

Donning the Regimentals: The Transition to Imperial Uniforms in Colonial Queensland

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The act of volunteering for any task usually indicates a belief in the purpose or value of that activity. There is often a desire to contribute, and from that may flow a measure of self-esteem. In a colonial military context, volunteering for part-time unpaid military service also enabled the volunteer to appear in a unique recognisable uniform, or “regimentals” as contemporaries might have expressed it. A military uniform could give a sense of belonging, pride, and identity. All of these became important elements in the development of colonial Queensland's military forces. Concepts such as upholding the honour of the uniform were even written into regulations, and the pride in the physical appearance of a company or regiment was encouraged to build a cohesive identity.

The early administrators of the Queensland Volunteer Rifle Brigade and the later Queensland Volunteer Force (hereafter referred to jointly as the Volunteers) both recognised and encouraged the concept of a strong and visual sense of identity. These ideas had long been an integral part of the development of the British regimental system. For many years, however, the Volunteer companies of colonial Queensland were described as a rag-tag and motley crew when it came to their uniforms and overall appearance. There was little consistency in the quality or supply of military dress which could be primarily attributed to competing fiscal priorities for the government, neglect alternating with a miserly desire to spend the least necessary amount, and a lack of central direction or formal military structure before 1884. Citizen soldiers supplemented the military professionals but were not expected to replace them. For Craig Wilcox, this ethos found its natural expression in the field uniform of dark, baggy grey favoured by colonial volunteers in Australia in the 1860s and 1870s. “Red meant regulars,” he suggests, “everything a [Volunteer] rifleman was not. Grey, on the other hand, mimicked the dashing skirmishers of romantic, progressive European armies.”¹

It appears the public view of military volunteering began to shift after the British Army withdrew from Australia in 1869, and

realisation dawned that if a crisis arose it would be largely left to those Volunteers alone. Commandant of the Queensland Volunteer Rifle Brigade, Colonel Maurice O'Connell, reported in 1870 that it would require a much better trained and equipped military force to be able to act alone against an enemy. He continued to argue for increased spending on training and arms for the local force.² That expenditure was sporadic and appeared to align with the presentation of a Volunteer Bill to the Parliament.

It was not until 1878 that a new *Volunteer Act* was passed, by which time the Queensland Government had made two issues of locally designed uniforms, replaced some obsolete small arms, and engaged professional British soldiers to guide the development of the colony's defences. The influence of the British Army on the colonial Volunteers is evident in the design and structure of the military system that was commenced.³ That this influence should also manifest itself in the adaptation of British Army style uniforms for the Volunteers is not unexpected.

By the early 1880s, the iconic scarlet tunics of the British Infantry had been adopted across Queensland with only a handful of exceptions. Facsimiles of the Royal Artillery uniforms had been introduced as early as 1863, and the Queensland Volunteer Engineers were wearing a full-dress uniform comparable to that of the Royal Engineers. When the new Queensland Defence Force paraded for the first time in 1885, its uniform and accoutrements matched its new identity as a coherent and centralised militia force, semi-professionalised but still drawing on the volunteer traditions and spirit of the thirteen Queensland towns where military units flourished.⁴ The transition to Imperial pattern uniforms in Queensland, however, was not entirely a matter of collective emotion, as Willcox's account of "scarlet fever" might imply. Nor was it explicitly the result of the new centralised scheme implemented by the *Defence Act* of 1884. This article explains how and why that transition occurred, drawing attention to specific local factors and circumstances.⁵

Background

In many ways, the story of Queensland's colonial defence is typical of other Australian colonies and bears comparison with similar situations in other British colonies. From 1860 the colonial Queensland government generally exercised control of its defences, the Governor taking the role of Commander-in-Chief, and establishing a small force of Volunteers for the task. It supported this force for 40 years, during which time a Militia and small Permanent cadre were also established under the *Defence Act* of 1884, reducing the number of actual Volunteer companies. After Federation in 1901, the Commonwealth

of Australia took over the role of defending the country.

The first Volunteer infantry and mounted rifle companies formed in Queensland during 1860 adopted uniforms of a style finding favour in the British volunteering movement of that time. The uniforms, initially grey or blue with facing colours appearing on cuffs, trouser seams, and cap bands, were approved by the Governor. In 1862 Captain Henry Pitt RA, *aide-de-camp* to Governor Bowen was appointed Brigade Major of the Queensland Volunteer Rifle Brigade (QVRB) and Captain-Commandant of the Queensland Volunteer Artillery (QVA).⁶ By the end of that year Pitt wielded enough power to limit the number of proposed exotic and expensive uniforms, countering it with the concept of a single uniform for the entire force, and appropriate regulations to guide its implementation.⁷ Queensland settled on the green wool uniform of the Rifle Regiments to clothe all except the newly formed artillery, who wore a semblance of the Royal Artillery uniform. An economic recession however in 1866 almost wiped out the volunteer movement in Queensland, but when it staggered to its feet a few years later one infantry unit, the Spring Hill and Fortitude Rifle Company, had adopted a scarlet tunic by 1868.⁸ Pitt had moved on, however, and there was no one with the interest or influence to continue the process he had started.



Figure 1: Spring Hill and Fortitude Valley Rifles, c. 1868, in their new scarlet infantry tunics (*private collection*).

