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THE REGIMENTS AND THE CANADIAN ARMY OF TOMORROW: ARE BOTH RECONCILABLE?

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THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.
“The bottom line is that no matter how high-tech warfighting becomes, war is about people and the military and security forces are ultimately about controlling people. It is not enough to dominate the technological domain. Precision munitions, air, space, and cyber power are elements of, but not the entire solution. Having infantry on the ground is what it takes to control people.”1

The rapid transformation of the world in the last 15 years, the increased operational tempo and shrinking defense budgets have forced the Canadian Army to think seriously about its transformation.2 The Army recognizes that this vast enterprise has implications in the fields of education, training, doctrine, technology and equipment.3 However, this paper is most concerned about the organizational reengineering of the Canadian Army.4 After having introduced the current transformation model of the Canadian Army and the constraints of the regimental system, this study defines an optimal structure that should be adopted by the active combat arms units of the Canadian Army. It also proposes to modify our training and regimental systems in order to better support our new force structure. Regimental narrow-mindedness and constant personnel reshuffling are incompatible with today’s battlefield where rapid intervention, flexibility, cohesion and expeditionary mindset are essentials. Therefore, this paper submit that the Canadian Army could gain a lot in terms of cohesion and operational effectiveness by adopting permanent combined-arms units to which could be added highly specialized sub-sub5 units or small detachments based on the mission requirements. Such a change requires that the regimental system adapts itself to the current combined-arms reality in order to maintain its relevance.

The Interim Army and the Army of Tomorrow

While the world was experiencing a new and unstable international security environment in the last 10 years, the Canadian Army was, on one hand, struggling with an increased operational
tempo and on the other hand, experiencing “personnel and resource reductions, organizational re-
engineering and cultural upheaval”.6 Faced with those challenges, the Canadian Forces
embarked in 1999 on a reengineering process guided by a strategy entitled Shaping the Future of
the Canadian Forces: A Strategy for 2020. As an answer, the Army published its own vision in
May 2002: Advancing with a purpose, The Army Strategy One Army, One Team, One vision.
This core document aims at providing “the necessary broad direction to guide the Army into the
future.”7 The Army’s strategy laid a foundation and a 5 and 10 years timeline around which the
Interim Army (0-5 years) and the Army of Tomorrow (5-10 years) will be built.8 However, the
Canadian Forces undertook this transformation process with little strategic guidance and despite
the fact that Canada’s Defense Policy has not been revised since the 1994 White paper.

Current proposal – The Interim Army

The Chief of the Land Staff’s (CLS) guidance for the Interim Army was published in March
2004 under the title Purpose defined, The Force Employment Concept for the Army. Basically,
this guidance is the “conceptual foundation for the Interim Army” and it will drive the Army’s
employment for the next few years.9 This document reinforces the importance of maneuver
warfare and mission command in our doctrine but also proposes the adoption of network-enabled
warfare, effects-based operations (EBO) and it recognizes the importance of information
operations. The Army also insists on the importance of building cohesive and robust fighting
teams with a high level of readiness and fighting spirit.10 In terms of force structure, the Interim
Army’s strategy is as follow:

“base its structure on modular, task-tailored forces that will provide commanders with a
selective mix of capabilities … Task-tailored forces will normally be built around a unit
or brigade headquarters. The term “battle group” and “brigade group” will remain in use
… but without the previous connotation of fixed size and capabilities … modularity allows for the injection of cohesive sub-units with generic or discreet capabilities that can reinforce a task-tailored force.”

The latter description implies the maintenance of the unit, as it is today, and evokes the creation of task-tailored combined-arms units and formations, which in itself is not very different from what the Army has been doing in the last 15 years. Nothing new is proposed in terms of force structure except for the addition of sub-units capable of providing capabilities like ISTAR, PSY OPS, CIMIC, UAV etc. Obviously, those new capabilities are essential since they will improve our effectiveness, allow us to dominate the battlefield, increase our operational tempo and reduce our decision cycle.

