's War with many of its members taking their discharge in Canada, thereby becoming, in G.F.G. Stanley's words "the first Scots to form an integral part of Canadian life and history."²

The 78th raised in 1793 (after 1796 sub-titled the Ross-shire Buffs) was to spend a good portion of its career in India, which became the locale of its greatest military accomplishments. Thus it was one of three British (as distinct from Indian) regiments that won fame under Sir Arthur Wellesley at the battle of Assaye in 1797. During the Napoleonic wars probably its most notable achievement was its participation in the siege and capture of Fort Cornelis on the island of Java in 1811.³ The regiment probably gained its greatest military renown, however, in the Indian Mutiny of 1857-58. Under the command of Sir Henry Havelock it was in the van of the first British thrust down the Ganges into rebel held territory, and led the recapture of the town of Cawnpore and the first relief of the besieged British garrison at Lucknow. These feats, against a vastly more numerous enemy, in the hottest season of the year in India when British troops usually lay sweltering in their barracks, became one of the most celebrated epics of the Victorian army. Indeed, dubbed

with such sobriquets as “saviours of India” and “heroes of Lucknow”, their deeds commemorated by poets such as John Greenleaf Whittier and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, it is no exaggeration to say that the officers and men of the regiment for sometime afterwards enjoyed the status of great popular heroes. Although there were then only four officers left who had participated in these feats, and probably not a great many more rank and file, this aura to a great extent remained intact when, during the second leg of a North American tour (it was in Montreal from 1867-69), it spent two and a half years in garrison in Halifax.⁴

This is not an operational or a military study, however. Rather the aim here is to focus on the 78th as a representative Highland regiment at roughly the mid-point of the Victorian era, in an attempt to see what detailed research on the regiment’s officer corps for these years reveals concerning the national origins, social background, and financial circumstances of the membership.

A British Parliamentary return published in 1872 (the year after the 78th left Halifax) on the subject of nationality in the army reveals the following concerning the national composition of the officer corps of Scottish regiments. The five kilted Highland regiments, the 42nd, 78th, 79th, 92nd, and 93rd, contained by far the greatest number of Scottish officers, with the 79th Cameron Highlanders, the most Scottish of them all, having 25 Scotsmen as officers, and only eight English and seven Irish. The next highest were the 78th and

the 92nd Gordons, with nineteen, ten, and ten, and nineteen, twelve and five respectively. The 42nd Black Watch had nineteen Scotsmen, fifteen English, and five Irish; and the 93rd Sutherland Highlanders eighteen, ten, and seven, respectively. The next highest as a group were the trews-wearing Highland regiments, with the 74th and 91st regiments having sixteen Scottish officers each, and the 72nd Duke of Albany's and 71st Highland Light Infantry twelve each.⁵

The demographic mix in Lowland Scottish regiments was markedly different. The 1st Battalion of the Royal Scots (the 1st Regiment of Foot) with only three Scottish officers, compared with twenty-one English and ten Irish, was typical. The 1st Battalion of the 25th Scottish Borderers had four, twenty-three, and four respectively; the 26th Cameronians, four, twenty-seven, and eleven. Indeed, the national make-up of Lowland Scottish units was indistinguishable from that of any other British - i.e. non-Scottish - units on the return. And the same basic patterns held true for the rank and file as well.⁶

Readers of the *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* will have noticed some discussion concerning this situation recently, and also some puzzlement expressed as to why it should have been so.⁷ This phenomenon was, of course, noted some time ago by the Scottish and constitutional scholar, H.J. Hanham, in an important article, "Religion and Nationality in the Mid-Victorian Army", published in 1973. Noting that over the course of the nineteenth century the total

number of Scotsmen serving in the army declined, Hanham provides statistics which show that those who did join tended to congregate in the Highland regiments, while Scotsmen joined Lowland regiments in about the same numbers as they joined other non-Scottish regiments. "Highland regiments did better than Lowland ones", writes Hanham, "partly because their traditions were stronger."⁸

These traditions were, of course, all Highland ones, although since the beginning of the century, with the popularization and the romanticization of the image of the Highlander in writings such as the novels of Sir Walter Scott, they had increasingly become identified with a pan-Scottish identity. Scott's novels had of course enjoyed immense world-wide success, and they had done a great deal to foster a vision of Scotland that the international community, and indeed Scotsmen themselves, had come to equate with true Scottishness. This has been described by Hanham in another work as essentially the Scotland "of the modern tourist industry", with its special emphasis on kilts, bagpipes, clans, remote castles, and romantic Highland warriors.⁹ (This indeed seems to have been enjoying something of a revival lately in Hollywood.) While it may be true, as Hugh Trevor-Roper argued in his well-known article, "The Invention of the Highland Tradition in Scotland", that there was a great deal of misrepresentation, and indeed outright fraud, on the part of some of Scott's fellow Scottish antiquarians in promoting this picture of the past, it cannot be denied that by the second half

of the century it had become thoroughly implanted as the national mythology, in the Highlands as well as the Lowlands.¹⁰ In the popular mind, writes the historian Keith Webb, “the Scots had a common past, a history and heritage which all could share, sufficiently colourful and distinctive to ensure the symbols of Scotland international recognition.”¹¹ The Highland regiments, through numerous heroic and well-publicized deeds in imperial military campaigns had of course helped to add further glory to the image of the Highlander, and with their dress, music, and traditions, they had become in ways figureheads for this national mythology.