In September 1871 the *Brisbane Courier* reflected on the poor treatment of the Volunteers and the way funds issued by Parliament were “frittered away in salaries to an incompetent paid staff”. As a result of this,

the officers have had to refuse men admittance to the ranks of their companies for want of funds to clothe them, and at present half the strength of the companies are without proper and decent uniforms, and consequently cannot appear upon the parade that their comrades are called out for upon next Tuesday. The men, the majority of whom are working men, cannot afford to pay for their uniforms, or replace those worn out, and it is not to be expected of the officers that they will allow themselves to be personally liable for the cost of new clothing in the hopes of some day or another of obtaining the Government grant. Good men and true, are consequently shut out from our ranks, and the vacancies incurred by men resigning or being struck off the roll by reason of non-attendance at drills are not filled up.⁹

In 1873 the Queensland Government implemented a blue infantry uniform, not unlike an artillery uniform, across all its Volunteer companies. This transition occurred in the context of repeated parliamentary debate over various Volunteer Bills designed to re-organise the force. During these debates, the irregular and variable appearance of the various units became a subject of comment. For example, in August 1872 as the Queensland Legislative Assembly discussed yet another Volunteer Bill (later withdrawn because of contentious clauses on the disbursement of public monies), the Colonial Secretary, Arthur Palmer, noted the outward signs of neglect. “Their uniforms were worn out,” he told the House, “and when a few of them assembled to form a guard of honour for His Excellency the Governor, they looked more like Falstaff's ragged regiment than what they ought to be.”¹⁰ Although the Bill was withdrawn, Palmer placed some expenses for the Volunteer Brigade on the Supplementary Estimates, including payment of drill instructors and funds for uniforms. He explained that the uniforms were for current volunteers, estimated at around four hundred: “As he had before stated, [Palmer] thought the Volunteers had been very badly treated, and the least that could be done for them was to grant them new uniforms.” The sum of £1,200, estimated to manufacture four hundred uniforms for £3 each, was passed with little dissent.¹¹

It was an unexpected bonus for the Volunteers and by March 1873 measurements for a new infantry uniform were being taken around the colony.¹² The uniform adhered to a Government design and

was to be issued to all existing infantry companies. These uniforms were manufactured in the Tailor's Shop at Brisbane Gaol, one of the trade workshops established within the Queensland prison system in 1871. The prisoners employed at the various tasks were often taught their trades while serving their sentences. The goods they manufactured were generally supplied to the Colonial Stores, the Colonial Storekeeper pricing them at the lowest rate, thus making it an extremely effective method of contracting for the Stores.

Uniforms for the infantry companies in Brisbane and Ipswich were produced first and issued in Brisbane between May and August, and in Ipswich in July.¹³ The Colonial Storekeeper called for further tenders in September 1873 for the making up only of uniforms for No 4 (Rockhampton) and No 5 (Warwick) Companies, QVRB, and for No 1 and No 2 Batteries, QVA.¹⁴ "Making up" usually implied the cloth was already cut and ready for assembly. Details of a successful tenderer have not been discovered.

The companies of the Queensland Volunteer Rifle Brigade were able to parade reasonably homogeneous and respectable uniforms at the beginning of 1875. The situation was very different when it came to the Volunteer's arms and accoutrements. A correspondent calling himself "Front Rank" provided a glimpse of the infantry companies in Brisbane, though it was likely little different across the colony, where

...many of the men are not even furnished with the necessary accoutrements to complete their uniform, being without waist-belts and pouches, although we are given to understand by our officers that they have repeatedly furnished requisitions for the same, to which no attention has ever been paid; and it is for this reason that many of the men absent themselves from day parades rather than be seen slovenly and un-soldierlike. But the chief reason why we have no ball practice is because our arms are obsolete and useless, omitting all mention of being dangerous to use...¹⁵

During 1875 the Brigade Adjutant, Captain Godfrey Geary, provided the Under Colonial Secretary with a list of items needed to put the QVRB on a more efficient footing.¹⁶ In Geary's opinion, both the rearming and reclothing of the Volunteers was necessary. He proposed a system by which the Government need not make any further issues after once equipping and clothing the Volunteers. Rather, at the end of each year, an allowance of £1 per infantryman and £1/10/- per artilleryman be made for each man who proved efficient.¹⁷ That allowance would be used "to provide uniforms and

accoutrements as they become worn out and also for recruits as they join.”¹⁸ In the Adjutant’s scheme, the uniform was to remain the property of the company involved. He also suggested that the sum allowed for efficient could be used for any other expenses related to the corps.¹⁹ His proposal was the basis on which a capitation allowance scheme evolved in Queensland, enabling the local Volunteer movement to reach a small, performance-based measure of self-sufficiency in the supply of uniforms and personal equipment.

By the end of June 1875 just over £1,000 was spent from the funds allocated for uniforms in 1873. It funded a total of 397 uniforms of other ranks and thirteen for officers.²⁰ By 1875, all the Volunteer infantry uniforms for Brisbane and Ipswich had been made in the tailor shops of Queensland gaols at less than £2 each.²¹

Despite this proposal, little had changed by 1876, and new volunteers were not supplied with new uniforms. Recruits in No 1 and 3 infantry companies as an example, wore only old uniforms, or civilian clothing.²² An obvious result of the lack of uniforms was that a full company could not parade on official occasions. Compared to the lack of firearms, this may not have affected the military capabilities of the Volunteer companies, yet it discouraged some men from attending drills and parades.

In early 1876 the Colonial Secretary requested Captain Walter Snelling, the senior officer of the Queensland infantry, to document his thoughts on the future of the Volunteers. A new Volunteer Bill was being drafted at the time. One of Snelling’s recommendations was the establishment of a capitation grant at £2 per efficient man. The scheme was almost identical to that put up by Geary in 1875 but twice as expensive. Snelling gave a more detailed *précis* on how the allowance might work:

The question will doubtless arise as to whether a capitation grant of 40s. per head is sufficient for Artillery purposes, the uniform being more expensive; but presuming that No 1 Battery, for instance, is fully supplied with uniforms, as well as No 2, Ipswich, that some time would elapse before the men of the 2nd Battery, Brisbane, would be efficient, it would be as well that for the first year, once the new Battery Companies were raised, to allow the officers commanding to have the sums placed to their credit, and it would then form a Sinking Fund, and in the end prove sufficient...The cost of uniforming is defrayed by [the officer commanding] out of this account, and the balance is retained as a general fund – prizes, rifle-shooting, extra ammunition, &c., as in New South Wales. It would be the most economical plan for the Government (as in New South Wales) to provide by tender or otherwise, the

uniforming, payment for which would be made before delivery by the officer commanding Battery or Company; a Clothing Board of three officers might be appointed.²³

Snelling's suggestions were not acted upon by the government, though the recently promoted Major Geary, commanding officer of No.1 Battery, QVA, found a way of drawing a sizeable allowance to clothe members of his Battery. Geary, who had been acting as a drill instructor for his Battery for some time, persuaded the Colonial Secretary to allow him to draw on the unused amount voted for an artillery drill instructor, to spend it on uniforms for the Battery. The Colonial Treasurer then granted cloth to make up the uniforms and Geary had them made up by a local tailor.