To generate those new capabilities requires personnel, equipment and money. Limited by its budget and a personnel cap, the Army launched its transformation in 2001 and 2002 by cutting personnel and shifting capabilities in order to generate surplus. The infantry battalions’ mortar and pioneer platoons were disbanded and the artillery and the engineer regiments were tasked, in addition to their traditional role, to provide those capabilities to the infantry units should the need arise or a deployment occur. In 2004, the Canadian Army announced the creation of a new tactical unit: the Direct Fire Unit. Under this new concept, three different weapon systems manned by three groups of military personnel coming from different regiments will be amalgamated into what has been known so far as the Lord Starthcona’s armored regiment. Armored soldiers will man the new mobile gun system (MGS – LAV III with a 105 mm gun), infantrymen the TOW, and air defense personnel the ADATS (air defense and anti-armor missile system). The Direct Fire Unit is not only a major improvement in terms of capability and range, but is also a break with the regiments’ organizational rigidity. Thus, for the first time, a
permanent combined-arms unit will be created in the Canadian Army during the fiscal year 2006-2007.15

The Regimental compartmentalization

The regimental system has always been the keystone of the Canadian Army. Despite the emotions and the traditions, its current relevance has to be addressed. After more than a century, the combat arms Regiments of the Canadian Army are still constituted around weapon systems or functions. In garrison, the infantrymen, the tankers, the gunners and the combat engineers live separated from each others. For most of the year, the training cycle of those single-arms units focus at the company level and below. The increased operational tempo and the lack of resources in the last decade, significantly decreased the number of combined-arms exercises at the combat team (reinforced company/squadron) and at the battle group (reinforced battalion) levels.16 Since 1992, combined-arms units or sub-units executed every operational deployment undertaken by the Canadian Army.17 Moreover, those units tasked to be deployed were often the only one getting the limited combined-arms training. Despite the obvious reality of today’s deployments, the Canadian units are still compartmentalized in a garrison-minded attitude based on their weapon systems and regimental traditions. The limited combined-arms exercises and the scarce training budgets create an unhealthy environment, which often leads to a lack of cooperation between the units in garrison. The integration of a new weapon system can also create unnecessary rivalry between the different Regiments. The debate between the infantry and the armor corps about the gun drills and the trade of the crew manning the new LAV-3’s turret and its 25 MM cannon is a prime example of this. Those debates hide a power struggle within the Army between the different branches, a power struggle that has been amplified in the
last 15 years by shrinking budgets and scarce resources. Obviously, the Regiment’s or the branch’s honor and influence cannot have precedence over the efficiency of the Canadian Army as a whole. The announced implementation of the Direct Fire Unit in 2006-2007 is an interesting development. The unit structure in garrison and in the field will be the same and members of different regiments will be working together on a permanent basis. Within the Direct Fire Unit, the dichotomy between the garrison and the field structure will finally be broken and regimental compartmentalization overcome.

The Army of Tomorrow - Permanent Battle Groups?

“Transform into a medium-weight, information-age army. An information-age army is one that, through continuous modernization, remains an agile, lethal, and survivable force. The force should be capable of using the five operational functions of sense, act, command, shield and sustain across the spectrum of conflict.”

While the Army strategy praises the value of network enabled warfare and effects-based operations (EBO), and proclaims that a “medium-weight force needs to fight differently”, it does not recognize that those capabilities, for the most part, reside in the higher formations of the tactical level (Brigades, Divisions and Corps). The Canadian Army has to realize that it can deploy one battle group at a time, two battle groups for a short duration and a single brigade group in case of a major international contingency. Many of the capabilities praised in our doctrine have a limited application for the battle group based Canadian Army. It is essential to have a sound doctrine but it is also necessary to be realist about what the nation can actually field and deploy. Limited ISTAR, PSY OPS, CIMIC and UAV capacities are highly desirable for a battle group. Energy and resources need to be invested in those capabilities since they can improve our tactical effectiveness. However, technology and new capabilities should not be seen
as a panacea. At the battle group level and below, which is the domain of the Canadian Army, the impact of organizational changes is fundamental in improving the overall effectiveness of our units.

