

1-20-2012

## John Baillie Turner and the Ottawa Volunteer Field Battery

Hugh A. Halliday

---

### Recommended Citation

Halliday, Hugh A. (1997) "John Baillie Turner and the Ottawa Volunteer Field Battery," *Canadian Military History*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 2.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh/vol6/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Canadian Military History by an authorized administrator of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact [scholarscommons@wlu.ca](mailto:scholarscommons@wlu.ca).

# John Baillie Turner and the Ottawa Volunteer Field Battery

**Hugh A. Halliday**

On 19 May 1855, Royal Assent was given to a new Militia Act, passed by the Legislature of the United Canadas. The statute represented both continuity and radical change in local military organization. Hitherto the province had relied heavily on British garrisons to deter American expansion. Previous Militia Acts had defined colonial forces in terms of the Sedentary Militia, a cumbersome body which had only one defined task - to assemble before the various regimental commanders once a year. In times of crisis (as in 1837-38) selected units had been mobilized or recruited from the mass of citizens, but no attempt had been made to organize a militia that trained or functioned between musters.

The Militia Act of 1855 continued the Sedentary Militia but provided for the formation of Volunteer Companies in various parts of the province. One of these was to be a Field Battery at Ottawa. The unit which came out of this (perpetuated today as the Bytown Gunners) owed much to a driving individual only recently arrived in town - John Baillie Turner.

Little is known of Turner's early life. He was born in Devon about 1804 and subsequently claimed to have served in the Devonshire Yeomanry. He subsequently joined Delacey Evans' mercenary brigade fighting in Spain's Carlist Wars of the 1830s. He was later described as having rendered "distinguished services," but in what capacity is not known; he may have been a veterinary Non-Commissioned Officer.'

Turner came to Canada about 1842, possibly as a veterinary surgeon with the 7th Hussars at St. Jean, Quebec. He subsequently moved to Montreal where he founded a short-lived newspaper, the *Morning Chronicle*. He secured a commission in the Montreal Dragoons. Steeped in military lore, Turner appears to have carried a duelling challenge on behalf of another

veteran from Spain, John Richardson. For a time he was also Deputy Grand Master of the Montreal Lodge, Orange Order but was expelled from that body on 26 March 1846 following accusations of embezzling Lodge funds. Turner denied these charges, and several of his fellow Lodge members also thought his expulsion to be unjust. It is notable that the controversy did not seem to follow him in his subsequent career.<sup>2</sup>

A Tory by inclination, Turner sympathized with those who supported the Annexation Manifesto and was outraged when the government revoked Militia commissions held by officers who had signed it. He was even more disgusted when authorities appeared bent on sniffing out others who might have extreme Tory views. In protest he resigned his own commission in January 1850.<sup>3</sup> He moved to Bytown (soon to be renamed Ottawa) about 1852.

Turner maintained close ties with the professional military as it existed in Ottawa - the staff of the Ordnance Department who administered property associated with the Rideau Canal and a group of Enrolled Pensioners who constituted the Ottawa garrison in the early 1850s. When word of Militia reforms began circulating in 1854 (a response to the reduction of the British garrisons during the Crimean War), Turner took an immediate interest. He was also more favourable to the government when it granted an amnesty to those officers who had been stripped of their commissions in 1849.

Turner took up the matter of an Ottawa unit in a letter to the Adjutant General dated 27 December 1854. He began by stating that several local folk had been urging him to undertake the formation of an artillery unit; chief among these was a Mr. James Forsythe of the Ordnance Department and formerly an NCO with the Royal Artillery. He went on to describe what he



*The Ottawa battery wore, from 1856 to at least 1863, a uniform that was quite distinctive from the other batteries. It was the uniform of the Royal Horse Artillery. The Ottawa battery was reported in blue uniforms with scarlet facings in the Quarterly Returns from October 1856. More details were given in an 1862 report: "Cloth blue, facings scarlet, lace yellow - Horse Artillery busbies - permitted especially for this corps by Sir Edmund Head. Notes: Our men do not wear coats, but round jackets laced across the front with yellow braid..." (NAC RG9, 1C8, vol. 4). The plate shows an officer and a trooper of the Royal Horse Artillery in the uniform introduced in 1855 which the Ottawa battery sought to emulate.*

*(Print after R.J. McDonald.  
Coll. & photo: René Chartrand)*

Frederick de Rottenburg, once more urging formation of a battery with himself in command. Again he displayed no modesty in describing his qualifications:

I am myself well acquainted with Field Battery drill, and with the science of projectiles, having gone to Woolwich on purpose to learn the drill, evolutions, etc., when Adjutant of the South Devon yeomanry, to which a half-battery of 12-pounder howitzers was attached.