This created some sensation when the commanding officers of the other battery and rifle companies became aware of it. They persuaded the Treasurer to withhold the funds from the No 1 Battery, as they were unable to draw a similar amount. This pettiness put Geary in a particularly tight spot as the uniforms had already been made and issued. Luckily, the tailor did not press for his money as it was some time before the matter was investigated. It was resolved in Geary's favour, and the tailor was paid.

The commanding officers of the metropolitan rifle companies immediately requisitioned uniforms for their men. Captain Snelling of No 3 Company claimed somewhat spuriously in his application that his men had never been issued with uniforms by the government since his company had been first uniformed in 1867.²⁴ Snelling's company had received more than seventy uniforms in 1873.²⁵ Despite such attempts, the metropolitan rifle companies were not able to obtain new uniforms at that time.

As there was no system for the constant supply of uniforms for the Volunteers, it took only a year or so after the last issue of clothing before problems developed. Old uniforms began to pass through several hands and there was no allowance to renew or even repair the garments. A few uniforms may have been obtained by private purchase, but even the existing capititation allowance provided funds only for accoutrements rather than uniforms.

Contrary to expectations, the Queensland Volunteers began to expand in a rather *ad hoc* manner during 1876. New companies were formed in various metropolitan and country areas, though the Governor did not accept all. Captain Snelling expressed his surprise that despite the condition the Volunteers found themselves in, men were continually joining up "and showing a praiseworthy and patriotic spirit."²⁶ The strength of the Queensland infantry companies on 31 December 1876 was 741 of all ranks excluding Staff, and a year later

it had risen to 828.²⁷

Requests to form a Volunteer unit at this time were still approved by the Governor under advice from the government of the day, and the members of an approved corps then submitted a uniform design. As no uniforms had been manufactured since the original 1873-74 issue, the seven units formed since 1874 (nominally fielding 300 men of all ranks) were either without uniform or had provided their own.²⁸

With little prospect of government support Volunteer units across the colony provided for themselves. In Toowoomba as an example, from when it was gazetted in 1875 No. 8 Company raised £620 for uniforms, band instruments, administrative costs and the salary of a bandmaster. The Light Infantry Corps spent £437 and the Cadet Corps £133, an expenditure of £1,040 in a little over two years to March 1877.²⁹ By comparison, this was half the amount the Queensland Government spent on all its Volunteers during 1876-77.

On the first day of the 1876 Brisbane Exhibition, when over 600 Volunteers from the country as well as metropolitan corps turned out for the opening, the *Courier* presented a fiery analysis of the Government's neglect.

It is matter of notoriety that the encouragement given to these corps by successive Governments has been anything but hearty or spontaneous. The various Companies exist rather on sufferance than owing to any cordial recognition given to them. Their services are, when offered, not refused, but they are never invited. With regard to the mere item of uniforms, assistance has been doled out with a niggardly hand. As respect equipments [*sic*], arms and munitions, they have been practically ignored....[It is] not creditable that a thousand citizens would devote a large proportion of their leisure to gathering without some expectation of effecting something more practical than merely learning a few evolutions of drill, year after year, and parading about in shabby uniforms furnished in a large degree at their own cost.³⁰

The effectiveness of the poorly equipped volunteers in defending the colony against any expeditionary force was questionable, and the occasionally supportive *Courier* suggested that they would be utterly impotent.³¹

In face of the public interest in the Volunteers, and the criticism the Government was receiving for its treatment of them, the reluctant Legislative Assembly supported a vote in October 1876 of £2,960 for the Volunteers, which included additional drill instructors, targets, and ammunition. During the following month, the Legislative

Assembly surprisingly voted £2,000 for Volunteer uniforms but the Colonial Secretary appeared slow in deciding how to spend it. It was not until January 1877 that officers commanding companies were told that uniforms would be issued to men who had been at drill for at least six months, and numbers were sought.³² The *Rockhampton Bulletin* felt “the government aid should be forthcoming with alacrity. Nothing is more annoying to the volunteers than vexatious delays and red tapism.”³³

A correspondent to the *Brisbane Courier* suggested that if new uniforms were to be made, they should be sought from the southern colonies. He used the appearance of the country Volunteers at the opening of the 1876 Exhibition as an example of the lack of any standard uniform, noting that there were “some with coats of light blue waterproof, with three loops on the sleeve; next would be a dark blue serge with an Austrian knot.”³⁴ The observation drew the wrath of P.J. Dinte, a Brisbane tailor, who felt a slur had been cast on the local trade. He argued that the greater proportion of clothing sold in Queensland was made in the colony using imported cloth, and it was good quality. Dinte insisted that “if the Government, as in the case of the uniforms, choose the cheap and nasty, it does not follow that the clothing manufacturing industry should be maligned.”³⁵

Simple mathematics may have been causing the Colonial Secretary to procrastinate about the proposed Volunteer uniforms. He had £2,000 to spend on a thousand Volunteers, and £2 per man was not going to adequately supply clothes and accoutrements to all. The possibility for “cheap and nasty” uniforms was again on the table, and a decision was not reached swiftly. Captain Snelling, writing with some considerable knowledge on the subject, maintained that the responsibility for the delay in supplying uniform, arms and accoutrements was due to “red-tape and routine” in the Colonial Secretary’s Office. It was potentially a dangerous claim for a serving officer to make, and no doubt reflects the frustration felt by all ranks. “Not having access to the brigade office books,” Snelling wrote,

