

Honorary Appointments

Regimental Honorary Appointments

“Honorary rank is granted to a person who has rendered distinguished service to the Canadian Forces or who, from an educational or administrative point of view, is likely to promote the general efficiency of the Canadian Forces.”

While this definition is true, an honorary position within a Regiment means much more. Honorary appointments have been an important part of an army units Regimental Family as from early as 1755, when the Earl of Loudoun was appointed Colonel-in-Chief of the 62nd Regiment of Foot, a new four battalion Regiment. There are different types of Honorary appointments in the Canadian Army: Colonel-in-Chief, Honorary Colonel or Colonel of the Regiment and Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel. Sir Robert Borden described the practice of appointing Honoraries as “of greatest advantage to the Militia to be able to enlist the interest and sympathy of gentleman of position and wealth by connecting them to Regiments”^[1], a sentiment that remains true today. The Honoraries are seen to be the guardian of Regimental traditions and history, promoting the Regiment’s identity and ethos and being an advisor to the Commanding Officer on virtually all issues excluding operations.



Surely one of the highest honours a Regiment can receive is the appointment of a Colonel-in-Chief, and all Regiments in the Commonwealth pride themselves in being “the favourite”^[2] of the Colonel-in-Chief. The appointment of a member of the Royal Family to a regiment as a Colonel-in-Chief is for life, and demands fierce loyalty from its soldiers to their appointed sovereign. By no means a day-to-day commitment to the Regiment on the part of the Colonel-in-Chief, none-the-less, there is a bond between the two that fosters pride and esprit de corps amongst soldiers, and The Royal Winnipeg Rifles are always ready to answer the request of the current Colonel-in-Chief, Charles, The Prince of Wales.

The Canadian tradition of appointing Honoraries to units originated with the

British military but has only been in practice in Canada for a little over a century, the first Honorary Colonel appointment being Lieutenant-Colonel the Honourable J.M. Gibson, appointed Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel to the 13th Battalion of Infantry in 1895.

The first Honorary appointment bestowed upon The Royal Winnipeg Rifles was that of Honorary Colonel, His Excellency, The Right Honourable Sir Gilbert John Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound, 4th Earl of Minto, KG, GCSI, GCMG, PC, in 1899. Besides his involvement in the Northwest Rebellion, Lord Minto was Governor General of Canada from 1898 to 1904, and Viceroy and Governor General to India (1905 to 1910). The Earl of Minto was a popular figure in Canada, having several streets and towns named in his honour – it is no small coincidence that the current home of The Royal Winnipeg Rifles, Minto Armouries, is also named after The Earl of Minto, erected in the year of his death.

The importance of the Honorary Colonels to a Regiment cannot be underestimated; a historian of the Canadian Scottish Regiment described it as such:

“It is unfortunate but true that the part played by an Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel or Colonel within a Regiment is generally not known outside the ranks of the senior officers. Nevertheless, it is an important one and, for a Militia Regiment, such as the Canadian Scottish, it can mean a great deal of difference to the spirit and efficiency of the unit. Financially, his help is always welcome; do not assume, however, that honorary ranks existed merely as a means to raise money for the Regiment. Invariably, the Honorary Colonel was a man with considerable influence in the community and the province, and there were many ways in which he could further the interests of the Regiment with which the Commanding Officer of the Battalion could not cope. In a sense, the Honorary Lieutenant-Colonels acted as liaison officers between the Regiment and important political, social and financial groups on a municipal, provincial, or at times, national level”.

The role of Reserve Honorary Colonels and Honorary Lieutenant-Colonels described above has continued since the war. More than one Reserve Regiment has probably owed its survival to one of its honorary appointees. In 1964, for example, the Suttie Commission recommended the disbandment of two Montreal regiments, the Victoria Rifles and Le Régiment de Maisonneuve. The Honorary Colonel of the latter unit was a judge, and he pulled all the strings he could to save his regiment, with the result that it is still on the Order of Battle, whereas the Victoria Rifles have since been disbanded. Honorary Colonels and Honorary Lieutenant-Colonels of the Reserve have developed a role that is at least as much pragmatic as spiritual.

The related pages within this section introduce the current [Colonel-in-Chief](#), [Honorary Colonel](#) and [Honorary Lieutenant-Colonel](#) of The Royal Winnipeg Rifles, as well as all past appointees.