The Lowland regiments had, of course, been added to the army’s strength in the early to late seventeenth century long before such nationalistic considerations as went into the formation of the Highland regiments beginning in the mid-eighteenth century were ever conceived of or deemed necessary. As a consequence their dress and traditions took little or no recognition of their Scottish origins, and indeed were for the most part indistinguishable from the other regiments of the army. Thus by the mid-nineteenth century it would seem that most Scotsmen, whether Highlanders or Lowlanders, when they thought of their national regiments, thought firstly of Highland ones, especially those that wore the kilt, and only secondarily, if at all, of Lowland units.

In all there were 46 officers on the strength of the 78th during its years in Halifax (although not all at the same time, and three of them never served in the city). Of these, a total of nineteen (41%) were of Scottish

origin, eighteen (39%) of English, and eight (17%) of Irish nationality. Although the number of English-born officers about equalled the number of Scottish, in fact four of the former had strong Scottish family ties, as did at least two of the Irish-born officers. If these are added to the number of Scotsmen the latter's number increases to twenty-four, or fifty-four per cent of the total number of officers. A total of ten, or twenty-two per cent of the total, can be considered to be Highlanders - that is from the northwestern counties of Argyll, Inverness, and Ross & Cromarty (none were from Sutherland), and from the bits of bordering counties, such as Aberdeen, Perth, and Stirlingshire, that came within the Highland orbit.

That said, however, while it is true that statistically Highland regiments attracted a greater number of Scottish officers, and that about half the officers of the 78th were native born, nobody, not even Hanham, has yet attempted to ascertain the importance that the national or Highland factor actually played in influencing the choices of those who opted to become officers in Highland regiments. This in fact can be done by checking the correspondence contained in the officers' personal files in WO 31 at the Public Records Office, and this has revealed the following in the case of the officers of the 78th.

Of the 78th's Highland officers, only one, Captain George Forbes, son of John Forbes of Haddo House in Aberdeenshire, and Isabella, a Mackenzie of the Gairloch branch, had spent a significant period of time

with a non-Highland regiment - the 19th Foot, or Green Howards - in which he served for six years before transferring to the 78th in January 1861. And Captain Thomas Mackenzie of Ross-shire (son of one Forbes Mackenzie of the Glack branch of the family, who was one of the great so-called "improvers" or clearers of land in Ross-shire) served in the 20th East Devon Regiment for nine months in 1856 before securing a transfer to the 42nd Highlanders, and from thence, after a year, to the 78th. All the others had originally requested and had received initial appointments to Highland regiments.

Of all the officers, the influence of historical/cultural factors in influencing the choice of the 78th are perhaps most readily apparent in the case of one of its more junior captains, Colin Mackenzie, who joined the regiment in February 1862. Mackenzie, whose father was Treasurer of the Bank of Scotland in Edinburgh, was in fact a Lowlander, his family being from Peebleshire. It was descended, however, from Alexander Mackenzie-Fraser, who had formed a 78th second battalion during the Napoleonic period, and had died commanding a detachment from it in the ill-fated Walcheren expedition of 1809. First offered an Ensigncy in the 63rd Manchester Regiment, Mackenzie had turned it down, because, in the words of one of his referees, he was a "true Mackenzie",¹² and he preferred the 78th because "it was originally the Mackenzie regiment."¹³ This officer, it is interesting to note was the grandson of another Colin Mackenzie of Portmore House in Peebleshire, who had been a close friend of

Sir Walter Scott's, to whom, as has been noted, this nineteenth century preoccupation with Highland ways and traditions is in large part attributable. That Captain Colin Mackenzie was a great devotee of his national and family heritage, is suggested by his activity while in Halifax as a major force behind the organizing of a huge celebration marking the centenary of Scott's birth.¹⁴ And soon after the 78th left Halifax he retired from the army and took to writing, mostly on Scottish cultural themes.¹⁵ Indeed, he aspired to write a history of the 78th, but died before this could be done. The standard historical account of the regiment, Major H. Davidson's *History and Services of the 78th Highlanders (Ross-shire Buffs)* published in 1901, is based on materials collected but not used by him.¹⁶

In fact, the 78th had four officers bearing the surname Mackenzie in these years, a particularly bumper time for the number of officers bearing the name of the regiment's founding family. Three of these were from the Highlands - the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Mackenzie of Avoch in Ross-shire, possibly a child of the manse, although his exact origins have not been traced; Captain Sir Alexander Muir-Mackenzie of Delvine, near Dunkeld in Perthshire, the regiment's only baronet; and Captain Thomas Mackenzie, who is discussed above. Although their documentation is missing, presumably family associations influenced these officers' decision to join the 78th as well.

Family tradition is clearly evident in the choice of

Ensign Allan Cameron, from Inverness-shire. Applying to the Horse Guards for a first commission on his son's behalf in August 1867, his father expressed interest in the 79th, 78th, and 93rd, with the 79th "preferred on account of its being a *Cameron* regiment" and the fact his father had "served in it as well as assisted in originally recruiting the regiment along with his friend Sir Allan Cameron."¹⁷ Ensign Cameron was a great grandson of the Donald Cameron of Clunes, known as 'old Clunes', who had helped Bonnie Prince Charlie to escape after the battle of Culloden. His father, also called Donald, had earned a fortune in the Australian gold rush and had purchased an estate on Beaully Firth in Inverness-shire, which he also called Clunes. A position in the 79th not being available at this time, Cameron went to his second choice, the 78th.