I write somewhat from memory, but I recollect that after the Assembly was pleased to vote a sum for Volunteer clothing, the Commandant in December last forwarded to the Colonial Secretary an approximate return of the number of men in the various batteries and companies entitled by their attendance at drills and parades to uniforms. This was returned on the ground that it should have shown the name of each individual, which accordingly had to be supplied by the Captains Commanding throughout the colony, and six weeks further valuable time necessarily elapsed. The discrepancy between the approximate and second return showed only an increase of nineteen

uniforms required. Valuable time was again lost in deciding upon the colour, which, for the information of the force, is now to be a dark or Elcho gray, undress (the vote being totally inadequate for a full dress for 1,000 men). In the interim, a suggestion that a Clothing Board, composed of the Colonial Storekeeper and two of the senior officers should be appointed, met with disfavour. Had this even been accepted, I thoroughly believe that half of the force would now have new uniforms, and I am further aware that the Colonial Secretary was asked by the Commandant to give him and the Colonial Storekeeper full authority, Major M'Donnell in return promising that everything should be done economically, and the vote not exceeded. As matters stand at present, in the middle of March, four months or so since the vote was passed, all that appears to have been accomplished is the ordering of 1000 yards of cloth – about sufficient to clothe a third of the force, and which, as it has to be made in Victoria, cannot possibly reach Brisbane before another month. No tenders are as yet called, and the balance of the cloth, so urgently required, is not yet ordered. As 2,000 yards or more will be wanted to be made, it will at the present rate of progress be quite Michaelmas before all the uniforms are issued – thanks to red-tape and routine.³⁶

As it happened, the tender notice for the manufacture of Volunteer infantry uniforms appeared in the *Queensland Government Gazette* the same day Snelling's damning account was published. The Queensland Government, as per the notice, would provide the cloth, facings and buttons and the tenderer was to manufacture and supply 800 tunics and trousers.³⁷ The new Elcho grey uniform for the infantry Volunteers consisted of a "forage-cap, with blue band, tunic coat with blue shoulder knots, collars, and cuffs; and trousers, with blue stripe three quarters of an inch in width. The accoutrements will include a belt, bayonet fob, and pouch of saffron stained leather."³⁸ Nathaniel Lade was awarded the tender for the infantry belts and pouches, and Hyman Dinte for uniforms and caps.³⁹ The tender for 100 waist belts, shoulder belts, and pouches for the artillery called in October 1877 also went to Lade.

New uniforms and the 1877 Review

The perceived impotence of the volunteer movement across the Australian colonies prompted the Queensland Government, along with the governments of New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia, to request Imperial assistance in defence matters. General Sir William Jervois and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Scratchley, both of the Royal Engineers, inspected the colonial defences in the later part of 1877. Although Jervois returned to England after making his report,

Scratchley stayed to report and implement the schemes for colonial defence.⁴⁰

Thus the proposed inspection of the Volunteers at a review by Sir William Jervois and Lieutenant-Colonel Scratchley on their arrival in Queensland early in August 1877 provided the impetus for the completion of the new Volunteer uniforms. The first were delivered to some of the metropolitan infantry companies in June, while No 2 Battery (Ipswich), No 12 Company (Brisbane), and the Queensland Volunteer Engineers were issued their uniforms by late July. The remainder were delivered by August.⁴¹ The *Telegraph* noted: "The men looked very well as a body in their new uniforms, and their physique was, on the whole, good."⁴² "The new uniforms have a serviceable and sufficiently military appearance, although not of flaring colours," the *Brisbane Courier* commented, "and it is satisfactory that their manufacture has been pushed on with sufficient rapidity to enable such a large body of men to appear in them on this occasion."⁴³

As the back-handed compliment suggests, the new uniform was not greeted with universal acclaim. The brimless forage cap was a particular bone of contention. Providing no shade its design was not practical in Queensland's climate. Major McDonnell appears to have been the only Volunteer officer who, with the Colonial Secretary, was involved in the design or selection of that uniform. It seems improbable that he would have agreed to a headdress that offered no sun protection unless it was always considered to be an interim option or for use indoors or at night. The Government, it seems, responded to the criticism by immediately ordering a supply of "tropical pattern" helmets from England. Recently promoted, Major Snelling revealed this information at a dinner to which he and some of the Brisbane officers treated their Ipswich compatriots after the Review. One of the Ipswich officers suggested that they should have been consulted about the uniforms. Snelling "quite agreed with the idea and thought that a clothing board of volunteer officers ought certainly to be appointed, as he was quite sure that if such a board had been in existence the present 'shoddy' uniform would never have been supplied to the Rifles."⁴⁴

Major McDonnell showed the *Queensland Times* a sample of the felt helmet which, the newspaper noted, had the shape of the Indian army helmet. Similar helmets had been acquired piecemeal by Geary for the QVA early in 1874,⁴⁵ though this was the first time the Government had been involved in the process. "The volunteers should be thankful to Major M'Donnell, the Commandant, who was mainly instrumental in getting the Government to order this new covering for the head, which will add in appearance to the martial bearing of the men. We hope it will not be long before the helmets arrive."⁴⁶ It is

likely no coincidence that the British Army had in June 1877 officially authorised for wear this style of white helmet for all ranks on foreign service.⁴⁷