Turner stated that he had chosen potential officers - Alfred F. Forrest, Charles Edward Aumond, and Charles Henry Carrière. "Mr. Forrest and Mr. Aumond are both excellent swordsman; Mr. Forrest is an excellent mathematician, and understands the theory of projectiles very well." These individuals would, in fact, give him some difficulties, but one person recommended would indeed be valuable to Turner and the new battery:

I would also recommend Mr. James Forsyth, formerly Sergeant Major in the Royal Artillery, to be the permanent Sergeant Major. Mr. Forsyth is a Clerk employed by the Board of Ordnance, in the prime of life, and a very respectable man.

Turner recognized the need to balance populations within the unit (although he subsequently failed to achieve that balance). In his letter of August 17th he observed:

As this city has a population nearly divided between the English and French races, and as many of the most active and intelligent among the young mechanics who will volunteer are French Canadians, I thought it right to submit to you the names of two French Canadian

imagined such a battery would need - four guns, one Sergeant Major, three Sergeants, three Corporals, three Bombardiers, two Trumpeters, one Farrier, one Collar Maker, one Wheelwright, 31 Drivers, four spare span horses, four Officers' Servants, two spare Drivers, 28 Gunners, and ten spare Gunners - 94 men in all! He assumed the guns would be nine-pounders, "as no one in his senses would think of sending 6's to cope with the Yankees 9, now universally used by them." These, he felt, would need 60 draught and riding horses; he was confident they could be obtained locally. The men would be armed with carbines "and do duty as Infantry on occasion." Turner had no doubts about his ability to form and command such a unit - "I know all the drill and detail of the Field Battery service guns well" - and urged that formation of the company, and his command of it, be gazetted at the earliest possible moment.

Nothing was done, however, until the Militia Act had been passed and new Adjutant Generals appointed to administer it. Turner was off the mark quickly. On 17 August 1855 he wrote the new Adjutant General of Militia, Colonel George

gentlemen as subalterns, both of them of high standing in society here.

Finally, Turner showed he had given much thought to the accoutrements of the unit:

The men will willingly find their own uniforms if not too expensive, and under officers whom they like. If nothing is to be fixed by authority, will you allow me to suggest, in accordance with the wish of the other gentlemen, and some of the men, that as have a simple round jacket, with a red collar and cuffs, braided with black, as simple and not expensive, and as would also prefer the fur head dress of the Horse Artillery; it is not warmer in summer than a chako. I am making a water colour drawing of the proposed uniform, which I will send you in a few days.<sup>4</sup>

On 14 September 1855, Lieutenant-Colonel Roderick Matheson, hitherto commanding officer of the 1st Regiment of Lanark Militia, was promoted to Colonel and given charge of Militia District No. 1 in Upper Canada, an area that included Ottawa. A Militia General Order dated 27 September authorized formation of "one Field Battery, to be styled the Volunteer Militia Field Battery of Ottawa" and appointed as its Captain "J.B. Turner, Esquire, late Captain of the Montreal Cavalry." Turner had his unit and command and immediately set about organizing the unit. His correspondence was vigorous and abundant, showing the challenges and problems confronting a serious-minded militia officer of the period. Not the least of these was Turner's immediate superior, Colonel Matheson.

As a politician and Sedentary Militia officer of long standing, Matheson was adept at juggling provincial interests with local politics. His military prowess may have been another matter. Captain Turner, after conferring with Matheson while organizing the Ottawa volunteer companies, wrote of the old soldier, "...he knows nothing of 'modern' military managements, and listens to every blockhead that likes to talk to him."<sup>5</sup> On another occasion, when discussing the formation of Rifle Companies in Ottawa, Turner wrote of his superior:

*Trooper and officer, Royal Horse Artillery. While the basic pattern of uniform was the same for all ranks, the officers' were more elaborate with gold lace instead of yellow.*

