

## The Officers and Gunners of A Battery (Part 2)

About half of the original contingent of A Battery came from the Kingston Field Battery. It started as the Volunteer Militia Field Battery of Artillery in 1856. The militia renamed it the Kingston Field Battery in 1894, then the 32nd Battery, CFA in 1920, which changed names again in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1954, they joined with the 60th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, RCA. A significant portion came from the Toronto Field Battery. There had been batteries of artillery in the Toronto region during the War of 1812. They established the Volunteer Incorporated Artillery Company in 1813, which continued into the Rebellion of 1837-38. With the Militia Act of 1855, the name changed to the Toronto Field Battery. In 1895, they switched to the 9th Field Battery. The 11th Field Regiment of Guelph also provided several new gunners. In 1857, pre-existing military units became the 1st Wellington Battalion. In 1866, the Guelph Garrison Battery became part of No. 1. Company of the 30th Wellington Battalion. In 1871, it became independent and renamed the Wellington Field Battery.

Many of the early gunners in A Battery would go on to have distinguished careers. The first Adjutant, Captain William Henry Cotton, would be the Militia's Inspector-General from 1912 to 1914. Gunner Henry Walters was one of the first to join A Battery and became a professor at Morrin College in Quebec. Another original member of A Battery was Josiah G. Holmes, who later founded C Battery in BC. He went on to have a notable and distinguished military career. Also, among the early A Battery Gunners was Major D. T. Irwin, who provided leadership and training at the school. Irwin would succeed French and become the commanding officer of A Battery in 1873.

Samuel B. Steele was the only original non-officer recruit that became a Great Gunner. Sam Steele was born in Ontario in 1849 and enlisted in the Simcoe Militia, joined the Wolseley expedition, and then enlisted in A Battery in 1871. He was a physically fit, husky, six-footer and quick to master gunnery science. In 1873, Steele left A Battery and joined the NWMP as the third man to enlist. He participated in the Northwest Rebellion and organized a mounted force called the Steele Scouts under Major-General Strange. He gained the title "Smooth Bore Steele" from his drilling days on the 9 Pounder SM at A Battery. He led the Yukon detachment during the Klondike Gold Rush and commanded the Strathcona's Horse during the Boer War. The RCA Museum has the original Nominal Role of A Battery. Sam Steele and his brother, Richard, signed with A Battery on 3 November 1871.