The Chief of the Land Staff expressed clearly the criteria and objectives that will drive the creation of the Army of Tomorrow. First it is acknowledged that some units or functions of the current force may “be moved to a lower readiness posture because of the reduced likelihood of their use”. In other words, moved to the reserve. Secondly, the Army of Tomorrow should be able to deploy a battle group within 21 days and a brigade group within 90 days. Thirdly, there is now a clear admittance that the Canadian Army will no longer field certain assets like the tank and medium size artillery and that it will have to rely on Allies to provide us with those resources if needed. Fourthly the Army’s strategy will “avoid artificial constraints and allow the Army to seek its full potential” and finally the force will have to be expeditionary, agile and ready. Permanent battle group size units meet those criteria and therefore are an efficient way to reorganize our Army. The idea of creating permanent battle groups is not new and has been a subject of discussion in the officer’s mess for many years. Lcol Bondy proposed recently the creation of such units. Both for expeditionary or domestic mission, this type of unit will be very stable and it will keep the same personnel together throughout the year thus achieving the Army’s objective of cohesion. Permanent battle groups can also have an impressive level of inherent capabilities, which is in accordance with the objectives of robustness and agility. Finally by being located under the same roof, that kind of unit would be de facto easier and faster to train and deploy, thereby achieving the readiness objective of the Army. The Army has to address the obvious dichotomy between the garrison and operation organizational structures. If the Army really wants to be able to deploy a battle group within 21 days, the way we field those
combined-arms units will have to change. Ad hoc battle groups generate a constant reshuffling of units and sub-units prior training and deployment. One cannot pretend to be able to build cohesive and easily deployable unit just through a few weeks of common training or by the mere fact that you wear the same badge. Real cohesion and esprit de corps develop when you live and train together for months. The Canadian Army’s deployment in the last decade clearly demonstrated that when you are deployed, the differences between the cap badges tend to disappear after a few months. Why not try to achieve this permanently in our garrison and cement the bonds between the soldiers and their leaders before they deploy? Improving cohesion and personnel turnover were among the key recommendations of the official report made after the Somalia scandals in 1993. Permanent battle groups is a strong measure to address that.

The current Army interim model states that “rigid force structures reminiscent of the Cold War are no longer suitable.” This broad policy statement does not go far enough. The Canadian Army omits to address directly the problems generated by our regimental system, our “garrison force structure” and our “specialized units”. When the Army needs flexibility, in other words when units deploy for a real mission, our doctrine and common sense push us to form combined-arms battle groups built around infantry or armored battalions. Those last units can be constituted on a temporary or a permanent basis. In the first place, you can transfer (OPCOM/OPCON) sub-units and sub-sub-units to an infantry battalion or an armored regiment as the Army does today. In the second place, you can maintain a permanent combined-arms unit in which there is little personnel movements. Despite the fact that it announced the creation of its first permanent combined-arms unit, the Direct Fire Unit, the Army seems to be determined to remain in the domain of the temporary combined-arms units which has been the Canadian
model for the last decades. Modularity and cohesive sub-units are still the proposed building blocks suggested for the interim Army. While most Canadian soldiers recognize the importance of developing strong affiliations within the battle group prior to any deployment, the Army is unable to do so because of the nature of our regimental system. As mentioned earlier, most of the training is done at the section, platoon and company levels within single-arm units. Combined-arms training only takes place when personnel are assigned to a combat team or a battle group during brigade group maneuver or prior to an operational deployment. This approach is obsolete and harms cohesion building. Permanent battle-groups should be in charge of all their individual and combined-arms training. The training and deployment of temporary battle groups creates needless movement of personnel, generates unnecessary staff work in various headquarters and does not contribute significantly to improve our overall combined-arms capabilities since most of the training is done within the single-arms units.

Permanent battle groups put at the forefront their most important asset: the soldier. The flexibility needed by the Canadian Army as an institution should not be based on units or sub-units but on our soldiers owning various specialized skills and living in a homogenous entity. The Canadian soldier is well educated, flexible, versatile and highly capable. The Army should tap into those qualities and provide our soldiers with the specialized training they need while maintaining them within the same unit for the longest period possible. Therefore, the basic building block of the Army should not be an infantry or an armor unit to which is added sub-units as the Army has done in the last decades. Instead, the permanent combined-arms unit should be the building block to which is added highly specialized sub-sub units if required by the mission. Assets like the Mobile Gun System (MGS) squadron, the infantry company, the mortar
platoon and the engineer troops will be integral to the permanent battle group. Based on the mission, CIMIC, ISTAR, PSYOPS and UAV sub-sub-units will be made available to the battle group in order to enhance its integral capabilities in terms of command and control, fire and intelligence. Therefore, the core capability of the new battle group will remain centered around its ability to engage the enemy with direct and indirect fires by the means of its permanent members and weapon systems.