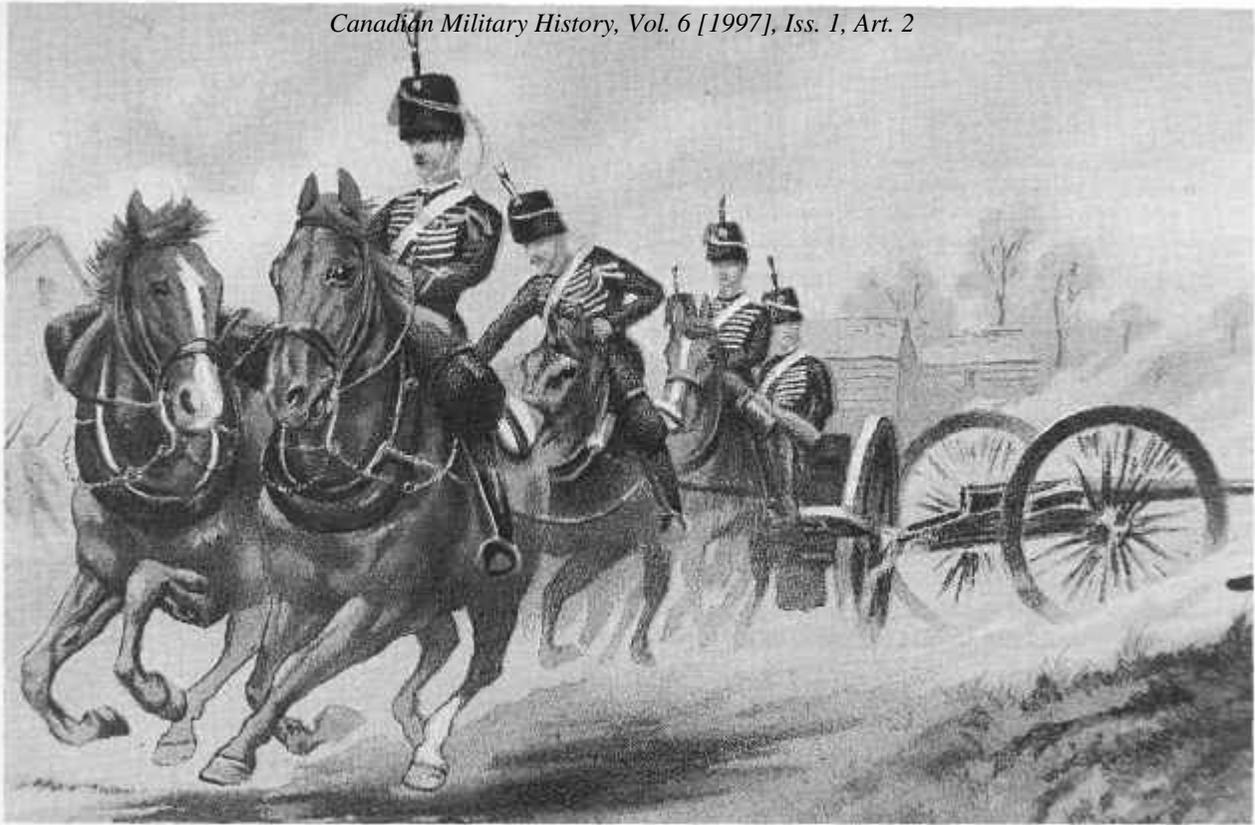
*(Print after P. W. Reynolds.  
Coll. & photo: René Chartrand)*

I have seen Colonel Matheson of Division No. 1 and from his conversation he appears quite ready to recommend almost anyone - the fact is, with all due deference to the old gentleman, his views are very like himself, behind die times and rather shady.<sup>6</sup>

Turner had three concerns - men, accommodation and guns. There appears to have been no difficulty in recruiting for the unit, and on November 14th four additional officers were appointed to assist him - Alfred G. Forrest and Charles Edward Aumond (First Lieutenants), Robert Farley (Second Lieutenant) and Dr. Edward van Cortland (Surgeon). On 6 December 1855 a Militia General Order placed Farley in one of the First Lieutenant spots, replacing Aumond "whose appointment has not taken place." On 12 January 1856, Alexander Workman was appointed Second Lieutenant in the unit.

Behind these shuffles lay a complex set of negotiations which underlined the difficulties of soldiering in Ottawa, as well as problems in relations between Matheson and Turner. All parties were trying to strike a balance among





*Royal Horse Artillery in full dress with gun. The Ottawa Battery would have looked somewhat the same when moving its guns.*

*(Coll. & photo: René Chartrand)*

Ottawa factions - English, French, Irish Protestant and Irish Catholic. Matheson was particularly anxious that the junior officers should have influence in the community - but from Perth he was poorly placed to judge which people had greater or lesser weight. Turner had originally recommended two Francophones to be officers - Aumond and Charles H. Carrière; when Farley applied for a commission, Turner forwarded the request to Headquarters without comment. Matheson was lukewarm to Turner's first Francophone choice - Aumond - and favoured Carrière, whom he had met on a steamboat. It would seem that Farley was substituted for Carrière when misgivings were expressed about excessive Francophone representation, but whether this change was made upon the insistence of Turner, Matheson, or someone in the office of the Adjutant General is unclear. The original appointment of Farley to a rank junior to that of Aumond created bitter controversy which ended only with Aumond's removal from the unit.

