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ACROSS THE ISLAND

'Siege Of Malpeque' Stories Recalled

By NEIL A. MATHESON

ELSEWHERE ON this page will be found a picture of Giant MacAskill, of Cape Breton fame, with me standing beside him. The giant died many years ago but a life size bust of him is standing on the verandah of the Citadel on Citadel Hill at Halifax.

I have been trying to get this picture for several years now, but this year we had some time before leaving Halifax and Mrs. Matheson took my picture as I stood beside the statue of the giant who was seven feet nine inches and weighed 423 pounds.

(Photo quality poor – unable to scan)

Siege Of Malpeque

THIS WEEK I found in my files an old document prepared by T. Edgar MacNutt, Island military historian, who died several years ago.

Keeping this as brief as possible the document refers back to the 'Siege of Malpeque' and contrasts what really happened with the following highly descriptive report the then Governor, Major General Fanning, sent to his superiors in London, England.

The following is represented as a very short quotation from a dispatch sent by Governor Fanning on September 30, 1797 to His Grace the Duke of Portland, London concerning the incident:

"I immediately resolved on going to Prince Town in person, taking with me McAlpin the Attorney-General, Mr. MacGowan the Deputy Secretary, the sheriff of the Island and some other Civil and Peace officers of the government, with intention that the three Commissioners or delegates should be apprehended, and the rest made to pay their fines, as the most regular and eligible way of enforcing obedience.

I also reflected that if military aid should become necessary, as was generally thought by the manner and tone of resistance, would be the case, to support the Civil authority, in taking up and securing the Delegates and levying the fines incurred by the rest for disobedience of orders when assembled, it might have the best effect on the Public opinion, and be the most prudent method to try the loyalty and Principles of the Independent Volunteer Militia companies on this occasion.

An Armed Detachment

A DETACHMENT of about 30 from some Independent Troops of Militia Light Horse immediately turned out as Volunteers on that service with which, and a Subaltern Command taken from His Majesty's Corps of Island St. John Volunteers. I left Charlotte Town on the morning of the 5th instant accompanied by Civil Officers of the Government aforementioned and a number of the principal Gentlemen in and about Charlotte Town, and arrived at Prince Town, a distance of about 40 miles, at six o'clock in the afternoon, without ever being heard of by the inhabitants, and by the vigilance, and activity of the

Party and measures pursued, the Delegates were apprehended and brought to examination before the magistrates, and two or three of the refractory companies assembled and mustered the next day, who being astonished by the appearance of the unexpected force assembled in support of the Laws of the Island, declared they had been led into error and had been deceived in the meaning of the law, and gave the strongest assurances not only of their sincere contribution for their past misconduct, but also of their ready and willing obedience in future to the Militia Laws.

“These early examples were followed by all the rest of the Companies of the regiment as they came in and were mustered; and it appearing to myself and the Civil and Military officers with me on this service, to whose loyalty, activity and good conduct, as well as to the detachment of the Island St. John’s Corps and Militia Volunteers, too much praise cannot be given, that these people had been misled by some secret Emissaries and unprincipled advocates of mischief,” etc. etc.

Stewart’s Story Different

MAJOR MACNUTT wrote later, Alex Stewart of Lot 18 giving evidence before the Land Commissioners Court in 1860 told an entirely different story of the so called Siege of Malpeque.

Mr. Stewart’s story was in part as follows:

“Governor Fanning issued orders for a Muster of Militia about the year 1802, which order was disregarded by the inhabitants of Malpeque. The Governor being indignant at the disobedience forthright ordered a detachment of soldiers and others to accompany him to Malpeque.

“On his arrival there not a man was to be found; all had fled to the woods. After remaining some days, and threatened what he would do, if he could not take them, the people not making their appearance, he had at last to pledge himself to do them no injury providing they would muster.

Then having been made acquainted with these promises, they immediately came and mustered. The Governor on being asked if they might dismiss, replied that they might go to Hell.

When he returned to Charlottetown he drew up a dispatch representing the whole Island as in a state of rebellion, and that he had besieged Malpeque, the principal stronghold of the rebels, and completely subdued them.

This man made his story really good, for Stewart added that Fanning “at the same time gave a list of the killed and wounded, accompanying it with a draft for not inconsiderable amount to defray expenses of the siege.

“One of the Officers, who was represented as being wounded, but merely got his trousers torn, applied for and received a pension,” the Stewart statement apparently told.

Major MacNutt indicates at the end of his story that it is taken from the Lord Commissioners Report 1860.