

7

A LETTER  
ON THE  
DEFENCE OF CANADA,

TO THE  
HON. SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD, K. C. B. :

BY D. BETHUNE, ESQ.

7

SIR,—As the head of the Government of the Dominion of Canada, I beg leave to address you upon the subject of the Defence of Canada.

Much has been said of late respecting the proper mode of defending Canada. A distinguished officer,—Sir John Michel,—recently in command of Her Majesty's Forces in this Dominion, has recommended that "Montreal, Kingston, and Prescott, should immediately be fortified," "whilst the grand route to the sea, by the Ottawa and French River should, as soon as possible, be undertaken, giving a back-bone of military strength."

The *Volunteer Review*, published at Ottawa, strongly advocates the opening up a line of water-communication from Ottawa to Lake Huron, for the transport of troops. No doubt, in the course of time, it may be desirable to have a canal from Lake Huron to Montreal; but, at present, the means of the Dominion will not warrant any such absurd expenditure of money as that vast work will require. But as a military work of importance to the defence of the country, I beg to express my entire dissent from the view taken of it by Sir John Michel.

My humble opinion is, that Canada must be defended on its frontier; and that the interior line of defence recommended by Sir John Michel, and its other advocates; cannot be of any use, if our frontier be penetrated and held by the enemy, between Montreal and

Kingston, or even above Kingston. The holding Montreal, Prescott, and Kingston alone, would be useless, if the intervening country between those points were undefended; and taken possession of by the enemy.

If, for instance, the enemy crossed Lake St. Louis, or Lake St. Francis, in force, of what use would the Ottawa Canal be?—as that part of it which passes St. Anne or Vaudreuil, would be in possession of the enemy. And from the north shore of Lake St. Francis, what could prevent his marching upon Ottawa, and taking possession of it and the canal there? Of what use would the Ottawa Canal be to Canada, if the country south of it were in possession of the enemy?

It requires no argument to show that the interior communication to Lake Huron, via Ottawa, would be perfectly useless, unless the enemy were prevented from occupying in force our frontier between Prescott and Montreal; and, therefore, that our first duty is so to fortify that frontier as to prevent such occupancy.

As for the plan proposed by the *Volunteer Review*, of sending troops to Lake Huron, via Ottawa and the French River,—it seems to me so utterly absurd, that I am astonished at its recommendation.

If troops are to be sent by the interior, to any point west of Kingston, they can be marched, or conveyed in carriages in summer, or in sleighs in winter, ten or twenty miles from the frontier, to Toronto, much easier than via Ottawa and Lake Huron. In summer, the probability is, that Lake Huron would be commanded by an American fleet. In that case, how are the troops who may, with great difficulty, travel that inland route, and be nearly eaten up by flies of every description, to reach Toronto, from the mouth of French River? In winter, that interior route would be frozen up and impracticable. But it is useless to waste more time upon the consideration of that plan, particularly if the line of communication be broken at any point between Montreal, Prescott, or Cornwall.

It must, therefore, be evident to the most unthinking, that our only security will be in the maintenance of our frontier against any attack that may be made upon it; more particularly, between Montreal and Kingston or Presqu'isle Harbor.

The question then arises, how is that frontier to be defended?

The defence of Montreal is the first question to be considered.

It appears to me, that if a canal be constructed,—as recommended by the Hon. Mr. Young, of Montreal,—between Caughnawaga and the Richelieu or St. John's River, that it would materially aid the defence of Montreal. That canal would not be, less than eighty feet wide at the surface of the water, nor less than eleven feet deep. By erecting earthworks on the east side of it—say every three miles—surrounded by wide ditches having eight or ten feet water in them—in which earthwork an Iron-clad Blockhouse should be erected, say

40 feet by 80—with case-mates at the four corners of the earthworks (also iron-clad) for infantry, armed with short repeating rifles, to destroy any enemy that might gain an entrance inside the earthworks, and by having at least 2 turrets—one at each corner of the work next the canal, armed with powerful Armstrong guns in addition to those in the Blockhouse and on the works, I have no doubt the line of canal could be defended against any enemy that might attempt to cross it. In addition to these works, a few iron-clad gunboats could easily prevent the enemy from passing in force to the east side of the canal, during the time navigation is open.

In winter, the enemy might, in small numbers, steal across the canal,—although a high embankment on the east side, formed of the earth taken from the canal, would render that a matter of great difficulty,—as he would be under the fire of the works I have mentioned, and otherwise exposed to attack. I omit the particulars of the defences behind the embankment. And as the snow, in that part of Canada, commences to fall about the latter part of November, and is generally from two to three feet deep during the winter months, the enemy would find it very difficult to maintain himself during the winter, east of the canal, and between that and the fortifications on the south side of the St. Lawrence, opposite Montreal, and those along the river St. John or Richelieu.

The same system of works should be erected on the north side of the River St. John or Richelieu as far down as its mouth at Sorel; and if properly constructed, they can be defended by less than 200 men each, against any force that can be brought against them. Those works would cost about £7,500 each.