During the affair Turner himself had to give up on Aumond under pressure from his own unit; his explanation illustrates the balancing act he was required to perform:

I am sorry to say, that the appointment of young Aumond will not do; I suppose I must have bungled in my letter, but I never intended Aumond to be above Farley, who is 35 years old, and a magistrate. Farley declines to serve, unless put in his right place, and last night, at a muster of the men, more than forty of them stated respectfully that they would not sign the muster roll if Mr. Aumond was appointed an officer. I had no idea that the prejudice against him was so strong; it is not religion because they all like Farley, who is a Roman Catholic; it is entirely his youth, and boyish appearance; my men are almost all steady, quiet mechanics and farmers, almost all of them 25 years of age, and they do not like to be commanded by a lad of 18. I and the Sergeant Major reasoned with them, but it was of no use, and it is quite clear to me, that unless his commission is cancelled, I shall lose all my best men, and several pairs of horses; I thought he would have had some influence among his countrymen, but he has only brought a couple of men and two pair of horses... I like the lad very much personally, and he is a clever, active [illegible] fellow, but still if such a prejudice exists against him, as absolutely to break up the corps, I suppose my prepossession in his favour must give way to the good of the service.<sup>7</sup>

Over the next few weeks Turner tried to reconcile all parties to the original appointments, but as of 28 November he found the men still opposed to Aumond's appointment, refusing to sign the muster roll if the young Lieutenant remained in

place. "I mustered nearly all of them last night, and did all I could, but I might as well have talked to one of the guns," wrote Turner. On 17 December 1855, the captain found himself virtually impaled on the horns of his dilemma:

Since I wrote to you last, the men have to a great extent become reconciled to Mr. Aumond; he has paid great attention to the drill, and Mr. Forrest tells me that since I have been laid up, he has taken great pains. Whether he will act as 2nd Lieutenant or not, I do not know, but I will send for him today and find out. I have certainly found out that Volunteers are not like regulars - What between Mr. Farley, who won't attend drill til he is gazetted in his *right place* and Mr. Aumond who will attend because he insists that he is in his right place, I am at my wits end.<sup>8</sup>

In the end, Aumond chose to back out - whether gracefully or not one cannot tell - and Farley was appointed in his place. The business of easing out Aumond was bad enough; Matheson had complicated it by assuring Carrière of a commission in the Field Battery. By then, Turner had become cool to the candidate; no French Canadian gunners or drivers had joined the Company, and its commander saw no point in seeking a Francophone officer when other qualified candidates were available. When Carrière's commission failed to materialize, both Carrière and Matheson were offended. On the other hand, Matheson tended to blame Turner for the confusion and ill-will generated during the selection of officers - and Turner may indeed have slipped up in offering First Lieutenants' commissions too widely at the outset.

Turner's second concern was accommodation for his unit. The Royal Engineers and a company of Enrolled Pensioners held the two most obvious sites - Barracks Hill and the Commissariat Building beside the Rideau Canal. The latter was the most inviting; on 8 November Turner inspected the premises, accompanied by his Sergeant Major, James Forsyth.<sup>9</sup> He duly reported that extensive repairs and modifications were needed - new flooring, modified doors and sills to permit passage of guns, removal of some partitions, construction of a proper harness room, exterior hitching posts for an estimated 62 horses, construction of a small inside stable, minor inside repairs, plus a room that permitted up to 20 men to drill inside during inclement weather.<sup>10</sup>

The need for proper equipment was paramount. Turner had inherited an array of equipment from earlier military units, including two iron six-pounder guns which were used to fire salutes during local rejoicing at the news of the fall of Sebastopol. With an eye on the coming season, he hoped that new guns would be delivered with sleighs rather than wheels. His horses would come from local sources; most would belong to the gunners enlisting. Turner went so far as to compare Vienna prices for clothing with those in London, but in this field he was most concerned that the unit secure good winter coats and hats; other matters of dress could wait until spring.<sup>11</sup>

For Turner the unit truly began coming together on 12 November 1855, when the first of his brass six-pounders arrived by train from Montreal. The men struggled to move their new equipment a mile from the station (then located in New Edinburgh) to the Commissariat Building. Although delighted to have received some hardware, Turner was not happy with its condition. The carriages were damaged, and in a letter to de Rottenburg, the captain complained:

The Quebec and Montreal people have had the pick of everything. The Quebec people have actually taken sheepskins enough for every one of their drivers, 16, while I am now wanting even for officers. There is but one set of officers' horse furniture complete out of five. The howitzer has been sent without a single round of ammunition, shot, shell or case, and is therefore [not] very useful. For the three guns they have sent 138 round shot and six case - no shells, no fuses, no shell implements. There are no entrenching tools, so that we could not level a hillock if we wanted. No carbines have been sent, nor pouches; no spurs for the driver; and the swords and sword belts are of the time of the Peninsula.