The Queensland Volunteer Rifle Brigade ceased to exist in name from January 1878, replaced under the new *Volunteer Act* of 1878 by the Queensland Volunteer Force. New uniforms, small arms, and accoutrements had been issued to all branches and corps. There were 1479 volunteers in Queensland by the end of April 1878, of whom 219 were members of cadet corps in Brisbane and Toowoomba. Two artillery batteries operated in Brisbane, and one in Ipswich, numbering 271 men. The Brisbane Engineers (formerly known as the Queensland Volunteer Engineers) had 87 of all ranks. Bundaberg, Maryborough, Warwick, and Ipswich each had one rifle company, Rockhampton and Toowoomba had two rifle companies each, while Brisbane mustered four, to a total of 902 infantry of all ranks. These Volunteers and cadets were armed with 1000 Snider rifles, 80 Snider carbines, and 100 'old pattern' rifles and carbines.⁴⁸ The artillery also had access to ten 24-pounder smooth-bore muzzle-loading guns, two 12-pounder smooth-bore howitzers, four 6-pounder smooth bore guns, and two 6-pounder breech-loading Armstrong guns, though Major McDonnell considered them "unfit for the requirement of modern warfare."⁴⁹

Lieutenant Colonel McDonnell submitted new regulations for the clothing and equipment of the Volunteer Force to the Governor on 14 May 1878.⁵⁰ They were approved by the Governor and Executive Council and sent for printing in the *Queensland Government Gazette* though were not published there.⁵¹ There is no hint as to why this was the case. No copy of these regulations has been found, and it is not known if they were based on those of the British Army or were devised locally. They were certainly distributed in some manner and taken into effect. Brisbane tailor Henry Dinte (son of Hyman Dinte) later referred to them in advertisements as the "Queensland Volunteer Dress Regulations."⁵² Subsequent uniform issues certainly reflect British uniforms. The successful introduction of a full-dress infantry uniform that followed these regulations was an obvious attempt to reinforce homogeneity in clothing throughout the Force, a subject dear to the heart of Commandant McDonnell and many Volunteer officers. When the British Army estimates had been presented to the House of Commons earlier in March 1878 it was revealed that more British Volunteer battalions were wearing scarlet uniforms in preference to green or grey, so the movement of the Queensland's Volunteers in that direction was not unexpected.⁵³

A former Ipswich Volunteer and aspiring politician, Charles Chubb, drew attention to the fact that the new woollen mills at Ipswich

could produce tweeds that might be very suitable for Volunteer clothing. He thought that the Premier, after his words of support at the opening of that factory would have ensured the local industry was patronised, and Volunteers would not have to put up with shoddy uniforms.⁵⁴ While the Government had made no decisions, the Queensland Woollen Company which owned the factory was considering potential markets.⁵⁵

In May 1878 the Legislative Assembly ordered the printing of a report on the expenditure on Volunteers since 1860, revealing that a total of £8,785/5/1 had been spent by the Government on clothing the Volunteers (as well as £220 towards band instruments) to 31 May 1878. Nearly £6,000 of it had been spent since 1876. Incredibly, that combined figure was slightly more than the entire sum spent on arms (including artillery) during the same period!⁵⁶ There was no attempt to calculate the sum spent by the Volunteers on their own uniforms. The expenditure previously detailed for the Toowoomba companies for 1875-77 suggests the colony-wide figure would be significant.



Figure 2: I Company, Maryborough, c. 1878, wearing the grey infantry uniform (*private collection*).

The arrival in June 1878 of white helmets for the 1200 members of the Queensland Volunteer Force represented one of the first steps towards dressing the Force similarly to the British Army. Its issue coincided with the production of the first scarlet full-dress tunics for Queensland's infantry, presenting a very British appearance to the military. This was however, the only official issue of helmets to the volunteers until November 1885. Between those years, officers commanding corps bought helmets when needed, paying for them through the capitation allowance, or by other means, resulting in a considerable variety of patterns and styles across the force.⁵⁷ The helmet was still being worn at Federation in 1901 when the Queensland military became part of the Commonwealth Military Forces.

Henry Dinte, seeing an obvious place in the market for himself had begun to import silver lace, braids, and cords for Volunteer uniforms, particularly for officers. In his advertisements in the *Telegraph* in early June 1878, Dinte suggested he was the best military cutter in Brisbane, and that he could make full dress uniforms for Volunteer officers.⁵⁸ At the end of October he tendered for the supply of 550 full dress uniforms for the companies of the Metropolitan Administrative Battalion (created in mid-January 1878 from three existing and one new infantry company). These uniforms which comprised scarlet tunics with blue facings and blue trousers, were very similar to a British infantry uniform. Dinte was the successful tenderer.⁵⁹

At the half-yearly meeting of the Queensland Woollen Company in February 1879, it was suggested more could be done about getting the Volunteer uniforms made from the company's tweed. William Ginn, chairman of the Directors, advised that the cloth had met with satisfaction and the directors were trying for Government orders.⁶⁰ The issue was the availability of dyes. Henry Dinte claimed in a letter to a Volunteer officer that his delay in supplying uniforms was caused by the Queensland Woollen Company claiming they had a vat capable of producing blue dye for their wool, when in fact they did not. Dinte then had to order the cloth from Geelong, which caused the delay in manufacturing the uniforms.⁶¹ The Queensland Woollen Company vehemently denied his accusations, stating they had told him there was no blue vat at that time. The mill manager went so far as to suggest that Dinte may have been simply wishing to pass on the blame for his own delays.⁶² The Queensland Woollen Company began construction of a blue dyeing vat later in 1879.

Dinte advertised his military tailoring abilities from November 1878 through till June 1879, noting he made officers full and undress

uniforms in accordance with the Queensland Volunteer Dress Regulations.⁶³ All full-dress uniforms for the Metropolitan Administrative Battalion had been issued by May 1879.⁶⁴

The adoption by the Volunteers of uniforms in the Imperial style was part of a growing trend across the colonies. The volunteers of the 1860s had made their own way as far as uniforms went, differentiating themselves from the British Regular Army. Even in Britain that process had reversed by the late 1870s. It perhaps reflected the change in attitude of the British public to their Army, and its role in a myriad of colonial wars. Cunningham noted that as early as 1877 British Volunteers were embracing the changes: "There was a nationwide move to scarlet, so that by 1878-9, 91 regiments wore scarlet, 66 green, and 57 grey of various shades."⁶⁵

In Queensland the adoption of British style uniforms was just a step along a new path. In March 1879 regulations under the *Volunteer Act* of 1878 were gazetted, enabling many important changes to military volunteering in Queensland. Among the structural changes was the introduction of a simplified British Army style regimental system, complete with Regimental Staff to supplement a Permanent instructional staff.⁶⁶ The Queensland Volunteer Force was being completely rebuilt on an Imperial model, the first time that such practical restructuring was willingly (albeit almost reluctantly) embraced by the colonial government. Through their inspection of the defences of the Australian colonies and their subsequent defence schemes, Jervois and Scratchley had developed a much stronger and integrated alignment between the colonies and Imperial defence. It would appear to have had a significant impact on how the Volunteers viewed themselves, and how they wished to be viewed locally.

