



C I T I Z E N S   A N D   S O L D I E R S

THE DEFENCE OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA 1836 - 1901

by

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PREFACE

The work deals with the problem of defence in a society of free settlers who had, by the middle of the nineteenth century, accepted the principle of universal military service. The demand for a defence force first arose from the necessity to maintain law and order. As the century progressed, South Australians became concerned with the safety of their littoral districts. They realised that the Royal Navy would not always be in a position to prevent lone raiders from attacking Adelaide and its port facilities, although the capability of the Royal Navy to intercept large invasion forces was never doubted and was, in fact, the basic premise on which all defence appreciations were based. Consequently, coastal fortifications like Fort Glanville and Fort Largs in South Australia, were intended exclusively to counteract those raiders who might escape the vigilance of the Royal Navy, while the federal forts on Thursday Island and at King George Sound were designed to facilitate the Royal Navy's task of protecting Imperial communications with the Australian continent.

With the expansion of the Empire and an increase in the colonising activities of non-English powers in the Pacific, there developed in the mid-eighties a dual loyalty in the Australian colonies. The colonists' initial loyalty had been towards their own hearths and homes. Had England then become involved in a major conflagration, some of the colonies would have doubtless remained neutral. The neutralist, and at

times even separatist, sentiment was quite strong in South Australia; the Paradise of Dissent would only be safe if the Colony kept aloof from Empire defence. However, the bonds of kinship and, more importantly, the realisation that Empire defence had tangible advantages, fostered a loyalty to Empire which expressed itself, first in offers, and subsequently in actual military assistance to England, and also in a growing inclination to participate in Imperial defence generally.

The organisation of South Australia's defence effort throughout the century continuously faced two issues. One issue concerned the type of military force best suited to the Colony. Should this Colony rely on British regulars, or on a compulsorily enrolled militia; on a partially paid volunteer force or on a voluntarily enlisted force receiving no pay whatsoever? The other issue concerned the strategic framework of the defence effort. Should the Colony concentrate on a mobile force, or should the major effort be expended on fixed defences and on their logical extension, that is, on naval forces protecting the approaches to Adelaide. The question of the type of force became a political issue, particularly after the withdrawal of British regular troops. The Colony's more radical elements supported the principle of universal service, but treated a wholly voluntary (unpaid) force with a certain amount of political suspicion, while the professional soldiers largely rejected the idea of an unpaid volunteer force for its inherent military ineffectiveness. Unpaid volunteering did find favour with the well-to-do classes, anxious to emulate the relatively successful volunteer movement in England, drawn from strata similar to their own. Eventually,

the Colony created a force of citizen soldiers, without the traditional labels of militia men and volunteers, soldiers who could be compulsorily enlisted and who were paid for the time spent on training.

The emphasis on fixed defences in the seventies and eighties resulted in the construction of the forts at Glanville and at Largs, with H.M.C.S. Protector providing the flexibility necessary to prevent an enemy from landing out of the range of the fort. As naval gunnery developed, the value of fixed defences decreased, and the Colony strove towards improving her mobile defence forces. As a test of defence preparedness, the 1885 crisis showed up serious shortcomings. Thereafter, continuous improvements, aided by overseas military experts, the Colonial Defence Committee and the joint deliberations of military and naval colonial commandants, led to a defence capability which enabled the Colony, within one month, to raise, equip and train a contingent for the defence of Empire in South Africa at the turn of the century.

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