My plan for the defence of Montreal—south of the St. Lawrence—would be, to carry a wide and deep ditch from about four miles west of the city, at least two miles towards the Richelieu,—and eastward at least two miles east of the Island of St. Helen. That ditch could be supplied with water either from the Richelieu or from the Lachine Rapids.

A high embankment should be thrown up within the ditch—or on the side to be defended—and Iron clad Block-houses erected every mile round the whole work—say for 10 miles. In rear of the block-houses, another embankment should be thrown up and there should be a ditch between the embankments—so that the enemy passing from one embankment to the other would have to cross the inner ditch and be exposed to the fire of the guns in the block-houses,—as well as to that of the infantry in the works. A third embankment should be thrown up and stockaded, with a ditch as before stated behind the second, and a work erected in rear of the block-houses—or, a second range of block-houses iron-clad with plates only two inches thick—to sweep the space between the embankments. Those works

would effectually prevent the passage of an enemy. Those block-houses and works would cost about £150,000. I need not say that I would also use turrets at proper points for the protection of the works, nor need I enter into further particulars, in this paper, of these defensive works.

During the spring and summer, and until the ice closes Lakes St. Louis and St. Francis, a couple of gunboats on each lake would prevent the enemy from landing on the north side of those lakes.

During the winter, and after the ice is strong enough to bear artillery, the enemy must be prevented from landing by the same system already recommended for the defence of the canal. About four or five such works between Lachine and the Point south-east of Vaudrouil, a distance of some thirteen miles,—with the two gunboats properly moored,—would prevent the enemy from crossing Lake St. Louis on the ice.

From Coteau Landing to Cornwall—say 30 miles—7 block-houses and 2 gunboats would be sufficient.

From above Cornwall to near Prescott—say 40 miles—8 block-houses. The block-houses between Lachine and Prescott would not require to be heavily plated in front, as they would not be exposed to the fire of very heavy guns; and on the other three sides, the plates need not be more than two inches thick. One-inch plates would be sufficient for the roofs. They would cost about £3,000 each.

Between Prescott and Brockville—12 miles—4 blockhouses.

Between Brockville and Kingston—say 45 miles—10 block-houses, which would cost about £7,500 each, or. £108,000

Two works would be necessary at the foot of Long Island, opposite Kingston, to command the American channel west of French Creek or Clayton, and prevent a fleet from passing down the St. Lawrence, £10,000 each, . . .	20,000
One at the foot of the Island—Four Mile Point—to command the Batteaux Channel and that north of it towards Snake Island, . . .	10,000
One at the Brother's Island, west of Kingston, . . .	7,500
One at Snake Island, . . .	7,500
Two at the Upper Gap, . . .	15,000
These works would prevent a fleet from entering Kingston Harbor, and the cost of all of the works above-named would be about, . . .	475,000
Two block-houses at the Carrying-Race, . . .	10,000
Two at Presqu'isle, . . .	15,000
One at Colbourne—on the Lake Shore, . . .	5,000
One at Grafton, . . .	5,000
One between Grafton and Cobourg, . . .	5,000

Two at Cobourg, . . . . .	10,000
Two at Port Hope, . . . . .	10,000
Two between Port Hope and Newcastle, . . . . .	10,000
One at Bowmanville, . . . . .	5,000
Two at Whitby and Oshawa, . . . . .	10,000
Two between Whitby and Port Union, . . . . .	10,000
One at lower entrance to Toronto Harbor, . . . . .	5,000
One work at upper entrance, . . . . .	8,000
One west of the so-called Fort, . . . . .	5,000
One on the east side of Humber Bay, . . . . .	5,000
Barracks and works at Toronto, . . . . .	25,000
One west side of Humber Bay—(Merigoll's Point), . . . . .	5,000
One at Oakville, . . . . .	5,000
Two between Oakville and Wellington Square, . . . . .	10,000
One about four miles south—on Lake Shore, . . . . .	5,000
Three between that and Port Dalhousie, . . . . .	15,000
Two at Port Dalhousie, . . . . .	10,000
One between that and Niagara, . . . . .	5,000
Works at Niagara, . . . . .	10,000
One block-house opposite Youngstown, . . . . .	5,000
One at Queenston, . . . . .	5,000
One at Suspension Bridge, . . . . .	5,000
One opposite upper end of Navy Island, . . . . .	5,000
One at Waterloo, . . . . .	5,000
One opposite Buffalo—Fort Erie, . . . . .	10,000
One at Point Albino, . . . . .	5,000
Two at Port Colbourne, . . . . .	10,000
One at Grand River, . . . . .	5,000
One at Port Dover, . . . . .	5,000
One at Port Stanley, . . . . .	5,000
One at Rondeau, . . . . .	7,500
One at Amherstburgh, . . . . .	7,500
One at Windsor, opposite Detroit, . . . . .	10,000
One at mouth of the Thames, . . . . .	5,000
Three between that and Sarnia, . . . . .	15,000
One at Goderich, . . . . .	7,500
Four between Goderich and Collingwood, . . . . .	20,000
One at Collingwood, . . . . .	7,500
One at Penetanguishene, . . . . .	7,500
Two at St. Catherines, . . . . .	10,000
Four works on Mountain between St. Catherines and Hamilton, . . . . .	20,000
Eighteen between St. Hilaire and Quebec,—£5,000 each, . . . . .	90,000
	£965,500

The whole cost of these works—not including earthworks, which may be thrown up by the Militia—for the defence of Montreal and the frontier from Québec to Sarnia and round Lake Huron to Pene-tanguishine, would be about one million pounds.