Training system

The proposed permanent battle group must be supported by a training system that will produce troops with a strong initial infantry background. The recent experience of the U.S. Army who dismounted artillery units in Iraq and used them as infantrymen right after the end of major combat phase, demonstrates clearly the importance of having infantry skills in today’s battlefield. The shift from combat operations to stability operations can be rapid and both types of operations may have to be executed at the same time by the same personnel. Therefore, battle groups need to be able to execute both type of operations and all the members of the unit should be able to execute effective basic infantry tactics and procedures. Units designed, equipped and trained in garrison for a specific function during ground combat operations may be hard to deploy for stability operations. The addition of an infantry company to the proposed Direct Fire Unit and infantry training for the whole unit could make it as versatile as a typical infantry battle group. The wise decision to buy a single combat vehicle with various specialized versions also reinforces the proposition of adopting a more common training approach. Wherever you serve, a driver or a gunner will use the same platform. Such a shift would take a few years and necessitate a period of transition. However, the long-term advantages on this new
approach in terms of training and personnel management will offset the short-term disadvantages it could create. In brief, this paper advocates the creation of a single combat arms military occupation. A common infantry basic training and a mandatory period of service within one of the four battle groups of our brigade groups will also achieve the objective of maintaining a high level of war fighting spirit. Following that period, specialized training will be offered on the various weapons systems and platforms in the inventory and members will stay in the battle group as infantrymen or specialists or be employed within the combat support and combat service support units of the brigade group. Finally, other members may ask to go on advance training with a view of serving with a CIMIC, an ISTAR or a PSY OPS platoon or company. After a certain period of transition, the system would feed itself on personnel sharing a common background of the combat arms. The U.S. Marines Corps (USMC) adopted a similar infantry centric approach long ago and still emphasizes today “Every Marines is a rifleman”. Not only do all members of the USMC undergo infantry training as recruit, but they also do infantry training on a regular basis. It can argued that the establishment of permanent combined arms battle groups will have a negative impact on the skills proficiency required to do indirect fire or field engineering tasks. Such a statement assumes that the regiment is the guardian of the profession in terms of teaching the basic skills of a specialty while in fact the branches schools execute this role. Reorganized artillery and engineer units will have a role to play in terms of standards and refresher training within a brigade or in support of reserve units. However, those units do not need to be maintained at full strength in order to evaluate and monitor a few specialized sub-units.
Battle group and brigade group structure

The brigade groups will be constituted of a brigade headquarters, four maneuver elements (permanent battle groups), combat support units and a combat service support unit. The four maneuver elements will consist of the Direct Fire Unit battle group, two motorized infantry battle groups and a light infantry battle group. Each of those will have organic field engineer (mobility) and mortar (indirect fire) capabilities. The Direct Fire Unit battle group will gain an infantry company and both motorized infantry battle groups will gain a MGS squadron (Appendix A). Numerous other models and variants can be suggested but the most important point in the proposed model is the permanent nature of the battle group, which will bring cohesion, efficiency and flexibility. Moreover, the Direct Fire Unit and the two motorized infantry battle groups will become square combined-arms units with all the advantages it brings in terms of depth and reserve. The light infantry battle group could also be made square by adding a reservist company. The impact of such a change will have dramatic effects on the artillery and the engineer units. These combat support units would assume the burden of loosing personnel and sub-units in order to field not only the permanent battle group but also the ISTAR, PSY OPS, CIMIC and UAV sub-sub units. The artillery and engineer units’ focus will become twofold. On the one hand, they will support the battle groups in terms of refresher training and standards with a limited amount of regular personnel. On the other hand, they will be ready, at a lower level of readiness, to support the brigade group in their traditional role with a capability mix of regular and reserve personnel. Finally the current lack of equipment within the Canadian Army also pushes us toward this direction. In order to create the Canadian Maneuver Training Center, regular combat units will soon be stripped from LAV and other major combat platforms. In other words, the Canadian Army will not have enough major combat platforms to equip all its
maneuver elements. While a few years ago national training tasks and operational tempo created leadership shortfalls, now equipment will also be at an insufficient level. By assigning a lower level of readiness and training to some units, the Army will partially solve the problem in terms of training, equipment and budget but this will be done at the expense of the long-term combined-arms experience of its members. \(^{33}\) Despite the lack of leadership and equipment, the personnel left behind in the low readiness units still need to be trained. The strong infantry training background of the battle groups will then allow them to revert to inexpensive light infantry training when budget and equipment are scarce.