Ensign Arthur Dingwall Fordyce, whose family owned the large estate of Brucklay in northwest Aberdeenshire, preferred the 74th or the 92nd Gordons, the latter of which, at least, had traditionally recruited in his area. But when he was offered the 91st Argyllshire Regiment instead, and he heard of a vacancy opening up in the 78th, he snapped it up with alacrity. His older brother, who was then proprietor of Brucklay and head of the family, had written to the Horse Guards that Arthur would "much prefer" the 78th to the 91st and that he was "most anxious that my brother, who is a Scotchman and a Highlander should enter the army and the 78th Regiment."¹⁸

It would seem likely that nationalistic considerations

were behind Fordyce's predisposition in favour of the 78th over the the 91st. The latter regiment had been founded only a year after the 78th and had an honourable record; but in 1809 it had been dropped from the establishment of Highland regiments and was deprived of all its Highland appurtenances for many years afterwards. Although it was retitled as a Highland regiment in 1821 it was largely seen as Scottish "in name only" until 1864, when the officers at last succeeded in having the unit re-equipped with such standard Highland items as trews, doublets, and a pipe corps.¹⁹ It is possible that at the time that Fordyce was applying for a commission in 1867 the Highland credentials of this unit had not yet become fully re-established, at least amongst the committedly nationalistic.

The national factor was also important for the family of Lieutenant Edward Mayne Alexander, which owned the Westerton estate near Bridge of Allan in Stirlingshire. The father, retired Major General James Alexander had served with the English 14th Foot and had spent a number of years in Canada (his son Edward had in fact been born in Halifax, and he had written a fairly well-known account of his years here, entitled *L'Acadie or Seven Year's Explorations in British North America*). When considering a regiment for his son, his initial preference was for the 71st Highland Light Infantry, as he had "long known [it] in Canada." He was not by any means disappointed, however, when Edward was instead offered the 78th. "Lady Alexander & myself return many thanks" he wrote to the Horse Guards.

“Being Scotch ourselves we were anxious that he should serve in a national regiment & we are much pleased that he has been selected for a Scotch corps.”²⁰ It is worth noting that the reference here is to a “Scotch” unit, not specifically to a Highland one, perhaps an indication of the degree to which in some quarters the two concepts had by this time become identified.

The Highland factor was clearly foremost in the mind of Ensign George Frederick William Callander, proprietor of the Craigforth estate in county Stirling, and that of Ardkinglas in Argyllshire. Callander’s first choice (unfortunately not explained) was for the 78th, and in his recommendation to the Horse Guards, his kinsman, the Duke of Argyll, after commenting that the young man was “the owner of a considerable estate in the county and is a good steady lad”, remarked that “I suppose it is desirable to have Highland gentlemen connected with Highland regiments.”²¹

Significantly the first choice of seven of the eight Lowland officers was for a Highland regiment as well (the first choice of one not being recorded). Admittedly, however, the fact that the Edinburgh-born Captain Andrew Murray, evidently one of the 78th’s poorer officers, chose the Highland regiment over the English 60th King’s Royal Rifles was governed as much by economic considerations as anything else. When he was looking to join the regiment was in India where one could live much more cheaply than at other postings. He did note however, that he liked the 78th because it was a “Scotch Regiment”, and that an uncle had served

in it.²² Also, although the first choice of Captain George Lecky, Irish born but the stepson of the Scottish Earl of Carnwath, was the 78th, his second was the 60th. The first choices of all the other Lowland officers were exclusively Highland, however. Captain Oliver Graham of Edinburgh, whose father had been an officer of the East India Company army,²³ preferred the 78th or 79th in that order; Lieutenant William Francis Maitland-Kirwan of Gelston Castle in county Kirkcubright, the 79th Camerons, although he was “quite willing to accept the 78th in lieu of the 79th” when a position opened up in it instead.²⁴ Lieutenant C.J.B. Stewart of Edinburgh, whose father was an officer in the Madras Army, and later an official in the audit office at the Horse Guards, preferred the 74th and 42nd “or failing these two regiments some other highland corps”²⁵. And Ensign John Dodd of Roxburghshire, about whose background nothing is known, preferred simply a “highland regiment.”²⁶

The two English-born officers who had Scottish roots also elected to serve in a Highland unit. Lieutenant Charles Roberts, whose father was a merchant in Nottinghamshire, preferred the 78th or the 93rd, although, wrote the father, “I do not understand it”. (Another correspondent commented: “I suppose some Scotch blood in his veins makes him anxious for a Scotch Regiment”.)²⁷ Also, when Ensign William Wellington Sandeman of the estate of Liss near Stodham in Hampshire, but whose father was from Dumfries-shire and had served in the 42nd and 73rd Highland Regiments, was appointed to the 48th

Northamptonshire Regiment, the father informed the Horse Guards that his son “would be disappointed at not being appointed to the 42nd Royal Highlanders or to some other Highland Corps.”²⁸ Also, it is probably significant that Ensign John Henry Ewart, son of a wealthy East India merchant in Cheshire, but whose grandfather was from county Kirkcudbright (one of his sons was the William Ewart after whom Gladstone was named) served only one month in the Lowland regiment, the 21st Royal North British Fusiliers, before securing a transfer to the 78th. On the other hand, while the Edinburgh-born, but London-raised, Ensign Charles Carfrae, chose the 78th as one of his preferred regiments, the other was the 69th South Lancashire Regiment.²⁹