One of the practical applications insofar as uniforms, arms and equipment were concerned had been the enshrining of the capitation allowance in the Regulations under the *Volunteer Act*. This allowance was paid by the Government to the Volunteer Company at a set rate per man who proved 'effective' in each year. All uniforms were to be supplied from the capitation allowance, which also meant all uniforms were Government property. There were stipulations that all corps or regiments were to be dressed alike, and strict adherence was to be made to the local Clothing Regulations regarding the uniforms, appointments, and rank distinctions.⁶⁷ The new system was by no means perfect and as time went on the need for a constant supply of items such as belts, ammunition pouches and haversacks strained the limits of the capitation allowance. The high costs involved in employing local labour to manufacture the required uniforms and accoutrements eventually led to the conclusion that the importation of goods was more cost-effective than local manufacture.⁶⁸

In the 1880s

An unexpected consequence across the British Empire of the changes in uniforms by local military forces was that some colonial uniforms were considered indistinguishable from those of the British Army. In March 1880, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, in consultation with the Secretary of State for War, and the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, raised these concerns in a circular to all the colonies:

Her Majesty's Government, while highly appreciating the feeling which has led to the use in the Colonies of Uniforms of a similar character to those in use in this Country, and by no means desiring to discourage this practice, are of the opinion that, with the view of preventing the misunderstandings to which I have referred, it would be advisable whenever the Colonies may adopt, for their Local Services, uniforms similar to those of the Imperial Service, that each Colony should substitute the badge which has been adopted for its flag, or some other distinguishing device which should include the name of the Colony, for the badge upon the caps and buttons which is in use in this Country.⁶⁹

Figure 3: Sergeants of No. 1 Battery, Queensland Volunteer Artillery, c. 1881-2, wearing a uniform very similar to that of the Royal Artillery (*private collection*).



Colonel George Blaxland, the Commandant of the Queensland Volunteer Force reported “this Colony have badges totally different to any of those in use in any Imperial Corps & that the Lace & trimmings used are invariably ‘Silver’.”⁷⁰

Despite the new structure introduced in the late 1870s, the Volunteer Force experienced stagnation during 1880-81. While the government acquired new arms and ammunition the capitation allowance, which paid for uniforms and many other expenses, decreased. A local Military Committee of Inquiry report in January 1882 had a wide range of recommendations including a proposal to form a paid militia. It put in train a process that ultimately led to the employment of an Imperial officer as Commandant and the introduction of the *Defence Act* of 1884. In terms of dressing the Force, there was a consensus that clothing should be obtained from England and distributed locally from a central supply store.⁷¹

During May 1883, the Volunteer Staff Officer in Brisbane, Major Moore, received approval to order uniforms for the force from England, though inexplicably this didn't occur. In August he followed this up with a recommendation to the Government that the Acting Commandant Lieutenant Colonel Drury (who was visiting London) be authorised to consult with Major General Scratchley and the officer to be chosen to fill the position of Commandant, to select the style of uniform most suitable to the colony.⁷² Consequently, in September, having just been appointed Queensland Commandant, Major George French RA, met with Drury and Scratchley in London to discuss a suitable local uniform. They concluded that it was desirable to clothe the colonial force much the same as the Auxiliary Forces in England, which was of course, very similar to the Regular forces.⁷³ Despite this decision, no order was made at the time.

After arriving in Queensland Colonel French reported on the local forces to the Queensland Parliament in March 1884, revealing that the clothing and equipment in Queensland were “almost as varied as the number of corps, and even in the same corps there are often several different patterns, the result being that they present a very motley appearance on parade.” Belts and helmets were also in a bad state, and there was no system for their supply. Colonel French believed heavy cloth tunics were unsuitable for the climate and intimated that “Indian Khakee” which was expected to be adopted as the service dress of the British Army, would form a very good summer dress in the colony. Confirming the outcome of the earlier London meeting, French advised “that for the present it is desirable to procure the bulk of the uniforms from England, and I would advise that steps be at once taken to order a supply for the Force.” He went on:

It may be as well to state that in certain details we cannot copy the Regular Forces, and that Special Instructions will have to be sent to the Agent-General on this point - thus our Artillery or Engineers cannot take the motto of the RA or RE 'Ubique', but should have the word 'Queensland' instead. This word might also be on all buttons, and special dies would have to be struck off. If my recommendations regarding a small Permanent Force should be approved of, it would be desirable to enlist therein a few Military Tailors, & then all or nearly all the Uniforms might be made up in this Country, and this is the direction towards which we should I think work.⁷⁴

Requisitions for uniform cloth and equipment were finally transmitted to Queensland's Agent-General in London in September 1884. By then a sense of urgency permeated the entire process, Colonel French noting that as the government had decided to have as much of the clothing as possible made up in the colony, no time should be lost in sending out the cloth.

Conclusion

With the re-organisation of 1885 the purely volunteer system was dispensed within Queensland. The changes introduced a Queensland Defence Force formed mainly of partially paid militia, with some volunteer corps, and a small permanent force. Although Queensland's military forces had been wearing uniforms that were similar to Imperial uniforms, the practice of ordering directly from the Royal Army Clothing Depot (RACD) introduced specific Imperial pattern clothing to the colony, rather than the Auxiliary force's uniform as proposed in 1883.