By Andrew Oakden, Director of the RCA Museum



*Canadian Militia with 9 Pounder RML, 1890s.*

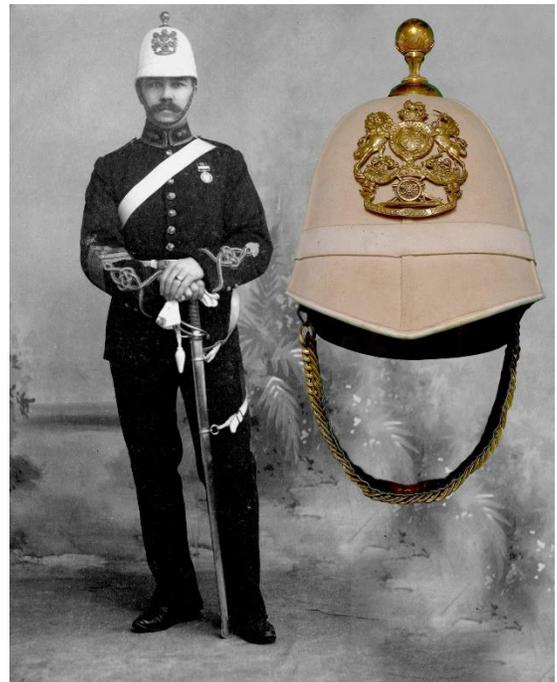


*A photo of Colonel D. T. Irwin.*



*A photo of MGen Sir S. B. Steele.*

The first soldier to sign the A Battery Nominal Role was Sergeant-Major John Mortimer on 25 October 1871. Mortimer went on to be the chief assistant instructor and Sergeant Major at A Battery. He came from Shoeburyness, England and was the first British instructor of Armstrong guns. After 22 years of service with the British Artillery followed by compulsory retirement, he immigrated to Canada and enlisted in the Red River Force, then enrolling in A Battery. Many of the 37 ex-British soldiers had completed their maximum 22 years of service before enlisting with the active Canadian militia. A Battery had many first-class instructors, such as John Mortimer. He gained his experience in the British Army and then passed this experience to A Battery's active militia. The recruits would take this knowledge back to militia units across Canada. The schools of gunnery provided the framework for men such as Sergeant-Major John Mortimer to pass on his wealth of British military experience to Canadian Gunners. Mortimer certainly deserves an honourable mention.



*A 1871 RCA uniform with Coat of Arms.*

It took roughly three months for both batteries to get up to strength. In March 1872, Kingston had one Captain, three Lieutenants, one assistant Surgeon, seven Sergeants, four Corporals, four Bombardiers, three Trumpeters, and 110 Gunners quartered in the "Tete-du-Pont" Barracks, for a total of 133 officers and men, not including Lt-Col French. All the officers and men belonged to various militia corps and were attached to A Battery for instruction or education. They gave instruction based on the rank in which they joined from their batteries. They trained gunners to complete all the required duties within their allotted positions. Of note, the Toronto detachment generally gets lost in the discussion about A and B Batteries. A Battery also provided a party to Toronto. These soldiers were permanent and full-time soldiers in Toronto. The initial force included 1 Lieutenant, 1 Sergeant, 1 Corporal, 1 Bombardier, 1 Trumpeter, and twenty Gunners.



*A photo of A Battery with Winter Carriage in Kingston, 1887.*

A Battery progressed quickly due to the strong leadership and the high quality of the officers and men. From a report dated 10 January 1872, Lt-Col French wrote on A and B Batteries, "from what I have seen; I feel assured that their formation marks a distinct era in the history of the Canadian Artillery." He went on to state that each officer or gunner through training can "learn his duties in a thorough manner, by joining for a long or short period, and at whatever time of year may be most convenient for him." He reported that the conduct of his men was generally exemplary. In 1874, non-commissioned ranks started to receive longer set periods of service with A Battery, for up to 3-years of service, with possible renewals of service. As time went by, they added more permanent staff at A Battery.

By Andrew Oakden, Director of the RCA Museum

In 1871, the Canadians wore almost the same uniform as the departed British Royal Artillery. One exception was that the Canadians removed the word UBIQUE from their Coat of Arms. UBIQUE was not worn on the Arms of Canadian Gunners in 1871 because they had not earned the right to wear it. The militia displayed Arms following successive honours and distinctions bestowed upon them first by King William IV in 1832. Batteries of artillery raised in the Province of Canada in 1855 and by A and B Batteries in 1871 wore the British Arms, except the word CANADA replaced the battle honours UBIQUE. In 1925, King George V, to recognize and honour the Canadian Artillery's substantial contribution during WW1, granted usage of the battle honours UBIQUE. While becoming more ubiquitous, the Canadian Artillery added the motto UBIQUE to their Arms in 1926.



*A photo of the Canadian Field Artillery using a captured German howitzer at Vimy Ridge, 1917.*



*A photo of A Battery, RCHA, in Renfrew, Ontario, dated 3 June 1907.*

The Canadian militia designed A Battery based on British Artillery principles and expectations, and it quickly took shape. The school's primary purpose was to train the officers and men and then transfer the skillset to active militia units across Canada. The officers and men of A Battery were seasoned active militia personnel from across Ontario. At least 25% had experience in the British Royal Artillery. Many undoubtedly led fascinating and remarkable lives. Originally, gunners signed up for a year of service, and some stayed for many years. What is more, Canadian Gunners earned the right to wear UBIQUE through their participation and sacrifice in WW1, and since then, they have worn the

motto with pride. The formation of A and B Batteries and the recruitment, instruction, and return of officers and men to their original units made Canada's Artillery ubiquitous.