Of the remaining English and Irish officers, the desire to serve in a Highland regiment is less marked. The junior major, Augustus Warren, for example, served for ten years in the English 82nd (Prince of Wales Volunteers) Regiment before transferring to the 78th in 1859; the adjutant, Lieutenant Charles Edward Croker-King spent four years with a number of English regiments before transferring to the 78th in 1866. (The reason given by his commanding officer for his transfer to the 78th was “a severe domestic affliction and [he] is desirous of a change of scene.”³⁰) The Winchester-born Captain William Charles Smith, whose father was a Canadian by birth, actually requested the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment (an odd choice, since it was not a regular line regiment at all), and by what route

he ended up in the 78th is not certain. The family of Lieutenant Matthew Moreton, tenth son of the Gloucestershire peer, the third Earl of Ducie, and hence the 78th's one genuine aristocrat, initially preferred the 60th King's Royal Rifles, one of the most fashionable of the non-Guards regiments, but this could not be arranged. Despite the fact that Moreton's secondary wishes lay with a number of other English regiments, he eventually was commissioned in the 78th. Lieutenant Henry Frederick Rowley of Norfolk, son of a captain and grandson of an admiral in the Royal Navy, also initially preferred the 60th but was given the 79th Camerons instead. He transferred to the 78th after becoming ill while serving with the Camerons in India and being invalided home.³¹ The father of Lieutenant George Budgen, on the other hand, who was a retired major general of the Royal Engineers, specified only that his son be appointed to a single battalion regiment, "anyone between 25 and 100."³² And while the Dublin-born Lieutenant Edward Pakenham Stewart, whose father listed himself as a land agent, initially preferred the 78th, this was only because two of its officers were near relations.³³

Nonetheless, the 78th had a number of English and Irish-born officers of prominent families who had been interested in serving in Highland regiments from the beginning and who had no known previous connections to Scotland. Thus the senior major, Oswald Barton Feilden, the fifth son of Joseph Feilden, proprietor of the large and wealthy estate of Witton Park in Lancashire,

chose to begin his military career in 1850 with the 72nd Duke of Albany's Highlanders, transferring to the 78th in 1858.³⁴ The second most senior ensign, Edward John Knight, the third son of Edward Knight, owner of the substantial Chawton estate in Hampshire (at which earlier in the century Edward John's great aunt, Jane Austen, had written most of her novels) opted firstly for the 72nd Duke of Albany's also, but when this did not work out, went to the 78th, with which he remained for a military career that spanned nineteen years.³⁵ And the thoroughgoing Irishman, Lieutenant Gilbert O'Grady was, according to a letter to the Horse Guards from a family friend, "although a Hibernian...very anxious to wear the kilt - in that his first desire is to be appointed to the 42nd regiment." (A Horse Guards official had appended a note indicating that although the 42nd was not possible, "the 78th was a kilted regiment").³⁶ Gilbert was the son of Thomas O'Grady, of the estate of Landscape in County Clare, and the grandson through his mother of Gerald Courcy O'Grady, of Killballyowen, County Limerick, who, termed 'the O'Grady', was the chief of the family of that name.³⁷ That men with such backgrounds chose to join a Highland regiment, apparently entering into its national/cultural environment with enthusiasm, is doubtless a testimony to the appeal that these units had begun to exercise throughout British society, and not just in Scotland itself.

Thus it does seem that when their motives are examined closely the national factor was of consider-

able, if not paramount, importance in determining the choice of the Scottish-born officers to serve out their careers in a Highland regiment, if not specifically in the 78th. Furthermore there was little or no distinction between Highland and Lowland-born officers in this regard. While amongst the non-Scottish officers there were doubtless some who were in the regiment for career reasons as much as anything, even amongst this group there were a number for whom the Highland factor had exercised a considerable appeal.

What then can be said about the social as distinct from the national backgrounds of these officers. Analyses of the social make-up of the officer corps of the Victorian army have not been lacking before now, the more noteworthy probably being those undertaken by P. E. Razzel in the *British Journal of Sociology* in 1963, by C.B. Otley in the *Sociological Review* in 1970, and by Edward Spiers in his book *The Army and Society* in 1980.³⁸ Certainly the findings of these studies that the officers corps of the army in the Victorian era was heavily dominated by members of the country's landed interest is beyond dispute. Yet these studies do have their disadvantages. Otley's figures, for example, are based upon data taken from the entrance registers at the Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, and the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. The weakness of this for the Victorian period, particularly for the infantry, is that only a small number of serving officers actually attended these institutions - fourteen out of forty-six in the case of the 78th, for example. Razzel and Spiers perhaps

more legitimately base their figures on officers actually on the active list - but they restrict their analyses to the military leadership, or those who had become general officers or colonels.

This, of course, presumes that those who had opted for a long-term military career and had risen to the top, were representative of the officers corps of the army as a whole. Yet the truth was that the majority of officers never made it above the rank of captain, if for no other reason than the fact that the numbers required in any one regiment dropped from a total of ten for the position of captain to two for the succeeding position of major. Thus when the full careers of the forty-six officers who served with the 78th in Halifax are examined, it can be seen that a total of twenty-six, or more than half obtained no higher a rank than that of captain, and only five of the remainder ended up as colonels or above. Thus while the makeup of the higher ranks of the army may well have been representative of the officer corps' broader membership, it does seem that one is taking something of a leap of faith in assuming this without undertaking more complete studies that include within their purview junior as well as senior officers.

Such a study would indeed be a formidable undertaking, and probably the most 'cost effective' approach would be to focus on a number of different regiments at different times in the century. Certainly with the studies referred to one misses a sense of what the particular mix would have been within individual units, and perhaps most notably ones of a special type,

whether Guards, Highland or Lowland Scottish, Irish, Welsh, or whatever. The following then represents a very small initial step towards filling this lacuna in the case of Highland units.

