

History and Role of the IG

by

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Within the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery there exists a group of officers known as Instructors in Gunnery. To become IGs, these officers complete a lengthy course covering a wide range of artillery topics. As a result of their extensive training, they possess a sound technical and tactical knowledge, as well as an understanding of the artillery system as a whole. What is more, they are expert instructors, grasping how individual and collective training must be carried out to produce fully capable and efficient artillery units and sub-units. While other arms have capable instructors and knowledgeable officers, the IG is part of an institution unique to the Artillery. IGs have been incredibly valuable throughout the history of the RCA, ensuring uniformity and proficiency across the Regiment, and maintaining the abilities and effectiveness of units during times of conflict and peace.

The tradition of IGs in the RCA can be traced back to the Royal Regiment of Artillery (RA). Artillery was certainly a more technical arm than infantry and cavalry, wherein fortitude and athleticism alone could not lead to success. The British understood that the effective use of artillery required a solid technical foundation, and The Royal Military Academy at Woolwich was founded in 1741 for the sole purpose of training Artillery and Engineer Cadets.¹ Napoleon's guns were renowned for their effectiveness, and there is little doubt that his École de Tir contributed to this success. In comparison, the British Artillery at Waterloo suffered from a "want of uniformity"² according to contemporary observers. In response, a group of senior RA officers founded the Royal Artillery Institution in 1838 as a forum for discussion and study regarding their arm. This was arguably the first concrete step towards higher education in gunnery and the modern IG.

While the Royal Artillery Institution was the result of efforts within the regiment, the Crimean War prompted action from above as well. In 1859, the War Office formed the School of Gunnery in Shoeburyness, having an instructional staff of 7 Officers and 14 NCOs³. "Instructor in Gunnery" was a title used to describe these positions, not a title signifying a qualification as it is today. I can find no evidence that these officers had formal training analogous to the modern IG course; I suspect their expertise was a product of self-directed study and experience. Gunnery Instructors and Assistant Instructors in Gunnery appear to have had a role outside of the school, based on the 1864 Standing Orders for the Royal Regiment of Artillery. These referred to Officers and NCOs making up part of a Brigade's staff, responsible to the brigade commander that training was carried out "In strict accordance with Gunnery School Regulations."⁴ The IG exercised influence over the individual and collective training of gunners, having as a goal the standardization and effectiveness of the Regiment.

Meanwhile, gunnery in Canada was beginning to benefit from events in England. Officers having been trained in the constantly-improving RA system were then stationed in Canada, where they instructed local militia batteries used to supplement the British regular gunners in Canada.⁵ In 1847, for example, the Toronto Independent Company of Artillery requested to conduct a practice shoot under

¹ Shelford Bidwell, *Gunners at War* p.51

² Letters of Sir A.S. Fraser in LCol Henry Hime, *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery 1815-1853*, p.8

³ Col J. R. J. Jocelyn, *The History of the Royal Artillery (Crimean Period)*, p.100

⁴ Horse Guards, *Standing orders, Dress Regulations and Trumpet and Bugle Sounds for the Royal Regiment of Artillery*, p.12

⁵ Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, *The Gunners of Canada* Vol. 1p.60

the supervision of an officer of the Royal Artillery.⁶ This was perhaps the first practice camp to be observed by a qualified officer, beginning a tradition which would prove very important for maintaining the effectiveness of the RCA. Canada assumed responsibility for her own defence in 1871 and formed "A" and "B" batteries in Kingston and Quebec. The Canadian Government understood (as the British had in 1741) that the technical nature of Artillery demanded a professional instructional cadre. This would take the form of two schools of gunnery associated with these permanent batteries, whose purpose was to train the militia artillery⁷. The gunnery instructors there were experienced officers and NCOs seconded from the RA.⁸