If the Battery is to be effective it must be provided with what is necessary, in implements and ammunition, and I am one of those queer constituted people that very quickly gets discouraged if I cannot see things right. The packed battery was ready for us, so the men tell me who came up with it, when they had an order to unpack it, and only bring the skeleton. Are we to have sleighs? Without them we cannot take out the guns for practice in winter, with shot. No powder has been sent up....<sup>12</sup>

Turner was still unhappy on 22 November when he wrote again to de Rottenburg, declaring



*Officers of the Royal Horse Artillery in undress uniform, c. 1860.*

*(Coll. & photo: René Chartrand)*

that he had not yet received gun sleighs and was thus unable to conduct practice shoots. "I understand that the Montreal and Quebec batteries have been supplied with winter carriages, and I know that there are plenty in the stores," he wrote. There was still no ammunition for the howitzer and not enough for the other guns. Turner wanted gun sleighs (four) and ammunition sleighs (eight); he needed equipment to hitch horses to his guns; he sought carbines and pouches, lifting jacks, axes, entrenching tools, buckets, kettles, additional ammunition with fuzes, tools, a trumpet, a bugle, even a spirit level. He was also looking for kit for his men: knapsacks, mess tins, haversacks.<sup>13</sup> On 28 November he wrote once more, this time to announce happily that almost everything he needed had now arrived; the most notable exceptions were spurs and proper sleighs. He had been shipped enough harness oil and axle grease for a year, and had even received fur, cloth and buttons for uniforms.<sup>14</sup>

With equipment in hand, Turner and his officers pressed on with training. Most of this was conducted in the Commissariat Building, but the men also went through sword drill in an area set aside for them in the city Market Building. The crews were also carrying out regular gun drills, and on 21 December Turner wrote that it was his intention to conduct a first "shoot" on Christmas Day, with additional "shoots" in early January. He evidently followed

through, for on December 31st he wrote again, detailing the first exercise conducted with two guns at an improvised range near the Chaudière Falls, using 12-foot targets the men had dragged onto the Ottawa River ice. The guns were awkward to move and lay - they still had wheels rather than sleigh mounts - but the results were gratifying. The gunners fired sixteen rounds at their targets, 450 yards distant. Most missed to the left or right, but six rounds hit the target, including two perfect Bullseyes. The Ottawa Volunteer Militia Artillery Company was well launched.<sup>15</sup>

Turner's efforts in pulling the unit together was duly recognized; on 20 November 1856 he was promoted to Major. It may have been some consolation for the company's nagging problems; following a "shoot" in January 1857 he reported defective ammunition and continuing difficulties with wheeled guns in the snow. An unexpected thaw early in 1858 resulted in flooding in the Commissariat Building. In March 1858 he received sleighs for his guns and promptly marched the unit nine miles to Aylmer for a "shoot." Again, he was plagued by faulty ammunition, and the gun sleighs began coming apart during firing. Turner suspected they had been manufactured by a contractor who was cutting corners.<sup>16</sup>

Major Turner was undoubtedly the most thoroughly professional officer among the Ottawa

Valley units. His interest extended to establishing a short-lived journal, the *Canada Military Gazette*, which appeared in 1857. He also formed a band with brass instruments from Paris, and attempted (unsuccessfully) to have a music teacher commissioned in the Sedentary Militia so as to secure his services for free. He was distressed when the Adjutant General proposed reducing the number of days spent in training, not merely because it would reduce practices and sap enthusiasm, but also because it would reduce the mens' pay (which was based on daily attendance at drills). Since the gunners and teamsters had to pay for replacement clothing - and the kit was becoming threadbare with use - there would be every incentive for men to leave the unit. Of his own pay and that of his officers, Turner would good-naturedly remark, "... a few dollars more or less is nothing, because our pay is not half as much as we spend in treating our men to beer."<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the Field Battery, Ottawa was to have two Rifle (infantry) Companies. These began to take shape with a Militia General Order dated 3 April 1856. Each was to consist of 63 privates. Captain George Patterson, Lieutenant James Fraser and Ensign Francis Abbott were appointed to the 1st Company (Patterson and Fraser had held commissions in the 4th Carleton). The 2nd Company was to be a Francophone unit; Captain Joseph B. Turgeon was to command; there was an ironic twist to this, for Turgeon had reputedly boasted of having been a rebel in the troubles of 1837-38.<sup>18</sup> Additional appointments fleshed out both companies; Charles H. Carrière, who had been passed over in appointments to the Volunteer Artillery Company, was commissioned as a Lieutenant in the 2nd Rifle Company on 2 May 1856. Efforts to raise additional units in neighbouring rural areas came to naught, but on 19 June 1861 a third Rifle Company was organized in Ottawa, commanded by Captain William B. Gallwey. This had been due partly to the new commander's initiative, and partly to events in the United States.<sup>19</sup>