By way of prelude, it should be noted that in this period land still constituted Britain's greatest source of wealth, with ownership of land and the income that this generated still yielding the greatest form of social status and prestige. The topmost level of British society was, of course the aristocracy, composed of the titled peers of the realm, who as a general rule of thumb, according to F.M.L. Thompson in his study of the nineteenth century landed classes, possessed estates that were larger than 10,000 acres and the incomes that they generated usually larger than £10,000³⁹. Just below them in the social hierarchy was the landed gentry, landowning families that (except for the topmost level, the baronetage) did not possess titles, and whose estates were generally smaller than 10,000 acres and their yearly incomes less than £10,000. The leading historian of the gentry, G.E. Mingay, divides this social stratum into three main sub-sections: first, those with incomes from landed property of between £3,000 and £10,000 a year, which he defines as greater gentry; second, those with incomes of £1,000 to £3,000, which he defines as lesser gentry (also often called 'squires'); and third, those with incomes rising from £200 to £1,000 per annum, which he terms 'country gentlemen'.⁴⁰

By today's standards, these incomes do not seem high at all, and even by the standards of the Victorian

era they were small compared to some of the fortunes earned by aristocratic families - the Scottish Duke of Buccleuch, for example, took in £216,126 a year from his landed properties alone; the Duke of Argyll, £50,842.⁴¹ Still, relative to most incomes of the era, the gentry was very well off indeed. A survey of personal income in Great Britain carried out in 1867 found that only 7,500 people in the land had incomes greater than £5,000 a year, and only 49,000 earned more than £1,000 yearly.⁴² Privates in the army, admittedly one of the most poorly paid occupations, earned a total of £18 and some pence a year. On the other hand, some of the most highly skilled artisans in the country, such as scientific instrument workers, and watch and jewelry makers, earned on average only about £90 a year. A comfortable 'upper middle class' income was considered to be about £500 a year.⁴³ By these standards £1,000 a year represents a very substantial income, and a sum of £5,000 or more a fortune.

Diana Henderson in her valuable and in many ways masterful social history of the Highland regiments, *Highland Soldier* published in 1989, states that in 1875 the social composition of the officer corps of Highland regiments was eighteen per cent aristocracy, thirty-two per cent landed gentry, and fifty per cent middle class. She does not, however, state where these figures come from, and hence they must remain questionable.⁴⁴ Indeed, Henderson is somewhat dismissive of the whole question of social class and background in discussing the officers, observing that it has too often become a

form of value judgement respecting their professional competence. Thus she writes:

It is important to try to set aside modern misconceptions of class and to attempt to see these men for what they were in their own time, without immediately prejudging them incompetent simply because they fell into a category of 'landed gentry', or alternatively noble and good because they rose from the ranks or had humble beginnings.⁴⁵

Certainly one would not want in any way to confirm the stereotypes that she justifiably attacks. Nonetheless, one would not want to go to the opposite extreme and say that the term gentry has no legitimate application when discussing army officers. The time of which we write was one of pronounced social stratification, as social historians such as F.M.L. Thompson, W.L. Burn, and Geoffrey Best, have been at pains to point out.⁴⁶ The gentry was the second most eminent of social strata behind the aristocracy, and while membership in it certainly did not qualify one as an 'upper class twit' (surely the history of the British army is enough to guarantee that), it did, with its considerable social status and relative financial independence, entail quite defined standards as to manners, taste, deportment, and lifestyle. Naturally the officers were soldiers and were strongly influenced by the regimental and the military experience; but they were nonetheless also products of

broader social circumstances and conditioning that the military certainly did not see itself in any way in the business of attempting to eliminate. Admittedly we are hampered somewhat by the fact that we do not yet have any analysis of the nineteenth century Scottish landed classes to compare with those of Thompson and Mingay for the English, and doubtless, as Henderson implies, there were certain differences between them. But there were also many parallels and similarities, and many of the same categorizations can be applied to both.

With her rather 'insiders' approach to her treatment of Highland officers Henderson also suggests that they were not all that well off financially.⁴⁷ One must realise, of course, that this did tend to be something of a favourite conceit amongst the officers of the Victorian army themselves, i.e. they rather liked to conceive of themselves, despite their reputation for the opposite, as in fact quite poorly-off and hard done-by.⁴⁸ Indeed, what professional group when confronted by the daily difficulties and challenges of their world of work - and the lives of the officers of the Victorian army were certainly not without these - likes to conceive of itself as starting from a position of wealth and privilege? What then does our examination of the officer corps of the 78th reveal concerning its members real situation in this regard?

In all, the social backgrounds and circumstances of thirty-five of the forty-six 78th officers of these years (76%) is known for certain. Of these a total of twenty (43%) can be identified as coming from the landholding

portion of British society, a determination which is based upon whether an officer's name or that of his family appeared in one or other of the era's guides to the landholding interest, such as the Parliamentary Paper, "Return of Owners of Land" of 1874 and 1876 (together constituting the so-called 'New Domesday' Survey), or one of the published guides to the landholding interest, such as Burke's *Landed Gentry*.

Adopting Thompson's and Mingay's distinctions referred to above, only two of its officers, Lieutenant Matthew Moreton and Captain George Lecky, can in any way be deemed aristocracy. And only Moreton can be considered of aristocratic background in the fullest sense of the term - i.e. his father was an earl with a seat in the House of Lords, and with properties that yielded an income of more than £10,000 a year. Matthew was the earl's tenth son, however, and thus well down in the family's order of precedence (although they were careful to point out that he had "sufficient fortune to enable him to live as an officer".⁴⁹) Lecky was the step son of the Scottish Earl of Carnwath, who did not sit in the House of Lords, and whose estate of Glenae House in Dumfries-shire, consisting of 1,243 acres and yielding an income of £943 a year, was closer in size to those of the lesser gentry or even country gentleman class of landowner than the aristocracy.⁵⁰ On the other hand, a total of Eighteen officers (39%) were identifiably of landed gentry background: seven (15%) from the greater gentry - Feilden, Muir-Mackenzie, Knight, Fordyce, and Callander; three (6½%) from the lesser

gentry - Finlay, Alexander, and a Lieutenant Allin, whose family owned property in Berkshire; and eight (17%) from the 'country gentleman' class of landowner - Captain Thomas Mackenzie, Lieutenants Pakenham Stewart, Rowley, Pitt-Taylor, and O'Grady, and Ensigns Cameron, Sandeman, and Ewart.