Under the instructors at the Schools of Gunnery in Canada, the training of the militia artillery proceeded with direction and purpose. Individual training was offered in the form of courses held at the School, and instructors were provided to organize and oversee annual practice camps for batteries. These camps were associated with competitions between batteries and prizes offered by the Dominion Artillery Association. Instructors and senior officers from the Schools would judge batteries on such diverse criteria as the condition of their equipment, knowledge of their members, and execution of their drills⁹. Through these competitions, instructors in gunnery provided a chance for batteries to show their proficiency, and the knowledge and skills to excel. There was a marked improvement in the performance of militia batteries in these competitions during the 1890's, as noted by one LCol Drury, a Chief Instructor at the School¹⁰. A contemporary observer noted, "The Canadian Artillery could never have done the job it did [in the Great War] without the wonderful pre-war training we had under the officers and Gunnery Instructors of the R.C.H.A."¹¹ There is no doubt that the instructors at the Schools of Artillery shaped the Canadian Artillery into a more effective force.

Following the First World War, the first IGs graduated from the Gunnery Staff Course in Larkhill. Their role was to ensure the standardization of artillery throughout the Royal Regiment, to be stationed throughout the Regiment to, "propagate the gospel according to Larkhill."¹² Historian Shelford Bidwell's dramatic comparison to early missionaries gives some indication of the zeal with which IGs carried out their role and the precise adherence to doctrine they demanded. The IG would do this by observing batteries on exercise and watching carefully for any deficiencies. In the 1920's and 30's, Canadian officers from the Schools of Artillery were sent to take the Long Gunnery Staff Course, and returned to spread their knowledge through the Permanent Force and Militia. By the 1930's, the RCA unmistakably felt Larkhill's influence. Under pressure from Canadian IGs trained in Larkhill, the exercises of Canadian militia batteries became much more realistic. For example, targets used to train leading up to the Second World War were less clearly marked and more closely reflected those to be encountered in battle.¹³ Thanks to the efforts of the IGs, lessons learned in the First World War were not entirely lost by the beginning of the second. This demonstrates the importance of the IG in maintaining the abilities of the regiment during peace, a challenge faced by all arms and armies.

⁶ *Ibid*, p.78

⁷ *Ibid*, p.99

⁸ Steele in Maj. G.D. Mitchell *et al.*, *RCHA - The Right of the Line*. p.7

⁹ Nicholson, Vol. 1 p.135

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.143

¹¹ Letter Dr. Ross in Nicholson, Vol. 1 p.175

¹² Nicholson, Vol. 1 p.54

¹³ Mitchell *et al.* p.61

During the Second World War, IGs and AIGs were generally kept out of operations, owing to their value as instructors. Canadian IGs continued to work in Canada, providing training at camps established across the country. More Instructors were needed, however, and a condensed War Gunnery Staff Course was offered at Larkill. These instructors found no shortage of work when the Canadian School of Artillery (Overseas) opened. Over 4500 officers and men were trained by the instructors there over the course of the war. IGs (British and Canadian) were also involved in the extensive collective training that took over the English countryside during the war (especially important when shoots took place close to human habitation¹⁴). The presence of IGs at an exercise served as an independent check of effectiveness, to the dismay of any officer whose unit's performance received a bad IG report¹⁵. This ensured that standards which were established in individual training were maintained in the Regiment.

Demobilization followed the end of the war, and brought its own challenges for the IGs of the RCA. Many IGs took their release, and the Gunnery Staff Course went back to its 13-Month pre-war format. This produced an immediate shortage of IGs in Canada, and meant that training more would take time. Nevertheless, those IGs who remained were instrumental in retaining the lessons learned in six years of war. As early as spring of 1946, IGs and AIGs were in Petawawa conducting courses for qualified artillery officers. These served to ensure that officers trained in wartime received the necessary instruction to function as officers in the Active Force during peacetime.¹⁶ There were too few IGs to allow their frequent engagement in unit training, however. The only serious involvement of an IG outside of the RCSA was then-Capt. WW Turner's preparing of 2RCHA for Korea. He designed a complete pre-deployment training regime and instructed the instructors who would deliver it. Rather than deploying with them, however, he was recalled to the School to resume his duties as an instructor there¹⁷. The need for more officers with the IG qualification was apparent.