Major Turner kept a watchful eye on the Rifle Companies and his letters to the Adjutant General throw light on their evolution. Late in 1856 he reported that cloth had arrived to make uniforms for the soldiers. The officers in Turgeon's company had already purchased

uniforms from London sources - "very handsome" - but Patterson and his junior officers had made no effort to have themselves kitted. "Turgeon may do something" wrote Turner, "but I am certain that Patterson's corps will be a dead failure."<sup>20</sup> He was wrong; Patterson's rifle company was duly kitted and continued to exist, but in May 1858, following joint exercises involving the Artillery and Rifle Companies, Turner was moved to write:

Patterson's Company is woefully deficient in the skirmishing part of the business, not appearing to have the slightest idea of what it is *intended for*, and Patterson *won't be* taught; he is the most pig-headed man I ever met with.<sup>21</sup>

Another unit contemplated for Ottawa was a detachment of Volunteer Lancers, authorized by a Militia General Order dated 3 September 1857. The unit was to have one officer and 26 men. John Yielding, an ensign in the 3rd Russell (Sedentary Militia), was to command the troop with the rank of Lieutenant, although Major Turner of the Field Battery was to exercise overall control. By the following May, Turner was utterly disillusioned with the unit and declined further responsibility for it. Writing to de Rottenburg, he declared:

I will have nothing more to do with the Lancer Detachment, so long as Yielding is its Lieutenant.. He pays no attention to it whatever; is never here, won't come near me, and the money which was advanced has been re-claimed by the men.<sup>22</sup>

The lancer unit died; when Ottawa was visited by the Prince of Wales in September 1860, a mounted escort was provided by the Durham Light Cavalry of Port Hope.<sup>23</sup>

The mid-century militia was prominent in society matters. Turner ensured that his was a happy unit by organizing battery parties; on 11 July 1859, for example, the officers and men, probably with families, took the train to Prescott and subsequently had a picnic and steamer excursion to Ogdensburg. A similar Field Battery picnic was held around Hull in August 1861. Annual military balls began about 1860 with the Artillery Company taking the organizing lead.<sup>24</sup>

The artillery was clearly the strongest part of the Ottawa Volunteer forces. On 22 March 1861 a Militia General Order authorized

formation of a Volunteer Foot Artillery Company in the city, to be attached to the Ottawa Field Battery. Captain Alfred G. Forrest was detached from the senior unit to command its junior partner.<sup>25</sup>

As the most active of the Volunteer commanders, Turner was involved occasionally in providing services for Imperial troops. Thus, in December 1861 he placed advertisements in Ottawa papers soliciting 150 draught horses for Royal Artillery use; owners of suitable animals were to notify Turner; an officer of the RA was to visit Ottawa, presumably to inspect, select and purchase horses, on 13 January 1862. It is not known how successful this appeal was, but Turner's participation suggests that he was respected outside the narrow community of the Ottawa military.<sup>26</sup> Further proof of this came in February 1862 when Militia General Orders announced his promotion to Lieutenant-Colonel, with effect from 20 November 1861.

The field battery regularly drilled and exercised. When the Ottawa River froze, it hauled its guns onto the ice, conducting "shot and shell practice." The general populace turned out to watch, and the newspapers carried detailed accounts of the gunners' results, down to the last shell, whether on or off target, wide or short.<sup>27</sup>



Such attention had its drawbacks. A public practice drew swarms of youngsters. Turner recognized the potential dangers; he sent men out to keep spectators clear of the intended range and repeatedly issued warnings that stray ordnance spotted by children should not be touched, or if handled should be brought back to the Battery. In March 1863, however, a boy retrieved an unexploded shell on the Ottawa River ice and took it back to a city blacksmith. The tradesman (whose ignorance must have been appalling) put the shell in his fire and began applying his bellows. Seconds later a tremendous explosion wrecked the shop; miraculously, none of the five people present were injured.

There followed one of those curious literary duels that characterized 19th century journalism. The Ottawa *Citizen*, dubbing Turner "the Battery-man," accused him of negligence; Turner furiously defended himself against the charge in letters printed in the Ottawa *Union*; neither paper printed the opponent's case, and anyone trying to make sense of the exchange would have to buy both papers. Among other things he declared that the children who frequented these "shoots" had often been warned not to touch unexploded ordnance but that the urchins repeatedly picked up fragments and shot for sale to local ironmongers.