While the aristocratic representation amongst this group of officers is below that of the army as a whole according to Edward Spiers' figures (four as opposed to about fifteen percent), the figure for the gentry is higher (thirty-nine as opposed to twenty-seven percent). And it was the full range of gentry society that was represented, not just its lower reaches. Indeed, at fifteen percent of the total number of officers, and thirty-five per cent of those with landholding backgrounds, the greater gentry was probably over-represented in the 78th in terms of that group's total representation in society. It is interesting to note that five out of the seven greater gentry, and two of the three lesser gentry officers were Scottish. It is not known what the comparable figures were for other regiments, but it is probably fair to speculate that the phenomenon was attributable to a preference on the Scottish gentry's part for service in national (i.e. Highland) regiments, causing them to concentrate in larger numbers than average in the relatively few regiments that fell into this category. This suggests, of course, that in Highland regiments at any rate, the national factor was of some significance in determining social composition.

The group with the next highest representation

within the 78th's officer corps was the military itself, with a total membership of six (13% of the total number of officers). These were all products of the military elite, in that three were the sons of generals and three of colonels. Two others (4% - Major Augustus Warren and Ensign William Macdougall, both from Ireland) came from legal families of some eminence; another (Captain Colin Mackenzie) from a banking family; another (Lieutenant Massy Stacpoole, again from Ireland) the clergy; and yet another (Ensign Charles Carfrae, from London) a family of so-called "independent position"⁵¹. Only two officers (Captain George Gower, whose father was a soap manufacturer and merchant in Ipswich, Suffolk; and Lieutenant Charles Roberts, whose father started out as a "hatter, tailor, and woolen draper" in Nottinghamshire) came from families that in any way can be defined as 'trade', and they seem to have been ones who had done quite well at it. The paymaster, Charles Skrine of Bath, England, and the quartermaster, Alexander Weir, of Kilkenny, in Ireland, were, of course, from working-class backgrounds and had risen from the ranks, as was customary with these positions throughout the army.

The backgrounds of eleven of the officers (24%) have not been ascertained with certainty. It should be noted, however, that a total of five of these were born in India, which strongly suggests families with backgrounds in either the British or East India Company armies, or else the Indian Civil Service.

W.L. Burn has written that the mid-Victorian era had

a class structure that was “both simpler and more rigid” than our own, with concomitantly well defined notions as to what constituted respectability, or the lack thereof. The greatest respectability, he points out, attached to members of the landed interest, and especially those who did not have to work for a living, which was closely intertwined with the concept of gentility. “Before occupational precedence”, he writes, “ranked the prestige attaching to a fact and a concept, the fact of ownership of land and the concept of gentility.” Outside this pale, true respectability was accorded to only a limited number of occupations in which one earned one’s living by working. According to Burn: “What sociologists call occupational prestige attached in the highest measure to a smaller number of occupations [than today]; particularly to the Church, the Bar, the highest ranks of the Civil Service (particularly the Diplomatic Service) and the armed forces.”⁵² F.M.L. Thompson casts the net a bit wider to include such non-landed groups as “country bankers, merchants, and career officers and servants of the East India Company.”⁵³

These were, of course, all groups with which the gentry interacted and formed connections at many levels. Indeed they were ones from which members of the gentry had frequently ascended, or to which they had returned, owing to the system of primogeniture, by which family properties were always left to the oldest son. Thus, while Henderson is doubtless correct in suggesting that the term ‘gentry’ may be loaded with a certain amount of unintended descriptive baggage, so in

another sense is the term 'middle-class' when it is used to refer to all officers who derived from non-landed backgrounds.⁵⁴ In the case of the 78th, for example, significant elements of what are normally considered to have composed this social stratum are missing entirely, with only a small number not coming from groups that fell within landed society's hierarchical notions of true social and occupational respectability.

With regards to income, the seven members of the so-called greater gentry were from sunstantially well-off backgrounds. Thus the family estate of Major Oswald Feilden, Witton Park in Lancashire, was worth £7,314 a year. The family income of Major George Forbes from estates in Aberdeenshire and Banffshire was £4,170 a year; the Delvine estate of Captain Muir-Mackenzie in Perthshire was worth £6,419 a year; the Gelston Castle property of Lieutenant William Maitland-Kirwan in Kirkcudbrightshire, earned £5,000 a year. The properties of Ensign George Callander in Stirlingshire and Argyllshire, earned a total of £7,511 a year, and those of Arthur Dingwall Fordyce's family in Aberdeenshire and Kincardineshire, a total of £14,058, which, as seen, somewhat exceeded customary gentry levels.⁵⁵ Such earnings would have meant the possession of a country estate with mansion, extensive properties, sizable household staffs, and access to the best in terms of material goods and education. Furthermore, four of these seven were the first born of the family, which meant they stood to inherit the lot; and indeed two, Captain Muir-Mackenzie and Ensign Callander, were

already the proprietors of their estates. Callander in fact came into legal possession of his properties soon after the 78th arrived in Halifax, and he threw a celebrated party on McNab's Island to mark the event.⁵⁶

