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"THE SOUTHERN BRIGADE . . . 1763-1775"

by **CHARLES L. MOWAT**

in *The Journal of Southern History*

The British colonies of East and West Florida differed from their thirteen cousins in so many ways, as evidenced especially in the outcome of the American Revolution, that their close relationship to the thirteen in the mind of the British government is seldom realized. For two decades they were an integral part and the important left flank of the British empire in America, without the possession and security of which, as any military man will hold, it were unwise to advance.

So Dr. Mowat's article, "The Southern Brigade : A Sidelight on the British Military Establishment in America, 1763-1775," in *The Journal of Southern History*, the issue of April last, is of both Florida and general interest.

For background Professor Mowat writes: "The decision taken at the end of the Seven Years' War to maintain in peace time a permanent military establishment of ten thousand regular troops in North America was one of the most important ever made by the British government affecting the American colonies. Its general effect, of course, was to arouse in the colonists a fear, at least in part justified, of military domination. . . . It was, in fact, part of a much larger program to establish imperial authority over the colonial governments by taking away from the latter control over Indian affairs and western lands . . . and to bring other functions under imperial control, exercised through officials appointed for two districts, the Northern and the Southern. This program at once brought into question, the constitutional relations of colonies and the mother country. . . .

"The Southern district effectively comprised only the province of West Florida (which included the lower Mississippi country), though it was intended to include East Florida also. The troops in it were referred to as the Southern Brigade, and at least once as the Florida Brigade. The normal complement comprised two regiments in West Florida (at Pensacola, Mobile, and outposts), and one in East Florida.

Colonel Henry Bouquet was appointed military commander of the district as brigadier general, but died a few days after his arrival at headquarters in Pensacola; and the position of acting brigadier fell to Colonel William Tayler, then the commanding officer at St. Augustine. Tayler at once transferred his headquarters to Pensacola, and remained there until superseded in March 1767 by Colonel Frederick Haldimand, who had received his appointment in January 1766. He remained in command of the Southern district until 1773."

Professor Mowat continues: "The entire imperial policy inaugurated in 1763 regarding western lands, Indian relations, and the military establishment, was reconsidered [in 1768]. The resultant changes in the Southern district included the removal of headquarters from Pensacola to St. Augustine, and the concentration of the main military strength in the South at the latter place, at the expense of West Florida's military importance. . . . The detachments stationed at Bermuda and New Providence were to be withdrawn to St. Augustine, the West Florida posts of Natchez and Fort Bute abandoned, and Pensacola and Mobile garrisoned by three companies; the remainder of the troops in West Florida were to embark for St. Augustine. This meant that three regiments would be stationed

at St. Augustine, with three companies detached for West Florida.

"Man and nature combined to defeat the plan. Haldimand had great difficulty in taking up transports . . . several of which came to grief . . . and the last detachment did not reach St. Augustine till March 1769. Moreover, the 21st Regiment did not stay long in St. Augustine, for its commanding officer, finding that his men would be obliged to encamp in damaged tents on the site of the new barracks, moved on to Charleston.

"Haldimand himself took his time in transferring the headquarters of the Southern brigade. Eventually he made the journey to St. Augustine by land arriving there before the end of April 1769. He stayed there for almost exactly a year before returning to Pensacola. He bought a farm near the town which he called *Mon Plaisir*, and evidently liked his new headquarters.

"Even during Haldimand's brief stay St. Augustine never had its intended three regiments By the end of November 1769 the garrison was the 21st Regiment and six companies of the 31st.

"Meanwhile, events had occurred which upset the new disposition and threatened the military ascendancy of St. Augustine . . . As a result of an insurrection by the French population of New Orleans against Spanish rule which occurred in 1768, the Spaniards had sent a new governor, Alexandro O'Reilly, to Louisiana with 3,500 regular troops, a force which seemed too large for the purpose merely of giving the province protection. As a result West Florida was strengthened by an additional regiment, sent direct from New York to Pensacola early in 1770. At the same time Haldimand was ordered to move his headquarters back to Pensacola, which he reached on May 15. The building of new

barracks at St. Augustine for the enlarged garrison was suspended, and the military importance of the town eclipsed.

"Forces were at work, however, to restore a part of St. Augustine's military prestige. Governor Grant wrote in vigorous terms to Gage and Hillsborough describing the growing prosperity of his province and asking for another regiment. The fact that by this time various powerful persons had obtained land grants in East Florida and had sent over agents to begin settlements probably increased the pressure on the government to reconsider the matter. . . . The result was that Gage informed Haldimand in August 1770 that it was the King's pleasure that two regiments of the 'Florida Brigade' should be stationed in St. Augustine, and the third in West Florida. Headquarters, however, remained at Pensacola. This brought the resumption of the building of barracks at St. Augustine, but the plan was not completely carried out. . . .

"When war invaded the South the forces in the two Floridas were strengthened and under Colonel Augustine Prevost the weakly-pressed American invasions of loyalist East Florida from Georgia were repulsed and a counter-invasion of Georgia, in support of the expedition sent from New York by sea was carried out. Meanwhile West Florida had fallen to Spanish forces operating from New Orleans in a campaign lasting from 1779 to 1781, when Pensacola capitulated. The command in these years was held by another brigadier general, Lieutenant Colonel John Campbell.

"Finally, in January 1783, when St. Augustine and the northeast corner of Florida were crowded with refugees from Savannah and Charleston, the officer left in command at St. Augustine, Lieutenant Colonel Archibald McArthur, was given the rank

of brigadier general in command of the Southern district. With his departure for the Bahamas in August 1784, at the time of the British evacuation of East Florida and the re-establishment of Spanish government, the last vestige of the Southern Brigade and the Southern district in the British military establishment disappeared. With the exception of the 'Western Posts' East Florida was the last piece of territory within the present limit of the continental United States to be evacuated by the British after the Revolutionary War; and with its evacuation, not only the Southern Brigade but the last relic, south of the Canadian border, of the military establishment so hopefully begun in 1763 passed into the limbo of forgotten things."