From 1885 Queensland's Field and Garrison Artillery wore the uniform of the Royal Artillery; the Brisbane Engineers the uniform of the Royal Engineers; the Moreton Mounted Infantry adopted the uniform of the 1st Kings Dragoon Guards, and the Moreton Regiment that of the Royal West Surrey Regiment.⁷⁵ Queensland's Marine Defence Force also adopted the uniform of the Royal Navy and that of its Naval Brigades.⁷⁶ Scarlet remained the colour of infantry uniforms as other regiments were formed across the colony, although each initially received its own facing colours. Even when new volunteer corps were formed the trend of acquiring directly from the RACD was continued, and the Queensland Scottish Volunteer Corps adopted the uniform of the 92nd Gordon Highlanders,⁷⁷ and the Queensland Irish Volunteer Corps that of the 1st Battalion, Royal Irish Rifles.⁷⁸

Locally designed khaki uniforms also began to make their appearance in the mid-1880s, usually as undress uniforms, the Imperial pattern uniform being kept for full dress. The Mounted

Infantry tried various full dress and undress khaki uniforms, but for some years could not shake off the idea of wearing thick serge materials. It wasn't until the late 1890s that cotton khaki uniforms were adopted as far better suited to the climate. All infantry militia Regiments except for the 1st Battalion of the Moreton Regiment abandoned the scarlet tunic as a full dress around 1890. It was re-introduced in 1898 as a full dress for all militia infantry battalions across the colony to encourage recruiting. The Engineers retained their scarlet tunics until the late 1890s before giving way to the ubiquitous khaki. The Artillery adopted a working dress of khaki, but also kept their full-dress blue uniform until around 1911, long after the federation of the Australian colonies.⁷⁹

In his standard history of Queensland's colonial forces, Johnson is silent on the reasons for the colony's transition from green, grey, and blue, to scarlet and ultimately to khaki.⁸⁰ Likewise, Grey was content to observe broadly that khaki drab and the slouch hat were being adopted nationally by the 1890s, replacing earlier imperial patterns.⁸¹ Willcox's view that the adoption of scarlet was an emotive preference of the rank and file, meanwhile, does not match the evidence, particularly in the Queensland context.⁸²

What is evident from a close examination of the logistics system for Queensland's colonial volunteers and militia uniforms is that supply was usually haphazard and in response to crisis during the first two decades, though it achieved some sustainability in the early 1880s. Decisions on uniform design and supply were seldom left to the rank and file, senior officers being involved in or determining force-wide designs in 1863, 1873, 1877, 1878 and 1884. A steady trend towards Imperial style uniforms can be noted, which might in some way also be attributed to a conscious, or even unconscious bias of those decision-making officers, all who had previously served in the British Army. From a pragmatic view the Queensland Government, which was often reluctant to replenish uniforms and arms, found it in their pecuniary interest to obtain clothing and equipment directly from England.⁸³ Unravelling this logistical nightmare has enabled new perspectives on an old subject.

Notes

¹ Craig Wilcox, *Red Coat Dreaming: How Colonial Australia Embraced the British Army* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2009) p. 83.

² Queensland Parliament, *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly* [hereafter *QV&P*], Brisbane, 11 August 1875, pp. 1407-16 .

³ *QV&P*, 1877, 'Defences. Preliminary Report, 1877', pp. 1275-90.

⁴ Brian Rough, *Lines of Defence: A lineage of Queensland's Naval and Military Forces 1860-1903* (Brisbane: Colonial Forces Study Group, 2018).

⁵ This paper draws on extensive research for forthcoming volumes on the history of colonial military uniforms in Queensland. Elements have been published in earlier forms including Victorian Military Society, *Dress Regulations: Newsletter of the Uniform Study Group*, No 2, 1998, Wolverhampton, UK; and on the CFSG(Q) website www.colonialforces.org/clothing-the-military. My thanks to *QJMH*'s editors and reviewers for their comments and advice.

⁶ *Queensland Government Gazette* [hereafter *QGG*], 2 August 1862, p. 393; *QGG*, 30 August 1862, p. 455.

⁷ *QGG*, 21 February 1863, p. 143.

⁸ *Brisbane Courier*, 21 May 1867, p. 1.

⁹ *Brisbane Courier*, 9 November 1870, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Queensland Legislative Assembly Debates*, 13 August 1872, p. 854.

¹¹ *Brisbane Courier*, 19 August 1872, p. 2.

¹² *Rockhampton Bulletin*, 14 March 1873, p. 2.

¹³ *Queensland Times*, 8 July 1873, p. 6.

¹⁴ *Telegraph*, 19 September 1873, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Telegraph*, 15 January 1875, p. 2.

¹⁶ The Colonial Secretary was the head of the Civil Service branch which administered the Volunteers among many other government services and entities.

¹⁷ Efficiency was built around the number of parades a man attended, and his participation in the annual musketry courses. He qualified as 'efficient' if he met the minimum requirements, and his company received the capitation allowance.

¹⁸ Queensland State Archives [hereafter *QSA*], ITM846936. Inwards Correspondence, letter 75/622, 16 February 1875.

¹⁹ *QSA* ITM846936. Inwards Correspondence, letter 75/622, 16 February 1875.

²⁰ *QV&P*, 1875.

²¹ *QV&P*, 1875, 'Gaols of the Colony' (Report from the Sheriff).

²² *Brisbane Courier*, 9 March 1876, p. 2.

²³ *QV&P*, 1876, 'Volunteer Force – Expenditure, &c.'

²⁴ *QV&P*, 1877, 'Uniforms for No 1 Battery, Queensland Volunteer Artillery,' pp. 1257-9, 1271.

²⁵ *Telegraph*, 20 October 1873, p. 2.

²⁶ *Brisbane Courier*, 5 July 1876 p. 2. The surge in recruitment is still unexplained, and is worthy of further investigation.