As for the families of the three officers from lesser gentry backgrounds, that of Captain John Finlay, received £1,922 a year from the Deanston House estate in Deanston, Perthshire; that of Lieutenant Edward Alexander £1,102 a year from the Westerton estate in Stirlingshire; and lastly, that of Lieutenant John William Allin, £1,410 a year from the Downs House estate in Berkshire. Again, both Alexander and Allin were the first born of their families. A measure of the living standards that such incomes allowed can be gauged by the fact that the family of Lieutenant Allin, which had been principal landowners in the village of East Hendred, Berkshire, for generations, and had prospered during the period of growth during the Crimean war, were able from their yearly income of £1,410 to live in a "fine modern" mansion, to maintain a deer park of ninety acres, and maintain a household staff of seven, housed in special cottages on the estate.⁵⁷ And these figures, it should be noted, refer only to income from land, and not from other sources such as investments or other ventures. Thus the income that the family of Captain Finlay received from its Deanston House property would have been substantially supplemented by revenues stemming from its involvement in the Scottish cotton industry. In fact Captain Finlay's grandfather, Kirkennan, had "acquired control of a

major part” of this industry earlier in the century, and Deanston was in fact a mill town mostly owned by the Finlays⁵⁸. It is interesting to note that later in the century Captain Finlay was to inherit the entire family fortune, after the deaths of a number of other family members with prior claims.⁵⁹

The so-called ‘county gentlemen’ would have been less well off. But as Mingay writes, although “Individually [their] estates were small, often no larger than a good sized house and paddock with perhaps one or two farms, ... they frequently had other sources of income from investments in stocks and shares or urban property, for example, and collectively they owned as much land as the great proprietors.”⁶⁰ Thus, it is known that the families of three members of this group in the 78th had income apart from their land. The father of Lieutenant Edward Pakenham Stewart, for example, who owned 802 acres in county Longford in Ireland worth £470 a year, was also employed as an estate agent, which occupation was generally very well paid.⁶¹ Ensign Allan Cameron’s father, of the Clunes estate in Inverness-shire worth £606, had carried away a fortune from the Australian gold rush, and was described by one of his son’s referees for a first commission as “a man of great wealth.”⁶² And the father of Ensign James Henry Ewart, who earned £302 from his estate of Hoole Bank in Cheshire, was also heavily involved in East India commerce out of Liverpool.⁶³

As for the non-landed officers, it is more difficult to determine their levels of income, as there are no handy

guides, such as those to the landholding class, to tell us. Certainly Major Warren, whose father, Serjeant Warren, was recorded in a *Times* obituary column in 1848 as “receiving perhaps the largest income ever gained at the Irish bar”, came from a background of some wealth.⁶⁴ This was probably also the case with Ensign William Brewster Macdougall, whose father was Clerk of the Writs and Seals of the Superior Court of Ireland, and whose grandfather was an Irish Lord Chancellor.⁶⁵ Captain Colin Mackenzie’s father, Treasurer of the Bank of Scotland, and the son of a landowner in Peebleshire, probably was fairly well-to-do. And Ensign Charles Carfrae’s father, who referred to himself as a “gentleman” and of “independent condition” probably had some means. The father of Lieutenant Massy Stacpoole was a clergyman, certainly not one of the era’s better paid positions, but he did rise to become Dean of Kingston in Ireland, and he is recalled by one of his sons (who became a best selling novelist) as having had “a good income”, and employing a fair sized household staff that included a coachman, a cook, a “sort of” butler, and maid servants.⁶⁶ Captain Gower and Lieutenant Roberts were, as noted, the only officers to derive from families involved in trade, a pursuit which, according to Thompson, was well outside truly respectable occupations⁶⁷. Nonetheless, Gower’s family did have some connections with landowners in Essex, and the families of both seem to have done quite well for themselves.⁶⁸ It is possible that the sons, if not amongst the most socially respectable of the officers, were not amongst the poorest either.

Of the remaining officers (eleven in all), whose family backgrounds were either military or unknown, one can only speculate. Although as noted earlier the fathers of the officers from military backgrounds were from senior positions, their retirement pensions were not vast, although they may have had means from other sources. The father of the senior ensign, Gilbert Waugh, for example was a former major general in the Bengal and in the Royal Engineers, and was at the time of his son's service in Canada, retired and living in London. He was a deputy lieutenant of the city, a member of the Athenaeum club, and maintained an involvement in his former profession of surveying through membership of the Royal Geographical Society, and geographical societies on the continent. This suggests a life of some comfort for himself, although whether there would have been much left to support anything in the way of luxury for his son is impossible to say.⁶⁹ As for the remainder, we only have Captain Andrew Murray's testimony to the fact that his means were "very limited". It is possible that amongst this group there was a leaven of officers whose means were relatively circumscribed, and who perhaps more than the others were dependent on their army pay alone as their chief means of livelihood. Certainly this group had more than its share of military workhorses, whose careers were long, under frequently gruelling circumstances. No less than four of its members were to die of disease at remote postings. In addition, it is interesting to note that the three 78th officers who married Halifax

women - all from well-to-do backgrounds - were also from this group.

What then does this close-up study of the officer corps of the 78th tell us that is different from the demographic studies published so far. First, is the fact that although the percentage of officers from the landed interest generally is about the same (roughly between forty and fifty percent), the balance in the 78th is radically different, with a relative lack of officers from the aristocracy and the virtual domination of this group by members of the landed gentry. It is not known how the 78th compared with other regiments on colonial service in this respect, but the aristocracy was fairly well known for selling out or for arranging transfers to other regiments when such service threatened. Furthermore, when the 78th officers who had long term military careers are compared with those who served a relatively short period of time, it is clear that the percentage of officers with a gentry background was much higher in the second group than in the former (sixty compared with thirty-eight per cent). Does this perhaps suggest a higher over-all percentage of gentry involvement in the army's officer corps than other studies have suggested? Is this a phenomenon especially associated with Highland regiments? Probably only similar studies of other regiments will show for certain. Also, our survey of the non-landed officers shows that with only a few exceptions they came from the most socially prestigious occupational groups of Victorian society, ones which traditionally had close professional and

familial relations with the landed and particularly the gentry interest - a group to which such an undifferentiated term as 'middle class', as used in some other studies, does not seem precisely applicable. Was the 78th representative? Again only other studies of other units will tell us.