Permanence and stability

The paramount importance of cohesion at the battle group level in the current transformation process has been accurately identified by Bondy. \(^{34}\) The current Canadian system of tying up personnel to a specific brigade for long periods of time has very positive effects. The regimental system also contributes to build trust and loyalty within the infantry, artillery, engineer and armored units. While the Americans are struggling with a personnel system focusing too much on the individual at the expense of the unit cohesion \(^{35}\), the Canadian Army has difficulties with a personnel system that focus too much on weapon systems based regiments at the expense of the combined-arms units. Long-term service within the same unit has many advantages and has been proposed as a solution to improve U.S Army units cohesion. \(^{36}\) The overall importance of cohesion cannot be underestimated and anyone who served within a motorized infantry battalion can appreciate it. The key here is to extend it to a larger group of military personnel. The current Canadian regimental system has many positive effects, it simply needs to modify its current nature. The combat efficiency of the German Army during the Second World War was
based largely on the fact that units and formation were regionally based and trained. Units were kept together until they were rendered combat ineffective and then, as a cohesive group, they were rotated back to the rear area. There, new recruits were received and trained by the veterans and the unit as a whole was then sent back to the line.\textsuperscript{37} Our current regionally based brigade group structure and our Regiments have similar features. The proposed permanent battle groups will further enhance this level of cohesion. The current Army model of building ad hoc battle group by adding sub-units to a battalion brings us between a individual replacement system and a unit / formation replacement system. The German Army has proved the value of the latter approach on the battlefields of the Second World War\textsuperscript{38} and this is why the Army should aim at permanent battle groups.

The value of the regimental system

“The regimental system tends to perpetuate established procedures, narrow men’s outlooks, and, most significantly, complicate organizational change. These complications arise not only from the natural resistance to disbandment that can be expected from any well-established entity, but also from the practical difficulties encountered in attempting to integrate highly particular groups into other equally particular groups.”\textsuperscript{39}

In order to understand our current regimental system, it is necessary to go back to its origins. At the outset of the First World War, the regimental system allowed soldiers from the same locality and sharing the same language to be recruited, trained and deployed together within a single-arm unit. During the Second World War, the value of close cooperation between armored and infantry units began to be appreciated and temporary combined-arms units were deployed on the battlefield. However, in the meantime the realities for the Canadian Army have changed considerably, forcing us to deploy almost exclusively combined-arms units. The regimental
system needs to adjust to today’s reality in order to maintain its relevance. Fielding permanent battle groups can be done as long as the Army cuts the link between specific weapons systems and the regiment organizational structure. Again, the Army of Tomorrow’s maneuver elements have to be made of men and women sharing a common infantry training and various specialized functions. The name, the regimental affiliation or the number given to those four battle groups should be our last concern. Efficiency and cohesion should be at the forefront of our discussions. A study done recently in Iraq proved conclusively again that soldiers do not fight for a unit or a regiment but for their “buddies”. The personnel attachment to a specific regiment is a learned process inculcated through indoctrination and years of belonging to an organization. The idea that soldiers must “perceive the regiment as their primary group is an invention of the regimental system”. In any case, the regimental system fulfill well the human need of belonging to an organization by providing an organizational structure to which one may link when combat is over. Current reality, efficiency and the need to share a common Canadian military ethos force us to reconsider the place and the role of the regiments within the Canadian Army. Too often it is forgotten that many of our war heroes fought the Second World War and the War of Korea in different Regiments. Those men have roots in different veterans groups and participate in various regimental activities and this should the same for our generation. The Regiments and the Army as a whole have to adopt an inclusive attitude and turn the page on the current regimental rigidity. Contrary to what one may think, our best guides in that process may well be our veterans and the members in the service today will probably be the most important source of friction in this proposed transformation process.
Conclusion