The cost of the proposed Ottawa Canal to the mouth of French River on Lake Huron, would not be less than Forty Millions of Dollars, and when completed, would be useless, unless we had the command of Lake Huron, for the purpose of sending troops and stores to Toronto from Montreal.

Supposing the cost of the works I have mentioned to be—including earthworks—five times the amount I have named, or, five million pounds—they would not cost more than one-half of what the useless—~~for defensive purposes~~—Ottawa Canal would cost;—and we should have works that no enemy would think of attacking. The works at Fort Erie and Windsor would command Buffalo and Detroit, so that those large cities would be at the mercy of our guns. Those of Fort Erie would also command the entrance to the Erie Canal and Buffalo Harbor.

It was suggested by the Adjutant-General of Militia, that we should have an entrenched camp at Toronto and London—upon which the Militia and our regular troops could fall back. I do not understand whether Col. Macdougall intended that those entrenched camps should be capable of resisting an army of 100,000 or 150,000 men. If so, and they were large enough to contain 25,000 or 30,000 men, they would only be an injury instead of a benefit to us, in a defensive point of view; for they would withdraw that large force from important points of defence. If he meant that there should merely be, at those camps, barrack accommodation for our troops which might be required at exposed points, then they would be of service; although I think those barracks should be nearer the probable scene of action—say at Thorold, instead of London; and unless those entrenched camps (if intended to resist an attack) were shell proof, I fear the men within them would fare badly, when attacked by a large artillery force.—Shells are rather awkward customers. But I must not bear too heavily upon our Adjutant-General—who doubtless is a very good officer in his way, but not an engineer,—and forbear further remarks upon his recommendation to the Government.

It will, undoubtedly, be necessary to have Barrack accommodation for a considerable force at Toronto, Kingston, and near Prescott; also at Thorold, Chatham, and one or two other points.

The Canal from Caughnawaga to the Richelieu River will enable us to command that River, and even Lake Champlain, if necessary,

If the St. Lawrence Canals were enlarged so as to admit the passage of vessels upwards of 250 feet long and 45 feet beam, not drawing over 10½ feet water. The Canal between Lake St. Louis and Lake St. Francis should be on the North shore—from Vaudreuil to Coteau Landing, as the Beauharnois Canal cannot be easily defended.

I have gone at greater length than may be necessary into the cost of the defence of that part of Canada lying between Quebec and Sarina, for the purpose of shewing that our frontier can be defended, and at no great cost. The number of men required will not be great—nearly all the works can be defended by less than 200 men each.

I have supposed that 140 earthworks and blockhouses—besides the works at Montreal—will be sufficient to defend our frontier, and that 200 men will be sufficient for each, making the whole number required for these works—28,000. But supposing the number of works should be increased to 200, we could certainly spare 40,000 men to occupy them. According to my plan, the work opposite Montreal, for its defence, would not require more than 8,000 or 10,000 men to defend them against a force of 250,000 men, or more.

It is probable that additional works will be required at Kingston—as I do not think much of the present works there; but these additional works will not be expensive. Additional works will also be required East and West of Montreal, on the North shore, and on Nun's Island.

With about 150,000 Militia and Volunteers and 20,000 British troops, and with the fortifications I have suggested, I have no doubt that the Provinces of Quebec and Ontario can easily be defended against more than half a million of men.

As for the line of railway to New Brunswick, I have no doubt ~~that~~ can also be easily defended—even if we were obliged to have an iron-clad block-house every three miles, where the road passes near the American frontier. No attack could be made in that quarter, through some forty miles of woods, without our having ample notice of it; and it would require a stronger force of artillery, and heavier guns to batter down our iron-clad block-houses than could be brought against them through such a wilderness.

I take it for granted that our Government will, without any delay, commence the enlargement of the St. Lawrence Canals, so as to admit the passage of proper sized *iron clad* gunboats (those we have at present being almost useless); and that the Home Government will;

either at our expense or their own, furnish us with all the iron-clads we may reasonably require; and which should not draw over 10½ or 11 feet of water,

From what I have said, it will be apparent, that at least thirty thousand of our Volunteers or Militia should be well drilled artillery men, a force which has hitherto been much neglected in Canada.

Trusting that I shall be pardoned for venturing to trespass so long upon your attention,—as the subject matter of this letter is of the greatest importance to the people of this Dominion,

I beg to subscribe myself,

Sir,

Your obedient servant,

**D. BETHUNE.**

Port Hope, October 28, 1867.

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