With regards to family income, and this is the first study to attempt any precision in this matter, certainly no 78th officer was from the extravagantly wealthy circumstances of some of the great aristocratic families; nonetheless a sizable number do seem to have been from very well-off backgrounds. Of course, the percentage of the landed incomes that would have been eaten up by estate charges, provisions in wills for relatives, etc. is not known; but the figures cited are those for income from landed property alone and not from other sources such as investments. Also, the extent to which any of these incomes percolated down to the members of the family actually serving is not known. The only 78th officer visibly to flaunt his wealth while in Halifax was Ensign Callander (he ran a race horse, owned a yacht, and held a number of spectacular parties), but he was the only one to serve any length of time in the city who was the actual proprietor of his estate and thus the major recipient of its revenues. Nonetheless, although the impression that emerges from the officer corps as a whole during its years in Halifax is one of solid, if not extravagant comfort, it would be difficult for the majority of the officers to argue that they were from especially impoverished backgrounds. Apart from these

considerations, however, as for the most part members of the landed gentry stratum of British society, or else of groups that were closely affiliated with it, the officers do seem by any standards to have been for the most part members of a privileged elite, although of society's penultimate, not ultimate rank.

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ENDNOTES

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⁴ On the military aspects of the mutiny, see Michael Edwardes, Battles of the Indian Mutiny, (London: Batsford, 1963), *passim*. For Whittier's celebration of the relief of Lucknow, "the Pipes of Lucknow", see John Greenleaf Whittier, The Complete Poetical Works, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1894), pp 58-59; for Tennyson's "The Defence of Lucknow", Hallam, Lord Tennyson, The Works of Tennyson: Ballads and other Poems (London: Macmillan & Co., 1908), p. 146.

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⁷ See, for example, Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, Vol. LXXI, 1993, R.H. Cockburn, "Speculations Concerning the Lowland Regiments", pp 279-281; Vol. LXXII, 1994, Stuart McBain, "The Lowland regiments", pp 189-191.

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⁹ H.J. Hanham, Scottish Nationalism, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 70.

¹⁰ Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Invention of the Highland Tradition in Scotland", in Eric Hobsbaum, Terrence Ranger, eds. The Invention of Tradition, (Cambridge: University Press, 1983), pp 15-41.

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¹³ PRO WO 31/1293, Charles Fraser, Castle Fraser, Aberdeen, to Military Secretary, 3 September 1861.

¹⁴ This event is discussed in the author's Ph.D thesis, "Highland Officers in Halifax: A Social, Cultural, and Military Study of the Officer Corps of the 78th Highlanders in Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1869-71". Unpublished Ph.D., Queen's University, 1992.

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²¹ *Ibid.*, 1436, Duke of Argyll to Mil. Sec., 13 December 1867.

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²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1414, John Dodd to Mil. Sec., 13 June 1867.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1373, Pt. 2, Percy [?] Williams to Mil. Sec. 21 June 1865; also John Roberts to Mil. Sec., 20 June 1865.

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³¹ *Ibid.*, 1273, Proceedings of a board of Medical officers assembled to examine and report on the state of health of Ensign H.F. Rowley.

³² *Ibid.*, 1380, [illegible] to Mil. Sec., 20 June 1865.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1282, Edward Pakenham Stewart to Mil. Sec., 22 June 1861.

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⁴³ These figures are from Best, Mid-Victorian Britain, p. 110, 115.

⁴⁴ Diana Henderson, Highland Soldier: a Social History of the Highland Regiments, 1820-1920, (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1989), p. 92.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

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Scottish Tradition Vol. 23 1998

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⁴⁸ See for example, the memoir of Lt. Col. B.W.A. Sleigh, Pine Forests and Hackmatack Clearings, or Travel, Life, and Adventure in the British North American Provinces, (London: Richard Bentley, 1853), esp. p. 69.

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⁵⁰ On the Glenae House estate see Francis Groome, ed., Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland, (Edinburgh: Thomas Jack, 1883), Vol. III, p. 177.

⁵¹ PRO WO 31/1446, Thomas Carfrae to Mil. Sec., [?] 1868.

⁵² Burn, Age of Equipoise, p. 254.

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⁵⁴ The worst offenders in this respect are perhaps Razzel, "Social Origins of Officers in the Indian and British Home Army", pp 248-260 and Henderson, Highland Soldier, p. 92.

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⁵⁶ See the Acadian Recorder (Halifax), 29 July 1869, p. 2.

⁵⁷ See Kelly's Directory of Berkshire, Bucks, and Oxon, (London: Kelly & Co., 1891), p. 83; E.R. Manly, A Descriptive Account of East Hendred, (published privately by the author, 1969), pp 41-42. I am grateful to the Reading Central Library for sending me photocopies of pages from these two works.

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⁶³ See Walford, County Families, p. 337; Return of Owners of Land (England), 1874, p. 131.

⁶⁴ The Times, 8 July 1848 p. 6.

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⁶⁸ Information supplied to the author by the Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich, January 1990, and by the Nottinghamshire County Library, Stephen Best to the Author, 18 April 1990.

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