The issue was hotly argued. Unhappily, early in the correspondence, Turner expressed himself poorly, writing that "The boys who will run about whenever the battery is at practice have been warned over and over again not to touch any shells that they may pick up, but to bring them to the Battery." The *Citizen* seized upon this poor turn of phrase and repeatedly mocked Turner for supposedly believing that people could pick things up without touching them. His contorted prose (rare for Turner) was repeatedly quoted back, fully italicised to demonstrate its contradictions. The paper ignored his later clarification; he had meant that people finding shells should not tamper with them but bring them to the gunners (itself rather dubious advice).

The *Citizen* continued to heap abuse and ridicule on the "Battery-man." Turner did not help his case when he attempted heavy-handed

T.A. Gemmill, *Ottawa Artillery, in undress uniform, 1868.*

(NAC C5373)

*The old Commissariat Building, which stood on the Rideau Canal where it meets the Ottawa River, served as the headquarters for the Ottawa Volunteer Field Battery. In the background are the Parliament Buildings under construction, 1862.*

(N/AC PAC 10008)

humour; at the close of one reasoned letter he declared that it would be a Godsend if the *Citizen's* correspondent were "blown into little bits." The paper responded with mock indignation and outright insults; a "letter to the editor" hinted that Turner was into the bottle and described him as a failed journalist. The irate officer threatened to sue for libel, but tacitly acknowledged the *Citizen's* point when, on 10 April he sent troops out to retrieve unexploded shells from a further "shoot," even though he had previously declared they should not have to do so. A junior artillery officer, Lieutenant W.D. Ward, attempted to defend his commander; the *Citizen* derisively dismissed him as one of Turner's "satellites," even criticising the younger man's grammar and composition. The affair had fizzled out by the end of April. Turner was probably the worse for wear. He had left off signing his own name to letters printed in the *Union*; these were now printed as coming from "An Observer" - a device which gave the *Citizen* further grounds to mock the senior officer.<sup>28</sup>

On rare occasions Militia units were called out in aid of the civil power. On 19 December 1857, the mayor of Ottawa requested that all three Volunteer companies stand by during a particularly tense provincial election. Unfortunately, no copies of Ottawa newspapers survive from that period, but it would seem that the move was precautionary rather than in response to any specific disturbance. A Militia General Order dated 9 January 1858 praised the units for their "good conduct, steadiness and forbearance."<sup>29</sup>

A more serious affray occurred in May 1863. Two groups were struggling for control of the Ottawa and Prescott Railway; riots erupted, property seized, and special constables called to protect company buildings. On 13 May the Mayor was persuaded to mobilize the Volunteer Militia. All five units then based in the city - the Field Battery, Foot Artillery Company, and three



Rifle Companies - appeared about 9 pm and took control of the station with its adjacent yards and warehouse. Matters cooled down thereafter.<sup>30</sup>

The Volunteer Militia Companies were regular participants at patriotic celebrations, though they were not central to those events, and things did not always go smoothly. When Ottawa celebrated the Queen's Birthday in 1860, the day's highlights were a steamer excursion to Grenville and an evening torchlight parade. All the same, the militia had its part to play:

The military display took place on the western margin of the canal where, at about eleven o'clock, a large body of the active and sedentary militia mustered. At twelve the Field Battery fired a grand salute, and the Rifle Corps fired a feu-de-joie...

We regret to learn the celebration was not altogether unattended with accident. One of the gunners had a narrow escape when firing the general salute, owing to the premature discharge of one of the guns. He was in the act of ramming home the charge when the explosion took place, but his expertness saved him from serious injury. As it is he has only suffered some slight contusion on the arms which were struck by the discharged ramrod.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to national holidays, the Volunteers preened and paraded for other events which were followed closely by the local press. A visit by the Governor-General on 20 May 1859 saw the two Rifle Companies on hand to serve as a Guard of Honour while the Field Battery fired salutes.<sup>32</sup>

Military funerals were splendid occasions for militia show. None was so grand as the one

staged on 25 March 1864 for Lieutenant-Colonel Turner, who had died suddenly two days earlier. His coffin was draped with the Union Jack on which rested his shako and sash. Virtually the whole of the Volunteer Force in Ottawa paraded for the occasion; three colonels and a major served as pallbearers; Turner's horse trotted in the cortege with boots reversed in the stirrups and a black blanket across its back; a six-pounder field gun fired three rounds at the burial.<sup>33</sup>

Predictably, the local papers praised Turner's contributions to the community. The *Union* in particular noted his literary talents and knowledge of the classics. The *Citizen*, which had been so critical of his conduct in the matter of unexploded shells, wrote of "his winning qualities of an open heart and a cordial disposition." Nevertheless, the editor could not resist getting in one more "dig" at Turner; the obituary concluded:

His productions on military subjects were remarkable for scientific knowledge and boundless information. He was a military Thesaurus. As a frequent contributor to The Ottawa Citizen, we may truthfully say of him:

"Nihil tetigit quod non ornavit"

and pause, in the presence of an event which makes regret futile and praise empty.