²⁷ *QV&P*, 1882, Appendix X, 'Report of the Military Committee of Inquiry.'

²⁸ These units were No 8 Company, Toowoomba in January 1875; Queensland Volunteer Engineers in January 1876; Toowoomba Light Infantry in February 1876; Toowoomba Cadet Corps in May 1876; Cadets in Brisbane July 1876; Bundaberg Rifles, and Rockhampton Light Infantry in October 1876.

²⁹ *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 10 March 1877, p. 7.

³⁰ *Brisbane Courier*, 22 August 1876, p. 2.

³¹ *Brisbane Courier*, 22 August 1876, p. 2.

³² *Telegraph*, 2 January 1877, p. 2.

³³ *Rockhampton Bulletin*, 10 January 1877, p. 2.

³⁴ *Brisbane Courier*, 9 January 1877, p. 3.

³⁵ *Brisbane Courier*, 10 January 1877, p. 3.

³⁶ *Brisbane Courier*, 17 March 1877, p. 5. Elcho or 'Hodden' grey was a Scottish coarse woollen blend, favoured for its association with deerstalking and thus low visibility.

³⁷ *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 20 March 1877, p. 3.

³⁸ *Brisbane Courier*, 21 March 1877, p. 2.

³⁹ *Queenslander*, 5 May 1877, p. 19.

⁴⁰ Geoff Ginn, Brian Rough and Hilary Davies (eds), *'A Most Promising Corps': Citizen Soldiers in Colonial Queensland, 1860-1903* (Brisbane: Colonial Forces Study Group, 2010), pp. 8-13.

⁴¹ *Brisbane Courier*, 16 June 1877, p. 4; 21 June, p. 1; 18 July 1877, p. 2.

⁴² *Telegraph*, 13 August 1877, p. 2.

⁴³ *Brisbane Courier*, 13 August 1877, p. 3.

⁴⁴ *Queensland Times*, 14 August 1877, p. 3.

⁴⁵ *Brisbane Courier*, 6 June 1874, p. 1.

⁴⁶ *Queensland Times*, 14 August 1877, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Peter Suci, *Military Sun Helmets of the World* (Ottawa: Service Publications, 2009), p. 2.

⁴⁸ *QV&P*, 1878, 'Expenditure in cash or Land Orders on account of Volunteers, or in the defence of the Colony.'

⁴⁹ *QV&P*, 1877, 'Defences of the Colony – Reports of Commandant of Volunteer Force,' p. 1300.

⁵⁰ QSA, ITM861360, General Letterbook, out-letter 78/905, 23 May 1878.

⁵¹ QSA, ITM861360, General Letterbook, out-letter 78/905, 23 May 1878.

⁵² *Telegraph*, 3 May 1879, p. 1.

⁵³ *Telegraph*, 15 May 1878, p. 3.

⁵⁴ *Telegraph*, 27 May 1878, p. 3.

⁵⁵ *Queensland Times*, 13 February 1879, p. 3.

⁵⁵ *QV&P*, 1878, 'Expenditure in cash or Land Orders on account of Volunteers, or in the defence of the Colony.'

- ⁵⁷ *Brisbane Courier*, 24 July 1884, p. 5.
- ⁵⁸ *Telegraph*, 5 June 1878, p. 1.
- ⁵⁹ *Telegraph*, 9 November 1878, p. 2.
- ⁶⁰ *Queensland Times*, 13 February 1879, p. 3.
- ⁶¹ *Darling Downs Gazette and General Advertiser*, 9 April 1879, p. 2.
- ⁶² *Queensland Times*, 8 April 1879, p. 3.
- ⁶³ *Telegraph*, 3 May 1879, p. 1.
- ⁶⁴ *Brisbane Courier*, 19 May 1879, p. 2.
- ⁶⁵ Hugh Cunningham, *The Volunteer Force, a social and political history 1859-1908* (London: Archon Books, 1975), p. 95.
- ⁶⁶ *QGG*, Vol XXIV, No. 57, 14 March 1879, pp. 717-24.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁸ *QV&P*, 1882, 'Report of the Military Committee of Inquiry.'
- ⁶⁹ QSA, ITM847026, Correspondence Inwards, letter 80/3674, 30 June 1880.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁷¹ *QV&P*, 1882, 'Report of the Military Committee of Inquiry.'
- ⁷² QSA, ITM847121, Correspondence Inwards, letter 83/4244, 30 August 1883 (top numbered to 84/3619).
- ⁷³ QSA, ITM847121, Correspondence Inwards, letter 84/2216, 24 March 1884 (top numbered to 84/3619).
- ⁷⁴ QSA, ITM847121, Correspondence Inwards, letter, 84/3619, 20 May 1884.
- ⁷⁵ *QGG*, Volume XXXVI, No. 102, 6 June 1885, Queensland Defence Force, General Order No 111, 4 June 1885, p. 1837.
- ⁷⁶ *QGG*, Volume XL, No. 8, 8 January 1887, 'Regulations for The Marine Force under 'The Defence Act of 1884,' p. 108.
- ⁷⁷ QSA, ITM847173, Correspondence Inwards, letter 85/8043, 24 October 1885.
- ⁷⁸ QSA, ITM847247, Correspondence Inwards, letter 87/7205, 17 August 1887.
- ⁷⁹ Brian Rough, in Victorian Military Society, *Dress Regulations: Newsletter of the Uniform Study Group*, No. 2, 1998, Wolverhampton, UK; and www.colonialforces.org/clothing-the-military.
- ⁸⁰ D. H. Johnson, *Volunteers at Heart: The Queensland Defence Forces 1860-1901* (St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1975).
- ⁸¹ Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia* (rev. ed.) (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 43.
- ⁸² Wilcox, *Red Coat Dreaming*, p. 83.
- ⁸³ There was a government intent that in most cases when new orders were made in England that it also stimulated local industry, even to the extent in 1884 where the cloth was imported in considerable quantity to ensure the manufacturing could be carried out by local tailors.