In 1952, the Artillery Staff Course (the course which produced IGs) was offered for the first time in Canada¹⁸. This course took place in Shilo – the new home station of the RCA and location of the Royal Canadian School of Artillery. Soon, there were enough IGs and AIGs that some could be spared for several weeks each year to observe a unit on exercise. In the 1960's, these IG teams (consisting of one IG and several AIGs) would adopt the practice of producing an IG report: a formal report detailing the conduct of the exercise and the lessons that should be taken from it. This was a powerful tool for learning within the Regiment. Since the report was forwarded to the Director of Artillery and the Commandant of the RCSA, it also helped produce a 'big picture' of the effectiveness of the RCA, and maintain uniformity within the Regiment.

There is no doubt that the IG was powerful in his role as author of an IG report, but the aim of these reports was improvement, not evaluation. The IG team came at the request of a CO, and the IG worked closely with the CO to plan how he would observe the Regiment and to provide feedback on what he saw. To this end, the IG would typically conduct daily de-briefs on how the exercise had gone that day and what the next day's focus should be¹⁹. The IG was responsible to see that the maximum

¹⁴ LCol (ret'd) C Baker, Telephone Conversation 19 Dec 09

¹⁵ George C Blackburn, *Where the Hell Are the Guns?: A Soldier's View of the Anxious Years, 1939-44* p.134

¹⁶ Mitchell *et al.* p.157

¹⁷ BGen (ret'd) WW Turner, Telephone conversation 21 Dec 09

¹⁸ Col (ret'd) J Beer, Telephone conversation 17 Dec 09

¹⁹ LCol (ret'd) B Reid, Telephone conversation 07 Dec 09

training value was derived from every round fired, and took this obligation seriously²⁰. In the 1970's and 1980's, COs came under increasing pressure to have IG teams visit frequently. Concurrently, a movement within the RCA pushed to transform the IG report into a formal evaluation²¹. Ultimately, this change did not occur, and the IG report remained a tool for providing constructive feedback, not a unit-level test.

In addition to producing IG reports, IGs and AIGs ensured that skills (from individual competence with equipment to division-level staff duties) were retained that could not easily be kept otherwise. This was vital in times of shortage, as maintaining a body of experts who "understood the overall artillery system" was an effective way of storing a vast body of knowledge in a limited number of personnel²². LCol Reid recounts one such example where, upon his return to the School of Artillery as CIG, he was the only non-locating IG capable of operating the sound-ranging equipment in use²³. With the loss of the Anti Aircraft Artillery in Canada, knowledge in this field was retained by appointing field IGs as subject matter experts in Air Defence²⁴. This would suffice to keep some knowledge of this specialty alive. These IGs proved invaluable when Canada decided to build a Low Level Air Defence capability, until the first AD IG course was conducted in 1983. In this way, IGs acted as part of the Regiment's institutional memory, and gave it the ability to adapt in a changing environment.

One cannot fail to mention the inestimable contribution of IGs as instructors within the School of Artillery. There is no doubt that having instructors with training as extensive as that of the IG has benefits. If nothing else, there should be more uniformity between instructors who have taken the IG course. Instructors coming directly from different regiments may exhibit small differences in practice which the IG course would smooth over. Naturally, AIGs were equally important in delivering good instruction at the School. While I have made occasional reference to the value AIGs and the role of expert NCOs in training, their history has not been adequately covered. It should be understood, however, that when one writes of the role of IGs, one is also speaking of the AIGs who work closely with them. The knowledge of AIGs has always complemented that of IGs, and allowed IGs to make the contribution to the Regiment I have written about.

Throughout the history of the RCA, and even before its founding, IGs have been important to the Artillery of Canada. They have provided the regiment with a method of internal standardization, and ensured that training is carried out effectively. IGs have also acted as a repository of knowledge that can be called upon to develop new capabilities or revive old ones. There can be no doubt that the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery is better off for the continued presence of IGs.

²⁰ LCol (ret'd) M Walker, Email 27 Dec 09

²¹ LCol (ret'd) R Wilson, Email 10 Jan 10

²² LCol (ret'd) JB Dick, Email 28 Dec 09

²³ LCol (ret'd) B Reid

²⁴ LCol (ret'd) R Wilson