The current debate on the Army transformation is very healthy and has to be elevated to a higher level than regimental badges, mess kits and regimental funds. The Army of Tomorrow and the Army of the Future have to be built with organizational, resource and combat efficiency. The resources constraints will likely remain and organizational improvements will come from within the Army. The proposed transformation acknowledges the value of integrating new capabilities but puts a premium on our most important asset: our men and women in uniform. Changing the way our battle groups are generated will have tremendous impacts on the regimental and the training systems. However, those impacts are minimized when you consider the benefits gained in terms of cohesion, effectiveness and operational capability. The proposed organizational change will generate friction but the Interim and the Army of Tomorrow’s concepts provide us with the appropriate time frame to execute this transition. Branches and regiments have a place within our Army. However, the Army as a whole has to redefine itself in terms of efficiency on the battlefield. A refusal to cut the link between the regiments and specific weapon systems will bring us to the situation experienced by the cavalry and its horses at the beginning of the 20th century. The Army has to adjust its structure to optimize the capabilities of the combined arms units it deploys. Canada in the last decade has almost exclusively deployed ad hoc combined-arms units built around personnel coming from different regiments. Since the Army has expressed its intention of being expeditionary and readily deployable, the way those battle groups are generated has to be adjusted. Permanent combined-arms battle groups are the most efficient and rapidly deployable type of unit that will allow the Canadian Army to meet its commitments.

On top of that, the Canadian Government National Defense White paper has not been reviewed since 1994. Therefore, the Army tries to transform itself without any official national strategic guidance.

Chief of the Land Staff, Canadian Armed Forces, Purpose defines. The Force Employment – Concept for the Army, 42.

A renewal of interest on organizational transformation has been observed recently within the Canadian military community. Three recent articles written by Hunt, Bondy and Bank brought different perspectives on the subject.

In Canadian Army doctrine, a sub-unit is the equivalent of a company and a sub-sub unit is the equivalent of a platoon.

Chief of the Land Staff, Canadian Armed Forces, Advancing with Purpose, The Army Strategy, One Army, One Team, One Vision, 3.

Ibid, 3.

Chief of the Land Staff, Canadian Armed Forces, Army Strategy, May 9th 2002.

Chief of the Land Staff, Canadian Armed Forces, Purpose defines. The Force Employment – Concept for the Army, 1.

Ibid, 12.

Ibid, 11.

If we push the concept of modularity to its extreme, we could even see a battle group built around a headquarters to which we add different sub-units, none of which belonged to that HQ prior the formation of the combined-arms units. While the American Army tries to be modular at the brigade level, we Canadians micromanage it at the company-squadron level.

In Canadian doctrine, a sub-unit is a company size organization and a sub-sub-unit is a platoon size organization.

Mooney, Paul, “Army transformation to begin affecting more units, branches”, Canadian Army News, 1-2

Ibid.

The Canadian Army’s training levels are as follow: level 1 Individual Battle task Standards, level 2 Section, level 3 platoon, level 4 company, level 5 combat team and level 6 battle group.


Chief of the Land Staff, Canadian Armed Forces, Purpose defines. The Force Employment – Concept for the Army, 25.

Chief of the Land Staff, Canadian Armed Forces, Advancing with Purpose, The Army Strategy, One Army, One Team, One Vision.

Ibid, 22

Ibid, 22

Chief of the Land Staff, Canadian Armed Forces, Purpose defines. The Force Employment – Concept for the Army, 26.

Ibid, 8.


Minister of National Defense, Somalia Inquiry Report, Executive Summary, “Suitability and cohesion”.

Chief of the Land Staff, Canadian Armed Forces, Purpose defines. The Force Employment – Concept for the Army, 11.

In the Canadian Army, an artillery and an armored regiment are in fact battalion size units.

Ibid, 11.

Galloway, J., Changing an Army”, Military.com, 3.

Hunt, C, “Beyond the next round: one captain’s views on the Army of Tomorrow”, Canadian Army Journal, 35.

This idea has been introduced in 2004 by lcol Banks in his article: “A comment on “The new regimental system”, Canadian Army Journal, 86.

If by misfortune a young officer serves in a low readiness unit during the course of two posting, we may end up in a few years from now with company and battalion leaders having little if none combined-arms training experience.


Ibid. Lcol Vandergriff proposed that U.S Army units should be kept together for a minimum of 3 years.


Ibid.
41 O’Leary, Michael, “The Regimental System”, *The Regimental Rogue*, 7
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