Legion of Frontiersmen

Legion of Frontiersmen, Edmonton, Alberta, 1915.

A Recruiting Poster, London.
The contact was Erskine Childers, author of The Riddle Of The Sands, who was executed by firing squad in Beggar's Bush Barracks, Dublin, on 24 November 1922 after a military trial. His son became the 4th President of Ireland.

The Legion of Frontiersmen is a paramilitary group formed in Britain in 1905 by Roger Pocock, a former constable with the North-West Mounted Police and Boer War veteran. Prompted by fears of an impending invasion of Britain and the Empire, the organisation was founded as a field intelligence corps on a romanticised conception of the "frontier" and imperial idealism.
Headquartered in London, branches of the Legion of Frontiersmen were formed throughout the empire to prepare patriots for war and to foster vigilance in peacetime. Despite persistent efforts, the Legion never achieved much official recognition.

One of the Legion’s earliest members was HRH Prince Louis of Battenberg, whose grand-daughter, Countess Mountbatten of Burma, is the current Patron.

Frontiersmen were among the very first to go into battle against Germany in 1914. The British Government initially declined to allow the Legion to form its own unit within the British Army, so, in order to get into action against the Germans the members of H Troop of the Legion of Frontiersmen joined the Belgian Army instead. These Frontiersmen are recorded as having fought with great distinction alongside their Belgian comrades as part of the 3rd Lancers as early as October 1914.

In 1915 the War Office in London finally authorized the formation of a battalion of Frontiersmen within the British Army, and this became the 25th (Service) Battalion, Royal Fusiliers (Frontiersmen), who took part in the hard-fought East Africa campaign, 1915-17, winning many medals and awards, including a Victoria Cross. In recognition of the role played by the Frontiersmen battalion in Africa, the Royal Fusiliers gained the following battle honours: “Kilimanjaro”, “Behobeho”, “Nyangao” and “East Africa 1915-17”. At one point they even captured an Imperial German battle flag which is on display at the Royal Fusiliers Museum.

Casualties in the First World War devastated the Legion of Frontiersmen, and except for a brief resurgence in the interwar period, a series of schisms and sectarianism prevented attempts to reinvigorate the movement. In the late 1930s, the Legion of Frontiersmen in Canada was formally affiliated with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, but after a schism split within the Canadian Frontiersmen, the RCMP severed formal ties. Various Legion of Frontiersmen groups still exist throughout the Commonwealth, but as a whole, it has been unable to define its niche in the post-imperial world.

Colonel Daniel Patrick Driscoll DSO, Vanity Fair caricature 15 February 1911. Driscoll later raised the 25th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers from Frontiersmen.
During the First World War, the Legion of Frontiersmen helped raise and fill the ranks of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, the 19th Alberta Dragoons, the 49th Battalion - Canadian Expeditionary Force (today's Loyal Edmonton Regiment), the 210th Battalion (Frontiersmen), - Canadian Expeditionary Force, the 25th (Frontiersmen) Battalion, Royal Fusiliers, and the Newfoundland Regiment.

The earliest official description of an authorized uniform for a Canadian unit is noted in *The Frontiersman*, (December 1912, page 223) describing Vernon and Okanagan Command's uniform as follows: “Shirt Tunic – To be of substantial material, colour navy blue; leather buttons; nickel shoulder chains. Breeches or (Trousers) – Any shade of khaki. Footwear – Brown leather; any combination that affords cover as high as the calves. Headdress – Straight brim Stetson, any shade of brown, with leather band and regimental crest and monogram. Accessories – Brown leather fringed gauntlets; silk blue and white “bird's-eye” neckerchief; regulation LF holster.”

The Current dress uniform is generally centred around a cavalry blues theme - complete with shoulder chains.

Different branches of the legion, in different parts of the Commonwealth award medals within their units and occasionally to external branches, commands or units. These medals are not part of any government honours system and should not be treated or claimed as any kind of official military decoration. These medals are much like those of the Freemasons, valued only by members. The Australian Division awards a decoration called the "Australian Medal of Merit" (internally used post nominal letters AMM) that has caused controversy where it has been implied by an occasional recipient that it is a government-endorsed, official medal.