That would seem generous to most readers until they remembered the 1863 controversy and noted that the Latin expression translates as, "He touched nothing that he did not honour."

### Notes

- Obituaries printed in *Ottawa Citizen*, 25 March 1864 and *Ottawa Union*, 26 March 1864.
- National Archives of Canada (NAC), Manuscript Group (MG| 24 L. 16, "Correspondence, Loyal Orange Association District Lodge" and in particular folios 16-17 (Turner to R. Brown, denying allegations), 25-26 (Record of sentence of expulsion], and 29-30 (protest by local members against proceedings).
- Militia General Order dated 4 January 1850, noting the resignation of Captain John B. Turner, "Montreal Cavalry." This followed closely the dismissal of 32 officers (27 from Montreal units) including Lieutenant-Colonels Sabrevois de Bleury, Benjamin Hart and John Molson. Turner explained his resignation in a letter to the Adjutant General of Militia dated 27 December 1854 (Adjutant General's Correspondence, NAC Record Group (RG) 9 1C1, Volume 61).
- Adjutant General's Correspondence (NAC RG 9 1C1 Volume 126). Turner to de Rottenburg, 17 August 1855.
- Ibid.* Volume 128; Turner to unidentified correspondent, 3 November 1855.
- Ibid.*, Turner to second unidentified correspondent, 3 November 1855.
- Ibid.*, Turner to unidentified correspondent, 22 November 1855.
- Ibid.*, Volumes 128 and 129; Turner to de Rottenburg, 28 November and 17 December 1855.
- Forsyth was later commissioned and appointed Adjutant to the Artillery Company as officers resigned or were assigned to other units.
- NSC RG 9 1C1, Volume 128, Turner to de Rottenburg, 8 November 1855.
- Ibid.*, Turner to de Rottenburg, 11 October 1855.
- Ibid.*, Turner to de Rottenburg, 13 November 1855.
- Ibid.*, Turner to de Rottenburg, 22 November 1855.
- Ibid.*, Turner to de Rottenburg, 28 November 1855.
- Ibid.*, Volume 129, Turner to de Rottenburg, 21 & 31 December 1855.
- Ibid.*, Volume 130; Turner to de Rottenburg, 1 February 1857; Turner to de Salaberry, 29 March 1858.
- Ibid.*, Turner to de Rottenburg, 30 April 1858.
- Ibid.*, Captain George Patterson (4th Carleton) to Matheson, 15 January 1856.
- Militia General Order issued at Quebec, 19 June 1861, printed in *Canada Gazette*, 22 June 1861.
- NAC RG 9 1C1, Volume 128, Turner to de Rottenburg, 30 December 1856.
- Ibid.*, Turner to de Rottenburg, 29 May 1858.
- Ibid.*
- Militia General Order issued at Quebec, 18 August 1860, published in *Canada Gazette* of that date.
- Ottawa Union*, 13 July 1859 and 30 August 1861; *Ottawa Citizen*, 1 February 1861.
- Militia General Order issued at Quebec, 22 March 1861, printed in *Canada Gazette*, 30 March 1861.
- Ottawa Union*, 24 December 1861.
- See for example, *Ottawa Citizen*, 7 & 27 February 1866.
- Ottawa Union*, 2 April 1863, 7 April and 14 April 1863. *Ottawa Citizen*, 4 April 1863, 11 April 1863 and 18 April 1863.
- If any riots or disturbances had occurred, they would almost certainly have been noted by the *Bathurst Courier* published nearby in Perth, or by a Montreal paper. Neither of these sources reported incidents in Ottawa; the calling out of the Volunteer Companies went unnoticed - negative evidence that the call-out of 19 December had been uneventful.
- See H.M. Jackson, *The Royal Regiment of Artillery, Ottawa, 1855-1952* (Ottawa, 1952), pp.30-31; *Ottawa Citizen*, 16 May 1863; *Ottawa Union*, 5 May 1864.
- Ottawa Citizen*, 26 May 1860.
- Ottawa Union*, 25 May 1859.
- Ottawa Union*, 29 March 1864.

Hugh Halliday is currently putting the finishing touches on a manuscript dealing with Canadians who have been awarded the Air Force Cross and the Air Force medal.